

Communication and Your Players

by: Todd Williams

Communication with your players goes far beyond simply giving them verbal instructions. In many situations, it's not what you say but how you say it, and how you make them feel about themselves. Non-verbal communication plays a significant role, well in excess of 50%.

Your **facial expressions, physical gestures**, and even the **tone of your voice** can convey much. So, do your best to talk to your players on their level. **Get down on one knee. Look directly into their eyes. Use simple and direct statements.** If you can avoid it, **don't wear sunglasses** or, if you do, prop them up on your head so you can make full eye contact.

There is no room for sarcasm on the playing field, nor the practice field for that matter. Always **be positive, honest, and sincere** with your players. Players will respect a coach that is honest and positive. Make sure your non-verbal language is consistent with your words and remember that your non-verbal cues can be much more significant than what you say.

You can also **expect to repeat yourself**. In fact, it's almost a requirement. You might as well get used to the idea. A good rule to follow is to always repeat the message at least three times, in different ways, to ensure you get it across. It takes people, in general, an average of seeing or hearing something seven times before it finally sinks in. With a conscious effort on your part and a little focus on your player's part, you can improve on that, but it'll still probably take three times to be successful. Tell them what you want to tell them, tell them again for good measure, and then tell them one more time just in case the first two attempts didn't sink in. If you rephrase your point a little each time you'll have a much better chance of getting the point across.

Make sure the players can hear you, but try not to get to the level of screaming at them. I'm loud by nature. Not in a mean or malicious way, but I'm always yelling to the kids when I'm on the field so they can hear me. I believe there's a difference between being loud and yelling to the kids versus loudly yelling at the kids. The gap between the two might be pretty narrow so, if you're like me, be careful. In one-on-one communication, lower volume may serve the purpose and be much more effective than a normal or loud voice. A still, small voice can be very powerful in the right situations.

Good communication is so important as a coach, and like many things in life it takes consistent effort to get it right.