



Developing a Team Handbook or Constitution

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Having guidelines and expectations outlined for your dance team in a handbook or constitution format can make your job as a coach much easier. When expectations and rules are laid out for your dancers to follow there is no question about why things are done a certain way. It is important to have these expectations completed for dancers to read over either as soon as they are named a dance team member, or prior to tryouts beginning. How detailed your handbook or constitution is depends on the coach and school's preference. Some have statements that are more vague yet open-ended to cover several situations with one point, while others are extremely detailed to insure that dancers know exactly what the consequences will be if they do not follow the rules that are set in place. Whatever your preference may be as a coach, it is imperative that you take time to discuss the handbook or constitution with your dancers and their parents so that everyone is on the same page.

When developing your team's handbook or constitution there are several places you can look to get started. One place would be your school district's code of conduct and policies and procedures. Districts outline expectations for their students as well as the type of behavior that is considered acceptable. Many districts also will include consequences for common mistakes that students make so this may help you in deciding on your consequences for your dancers.

Another place to look for guidance when developing your dance team's constitution or handbook is your school's rules. Some may be more specific than what the district has outlined. Check with your school's athletic director and/or administration for the specific requirements for dancers to be considered eligible to participate in your dance team. Most schools have a GPA requirement as well as expectations for attendance, behavior, and school involvement in other areas besides your dance team. The dance team's main purpose is to be a positive representation of your school out in the community and at performances, so it is important for your dancers to live up to the expectations that the administration has set for all athletes and other high profile representatives of your school.

Another place that you can look for advice when developing your handbook or constitution is to check with other groups at your school for examples. The cheerleading squad or other auxiliary groups may have expectations set in place that have worked well for their members and they can give you insight to what is best for the student body at your school. Based on what they have developed you can adjust or add to it accordingly.

If you are a new coach taking over an existing program or if the rules you have set in place do not seem to be working for your team, it may be best to follow the guidelines that have been agreed on and tweak the rules as you see fit without making too many major changes. At the end of your season, ask a trusted parent and/or officer to help you evaluate the rules and make changes if necessary. consequences that they think are fair for infractions of the rules. Having the input of parents, especially if you are a new coach, can help them to feel as though they are a part of their dancer's life, and because they helped you develop the rules, they are more likely to agree with you when you follow them.

When developing your constitution take into account the type of team you want to have. Think about your dance team's purpose, how members are chosen, the team structure, requirements of members, expectations of dancers, rules to follow and the consequences if rules are broken. Your team's purpose should include why the school has decided to have a dance team. Is it to represent the school, promote school spirit, or perform at specific functions? The tryout process should also be included in your constitution or handbook so that everyone is aware of how a team member is selected. The team structure should include whether or not you will establish officers or captains so that team members know they will be expected to follow a peer's lead. The member requirements should include the academic and behavioral standards that must be upheld to remain a team member. The expectations of dancers could consist of the daily procedures they are expected to follow in different situations or be more general and include your expectations for your team members overall. Finally the rules and consequences should be outlined specifically so that the team members and you as the coach are all clear about exactly how things will run on the team.

Once you have developed your constitution or handbook it is important that you go to your school's administration for approval. If they do not approve of the rules you have set, ask for their assistance in developing rules that they will approve of. Once they have agreed that the handbook or constitution you developed is good, give them a copy to keep on hand should problems arise throughout the year. If the constitution you have developed is very different than one from the previous year you may want to take the time to go over the new rules with the dancers that are planning on re-auditioning so that they are aware of the changes.

After your constitution or handbook is decided upon, be sure to include an area for parents and dancers to sign to demonstrate that they have read and understand the rules that are in place. It is important to include a parent signature to make the agreement legal. Without an adult's signature, if a problem came up during the season and the constitution was challenged, the rules and expectations are just considered informative and not a policy that must be adhered to. Bringing the parents on board with your expectations for their dancer is important especially if you would like their support if their dancer has to be punished for some reason during the year.

Having a handbook or constitution for your dance team is a great way to insure that all of your dancers are aware of the policies and procedures that they must follow to remain in good standing as a dance team member. With this document in place you will hopefully be able to avoid conflict during your season and be able to focus on getting to know your team and working well with each other.