



The Feedback Perspective

What is the purpose of feedback to Athletes?

- Motivate
- Challenge
- Direct
- Support

All on the quest for a player to improve skills and by extension performance. These can be practical (e.g., shooting), mental (e.g., decision making) or physical skills (e.g., speed).

How a coach should approach feedback is best presented in the following vision of a set of scales.

Quantity and Quality are on separate ends. Ideally the scales will be balanced but if they are not which side is it best to err on? Quantity or quality?

The quantity and especially the quality of feedback you give your players is one of the biggest keys to how well you can develop them.

In order to enhance your coaching, keep the following guidelines in mind as not only you and any other coaches give feedback to your players but also when players are giving feedback to each other. The guidelines will help create/maintain and support a positive and productive team environment.

1. **POSITIVE** - Coach John Wooden found that during the course of a typical practice he gave a ratio of three positive, instructional messages ("keep your knees bent, way to use a bounce pass, run the shuffle cut") to every one negative message ("that's a terrible shot"). Take a moment now and remember back to your last training session. What was your mix of positive, instructional to negative feedback? Remember as with all reviews, there will be an element of bias and also how good is your self-awareness? At your next practice ask someone, could be an assistant or even a job for a parent to keep track of your feedback quantity and some anecdotal feedback on its quality to allow you to review that later. Ask them to not only focus on what you say verbally but also any non-verbal feedback you give that you may or may not even be aware of! Remember you don't have to shout to send a loud message! "it's better to "catch people doing something right," than it is to only notice when they are doing something wrong" Ken Blanchard.
2. **SPECIFIC** – Whilst saying good job to a player will give them an endorphin rush, they might believe it is for one thing whilst you meant it for another. Be sure you are clear and concise about what you are praising them for and there is a higher chance they repeat it.
3. **TIME SENSITIVE** – If your feedback can be immediate, it will have much greater resonance. Consider how you train a dog to sit and stay. Immediate praise and reward, reinforces the action and promotes repetition.



4. **LEARNING PATHWAY** – As a player is learning a skill, the coach will want to be providing positive and corrective feedback in order to pick up any issues immediately and provide confidence when they succeed, and they can help get back on track if they are struggling. As skills and strategies are honed and become second nature, the coach will be able to take a step back and make contributions only when necessary.
5. **GENUINE** – If you end up over complimenting a player it can backfire on you. The terms can lose all meaning and players will begin to not know when you actually mean it!
6. **PROCESS OVER OUTCOME** – Often a player can have done everything right but not get the reward. You should still acknowledge the effort as this will make them more likely to maintain that intensity and repeat and get the reward next time.
7. **TWO WAY STREET** - Set the example you want your players to follow. Make it clear to your players as long as they follow all the ways you give feedback to them then you are open to receiving it from them as well.

Feedback is the breakfast of champions– Ken Blanchard

Negative Feedback

The line between physical performance and psychological state of mind is blurrier than you might think. If a player has their motivation and mental state correct and their natural hormone levels are not influencing them, they can have a powerful physical boost but if you have just received a “spray” or heard some negative feedback from your coach you can be adversely affected!

Three studies by the Imperial College of London show the effects on players mental states with videos and feedback from a coach and what the flow on effect on their physical performance is.

EXPERIMENT NO. 1: Motivation boost

The set-up: A dozen volunteers watched six four-minute YouTube clips, one at a time, then hit the gym after viewing each film to test how much weight they could squat in three repetitions. The videos each displayed a specific emotion: sad, aggressive, "training motivational," humorous or neutral. Saliva samples were collected before and after each showing of the videos to measure testosterone levels.

The payoff: The aggressive video (a montage of big rugby hits) and the motivational video (a mixed martial arts fighter in training) caused testosterone levels to spike and produced an average increase of nearly five per cent in squat performance. The sad video ("starving children in Africa") actually lowered testosterone and workout performance, while the funny videos were somewhere in between.

EXPERIMENT 2: Supportive vs. Cautionary

The set-up: Two hours before a professional rugby match, 12 players received a 15-minute video session. They were either shown clips of great plays they'd made in a previous game, with the coach



providing positive feedback, or they were shown clips of their opponents making great plays, with the coach saying things like, "Don't let him get away with that today."

The payoff: The positive feedback increased testosterone and resulted in better performance during the game, as measured by several statistical markers and subjective ratings. The cautionary feedback, in contrast, decreased testosterone and increased the stress hormone cortisol, with predictable results: poorer game performance.

EXPERIMENT 3: Positive vs. negative

The set-up: One day after a professional rugby match, 12 players completed a one-hour video feedback session with their coach. The session either showed footage of the player's most successful moments from the previous night's game, along with positive feedback from the coach, or it showed a montage of the player's worst mistakes, with the coach providing critical comments such as: "Why couldn't you do that right?"

The payoff: A few days later, in response to a physical stress test, the players who had received positive feedback showed dramatically higher testosterone levels compared to the negative-feedback group. A week later, before their next game, the positive-feedback group still had higher testosterone levels and produced better performances in the game.

Structuring a Feedback Discussion

Coaching in Questions and soundbites

- In timeout huddles or when a player comes off the court, ask "what do you think?" or "What did you see out there?" Listen to their feedback.
- A good ration is to ask 3 questions for every 1 instruction.
- Players won't retain information when you coach in paragraphs. Use impactful soundbites to emphasize main teaching points.

Coaching Feedback is best delivered when you ask the player to give themselves feedback before giving your own. This applies both to positive feedback and developmental feedback. Below we will outline a series of questions you can use to help structure the conversation regardless of context, culture or style of communication.

1. What would you like to achieve out of this discussion?
2. What did you notice about your performance?
3. What went well / challenged you?
4. Can I share with you what I liked?
5. If you were in the same scenario again, what might you change?
6. Can I make a suggestion? / Can we discuss ...?
7. How would you like to work on that in the future?

The wording and indeed the order can change but the purpose of each is the most significant.



1. This question will mean both athlete and coach are working together and on the same page to achieve the same outcome and provides direction and purpose.
2. If you ask someone what they think it immediately suggests to them that you believe they will think differently to you and puts them on the defensive. By asking them what they noticed or what their experience was you take any potential judgement out of it and are more interested in their opinions.
3. Most players will naturally default to a negative when answering the second question so it's important to make sure they have the opportunity to share some positives.
4. This gives the coach an opportunity to provide some authentic positive feedback and ensure the player appreciate their own strengths.
5. This question can be repeated multiple times during the conversation and can form the central part of the discussions. Within this section you can further engage the player with GROW questions such as, "How will you do that?" "How might you change that?" and "What is getting in the way?"
6. Depending upon the context of the conversation, this is an opportunity for the coach or coaching manager to offer any advice or to deliver any 'learning' feedback that needs to be given. With any luck, the person will already have come up with their own learning feedback, negating the need to deliver it at all. Notice that this question is placed near the end of the list. People perform best when they are in control of their own ideas and pace, so once they have said all they want to say, they will be more receptive to input from others.
7. If this is attempted too soon, without a thorough exploration of the present situation and the future, people will tend to remain 'stuck' and not know how to resolve their dilemmas or change their behaviour.

“Right across the business we have a philosophy of encouragement. Our people are rarely criticised. If someone makes a howling mistake, usually they don't need to be told. They know. People have a fear of failure, and while this is perfectly reasonable, it's also very odd. Because it seems to me that it's through making mistakes that we learn how to do things. Watch a musician practise sometime. Watch a baby figure out how to walk. Listen to a toddler speak. Skills like walking and talking and playing music emerge gradually, steadily, from a blizzard of (often pretty funny) mistakes. I think this is true of everything – that learning is about making mistakes and learning from them.” Richard Branson