

CULTIVATING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IN SPORT

Effects on Athlete Development, Performance and
Well-Being

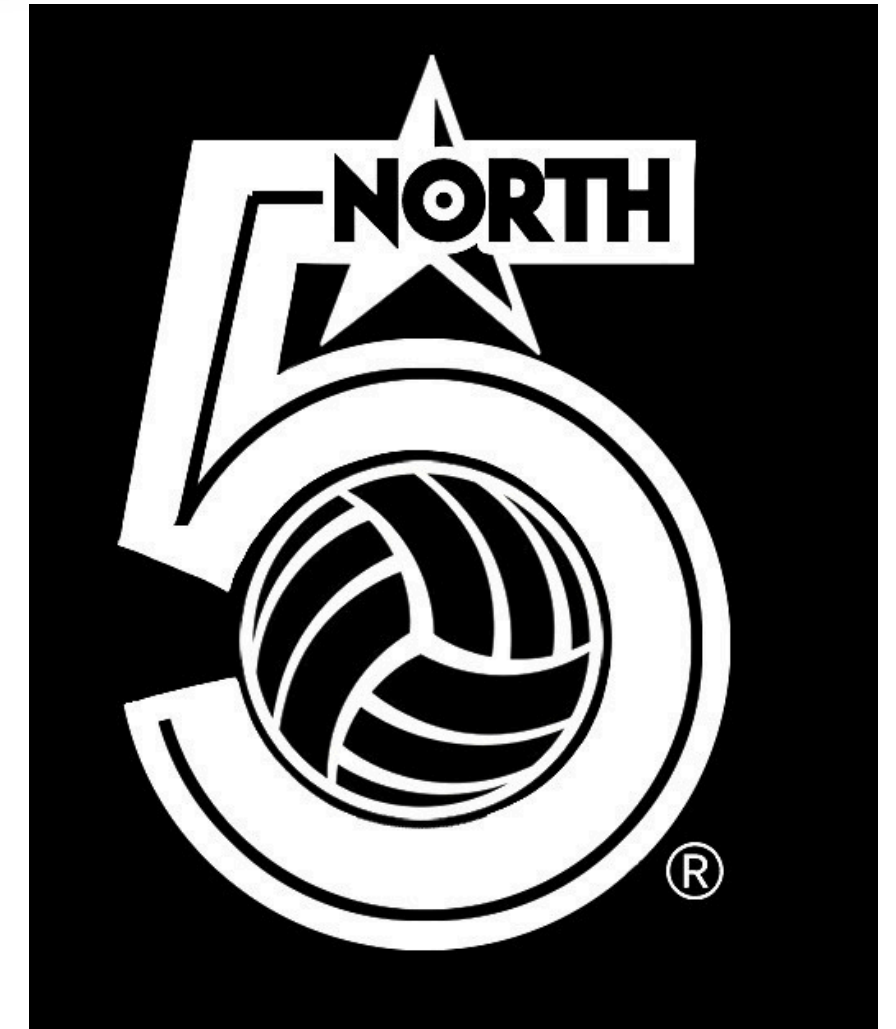
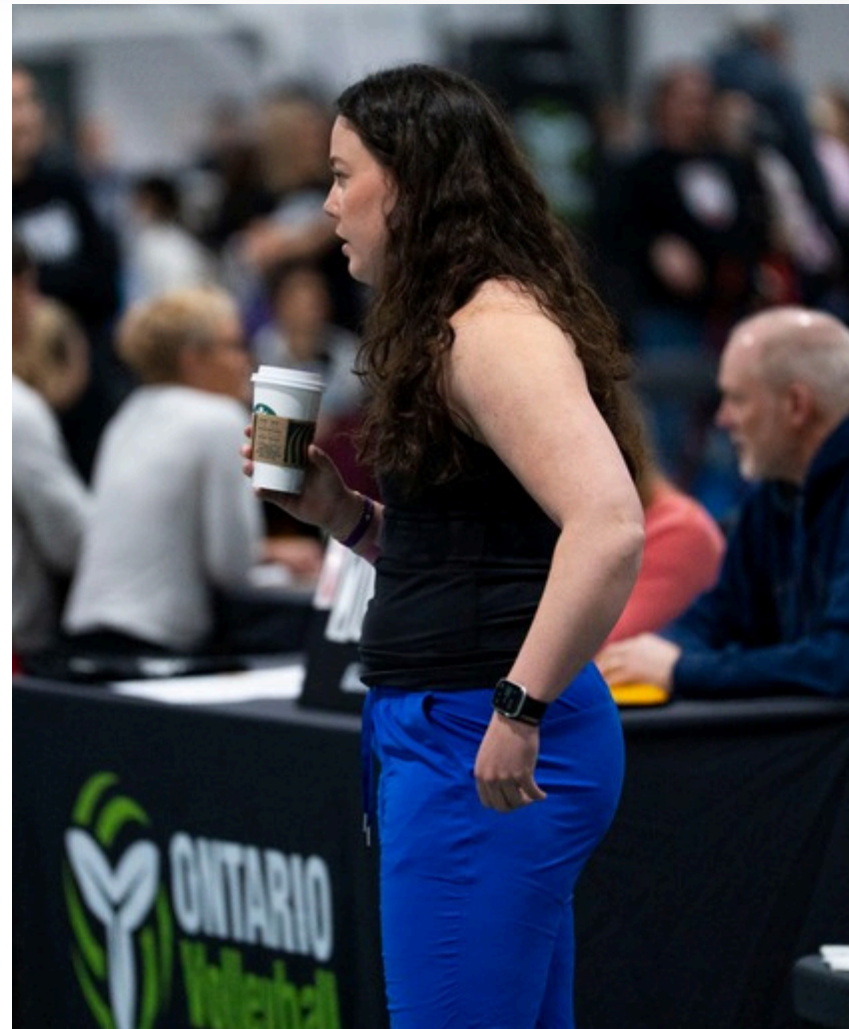
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Professor Dodge
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QUICK QUESTION

What leadership styles did you see your coaches use most often?



MY PERSONAL JOURNEY



ATHLETE → COACH → ATHLETE → COACH

EARLY COACHING EXPERIENCE



Team ranked 50th in Ontario → rose to top 6 provincially and top 10 nationally

Not due to skill alone, but **environment** and **culture**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this presentation, you will be able to:

1. Define transformational leadership and why it matters
2. Explain psychological safety and why it matters
3. Understand how leadership influences well-being, performance & resilience
4. Identify practical leadership strategies
5. Analyze real-life coaching examples
6. Apply evidence-based leadership methods to your own contexts





WHY DOES THIS TOPIC MATTER?

- Coaches shape athlete confidence, identity, and resilience
- Leadership impacts burnout, motivation, and performance
- Sport is a major developmental environment for youth

TOXIC LEADERSHIP

Toxic leadership occurs when coaches or leaders prioritize control, intimidation, or self-interest over support and guidance.

- What it looks like:
 - Abusive supervision
 - Authoritarianism
 - Favoritism
 - Suppression of athlete autonomy
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- Impact on Athletes:
 - Psychological and emotional harm (fear, anxiety, depression)
 - Reduced autonomy and confidence
 - Damage to trust and team cohesion





ADDRESSING TOXIC LEADERSHIP

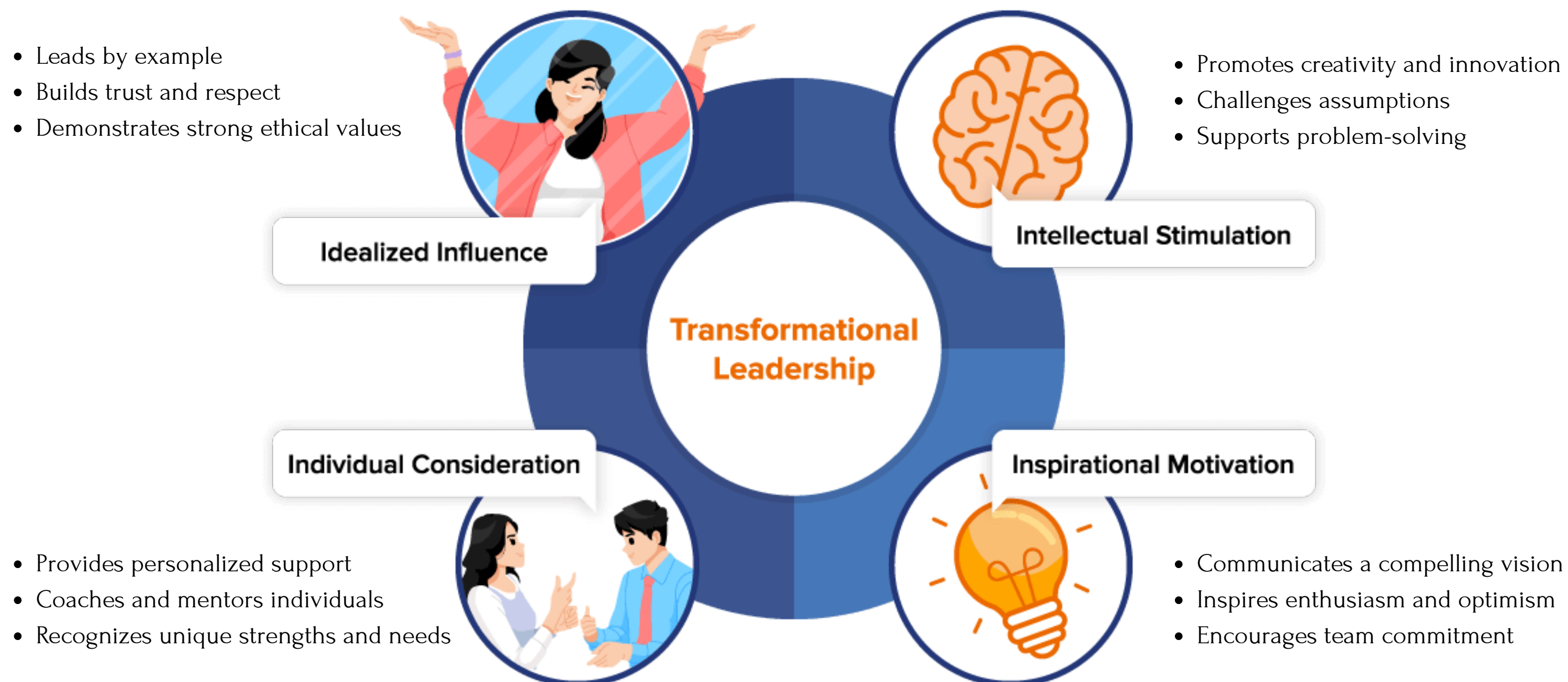
Solutions:

- Promote empathy, support, and constructive guidance
- Encourage athlete autonomy
- Implement accountability and safe reporting mechanisms
- Foster athlete-centred practices

Benefits:

- Improved psychological well-being
- Stronger coach-athlete relationships
- Enhanced team cohesion and sustainable performance

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP



WHY TL WORKS

Research consistently shows TL leads to:

- Higher athlete motivation
- Improved well-being
- Enhanced performance
- Greater team cohesion
- More resilient teams



PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

A climate where athletes feel safe to:

- Speak up
- Make mistakes
- Ask questions
- Take risks



WHY IT MATTERS



PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY LEADS TO

- Better learning
- Higher confidence
- Lower anxiety
- Stronger team bonds

HOW PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY SHOWS UP IN SPORT



- Teammates supporting each other
- Coach reacting constructively to mistakes
- Athletes not afraid of failure
- Athletes feel valued
- Builds trust in the coach

TL AND TEAM RESILIENCE



Leadership → Organizational resilience

Key findings:

- TL increases creativity & risk-taking
- Supports shared identity
- Enhances adaptive thinking
- Creates psychologically safe environments

TL AND COACH- ATHLETE RELATIONSHIP ON TEAM RESILIENCE



TL strengthens the coach-athlete relationship

Builds team resilience through:

1. Inspiration
2. Accountability
3. Collective identity
4. Productive challenge
5. Enjoyment in adversity

TL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



Transformational leadership →

- Higher well-being
- Stronger motivation
- Better psychological needs satisfaction
- Especially strong effects in female athletes

WHY FEMALE ATHLETES BENEFIT MORE

- Greater sensitivity to relational dynamics
- Higher tendency to internalize criticism
- Stronger response to emotional connection
- Prefer collaborative, communicative leadership

Adolescent Girls

Exploring How Gender Shapes Physical Literacy and Physical Activity Participation

Emma De Souza

Department of Kinesiology, Acadia University

KINE 5043: Physical Literacy Across the Lifespan

Dr. Bremer

December 2nd, 2025

TEAM CULTURE



Team Identity = Better Well-Being

- Shared identity builds cohesion
- Informal leaders often more influential than coaches
- Strong identity = better mental health
- Identity must be co-created, not imposed

ATHLETE PERFORMANCE



**Supportive coaching → Leadership → Relationship →
Fatigue Reduction → Performance**

- Better relationships
- Lower psychological fatigue
- Higher performance

PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS



Transformational Leadership Enhances:

- Innovation
- Adaptability
- Shared vision
- Intellectual challenge
- Team resilience

LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAYS

Characteristics of Poor Leadership

- Demanding trust without earning it
- Public criticism
- Withholding communication
- Punitive culture
- Favoritism
- Fear-based control

Characteristics of Effective Leadership

- Vision & inspiration
- Consistency
- Empathy
- Fairness
- Two-way communication
- Supportive challenge
- Authenticity



BUILDING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Steps:

- Normalize mistakes
- Encourage questions
- Celebrate vulnerability
- Model respectful communication
- Reward effort, not just results
- Co-create team agreements



TAKEAWAY-

TL + Psychological Safety
= Strong Culture

When both exist, athletes show:

- Higher performance
- Deeper commitment
- More confidence
- Better mental health
- Stronger resilience



“Great coaches don’t just develop athletes. They develop people.”

Transformational leadership and psychological safety makes this possible

Thank you!



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