

Guidelines for Sending Effective Messages

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1. Messages should be direct. Coaches who are weak on this quality avoid straightforward, direct communication. Their athletes may not know where they stand. These coaches assume others know what they expect, want, or feel. Rather than expressing their message directly, they hint at what they have in mind or they expect others to be mind readers. In other cases, they may tell someone else, hoping the message will get to the intended recipient indirectly. The problem is that indirect messages are often distorted and misperceived.

How strong are you in sending direct messages?

1 Weak 2 3 4 5 Strong

2. Own your messages. Use "I" and "my," not "the team," or "we" when referencing your messages. You disown your messages when you say, "The team feels..." or "Most people think you are..." when it is really what you believe. Using others to bolster what you have to say implies cowardice in expressing your own messages and a failure to take ownership.

How strong are you in owning your messages?

1 Weak 2 3 4 5 Strong

3. Messages should be complete and specific. Tell the whole story without leaving out important information. Provide the person with whom you are speaking all the information he or she needs in order to fully understand your message. Watch for leaps in logic, unknown assumptions, and unstated intentions.

How strong are you in making your messages complete and specific?

1 Weak 2 3 4 5 Strong

4. Messages should be clear and consistent. Avoid double messages. Coaches who say one thing one day and then something else on another violate this principle as do coaches who send contradictory messages. "I really want to play you, but I don't think this is a good matchup for you." "I think you're a fine athlete, but you'll just have to be patient." This example of a double message (acceptance and rejection) leaves the athlete confused and probably hurt. Double messages have contradictory meanings, and usually are sent when you are afraid to tell the person directly something that may offend him or her.

How strong are you in sending clear and consistent messages?

1 Weak 2 3 4 5 Strong

5. Messages should clearly state needs and feelings. Because our society frowns on those who wear their emotions on their sleeves, we tend not to reveal our feelings and needs to others. Yet revealing our needs and feelings is a foundation for developing close relationships and opening the communication

channels. Sharing needs and feelings opens the door for the other person to do the same. Unexpressed needs and hidden feelings result in unfulfilled expectations.

How strong are you in clearly stating your needs and feelings?

1 Weak 2 3 4 5 Strong

6. Messages should separate fact from opinion. State what you see, hear, and know, and then clearly identify any opinions or conclusions you have about these facts. You say to your son when he returns home late on night, "I see you've been out with the Williamson kid again." In the context in which it is spoken, your son receives the message, but he is not certain exactly what your concern is about the Williamson boy. A better way to send this message would be (a) "That was the Williamson kid, was it not?" (verifying a fact); and then (b) "I'm concerned that you spend so much time with him. I worry that he will get you into trouble" (stating your opinion). Although your son may not be pleased with your opinion, this message is far less ambiguous than the first one.

How strong are you in separating fact from opinion in your messages?

1 Weak 2 3 4 5 Strong

7. Messages should be focused on one thing at a time. Focus your message on one topic or issue at a time. Jumping from topic to topic only confuses the listener. Are your messages frequently disjointed thoughts because you don't take the time to organize your thinking?

How strong are you in focusing your messages on one thing at a time?

1 Weak 2 3 4 5 Strong

8. Messages should be delivered immediately. When you observe something that upsets you or that needs to be changed, don't delay sending a message. Sometimes holding back can result in your exploding later about a little thing. Responding immediately also is a sound principle for giving effective feedback. However, if your emotions are clouding your judgment, it is sometimes better to wait until a better time to deliver your message.

How strong are you in delivering messages immediately when you see the need to do so?

1 Weak 2 3 4 5 Strong

9. Messages should not contain hidden agendas. This principle means that the stated purpose of the message is identical with the real purpose. Hidden agendas and disguised intentions destroy relationships. Ask yourself these two questions to determine if your message contains hidden agendas: Why am I saying this? Is it because I want him or her to hear it or is there something else involved?

How strong are you in avoiding messages that contain hidden agendas?

1 Weak 2 3 4 5 Strong

10. Messages should be supportive. If you want the other person to listen to your messages over time, you cannot deliver them with threats, sarcasm, negative comparisons, or any type of judgment. Eventually the person will avoid

communicating with you or will simply tune you out whenever you speak. Your cumulative messages need to demonstrate support for the person.

How strong are you in sending supportive messages?

1 Weak 2 3 4 5 Strong

11. Verbal and nonverbal messages should be congruent. You tell your player it was OK to make the error, but your negative body gestures and facial expressions contradict your words. The two conflicting messages confuse your player and hurt your credibility in future communication.

How strong are you in making your verbal and nonverbal messages congruent?

1 Weak 2 3 4 5 Strong

12. Messages should be redundant. (That is, you should repeat the message. Get the point?) That's correct. Repeat the key points in a message to reinforce what you are saying. Preview what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then review what you just told them. However, be aware that too much repetition results in the other person not listening, so you must be discriminating in your redundancy. You can create redundancy by using additional channels of communication to bolster your message. For example, show a picture or video along with explaining the skill.

How strong are you in making your messages optimally redundant?

1 Weak 2 3 4 5 Strong

13. Messages should be at the receiver's level and frame of reference.

Speak at the level of the receivers in a way that they can readily understand. Your messages can be much better understood if you tailor them to the experiences of the people with whom you are communicating. For example, it is inappropriate to use complex language when speaking to young athletes who do not have the vocabulary to understand what is being said. Make sure the message being sent is understandable given athletes' age, development, and experience.

How strong are you in sending messages that are appropriate for the receiver's level of readiness and understanding?

1 Weak 2 3 4 5 Strong

14. Messages should be checked for understanding. Look for verbal and nonverbal evidence that the person with whom you are speaking is receiving the message as you intended. If you are unsure of the person's understanding, ask him or her to summarize the main points of the message or ask questions to assess comprehension. Athletes may be hesitant to ask questions if they do not understand for fear of appearing stupid in front of others.

How strong are you in obtaining feedback to make certain the person understands your messages?

1 Weak 2 3 4 5 Strong

15. Messages should be attention grabbing. You need to hook people into listening. Grab their attention by using their names or by explaining why it is important for them to understand the information you are communicating.

How strong are you in sending attention grabbing messages?

1 Weak 2 3 4 5 Strong

16. Messages should consider each athlete's learning style. Some athletes are visual learners, others are auditory learners, while yet others learn through doing (i.e., kinesthetic learners). Messages will be more easily comprehended if they accommodate an athlete's learning style.

How strong are you in considering each listener's learning style in sending messages?

1 Weak 2 3 4 5 Strong

Total your ratings and see where you fall in the following subjective scale:

67 – 80	Excellent
55 – 66	Good
43 – 54	Average
31 – 42	Weak
30 or less	Help!

