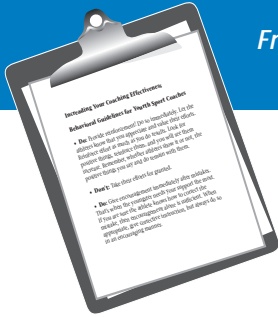


Increasing Your Coaching Effectiveness

Behavioral Guidelines for Youth Sport Coaches

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Sport psychology research conducted for the past 25 years provides valuable insights into how to create a mastery-oriented climate that contributes to youngsters' athletic and psychosocial development.

The Mastery Approach to Coaching is designed to increase desirable athlete behaviors and to create positive motivation to achieve rather than fear of failing.

Reacting to Good Plays and Athletes' Effort

- **Do:** Provide *reinforcement!* Do so immediately. Let the athletes know that you appreciate and value their efforts. Reinforce effort as much as you do results. Look for positive things, reinforce them, and you will see them increase. Remember, whether athletes show it or not, the positive things you say and do remain with them.
- **Don't:** Take their efforts for granted.

Reacting to Mistakes

- **Do:** Give *encouragement* immediately after mistakes. That's when the youngster needs your support the most. If you are sure the athlete knows how to correct the mistake, then encouragement alone is sufficient. When appropriate, give *corrective instruction*, but always do so in an encouraging manner. Do this by emphasizing not the bad things that just happened, but the good things that will happen if the athlete follows your instruction (the "why" of it). This will make the athlete positively self-motivated to correct the mistakes rather than negatively motivated to avoid failure and your disapproval.
- **Don't:** *Punish* when things are going wrong! Punishment isn't just yelling. It can be tone of voice, action, or any indication of disapproval. Athletes respond much better to a positive approach. Fear of failure is reduced if you work to reduce fear of punishment. Indications of displeasure should be limited to clear cases of lack of effort; but, even here, criticize the lack of effort rather than the athlete as a person.
- **Don't:** Give corrective instruction in a hostile, demeaning, or harsh manner. That is, avoid *punitive instruction*. This is more likely to increase frustration and create resentment than to improve performance. Don't let your good intentions in giving instruction be self-defeating.

Maintaining Order and Discipline

- *Do:* Maintain order by establishing clear expectations. Emphasize that during a game all members of the team are part of the activity, even those on the bench. Use reinforcement to strengthen team participation. In other words, try to prevent misbehaviors by using the positive approach to strengthen their opposites.
- *Don't:* Get into the position of having to constantly nag or threaten the athletes in order to prevent chaos. Don't be a drill sergeant. If an athlete refuses to cooperate, deprive him or her of something valued (i.e., participation). Don't use physical measures, such as running laps. If you establish clear behavioral guidelines early and work to build team spirit in achieving them, you can avoid having to repeatedly *keep control*. Remember, youngsters want clear guidelines and expectations, but they don't want to be regimented. Try to achieve a healthy balance.

Creating a Positive Learning Atmosphere

- *Do:* Give *technical instruction*. Establish your role as a caring and competent teacher. Try to structure participation as a learning experience in which you are going to help the athletes become the best they can be. Always give instruction in a positive fashion. Satisfy your athletes' desire to improve their skills. Give instruction in a clear, concise manner and, if possible, demonstrate how to do skills correctly.
- *Do:* Give encouragement. Encourage effort, don't demand results. Use it selectively so that it is meaningful. Be supportive without acting like a cheerleader.
- *Do:* Concentrate on the activity. Be "in the game" with the athletes. Set a good example for team unity.
- *Don't:* Give instruction or encouragement in a sarcastic or degrading manner. Make a point, then leave it. Don't let "encouragement" become irritating to athletes.

The Real Meaning of Winning

The principles presented above can be easily incorporated into your personal coaching style. In addition, the following philosophy of winning will put your athletes on a *healthy* road to achievement in sports and in life.

- *Winning isn't everything, nor is it the only thing.* Young athletes can't possibly learn from winning and losing, if they think the only objective is to beat their opponents.
- *Failure is not the same thing as losing.* Athletes should not view losing as a sign of failure or as a threat to their personal value.
- *Success is not equivalent to winning.* Winning and losing apply to the outcome of a contest, whereas success and failure do not.
- *Athletes should be taught that success is found in striving for victory.* The important idea is that *success is related to commitment and effort*. Convince your athletes that they are never "losers" if they commit themselves to doing their best. When athletes are taught to focus on giving maximum effort in mastering skills, they receive a priceless gift that will assist them in many of life's tasks.

Note: This material was excerpted from *Coaches Who Never Lose*. (Frank L. Smoll & Ronald E. Smith. Warde Publishers, Inc., 2006.)