

The importance of the art of communication in sports

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



The importance of communication in sports cannot be understated. It is said to be the key to success in both the sport and business world. Being able to communicate effectively is not limited to how your athlete is feeling.

Effectively conveying the goals of the team for the season is also a critical aspect of communication. If your team does not understand the goal for the week, season or year, they may also feel disengaged with the team and therefore less likely to produce a peak performance. Communication in sports is not only limited to coaches and players, but also from parents to athletes as well as coaches to coaches. Understanding the importance of communication and how to effectively communicate throughout the many levels involved in sports can ultimately lead to the highest level of performance possible.

Communication seems to be a lost art. Yet, for any relationship to be successful, good communication is essential. Ironically, we live in an age in which avenues of communication are limitless. But our increased resources are not leading to more efficient and productive communication. As a coach, you need to be an effective communicator to many people, including players, assistant coaches, school personnel, parents, and other community members. Being an effective communicator entails speaking clearly, yes, but it also involves nonverbal cues, written words, and listening skills (Jowett, 2017). Communication is a two-way street; part of a coach's job is to teach players communication skills and how to use them appropriately. The communication process involves both sending and receiving information and it can take several forms. Verbal communication is the spoken word, while nonverbal communication contains actions, facial expressions, body position,

and gestures. Communication can occur in one-on-one or in group settings, and in visual formats (e. g., pictures, videos, and observational learning). Communication involves not only the content of a message but also its emotional impact, or the effect the message has on the person receiving it (Onag & Tepeci, 2014). The use of all forms of communication can help achieve the highest level of performance by an individual athlete, team, or sport organization. “ Within the context of sport, social support has been used to describe the general quality of relationships; perceived, available, or received support; or social network size” (Cranmer & Sollitto, 2015).

There are numerous types of social support, but within sport four specific types of social support have been suggested as particularly salient to athletes: tangible, informational, emotional, and esteem. First, tangible support includes recognition that coaches provide athletes with goods or services (e. g., rehabilitation= injury treatment, practice schedules, sporting equipment, or financial help). Second, informational support encompasses recognition of coaches’ provision of information or advice to athletes (e. g., teaching proper technique, conveying strategy, or providing corrective feedback). Third, emotional support refers to recognizing coaches’ demonstrations of concern or empathy for athletes (e. g., attempting to relieve pressure or being a confidant during difficult times). Fourth, esteem support denotes recognition of coaches’ reassurances of athletes’ abilities or self-worth (e. g., giving motivational talks; Cranmer & Sollitto, 2015). Within the context of sport, the reception of the various forms of social support are suggested to increase athletes’ motivation, performance, self-confidence,

and perceptions of team cohesion. Others have suggested that received support acts as a buffer against athlete burnout or stress and helps athletes recover from injuries (Cranmer & Sollitto, 2015). Although this type of support varies in appearance, many forms of communication are interwoven into the frameworks of social support.

Besides the perceived view of support from coaches to players, other factors can have an influence on the level of communication between the two groups. Many behavior or performance challenges in sport can be addressed through communication and the training of the athlete's mental skill and physical ability (Cranmer & Brann, 2015). But sometimes, even these efforts fall short and a coach might suspect that something else is at play. Taylor (2015) suggests that there are three elements that coaches must incorporate in order to have an open line of communication with athletes. First is putting an 'open door policy' into practice. Many coaches say that they have an open-door policy with their athletes, but they may struggle with creating conditions that actually put it into practice. Great coaches understand how critical it is to convey to athletes that they care about them as people, and not just as athletes. This applies whether a coach is working in recreational sport or in high performance (Taylor, 2015).

Second is 'be prepared to listen'. There could be literally hundreds of reasons why an athlete isn't feeling or acting like him or herself on any given day. It could be fatigue, school stress, or any number of personal or family issues or crises (such as having a critically ill friend or family member, struggles with alcohol or drug abuse, financial stress or job loss, etc.). Or it

could be something else, such as school bullying, physical, emotional or sexual abuse, a break-up, or an underlying mental illness or a mental health issue. A coach may not always have the “right” answer or solution but can be a huge influence on the player by just listening (Taylor, 2015). Third is ‘build trusting relationships’; it takes time and energy to build trust. But any good coach knows that the effort is well worth it. Trusting teams are also healthier and higher performing teams. And an athlete who trusts in their coach is more likely to open up to him or her when help is needed (Taylor, 2015). The coach is often the first line of communication for an athlete who is facing a crisis. How the coach integrate a culture for the athlete to be able to communicate is vital to building trusting relationships that will allow for the athlete to have the best opportunity to be successful.

Not only does the communication between a coach and an athlete play an important role in performance but the communication between family and athlete can have the same impact on performance both positively or negatively. The family’s influence begins with early childhood interactions and continues through adolescence and young adulthood. Parents are still likely to have the greatest single influence on the current and future behavior of their children. In sport athletes are more likely to build relationships with coaches and each other, based on their attachment styles with parental caregivers. We’ve all seen that one parent on the sideline, shouting out inappropriate comments at the top of their voice that are not only directed at their own child, but often at their teammates, teachers or coaches and the referee.

How much does this behavior influence the sporting experience of their child? In young people good early experiences enable them to develop a secure attachment style, which helps to build a positive, internal perception of themselves, and facilitates positive relationships in sport (Al Sudani & Budzyńska, 2014). Moreover the way young people build relations with other teammates or coaches reflects the bond that they share with their parents. Young people can also internalize some strategies, for example coping with stress, developed in early relationships and reproduce them in relationships with friends from their team (Al Sudani & Budzyńska, 2014). Much of the social structure from athletes stem from family interaction. The role of the parents can have enormous impacts on the initial interaction with sports for athlete which in turn effects their overall experience with sports.

While current research has begun to address parental influences on talent development in sport, sibling interaction remains relatively under-examined. With elite-level youth sport relying heavily on the family as a facilitating agent for children's involvement, it is surprising how little research attention has been directed towards sibling interactions in an effort to accelerate the development of sporting talent (Taylor et. al, 2017). One study found that elite athletes were more likely to be later born children showing an association between birth order and skill level. In an earlier study on the physical performance of pre-school children, those children with older brothers or sisters performed better than only or first-born children. This suggests first-born children are motivated to learn with younger siblings motivated to win. This provides a potential explanation for studies showing

the majority of elite athletes being later born children; however, role modeling may provide another (Taylor et. al, 2017). Many younger siblings who play sport do so because they aspire to be like their older brother or sister. Personality characteristics may also play a part with first-born athletes reporting significantly higher cognitive and somatic anxiety compared to later born athletes. For example, athletes with higher anxiety levels are often reported as being less able to cope with the demanding pressures of elite sports performance (Taylor et. al, 2017). Trying to meet the expectations that has been set by an older sibling is yet another form of how sports are communicated to an athlete. These types of interactions can drive great competition between siblings and can create positive experiences in which sports strengthened sibling relationships.

Although communication from various influences to athletes is important, the communication amongst coaches is equally important for the performance of his/her athletes. Sports coaches are expected to be able to deliver constructive and informative feedback to their athletes and the communication process is central to effective coaching. One of the sport coach's key roles is to provide the best possible feedback that allows athletes and teams to learn and consequently improve performance (Swanson & Deutsch, 2017). Coaches often communicate with one another to gain insight into the effectiveness of their coaching strategies as well as the effectiveness of their communication to their players. Feedback is a necessary component at all levels of coaching and its significance and centrality in the coaching process should not be disregarded at the basic

levels. Nor should the importance placed on a self-generated network of peers by the expert coaches be ignored: such networks should possibly be formalized to enable novice coaches to benefit from more informed sources (Nash et. al, 2017).

Most people recognize that coaches are teachers. They teach their athletes lessons—either knowingly or not—about winning and losing, dedication and teamwork, sports and life. But who’s responsible for teaching the coaches? In our country, the answer is no one. The United States is the only major nation in the world without a national coaching education and certification system. The result has been a hodgepodge of requirements, varying greatly from state to state and sport to sport. At the high school level, this leaves athletic directors holding the bag. Parents and upper-level administrators want coaches who are trained professionals, but there is no set standard on how that training should take place (Nash et. al, 2017). In response, athletic directors must keep up to date on the latest in coaching education and how to best educate their own staff of coaches, both formally and informally. Athletic directors also have other methods at their disposal besides classroom training. One of the easiest for coaches, and most popular for athletic directors, is a regular staff meeting. The approach can range from simple discussions of issues among coaches to presentations from outside experts.

In sports, there are many forms of communication as well as many people who are affected by the communication process. A team filled with the best players in the league who communicates poorly will flounder in mediocrity,

while a team filled with run-of-the-mill players who communicates flawlessly will be contenders every year. Effective communication in sports is an absolute essential trait that quality teams must have to be successful, from the coaches, to team leaders, all the way down to the role players.

Everybody must be on the same page. Achieving such a high level of performance is directly related to communicating and having measurement tools and communication criteria in place to take internal and external influences and mold them into a cohesive unit. In order for all levels of sport to achieve the highest level of performance, then all levels of sport must achieve the highest level of high performance communication.