

Being a 'good' gymnast

Expectations

A 'good' gymnast will display the following qualities:



1. **Be respectful to coaches.** Coaches will usually have spent a long time learning how to coach, either as a gymnast or on courses or both. They have to do additional training every year to learn new techniques and to keep up-to-date. They are in the gym because want to be. They are trying to impart all of their knowledge in order to help you, the gymnast, improve and achieve your aims.

2. **Be prepared to work hard.** Time in the gym is limited and time on an apparatus is even more limited. It can take up to 1,500 repetitions to learn the elements of a high level skill and to actually do that completed skill on an apparatus in a routine at a major competition. If 10 repetitions are done in a training session, and there are three sessions on that apparatus each week, it could take some 50 weeks before that skill can be competed in front of the judges.



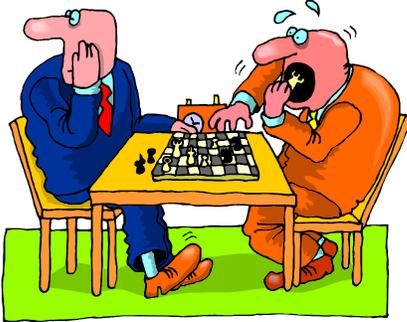
3. **Be honest.** Telling lies (fibs) undermines the trust between a coach and a gymnast. Mostly the only person who is hurt when lies are told is the person who actually tells the lies. A gymnast who tells lies will not be trusted or respected by *anyone*, least of all by the coach. This could lead to the coach ignoring the gymnast because they can't be bothered talking to someone who lies.

4. **Be focused and motivated.** Entry through the door of the gym when coming to training should be like shutting out the outside world. Coming through the door means that the gymnast is ready to train and put in a full effort. All the worries and concerns generated at home, school and socially must be forgotten until training is complete. Listening to the coach, thinking about what is required and then trying to fix what went wrong the next time the apparatus is touched is what must be done.



5. **Remember the Aim.** Gymnasts must keep their mind on what they are doing and why they are in the gym. Time in the gym is not for socializing. It is the same as going to school, it is for learning gymnastics. Coaches can't teach anything, they can only help gymnasts to learn.

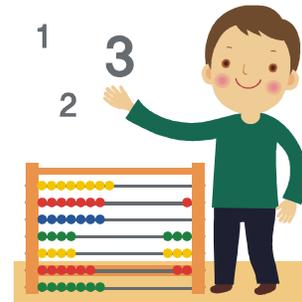
Cheating Yourself



Cheating is not all about 'someone' doing the wrong thing at competitions.

Cheating occurs in every gym, every day. Cheating is done by gymnasts at training.

Cheating while training in gymnastics is relatively easy. Coaches will normally have a set series of exercises for gymnasts to do or they will tell the gymnast what series of exercises to do when they are warming up, stretching, warming down, or doing strength. Normally, senior gymnasts will be expected to be able to do his or her stretching or strength mostly unsupervised. However, in a large number of cases they will not do the exercises properly, they will reduce the number or they will not do an exercise at all. *This is cheating.*



Cheating also occurs when they are using an apparatus. Not everyone can be on the apparatus at the one time, so there will be gymnasts waiting for their go. Because they are senior gymnasts and the skills are often difficult and complex, they would not normally have a circuit of skills to complete while they wait for their next turn on the apparatus. They will sit and talk, not stretching as they we have been told nor spending the time thinking about what changes they have been told to make in their next go. *This is cheating.*

Both instances imply that the senior gymnast is *trusted* and is *honest* enough to be able to complete the exercises by themselves. They are cheating themselves and their team mates by not doing what they have been told and thereby reduce the effect of their training.

Coaches find it very hard to deal with the constant dishonesty and blatant cheating on gym assignments from some of their integrity thin athletes. Coaches end up frustrated and get angry when senior gymnasts constantly cheat on their assignments.

Conclusion

There are a few lines that should *never* be crossed by an athlete. Being dishonest (which include deception and lying) is right at the top of the list with being disrespectful and lazy. The 'Cheater' usually displays all three of these undesirable traits and rarely achieves his or her aims.

COACHING POINTS ON WAYS TO OVERCOME CHEATING

It is the duty of the coach to guide gymnasts who cheat down a more productive path.

The solution?

The simple solution is the 1-2-3 strikes and you are out. In the perfect world, this would work well. The perfect world being where clubs did not have to pay bills and coaches didn't have to produce competitive teams. This solution is worth considering provided the definition of cheating is well known and enforced within a program AND the 3rd strike is modified a bit (banning someone altogether isn't really a viable option for most businesses). Where do you start in regards to creating an atmosphere where cheating is a rare occurrence rather than the every day norm?

- ☞ **Has the importance of honesty and integrity been explained?** This is a very important life lesson to instill honesty and integrity in all athletes. A definition of integrity has been 'doing what is right when nobody is watching and doing it in the toughest of situations'. It is easy to be honest when everything is going well, when the gymnast is feeling strong or nailing routine after routine or skill after skill. Integrity is doing what is right when things aren't going quite so smoothly. This is when athletes are most likely to cheat in the gym. Instilling the attitude that *cheating is for losers* is an important carry over skill that will assist athletes throughout life and one that most parents would support. Integrity lessons are at the core of every successful gymnastics program and serves to self-police dishonesty issues. In an atmosphere where cheating is plain and simply not acceptable, the occurrences will certainly be few and far between.
- ☞ **Has cheating been defined in the class?** Most would think every well raised child would know what constitutes dishonesty. However, with the variety of home situations (some strict, some not so much) the definition of dishonesty can vary a great deal. Coaches constantly have to ask gymnasts if they did their strength properly, being told that they have and then being told by others that 'so-and-so' did not do all their strength. The obvious violations are doing less numbers than assigned (five routines instead of eight, 10 reps instead of 12, etc). Using any definition of cheating if a gymnast is even one number short, then *that is cheating*. Quality elite programs like to take it a step further and consider *inadequate effort* as cheating also. Not putting in enough effort to pull the chin above the bar on a chin up, not lifting legs all the way to the bar on leg lifts, not giving maximum effort on rebounding skills, etc. is all a form of cheating.
- ☞ **Have the expectations been explained?** Many times what coaches think is cheating is simply a lack of communication where the number of assigned routines or repetitions is misheard or misunderstood (this of course can also become a very weak excuse over time) or the actual expectation of the requirement is vague. Prior to scolding a gymnast, be sure that they understood the expectations of the assignment and were capable of executing the demands. For instance, if the requirement for the day is for five mistake-free floor routines but the gymnast counted routines with missed landings, then this is cheating, particularly if they are fully aware that a missed landing constitutes a mistake.
- ☞ **Is the assignment reasonable?** Based on the individual ability of the athlete (not the group that he or she is in), is the assignment doable? Many times coaches set requirements for the majority of a group and expect the bottom rung members to keep pace. Sometimes this is unreasonable and the only way to keep up is to CHEAT. Athletes should never be placed in a position where cheating is the only way they can say they accomplished the goal. Assignments should be challenging yet reasonable in order to avoid pushing some to the brink of cheating.

- ☞ **Is open communication encouraged?** As all coaches know, athletes are going to have bad days now and then. This is the nature of sport. In a system where athletes feel comfortable in communicating honestly without major repercussions they will discover less need for dishonesty. They should not be let off the hook everyday, but if they are truly struggling and they communicate a logical explanation, combined with a reasonable amount of effort, then they should be cut them some slack. The alternative is to brow beat them into a situation where some may opt to cheat.

The next step

If these processes and procedures are in place, how then is cheating to dealt with? One suggestion is detailed below.

STRIKE 1 - *caught red handed the first time. Talk to the gymnast privately and review the importance of being honest as a person of integrity and substance. Emphasize the impact that dishonestly can have on the team morale and program success. What IF everyone cheated on their requirements? Insist that the athlete repeat or make up any of the requirements where they were caught cheating on and then after a *sincere apology* the subject would be dropped. However, there might be a subtle hint of that they would be watched more closely in the future.

STRIKE 2 - *caught again! This requires a sterner message and appropriate repercussions that fit the crime (reasonable and enforceable). If we are in competition season this may mean sitting out the next competition. If we are in off season the punishment may include missing a training day (to think about their mistake). Peer pressure may be introduced at this point. Have the offender sit and watch as her teammates do the work for them. This is severe but will definitely get the message across in the change room. In both cases, at this point, a parent conference and possibly a team meeting may be called and the problem discussed. Most parents should be quite willing to stand behind a coaching staff at STRIKE 2.

***STRIKE 3** - This is where it gets tricky. Our club can not afford to lose a gymnast or the financial revenue. I would suggest a more stringent version of Strike 2 with missing up to a week of training. Removing them from a couple competitions is an option but this is where parents will be upset (especially with other gyms in town). Using further peer pressure, team and parent meetings may be needed to set this athlete on the right path but unless the case is so totally disruptive to the program, I do not suggest removal from competitions. Keep driving the message home and you will eventually teach a valuable lesson.

Don't use conditioning as a punishment! In a sport where conditioning is so vitally important it is counter-productive to use conditioning as a punishment. I am not sure that conditioning and strength training is ever going to be enjoyable BUT we certainly don't want to teach our athletes to HATE CONDITIONING. This is the message that is sent when ridiculous numbers of repetitions (climb the rope 10 times without your legs, do 300 push ups, 100 dips etc) are given as a solution to a discipline problem.

Conclusion

There are a few lines that should *never* be crossed by an athlete. Being dishonest (which include deception and lying) is right at the top of the list with being disrespectful and lazy. Interesting enough the "Cheater" usually displays all three of these undesirable traits yet it is our jobs as coaches to guide them down a more productive path.