

Give your team a  
leading  
edge.

# DEVELOPING ATHLETE LEADERS

Coach's Guidance

for helping your athletes get  
the most out of their reports

# Coach's Guidance

We ask athletes to complete worksheets as they receive their 360 report results in order to help them process and then plan further action.

We first ask them to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses (page 1), comparing their results to what they expected and what others perceived (pages 10-15). Then, we encourage them to choose three factors from the report that they most want to improve (page 16) and create a roadmap for how they intend to go about achieving those goals (pages 17-23).

**Here, our goal is to provide you with a few useful tips for how to go through these worksheets with your athletes.**

Think of this like a practice plan you might develop for any other athletic skill you want your team to learn:

**Where and how will they get "reps"?**

**How will they know what they're getting better at?**

**Where do they still have room for improvement?**

Keep these things in mind as we dive into the worksheet and your possible roles in debriefing.

The first and most importantly: ensure your team completes or at least reflects on the **introductory questions on page 1**. Have them dedicate at least five minutes thinking about these questions before seeing their results and documenting their reflections in some way because we all have a tendency to “remember” that we were right and not actually surprised by something after the fact.

Research supports the idea that actually hand-writing answers down (i.e., not just talking about it, and not typing a response on a phone or computer keyboard) leads to better cognitive processing and memory of concepts, so encourage your team to hand-write their responses out on their physical copies of the report. Quaint but effective! Their responses do not need to be in-depth (though they can be, depending on how much time you want to dedicate to this experience).

### ***Should I do my debriefs one-at-a-time or in a group?***

In addition to your own time considerations, you may also want to think about how personal you want to make your debriefs. For instance, if you plan on deep-diving into opportunities for your captains to improve their levels of consideration of others, it may not be the best time to include multiple other first-years in the debrief session.

However, if you want to debrief more of the team aspects like communication or overall accountability, or if you are trying to build a team culture that encourages open discussion and sharing, that may be the perfect time to have a group session.

When thinking about what size of the group (as well as whether to debrief individually), consider things like how much psychological safety your athletes need, how much time you expect to spend on any given individual, and whether the overall feedback appears to be negative or positive. In larger groups, it's also worth considering how you'll engage each member of the group and encourage contributions from everyone.

For the **strengths and weaknesses section on page 10**, if you are running a discussion or workgroup, you will want to know what factors you prioritize in a leader and which may not be as important. You may find it useful to first reflect on what the expectations are for athlete leaders on your team, and how you typically communicate them. This will come in handy if, for instance, you have a captain who is lower in empathy and thinks they should improve that score, but you are of the mind that too much empathy can derail a leader.<sup>1</sup> As mentioned on page 8 of the athlete’s report, most of these variables are not a “more is better” situation and the nuances of your expectation as a coach will be important to bring into the discussion in this section.



### *Can I still be effective if I just wing it?*

Some of the best debrief sessions can appear like natural conversations with no script. But some of the worst debrief sessions also feel that way. We highly recommend preparing at least a rough outline of how you want the debrief sessions to go, including things like setting – and getting agreement to – ground rules (such as be respectful and keep things confidential), time limits (hard stops) to keep from unfairly spending too much time on one athlete, and a way for any athlete to pause the discussion if they need to take a moment (such as by raising a red card). At a minimum, we suggest taking a moment to reflect on the outcomes you’d like to get to as part of the discussion – what would make it feel like it was time well spent?

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this idea, see Paul Bloom’s book, [Against empathy: The case for rational compassion](#).

For **comparisons between an athlete's self-view and their teammates' view** (starting on **page 16**, right after the strength and weaknesses tables), some advice:

First off, note that there are ten variables and we provide a worksheet for each. This can be overwhelming for anyone to do in one sitting, and we suggest you give your athletes some guidance about whether you want them to come having done all of the worksheets or perhaps you want to talk through their initial reactions to their scores and send them home with the goal of working through 3-4 of those factor-specific worksheets (pages 16-25) in more detail.

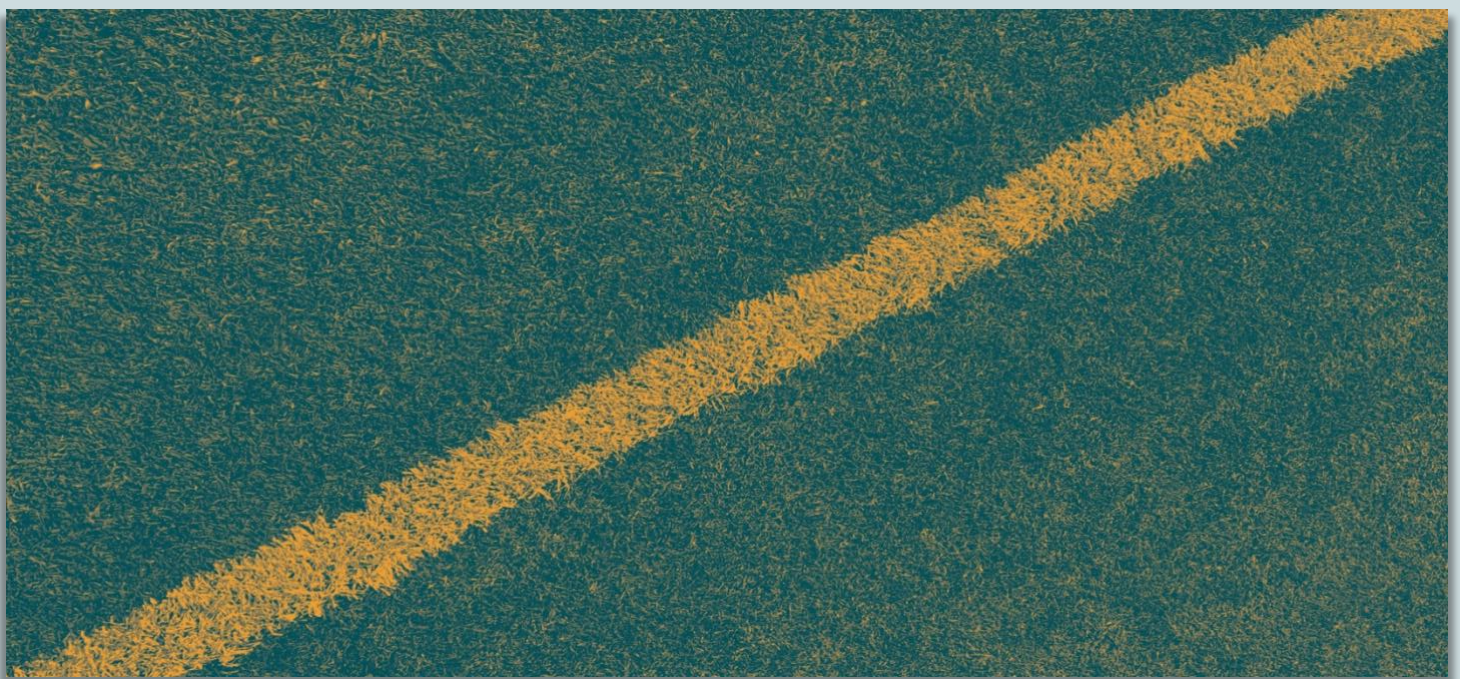


Usually when someone sees a discrepancy in how they see themselves versus how others see them, the goal is for a leader to “close the gap”.

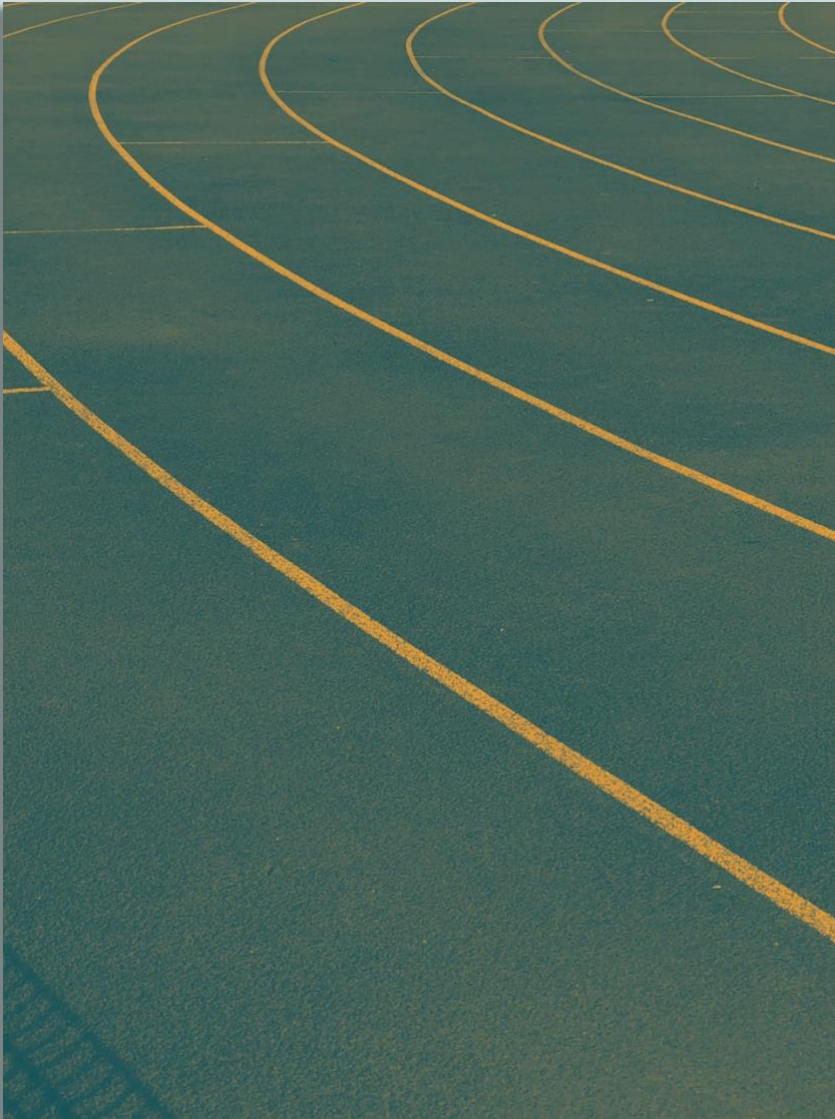
Research suggests that aligning perceptions between leader and follower can help a leader grow and can often improve leader effectiveness. It will be useful to talk through the different ways that alignment can be achieved.

For example, if a captain thinks they are higher in consideration than their teammates report, what is the best way to get consensus? Is it by increasing consideration behaviors? Or is it by getting the captain to realize or acknowledge they probably over-rated themselves? You may want to encourage the former if you prioritize that style of leadership on your team. But if you prefer a less “sensitive” approach to leadership, simply making sure the captain and players see things in the same light might suffice. If you don’t have a preference, generally speaking it is better to have higher ratings of consideration. However, like empathy, it can sometimes get in the way of other important things like accountability.

Remember (and feel free to remind your athlete if they seem caught up in their teammates’ perceptions) that this is a report of a *random sample* of their teammates’ point of view. Everyone did not rate each teammate, and it’s possible the average score is skewed by a few outliers. That said, getting hard-to-hear feedback is a valuable experience and one of the core tenets of a report like this. Someone getting such feedback might want to grasp at straws or look for an easy way out. Therefore, we advise keeping this approach as a last resort to be used only if the athlete seems to be distraught or if the ratings seem too harsh in your opinion.



Finally, for the **roadmap worksheets starting on page 17**, one of the best things you can do is go through each of your team's goals (or have them trade off with a teammate for peer review).



**Ask them which of their goals are short-term and which are longer-term.**

**Ask them why they arranged their goals the way they did.**

**Ask them any open-ended questions you can.**

Question-asking here is one of the most vital parts of the exercise because it forces your athlete to process and reflect on *why* they wrote what they wrote, and perhaps even refine and reevaluate.<sup>2</sup> The more curious you are and the more you can get them talking, the more successful this part will be for the team.

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<sup>2</sup>Something to keep in mind: open-ended questions tend to start with “how”, “why”, or “what” (rather than yes/no or leading questions that begin with “do you” or “don’t you think”). For instance, instead of asking “do you like our team’s culture”, you might instead ask “how do you feel about our team’s culture,” and “what do you like or dislike about it?” For even more information and useful tips on best practices for asking open-ended questions, visit <https://hbr.org/2018/05/the-surprising-power-of-questions>, or [reach out to us!](#)

Another reason it's going to be good to sit down and discuss this section in particular is that **SMART goals**,<sup>3</sup> while perhaps familiar, are still difficult to get right on the first try, especially when working alone.

As a reminder, here is the outline for the acronym and a few helpful questions that, based on our experience with college athletes during this exercise, help them refine their goals.

## SMART goals are

⇒ **S**pecific

"I will practice more," for example, is not specific enough. How much more? In what way?

⇒ **M**easurable

How will you know it is achieved? How will others know? Do you have someone who you can go to and ask them to hold you accountable? What would that accountability look like?

⇒ **A**ctionable

Select a goal that you can take action on right away – that you, and not others, have control over.

⇒ **R**ealistic

Can you really do anything about this?

⇒ **T**ime-bound

Have a definitive, not-too-distant time frame

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<sup>3</sup> Doran, G. T., Miller A., & Cunningham, J. (1981). There's a SMART way to write management's goals and objectives. *Management Review*, 70(11), 35-36.

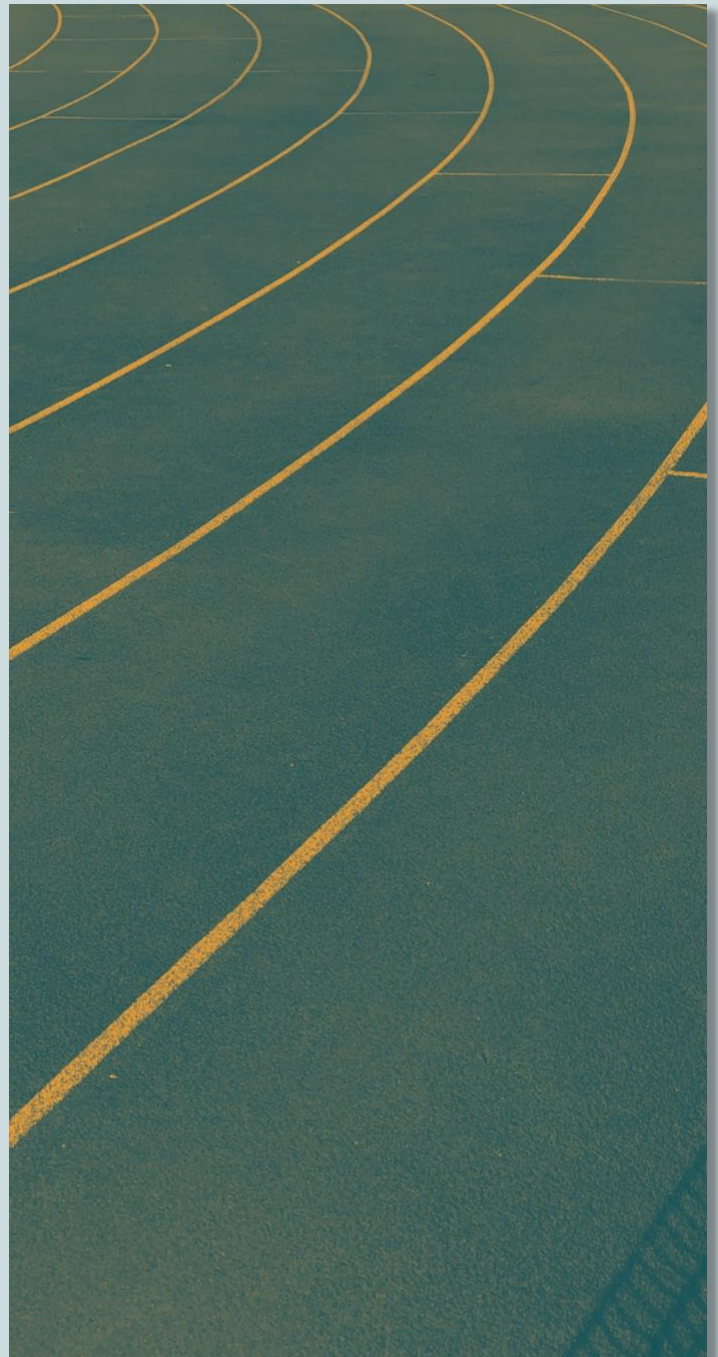


# Where to go from here

Survey tools like 360s can be very impactful, but they are only tools. Think of this like a fitness assessment you might have your team do, or game film you might watch together. A 360 provides data you can use to refine your strategy and continue to improve. Like any other athletic skill, there must be a way to continually practice and receive feedback. The workbook we have provided allows your athletes to reflect on where and how they'd like to practice some specific skills that, if improved, would benefit their own development as a leader and also your team as a whole.

It will now be up to you to determine how you want to hold them account-able for what they have outlined. How can you help to provide opportunities for them to practice their intended leadership skills? How can they find and receive the feedback they will need to reflect and get better? We encourage you to allow them to be self-directed in this effort, but you are best placed out of anyone to support them along the way. **The key is requiring them to take the feedback they've received from the 360, and put it into action.**

Almost as important as your initial debrief will be the **reassessment and evaluation of progress**. Not only will checking in later send the message to your athletes that this is important to you and the team's success, it will also force them to reflect on their work-



sheet responses and hold themselves accountable (a leadership practice unto itself!). How frequently you check in is a matter of discretion, but we've seen the most success when coaches do at least one pre-season and one post-season check-in. You likely do individual meetings with your athletes throughout the year – both formal and informal – and we would recommend that you consistently revisit their post-360 action plan in the same ways in which you might check in on their academic progress, mental health, etc.

Checking in frequently is not just about course-correcting or making sure progress towards a goal has been made. It is also about **expanding development and pushing your athletes further** in their leadership development than their original goals. Maybe your captain worked hard over three months to improve their leader identity metrics, and achieved their goal. That's fantastic, and the success should be celebrated. Frequently checking in ensures that your captain doesn't sit back and rest (for too long) on that success the rest of the year. We are never fully developed as leaders, and the more we continue to grow and improve, the better we make every team of which we are a part!

Maximizing the value you get out of this survey tool means a level of engagement and time commitment not many coaches will prioritize. It is easy to focus on other responsibilities, and hope that strong leaders emerge naturally and take your team where you want them to go. **We believe that a team with strong leaders is a sustainable competitive advantage**, and therefore worthy of as much attention as anything else you might focus on when trying to elicit a high level of performance from your athletes. Leadership is a skill worth developing with the same level of intention as you would strength, speed, or tactics.

Congratulations on taking the first step, and with the help of this 360 tool, more specifically identifying the skill gaps that are worth addressing. We encourage you to reach out to us with any questions, resource requests, and input you may have. We're also working to build a community of like-minded coaches that can be a valuable and inclusive resource for us all moving forward.

# D A L

More good resources for first-time 360-debriefings can be found at

[www.developingathleteleaders.com](http://www.developingathleteleaders.com)

You can also reach out to us at

[support@developingathleteleaders.com](mailto:support@developingathleteleaders.com)

for a more extensive list of resources and options