

Empowering the **Iowa Girl**



Leadership - Culture - Character - Performance



Empowering the Iowa Girl

Leadership. Culture. Character. Performance.

Team Culture Audits

Featuring  **EXCELLENCE WITH INTEGRITY™
TOOLS & ASSESSMENTS**

Drake
UNIVERSITY

The Robert D. and
Billie Ray Center





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Contents

Introduction	5
Team Culture Audit	11
Team Culture Check-In	14



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ighsau.org

Every Iowa Girl deserves the opportunity to participate in athletics and activities that positively impact her growth and development physically, mentally, and socially.

For decades, coaches across the state have worked tirelessly to provide that experience, and have shaped the lives of thousands of Iowa Girls. As part of the IGHSAU strategic plan, we want to provide additional educationally-based resources to help our coaches continue to do this important work.

The Iowa Girl's High School Athletic Union is proud to offer these culture-shaping and leadership development resources for coaches of all Iowa girls' athletics. The topics addressed in these resources were chosen by coaches across the state, and the content shaped by feedback from coaches and other stakeholders. These resources are not a program. They are tools to be adopted and adapted in support of the great work you are already doing. Use these materials to help you shape the culture of your program and enhance the experience of the Iowa Girls on your team.

Empowering the Iowa Girl today, to lead tomorrow!

Erin Gerlich
Executive Director

Taylor Anderson
Assistant Director



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INTRODUCTION

The materials in these resources are based on 25 years of applied research and development in various educational, workplace, and sport environments by Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D., Vladimir T. Khmelkov, Ph.D., and their colleagues at the Excellence with Integrity Institute. Over the years, we expanded our grounded theory framework, designed new assessment instruments, and developed and implemented a vast range of instructional resources that help leaders develop the strengths of culture and character needed for optimal performance.

We received feedback from many athletes and coaches who successfully implemented our work in competitive collegiate athletics and in pre-collegiate settings. We are also grateful to our talented partners at The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University. Special thanks to Scott Raecker who has contributed to our theory, practice, and assessment since the very first versions of our work. We are especially grateful to Jeff Kluever, whose extraordinary talents and abilities have helped shape these resources.

Our Approach

In 1969, the University of Nebraska hired Boyd Epley as the first intercollegiate strength coach at a time when most everyone believed that strength training would *undermine* athletic performance. Less than a decade later, the National Strength Coaches Association was formed in 1978, still fighting the prevailing opinions of the day, which believed that building strength would undermine rather than aid athletic performance. Fast forward to today, strength and conditioning programs are an essential component of every college athletic department, every professional and Olympic sport, and most high school and pre-collegiate experiences. What started with one coach in Nebraska is now the art and science of diverse strength practices that are customized to the athlete, the sport, the style, and conditions.

At the Excellence with Integrity Institute, we believe that the science and practice around the formation of character, culture, and leadership has the potential to impact pre-collegiate and intercollegiate athletics much like the physical strength field has done over the last 50 years. What was once defined by myths, half-truths, and un-truths is now becoming a critical facet of individual and team performance, with the potential to enhance or undermine physical strengths, athletic ability, and team strategy. Physical strength and conditioning is essentially the art and science of proactively designing programs to target and develop the strength, endurance, flexibility, and mobility needed to avoid injuries and achieve success. ***Avoid injuries and achieve success:*** these twin goals form the foundation of the work to intentionally shape the art and science of strength and conditioning for culture and character.



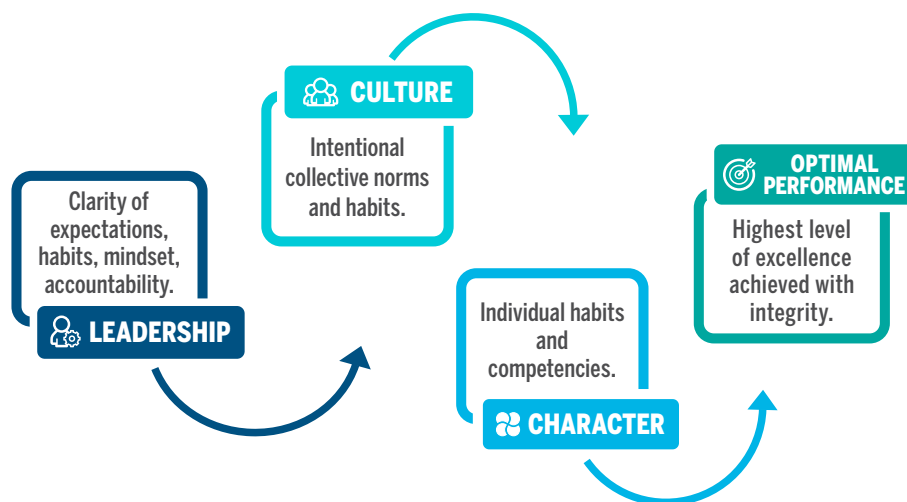
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Coaches have always known the importance of teamwork, leadership, accountability, work ethic, and resilience. Talent obviously plays a role in the success of individuals and teams, but talent will always be strengthened or weakened by the strengths or weaknesses of culture and character on that team. We have a very good understanding about the strengths of culture and character that contribute to optimal performance, as well as an understanding of the most common culture and character weaknesses that undermine optimal performance and lead to psychological and moral injuries.

The emphasis and importance of athletics has increased. Student-athletes compete more, and the competition is intense, with more media coverage, public interest, scrutiny, and pressure. That is why coaches need to work more intentionally and deliberately to ensure that their teams and student-athletes have the culture and character needed for the pressure and intensity of today's competition to maximize the potential of their team and student-athletes to avoid injuries and achieve success.

What is culture? In simple terms, culture is your ***collective values in action, your way, your collective norms and habits***. Culture is your values in action—not simply your stated values, but your operational values, what you truly value as reflected in your actions. For example, I can say my team values accountability, but if team members are rarely or inconsistently held accountable for their actions, then our operational value (loose standards and expectations) is more real than our stated value of accountability. Knowledge of your values isn't enough to shape culture; you must practice your values every day. That's how culture is intentionally created and improved. **Leaders shape culture, culture shapes (or corrupts) character, and character drives optimal performance—the highest level of excellence we can achieve with integrity.**

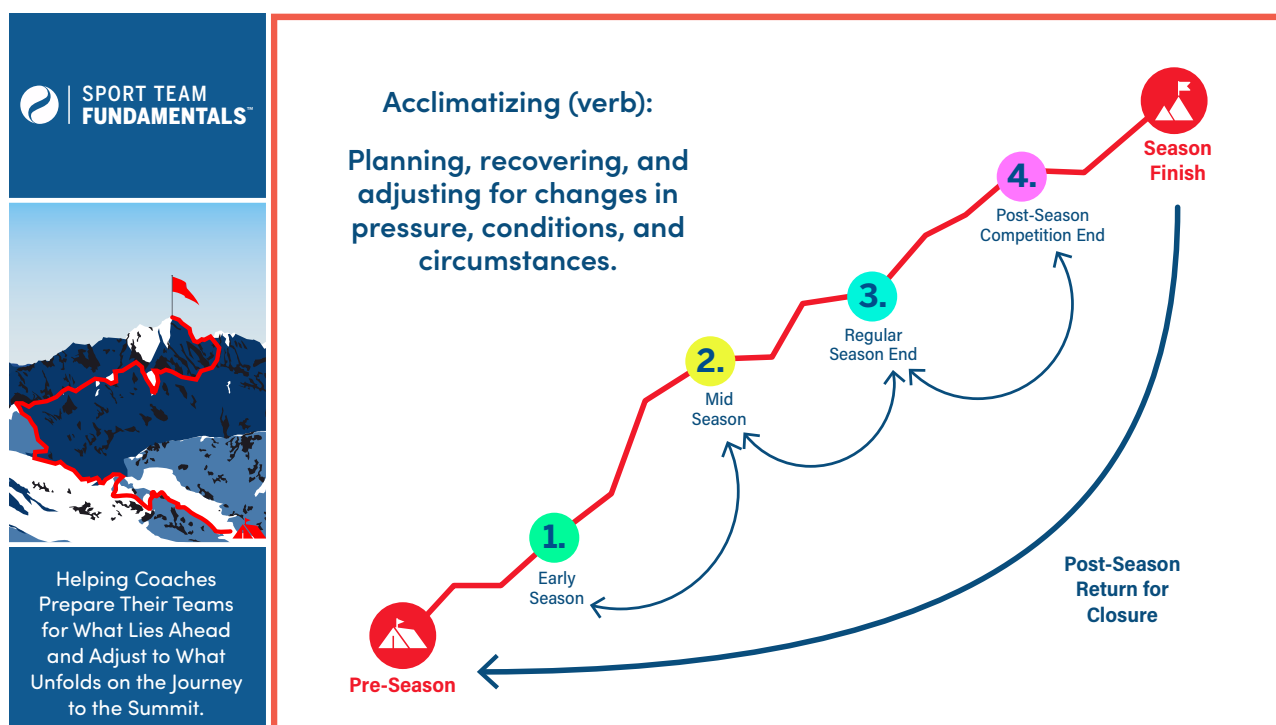




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This model helps to frame the **what** and **how** of shaping culture and character. But what is also essential is an understanding of **why** and **when**. Why are coaches shaping culture and character in competitive teams? So that teams and their team members have the strengths of culture and character to achieve their goals—without injuries. We think about a team journey as the process of “acclimatizing team cultures to summit.” Competitive seasons are a journey from base to summit, from the pre-season to the post-season. Pursuing summits safely is what coaches and teams are striving to accomplish. Coaches operate as expeditionary leaders guiding their teams towards new heights, new challenges, and uncharted territories, and they have a responsibility to ensure that teams can summit safely—without physical, mental, emotional, or interpersonal meltdowns or breakdowns.



The famous quote says, “It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves.” Competitive teams need lofty goals and the challenge of new summits to overcome their weaknesses and forge new strengths of culture and character that simply will not be developed pursuing the “low peaks.” Competition means “striving with”—with teammates and with worthy opponents—to bring out new levels of strength and to develop our abilities fully.

So, we develop the strengths of culture and character to summit safely by using the journey of a season to continuously prepare for what teams will encounter at the summit: further elevated pressure at the end of a long journey marked by the inevitable highs and lows, victories and defeats that are part of a typical season.



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We believe that strength and conditioning for culture comes to life when coaches understand that they are building strengths that can withstand the pressure of competition needed to summit safely. Coaches aren't just doing some good, nice, important work on culture and character. They're developing the strengths of culture and character needed to summit safely. If teams don't have sufficient culture and character assets for the pressures and duration of a competitive season, then breakdowns and injuries are inevitable! It's not about developing some nice assets that could help in life in the future; it's about developing the strengths of culture and character **needed for** the journey from base to summit for this team in this season. If we don't properly target and develop assets like psychological safety, leadership, resilience, self-awareness, accountability, then we should not be surprised when we don't reach our performance goals. More importantly, we shouldn't be surprised when we see breakdowns and psychological injuries within the team and among its members.

There are many nuances to the emerging art and science of shaping culture and character strengths needed to summit safely. But the essence of the approach can be summarized quite simply as the continuous intentional process of balancing **demandingness and responsiveness**. On the journey of a season, from pre-season to post-season, coaches must apply pressure sufficient to forge the team and individual assets needed for the challenge. But they must be able to temper, adjust, and respond when the demandingness is no longer landing or working with the team. What was optimal in the pre-season may not be in the middle of the season. What was too demanding in the pre-season may be perfect as we approach the post-season (or vice versa).

**SPORT TEAM
FUNDAMENTALS™**



Helping Coaches
Prepare Their Teams
for What Lies Ahead
and Adjust to What
Unfolds on the Journey
to the Summit.

**ACCLIMATIZING TEAM CULTURE FOR
OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE**

**Coaching that is both
Demanding and Responsive**
to changes in the team,
which creates
Collective Safety and Confidence
that are needed to summit—to achieve
Excellence with Integrity!



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Optimal performance coaching, or coaching to summit safely, is the art of balancing demandingness and responsiveness, which requires an ongoing dialogue between coaches and team members. *Demandingness* reflects the coaching practices used to forge a culture of competitive excellence and drive the team towards greatness; *responsiveness* is how coaches listen, observe, and engage the team in dialogue to determine necessary adjustments to the intensity, duration, and tactical effectiveness of coaching practices and strategies. Optimal performance coaching isn't just what you do, it is *how well your demandingness lands with your team*. Coaches ensure their coaching is landing, by being demanding **and** responsive.

Resources

The “workouts” presented in this resource are activities designed to help you engage your team in the culture work *needed for* the journey of a season from base to summit, from pre-season to post-season. Culture is always a work in progress. These workouts can help you shape your team culture consistently and intentionally, and will ultimately help drive the performance of your team.

The workouts are organized into the following broad categories: leadership, teamwork, accountability, work ethic, communication, and resilience. Within each category you will find several short, focused workouts to conduct with your team. The workout categories are not scaffolded as a sequence, meaning you need not start with a certain workout, then progress to another in the order, and so on. You can start with any workout and move between categories as you see fit. Likewise, each workout can be conducted in a variety of environments: the court, the field, the locker room, a classroom, a film session, or even on the bus. If time is an issue, each workout can be divided into shorter, multiple segments.

The keys to effectively using this resource:

1. **Target where you are on the journey from base to summit.** If you're in the pre-season, you might have more time to select particular workouts, dig deeper, or return for several workouts. If you're in the middle of the season having just experienced a couple of tough losses or big wins, you might choose a different workout or focus.
2. **Be consistent.** Like strength conditioning, a heavy dump in the pre-season won't inoculate your team. To truly impact your culture, you must consistently address culture where it is most needed, targeting weak areas like you would weak muscles or weak strategy. As Pete Carroll once said, “If you're not coaching your values each day, then those aren't your values.”



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Each topic includes an activity to engage your team in active learning that incorporate research-based tools and strategies. Relationship-building questions and activities can be found throughout the workouts, so that your team can form connections with one another. Each category also includes optimal performance self-studies, so your team can reflect on how they are demonstrating the key values of your culture as individuals and as a team.

Finally, there are workouts you can use to engage parents, who are key stakeholders in the culture of your team. Some of the team workouts for student-athletes can also be extended to parents if desired. And there are two workouts to help get feedback on the culture of your team. Culture is ever-changing, so having simple, effective ways to gather information from student-athletes, other coaches, and parents regarding their perceptions of team culture is a useful tool.

In short, we've sought to include everything you need to consistently and positively shape your culture with simple, direct, and meaningful workouts. **Leaders shape culture, culture shapes character, character drives performance.** Now, the work is up to you. Your journey begins by working more intentionally to develop the strengths of culture and character needed to summit safely! Onward and upward!

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

~ Laozi

Traveler, there is no road; you make your own path as you walk.

~ Antonio Machado



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TEAM CULTURE AUDIT


Scope: 10-30 minutes, done periodically throughout the season.

Team culture is constantly changing. Culture isn't what you do or intend, but how what you do and intend is received by your team. Thus, ongoing dialogue is key to clarifying where your culture is, and what can be done better or differently throughout the season.


Using the Team Culture Audit, ask your team to discuss what you collectively need to start doing to improve or enhance team culture, if there's anything you need to stop doing, what practices should be continued, and what needs to be improved. As student-athletes become familiar with this framework, you can more quickly and efficiently use it throughout the season.

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TEAM CULTURE AUDIT


 **START**

New practices: that may help address a new situation or factors that did not exist before, or new ideas that the team may want to try to improve effectiveness and/or efficiency

 **STOP**


Practices that:

- are not having the desired outcome
- may have proved impractical or inefficient
- are distracting from core mission or overall effectiveness

 **CONTINUE**

Practices that:

- are having the desired outcome
- are efficient and effective

 **IMPROVE**

Practices that:

- are having some of the desired outcome, show promise
- but need to be more efficient or effective



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Extension

This workout can also be done with parents to gather insight on their perceptions of team culture.



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TEAM CULTURE AUDIT

↑ START

New practices:

that may help address a new situation or factors that did not exist before, or new ideas that the team may want to try to improve effectiveness and/or efficiency

× STOP

Practices that:

- are not having the desired outcome
- may have proved impractical or inefficient
- are distracting from core mission or overall effectiveness

✓ CONTINUE

Practices that:

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- are efficient and effective

↻ IMPROVE

Practices that:

- are having some of the desired outcome, show promise
- but need to be more efficient or effective



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TEAM CULTURE CHECK-IN

Scope: 5 minutes weekly, or at any other consistent time period.

The Team Culture Check-In is a simple way to gather information about the perceptions of your team culture from your coaches, student-athletes, and even parents if desired. Ask members of the team to fill out the following reflection about your team culture. Give them a time frame to consider as they reflect (last week, month, quarter, etc.). When complete, student-athletes can share their evaluation with a partner, small group, or the entire team. Or, if you prefer to keep the check-in anonymous, they can simply turn in their responses to you.

This activity should be done multiple times per season so you stay in touch with the culture of your team. Culture is never static. It is impacted by the things that are done or said each day, both positively and negatively. The reflection should not be used as a weapon, rather as a way to engage in meaningful conversations about what's going well and what can be improved.



TEAM CULTURE CHECK-IN

Team Culture **PRAISE**

—things you appreciate or want to affirm in the coaching practices and our overall culture:

Team Culture **POLISH**

—things you would like our coaches or those in our team to do better or differently:





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Rate the overall **state** of your team culture:

1 = DISTRESSED

10 = OPTIMAL



1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

Which of the options below best describe the **trajectory** of your team culture:

- A. Moving in negative direction
- B. Stalled, stuck, stagnant
- C. Developing in positive direction
- D. Stable, in optimal condition

EXPLAIN

the choice you indicated above:



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INSTITUTE

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About the Consortium

Almost two decades ago, the Excellence with Integrity Institute and The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University, created a consortium partnership to advance our respective visions and missions. Together, we pursue strategic opportunities in youth leadership, employment readiness, athletics, education, and organizational development in community and workplace environments.

The Institute's main focus is on research and development of instructional and assessment tools and strategies that help leaders shape culture, build character, and achieve optimal performance.

The Ray Center's main focus is on coaching, training, and expanding our collaborative implementation projects across Iowa and around the globe.