

5 Key Traits of Well Rounded Tennis Professionals



by Federico Mas

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When we think about a good tennis pro, several hallmark traits come to mind, including knowledgeable, enthusiastic, positive and professional. A tennis pro who is considered successful also has good customer service skills and has been able to develop a large clientele of players who take lessons regularly. It certainly takes hard work and dedication to acquire these characteristics and they are important factors in becoming a successful tennis pro. Pros who are still trying to establish themselves and earn full-time status must strive for these. However, the journey to becoming a well-rounded pro doesn't stop with a full book of clients and good coaching skills. Well-rounded tennis professionals possess skills and qualities that make them highly valuable, not only to their clients, but to their colleagues and management as well. These traits hold worth and marketability in the industry, making pros who possess them more attractive and qualified than other candidates for tennis positions. The following are five key traits of well-rounded tennis professionals.

1. Highly Communicative

The tennis profession requires coaches to be great communicators not only face-to-face on the court, but also digitally off it. Unfortunately, some pros forget the value of prompt digital communication, especially with fellow staff members. While some are quick to answer customer messages, email correspondence with team members can sometimes be considered low priority and be left behind.

Well-rounded pros are exceptionally good at communicating through text and email, as well as in person, not only with their clients but with fellow pros and program directors. It's understandable that most full-time pros have busy on court schedules that leave little time for administrative duties, however, with today's mobile technology, this excuse for a lack of communication is questionable at best. Although it should be done off court, replying by phone to an email can be as simple as a swipe of the finger and a voice-to-text message. A quick, simple 'Got it' or 'Let's discuss tomorrow' reply goes a long way, and good communicators use this very efficiently.

When there's no time to go into detail, replies like these, at the very least, acknowledge that the message was received and that the intention is to following up at a later point. These quick email replies are a professional courtesy to the sender, and take just a few seconds to ensure nothing falls through the cracks. Digital communication keeps the dialogs going, and are a key component in a properly functioning work environment. Everyone plays an important role in fostering a communicative environment and successful pros understand the importance of their part in it.

2. Passionate about Education

Good tennis pros have vast knowledge of the game and understand it is essential to continually expand what they know. Tennis pros who are truly invested in education read articles and books, borrow ideas from other coaches, and make the sacrifice it often takes to attend educational seminars and workshops. These pros don't simply obtain certifications for credential purposes or because it is required by their club. They do it for themselves and their players. They continue to read, study, and earn higher certification levels because they are eager to learn and develop as professionals, regardless of their current status in the industry or the success of their players.

There are so many resources from industry organizations, including PTR workshops, symposia and conferences. These opportunities are readily accessible for those who take the time to look for them. PTR offers hundreds of hours of free education online that you can view on your own timeline, so there's no excuse. Networking with fellow coaches and industry leaders is another great way to learn. Pros who are passionate about education actively seek opportunities to connect with others to expand their knowledge.

3. Team Focused

Team focused pros help others as much as they can. They are concerned about the success of the club and fellow staff in addition to their own book of business. While they understand the importance of growing their clientele, a team oriented pro is mindful of the needs of others on the staff, as well as program revenue goals. If they are not able to fit someone into their schedule, they encourage players to join other classes and to participate in programs with other coaches at their club. They also promote club events and programs to their players. In a sense, they are a sales person for the club and not just for themselves. Last but not least, a team focused pro is always willing to help cover classes when there are staffing emergencies, even if it's inconvenient.

4. Creative

Creative pros generate new ideas for programming and are eager to initiate their own group lessons. They are not content with simply accepting the class assignments given to them for existing programs. Some beginner tennis pros think classes are initiated only by the director or program coordinator, but this is simply not true. Tennis managers love new ideas and appreciate pros who can take the lead on shaping new programs. Innovative pros don't allow their busy schedules to stifle their creativity. They know that creativity doesn't stop at designing new classes or events; they constantly brainstorm new strategies to bring value to their current programs and to engage more players on the court in fun and exciting ways. They are proactive and they take the necessary steps to bring their ideas to fruition.

5. Open to Change

Whether it's learning a new method to teach a forehand, a new structure for conducting classes, or a new approach to improve any aspect of their coaching or player performance, pros who are open to change understand that there are different ways to do things. They accept that change may be uncomfortable, but don't shy away from it. This can be challenging for experienced pros. Some coaches who have been set in their ways for a long time, and have garnered success and possibly even accolades for their approach, may be resistant to change. However, a need for change doesn't mean that what you have been doing is wrong or that you have to change who you are as a coach. It simply means that there is always room for growth in our field and no one is exempt from improvement. Getting out your 'comfort zone' can be difficult, but it is something that well-rounded pros embrace.

With busy schedules and so many responsibilities and distractions every day, it's easy to disregard the value of small actions like volunteering, sharing an idea, reading a tennis article, or promptly replying to an email, and forget what these small efforts can do for your long term success. These seemingly insignificant actions may not always be followed by immediate praise, but their value accumulates over time and they will make you a more appreciated, educated and ultimately sought after pro.

If you want to become an influential pro at your club and beyond, consider weaving these behaviors into your everyday functions to help you step up to that level. For those of you in the job market, emphasize these traits. Employers see immense value in them and these attributes will increase your chances of getting the job you are seeking. If you are already an established pro, enhancing these characteristics will increase your value in your club and you will be seen in a completely new light.