

Effective Communication Skills Are Key to Successful Coaching in Sports

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Abstract – The subject of strengthening communication skills is one area where sport psychology and coaches could have a huge impact in child sport. Such abilities, both in terms of verbal and nonverbal communication, are regarded as critical to a team's performance and success (Sullivan, 1993), and many coaches find themselves continually striving to improve in this area. Coaches are frequently heard bemoaning their team's "too silent" on the field, and how confusion reigns as a result of their players' failure to communicate with one another.

The act of expressing (or conveying) ideas, information, knowledge, emotions, and feelings, as well as understanding what others say, is referred to as communication. Sending and receiving messages are both part of the communication process, which can take many different forms.

The spoken word is verbal communication, whereas nonverbal communication includes actions, facial expressions, body position, and gestures. Communication can take place in one-on-one or group situations, and in written or visual media (e.g., printed materials) (e.g., pictures, videos, and observational learning). And it includes not just the message's substance but also its emotional impact or influence on the person who receives it. There are six components to effective communication. Crookes, 1991;

Clear	Ensure that the information is provided in a clear and understandable manner.
Concise	Keep it short and sweet; don't let your message get lost in the shuffle.
Correct	Be truthful and avoid presenting false information.
Complete	Give all of the information rather than just a portion of it.
Courteous	Avoid conflict by being pleasant and non-threatening.
Constructive	Be upbeat and avoid being critical or pessimistic.

Key Words – Sports Psychology, Coaching, Communication Skill

INTRODUCTION

Any coach's success, at any level of competition, is defined on his or her ability to successfully communicate with players and, as a result, get them to communicate better with one another. It's easy to get caught up in the technical aspects of sport — putting up strong game plans and teaching proper technique — but it's also simple to overlook the importance of efficient communication. Coaches may be informed and well-organized, but their athletes' performance may never reflect these qualities if they lack strong communication skills.

Consider the following questions. Do you encourage athletes to express themselves? Do you observe people's body language? Do you know how to spot indicators of dehydration and exhaustion? It would be easier to communicate if athletes always informed coaches when there was an issue. According to studies, nonverbal communication accounts for 70% of

all communication. That is why it is critical for coaches to be on the lookout for signs that anything is awry. Coaches who can read their players and encourage them to speak up can help athletes avoid dehydration or injury, improve their skill development, and boost their confidence. (Petlichkoff 2002)

NON-VERBAL MESSAGES

Face-to-face communication may appear to consist of taking turns speaking at first. The player is required to listen to the coach and wait patiently until he or she finishes speaking. On closer inspection, it can be seen that people use a combination of verbal and non-verbal behaviors to keep communication flowing smoothly-

- a) Head nods, grins, frowns, physical contact, eye movements, laughter, body posture, language, and a variety of other acts are examples of this type of behavior.

- b) The facial expressions of athletes provide feedback to their coaches. Boredom or disinterest is indicated by fidgeting, as well as unfocused or downturned eyes. Half-raised brows suggest puzzlement, whereas fully raised brows indicate disbelief.
- c) The group's posture can be used to determine their attitude toward the coach and can also be used to gauge their mood. Controlling a group necessitates a coach's sensitivity to the signals sent out by the athletes.
- d) Their faces usually give a decent indicator of how they feel, and the coach will benefit greatly from a thorough grasp of nonverbal signs.

COMMUNICATION BLOCKS IN COACHING

Crookes (1991) believes that communication problems with athletes can be caused by a variety of factors, including the following:

- a) The athlete's perspective on something is not the same as yours.
- b) Instead of moving through the process of hearing, understanding, and accepting, the athlete may leap to a conclusion.
- c) It's possible that the athlete lacks the necessary understanding to comprehend what you're trying to say.
- d) The athlete may be unmotivated to listen to you or act on the information you provide.
- e) The coach can have trouble conveying what he or she wants to communicate to the player.
- f) Emotions can get in the way of dialogue.
- g) There could be a personality mismatch between you and the athlete.

Because these barriers to communication work in both directions, coaches must carefully analyse the communication process.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: CONSIDERATION AND COMPONENTS

Coaches should consider the following before talking with an athlete, according to Crookes (1991).

- WHY do they want to communicate?
- WHO do they want to communicate with?
- WHERE and WHEN should the message be delivered?
- WHAT do they want to communicate?

- HOW will they communicate the information?

Crookes (1991) identified six components of effective communication:

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<i>Constructive</i>	<i>Be upbeat and avoid being critical or pessimistic.</i>

SUGGESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN COACHING

The ten suggestions below will help you improve coach-athlete and team communication.

1. Make yourself approachable.

Keep channels of communication open with your players. Specific inquiries on injuries, hydration, and recovery should be asked. Pay attention to the messages your athletes send, both verbal and nonverbal. If they appear fatigued and uninterested, they may be communicating a nonverbal message regarding their hydration and nutrition level, as well as the need for more rest. (Petlichkoff, 2002)

2. Be a good listener.

It's a big difference between hearing and understanding what your athletes are saying. If you're not sure what they're saying, reword it so they know you're paying attention. 'What you're saying is...' or 'Are you suggesting that...', for example, shows athletes that you're paying attention and understand their worries. (Petlichkoff 2002)

3. Define athlete roles

Give each athlete a sense of where he or she belongs in the bigger picture. You can offer your athletes a sense of worth and accomplishment by recognizing the role each of them plays on the team. You should instill in each team member the belief that through hard effort and dedication, they can better their position. (Steuerwald 2002)

4. Determine goals

Encourage your players to create attainable goals and share how they plan to achieve them. Discuss the contrasts between individual and team goals, as well as the necessity of sacrificing personal

aspirations in order to achieve team goals. Setting goals with a feeling of purpose is a life skill that will benefit your athletes outside of their sport. (Steuerwald 2002)

5. Mutually establish trust.

Mutual respect and trust are the foundations of healthy relationships. Even in the heat of competition, your athletes need to know that they can count on you to remain fair and positive. Criticize actions or decisions, but leave personality out of the equation. Criticism must be constructive, positive, and constant, with an emphasis on performance improvement. When your players are made to feel bad, they will not improve. (Steuerwald 2002)

6. Communicate with a positive approach

Consider good, better, and how when giving constructive feedback.

- a) Good — Begin with something they got right.
- b) Better — give constructive criticism on how to improve.
- c) How — Finish with a complement to encourage them to improve. (Petlichkoff 2002)

7. Encourage athletes to succeed.

Empower your athletes to make decisions and control various parts of a game or competition within the context of a disciplined and structured setting. Teach subjects thoroughly so that each athlete understands his or her role. Then, hold your athletes accountable for doing their part by making modifications on the fly and disclosing any issues to you. Authority and responsibility must go hand in hand. Avoid instilling a fear of failure in your communication tactics, and instead promote risk-taking as a necessary aspect of sports competition. (Steuerwald 2002)

8. The minds and bodies of athletes need to be fueled

Without the correct nutrients and water, your athletes will be unable to perform intellectually and physically. Educate athletes on the need of refueling and rehydrating with food and drink choices. Athletes can benefit from sports drinks in addition to water since they replenish fluids and electrolytes lost via sweat and provide carbohydrate energy. Athletes who are properly fueled can perform at a greater level both physically and mentally. (Steuerwald 2002)

9. Create a communication strategy

Just as you would plan for game structure, you should also plan for communication opportunities. Finding an athlete after a rough practice and asking whether they understand the rationale for the comments offered

might be a simple way to communicate. Your athletes will only be able to follow coaching advice if they understand what is expected of them. A season-end interview is an effective approach for creating lines of communication. In a calm atmosphere, you can ask an athlete 20 questions to make them feel like you care about them as a person. (Steuerwald 2002)

10. To promote teamwork, use communication.

(Lenti 1996) Better teamwork is the result of the combination of five fundamental elements

- a) **Communication that works** - Establishing the concept of 'teamwork' requires clear, positive communications from coach to coach, coach to athlete, and athlete to athlete. All team members and staff will have a clear understanding of the team's goals and will strive toward achieving those goals.
- b) **Attitudes that win** — We all know that athletes with positive attitudes are more likely to contribute to the team. It's not enough to instill positive attitudes in individual players; a 'team attitude' is required to foster the type of collaboration required for success. How effectively your athletes accept their duties and responsibilities to the team can be used to establish a positive team attitude. The star part is relatively simple to accept, but team experts and back-ups must also grasp and accept their roles and obligations. Encourage this mindset by leading by example: accept all of your responsibilities as a coach, not just the ones that you enjoy.
- c) **Ego of the team** — Once participants understand and embrace their duties on the team, the concept of "team attitude" can be expanded to include "team ego." This simply implies that players must put their egos aside for the greater welfare of the team.
- d) **Motivation** — Your athletes must be given reasons to be motivated in order to achieve team success. Set long-term goals and encourage your players to meet them by completing a succession of short-term targets to create a continuous system of motivation. Include your personal, academic, and professional objectives as well. Your players will feel a feeling of accomplishment as they make modest strides forward, which will keep their motivation high. Your athletes can also help each other to stay motivated. Make your players feel like they have a genuine interest in each other by dividing them into drill groups and scoring them as a team rather than as individuals.
- e) **Discipline** — The ingredient of cooperation, discipline, plays a significant role in the formation and maintenance of positive

communications, team attitudes and egos, and motivation. The glue that keeps everything else together is discipline. Remember that discipline, when applied fairly and consistently, is a positive force in the development of teamwork. Rules are an important part of discipline, so make sure the ones you do have are consistent with team goals, realistic, and enforceable. Develop self-discipline as well — "what one does when no one is looking." Assist athletes in developing self-discipline by: a) setting goals, b) clearly communicating your expectations of them and holding them to those standards, and c) providing positive reinforcement and, c) expecting the best performance from each of them, whether in practise, the classroom, or the game.

CONCLUSION

Coaches, according to Crookes (1991), should:

- 1) Improve their verbal and nonverbal communication skills.
- 2) Provide positive feedback during coaching sessions.
- 3) Give equal attention to all athletes in their training groups.
- 4) Communicate as appropriate to your athlete's thinking and learning styles.
- 5) Ensure that they not only talk to but also listen to their athletes.
- 6) Better communication skills will allow both the athlete and coach to get a lot more out of their coaching relationship.

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