

“CLAW” your way to becoming the Complete Umpire

Complete umpires offer a lot more than strong ball/strike and out/safe performances. There are a multitude of skill sets and personal traits found in top level umpires that go much deeper and even provide the *foundation* for those performances.

If you aspire to truly be a complete umpire, consider “CLAW”: character, leadership, ability, and work ethic. These are the pillars that you must have in place to support your mission. When you look around for the best role models and mentors – the consistent high achievers and most respected in any field – you find these traits.

Let’s begin with character. This is a broadly used word, but consider that character defines who you are at your core; this is programmed the moment you are born (and perhaps even before that). It is, therefore, the most difficult to change of the four pillars. We all have flaws in our character, but being honest with oneself about those flaws is the key to limiting their damage. Officials are expected to be of “very high character”, and so, we must continuously work to better ourselves at our deepest level.

Next is leadership – not bossing people around or exploiting certain privileges – I mean *real* leadership. Our great military instills a code that places the lives of other soldiers above one’s own. It is said that the top officers eat after all their soldiers have already done so. Borrowing this philosophy to apply it to sports officials is not meant to imply that officiating sports is nearly on the same level of sacrifice or importance as our military but to instill some change in the way we approach leading. There is no one more important in your baseball world than the members of your crew on any given day. Treat them accordingly – crew chief or not!

Umpiring ability is, of course, vital in making a competent umpire. Some are born with more natural ability than others, and frankly, more so than with many other professions, not everyone can do this job. Some coordination, vision, athleticism, instinct, judgment, and even social aptitude are necessary. Although there are some ways to improve these areas, you generally either have some element of these or you don’t.

Finally, there is work ethic. This is where we have a choice to develop what ability we have. Our profession has several skill sets, and they all require hard work and consistent reinforcement to be at our best. There are no secrets here, and umpiring can be very humbling at times; bouncing back from adversity is a must. Maintaining a top-level game means staying up to date with rules and procedures and staying physically fit and sharp with your skills. Mentor others, give back, seek mentoring of your own no matter where you’ve been, and never stop improving!

Whenever you ask yourself whether you are a complete umpire, consider “CLAW” and use it as your guide for getting to yes!