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## **Midseason Coach Connection**

Management of the program

Management of me

Things I need to do better

Communication

Sub varsity program (s)

Home Game Management

Transportation

Eligibility

Internal and Fundraising Accounting

Student Discipline

Athletic Training Services

Officials

Senior Night/Parent Night

Post Season Routine

Next season

Other Concerns?

More Support Needed?

Changes Needed?

Where do you see the program at mid- season? Rising/Declining/Plateauing/Problematic/Elite?

Other

# Elite, Rising, Plateauing, Declining, or Problematic? The 5 Stages of Program Development

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## WHERE IS YOUR PROGRAM?

- Is it one that is on the rise with a bright future?
- Has your program plateaued and just can't seem to breakthrough to the next level?
- Are you fortunate to be at an elite level and competing for championships year after year?
- Or is your program admittedly on the decline and you're having trouble stopping the slide?
- Worse yet, is your program in turmoil and spiraling out of control because it is mired in dysfunction, distractions, and deceit?

Whether you are a coach coaching your own team or an athletic administrator leading an entire athletic department, your overall program is either improving, plateauing, dominating, declining, or imploding.

To help you get a better grip on your situation, let's take a look at what I call the 5 Stages of Program Development. These stages apply equally to specific sports teams as well as overall athletic departments.

## THE FIVE STAGES OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

### 1. Rising Program

A Rising Program is one that seems to be getting better each year. The record is improving and the program is clearly climbing up the conference, state, and/or national standings. The coaches and captains focus on building a solid foundation of success that can support the program's ascent for the long-term. There is a strong sense of optimism, energy, and enthusiasm in and around the program, which creates a positive momentum. People are attracted to a Rising Program, expectations are high, and the outlook is favorable as the program continues to improve.

### 2. Elite Program

An Elite Program is one that has a realistic chance to compete for and win conference, state, and/or national championships virtually every year. Usually led by a credible and passionate leader who has mastered the [Seven Secrets of Successful Coaches](#) we describe in our book, an Elite Program is well-developed on many levels, has a strong pipeline of talent, and a well-defined culture of success that attracts athletes, coaches, and support staff with like-minded goals. The Elite Program knows exactly what it stands for and recruits and rewards people accordingly.

### 3. Plateauing Program



5 Stages of Program Development Model

A Plateauing Program is one that seems to be stuck at a certain level. This program typically attains a consistent moderate to mediocre level of success, but can't seem to ascend beyond it. Plateauing Programs tend to hover in this similar success range year after year but struggle to breakthrough to the next level. There may be a variety of reasons why the program has leveled off - but many can likely be traced to the talent level of the athletes, their lack of development within the program, as well as the overall leadership limitations of the coaching staff. Over time the same issues resurface and tend to hold down the program. Thus, the challenges either must be addressed internally by making some meaningful changes and improvements. Or the situation can be solved externally by upgrading to a more talented and credible leader who has the skills to help the program breakthrough to the next level.

#### 4. Declining Program

The Declining Program is one that is struggling and the results and the record show it. The losses mount over time and likely take their toll on the coaches, athletes, administrators, parents, and fans. Most often the slide is gradual as the program fades slowly out of contention. Other times the fall is precipitous like dropping off a cliff. Whatever the case, there is almost always a certain frustration surrounding the program. This leads many to bemoan the problems and blame those who they think are responsible for them, usually the leaders.



#### 5. Problematic Program

A Problematic Program is one that is highly dysfunctional and often in total disarray. This could occur for a variety of reasons including an overbearing or overwhelmed coach, athletes with dubious character, double standards within the team, little communication, mind games, meddling parents... the list goes on and on.

In Problematic Programs, the inmates either run the asylum, are beaten down by the coach and have succumbed to learned helplessness, are covertly or overtly sabotaging the team, or have totally abandoned ship. Because of this pessimistic and poisonous culture, the administrator's email inbox and voicemail are full of messages from irate parents. A Problematic Program is a ticking time bomb in need of a serious transformation - and fast!



#### What Separates the Various Programs?

Being privileged to see the inner workings of over 250 teams each season through our work with 14 Leadership Academies at top colleges across the nation, every week we get to see what separates Elite Programs from Rising Programs from Plateauing Programs from Declining Programs from Problematic Programs.

As you might imagine, there are significant and subtle differences between each of the programs in a variety of areas: recruiting, leadership, commitment, chemistry, culture, attitude, accountability, discipline, fan support, etc. The Elite Programs do things very differently than the Plateauing Programs. The Rising Programs have a completely different mindset than the Declining Programs.

Over the course of the next few months, we'll take an in-depth look at each of these stages. We'll explore the hallmarks of each stage, diagnose the primary and secondary causes, analyze actual teams and schools that are representative of each stage, and most importantly, show you how to move out of the less desirable stages, and how to develop or sustain an Elite Program. (Of course getting better talent certainly helps, but there is so much more to it than that!)

**How do you know where your program stands?** Our follow up article for our Championship Coaches Network members linked below provides you with some specific steps you can take to analyze the current status of your team.

*Teaching leadership and character in the quest for athletic excellence.*

Additionally, if you are an athletic administrator looking to apply these stages to your teams, we also provide a helpful framework to help you assess your entire athletic department.