



Communication

INTRODUCTION

To be an effective coach you must appreciate both the art and the science of coaching. A coach may have a great deal of sport-specific knowledge and experience (the science of coaching), however this knowledge and experience are of little value to the player unless it can be effectively communicated (the art of coaching).

Most of the coach's time is spent trying to transfer knowledge to their players and ensuring they understand what is expected of them. How that knowledge is transferred or communicated is an essential ingredient of successful coaching.

On completion of this module, you will be better able to:

- **UNDERSTAND THREE DIMENSIONS OF COMMUNICATION**
- **DEVELOP COMMUNICATION SKILLS TOWARDS SUCCESSFUL COACHING**

UNDERSTAND THREE DIMENSIONS OF COMMUNICATION

Effective coaching requires sport-specific knowledge, but also sound teaching and communication skills. Both the coach and the player must be prepared to transmit and receive information to and from each other. Too often coaches transmit but do not receive information.

Good communication comes not only from what you say, but how you say it. Every word and gesture send your players messages about your attitude towards them. In fact, it is impossible not to communicate, as everything we do is communication of one type or another.

To begin with the basics we have identified three dimensions of communication:

Sending.....Receiving
 Verbal..... Non-verbal
 Content.....Emotion

Communication is not only about sending messages but also receiving them. Coaches should not only be able to send clear and concise messages, they also need to be **astute listeners** to understand what their players are communicating in return.

While most people tend to focus on communicating the verbal message, research indicates that more than 70% of all communication is non-verbal, such as facial expressions, body language and the tone of voice. We tend to have more control over what we say than what we do. For example, how may a coach's body language, after a player makes a mistake, suggest annoyance or disappointment? What effect may this have on a player? Should a coach try to hide their body language?

The third dimension of communication is content, the factual information contained in the message and emotion or how the sender feels about the message. Coaches can at times have difficulty containing their emotions, particularly under the pressure of intense competition.

Many coaches tend to be good at the sending, verbal and content aspects of each dimension but need to improve on the receiving, non-verbal and emotion aspects.

QUESTIONS & EXERCISES

Using the dimensions of communication outlined above, make a list of your own communication strengths and weaknesses.

DEVELOP COMMUNICATION SKILLS TOWARDS SUCCESSFUL COACHING

Successful communication depends on developing good people skills and showing a human face. If coaches want players to listen over time, they cannot deliver their messages with sarcasm or threats. It is important to maintain a positive and open communication channel with players. Ongoing and open communication will often deal with minor concerns before they become major problems.

Successful communication depends on developing good people skills and showing a human face. If coaches want players to listen over time, they cannot deliver their messages with sarcasm or threats. It is important to maintain a positive and open communication channel with players. Ongoing and open communication will often deal with minor concerns before they become major problems.

Following are some important tips that will assist you in communicating more effectively with your players:

Demeanour

Dress appropriately and have an open, positive and enthusiastic approach.

Acknowledgement

Greet participants warmly by name or by physical acknowledgement. Take the trouble to pronounce players' names correctly.

Positioning

In the coaching situation, ensure you can see everyone and they can see you.

Body Language

Adopt a neutral body posture, facing your players. Also, watch players' faces and gestures for clues on how they are reacting.

Eye Contact

Looking your players in the eye shows sincerity and confidence. However, be aware that eye contact may not be appropriate in some cultures.

Voice

Speak clearly and use words at a level your players can understand, e.g. players who are new to the sport will not understand sport-specific jargon. Vary the tone of your voice to keep the interest up and adjust the volume according to the situation.

Listening

Listening tends to be one of our weakest communication skills. Being a good listener is an essential coaching skill. Listen carefully to players' questions and comments – respect their views.

Feedback

Have a positive and constructive attitude when both giving and receiving feedback from players. Offer sincere compliments and encouragement, e.g. "that's better", "what a good idea".

Last but not least, having a sense of humour is a must and remember, enthusiasm is infectious!

COMMUNICATING ACROSS CULTURES

New Zealand is a multi-cultural society with a mix of mainly European, Māori, Pacific Island and Asian ethnic groups. As a coach, it is important to be sensitive and alert to the cultural differences in communicating with the players you coach, for example, many cultures of the world believe direct eye contact to be inappropriate. If you are unsure about how to communicate with a player from a different culture, ask somebody for advice. Above all, a friendly and sincere approach will always be appreciated, and remember, the smile is an international sign of welcome.

ACTIVE VERSUS PASSIVE LISTENING

Passive listening, or remaining silent while another person speaks is how many people 'listen', often without actually hearing much. While passive listening can be appropriate at times, it does not guarantee understanding, nor does it build a relationship or any empathy with the sender.

Active listening, on the other hand, involves interacting with the sender, seeking clarification to ensure you fully understand what is being said. Instead of just guessing at the meaning of a message, you actively work to figure it out. Being an active listener will help you to 'read between the lines' to decipher the real (sometimes hidden) meaning of the message. Read the following tips to improve your active listening skills.

- Adopt a neutral and relaxed posture facing the player and leaning slightly forward
- If appropriate look at the player when communicating with them. Maintaining eye contact shows that you are interested in what they have to say
- Let the player finish speaking without interruption – even if you think you know what is going to be said
- Show that you are following what the player is saying by nodding your head and making verbal comments such as "Yes... I see...Uh-huh" every now and then
- Repeat what was said in your own words to ensure that both of you understand what was said
- Ask questions if you don't understand or if you require further clarification
- Search for the real meaning behind what is being said rather than focusing on the details

QUESTIONS & EXERCISES

Why is active listening so important to effective communication and coaching?

What could you do to improve your listening skills?