

MIND GAMES

60-SECOND SUMMARY

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# OLYMPIC COACH

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Message from the

**DIRECTOR OF COACHING** and  
**SPORT SCIENCES**



**WHAT COACHES CAN  
LEARN FROM MEDAL-WINNING  
COACHES...**



**LEADERSHIP AND MOTIVATION  
IN SPORTS**



**BE THE COACH YOU WANT  
TO BE**

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Message from the  
**USOC's**  
**DIRECTOR OF COACHING**  
**and SPORT SCIENCES**  
by  
**PETER DAVIS, Ph.D.**

**W**hen... the response from the readership survey concerning Olympic Coach magazine was almost overwhelming. We learned a lot about you (the reader) and how you view this magazine. We learned that 60% of you, who subscribe by either hard copy or the e-version, are coaches, with the rest being athletes and administrators. Twenty four percent of you coach elite level athletes and 21% of are involved with club athletes and we had a tie between the youth and Collegiate coaches at 16%. We always had suspected that we had a wide range of coaches and coaching needs, and this data confirms it.

We had many request for sport specific information, which we find difficult to address with 47 sports under our umbrella, so we hope you don't mind that we stay with topics that can impact all sports and coaches. We will however, from time to time, try to add some sport specific information. Even if the article isn't about your sport, cross-fertilization will be interesting.

We were surprised by the number of subscribers who use Olympic Coach as a teaching tool at the university level or

with their staffs. That is a great way to use the magazine and we encourage anyone to share the information and the electronic subscription address—<http://coaching.usolympicteam.com/coaching/ksub.nsf> with their classes or colleagues. After all, the electronic version is free and an easy way to distribute to fellow coaches and/or athletes.

Eighty four percent of you checked off that Olympic Coach was a relevant coaching resource and many of you ask for more issues per year. We are trying to figure out ways to make more coaching oriented information available, so we will keep you posted. We are glad that we can make an impact, as 82% of you told us that Olympic Coach makes you think about what you do when you coach and 78% of you said that some of the concepts in the magazine have made you a better coach. Believe me, we were excited to learn that and we will strive to continue to provide current and relevant information for coaches.

Olympic Coach went out on the limb when we changed our format to the thematic approach—75% of you told us that you like the concept. We appreciate your support in this change. We hope to provide enough variation in the non-theme articles to keep the other 25% of the coaches happy.

We would also like to announce the winners of the USOC Coaching jackets—Robert Largman won the electronic version of the survey and Chuck Hines won the hard copy subscribers survey prize.

Thanks to all of you who responded, we appreciated your input.





## WHAT COACHES CAN LEARN FROM MEDAL WINNING COACHES

By Catherine Sellers, USOC Manager of Coaching

**W**e saw the television footage of the Athens Olympic Games. We watched in awe as we witnessed the medal winning performances of Michael Phelps (six gold medals and two bronze) the men's gymnastics team astounding silver medal performance, the dominance of the women's softball gold medal performance (51-1 run ratio against all competitors), the surprise medal by Lauryn Williams in the 100 meters, and we read about the women's sitting volleyball team capturing a bronze medal. What you may not know about is the coach that worked with these athletes and teams everyday and shared that desire for success on the podium.

Bob Bowman (Michael Phelps), Ron Brant (Men's Gymnastics) Mike Candrea ( Head Coach of the Women's Softball team), Amy Deem (Lauryn Williams) and Denise Van De Walle ( Assistant Coach for the Paralympics Women's Sitting Volleyball team) agreed to be interviewed for a series of questions about their coaching background, their personal motivation and their advice to young coaches.

**SELLERS: WHAT WAS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT CONCEPT THAT YOU HAVE LEARNED THAT HAS MADE YOU A BETTER COACH?**

**BOWMAN:** No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.

**VAN DE WALLE:** I agree, wholeheartedly. I also try to coach with the understanding that it takes a long time to get really good at something. Patience is the key. I learned quickly that players on the sitting team can be pushed hard physically and mentally. There was no "feeling sorry" for these athletes. They were there as elite athletes that wanted to win a medal in the Paralympics. Their amputation was not a hindrance.

**CANDREA:** Preparation, Preparation, Preparation! Preparation is the foundation for success. Over the years, I have found that paying attention to the process will give you the best chance for success. Preparation of that process, continued evaluation of the process, and paying attention to details have made me a more efficient and effective coach. I desire to be over-prepared vs. under-prepared any day!

**BRANT:** At the highest level of competition the smallest of details is the difference between a medal and no medal. I feel this is critical to success and no stone must be left unturned. Next, communication, which includes listening, information is only valuable when it is delivered in a timely and precise manner.



**BOB BOWMAN**



**DENISE VAN DE WALLE**

**DEEM:** I do not believe that you ever stop learning. If we as coaches think we know everything there is to know, then it's time to find a new profession. I find it is more important to coach the athlete than the event. While possessing an understanding of particular events is vitally important, it is perhaps more important to possess an understanding of the athlete and how to promote improvements considering their level of understanding.

**SELLERS:** YOU TALK ABOUT LEARNING. HOW DO YOU EDUCATE YOURSELF? YOU ARE AT THE TOP OF THE GAME IN YOUR SPORT, HOW AND WHERE DO YOU GO TO STAY CURRENT?

**VAN DE WALLE:** When I was given the opportunity to coach the USA Women's sitting team, I had to learn on the job. I had no prior experience of working with amputees' and especially amputees sitting on the floor playing volleyball. Some of my best knowledge has come from trial and error, and in talking with the captain and Head Coach of the Netherlands Women's team.

**BRANT:** I am constantly talking to other elite coaches and not necessarily just coaches in gymnastics. I spend time every week in the USOC Sport Sciences departments discussing my ideas and looking for new ways to evaluate and maximize performance for the USA Men's Gymnastics team.

**BOWMAN:** I seek out the most knowledgeable and experienced international coaches and pick their brains. When you are fortunate enough to have a special athlete like

Michael Phelps you can learn a lot by just watching what they do and by trying to understand how they operate.

**DEEM:** I also maintain a working relationship with a small network of highly experienced coaches, which not only provides opportunities to learn from successful coaches but also provides opportunities to share ideas and concerns about all aspects of training. I study relevant books, articles and research pertaining to training methodology and athlete development.

**CANDREA:** Education should be a continuing process that never stops. It is my responsibility through conversation, conferences and reading to enhance my knowledge base and confirm my methodology. Nothing stays the same it gets better or it gets worse!

**SELLERS:** SO YOU ARE ALL CONTINUALLY LEARNING ABOUT SPORT. HOW DO YOU REFLECT YOUR LEARNING AND PERSONALITY INTO YOUR COACHING PHILOSOPHY?

**CANDREA:** My coaching philosophy definitely reflects my personality. To sum it up, I use three C's. The first "C" stands for competence. You must stay on top and the game and continue to be active in the education process. This keeps your motivation and enthusiasm at the highest levels. The second "C" stands for consistent. Being consistent with your approach to the process and your management of people creates a quality environment for developing your athletes and team concept. The third "C" stands



**MIKE CANDREA**



**AMY DEEM**

for caring. I have had the pleasure of coaching both men and women. Men have to play good to feel good, while women have to feel good to play good. Caring about the athlete as an individual is very important to building trust.

**BRANT:** My philosophy has changed as I have developed as a coach. It is important to grow and adapt to stay on top of your sport. My goal is to develop individuals who win, which in my case, means both coaches and athletes. I work on leaving my ego at home and developing strong working relationships, which is based on honesty and integrity.

**DEEM:** My philosophy revolves around assisting athletes to grow in all aspects of their lives, not just athletically. I feel personally responsible for providing an environment that will foster the overall growth and development of each athlete. Hopefully, they will be better prepared for life than when they first stepped on our campus.

**BOWMAN:** I believe that hard work eventually leads to success. There are many more talented coaches than me out there, but nobody can out work me.

**VAN DE WALLE:** I want to add passion to this discussion on philosophy. I believe you should have a passion for your sport. With team sports, that creating a great team chemistry is as critical as training their skills.

**SELLERS: HAVE YOU HAD IMPORTANT MENTORS IN YOUR COACHING CAREER?**

**DEEM:** The USA Track & Field Program has provided my most significant mentoring influence. The coaching relationships and coaching knowledge that I have gained through the program has been an invaluable resource.

**CANDREA:** My family was probably my most important mentor because they taught me that winning championships is not the most important part of the process. They made me aware of how important balance is to the longevity of your career and happiness in life. Balance between your family, profession, and the importance of spirituality. Once I realized balance, I became a better parent, coach and husband.

**BOWMAN:** My most influential mentor has been Paul Bergen. He developed great swimmers like Tracy Caulkins, who was the female equivalent to Michael Phelps. I was very lucky to be his assistant and his guidance has been invaluable.

**SELLERS: HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH THE EMOTIONAL ROLLER-COASTER OF ELITE LEVEL COMPETITION?**

**BOWMAN:** I think my job at the major meets is to be the picture of confidence and composure. That's when the athletes need a source of stability. I tend to get nervous during training—that's when I can get intense. At the meets, you need to keep your cool and go with the flow.

**BRANT:** This is a difficult task and maybe the hardest. However, the better prepared the team is and the ability to cover all details lowers the emotional stress. Therefore, planning is crucial and that it is accomplished by planning early and reviewed at the end of the year.



**RON BRANT**

**CANDREA:** I find that much like Ron, being process oriented helps in handling the ups and downs you face in the game. I have found that being totally dedicated to preparation and the process keeps me in the present moment. I do not live in the past and do not look to far ahead. I also stress not to get too excited when things are going well and not to get to down when things are going bad!

**VAN DE WALLE:** Coaching is not where I get my significance. I have an active prayer life. After our first loss, I took time to reflect on what was really important. Stressing out and being negative was not the answer.

#### **SELLERS: WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT CONCEPT THAT YOUR ATHLETES GET FROM YOU?**

**BRANT:** Life is difficult, deal with It! It sounds harsh, but it has deeper meaning. There are obstacles and adversities we must all be prepared to overcome in order to reach the dreams we each have. Once you have committed to your dreams go after them and don't be setback by the adversities of life, they are just opportunities to learn to get better.

**CANDREA:** Hard work pays off and everyone must do their part to achieve success for the team. It is not about me, it's about USA! Prepare for success!

**DEEM:** There are no shortcuts to lasting success. I encourage my athletes to take ownership of their success by investing the time and energy and efforts necessary to accomplish their goals.

**BOWMAN:** I teach my athletes to think big. Don't be afraid to use your imagination.

#### **SELLERS: WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A COACH JUST STARTING OUT IN THE PROFESSION?**

**BRANT:** First, be honest and maintain a high level of integrity, it will take you a long way in your life. Secondly, when a coach stops learning, he will be beaten in a short period of time.

**CANDREA:** If you do not have passion for what you do, it will be a difficult journey. You must be able to adapt to constant change, be flexible and use every resource you have available to you. When dealing with your administration or outside groups, communicate often, be direct and you never can go wrong with honesty.

**VAN DE WALLE:** I would want that person to spend a lot of time with the sitting team. It would be important to see the game played and to see the training. We don't have the resources of books or videos, so watching and lots of dialogue about the game is important.

**BOWMAN:** My advice to young coaches is to be patient. Take your time and learn from other good coaches before you strike out on your own. Very few coaches truly excel at preparing athletes for international competition. Seek them out, observe what they do and how they do it and don't be afraid to ask questions.

**DEEM:** I think it is vitally important that coaches learn to conduct themselves as professionals. I believe, as coaches, we do not always portray ourselves in a professional manner. Coaches are executives managing resources and personnel on a large scale. Some larger than others, but if we expect to be treated as professionals, this involves embracing the professional culture and evaluating everything from our office attire to our office demeanor.

*Bob Bowman served as the Men's Swimming Assistant Coach at 2004 Olympic Games and is the Head Swimming Coach at the University of Michigan.*

*Mike Candrea has been the National team coach for Softball at the 2000 and 2004 Olympic Games and is the Head Coach at the University of Arizona.*

*Denise Van De Walle is the Head Volleyball coach at Bowling Green State University and served as the Assistant Coach for 2004 Paralympics Women's Volleyball team.*

*Amy Deem serves as the Head Track & Field Coach at University of Miami.*

*Ron Brant is the USA Gymnastics Senior Men's National Team Coordinator.*

# LEADERSHIP

## and MOTIVATION

## IN SPORTS

Packianathan Chelladurai and Catherine C. Quatman  
The Ohio State University

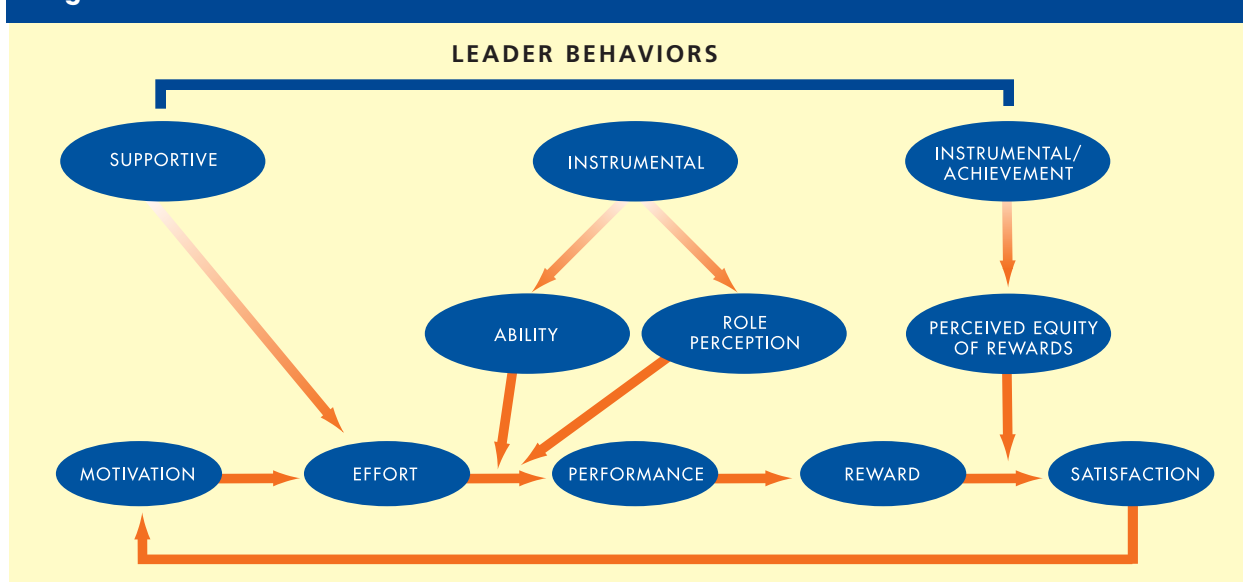
Leadership has been defined in a variety of ways, but most definitions generally refer to it as a behavioral process with the intent of influencing individuals or entire groups toward a set of goals. As it pertains to the contexts of sport and athletics, the concept of leadership can play a critical role in a program's successes or failures. Ultimately, the leadership behaviors of coaches can significantly impact the outcome of a team's performance.

From both theoretical and practical standpoints, motivation to perform a task is the key to achieving desired performance. Though the link between motivation and actual performance outcome can be somewhat blurry (i.e. a highly motivated team may not necessarily be a winning team), most will agree that a lack of motivation is not conducive for accomplishing any task. In the realm of sports, motiva-

tion entails the establishment of a desire to apply great physical effort and a sense of dedication towards the team goals. Therefore, one of the most important leadership functions for a coach in influencing an athletic team toward a set of goals is to be able to help create and facilitate athletes' motivation.

Where then can a coach begin in figuring out how to influence or motivate their athletes toward greater performances? The role of the coach as a motivator entails three major functions: to provide direction toward the team's goals, to help energize the team's effort in that direction, and finally, to find a way to make the effort toward the goals persist and persevere over time. One useful way to understand how to go about meeting these three functions is to simply begin by analyzing the athletes in terms of

Figure 1: LEADER BEHAVIORS ATTUNED TO AN INDIVIDUAL'S MOTIVATIONAL PROCESS



Source: Chelladurai, P. (1981). The coach as motivator and chameleon of leadership styles. *Science Periodical on Research and Technology in Sport*. Ottawa, Canada: Coaching Association of Canada.

their motivational patterns. Figure 1 provides an illustration of leader behaviors and an athlete’s motivational process as developed from existing leadership theory and research.

An underlying aspect of pursuing excellence in sport is that the athletes themselves possess a certain degree of self-motivation. Put differently, individuals are motivated to engage in athletics because they value the rewards of such participation. The rewards may be things such as kinesi-  
 thetic gratification (enjoyment of the physical feeling of performing the movements and skills), the desire to do something well, and attaining prestige or status among other things. However, the rewards of excellence and prestige accrue to the athlete only if a certain level of performance is attained. Therefore, the amount of effort and motivation must be closely linked to the expected performance level. In looking at Figure 1, the athlete’s motivational process begins with the athlete’s self-motivation, which in turn directly affects the athlete’s effort.

The relationship between effort and performance, however, is not always straightforward. Rather, effort as it relates to performance can be impacted by other factors such as the athletes’ inherent traits and physical skill. Likewise, effort is also affected by the athlete’s role perception (i.e., understanding of personal responsibilities and how to fulfill those responsibilities).

Performance is, in essence, what leads to rewards. The attainment of rewards results in satisfaction, though the level of satisfaction can be either enhanced or diminished depending on whether or not the athlete perceives the rewards to be equitable. In other words, an athlete compares the rewards received with some standard and decides whether the rewards are equitable or not. One way to look at this concept is to expect that the athlete will compare the total cost (time and energy) with the total benefits they receive (rewards). With enhanced satisfaction, the athlete is motivated to put forth more effort; with lowered satisfaction, motivation and effort is reduced.

Given this basic model of an athlete’s motivation, performance and satisfaction, it is easier to specify the points at which a coach can intervene in order to enhance athletes’ motivation and performance. Generally speaking, five basic dimensions of coaching behavior have been identified: Training and Instruction, Positive Feedback, Social Support, Democratic Behavior and Autocratic Behavior. Table 1 below provides descriptions of each of these dimensions. Three of these dimensions, namely Training and Instruction, Positive Feedback and Social Support directly relate to the motivational process depicted in Figure 1.

The Social Support behavior of the coach can directly affect the effort on the part of the athlete. The significance of Social Support behaviors is highlighted by the fact that

**Table 1 DIMENSIONS OF COACHING BEHAVIOR**

DESCRIPTION:	COACHING BEHAVIOR DIMENSIONS:
<b>Training and Instruction</b>	Behavior of the coach that entails teaching the skills, techniques and tactics of the sport as well as arranging and conducting practice sessions in order to maximize the mastery of the skills and coordinating and clarifying the roles and activities of each of the team members.
<b>Social Support Behavior</b>	Behavior of the coach characterized by a concern for individual athletes, for their welfare, for positive group atmosphere, and for warm interpersonal relations with members.
<b>Positive Feedback Behavior</b>	Behavior of the coach which includes providing reinforcements for an athlete by recognizing and rewarding good performance.
<b>Democratic Behavior</b>	Behavior of the coach which allows greater participation by the athletes in decisions pertaining to group goals, practice methods, and game tactics and strategies
<b>Autocratic Behavior</b>	Behavior of the coach which involves independence in decision making and which stresses personal authority.

Source:Chelladurai, P. & Saleh, S.D. (1980) Dimensions of leader behavior in sports: Development of a leadership scale. *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 2(1), 34-45.

athletes spend a large number of hours training relative to the duration of competition. The coach's Social Support during these training sessions can soften the deadening impact of the strenuous and monotonous work during the season.

The Training and Instructional behaviors of the coach consists of teaching the skills, techniques and tactics of the sport as well as conducting practice sessions that maximize the mastery of the skills. Training and instruction... involves defining and clarifying the role that each of the athletes on the team. The coach may organize the relevant abilities and talents of athletes into a complete strategy for the team, but these plans can only be successful if the athletes have a clear understanding of how they fit into the total picture. Ultimately, by improving the technical skills of the athletes and by clarifying their roles on the team, the coach strengthens the effort-performance relationship, and enhances the overall motivation of the team.

The third dimension, Positive Feedback feeds into the concept of the athlete's perceived equity of rewards. Coaches must be cognizant of how they distribute their positive feedback because it can be a very powerful and critical

factor in the athlete's motivational process. Essentially, a coach's motto in this regard should be "equal rewards for equal performance."

Though they are not identified specifically in the athlete's motivational process, the final two dimensions of coaching, Democratic and Autocratic Behaviors, are also important components of leadership. They are both decision-making styles that coaches may adopt, and it is important to point out that all activities carried out by the coach involve decision-making (including the acts of Social Support, Training and Instruction and Positive Feedback). In a democratic or participatory style the coach allows for their athletes' input in a decision, while in an autocratic style the coach makes the final decision alone. Although, coaches instinctively favor one style over the other, recent approaches to decision-making suggest that the style of decision-making depends more upon the situation in which the coach finds him/herself rather than upon the coach's attributes. Thus a coach should learn to adjust his/her decision style as the situation dictates.

While models such as Figure 1 can provide useful insights into the motivational process, the nature of coaching entails interpersonal interactions between the coach and each of the athletes. Therefore, developing a protocol for optimal leadership behaviors can be somewhat complex. Each team member possesses a unique personality and ability level, and therefore the athletes will respond to a coach's leadership in individual ways. Furthermore, coaching what is essentially a group of "I's" toward a set of group goals is compounded by the fact that individual preferences may not necessarily be congruent with the leadership behaviors that a particular situation dictates. While the idea of a coach being able to meet the varying needs of each individual athlete is appealing, factors relating to the organization and its environment can also impose certain demands and constraints on the leader's behaviors. Thus, one of the greatest challenges that coaches face is that of balancing the needs and desires of each team member while at the same time meeting the needs of the team as a whole and the demands of the situation.

Obviously, these factors pose a problem for any coach seeking a simple answer to the question of how best to go about motivat-



ing athletes toward greater performances. Though there may not be a straightforward answer, many studies have been conducted in this area. One prominent approach used in many of these studies has been a leadership assessment tool developed by Chelladurai and Saleh in 1980 called The Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS). The LSS is a questionnaire made up of 40 items that are divided into sub-scales based on the five coaching dimensions mentioned earlier.

The LSS has been used in a variety of contexts to measure many different variables related to leadership in sport. Generally, there are three main areas the scale has been used to measure: athletes' preferences for specific leader behaviors, athletes' perceptions of their coach's behaviors, and coach's perceptions of their own behaviors. Among other things, the scale has also been used to study other important facets of leadership in sport including athletic maturity, discrepancies in athlete preferences' across cultures, discrepancies between preferences and perceptions of leader behavior, discrepancies between gender preferences, relationships between coaches and athletes, and team cohesion.

The LSS can be as valuable from a practical standpoint as it has been from a theoretical standpoint. In fact, various sport organizations have put the scale to good use for their own personal assessment purposes. For example, in 2002 a North Baltimore Aquatic Club affiliated with USA Swimming used the scale to determine whether the athletes' perceptions of their coaching leadership behaviors matched the perceptions and purposes of what the Club intended. In a similar manner, coaches themselves may engage in self-assessment using the items in the LSS. They can check by themselves the extent to which they engage in the behaviors listed in the LSS. They may also ask some impartial observers to assess the extent to which those behaviors are exhibited by the coach.

In the final analysis, the foregoing analysis provides only a basic framework for the coach to utilize. Coach's past experiences themselves do constitute a vast reservoir of information. Such experiences would show the links between coaching behaviors and athlete's positive and negative reactions to those behaviors. In fact, most coaches may be able to relate their experiences to the model proposed in Figure 1. Such an effort would facilitate a greater understanding of the motivational processes of individual athletes, and how one's leadership behaviors would enhance athlete's motivation and effort.



# Be the Coach YOU WANT TO BE

by Peter Davis, Ph.D, Director of Coaching and Sport Sciences

**T**here are no rules or clear pathways to become a great coach. There are no laws that say you should do this or you should do that. There is no set or established plan that you must follow to become a good coach or a great coach. John Wooden did it his way, Bill Walsh did it his way, and Pat Summit does it her way.

So how do you figure out how to become a good coach, a better coach, or a great coach? How do you become the coach you want to be? Is there a special course to take, or a special book to read? We often read biographies about the great “guru” coaches of some sports and they all seem to be different. Some have tried to learn everything they can about their sport, or are great “historians” of their sport, some have studied great leaders in business and military history and employ those same tactics in their career and sport. Some are not the greatest tacticians, but are great people managers. Some might have even just been in the right place at the right time— but if they became great coaches they were more than just lucky.

From my experience working with and observing some leading coaches there are certain predictable abilities and characteristics that the great coaches have in common. They can be summarized into several different categories, including (but not limited to) knowledge and education, attitude, planning and character. We all know some coaches who know a lot about the game but have questionable character and integrity. We all know some coaches who have planned and managed their career to perfection, but are not the leaders in knowledge (beyond x’s and o’s) of their sport. Some are great recruiters or talent scouts— but lousy teachers. There are no “rules.” Nothing is mandatory in this business, but if you want to be the best you can be, here are some guidelines.

## KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION

You don’t have to have a “PhD” in your sport; but if you want to be the best, you should seek to know as much about the sport as you can. Respect the sport and the fact that there is a body of knowledge to understand about any sport. If you treat your sport and coaching as inconsequential, then you won’t be taken seriously. Take as many formal courses as you can. If your sport offers coach education course seek them out and take them. If your sport doesn’t have formal courses, explore the International Federation for your sport — sometimes they offer coach education courses.

If you can’t find courses in your own sport, look for coach education courses in other sports. In fact, once you have taken all the coach education courses in your sport it is a great learning experience to take coach education courses in other sports. Cross-fertilization works wonders for innovation and creativity and setting yourself apart from your peers.

Look everywhere for coach education material — books, DVDs, videos and so on. The more you know the better you will be.

And think beyond your sport. Look for courses on leadership, communication, time management in other areas beyond coaching; skills in other industries transfer well into coaching and vice versa.

## EXPERIENCE

Nothing beats “having been there done that”, but you can’t always start out with the head job and get all the experience you need at once. Volunteer as much as you can for as many different situations as you can. Find the coaches you want to be around or the situations where you need more experience and volunteer. Take stats, shoot video,

Look for courses on leadership, communication, time management in other areas beyond coaching; skills in other industries transfer well into coaching and vice versa.

put up the nets and shag balls. Do whatever it takes to get some experience. Any time you can be around top coaches (and athletes) is time well spent—as long as you have a plan and make good use of the time.

### PLAN IT AND MAKE IT WORTHWHILE

Volunteering is good in itself, but plan it and make it worthwhile. Don't just volunteer to "spend time." Volunteer to learn—it's an investment in your career if you plan it and work it. Make a list of the strengths you want to cultivate, or the weaknesses you want to strengthen. Volunteer in situations that will help you get better in that area. This might include things like: improving time out communication strategies, managing star athletes, understanding the application of medicine and science better, dealing with volunteers/parents or any number of other areas. Figure out what you need to do and know, and where you can get it. When you are volunteering take notes, observe what happens around you and ask questions. But remember, the objective (or at least the learning objective) when you are volunteering is not to change the coach you are working with or take over the program—it is to learn what to do or not do when it is your turn and to develop your own personal coaching character and style.

### PUT YOURSELF IN THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

Volunteering is one way to put yourself in the right environment, however, not everyone can always find the time to do that. If you can't find a way to volunteer, find a way to be around the best people. Who is the best coach in your league, your city, or your State? Make plans to be around these people, whether it is in the same competitions, or whether you just go to their competitions and observe how they operate. Invite them to come and talk to your team or school or club. Don't just limit yourself to the best coaches. Find a way to be around good people and experts in other fields. Observe how they operate. How they deal with people? How they meet challenges and handle setbacks?

Establish a personal pattern of learning and improving. Most of the things I mentioned above revolve around establishing a pattern of learning. You should take every opportunity to observe and learn from the best (and the worst) coaches. As a coach you will be at literally hundreds of competitions over time. Focus on your game and your own teams while you are in competition; but after that is over, spend some time observing other coaches at work. You can even get a lot out of watching college and profes-



sional coaches on television. Observe how they react to success and failure, how they react to adversity (bad calls by officials, bad decisions by athletes etc) on the field, how they interact with officials. Reflect on their behavior and reactions and visualize what you would do and how you would react if (when) you were in that situation.

As well as observing other coaches, how about observing your self? I have said in previous articles in the Olympic Coach magazine that coaches are spending more and more time filming and analyzing their athletes (and their competition). This is great; but how about turning the camera on yourself for a while. Ask a friend or another coach film you at work —either in a practice or competition situation (preferable both) and observe how you operate. How do you communicate with athletes? What is the balance between positive and negative feedback? How do you function in time outs? What is the ratio between activity and verbal instruction in your practices? How do you spread your interaction between all the athletes on the team in competition and training? There are a thousand things to observe and that is not the focus of this article. The point is, how are you learning? How and what are you learning from the great coaches and what are you learning from yourself?

**LISTEN TO YOUR ATHLETES AND PARENTS.**

Don't be afraid to seek input and feedback from athletes and parents—.at the right time. Don't ask them how you rate as a coach 10 minutes after you have lost the league championship—structure it.

At the beginning of the season, when you lay out the season plan, your philosophy and expectations for the athletes, team and parents, explain that one of your goals is to improve your own skills as a coach. Let everyone know what you hope to achieve as a coach and let everyone know that at certain times in the season you will be seeking their honest feedback about how you are doing and what areas you need to improve...just like you would do with your athletes

Some coaches will argue against this strategy because they think that athletes and/or parents will give negative reviews because you have lost games, didn't get enough playing time, or because they have hidden agendas. This might be the case sometimes; but ask yourself how could you possibly evaluate yourself and improve your skills if

you avoid honest feedback from two of the most critical stakeholders in your profession.

If you structure feedback sessions or “report cards” so that they seek honest feedback with examples of strengths and weaknesses you will filter out the “disgruntled” athlete or parent and get to your true evaluation.

**WHAT DOES YOUR NETWORK LOOK LIKE?**

Not many coaches make it “to the top” by themselves. Most of the best ones have at least one mentor. Most of them spent a lot of time around coaches when they were growing up as either a child of a coach or as a young athlete. Most of them have a strong support team behind them. Make sure you identify people whom you admire and can learn from and seek them out as mentors. Most good/great coaches, who are leaders, value what they do and are proud of their profession and love their sport. They often love the chance to mentor others who have the same love of coaching and commitment to learning as they do. Take advantage of it. If you ask someone to be a mentor and they say no—don't give up, keep looking until you find someone who will help you. It works both ways, don't be afraid to be a mentor to someone else. Being objective and reflecting on someone else's performance can sometimes open your eyes to yourself.

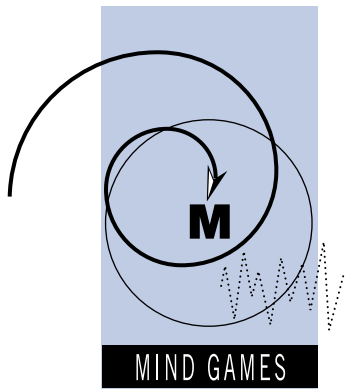
Not many coaches make it “to the top” by themselves. Most of the best ones have at least one mentor.

And don't forget that your mentor(s) can come from outside sport and coaching.

**THE BOTTOM LINE....**

The bottom line is that most great coaches don't go from novice volunteer coach to a “great” coach instantaneously. They work hard, they sacrifice and sometimes they take chances. In all cases, they love the game and they respect the sport and the profession. They make a commitment to learning and excellence. Every opportunity is a learning opportunity. They have standards and a coaching philosophy and they don't compromise.

Being a great coach doesn't mean winning the World Series or the Super Bowl—you can all be great coaches at your respective level....but you have to plan it and work it. It won't happen by itself. It starts right now...at your next practice, your next competition, the next book you read, the next video you watch. What are you waiting for?



## Communicating With Athletes: Timing is Everything!

By Robin S. Vealey, Ph.D,  
Miami University, Oxford, Ohio

**M**ary Harvey, goalkeeper on the U.S. Women's Soccer Team, who won the 1991 World Cup, gave up an "easy" goal just before halftime of the championship game, which tied up the score 1-1. Instead of berating her or questioning her about what happened on the goal, Coach Tony DiCicco simply talked to her about the upcoming second half and what she should focus on to prepare for the next half of play. A year later, Harvey told her coach: "I never told you this, but at halftime, when you didn't mention the mistake I made and simply told me what I needed to do in the second half, well, that had an unbelievable impact on me. It gave me a lot of confidence and allowed me to focus on the second half" (DiCicco, Hacker, & Salzberg, 2002, p. 101).

Most coaches understand the importance of communication skills in interacting with their athletes. However, most articles written on communication talk about what to say and how to say it. But as veteran coaches know, choosing when to say it is perhaps the most important thing. Sending the right message in the right way at the right time is the most important communication skill for effective leadership. Coach DiCicco understood that halftime of a World Cup Championship game was not the time to criticize or even discuss an obvious mistake made by a veteran player. His choice of message at that time was brilliant, because it provided powerful motivation and confidence for Harvey, and allowed her to focus on what she needed to do in the second half.

Like me, you probably can remember times when you had the best intentions to communicate in a thoughtful way, only to have the situation blow up in your face! Because of the intensity and emotional highs and lows of sport competition, understanding when to communicate certain messages to athletes is a constant challenge. The four quadrants in Figure 1 represent what can happen in four different situations based on the message sent to athletes as well as the timing of the message (adapted from Maxwell, 1998).

		Message	
		Wrong Message	Right Message
Timing	Right Time	Wrong Message Right Time <b>MISTAKE</b>	Right Message Right Time <b>SUCCESS</b>
	Wrong Time	Wrong Message Wrong Time <b>DISASTER</b>	Right Message Wrong Time <b>RESISTANCE</b>

### WRONG MESSAGE AT THE WRONG TIME

The bottom left quadrant represents what can happen when a coach chooses the wrong message at the wrong time. Disaster! As a college basketball coach, I was once attempting to help a player learn a new offensive move. As she struggled in learning the move, I said in a glib attempt to motivate her, "Come on, Mary. You can do it. It's easy!" She looked at me with frustration, defeat, and tears in her eyes and replied softly, "It's easy for you." I realized I was wrong to infer that it should be easy for her to learn this skill, especially at a time when she was struggling and feeling incompetent. It took some time to gain back her trust due to my lack of empathy at a time when she needed reassurance instead of my attempt at lighthearted motivation. My intent was to be positive and motivational, but my timing was wrong.

### RIGHT MESSAGE AT THE WRONG TIME

Even the right message delivered effectively, but at the wrong time, still represents ineffective communication. The bottom right quadrant represents what can happen when a coach chooses the right message at the wrong time. Resistance! I learned quickly as a coach that talking to a team immediately after a heartbreaking loss requires great

care. My mistake the first time this happened was to attempt to get my athletes to open up to discuss their feelings about a tough loss to our arch-rival. It wasn't a bad idea, but they just weren't ready for it. I met stiff resistance in the form of averted gazes and rolling eyes, which surprised me as they typically responded very openly to me about their thoughts and feelings. The next day at practice they were ready to discuss the loss, and they explained to me that the night before was just not a good time for them to think rationally and unemotionally about their performance. They needed some time to think through what had happened in the game. My athletes helped me learn the valuable lesson of timing, because although my actions were right, my timing was wrong.

### WRONG MESSAGE AT THE RIGHT TIME

The upper left quadrant represents what can happen when a coach chooses the wrong action at the right time. Mistake! With eight seconds left in a game in which we were down by one point, I called a time-out to set up a play for my team. Instead of telling them exactly what to do, I called for an offensive set in which they would then read the flow of the play to dictate who would take the last shot. I used a democratic leadership style, so often lauded in coaching books, to let them determine for themselves who should take the last shot. We failed to score because we turned the ball over due to a lack of execution. I immediately realized that I had chosen the wrong course of action for my team at that time. It was not what they needed from me, and it was a mistake. It was the right time to make a crucial decision, and I made the wrong one.

### RIGHT MESSAGE AT THE RIGHT TIME

Fortunately, I was able to rectify my mistake in a game later that season. This situation represents the upper right quadrant in Figure 1, which is where the coach chooses the right action at the right time. Success! Our team found ourselves in the same last second situation we had faced earlier in the year. This time I was ready, as I had learned from my previous mistake. My leadership behavior was totally autocratic, which was the right action for this situation because autocratic decision-making is needed in stressful situations. I told each athlete exactly what they must do on the play, emphasized they each had one job to do, and made those jobs very clear and specific for them. The result was we got a great shot, it went in, and I learned a valuable lesson about choosing the right communication style to use depending on the timing of the situation.



### IMPROVING OUR TIMING

Enhancing the timing of our communication requires a lot of practice, trials-and-errors, and critical self-reflection to learn from mistakes. Here are some suggestions for working on your timing in your messages to athletes:

1. Consider the emotional needs of your athletes based on the time of the season, the proximity of competition (upcoming or just completed), and the influence of good and bad performances (or wins or losses). In emotional moments, athletes are typically not effective listeners or able to engage in thoughtful and rational discussions. None of us are.
2. Consider your emotional state when communicating with athletes. If anger or frustration blocks your ability to communicate productively, wait until your emotions are under control before speaking with your athletes. Know yourself, and only deliver important messages when you are able to do so in a thoughtful, rational manner. And if you say things that you later regret, simply take the time to explain that to your athletes and apologize if necessary. By honestly and openly taking responsibility for mistakes, coaches gain credibility and the trust of their athletes. In fact, it's good timing to follow up your mistakes with an honest admission of fault and regret.

3. Realize that athletes respond better to concise messages as opposed to lengthy explanations or tirades during practice sessions and competitive events. A research study found that legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden rarely spoke more than 20 seconds at a time during practice, with his teaching comments being short, punctuated, and numerous (Gallimore & Tharp, 2004).
4. In tense situations, communicate in unexpected or light-hearted ways that help athletes loosen up and gain perspective. A high school baseball coach developed a unique (and a bit off color!) sign to give to his players from his position in the third base coaching box in pressure situations. As the batter watched, the coach would go through his sequence of signs and then finish up by touching his thumb and second finger together in the shape of a circle. The sign represented a key sphincter at the rear end of the player's body that the coach wanted the athlete to keep open and loose. The circle sign told each player to "be loose and take an aggressive cut." The coach told me that his players loved the sign, and always smiled no matter how pressurized the situation!

In pressure situations, also avoid stating the obvious such as "just relax," "we really need this," or "it's all up to you." I had a well-meaning coach that had the habit of always telling me to "relax" in tense situations. The comment always caused me to wonder "Am I not relaxed?" and to become more tense as a result. Provide some concise instructions, give a verbal or nonverbal show of support, but don't state the obvious.

5. Similarly, avoid pointing out or dwelling on the obvious when athletes make dumb mistakes. It only focuses on the negative, so a better strategy is to ignore it or to develop a "mistake ritual," which is a common gesture coaches can communicate to athletes after mistakes to indicate that it's no big deal. Examples include "no sweat" by wiping two fingers across your brow as if wiping sweat away, "brush it off" by brushing your hand across your shoulder to brush away the mistake, and "wave goodbye" in softball and baseball by taking off your cap momentarily as if to wave away the mistake prior to putting the hat back on (Thompson, 2003). Ask your athletes to develop their own Mistake Ritual - it really works!
6. Avoid constantly using high intensity, rah-rah approaches to motivating your athletes. Why? They quickly learn that this is an act, and then in situations where you attempt to communicate intensity to them, they don't buy it.

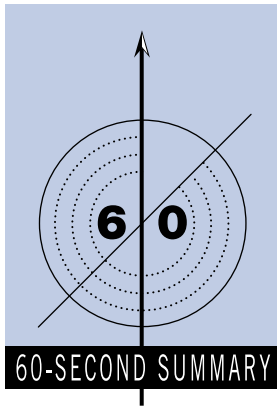
Highly successful Duke men's basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski (2000) talks about the importance of always telling athletes the truth to create trust in what the coach says, or what he calls "instant belief." Coach Krzyzewski credits the development of "instant belief" for his ability to help his players focus in the final 2.1 seconds of the 1992 NCCA Regional Final with a trip to the Final Four on the line. After a Kentucky player scored on a miraculous shot, Duke called time out down by one point. Coach Krzyzewski knew that the message his athletes needed to hear at that moment was critical, because he saw in their eyes that they didn't believe they could win. As his athletes came to the bench, he shouted at them, "We're going to win! We're going to win!" Could he guarantee this? Of course not. But because he had been an honest communicator all season, his players trusted him and believed him, and what was important at this moment was to create an "instant belief" that they could win. Of course, Duke went on to win the game on one of the most thrilling last-second shots in basketball history. Coach Krzyzewski sent his team the one message they needed to hear and believe at exactly the right time. The key point to remember is that if he had constantly used this rah-rah ploy with his team, they would not have believed him at the critical time when it was needed.

When coaches send the right message at the right time, communication flows, athletes learn, and teams flourish. Veteran coaches understand the crucial aspect of timing in attempting to enhance team cohesion, performance, and motivation in their athletes. Develop a file folder in your head of what you learn about timing and communicating with your athletes. Timing is everything in knowing not only what and how, but especially when to communicate with your athletes. Good luck, and good coaching.

*Dr. Robin S. Vealey is a Professor in the Department of Physical Education, Health, and Sport Studies at Miami University in Ohio. A former college basketball coach, she now teaches courses, conducts research, and consults with athletes and coaches in the area of sport psychology. This article is taken from her book, Coaching for the Inner Edge, available in March from Fitness Information Technology ([www.fitinfotech.com](http://www.fitinfotech.com)).*

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## Do generalized visual training programmes for sport really work? An experimental investigation

By Bruce Abernethy and Joanne M. Wood  
*Journal of Sport Sciences*, 2001, 19, 203-222

### REVIEW

**T**he Australian Sports Commission supported Abernethy and Wood's research in vision training for athletes. While this appears as a very popular and commercially available training program, what does the research say? Abernethy and Wood's in this article reviewed 48 references and conducted a research project as well. They looked at three key assumptions as it related to vision training: "vision is directly related to sports performance (such that sub-normal vision is detrimental to sports performance and that supra-normal vision is beneficial to sports performance); that key visual attributes for sport can be trained; and that improved vision translates to improved sports performance."

Research shows that "the consensus is that expert and novice athletes are not characterized by differences in basic visual function. Rather the expert's advantage appears to be perceptual, related not to basic visual function but to how domain-specific visual information is interpreted and used to guide action."

The most commonly measured visual functions can be improved through training, yet caution must be used because "the exercises used to train vision are identical to,

or simple variants of the procedures used to test basic visual training." Is the athlete just becoming more familiar with the test?

The third assumption that improved vision translates to improved sports performance on the surface seems like a logical conclusion, however, three studies failed to confirm this. Two studies showed improvement, but these studies were not considered valid due to the possible interference of the "Hawthorne" effect and one due to the lack of a placebo group. Wood and Abernethy in a 1997 study "found no evidence of improved visual or motor performance in a group receiving four weeks of visual training using exercises of the type typically used by sports optometrists." Wood and Abernethy further state that "even if programs succeed in enhancing basic visual function, this is unlikely to transfer into a motor performance advantage."

One significant statement is "the training programs' fundamental failure would appear to be that they attempt to train general visual factors that are now known not to be the limiting factor to sports performance."

The two researchers admit that the controlled studies do not match up to the anecdotal reports. The question is then how valid are the anecdotal reports. "Wood and Abernethy, strongly suggest that generalized visual training programs of the type advocated by sports optometrists should be used with caution by athletes and coaches."





## HOT OFF THE PRESS

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#### PARENTS AND COACHES CODES

<http://www.hscoaches.org/coachcode.html>

#### USOC COACHES CODE OF ETHICS

<http://www.usolympicteam.com/12688.htm>

#### NATIONAL COACHES EDUCATION CONFERENCE

<http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/ncace/template.cfm?template=main.html>

#### ACOSTA/CARPENTER LONGITUDINAL STUDY ON WOMEN IN COACHING

<http://www.aahperd.org/nagws/template.cfm?template=acostacarpenter.html>

#### COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL ENDURANCE PROGRAMS: FACTORS OF SUCCESS

<http://www.usaswimming.org/USASWeb/ViewMiscArticle.aspx?TabId=307&Alias=Rainbow&Lang=en&mid=436&ItemId=611>

#### NATIONAL STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING ASSOCIATION'S SYNOPSIS OF POSITION PAPERS ON A VARIETY OF TOPICS

<http://www.nasca-lift.org/Publications/PosStatements.shtml#Explosive>

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