

Communication Tips for Coaches

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Coaches at all levels have to be very conscious of the communication they have with their players in the locker room, on the ice during practice, and during games. The messages you deliver and more importantly how you deliver those messages is the key factor in the coach – player relationship. Successful communication with your players is the essence of good coaching. In order to maximize the communication process there are four points to be considered.

1) Focus your communications to just a couple items at a time, ideally one.

The Human brain can only focus on one task or thought at a time. By presenting multiple ideas and tasks you reduce the effectiveness of your messages. They get lost in the “noise”. A coach that goes to the white board for ten minutes before a game diagramming breakouts, PP, PK etc will lose the attention of the players in about 60 seconds or less with young players. Pre-game conversations should have one focus point for the game and stick to it. In practice it is a good idea to have a focus point for that day. Design your practice around that emphasis and keep reminding the players how the drills fit into the daily emphasis.

2) Be consistent in your messages as habits take time to develop.

Nothing concerns players more than coaches who are inconsistent in their messages and actions. If you preach self control and discipline to your players and then lose your cool when a penalty is called your players recognize that you do not walk the talk and will not take you seriously. They need to know you believe what you say and more importantly practice what you preach. Actions speak louder than words.

3) Communicate in an age appropriate and gender appropriate fashion.

This is important for coaches at all levels. Coaches need to understand the attention spans and maturity levels of their players. Young players simply want to have fun and need the support of their coaches in a positive environment. Negative feedback is counterproductive with players twelve and under. Grade school PE teachers all know that youngsters love to compete and will play hard in the right environment. It does not take yelling at them and challenging them. Be creative and learn what interests and motivates players at the age you are coaching. Female players do not respond well to the typical male approach to team issues and coaching approaches. Female players want to have a good relationship with their coaches and need to have trust in that relationship. The social aspect of a female team is very different than a male team. Male coaches of female teams need to be aware of these differences or they will fail.

4) Your tone of voice, inflection, and volume are all important.

Communication done poorly will result in the message being ignored. After your choice of words, how you say it is equally important. Too many thoughts or ideas at one time and the impact will be lost. Learn to talk with your team as a group and

each player individually. Take the time to listen and ask for input from your players. Older players enjoy being part of the planning process for practices. Solicit ideas from them about things they want to work on in practice. Younger players have favorite drills and cross ice games they like to play. Today's players want lots of feedback and want to be part of the process. They are connected to each through social media, texting, and email. Staying connected to your players will help them develop passion for the game.

Michael Langlois, founder of Prospect Communications Inc. has published a book to help youth hockey coaches improve their communication skills. You can order it from <http://www.prospectcommunications.com/shopminorcoach.html> .