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How do athletes understand their coaches?

What is the best style to communicate with coaches?

How should athletes communicate with their coaches and should these conversations be held individually or in a group setting? The answer varies – what works for one athlete may not apply to another athlete.

Athletes understanding coaches

When coaches and athletes communicate, there is much room for misunderstanding.

First, a coach must observe their athlete, then communicate to the athlete what they saw. Next the athlete must communicate their understanding back to the coach and carry out their understanding in play.

Communication works best when both people approach the conversation with open minds. Listen carefully for understanding and try not to get defensive. Coaches know that learning takes time and everything isn't going to be done perfectly the first time tried.





Private and group conversations

Athletes should know the appropriate times to communicate their questions and concerns. When deciding whether or not it is the right time to bring something up, ask yourself "Who would benefit from knowing this?" If what you want to ask/say is useful to the whole team, go ahead and bring it up during group meetings. If it only pertains to you individually, it would be better to bring it up in a one-on-one conversation with the coach.

Sometimes asking questions one-on-one can have the added benefit that there are less distractions and misunderstandings are less likely to happen.

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Peer Messaging

Student athlete influence

Some student athletes seem to be natural leaders, but what all does that involve? Being a leader is less about title and more about influence. Student athletes can have a big impact on their peers, whether they have an official leadership position, like team captain, or not.

Importance of peer-to-peer

The influence of peers can be as strong as that of a coach. Student-athletes are sometimes surprised to hear that their teammates look up to them and respect their judgement and actions. Even without a formal title, a student-athlete can lead through their attitude, through their actions, through encouraging others and through the ways they interact with teammates and the coach. Student-athletes should take peer relationships seriously, know their team's strengths and weaknesses, and make sure they are using their influence constructively. Doing this while still students helps athletes to develop skills that they can use throughout their lives.





The team

To be a part of an athletic team is something very special for youth to experience. There are many skills learned from the interactions that take place between coaches and student-athletes including communication, boundaries and respect. When student-athletes and coaches both have the team in mind, success will follow.

Information provided by Dr. Steve Graef, PhD. , a sports psychologist and performance coach based in Columbus. He is the owner of Mindurance - services to help athletes, performers and professionals. For more information, visit www.mindurance.org