WHY THEY MISUNDERSTAND YOUR WORDS

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Shelba Waldron
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10:00-11:00
Desiree is upset...

Desiree, a 10-year-old gymnast gets into the car with her mom after practice. She is crying and mom asks her what is wrong. She doesn’t say anything at first and just says, “Nothing.” Mom doesn’t press her, but says that she can tell her later when she calms down. The next day, she tells mom that the coach got really angry at practice, yelled at her and called her stupid. He then kicked her off the beam and made her do conditioning for the rest of the night away from the rest of the team.

What Mom heard...

• Coach called her daughter stupid
• Coach screamed at her daughter, scaring her
• Coach humiliated Desiree in front of the entire team
• Mom is angry and wants a meeting with the coach and club owner
**WHAT REALLY HAPPENED...**

Desiree was working on beam by herself when she attempted a skill that wasn’t in her routine and above her current ability. She has done this before.

Coach was working with another athlete on bars and was in the middle of spotting that athlete.

Coach observed Desiree across the gym and it scared him. In a visceral reaction, he screams across the gym, “Desiree stop it!! Get off the beam now!”

He charged toward the beam and said to Desiree, “That was a really stupid thing to do. You could have broken your neck.”

Since it was toward the end of practice and because he has had this issue before with her, he told Desiree to go ahead and start her conditioning.

When confronted, coach became defensive blaming the entire situation on the athlete.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mistakes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Did not inform mom after practice as to what happened</td>
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<td>Did not make any other coach in the gym aware of what happened</td>
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<td>Used a derogatory word “stupid” in the course of the night when both his emotions and Desiree’s emotions were high</td>
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<td>Didn’t explain to Desiree why it was best she stop training for the night and begin the conditioning</td>
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<td>Did not include mom with problems before this situation</td>
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<td>Became defensive when confronted by mom</td>
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I NEVER SAID YOU WERE STUPID!

I never said you were stupid!

I *Never* said you were stupid!

I never *SAID* you were stupid!

I never said *YOU* were stupid!

I never said you *WERE* stupid!

I never said you were *STUPID*!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate</td>
<td>Position a person holds based on position or hierarchy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>Possessing knowledge or expertise in a particular area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coercive Power</td>
<td>Ability to influence others via threats, punishments or sanctions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reward Power</td>
<td>Ability to influence the allocation of incentives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Referent</td>
<td>Interpersonal relationships that a person cultivates with other people in the organization</td>
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BUT FIRST, IT ISN’T ALWAYS THE ATHLETE

Athlete is treated as a commodity
Professional Development is limited
Refusal to change
Personal problems go untreated

When power is seen as “absolute” then communication can only be one way.
While practicing any sport, what are tweens and young teens most interested in?

1. Perfecting a skill
2. Socializing with the team
3. Teamwork
4. Competing against others
5. Themselves

Between the ages of 11-14 teens crave control. In every aspect of their life they are out of control.
DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

- Early 5-8
- Middle 9-11
- Early Adolescence 12-14
- Middle Adolescence 15-18
- Late Adolescence 19-23
YOUTH BRAIN ARCHITECTURE

- Not fully matured
- Development and connectivity develops from back to front
- Continues to develop well into the 20's
- Pre-frontal cortex that regulates decision-making is last to mature

Emotions Rule!
PREFRONTAL CORTEX

Makes up only 17 percent of the brain and is in charge of judging, analysis, organization, connecting the dots, and deciding what is valid information and what isn’t

• Plays a huge role in empathy and self-awareness
• It's one of the last parts of the brain to develop and can be influenced
• Hormones and emotions easily manipulate the prefrontal cortex

Attention Span  Impulse  Moral Judgment  Planning  Goal Setting
Decides, based on the emotion a person feels, where to send information.

- If the person is stressed or freaking out, information gets routed to the reactive brain, avoiding the path to the long-term memory storage.
Now consider what happens when a coach yells at a child of 12 years old. How is their brain and body reacting?
I wish I had friends on the team.

I'm not thin enough.

I've got a new girlfriend!!

Mom and dad are getting a divorce.

I don't think the coach likes me.
AGENTS OF SOCIALIZATION

Socialization is the lifelong process through which people learn the values, norms, beliefs, and expectations of their society.

The Looking Glass = Identity
- Age
- Race
- Nationality
- Disability
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Mental health
- Trauma

Agents of socialization impart both positive values and beliefs, such as language and customs, and negative values and beliefs, such as racism and stereotypes.
### A MOMENT IN THEIR SHOES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Female Gender</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I don’t look like anyone else on the team.”</td>
<td>“I’m afraid of appearing too emotional.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“They are always thinking I should be naturally talented.”</td>
<td>“I’m afraid of being in a leotard during my cycle.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I’m afraid they will think I’m always an angry black girl.”</td>
<td>“I’m afraid of gaining weight, so I skip meals.”</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
<th>Male Gender</th>
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<td>“I’m afraid of coming out to my team.”</td>
<td>“I’m constantly told to man up.”</td>
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<td>“I’ve been bullied at school for being gay.”</td>
<td>“I don’t have the bulk other males on my team have.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I’m afraid of the coach finding out I’m gay.”</td>
<td>“Men aren’t supposed to share our feelings.”</td>
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<th>Hidden Disability</th>
<th>Transgendered</th>
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<td>“I don’t learn as quickly as everyone else.”</td>
<td>“I’m not comfortable on a female team, when I was born male.”</td>
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<td>“I sometimes get so anxious I fear daily practices.”</td>
<td>“I feel everyone is looking at me.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I’m afraid the rest of the team will find out I have a disability.”</td>
<td>“No one understands me.”</td>
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CONTROLLABLE AND CHANGING INFLUENCES

The Speaker (Coach)
- Voice inflection/tone
- Body language
- Length of Message
- Volume
- Misinterpretation of athlete body language
- Misinterpretation of athlete goals
- Failure to consider environmental factors such as noise level
- Mood/personal life factors

The Receiver (Athlete)
- Self Esteem
- Perfectionism
- Comparison to others
- Sense of safety/trust
- Fear
- Adrenaline
- Wandering mind
- Information Overload
- State of fatigue
“What’s wrong with you today?”
“Don’t eat too much for lunch.”

“You need to fix your face.”
“Why haven’t you achieved this skill yet?”

“We already covered that.”
“You have potential, but you don’t use it.”

“You need to take better care of yourself.”
“If you aren’t here to be serious then you can just go home.”
DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

1. Express Care
2. Challenge Growth
3. Provide Support
4. Share Power
5. Expand Possibilities
Participation in a high-quality program means that youth report that they:

• Feel safe in the program or setting
• Often learn skills such as teamwork or peaceful conflict resolution.
• Often develop warm and trusting relationships with peers and adults.
• Are often allowed to help make decisions
• Are allowed to develop their passion on their terms

Positive Experiences + Positive Relationships + Positive Environments = Positive Youth Development
HARMONIZED RELATIONSHIP

Closeness
Emotional tone of Coach-Athlete relationship. Expressions of like, trust, and respect

Co-Orientation
Common ground of athletic partnership. Communication towards experience, knowledge, thoughts, values and concerns

Complementarity
Cooperation towards coordinated efforts
SETTING UP THE SAFE ENVIRONMENT

• Team building activities that **do not** include gymnastics

• Written goals

• Daily check-ins

• Interaction with athletes during breaks

• Allowing for autonomy

• Listening to their ideas and concerns

• Creating a relationship with parents
FINAL THOUGHTS

• Align your goals to the athlete
• Align coaching techniques to both the age and ability of the child
• Seek feedback from both the parents and the athletes often
• Give parents feedback when things are going well, not just when things aren’t
• Schedule annual meetings with parents and athletes
• Create an open-door reporting policy that includes confidentiality and freedom from retaliation
• Include discussions of athlete concerns at staff meetings
• Give the athlete autonomy and chances to lead
THANK YOU!