



LESSON #1

Be a team player

Whether it was backing newcomers like Shikhar Dhawan and Rohit Sharma early on in their careers or letting teammates bask in the glory of the 2011 World Cup victory, MS Dhoni believes in giving importance to the team's priorities and space to his players, in turn, empowering them. "This is an important skill to learn — to be open with the team and to allow others to think through, feel the right and wrong in every situation and then take solution-based decisions, which enables best results in every task at hand," says Vandana Shah, executive and leadership coach at The Chrysalis.

"The difference between a boss and a leader is that a boss dictates terms, and a leader develops the team members, such that there is no more a need for a system to follow but where members work in sync on their own. Being flexible to the development of team members also helps them evolve and build their emotional stability," adds Khyati Birla, executive coach.

LESSON #2

Don't buckle under pressure

He isn't called Captain Cool without reason. In his career spanning over a decade, Dhoni has seen dark days too, and battled many controversies on and off the field. "However, when he's on the field, it's all about the game. The controversies directed at him may have rattled him. But, there were no flare-ups, display of hurt or angst or slanging matches. He conducted himself with dignity and pride, choosing to let go of things that don't add to growth, demonstrating a strong sense of character," says city-based victory coach, Farzana Suri.

"Every leader should stay grounded even during peak pressure time, criticism in personal and professional life, and maintain a degree of lateral thinking orientation that helps taking right decisions and best performance at all times," explains Shah. According to Birla, if the leader does not have the emotional resistance to stand strong under pressure, the team will follow suit.

LESSON #3

Go with your gut

Whether it is an odd selection of players, shuffling the batting order or attacking field setups, this skipper goes by his gut instincts on the field and that has led to many a wins for India. "This requires a lot of belief in oneself and one's abilities. No matter what position you are in, without self-belief, your steps won't move you to stride ahead. Leaders should keep that faith in what they believe in," says Suri. Birla feels that after years of experience, a person builds up a sixth sense. "There was once a Formula One driver who was looking at navigating a bend on the track. But at the last minute, he pulled over. Turns out, there was a pile-up ahead and his instinctive approach saved his life. He said this was because the audience was looking ahead rather than at him and he sensed something was wrong. This is what experience builds up," she elaborates.

According to Shah, leaders need to read between the lines and see what others may have missed and take the risk that is required at that moment.

LESSON #4

Boost team morale

According to the cricket commentator, Charu Sharma, Dhoni's undisputable positive personality results in boosting the morale of the team, an important skill for leaders to learn from. "His personality rubs off on the team and it is easier for them to be around him, if not follow him. You find captains who berate their team members in public or give them an angry glare if they lose a catch, but Dhoni never does that. He smiles, jokes and has the least possible baggage on his shoulders, which is refreshing," observes Sharma. Birla explains, "When in a team, not every member is evolved at the same level. For example, one person might have difficulty facing a fast delivery while the other might find it hard to face a spin ball. Reassurance from the leader, to at least try and not worry about the result, helps build the morale of members and affects the overall result."

LESSON #5

Walk the talk

As India's wicketkeeper, batsman and captain, Dhoni's personal performance has broken many records. "He has proven to be India's man during crisis. The number of times he has bailed India out with late order innings is what the leader is all about. You have to lead from the front and walk the talk," says Sharma.

LESSON #6

Learn to handle failure

There is no constant in heroism and a person isn't always on the top. Failure is an inevitable part of success and a true leader does a retake when there is failure. Several sportsmen such as Michael Jordan have seen failure and started again," says Birla.

LESSON #7

Connect individually

Apart from being a captain, Dhoni has also been a mentor for younger team players. "He connects with each player in the team, providing them quality time with equal frequency. Leaders who connect with each team member derive more out of them in the long run — their loyalty, high confidence and zeal to surpass themselves in their performance," says Suri. "A good leader ensures that egos don't develop in the team and has expectations that are realistic. He talks to people in a way that he reaches out to each member," sums up Birla.

a fit leader matters

Dhoni is known to take keen interest in fitness and this aspect has inspired members of the Indian team to keep up their fitness levels too. "Anybody who is physically fit is living consciously, hence, is focussed, alert and wise. To lift a 25 kg barbell, one needs to be focussed; hence, being mentally and physically fit is interconnected. This also affects the person emotionally and the person is an inspiration to the members of his team and they try and adopt this way of living as in the end, everyone wants to be on the top," says nutrition consultant, Karishma Chawla.

Dhara Vora and Krutika Behrawala
theguide@mid-day.com

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Do it the Dhoni way



LEADERSHIP SKILLS

As Mahendra Singh Dhoni leads India into the Cricket World Cup quarter-finals with six wins — after a dismal showing in the preceding Australia tri-series — **the guide** invites experts to decode Captain Cool's qualities that can serve as leadership lessons



Dhoni shares a light moment with teammates during a team training session at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) on January 5. PIC/AFP