

# SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

Effective Communication and Dealing with Athletes with Low Self-Esteem

# BIOGRAPHY

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- Provisional Registered Psychologist
- Master's of Counselling Psychology: City University of Seattle
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# FOUNDATIONS OF COMMUNICATION

- Coaches must communicate in a clear, honest, and direct manner for a team to function effectively
- Coaches need to remember:
  - be empathetic
  - be consistent
  - be responsive to player differences

# COMMUNICATION

- Communication does not just develop once the season begins, it requires constant development and maintenance in order to ensure success
- 10 steps to help you communicate effectively
  1. Be honest
  2. Do not be defensive
  3. **Be Consistent**
  4. Be empathetic
  5. Avoid sarcasm
  6. **Praise or criticize behaviour, not personality**
  7. Respect the integrity of others
  8. **Use positive nonverbal cues**
  9. Teach skills
  10. **Interact consistently with all team members**

# ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- Think about how you communicate with others (i.e., athletes, other coaches, officials, media, etc). How often do you find yourself engaging in the following behaviours?

1=Almost always 2=Usually 3=Sometimes 4=Seldom 5= Almost never

- 1. I pay attention primarily to what an athlete is saying and give little attention to what he or she is doing
- 2. I let an athlete's lack of organization get in the way of my listening
- 3. I interrupt if I have something I want to say
- 4. I stop listening when I think I understand the idea whether or not the reporter has finished
- 5. I fail to repeat back what has been said before I react

# ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

1=Almost always 2=Usually 3=Sometimes 4=Seldom 5= Almost never

- 6. I give little verbal or nonverbal feedback to officials
- 7. I pay attention only to the words, rather than to the words, tone, and pitch being used
- 8. I let emotion-laden words make me angry
- 9. If I consider the subject boring I stop paying attention
- 10. I find myself unable to limit my criticism to my athletes' performance
- 11. I find getting in the face of an official gets my point across

# ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

1=Almost always 2=Usually 3=Sometimes 4=Seldom 5= Almost never

- 12. I allow distractions to interfere with my concentration
- 13. I do not recognize when I am too upset or tired to speak or listen
- 14. I raise my voice when I want my athletes to pay attention to what I am saying
- 15. I try to give advice when someone is telling me his or her problems

from Lawrence Rosenfeld and Larry Wilder, 1990, Communication fundamentals: Active listening, *Sport Psychology Training Bulletin*, 1 (5): 8

# ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- Add your response to the 15 items
- The higher the score, the MORE effective are your communication skills
- This total number is less important than your responses to separate items
  - items that you scored 1, 2, or 3 are areas that need improvement

# ASSESSING YOUR TEAM'S COMMUNICATION

- The Attentional and Interpersonal Style (TAIS) inventory
  - a 144 item self-report questionnaire that measures twenty different concentration skills, personal and interpersonal attributes
  - Scores on the TAIS attentional scales allow you to identify an individual's concentration strengths and relative weaknesses. Scores on TAIS personal and interpersonal scales allow you to anticipate the types of performance situations which are likely to interfere with a person's ability to control their level of emotional arousal and breakdowns in communication. These two pieces of information, combined with an understanding of the concentration skills and interpersonal characteristics required by any specific performance situation will allow you to anticipate how a person will perform under pressure, and help you determine the specific steps that will be most helpful in overcoming any identified problem.

# EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- Communicating Your Message
  1. Develop your message
  2. Get in your athletes heads
  3. Tell the truth, directly and specifically
  4. Use supportive language and empathy
  5. Model the message
  6. Three R's: Repeat, repeat, repeat
  7. Watch body language
  8. Employ the sandwich approach when giving criticism
  9. Use more "ands" than "buts"; avoid why statements

# RECEIVING THE MESSAGE

- If you are too tired or not ready for a “draining” conversation, schedule it for another time; if you can’t stall in order to collect yourself
- Use “I” statements when responding to the message
- Be open to new ideas
- Reflect or repeat back to athletes in order to ensure you have understood their message
  - i.e. “What I’m hearing you say is ...” or “You seem frustrated ...”

# SETTING CLEAR GOALS

- Involve your team when setting goals for the season
  - Include both performance and process goals
    - Primary focus should be on *process* goals
  - Remember to set SMART goals
- ✓ Specific
  - ✓ Measurable
  - ✓ Adjustable/Accountability
  - ✓ Realistic
  - ✓ Time oriented
- Write them down and post them

# ATHLETES WITH LOW SELF-ESTEEM

- Require more attention than other athletes
- If you do not address their problems, they will NOT get better
- May or may not be related to your communication approach
  - reflect on the situation, develop a solution
- Generally the result of an imbalance between perceived challenge and skill

# ATHLETES WITH LOW SELF-ESTEEM

- Pre-plan for one-on-one meetings during the season
- If possible Determine what is resulting in the low self-esteem
  - if it is game-play related, modify athlete's role/position in order to build back confidence whenever possible
- When to refer to sport psychologist
  - Effective communication has been unsuccessful
  - Athlete states that problem is unrelated to situational game play
  - You are unsure or uncomfortable-trust your instincts
  - Problem is chronic and does not resolve
  - Athlete's performance is being affected

# QUESTIONS

# RESOURCES

- Creative Coaching: New ways to maximize athlete and team potential in all sports; Author: Jerry Lynch, Human Kinetics
- The Art of Team Coaching; Author Jim Hinkson, Warwick Publishing

# HOW TO REACH ME

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