

Coaching Approaches and Motivation

Coaches can have a powerful impact on the motivation of players they work with depending on the coaching approach they use. It is not uncommon for coaches to adopt a “controlling” coaching style - often driven by the assumption that more pressurizing environments and extrinsic rewards are more likely to make players work hard. However, research suggests such approaches will undermine, rather than foster quality motivation.

Controlling

Category	Strategy
Pressuring language	Using commands and instructions (e.g. “must”, “should”, “need to”) or inducing guilt and shame
	Criticising, belittling, devaluing or dismissing players
Empty communication	Imposing goals or rules with no explanations, or explanations which are confusing, inappropriate or pressuring
	Offering no specific feedback / praise, or talking in ways that are motivationally empty (e.g. “keep going)
Appearing “cold”	Appearing cold and indifferent to your player’s feelings
	Appearing unresponsive to or discouraging your player’s preferences, opinions and feedback
	Using “tough love” language
Structuring groups	Offering little variety and / or choices that are not meaningful
	Not interacting with your players
	Comparing players against each other and being overly competitive

Instead, adopting a “supporting” coaching style that is high in autonomy support, structure and engagement can promote intrinsic motivation. This approach encourages choice and nurtures and develops the players’ interests and goals – which influences their motivation to engage in and sustain regular participation.

Supporting

Category	Strategy
Listening to your players	Taking time to listen and be responsive to your players needs
	Encouraging questions and feedback from your players about their goals, problems or preferences
Advising your players	Providing meaningful and appropriate explanations
	Giving specific, timely and constructive feedback
	Using inclusive language (e.g. “we could try”)
Relating to your players	Acknowledging the players feelings and responding appropriately
	Offering meaningful praise which is unconditional
Structuring groups	Creating opportunities for players to have input and make decisions
	Offering choice and variety which are realistic and relevant to your players needs
	Finding opportunities to interact with players

Coaching is all about change. Be the change you want to see in your players.