

Communicating With Your Athletes

(30 minutes)

PURPOSE: To help coaches evaluate and improve their communication skills.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this unit coaches will learn

- eight communication problems common to the coaching profession and
- how to improve their communication skills.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Coaching Principles Classroom Instructor DVD
- DVD player and monitor

Unit Overview

Topic	Activities	Time (minutes)
A. Unit Introduction	Introduce the unit's purpose, objectives, and agenda.	1
B. Evaluating Your Communication Skills	Individually, coaches complete Activity 6.1 Evaluating Your Communication Skills, in which they rate themselves on several coaching communication skills.	12
C. Effective Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play DVD segment 5, "Communication." • In teams, coaches complete Activity 6.2 Becoming a Better Communicator, in which they match communication tips with problem coaches. 	15
D. Unit Summary	Summarize key unit points and answer coaches' questions.	2

UNIT CONTENT

A Unit Introduction (1 minute)



REFER coaches to the unit 6 learning objectives and unit overview on page 58 in the *Coaching Principles Classroom Study Guide*.



INTRODUCE unit 6.

In unit 6 we'll discuss how to communicate well with your athletes.

- You'll rate your own communication skills.
- We'll watch a DVD segment that discusses
 - verbal and nonverbal communication;
 - the communication styles of command coaches, submissive coaches, and cooperative coaches; and
 - improving your listening skills.
- In teams, you'll identify how coaches with poor communication skills can improve their communication.

B Evaluating Your Communication Skills (12 minutes)

Activity 6.1 Evaluating Your Communication Skills



REFER coaches to Activity 6.1 Evaluating Your Communication Skills on page 59 in the *Coaching Principles Classroom Study Guide*.



INTRODUCE the activity.

Coaches need certain communication skills to do their job well. In this activity you'll rate yourself in eight areas of communication that are especially applicable to coaches.



REVIEW the activity resources.

You'll use the Communication Survey that follows the activity instructions and activity outcome in the study guide.



EXPLAIN the activity instructions.

1. Work individually.
2. Read the description of each mythical coach and then rate yourself on the skill discussed. Circle the number that best describes you.
3. If you have not coached before, answer according to how you communicate in a leadership position.
4. Once you've rated yourself in every area, total your score and see where you land on the rating scale.
5. You'll have 10 minutes for this activity.



EXPLAIN the activity outcome.

When you're done, you should have completed the Communication Survey.



ASK for questions about the activity.



TELL coaches to begin the activity.



After coaches have started the activity, **CIRCULATE** among them, and **COACH** (listen, comment, and answer questions).



INSTRUCTOR NOTE: Your copy of the Communication Survey is on pages 151 and 152. The activity debriefing follows this note.



After 10 minutes, **DISCUSS** these additional points about the survey:

- The coaches on this survey are extremes, but hopefully you see the point: How you communicate with your athletes directly affects how they perceive you and how they feel about themselves.
- Regularly evaluate yourself with this survey to see if you need to work on a certain communication skill.
- Later in this unit you'll learn how you can improve if you have one of these communication problems.



ASK for questions about the eight communication problems described on the Communication Survey.

Communication Survey

Coach Incredible

Never admitting to an error, Coach Incredible finds he doesn't get the respect he demands because he doesn't show any for his athletes. He often doesn't follow through on what he says he will do, he thinks he's far more knowledgeable about the sport than he is, and he's very self-centered. When he speaks, he preaches rather than coaches so his athletes tune out because what he says never amounts to much. Coach Incredible has not yet learned that he cannot demand respect; instead it must be earned. Hence he has no credibility with his athletes.

Think about how you communicate with your athletes and others. Does it add or detract from your credibility? Rate yourself on how credible your athletes perceive your communication.

1 2 3 4 5
Very low *Very high*

Coach Naysayer

Most of the words and actions of Coach Naysayer are negative, sometimes almost hostile. She frequently criticizes her athletes, which increases their self-doubts and destroys their self-confidence. Coach Naysayer is slow to praise, as though she believes it is not "coachlike" to say a kind word, and when she utters an infrequent kindness, she usually overshadows it with other negative comments.

Think back to your recent communications with your athletes. Are you primarily positive in the messages you deliver, or are you like Coach Naysayer? Rate the degree to which your messages are positive or negative.

1 2 3 4 5
Negative *Positive*

The Judge

The Judge continually evaluates his athletes instead of instructing them. When a player errs, the Judge places blame rather than providing feedback or information about how to correct the error ("Who screwed up here?" "Why can't you get this right?" "You cost us the game with that dumb move."). When the players do well, the Judge cheers them on but doesn't know how to instruct them to achieve advanced skill levels. The continuous judgments, even when they are occasionally positive, cause athletes to feel uncertain and uncomfortable around the Judge.

Reflect a moment on the type of messages you send to your athletes. Do you give ample feedback and instructions, or are you like the Judge? Rate the extent to which the content of your communication is high in information or high in judgment.

1 2 3 4 5
High in judgment *High in information*

Coach Fickle

You are never sure what Coach Fickle will say next. Today it's one thing, tomorrow another. Last week she punished Janeen for fighting but not Sara, her star goalie. She tells players not to argue with the officials, but she does so regularly.

It's not easy to detect our own inconsistencies, but ponder for a moment how consistent you think you are in the messages you send and between what you say and what you do. Is your message consistent, or are you more like Coach Fickle? Rate the consistency of your communication.

1 2 3 4 5
Inconsistent *Consistent*

(continued)

C Effective Communication (15 minutes)



INTRODUCE the DVD segment, “Communication.”

It takes practice to communicate well, and just like learning to play a sport, you have to know what to practice! In this DVD segment we’ll learn some basic elements of communication.



PLAY DVD segment 5, “Communication.”



INSTRUCTOR NOTE: The DVD will stop automatically at the end of the segment.

Activity 6.2 Becoming a Better Communicator



REFER coaches to Activity 6.2 Becoming a Better Communicator on page 62 in the *Coaching Principles Classroom Study Guide*.



INTRODUCE the activity.

When you took the Communication Survey, you read about eight coaches with poor communication skills. You may have identified with one of those coaches or at least have been able to see some of the same characteristics in your own communication style. If you’re like most people, you can improve in some area of communication, and in this activity we’ll learn how to improve our communication with athletes.



REVIEW the activity resources.

You’ll use the Help the Coach form that follows the activity instructions and activity outcome in the study guide.



EXPLAIN the activity instructions.

- I. Work in teams of two to four.

2. The coaches who don't communicate very well are listed under "Coach Names" before the table. Several lists of ways coaches can improve their communication are included in the second column of the table under "Communication Tips."
3. Using the table, determine which list of communication tips would help each coach become a better communicator. Write the name of the coach in the blank provided in the corresponding left-hand column of the table. For instance, if the first list in the table seems to be the improvements that Coach Incredible needs to make, you'd write "Coach Incredible" to the left of the first list.
4. You'll have 8 minutes to complete this activity.



EXPLAIN the activity outcome.

When you're done, you should have filled in all of the coach names in the table.



ASK for questions about the activity.



TELL coaches to begin the activity.



After coaches have started the activity, **CIRCULATE** among them, and **COACH** (listen, comment, and answer questions).



INSTRUCTOR NOTE: Your copy of the Help the Coach form *with the correct answers* (activity outcome) follows this note. The activity debriefing begins after the form.

Help the Coach

Coach Names: Coach Incredible—Not credible; doesn't admit when he is wrong
 Coach Naysayer—Negative, critical, slow to praise
 The Judge—Gives feedback that is high in judgment rather than high in information
 Coach Fickle—Inconsistent in what she says; also, what she says is different from what she does
 Coach Glib—Often talking, rarely listening
 Coach Stone—Seldom shows emotion
 The Professor—Doesn't communicate clearly; talks above the athletes' heads
 Coach Skinner—Doesn't know how to use the principles of reinforcement correctly

COACH	COMMUNICATION TIPS
<i>Coach Glib</i>	<p>1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show the person speaking to you that you're interested in listening and trying to understand. • Once someone has spoken to you, check that you understand what was said by paraphrasing the message, not only the content but also the emotion behind it. • Express empathy, not sympathy, by showing that you care and respect what the person speaking to you has to say.
<i>The Judge</i>	<p>2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide athletes with specific information that helps them correct mistakes rather than general information that judges their performance. • Be certain that you understand the reason for your athletes' actions before you judge their behavior. • Avoid making evaluative comments when athletes know they've made a mistake. • Focus your comments on the athletes' behaviors, not on them as people to avoid damaging their sense of self-worth.
<i>Coach Naysayer</i>	<p>3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide honest, direct, and constructive messages. • Embrace an attitude in which you look to catch your athletes doing good or right, and then tell them they've done so. • Avoid sarcasm and put-downs, but at the same time don't sugarcoat athletes' behaviors by falsely putting a positive spin on them. • Emphasize what can be done, not what cannot be done, and avoid language that dwells on problems; instead, use language that focuses on solutions. • Seek to build character rather than destroy it.
<i>Coach Skinner</i>	<p>4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before the season begins, define for yourself what you will reward and how you will reward your athletes. Stick to this plan during the season. • Develop team rules with your athletes so that they know what is expected and what the consequences will be if they misbehave. • When an athlete misbehaves, follow through with the consequence that is listed in your player handbook. • Don't let your mood dictate how you treat athletes. The athletes' performance and behavior should dictate your use of rewards and consequences. • Reward athletes only when they have earned it. • Use positive discipline, which uses instruction, training, and correction, rather than negative discipline, which uses punishment.

(continued)

Help the Coach (continued)

COACH	COMMUNICATION TIPS
<i>Coach Fickle</i>	<p>5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strive hard to be consistent in your verbal messages and to ensure that your nonverbal actions are consistent with your verbal messages. • When you promise to do something, be sure to follow through. • Avoid gossiping, and discourage your athletes from gossiping. • Develop a sense of trust with your athletes by being consistent and positive. Through trust you become a coach of character.
<i>Coach Incredible</i>	<p>6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become a cooperative-style coach. • Become knowledgeable about the sport or at least honest about whatever knowledge you possess. • Be reliable, fair, and consistent. • Follow through on what you say you'll do. • Express warmth, friendliness, acceptance, and empathy. • Be dynamic, spontaneous, and open. • Remain calm under pressure. • Use the positive approach.
<i>The Professor</i>	<p>7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use language that your athletes will understand. Keep your vocabulary simple and straightforward. • Think through your demonstrations before you present them. Break skills down into a step-by-step process and then present them in an organized sequence. • Keep cues short and simple, such as "Stay on your man" or "Arms in the air." • Use analogies that your athletes can relate to. "It's like keeping a rudder steady on a plane" won't work very well because few of your athletes have piloted a plane.
<i>Coach Stone</i>	<p>8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize how much of what you communicate is in the form of nonverbal messages. • Learn how to both send and receive messages by effectively using and reading body position, body motion, voice characteristics, and touching behaviors. • Remember that it's not so much what you say but what you do that influences your athletes.



After 8 minutes, **CONDUCT** the activity debriefing as follows:

1. **ASK** one team which coach's name they wrote beside list 1 under "Communication Tips"
2. **ASK** other teams if they agree, and if not, why.
3. **LEAD** the discussion in a way that helps coaches arrive at the response given in the activity outcome.

4. **CONTINUE** debriefing the other lists of communication tips in the same way.

5. **EXPLAIN**, the following

You can apply these improvement lists to your own communication skills. For instance, if you catch yourself talking above your athletes' heads, look at the list for "The Professor" to read hints about how to improve. Or if you find yourself being negative with players, look at the lists for "The Judge" or "Coach Naysayer" and put the ideas into action.

6. **THANK** all teams for their work on this activity.

D Unit Summary (2 minutes)



REVIEW the key points of unit 6.

- How you communicate with your athletes directly affects how they perceive you and how they feel about themselves.
- Over 70 percent of communication is nonverbal. Your gestures, body positions, facial expressions, and actions are more important than what you say.
- Cooperative-style coaches show respect to athletes and others. They communicate in a straightforward, positive, and confident way and allow and encourage others to do the same.
- You can continually improve your communication skills. Doing so will help your athletes communicate appropriately with you as well.



ASK for questions about communicating with athletes or any other topic in this unit.