

Communication Lesson

Tue, May 23, 2023 8:22PM • 20:58

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

coach, communication, people, players, conversations, relationship, communicate, individual, great, explaining, learn, athlete, leader, basketball coach, interviews, create, tailoring, profiling, topic, working

SPEAKERS

Glee, Brad Dubberly, Joanne P McCallie, Tom Ryan, Bev Priestman, Tracey Menzies, Pokey Chatman, Paul Gustard, Paul Barnett, Jenny Boucek, Eddie Jones, Alyson Annan, Jon Deeble, Julia Price, Brenda Kirkpatrick, Justin Langer

Paul Barnett 00:00

Welcome to the lessons from the great coaches podcast. I've learned that you don't do it alone,

00:06

you learn so many different things from so many different coaches. That's an elite learning environment.

00:13

How you deal with how to be resilient, how important it is to infuse joy in the process of learning. To be

00:20

a good candidate, you've got to do more than you take. What an interesting way it is to be a leader.

Paul Barnett 00:28

My name is Paul Barnett, and you are listening to the great coach's podcast, where we explore leadership through the lens of high performance sport, by interviewing great coaches from around the world, to try and find ideas to help all of us lead our teams better. We started this podcast because we wanted to have better conversations with our families around the dinner table. In a social media world, with the goal is often to be the star of the show. We wanted to change the conversation and talk more about selflessness, leadership and responsibility. And the people we knew who best exhibited these qualities were great sports coaches. As the podcast has grown, the great coaches we've interviewed have shared so much insight and wisdom that we decided to create episodes dedicated entirely to the lessons that have resonated with us the most. Today's episode is on the topic of communication, and it features audio quotes from a wide selection of coaches that we have interviewed from around the world.

Tom Ryan 01:28

But lessons from the great coaches podcast,

Paul Barnett 01:30

Chapman University in America undertakes an annual survey into the fears of the average person. And a fear of public speaking, regularly comes out as America's biggest phobia. We didn't ask the great coaches, whether they have this phobia, though I'm sure many of them do. But we did ask them about communication and the role it plays in their approach to leadership. And what is common in their answers is a focus on communicating in a way that motivates builds trust, and provides direction. But in order to do this, you must first embrace honesty. Here is the Australian cricket coach Justin Langer explaining this.

Justin Langer 02:11

Ultimately, what it comes down to, is having honest conversations, I believe that honest conversations fix everything in the world. But it's bloody hard to have honest conversations because people don't like confrontation. People don't like often hearing the truth, but honest conversations can fix everything. But you've got to have the courage one, to have them but to to develop a safe environment where you can have and that's what Tim Ford allowed us to do. So was it at the time, I thought was overkill. No way, it's worth every single second of effort. And, again, most interesting for me is that these days, we had the conversations back then, but scars, you know scars, you've got to keep putting ointment on scars, right? Otherwise, it just there's a scar. So you've always got to keep working away and chipping away because there's always little triggers that keep coming up that bring back memories of the past. So the world we live in and we see it, you've got to be on this all the time, you've got to be having these conversations all the time to just make sure that you're all moving in the right direction together.

Paul Barnett 03:14

Honesty, is born from a relationship between athlete and coach where there is an appreciation for the truth. Here is cricket coach Julia Price, giving her view on relationships that enable honesty.

Julia Price 03:28

Because a lot of people find it difficult to have those honest conversations that are hard because, you know, You're upsetting people or you're it's difficult, but I have, I have to admit I've always found it just quite normal because I feel if I'm just telling them the truth, then there shouldn't be an issue, which of course sometimes it is. But then again, it comes back to having that relationship prior to the you know, just blurt out whatever you're saying. And you need that relationship with with, with your players to be able to have that honest conversation

Jon Deeble 03:55

first place.

Paul Barnett 03:58

The NBA coach Trevor Gleason builds on Julia's thoughts around the importance of relationships when it comes to communication. By making the point that communication in the heat of the game can often be direct and robust. And it can derail performance. If it's not supported by a solid relationship base.

Glee 04:18

That the passion is playing, I guess every play, it's the relationship that you have with the players to allow me to be that way. If I don't have a relationship with a player, and we have a very robust conversation in the heat of the battle for 10 seconds, that event could cause a lot of trouble if I haven't built up the trust and relationship with that player. And everyone's different how we communicate. But we also have some non negotiable team standards that I guess you say that we're not going to be successful if we don't achieve them. And sometimes you might lose the game. But if you drop in those standards of the performance that you play, you're going to let yourself down and that's swear I come in and say, Hey, that's not good enough. That's not what we represent here at the Wildcats. Let's not Wildcats basketball. And if we take care of those things normally the scoreboard takes care of itself.

Paul Barnett 05:13

wrestling coach Tom Ryan also believes that communication needs to be direct, but also simple in competition in order to help focus the athlete.

Tom Ryan 05:24

One of the places he really grew was you know, his motto became don't protect that, right? That was his mantra. And we are firm believers in mantras because the brain can only handle a few digits right at a time, right. So to simplify, when things are spiraling, you just go back to a monitor that settles your brain and brings you back to a place of total focus.

Paul Barnett 05:49

Wheelchair rugby coach Brad Dudley also believes in simplifying communication in competition, as he thinks it can often lead to self doubt if delivered incorrectly.

Brad Dubberly 06:03

I think a lot of coaches get stuck just trying to do too much. And then a too much too much instruction ends up just scrambling in athletes heads and they just shouldn't be here shouldn't be their way as a coach for me to do, I'm too late, I'm not there. And then they start doubting themselves. And so it was a case of really trying to concentrate on the key things that you want that will make a difference. And simplifying to the point that they can not only understand it, it allows them to put their own I suppose flair on it as well, which makes it more enjoyable.

Paul Barnett 06:36

A simple, honest conversation can often be painful to deliver, though. But that discomfort can be mitigated, at least partly by reminding yourself that as the leader, you have to act in the best interest to the organization. Here is baseball coach John Debo explaining his view on this.

Jon Deeble 06:56

But I think the biggest thing that I've learned in that area of communication with players, be honest, still got players on from Australia that don't talk to me that I've had to get rid of. But I can always look at myself in my heart and say you I did what was in the best interest of the organization. And I told you the truth. And that's something I always tried to do was be honest, as much as it hurt. A lot of people don't want to hear it. But I think it's the best way.

Paul Barnett 07:21

Another key theme that comes through in our interviews is that of tailoring your communication to the individual, especially if the age group within the team is broad. Here is rugby coach, Eddie Jones, explaining how he goes about this.

Eddie Jones 07:37

If you think about all the great coaches in the past, they've always understood the teams, they've always understood their players, maybe the the many did, it was less sophisticated than this now because you could be a bit more upfront a bit more in your face. Now, it's definitely more complex, because the learning approaches of each of the generations is changing quickly. More so than before. So your ability to be able to capture a group where you've got guys from the age of 32, to a team who've got completely different ideas of how they want to learn and how they do learn. And, and, and, and try to get the same message through has become much more challenging. And a lot you have to put a lot more work into that area than you used to, you know, used to be able to get up get a whiteboard, write the three points on the right boy boy for Right, right, let's get into it. And generally you capture enough players to get it right. And now you've got to be able to present that information in three or four different ways. Consult the players on it, discuss it with the players make sure they've had an input, which is it's Yeah, as probably made coaching a lot more interesting, because it's less about just the energy and and the drive of the coach and more about how you can create a more cohesive environment. Yes, so psychology is massive. But the other thing that also strikes me is that and all the great cases have said that, you know, people like Rick Charlesworth and Alex Ferguson. It's how you establish relationships with players, like they've got to remember conversations you've had if, if they don't remember the conversations and conversations are meaning meaningless.

Paul Barnett 09:39

When it comes to tailoring your communication style and content to the individual athlete profiling can help. Here is baseball coach John Dibble again

Jon Deeble 09:49

we had player profiles and everybody so we knew everybody's play a profile and the guys that you can yell at the guys you can't the guys if they need a foot up the bum that you could get that from That was all profiling and know what we do. We know what makes people tick, because of the profiling that we had, and you got to be cool. I think if the place that you're not cool, it's very hard for them to stay cool.

Paul Barnett 10:12

But if profiling isn't practical, it can also help to identify keywords that you can reframe, or use differently to reach the individual, as basketball coach Joanne P. McCauley explains. And Dr.

Joanne P McCallie 10:25

Rosen was a person who taught me a lot about words and reframing the way t individuals and players think cognitively, you know, there are words you can use, for example, when you're talking to a player, and they're perhaps not feeling as good as they should about their talents. You know, you can say you're very good, or you're a great player, but it's, it's much better to talk to a player about how dangerous they are, you know, dangerous with their skill set, you're dangerous by being on the floor,

and always being an issue for the opponent. You know, there's other philosophies like a Christmas tree, you know, the blinking lights on a Christmas tree. And there's always one that's very bothersome, that always seems to blink no matter what, well, you don't want to be that blinking light of your team. You know, you don't want to be the one that causes all the attention, or constantly is giving effort or not giving effort and sort of blinking with your commitment. And so you get these sorts of storytelling words.

Paul Barnett 11:38

You can also increase the chance of your communication message connecting with the individual, if you are prepared to communicate your own failures and uncertainties here as basketball coach, Brenda Kirkpatrick, Brown.

Brenda Kirkpatrick 11:51

But you have to have that situational awareness and know what that group's needs are. I've found Paul, and I didn't do this very well at the beginning of my career, but because you want to know everything you want to be right, and you want to have all the answers, but you have to be willing to say I don't know, I would also say you have to be willing to say I made a mistake. And here's where I could have done something differently in front of your kids in front of your staff, because they're constantly evaluating you and learning from you, and preparing perhaps themselves to be a head coach.

Paul Barnett 12:30

communication within teams is not just one way though, as the leader, you need to be able to get a response from the organization, as this allows you to understand whether your message is landing. two way communication also offers the chance for better solutions to be found. creating the right environment for this to happen is essential. And as the leader, you have to take on responsibility for creating and then nurturing it. Here is NBA coach Jenny Buzek explaining her view on this.

Jenny Boucek 13:01

I think the reason why some people don't speak up, or they get into this groupthink, and I have great empathy for this is they're afraid, what people will think if it's different, they're afraid of how that's gonna affect their job status. I don't believe that's true. But I think that is the belief system, and a lot of people is they have to please the people around them. And the way to please people around them is to agree. That's the safest choice. It feels the safest. It's the path of least resistance. And you see it a lot. And you see a lot and he's great. I'm in the NBA now. So these great men with great ideas, great thoughts, great experiences, great basketball minds, but they're caught up as a coach in in fear of failure, and then fear of what people think and people pleasing. And it's sad to me, honestly, because there's no freedom in that. But I get it. It's a competitive situation. And it's really easy to to get into that fear mindset, just like an athlete can. I think the freedom that I walk in, comes from being in the head coach shoes, to knowing what I wanted as a head coach, I didn't want Yes, people around me that didn't help me as a coach make decisions. So when I asked a question, or offered a topic to the group, I really appreciated people who challenged my thinking and through different ideas and thoughts out there. And even if I thought it was crazy, it still made me think in a healthy way and helped me make better decisions as a leader.

Paul Barnett 14:37

When you try to create an environment that unlocked productive communication, it can help to understand the triggers or actions that you take as the leader that disconnect you from the group. Here is gold medal winning soccer coach, Beverly Pressman explaining her experience with this.

Bev Priestman 14:54

Well, I think one of the lowest points of my career at youth level i We didn't qualify The under 20 team we lost on penalties to Mexico at the time, you just done a wheel right? And okay, well, it was this it was that, again, when you take a step out of your role you reflect and I remember I was locked in my room. I was living tactics on my computer. But I wasn't connecting with people. I was a five year version of bed Pressman that now refuses to be a computer coach, that's sort of the joke in my stuff. I'm like, no, like, I need to have my head above the clouds, I need to have the clarity.

Paul Barnett 15:30

But perhaps one of the simplest and best things that you can do as the leader, when it comes to communication, is to be very clear on what you expect, and ask questions when you don't see it. Here is rugby coach Paul costarred, reflecting on his experience working with Eddie Jones.

Paul Gustard 15:48

But I think I think one thing that Eddie does better than anybody is he trusts his I trust his instincts. In those he knows what it is that he wants. And when he sees it, he's able to, he's able to capture that moment freeze frame it. So he's very good with intuition. Second think based on that is, is very, very clear about what he wants very, very clear about what he expects, and very, very clear with a staff about the standards it looks at. So from that point of view, you've got a very clear picture about what you would expect to do as a coach and as a player working for it. And then the final thing, I think that he does better than anybody else I've ever come across some coaching is ask the question why? He asked a lot, and, you know, challenges people a lot. And it makes you it makes you reflect hard on your own coaching, makes you question your process or

Paul Barnett 16:42

another key theme on the topic of communication that emerges from our interviews, is that style is more important than volume. Here is swimming coach Tracy Menzies.

Tracey Menzies 16:54

You don't have to be loud to be heard. And I sort of coached in that capacity as well that you just go about your job quietly. And if you do that, your results will speak for themselves.

Paul Barnett 17:07

And a key part of your own style should include a structure that ensures your communication is ongoing and meaningful. And in service of creating impactful relationships across the organization. Here is basketball coach pokey Chatman giving her view on this.

Pokey Chatman 17:25

Think the one that I will always keep it a topic because I think it's the one that needs to consistently grow, and tweak and get better is always work at being the most efficient and effective communicator

with all aspects of your existence. That's from the sports performance staff, to the people who are leading the fan, is that tool of communicating with them more in every sense of the word? Yes, you have to talk. Yes, you listen. But it's your body language is the number of times and I mean, it's a constant evolution of that, that I want to stay on top of it, because it's always changing. You got a process, it works everywhere. And I really want to stay on top of that, because that in and of itself, will be a conduit to me having meaningful, impactful relationships and every everything that we do.

Paul Barnett 18:19

Bye, perhaps the best way to finish a review of the lessons from the great coaches on the topic of communication, is to appreciate that no one ever gets it right all the time. So it's going to be about getting it right most of the time. Here is gold medal winning field hockey coach, Alison Annan.

Alyson Annan 18:38

When we talk about communication, there are so many different forms of communication that you can get lost in translation, trying to do it all and lose yourself. Who am I? And how do I communicate what works best for me? And what's the reaction that I'm getting back from players and staff to be able to communicate better? And I think one of the biggest things is communication is one of the most difficult things worldwide. And we will never ever get it right. No one ever gets it. Right. So it's about getting the right most of the time. And I think that that's as a coach, I've never really leaned on the theoretical side of things because it's I just want to be unique to myself. I think that that's something that if you look at communicating, one thing I would always say is be true to yourself. And don't try and be someone else and learn to communicate within the person that you are.

Paul Barnett 19:29

We hope you enjoyed our episode on communication, and found one or two things that you can bring to your own dinner table, locker room or boardroom table for discussion. The key lessons I've taken away on the topic of communication from our interview guests our focus on communicating in a way that motivates builds trust and provides direction, embrace honesty when you communicate, but do it in a way that is as tailored to the individual as possible. Except that open honest conversations are required of you as the leader, and that these conversations may be difficult, but are ultimately in the best interest of the individual and organization. solid relationships will allow you to have direct, robust and simplified communication in the heat of competition without fear that it will derail performance. And relationships can be strengthened if you are willing to communicate your own failures and uncertainties as a coach here at the great coaches podcast we are always trying to learn so please let us know if you have any feedback. Just like Wesley Robinson who said another beauty Thanks, guys. Cheers, Wesley. The interaction with the people around the world who listen gives us great energy. And so if you have any feedback or comments, please let us know. All the details on how to connect with us are in the show notes or on our website, the great coaches podcast.com