The Six Elements of “COMMUNICATION”

Before communicating with an athlete coaches should consider:
- **WHY** they want to communicate
- **WHO** they wish to communicate with
- **WHERE** and **WHEN** the message could best be delivered
- **WHAT** is it that they want to communicate
- **HOW** they are going to communicate the information

Effective communication contains six elements:
- **Clear**: Ensure that the information is presented clearly
- **Concise**: Be concise, do not lose the message by being long winded
- **Correct**: Be accurate, avoid giving misleading information
- **Complete**: Give all the information and not just part of it
- **Courteous**: Be polite and non-threatening, avoid conflict
- **Constructive**: Be positive, avoid being critical and negative

**Be Positive**

When coaches provide information to the athlete which will allow him/her to take actions to effect change it is important that they provide the information in a positive manner. Look for something positive to say first and then provide the information that will allow the athlete to effect a change of behavior or action.

**Conclusion**

Coaches should:
- Develop their verbal and non-verbal communication skills
- Ensure that they provide positive feedback during coaching sessions
- Give all athletes in their training groups equal attention
- Ensure that they not only talk to their athletes but they also listen to them as well

Improved communication skills will enable both the athlete and coach to gain much more from their coaching relationship.
THE FIVE STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION:

Communication is the art of successfully sharing meaningful information with people by means of an interchange of experience. Coaches wish to motivate the athletes they work with and to provide them with information that will allow them to train effectively and improve performance. Communication from the coach to athlete will initiate appropriate actions. This however, requires the athlete to not only receive the information from the coach but also to understand and accept it. Coaches need to ask themselves:

- Do I have the athlete's attention?
- Has the athlete understood?
- Does the athlete believe what I am telling him/her?
- Does the athlete accept what I am saying?
- Am I explaining myself in an easily understood manner?

How to interpret non-verbal messages:

At first, it may appear that face-to-face communication consists of taking it in turns to speak. While the coach is speaking the athlete is expected to listen and wait patiently until the coach finishes. On closer examination it can be seen that people resort to a variety of verbal and non-verbal behavior in order to maintain a smooth flow of communication.

Such behavior includes head-nods, smiles, frowns, bodily contact, eye movements, laughter, body posture, language and many other actions. The facial expressions of athletes provide feedback to the coach. Glazed or down turned eyes indicate boredom or disinterest, as does fidgeting. Fully raised eyebrows signal disbelief and half raised indicate puzzlement. Posture of the group provides a means by which their attitude to the coach may be judged and act as pointer to their mood. Control of a group demands that a coach should be sensitive to the signals being transmitted by the athletes. Their faces usually give a good indication of how they feel, and a good working knowledge of the meaning of non-verbal signals will prove invaluable to the coach.

Communication blocks

Difficulties in communicating with an athlete may be due a number of issues including the following:

1. The athlete’s perception of something is not the same as yours
2. The athlete may jump to a conclusion instead of work through the process of hearing, understanding and accepting
3. The athlete may lack the knowledge needed to understand what you are trying to communicate
4. The athlete may lack the motivation to listen to you or to convert the information given into action
5. The coach may have difficulty in expressing what you want say to the athlete
COACHING STYLES MAY HELP “COMMUNICATION”

There are perhaps two coaching styles - autocratic (do as I say) and democratic (involve the athletes in decision making). The autocratic style could be broken into two types - telling and selling and the democratic style into sharing and allowing. Coaches will use a variety of styles/types depending on the coaching situation.

**Autocratic Style - Telling**
- The coach decides on what is to be done
- The athletes are not involved in the decision-making
- The coach defines what to do and how to do it

On a circuit training session the athletes are told the exercises in the circuit.

**Autocratic Style - Selling**
- The coach decides on what is to be done
- The coach explains what is required and the objectives
- The athletes are encouraged to ask questions to confirm understanding
- The coach defines what to do and how to do it

On a circuit training session the athletes are informed of the exercises in the circuit. The coach explains the object of circuit training and the purpose of each exercise. Athletes can ask questions to clarify any points.

**Democratic Style - Sharing**
- The coach outlines the training requirements to the athletes
- The coach invites ideas/suggestions from the athletes
- The coach makes the decision based on the athletes' suggestions
- The coach defines what to do and how to do it

The coach identifies a circuit training session. Athletes identify possible exercises for the circuit. The coach selects from the suggestions a set of exercises.

**Democratic Style - Allowing**

The coach outlines the training requirements to the athletes
- The coach defines the training conditions
- The athletes brainstorm to explore possible solutions
- The athletes make the decision
- The athletes define what to do and how to do it

The coach identifies a circuit training session. The coach defines the conditions of the circuit to ensure it is safe and meets the overall objectives of the session. Athletes identify possible exercises for the circuit and then select a set of exercises that meet the coach's conditions.

**FOUR ALTERNATIVE COACHING STYLES**

1. Command style - direct instruction, coach dictates
2. Reciprocal style - athlete takes some responsibility for their own development - monitored by the coach
3. Problem solving style - athlete solves problems set by the coach
4. Guided discovery - athlete has freedom to explore various options