

## How to Win Friends & Influence People

Coaching is an interpersonal activity and, as such, its success depends to a large extent on a coach's ability to develop rapport and strong working relationships with others. This applies not only to relationships with participants, but also with various significant others that influence an individual's involvement in sport. This may include parents, team managers, other coaches, and physios.

There are many sources that we as coaches can turn to in order to increase understanding of the factors that can influence the ability to develop positive relationships and rapport, both within and outside of sport. Perhaps one of the most famous of these is Dale Carnegie's classic text, *How to Win Friends & Influence People*. First published in 1936 and still going strong at over 15,000,000 copies sold, it includes sections on areas including: how to make people like you; how to win people to your way of thinking, and how to change people without arousing resentment.

Over the coming issues we will highlight some key principles from the book that can help you to improve your coaching relationships. This month we look at **Fundamental techniques in handling people**.

### **Principle 1: Don't criticise, condemn or complain....**

...or put another way, *'if you want to gather honey, don't kick over the beehive'*.

It can be frustrating when we are coaching our athletes and they consistently make the same mistakes. Similarly, it can be frustrating when explaining what appears to be a simple principle to a colleague that they just don't seem to understand. In such circumstances it can be easy to find fault and to criticise, or to complain about how things ought to be. But will this make things better or will it actually make them worse?

Store founder John Wanamaker provides a useful perspective when considering this, *"I learned thirty years ago that it is foolish to scold. I have enough trouble overcoming my own limitations without fretting over the fact that God has not seen fit to distribute evenly the gift of intelligence."*

Carnegie contends that criticism is futile because it puts a person on the defensive and usually makes them seek to justify their actions. And, as he says, *"any fool can criticise, condemn and complain – and most fools do. But it takes character and self-control to be understanding and forgiving."*

We should seek to understand why people do as they do, and in coaching this is particularly important as it can help us to identify the root cause of a problem, allowing us to address the problem more effectively than by merely tackling the surface symptoms. For example, a player may demonstrate an incorrect technique. If we look at the possible causes we may be able to identify many, including lack of understanding of instructions, lacking the necessary flexibility to complete the technique, or lacking motivation due to not understanding the technique's relevance. Each of these would require a different solution, so for coaches to be efficient we must understand what the real issues are before attempting to solve them. Clearly, seeking to understand our athletes in such a situation would be much more effective than criticism and condemnation.

### **Principle 2: Give honest and sincere appreciation**

There is only one way to get people to do anything – they must want to do it. Of course, we could get people to want to do something through the threats of undesirable consequences for not doing it; however, such methods have largely undesirable consequences in terms of motivation and individual fulfilment. The only way to get somebody to do something is by giving them what they want. So what do our players want out of their sport and how can we match this with what we want them to do?

A simple rule to remember is that everybody likes to feel important and we all like to be complemented. This can be a major motivator for action. If somebody's efforts are appreciated then they are more likely to want to continue with that effort. This is not to say that we resort to simple flattery or insincere praise. This is an easy trap for the coach to fall into – where everything that an athlete or player does is 'great' or 'excellent'. Such platitudes can actually have the opposite effect of demotivating players; after all, if everything is excellent - regardless of whether it actually is or not - then what is there to strive for?

The key then is honest and sincere appreciation. When we see somebody performing as we want them to then we should be specific and sincere with our praise. Consider what it is we are praising and what it is that we want to reinforce. Is it effort? Is it a technical point? Is it an improvement in a previously difficult to complete skill? By using specific praise we are showing a more honest and sincere appreciation than by merely saying 'great' for the umpteenth time.

As Carnegie has it, *"Be hearty in your approbation and lavish in your praise and people will cherish your words and treasure them and repeat them over a lifetime – repeat them years after you have forgotten them."*

### **Principle 3: Arouse in the other person an eager want**

When working to help our players and athletes to improve, whose goals is it that we are working towards achieving? It is easy to shape our practices, strategies and team selections around what we want. Carnegie makes an interesting point when he highlights, *"Of course, you are interested in what you want. You are eternally interested in it. But no one else is. The rest of us are just like you: we are interested in what we want."* So, the only way on earth to influence other people is to talk about what they want and show them how to get it. Ultimately, all that we do we do because at some level we want to do it.

Next time we want to influence somebody we should stop and think: how can I make this person want to do it? Henry Ford expressed the view that, *"If there is any one secret of success it lies in the ability to get the other person's point of view and see things from that person's angle as well as your own."*

These are key principles that highlight the need for effective goal setting within sport; to work together with players to identify team and individual goals, and reconciling these with our own personal goals. They also underpin what is termed 'athlete-centred coaching' – coaching that is built around the needs of the athlete rather than the desires and competencies of the coach. Our athletes and players are much more likely to commit themselves to working hard to achieve goals that *they* want to achieve, as opposed to what we want them to achieve. This is not to say that these goals are necessarily mutually exclusive, often they aren't, but it is worth bearing in mind that when our goals for players differ to their own, consider, which are they likely to work harder to achieve?