



Special Olympics

Wisconsin

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COACHING GUIDE

SOWI On-line Coaching Philosophy
Recertification Course

Special Olympics Coach Definition

A Special Olympics coach is a person who selects, assesses and provides Special Olympics athletes with comprehensive sports training and preparation for competitions, knowing, understanding and abiding by the rules of the sport being coached, Special Olympics General Rules and Official Sports Rules. The following coach description outlines the expectations from a Special Olympics coach.

Position:	Coach
Description:	The Special Olympics coach is responsible for providing athletes with comprehensive sport training and preparation for multilevel sport competition.
Responsibilities:	<i>See below</i>

1. To select, assess and train Special Olympics athletes for sport competition.
 - **Athlete Selection:** The Special Olympics coach will recruit athletes and properly complete and submit all required medical and registration material by established deadlines.
 - **Assessment:** The Special Olympics coach will assess each athlete to determine the individual and/or team skill level for training and competition in selected sports.
 - **Training:** The Special Olympics coach will develop an individualized training program for each athlete. The program shall include instruction in fundamental skills, conditioning and competition rules. The training and competition program will be a minimum of eight (8) weeks.
2. To know, understand and abide by the Official Special Olympics Rules.
3. To know and understand the sport being coached.
4. To execute the moral and ethical responsibilities and duties of a coach.
 - Provide proper planning for each step of training and competition
 - Provide and maintain a safe and secure physical environment
 - Use acceptable and safe equipment
 - Ensure appropriate sport skills instruction and safe competition
 - Match athletes according to ability, size and strength
 - Continually assess each athlete for participation in appropriate activities within, not challenged beyond, his or her capabilities
 - Inform athletes of inherent risks associated with a specific sport
 - Ensure acceptable supervision and maintain an adequate assistant coach-to-athlete ratio
 - Provide appropriate medical support at all times
 - Maintain accurate records

DEVELOPING YOUR COACHING PHILOSOPHY

What Do We Mean by Philosophy?

There are many more similarities than differences in teaching and coaching athletes with and without intellectual disabilities. Athletes are athletes; coaching is coaching; teaching is teaching and learning is learning. The major difference you will encounter in coaching Special Olympics athletes is that they may learn at a slower pace. Regardless, you will still need to develop a coaching philosophy and style that will enable your athletes to meet their performance goals and develop sportsmanship.

As you begin developing your coaching philosophy, ask yourself these important questions. The answers to these questions will impact every thought, every action and every decision you make as a coach. You bring your thoughts and ideas from each facet of your life in developing your coaching philosophy.

1. Why am I coaching?
2. Who am I coaching?
3. What kind of coach do I want to be?

Identifying Your Coaching Philosophy

Your coaching philosophy is simply the way you see situations and experiences and the value you give them. To answer the first question - Why am I coaching? We first need to define what coaching is. Simply, coaching is helping an athlete prepare, develop and improve their sport performance. Coaching involves teaching, training, instructing and more, which impacts many areas of an individual's life.

To be a coach is both an honor and privilege. Athletes meet sport at the place where the coach presents it to them. The coach can be the architect and definer of an athlete's sport experience. To be a successful coach, you have to be well prepared to provide exciting, positive, enriching, encouraging and meaningful experiences to athletes.

So, how do you feel about yourself? The following exercise contains statements that have been used to describe successful coaches. Take a moment and complete this exercise. Circle the rating you think your athletes would choose to describe you, not what you would like for them to choose. Mark those areas where you think you need improvement.

Exercise #1—Coaching Assets Self Evaluation

There are many factors that may define your philosophy. There are layers of people who are directly or indirectly involved and may have a different sport philosophy. Your success as a coach will depend more on your coaching philosophy than on any other factor.

Coaching Assets	Low	Average	High	Areas of Improvement
Knowledge of Your Sport	1	2	3	
Well Organized	1	2	3	
Honest	1	2	3	
Professional Appearance	1	2	3	
Qualified	1	2	3	
Enthusiastic	1	2	3	
Hard Worker	1	2	3	
Punctual	1	2	3	
Consistent	1	2	3	
Understanding	1	2	3	
Good Listener	1	2	3	
Provides Individual Help	1	2	3	
Builds Athletes' Confidence	1	2	3	
Builds Athletes' Confidence	1	2	3	
Motivates	1	2	3	
Good Teacher	1	2	3	
Encourages	1	2	3	
Praises Effort	1	2	3	
Respects Athletes	1	2	3	
Patient with Athletes	1	2	3	
Sense of Humor	1	2	3	

(IAAF, Introduction to Coaching Theory, 1991)

Coaches must understand that the Special Olympics philosophy, their own coaching philosophy and the philosophies of everyone involved play important roles in the success of their programs. Before you begin to coach and as you continue, ask yourself these important questions so that you do not lose sight of why you are a successful coach.

1. What am I trying to achieve for myself?
2. What do I want to achieve with my athletes?
3. What is my coaching style?
4. What is my motivation for coaching?

Coaching Tips

- Ask yourself “What motivates me to be the best coach that I can be.”

Developing Your Coaching Objectives

When you ask coaches what they want out of coaching, the answers usually include winning, fun and athlete development. All three are important, but which is most important to you? In Special Olympics, we want our coaches to place athlete development at the top of their coaching objectives, followed by fun and winning. We do not de-emphasize winning in Special Olympics. We know that our athletes train hard and long to win the gold. However, as we mentioned previously, coaching a Special Olympics athlete is like coaching any other athlete. Coaches that are most successful place athlete development first. By placing athlete development first, athletes are more likely to produce better performances with greater consistency and athletes and coaches derive more satisfaction than by emphasizing winning at all costs.

We will talk more about winning later. Now, take time to think what your objectives will be. Start by writing them down both for yourself and your athlete and team. The following exercise will assist you in assessing your coaching objectives.

Exercise #2—Assessing Your Objectives

The objective of this exercise is to help you get a better understanding of why you coach and identify the areas that are most important to you in coaching. Do you focus more on fun, athlete development or winning in your sport program?

The column with the highest total is the area that is most important to you in coaching and will be the foundation of your coaching philosophy and objectives. Let's see below.

Instructions

1. In the first group, read all of the statements and place a “3” by the statement that you feel is most important to you.
2. Place a “1” by the statement that you feel is least important to you.
3. Place a “2” by the remaining statement.
4. Repeat the process for the following five groups.
5. Add the scores in each column.

Exercise #2—Assessing Your Objectives

Assessment Statement	A	B	C
The best coaches are those who			
Encourage team spirit, cooperation and sportsmanship			
Make practices fun			
Have excellent competition tactics and skills to win			
A good coach			
Gives individual help and is interested in athlete development			
Practices enthusiasm and FUNdamentals everyday			
Teaches athletes the skills needed to win			
I would like people to say that I . . .			
Brought the best out of my athletes			
Looked for the positives in my athletes			
Was a winning coach			
I would like a news story about me to highlight that I . . .			
Coached a sports program which athletes enjoyed playing			
Contributed to the athletic development of athletes			
Coached to win			
As a coach, I emphasize			
Teaching skills that athletes can use throughout life			
Playing games and making sure athletes enjoy themselves			
Setting individual and team goals to produce winners			
As a coach, I promote			
Physical fitness			
Having fun			
Winning			
Totals			

1st column	shows	Priority for athlete development
2nd column	shows	Priority for having fun
3rd column	shows	Priority for winning

Exercise #2—Assessing Your Objectives – Example

This example shows a coach whose objectives focus more on winning first, athlete fun second and athlete development last.

Assessment Statement	A	B	C
The best coaches are those who			
Encourage team spirit, cooperation and sportsmanship	1		
Make practices fun		2	
Have excellent competition tactics and skills to win			3
A good coach			
Gives individual help and is interested in athlete development	2		
Practices enthusiasm and FUNdamentals everyday		3	
Teaches athletes the skills needed to win			1
I would like people to say that I . . .			
Brought the best out of my athletes		3	
Looked for the positives in my athletes	1		
Was a winning coach			2
I would like a news story about me to highlight that I . . .			
Coached a sports program which athletes enjoyed playing	2		
Contributed to the athletic development of athletes			3
Coached to win		1	
As a coach, I emphasize			
Teaching skills that athletes can use throughout life			3
Playing games and making sure athletes enjoy themselves	2		
Setting individual and team goals to produce winners		1	
As a coach, I promote			
Physical fitness	2		
Having fun		1	
Winning			3
Totals	10	11	15

Winning

Be honest with yourself about winning. Ask yourself these questions:

1. Do you at times overemphasize winning?
2. Do you sometimes make decisions that reflect more about winning the game than developing the athletes?

Many coaches face the issue of winning when developing their coaching objectives. Society clearly places great emphasis on winning. However, society also looks to sport as a means to help young and old athletes alike build character and develop leadership skills. The balance is in not evaluating yourself or your athletes on the win-loss record. You, the coach, must resist trying to win and encouraging your athletes to win at all costs. How do you overcome this temptation? Place your athletes first—athletes first at practice; athletes first at competition.

Striving to Win

Placing athletes first does not mean that winning is not important. Striving to win within the rules of sport and the competition is an important objective for both athlete and coach. Striving to win is essential for an enjoyable competition. Athletes do not train to lose perform poorly. The emphasis should not be on winning itself but on striving to win. It is the pursuit of victory, the dream of achieving the goal, that matters most.

Exercise #3— Personal Reasons for Coaching

<i>Reasons for Coaching</i>	<i>Not Important</i>	<i>Somewhat Important</i>	<i>Very Important</i>
To be involved in sport I like			
To have power			
To be in charge			
To be with people I like			
To give something back to sport			
To gain public recognition			
To enjoy myself			
To demonstrate my knowledge and skill in sport			
To demonstrate my knowledge and skill in sport			
To travel			
To help athletes develop physically			
To help athletes develop psychologically			
To help athletes develop socially			

(ASEP, *Successful Coaching, Updated 2nd Edition 1990*)

Keeping Winning in Perspective

Striving to win is important in sport. The process of winning can bring out the best in people—performance, attitude and approach to life. As coach, it imperative that you not lose sight of the long-term objectives: helping athletes to develop and improve sports skills, have fun, and do well in sport competition—to win. Winning or striving to win is never more important than your athletes' well-being. Keep winning in perspective - there is room for fun too.

Coaching Styles

We are now at your second most important decision as a coach - your coaching style. Your coaching style will determine:

- How you decide to teach skills and strategies
- How you organize your practice and competition methods
- How you discipline athletes
- What role you give athletes in making decisions

Coaches lean toward being authoritarian, casual or cooperative. In the past, coaches were more widely accepted as and expected to be authoritarian. In many cases, this is how they were coached and they adopted the same style. Today, athletes are encouraged to ask “why.” Asking why is good because it allows athletes to be co-creators in their athletic experience. The following chart compares the three primary coaching styles.

<i>Coaching (Leadership) Style</i>			
	Authoritarian	Cooperative	Casual
Philosophy	Win centered	Athlete centered	No emphasis
Objectives	Task objectives	Social & task objectives	No objectives
Decision Making	Coach makes all decisions	Decisions are guided by coach, but shared	Athlete make decisions
Communication Style	Telling	Telling, asking, listening	Listening
Communication Development	Little or none	High	None
What is Winning	Judged by coach	Judged by athlete and coach	Not defined
Athlete Development	Little or no trust in the athlete	Trust in the athlete	Trust not shown
Motivation	Sometimes motivates	Motivates all	No motivation
Training Structures	Inflexible	Flexible	None

As a coach, you want to find a balance in the styles that will allow you to be firm when needed while letting the athletes have fun and also letting them have a voice in their training and competition experiences. The team has to be well organized in order to function effectively and efficiently. The team or the athlete cannot have a vote in every decision that is made. As a coach, you provide the direction and instruction when it is needed and let the athlete make decisions and assume responsibility when appropriate.

Being an athlete is more than simply displaying athletic prowess. Athletes have to be able to cope with pressure, adapt to changing situations, keep winning and losing in perspective, show discipline and maintain concentration in order to perform well. By finding balance within the various coaching styles mentioned, you place trust in the athletes which helps boost their self esteem and motivation. Athletes are not motivated by fear but by a desire for personal fulfillment. This means that you must be in control of both the athletes and yourself.

Developing a Picture of Your Coaching Style

What are three of the most important characteristics in developing a coaching style?

1. Knowledge of the Sport
2. Motivation
3. Empathy

There is no substitute for knowing the rules, techniques and strategies in coaching your sport. Lack of knowledge in teaching skills risks injury and frustrates your athletes. Your ability to properly teach and coach the skills of your sport will earn great respect from the athletes. They will value you and the experience. This respect also gives you credibility that you can use in teaching athletes how to behave off the playing field.

As a coach, you can have all of the skills and knowledge in the world in your sport, however this means nothing if you are not motivated to teach and coach the athletes on all you know. Be motivated enough to take the time with athletes to work with them on learning drills so that they can perform better.

Empathy is the ability to readily understand your athletes by being aware of their feelings, thoughts and emotions and how they impact the athletes' performance and conveying your sensitivity to them. Make the effort to understand the athletes' joy, frustrations, anxiety and anger.

Now that you have answered the two most important questions, what are my objectives and how will I coach, you have begun to create your coaching philosophy. The key is to know who you are and to continually assess how your coaching experiences fit into your value structure.

The following exercises will help you see where you are as a coach and help you determine the attributes you might want to develop as a coach.

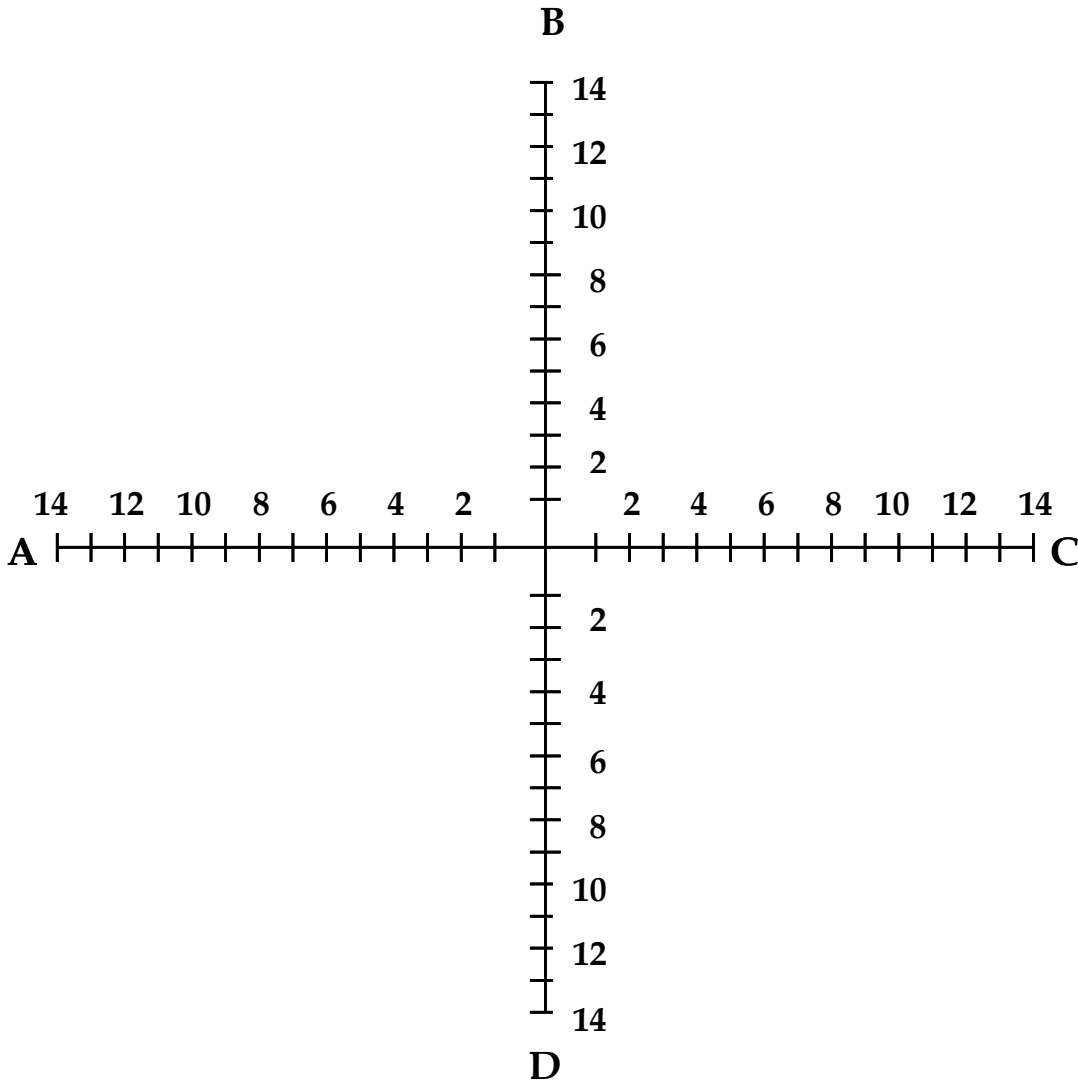
Exercise #4—Developing a Picture of Your Coaching Style - Part 1

Below are 15 rows of four words (across). From each row (across), select two words out of the four that best describe the way you see yourself. If all four words sound like you, select the two that are most like you. If none of the four sounds like you, select the two that are closest to the way you are.

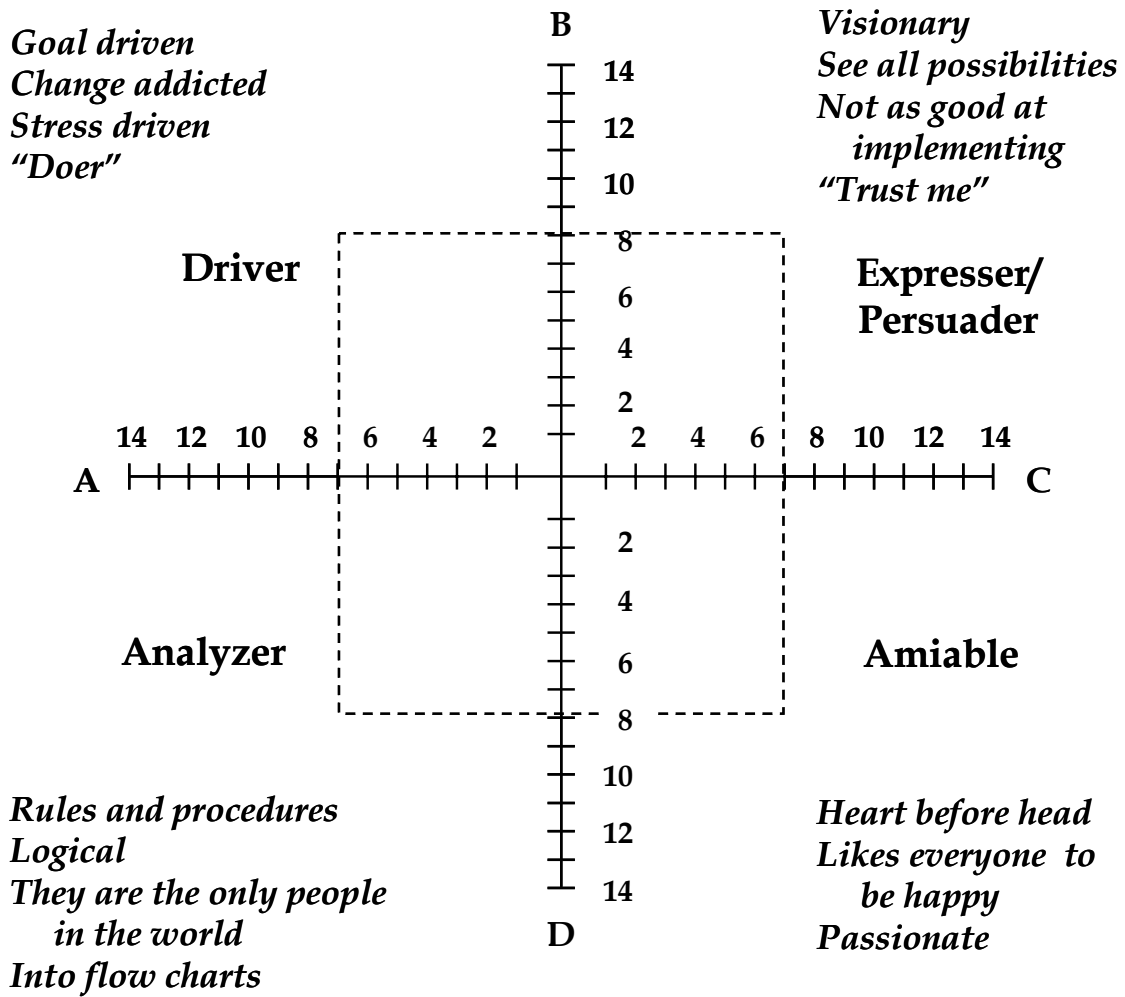
A	B	C	D
All Business	Bold	Personable	Deliberate
Organized listening	Telling	Courteous	Listening
Industrious	Independent	Companionable	Cooperative
No-nonsense	Decisive	Talkative	Reflective
Serious	Determined	Warm	Careful
To-the-point	Risk Taker	Amiable	Moderate
Practical	Aggressive	Empathetic	Nonassertive
Self-controlled	Authoritative	Show Emotions	Thorough
Goal Directed	Assertive	Friendly	Patient
Methodical	Unhesitating	Sincere	Prudent
Businesslike	Definite	Sociable	Precise
Diligent	Firm	Demonstrative	Particular
Systematic	Strong-minded	Sense of Humor	Thinking
Formal	Confident	Expressive	Hesitative
Persevering	Forceful	Trusting	Restrained
_____	_____	_____	_____

Exercise #4—Developing a Picture of Your Coaching Style - Part 2

On the previous page, total the number of words circled under each respective column. Plot those numbers on their respective axes of the grid below. For example, if you circled six words in column A, mark the A axis next to the 6. Complete the same procedures for columns B, C and D. Then extend the marks into each respective quadrant to create a rectangle. The next page shows a completed rectangle.



Exercise #4—Developing a Picture of Your Coaching Style - Part 2 - Example



UNDERSTANDING AND UTILIZING SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

Developing Your Communications Skills

There are many aspects of sport psychology, however none will be more important to coaching than learning how to communicate with your athletes and understanding what motivates them to train and compete in sports. By default, successful coaches are good sport psychologists - skillful communicators and motivators.

Coaching is communication. Every act of coaching requires you to communicate. As a coach you must be able to communicate effectively in countless situations.

1. Teaching athletes how to do certain skills, run plays
2. Talking to an official who you believe has made an incorrect call
3. Talking to parents or caregivers about their family member

Communication is more than a two-way process; it is dimensional. Communication encompasses sending and receiving messages, verbal and nonverbal language and emotions and feelings involved in the content of the message.

- Coaches must be as skillful in receiving messages as they are in giving clear understandable messages. Successful coaches need to be sharp, active listeners so they can understand their athletes.
- It is also essential that coaches be aware of nonverbal communication. It is estimated that over 70 percent of communication is nonverbal. Therefore, coaches must be aware that their athletes are constantly observing and modeling their actions.
- Content is the substance of the message and emotions and feelings pack the content.

Coaching Tips

- Communicate unto others as you wish them to communicate unto you.

The Communication Flow

1. The coach has a thought that he/she wants to tell the athlete.
2. The coach translates the thought into a message.
3. The coach conveys the message – verbally or nonverbally.
4. The athlete receives the message.
5. The athlete interprets the meaning of the message.
6. The athlete responds inwardly and/or outwardly to the message.

Sometimes this flow is smooth and sometimes it is not. It is based on the clarity of the message and the athlete's understanding of the message.

What Makes Communication Ineffective

- The content of the message may not fit the situation.
- The message does not adequately communicate your intentions.
- The athlete does not receive the message.
- The athlete does not understand the message.

- The athlete misinterprets the content of the message.
- The message itself is inconsistent.

Ineffective communication is not about finding fault. Poor communication can be a result of many factors as noted above. Finding where the communication flow stopped is the key to building successful communication between coach and athletes.

Developing Credibility When You Communicate

Your credibility is the single most important element in communicating effectively with athletes. Your credibility is reflected in the trust athletes place in you as a coach. Athletes give you initial credibility because you are the coach. You also have the ability to maintain and build upon this place of trust or to lose it. Once lost, it is tough to get back. How can you build credibility as a coach?

1. Be a balanced coach
2. Know your sport, be willing to learn more and be honest about what you do not know
3. Be reliable, consistent and fair
4. Express empathy, warmth and acceptance of your athletes and where they are in their development
5. Be positive

Coaching Tips

- It is natural for athletes to play and joke around.
- If athletes behaved perfectly, they would not need a coach.

Learning How to Listen

Statistics show that untrained listeners hear less than 20 percent of a conversation. The majority of us fall within this category. Poor listening skills cause a breakdown in the communication process. If an athlete continually fails in getting you to listen, he/she will simply stop talking with you. Coaches who are poor listeners often have more discipline problems; athletes stop listening to their coach because he/she is not listening to them. Athletes may make a drastic attempt to get you to listen by misbehaving or acting out. Your response to athletes' views and thoughts is important as you begin teaching and training them in their sport.

Improving Your Listening Skills

1. Recognize the need to listen.
2. Concentrate on listening by giving your undivided attention to what is being said.
3. Search for the meaning behind what is being communicated to you.
4. Avoid interrupting athletes as they are talking with you.
5. Respond constructively to athletes emotions.
6. Respect the rights of athletes to share their views with you. Listen to their fears, joys, problems and accomplishments.

Coach as the Model

Your every action as a coach on and off the playing field is a form of nonverbal communication. One of the most important things you communicate by your actions is respect or the lack of it. How you walk, approach others, your gestures and what you say and how you say it convey your attitudes about sportsmanship, other coaches and athletes. Athletes can be highly

impressionable, and they hold their coach in high esteem. Your actions can teach athletes much more than sport skills and rules of your sport.

Some Final Thoughts on Communicating

- ♦ Emphasize praise and rewards to strengthen desired behaviors.
- ♦ Positive communication helps athlete value themselves as individuals, athletes.
- ♦ Be aware of the emotion expressed in your messages to athletes.
- ♦ Set realistic goals about athletes' athletic performance abilities as well as their emotional and social behavior.
- ♦ Be consistent.
- ♦ Keep your word.
- ♦ Be as good as your word.

Positive Reinforcement and Rewards

When used appropriately, reinforcement is one of the primary communication tools of a successful coach. Reinforcement is used to praise an athlete when he/she does well or to get an athlete to stop undesirable behavior. Reinforcement is relative and not absolute. For reinforcement to work, a coach must be consistent and systematic in its use. If you are not consistent, your athletes will behave erratically, like the coach. If you are not systematic, you will send confusing messages to your athletes.

Communicating and Correcting Errors

1. **One skill at a time.** Correct only one behavior or movement at a time.
2. **Ask before giving correction.** Allow the chance to explain what they believe they did. This lets them feel they are a part of the process.
3. **Find the cause.** The cause of an error may be something that you may not see. Again, ask the athlete what they believe they are doing.
4. **Provide constructive instruction.** Avoid too much of "what's not right" by focusing on "how to do it right." Always build up the athlete; do not tear them down.
5. **Praise before correction.** Begin with a positive comment about something that the athlete is doing well. Now they are attuned to you. You have gained their attention and trust. Follow up with constructive instruction. Be concise and to the point. Remember to send another message of praise and encouragement.

Using Rewards

Rewarding athletes is not always as easy as it sounds. Below are a few tips on rewarding your athletes.

- ♦ Reward the performance, not the outcome.

- ♦ Reward athletes just as much for their effort as you do for the desired outcome.
- ♦ Reward little accomplishments on the way to learning an entire skill.
- ♦ Reward the learning and performance of desired emotional and social skills too.
- ♦ Reward frequently, especially when new skills are being learned.
- ♦ Reward as soon as possible when new skills are learned.
- ♦ Reward an athlete when they have earned it.

Misbehavior

It is only natural for athletes to misbehave. As a coach, you can respond to an athlete's misbehavior with a positive or negative approach. One positive approach is to ignore the bad behavior. This approach can prove successful in certain situations because punishing the athlete's misbehavior encourages them to act out more. Ignoring misbehavior does not work when the athlete causes danger to himself/herself or other teammates and coaches. In that case, immediate action is necessary. Ignoring misbehavior is also not successful when the misbehavior is self-rewarding to the athlete.

Punishment is also a means to correcting an athlete's misbehavior. Below are a few suggestions for appropriate use of punishment.

- ♦ Use punishment when team rules are violated.
- ♦ When possible, give a warning before using punishment.
- ♦ Be consistent when administering punishment.
- ♦ Do not choose a punishment that causes you to feel guilty or upset.
- ♦ Once a punishment has been given, do not make the athlete feel like they are still in trouble.
- ♦ Punish sparingly, only when absolutely necessary.

Goal Setting and Motivation

Developing Self-Confidence through Goal Setting

Realistic yet challenging goals for each athlete are important to the motivation of the athlete both at training and during competition. Accomplishing goals at practice through repetition in settings similar to the competition environment will instill confidence. Sport confidence in athletes helps make participation fun and is critical to the athlete's motivation. Setting goals is a joint effort between athletes and coaches. The main features of goal setting are:

1. Goals need to be structured as short-term, intermediate and long-term.
2. Goals need to be viewed as stepping stones to success.
3. Goals must be accepted by the athlete.
4. Goals need to vary in difficulty— from easily attainable to challenging.
5. Goals must be measurable.
6. Goals need to be used to establish the athlete's training and competition plan.

Athletes with or without a mental disability may be more motivated by accomplishing short-term goals than long-term goals; however, do not be afraid to challenge athletes. Include athletes in

setting their personal goals. For example, ask the athlete, “How far do you want to jump today? Let’s see how far you jumped at the last practice. What is your personal best? What do YOU think you can do?” Awareness of why the athlete is participating is also important when setting goals. There are participation factors, which may influence motivation and goal setting:

Age appropriateness	Ability level
Readiness level	Athlete performance
Family influence	Peer influence
Athlete preference	

Physical preparation plus mental preparation equal sport confidence.

Performance Goals versus Outcome Goals

Effective goals focus on performance, not outcome. Performance is what the athlete controls. Outcomes are frequently controlled by others. An athlete may have an outstanding performance and not win a contest because other athletes have performed even better. Conversely, an athlete may perform poorly and still win if all other athletes perform at a lower level. If an athlete’s goal is to run 12.10 seconds in the 100m, the athlete has greater control in achieving this goal than winning. However, the athlete has even greater control of achieving a goal if the goal is to run using the correct form, driving the knees through the entire race. This performance goal ultimately gives the athlete more control over his/her performance.

<i>Performance Goal</i>	<i>Outcome Goal</i>
Athletics Run in lane the entire race, completing event	Run race hitting split goals
Basketball Make contact with opponent and block out after the shot	Get the rebound
Soccer Sprint after balls coming into play	Get to the ball first and control it

Motivation through Goal Setting

Goal setting has proved to be one of the most simple and effective motivational devices developed for sport within the past three decades. While the concept is not new, today the techniques for effective goal setting have been refined and clarified. Motivation is all about having needs and striving to have those needs met. How can you enhance an athlete’s motivation?

1. Provide more time and attention to an athlete when he/she is having difficulty learning a skill.
2. Reward small gains of achievement in skill level
3. Develop other measures of achievement outside of winning
4. Show your athletes that they are important to you
5. Show your athletes that you are proud of them and excited about what they are doing
6. Fill your athletes with self-worth

Goals give direction. They tell us what needs to be accomplished. They increase effort, persistence and the quality of performance. Establishing goals also requires that the athlete and coach determine techniques for how to achieve those goals.

Measurable and Specific

Effective goals are very specific and measurable. Goals stated in the form of "I want to be the best that I can be!" or "I want to improve my performance!" are vague and difficult to measure. It is positive sounding but difficult, if not impossible, to assess whether they have been reached. Measurable goals must establish a baseline of performance recorded during the past one or two weeks for them to be realistic.

Difficult, but Realistic

Effective goals are perceived as challenging, not threatening. A challenging goal is one perceived as difficult but attainable within a reasonable amount of time and with a reasonable amount of effort or ability. A threatening goal is one perceived as being beyond one's current capacity. Realistic implies that judgment is involved. Goals based upon a baseline of performance recorded during the past one or two weeks are likely to be realistic.

Long- versus Short-Term Goals

Both long and short-term goals provide direction, but short-term goals appear to have the greatest motivational effects. Short-term goals are more readily attainable and are stepping stones to more distant long-term goals. Unrealistic short-term goals are easier to recognize than unrealistic long-term goals. Unrealistic goals can then be modified before valuable practice time has been lost.

Positive versus Negative Goal Setting

Positive goals direct what to do rather than what not to do. Negative goals direct our attention to the errors we wish to avoid or eliminate. Positive goals also require coaches and athletes to decide how they will reach those specific goals. Once the goal is decided, the athlete and coach must determine specific strategies and techniques which allow that goal to be successfully attained.

Set Priorities

Effective goals are limited in number and meaningful to the athlete. Setting a limited number of goals requires that athletes and coaches decide what is important and fundamental for continued development. Establishing a few, carefully selected goals also allow athletes and coaches to keep accurate records without becoming overwhelmed with record keeping.

Mutual Goal Setting

Goal setting becomes an effective motivational device when athletes are committed to achieving those goals. When goals are imposed or established without significant input from the athletes, motivation is unlikely to be enhanced.

Set Specific Time Lines

Target dates provide urgency to an athlete's efforts. Specific target dates tend to eliminate wishful thinking and clarify what goals are realistic and which are not. Timelines are especially valuable in high-risk sports where fear often promotes procrastination in learning new skills.

Formal versus Informal Goal Setting

Some coaches and athletes think that goals must be set in formal meetings outside of practice and require long periods of thoughtful evaluation before they are decided upon. Goals are literally progressions which coaches have been using for years but are now expressed in measurable, performance terms rather than as vague, generalized outcomes.

Team versus Individual Goals

While team goals appear to have great importance for team sports, the reality is that most team goals can be broken down into individual roles or responsibilities. Each player must achieve these individual roles or responsibilities for the team to function effectively.

Goal Setting Domains

When asked to set goals, athletes typically focus on the learning of new skills or performances in competitions. A major role of the coach is to broaden the athlete's perception of those areas, and goal setting can be an effective tool. Goals can be set to enhance fitness, improve attendance, increase intensity, promote sportsmanship, develop team spirit, find more free time, or establish consistency.

Exercise — Setting Realistic Goals

Identify a long-term goal. Now break down that long-term goal into short-term and intermediate goals that will help you reach the long-term goal. Coaches use a similar process to break down complex skills into smaller, simpler skills.

Short-Term Goals
Intermediate Goals
Long-Term Goal