

Influence of Motivation Techniques in Sports

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Introduction:

No doubt there are many ways to "motivate" and inspire others. In contrast, it may be argued that one person cannot motivate another, but only creates an environment that promotes one to motivate him/her. In short, to motivate anyone can be difficult, dynamic, and frustrating. To be effective, motivating others takes insight (a plan) and patience (time). There are generally three broad categories for which motivation strategies fall fear, incentives, and or purpose. Fear and incentives are often short-term "motivators", where as providing purpose is more long-term. All good sporting performances come from being well prepared, mentally as well as physically. To be the best requires you to use the skills that you have as effectively as possible. Often athletes who are fit and talented do not achieve their best possible performances because they have not developed the necessary mental skills. Maybe their concentration lapses at vital moments they lack motivation or find it hard to perform under pressure. Sport psychology is about helping athletes tap their potential and achieve the performances they dream about. Setting goals is an important starting point. All good athletes set goals and develop targets and plans to achieve their goals. Effective goal setting comes from making your goals positive, specific, actionable and flexible.

Motivation through Fear

First, instilling *fear* in others is simple (and it can quickly motivate some people) but over time, fear can easily breed resentment and disloyalty. The athlete who is motivated by fear is likely not so much trying to achieve something as they are trying to avoid something (e.g., losing a position or making a mistake). This athlete generally becomes focused on what not to do, rather than what to do. In time, this can become stressful and lead to a strong sense of resentment and/or disloyalty toward the one instilling the fear.

Motivation through Incentives

Incentives too can be effective for the short-term. Dangling the "carrot" (e.g., playing time, money, trophies, etc.) is a strong motivator for many athletes but these extrinsic means generally last for only a short time before the "incentives" need increased or made more appealing. The less appealing the incentive, the less motivation one will generally show.

Motivation through Purpose

Finally, developing a strong sense of *purpose* is most effective for promoting long-term motivation. Creating a sense of purpose and/or meaning is about changing the way athletes think about their roles, their reasons for coming to practice, their influence on teammates, their membership on the team, and their reasons for playing and competing. Providing purpose and meaning is about creating an environment that is conducive to personal growth and encouraging athletes to motivate themselves, as well as inspire their teammates. Developing purpose and meaning takes more time and energy (investment) but it can lead to that long-term motivation for which most coaches are striving.

Keys to Motivating Your Athletes

Get input from your athletes (and most importantly your leaders) - check with your athletes to determine if what you are communicating to them is understood, what they need, and what they want. Encourage your leaders to make suggestions as to how things (e.g., practices, travel, game day preparations, etc.) might be improved. Remember; if you are asking for input... at least be willing to incorporate something (a suggestion) at some point.

Keep your athletes informed as to when, where, how, and why (and WHY is most important) - people are not generally motivated to start (or finish) a task that is not clear in terms of when, where, how, or why. Take away any questions or doubts that your athletes may have by clearly and consistently communicating your expectations and intentions. Be clear as to when, where, and how . . . but most important, be sure your athletes know "why" they are being asked to do something.

Create an environment that allows for challenge, recognition, appreciation, and quality - some of your athletes will be motivated by a challenge, some by recognition, some by appreciation, and some by quality of performance. It is important to know your athletes and what their primary motive might be. Challenge some (1 v 1 against a teammate), recognize others in front of their teammates (at the end of practice or in the locker room), appreciate others in private (in your office or the hallway), and provide others with a chance to show you a quality performance (quality over quantity of work). Remember, different athletes are motivated by different situations and feedback.

Give your athletes a reason to want to work hard - take the time to develop genuine, honest, caring, and trusting relationships with your players. Athletes will work harder (and longer) for someone they know genuinely believes in them, cares about them, and is committed to helping them achieve their potential. At the heart of player motivation is the quality of the coach-athlete relationship.

Model what you want to see - be motivated yourself. If you want someone to work hard, you better be working hard. If you want someone to put in extra time, you better be putting in extra time. Athletes do what they see. This is why the motivation of the coaching staff is so important and why it is so important to have quality team leaders who can lead by example, hold accountable, and promote a climate of motivation and inspiration. Set a motivational "standard" by what you do, say, and expect. Say it, expect it, but also make sure you do it!

Summary

Each and every one of us has an untapped energy source that can be drawn upon to bring about superior results. Enhancing motivation is fundamentally about a change of attitude, developing a positive 'can do' mindset and engaging in systematic behaviors the short-term process goals – that facilitate improvement. If you have a leadership role in sport you will have considerable influence on how motivated your athletes or team might feel. You can instill a good work ethic, recognize individual effort and instigate transparent reward structures that reinforce people's sense of competence. To work best, the techniques mentioned in this article need to be molded around specific circumstances and the needs of individual athletes. Always strive to be original and innovative in the application of motivational techniques.

References

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