

It is a new season and with it the challenges of forming a team, sorting out roles, getting team processes and systems on track and then playing well all come into focus. The picture gets clearer nearer to competition as teams narrow their focus on what they need to do to play well. Reflecting on the challenges of establishing a new team with new leadership, here are seven insights that will help you lead a team or follow a leader.

Goals: Does the leader use goals? Does your team leader tell you what the team goals are or do they involve you in the team goal setting? A leader without goals is like a navigator without a compass. If your leader turns up without goals, any performance is good enough. Knowing the goal directs energy and effort, check your team leader's goals.

Vision: Does the team's leader (it does not have to be the skip, but traditionally this is the case) communicate the expectations for the team's performance on and off the ice or is it up to every player to figure it out and hope it works? Effective leaders envision the future they want for the team and themselves and they communicate clear expectations for themselves and others. They lead their team to reaching goals. Does your team leader do that?

Values: Does your team leader act with the values like trust, loyalty, friendship, integrity, and honesty in what they do? Leaders build trust when teammates feel that they do what they say they are going to do and when they provide direction and guidance when necessary that enhances performance. Does your team's leader do that?

Consistency: Does your team leader act consistently? Leaders that are consistent and reliable in how they go about their play and their life are easier to trust and rely on especially when the things they are supposed to do are done well. Leaders accept that they will be accountable and perceived as inconsistent if they do not walk their own vision. How consistent is your team leader?

Communication: Curling is a social activity. Leaders need to be somewhat social with their team mates and be able to communicate effectively. Being known, liked and reliable is more likely to lead to their messages being received and influencing people. Do you really know your leader, are they likeable and do you trust them?

Tough attitude: People follow leaders who have a strong belief in what they are doing and how they do it, and have shown themselves to be consistent and successful in the past. A new team means that leaders have to work to prove themselves again. A leader looks complacent when they talk about their past without performing well in the present and not preparing and working to improve. Leaders with strong beliefs work through tough situations and build belief in themselves and belief from others in their ability. Do you have a tough-minded leader?

Resilience: Top teams led by strong leaders win more or less 60-70 percent of their games. That means that team leaders lead from a loss quite frequently. Knowing how a leader treats victory and defeat is important because resilient leaders bounce back quickly to compete strongly, whereas leaders that dwell on defeat and look too hard for reasons to explain results struggle to refocus on how to lead the team back to a good performance. Does your leader bounce back quickly to lead the next game? Depending on your answers to these questions, you will have to figure out what your response is going to be. You can let things go, address things with team leadership, or wait and see and act when you have to. As a team member it is your choice how you lead or follow. But for sure, leading a curling team or following a team leader is never dull and is full of challenges that will test the seven insights outlined above.