

Realize That Feedback Is The Breakfast Of Champions

The familiar coaching adage that "what you do speaks so loudly that no one can hear what you're saying" is especially important to remember when dealing with athletes. Players benefit most from coaches whose actions reflect both their implied and stated values. The ability to observe, analyze and communicate are three of a coaches most valuable assets. A word of caution, however, is that the **beneficial effects of verbal instruction decrease in direct proportion to the amount given**. Remember: **Keep it Short and Simple**. Take time to videotape yourself coaching, not only at practice but also in games. Observe yourself as others see you. **Frequently there is a significant difference between how coaches think they are talking, acting and communicating and what athletes perceive.**

Practical suggestions for coaches:

1. **Give specific, performance-contingent feedback** to athletes rather than general comments lacking performance-related information.
2. **Be liberal with praise**. Most athletes prefer coaches who shout praise and whisper criticism.
3. Tell athletes what improvements need to be made, why and most importantly, how to make those corrections successfully and consistently.
4. Observe and provide meaningful feedback to every athlete at least once each training session and game.
5. Combine verbal praise with consistent non-verbal forms or encouragement (i.e. a pat on the back, smile, a high five, etc.).
6. Maintain your credibility as a coach by being accurate and sincere in your feedback and praise. Ignoring errors, giving excessive praise for mediocre performance or excessive praise for performance on simple tasks conveys to the athlete that either you don't know what you're talking about or else you have very low expectations of them as performers.
7. Correct performance errors in non-threatening and non-punitive ways. Finding problems is the role of a critic not a competent soccer coach. Good coaching requires the ability to not only recognize problems but also to solve them through effective, practical and successful solutions.
8. **Reward effort as much as outcome**. Repeated effort, especially in the face of failure and adversity, is one of the most important ingredients for future success.
9. Use the **"feedback sandwich"** when correcting youngsters. Find something the player did well and praise it. Next tell the athlete what they did incorrectly, what they need to do to improve and why. Finish with a positive, encouraging or motivational statement.
10. Foster an environment that allows for trying new skills, approaches and strategies without the fear or reprimand and punishment. Mistakes are integral to sport improvement. Ridicule, sarcasm and fear are impediments to both the immediate and future performance success.

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