

Turning Dreams into **Realities...** **Developing Athlete Confidence** **and Positive **Self-Esteem****

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Individual and team performance is **DIRECTLY** related to how an athlete feels about him/herself. Your athletes will learn faster, perform better, and have fewer practice problems when you, the coach, use techniques to catapult the athlete toward confidence and high self-esteem.

#1 Athletes Deserve Respect Too

Treat your athletes the way that you would like to be treated (The Golden Rule!). Respect them and they will respect you. If they respect you, they will learn from you openly and easily and will go to the ends of the earth to perform for you. Being a coach puts you in a unique and powerful position whether you realize it or not. A coach has the ability to make and break the self-esteem of a young athlete. When a coach humiliates and/or demeans athletes on a regular basis, they will fear you, dislike you, and grow to hate the sport. Young athletes are precious treasures in which you have much power to influence toward the positive or the negative. Athletes remember their coaches forever ... how would you like to be remembered?

#2 Avoid Comparisons at All Costs

Far too often coaches make the BIG mistake of comparing athletes to one another. Comparisons almost always make athletes feel badly and begin inter-squad rivalries and unhealthy competition. If you're going to compare, do so **ONLY** to **MODEL** such as: "Look at the way Janice executes that skill . . . especially watch what she does with her upper body -- that is what we are looking for." Young athletes perceive being compared to others in one of two ways. They are either the winner or the loser. Neither of which will result in raised confidence. The "loser" gets to feel like she/he will never be as good as Janice, or Janice feels guilty for being singled out or for being favored. Children/teens are young and very sensitive, not ignorant!

#3 Coach the Whole Athlete

If you take an interest in your athlete beyond his/her athletic abilities, it will go a long way toward making that athlete feel special and valuable. When an athlete knows that you care about him/her as a person, not just for what he/she can DO for you or the team, then he or she will "reward" you with high intensity, increased motivation, and peak performances. Giving an athlete the feeling of being valuable is extremely powerful. Remember, you never know what the athlete experiences at home, at school or with friends — your athlete's sport or you, the coach, could very well be their lifeline!

#4 Do Not Compare Your Athletes' Worth with their Athletic Performance

The athlete is valuable when they win and when they lose. Be sure to re-assure them of this **FACT** often. When your athletes perform poorly, they do not need any help to feel bad. So do not help them to feel like less of a person by scolding them (do you need your mistakes pointed out to you?). What they need from you most is a self-esteem boost, not a self-esteem assault. If an athlete knows that his/her coach will respond negatively when he/she performs poorly, the athlete will suffer from continuous performance anxiety. No matter how poor you the coach thought the performance was, there are **ALWAYS** things the athlete did well, find them and point them out, save the criticism for another day. Keep in mind, young athletes are chronic pleasers, and they are trying their best.

#5 Challenge Your Athletes without Threats

When you really want your athletes to stretch themselves and push to the next level, challenge them! Encourage them to go for it and let them know that you believe they can do it. A challenge is a positive way to interact with them. It raises their self-esteem. A threat is negative and entails a punishment. Threats potentially diminish confidence and will set up an ineffective coaching relationship.



Be Available, But Watch Your Boundaries

When your athletes bring personal problems to the gym, DON'T view this as a hassle and interference to your coaching. Instead, listen to your athlete and let them know they are significant and that their problems are important to you. If you approach their difficulties this way you'll automatically raise their self-esteem. Be very careful. There is a fine line between being supportive and interfering in something that may require an outside professional. Lawsuits are unfortunately plentiful!



Communication

Be open, direct, and honest in your communications to your athletes. Let them know clearly what is expected from them. If you are angry or upset with an athlete's behavior, let them know directly and specifically. Do not expect that they should "read your mind." Speak about the behavior not the athlete. Avoid using terms "you are bad," or "you are a liar." Communicate directly with them and they will do so with you. Manipulation of an athlete is a direct indication of a coach's own personal agenda or emotional problems. Pay attention to the reasons you coach. Is it fame and fortune or athlete wellness?



Listen

At the heart of effective communication is listening. The way to make athletes feel better about their self is to listen when they speak to you. Listening communicates caring on your part and will make an athlete feel good. So the next time the athlete speaks to you, DO NOT plan out in your head how you will respond. Be silent outside and inside and just listen.



Empathy

There is nothing that makes you feel good about yourself as much as knowing that someone you respect understands you. Step into your athletes' shoes when they come to you with their problems. View the world from THEIR perspective, NOT yours. If you let them know that you understand what it's like to be in their shoes, you'll make them feel cared about and valued. Communication with empathy is a key tool to raising athlete self-esteem.



Recognition

Recognition is one of the most powerful motivators. Every day let your athletes know that YOU know they are there. Thank them for being there. Athletes dedicate so much time and effort to their sport, it is a full time job with no pay! Even simple comments like "good effort," "nice job," "way to go" or "good to see you today," go a long way to make your athletes feel good about working with you. Sometimes all it takes is a simple pat on the back from you to help turn around an athlete's day. Try to recognize more good things about your athletes' performance than bad.

Coach CHALLENGE: For one or two days, keep a record of how many compliments you give out and how many criticisms you give out—I bet you will be surprised!



Be Extremely Positive

Not much good comes from negativity. Positive coaching is MUCH more effective than negative coaching. Consistently giving criticism and negative comments to your athletes will not make them feel good about you or themselves, and it certainly won't inspire them to greatness. Negativity will bring you and everyone around you down. Be positive NO MATTER WHAT. Display a positive attitude and you'll find that it catches on quickly.



Turn Athlete Failures Into Stepping Stones To Success

Teach your athletes that failures and mistakes are a necessary part of the learning process and NOT a cause for embarrassment and humiliation. Model this attitude and you will teach your athletes to take risks and really go for it. Scolding athletes for making mistakes will only assault their self-esteem and teach them to expect perfection. Perfectionists are usually unhappy people with unrealistic expectations. After all, an airplane is only on course 5 percent of the flight time, yet they always deliver the expected results! The only way to learn is to first make mistakes.

Coach CHALLENGE: If an athlete is not progressing, take a look at your knowledge base, (techniques are always changing) or review your communication style. How effective is it?



Praise/Criticize

When an athlete makes a mistake, try not to single that athlete out and humiliate him/her in front of the group. Correct the group as a whole when it is possible. When an athlete does something well, single him/her out by name in front of the whole group and like magic, the entire group will make the same correction. Be sure to use this technique for each athlete at each practice! If there is a need to criticize an athlete, DO IT IN PRIVATE.



Athlete Behavior

Try not to allow an athlete to put themselves or anyone else down. One negative athlete can bring the whole team down. Insist on positive talk. Try to not allow athlete's negative words or behavior to go on unchecked.



Model High Self-Esteem

If you want your athletes to feel good about themselves be sure that YOU ACT and present yourself in such a way that speaks of high self-esteem. This does NOT mean that you should go around in a superior or condescending manner. It DOES mean that you should act like you value and respect yourself. If you do not have high self-esteem and confidence, find a professional that can help you achieve it. Low self-esteem and low confidence follows you everywhere and will undoubtedly predict your behavior and effect your team negatively. ■