

GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports

Coaching Language Builds Up or Tears Down – What's the Impact of Your Message?

By David Benzel



At the start of the soccer season, I had a meaningful conversation with my daughter's coach.

It was about expectations – mine and his.

I wanted him to know that I would respect his decisions on how much or how little my daughter played in games. **He could EXPECT that I would trust his judgment.**

And MY expectation of him was simple.

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I wanted to pick her up from practice each day with her self-esteem as strong as it was when I dropped her off. **I EXPECTED that he would use language that would build her up rather than tear her down – no matter how she performed.**

Words are powerful.

And how they are delivered matters.

Every coach has the challenge of working with athletes of varying talents and different work ethics, but one thing is true across the board – the coaching message needs to be positive.

And this comes down to useful and inspiring language.

What Kind of Language Do You Use?

A coaching message that is negative, uses language that **diminishes** what an athlete believes to be true about himself.

At the end of the day, it undermines both his natural talent and his desire to work.

Typically, this kind of language falls under one of these:

- Ridicule
- Embarrassment
- Personal digs
- Sarcasm

On the flip side, a positive coaching message **improves** what an athlete believes about himself.

It inspires him to work harder at mastering his skills and push beyond what might be comfortable.

You can recognize this language when an athlete is:

- Encouraged
- Edified
- Appreciated
- Affirmed

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Are You Saying This?

It's easy to slip into language that doesn't inspire. Let's face it. We all get tired and frustrated.

But it's also hard to be effective when you feel like you have to "tip-toe" around everyone's feelings.

So where is the middle ground?

Here are some routine communications that don't reflect a positive message, followed by a more purposeful and productive response to replace it.



Negative: "No, don't do it that way. It's all wrong."

Positive: "Let's try this and tell me how it works."

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Negative: “Why are you so stubborn about the way you do that technique?”

Positive: “Tell me what you like so much about how you have been doing it.”

Negative: “There you go again, doing it your way.”

Positive: “Keep experimenting with what we talked about. Don’t give up on it.”

Negative: “Why are you so lazy? You are never going to get to the top working at half speed.”

Positive: “Tell me, between 1 and 10, what number are you working at? Now show me what plus 2 looks like.”

Moving Forward

Communication is key in all relationships.

As a coach, your message greatly impacts the day-to-day operations of your team.

More importantly, though, your message to individual athletes can have a lasting impact on their self-esteem – well beyond a given season.

Choose carefully how you speak to your athletes and always be intentional about building them up.

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