



Pete's PETs: Performance Enhancing Tips: Providing Appropriate Feedback.

In the last Coaches Column, we talked about the phases or stages an athlete goes through to acquire a skill, and how you the coach can help facilitate that. One of the messages in the last article was how effective interventions and feedback can help athletes move through the various stages of skill acquisition. This week's PET article will focus on how to give appropriate feedback to help maximize learning.

When providing feedback to your athletes, do you consider the following:

- 1) Are you using positive, "constructive" feedback
- 2) Do you use analogies, stories, to give feedback?
- 3) Are you giving athletes the "What, How and Why"?
- 4) Do you ensure your athletes understand what they are doing, and why they are doing something?

1) Using Positive, Constructive Feedback:

As coaches, we want to think of ourselves as "Builders", not someone who tears down things. Athletes, and especially kids, don't constantly want to hear what they are doing wrong (eg: "You're not in stroke", "you're dragging the paddle at the exit", "you're not using your legs") Whenever giving feedback, try to use positive terms or phrases like:

- a. "I really like your rotation at the set-up, let's try using both hands to get the blade into the water"
- b. "That's great, now we're going to try working on this"

In addition to feedback being constructive, ensure the feedback is specific versus general, and the more a coach can take the time to give individual feedback, the more meaningful it can be for the athletes.

2) Be a Story-Teller, Use Analogies:

Great coaches and leaders are also great story tellers, or can use several different ways of explaining the same concept. Coaches need to understand that there are different styles of learning from athlete to athlete, and obviously age group to age group. The more a coach can do to provide various learning opportunities to their athletes to, the better. Using analogies, metaphors or stories that can paint a mental picture for an athlete, or that can put it in their context can be a strong form of feedback. The classic example of the canoe-kayak analogy: Feathering: "Spreading peanut butter on toast, or putting icing on the cake".



3) Whenever providing feedback, try to include the “What, How, and Why” :

- i) The “What”: Using constructive feedback, explain to your athletes what it is you’re going to change. What technical or tactical change are you going to make? As explained previously, your approach in saying what they need to change should be as positive and constructive as possible.
- ii) The “How”: How are you going to change? How is the athlete going to rotate more with their core? How is the athlete going to work on the timing with their hip at the exit? This is a crucial component and stage of feedback as you the coach need to explain how to make the change in a language the athlete can understand. As described above, this is an important time to use analogies, metaphors, stories, etc to help get the message across. The “how” also includes any corrective drills, technical focuses, etc. , you’ll use to help make the change.
- iii) The “Why”: This third component of giving feedback or giving an intervention is often forgotten by coaches. Athletes want to know why they are changing something, or why they are doing a certain workout. The “why” helps an athlete understand why they are doing something, and probably most importantly, how the change contributes to better performance or making their boat move better. In the previous article, we spoke about the importance of athletes developing a strong cognitive sense, and knowing their event inside and out.

4) Ask your Athletes Questions:

Do you ask your athletes questions for clarity? Do your athletes understand why you are asking them to make a change? Asking questions to your athletes that get them to think critically about what they are doing is crucial for their understanding. Try to limit the amount of “closed” (yes-no) questions, and focus more on questions that spark though out answers. Asking questions to your athletes allow them to explain what and how they are feel when they make a change, how they felt a change affected their performance, but also allows you the coach to know that your athletes understand what they are trying to do.

Providing effective feedback as an intervention is crucial in helping your athletes develop skills, and correct areas in technique or race techniques. The more variety of ways a coach can constructively and positively provide that feedback, the better chance athletes have in acquiring and developing skills.



The Coaches Column, August 13th, 2010

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In next month's issue:

- 1) The transition period, and what your athletes should be doing.
- 2) Fall training