

## What we say and How we Say it!

We are in an age of self help, spiritual development and the so called soft skills, such as effective communication both at work and on the home front where the catch cry is often "its all about the people". It has gained a great deal of momentum, just look at the associated shelving in any bookstore!

On the flip side of this, technology keeps surging forward with the internet, emails, chat rooms, Facebook and the like which allows us to communicate without being in the room. Add ipods and Mp3 players to that and we can walk around without ever actually speaking to people directly.

In the world of sport and our chosen sport - cricket, this technology has allowed us to communicate freely and easily with associations, clubs, players and parents. People all over the place are "finding" themselves in this spiritual age and are demanding a different approach!

How as coaches do we communicate with our players at practice and on game day where we come face to face with all of the twists and turns of the game and the individuals within it while catering for the new age?

My answer is, it has always been about the people and we all like a performance so every practice or match becomes a performance and how we approach these will greatly assist or hinder our team and the players experience.



How do we approach game day? Do we pace up and down the boundary line issuing orders and kicking the ground when they are not performed suitably, or can we sit down, read the paper and enjoy our Caffe Latte knowing that our preparation has been good enough and the experience is in the players hands.

What do you say to your opening batsmen when they go out to bat, "make sure you let balls go!" How do we then react when the first ball is let go and they are bowled? Maybe a simple comment of "watch the ball" as they go is sufficient, something they can do and will assist them to play.

It is the last ball of the semi final, 4 to win for the batting team, 1 wicket for the fielding team, you tell your young opening bowler, "mate, just don't get hit for four" (he looks at you and is thinking "no kidding!!") What could you say?

We are at practice, the call comes from out behind the bowlers to the batsman, "stop hitting across the line", the batsman looks up and has every right to say "alright, how?"

Technology such as a simple video camera or more complex skill and match analysis equipment while assisting players to see what is happening needs to be matched with effective communication. As coaches, we need to remember it is about the players and how they discover the best approaches to achieve success. Just think back to your own backyard or park cricket experiences, how did you learn to not smash the kitchen window, or not hit the ball to the automatic 'wicky' and 'slips'.

How can we improve that discovery experience? Effective questioning or facilitative questioning where we are drawing the answers from the player. Let's look at the semi final bowling situation as mentioned earlier, how could we approach this?

"Mate, where has he been hitting you so far, or where will he try and hit it?"

"Ok, if that's where he is going to hit, where do you think we should bowl the ball?"

Maybe 2 ways from here

"Good answer mate, let's set the field for that and have a go, I know you can do it."

Or

"Ok, good answer however what happens if .....?"

"Your right, what is another way we can approach this?"

Here is an example of how our young captains can learn about how to work with their players!

The important thing here is the player is thinking through the options, if the approach is a little off the mark then we can then guide them or channel them towards a preferred approach rather than telling them.

The benefits, I am hoping there will be greater recall from the player when they are in that situation again. At worst we can then recreate the environment through questioning to stimulate their memory. The tough parts to this, it is a skill for us as coaches that we need to practice regularly, it takes some letting go of control!

Try it for yourself, our greatest mentors or mates and coaches are masters at this.

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