

We continue to bring you new and helpful articles that will help make you the best you can be.

This article "**Umpiring Is About Relationships**" written by Joel Balderman is heads-up advice for the thinking umpire. Joel is an ISF certified umpire with the Softball Canada programme. Joel hails from Brantford, Ontario, Canada

Umpiring Is About Relationships

Umpires work with people. This is an indisputable fact. As people who work with others, it would be to our advantage to better understand some of the ways we can be more effective in our interpersonal relationships both on and off the diamond.

When we take on the role of umpire, we are drawn into relationships with 4 distinct groups of people, as well as many other secondary groups. These groups are:

- Coaches
- Players
- Spectators
- Other Umpires

Establishing and maintaining positive relationships with the people we come in contact with, is challenging, to say the least. Let's examine the dynamics of dealing with these groups, as well as some do's and don'ts that should be considered.

In our relationships with all groups, we must show respect, in order to be respected ourselves. Look the coach in the eye when you are talking. Remove your sunglasses, if you are wearing them. Ascertain what the coach wants – is it information, or is it to show displeasure about a situation on the diamond? Should you respond the same way in both cases?

Use the coach or the catcher to short-circuit any potential problems before they become apparent to others. Communicate and gain respect.

If your interaction is as a result of a disputed call or play, maintain self-control, even if the coach or player is not doing so. **Umpires do not have the luxury of losing control of their emotions on the field.** Stay calm. Not raising your voice can be very disarming.

In order to be respected ourselves, we must keep within the spirit of the rules, and show firmness in application of the rules. Make that tough call, and apply the rules that govern the play. **We are not out there to win popularity contests.** When appropriate, a sense of humour can go a long way. Show that you are human.

There is no room for any kind of prejudice, bias or discrimination on the ball diamond. Prejudice can poison relationships, and must be set aside.

Never threaten either a player or a coach. Threatening makes people defensive. If we draw a line in the sand, we leave ourselves with few choices, should the player or coach cross the line.

Listen to the message that is being sent. Two people talking at the same time makes for a very poor conversation. **The word “listen” contains the same letters as the word “silent”.** Think before you speak. Show regard for the participant’s personal space, and stay in the **“comfort zone”**, rather than getting too close. No one likes it if we get in their face.

Realize that we communicate both verbally and through non-verbal means, and understand these elements of communication. Research shows that your non-verbal signals are much more important in shaping the perception of those who are watching than what you actually say. **Use the skills of body language, voice control and eye contact.** Crossing your arms, finger pointing, wild gestures and physical contact of any kind should be avoided.

Spectators are an important part of the game. It would be dull indeed to work in the absence of any fans. Generally, though, umpires should try to disregard the crowd in order to stay focused on the job. Large crowds can cause fear. Turn a negative into a positive, and use the crowd to energize and activate you.

Should a serious problem arise with a spectator, let the home team manager or tournament organizers handle those problems. Do not discuss the game within earshot of any fans. Avoid any response to hecklers. Never discuss plays with fans after a game, or when you are off the diamond watching other umpires work.

Our relationships with other umpires should be governed by the Golden Rule. **Treat others as you would be treated. Respect the skills and experience of your peers and partners. Support one another.** You are truly the third team on the diamond. Leave your ego at home. Umpiring is not about ego, it is about getting the calls right. Remember: ‘At the feast of ego, everyone goes hungry’. Don’t cop out – take responsibility on the diamond. Never try to make a scapegoat of other umpires, especially if it is to hide your own inadequacy.

In summary, your level of success, and your ability at this very human activity called umpiring will be enhanced the more you show your humanity to all others that you deal with. Enjoy your relationships, for they sustain you year after year.