

Positive Motivation: Getting the Best From Athletes

EMOTIONAL-TANK TOOLS FOR INDIVIDUALS

Player of the Day

For the player who needs something extra: look for anything and everything positive you can say about this athlete. Ignore everything that isn't good. Shower the player with positivity the entire practice and enjoy the improved performance. Don't let the player know he or she is Player of the Day – you (and your co-coaches) just act that way.

You're-the-Kind-of-Person-Who Statements

Reinforce positive traits such as resilience, a Teachable Spirit or being a good teammate: "I'm sure you were disappointed that you missed that shot, but one of the things I like about you is that you are the kind of person who...doesn't give up easily...learns from disappointments...picks up teammates when they're down."

Develop Player-Coaches – Help Players Think Like a Coach!

Ask Rather Than Tell: Ask players what they would do in a situation. If they give a "wrong" answer, you can correct them, but first make them think. Ask players for input on decisions that affect the team. You can still decide but they will feel valued by being asked and may have insights to share.

Magic Ratio – 5 Emotional Tank-Fillers for Every Criticism

Recognize athletes for what they do right, encourage their efforts, thank them for their contributions, listen to them, and give nonverbal signals (eye contact, head nods, high-5's and listening noises). This strengthens relationships and make athletes more coachable.

See+ Say+ / Say+ See+ (Positivity can be infectious and See+ Say+ can be the virus.)

People tend to do what gets rewarded, and E-Tank fillers feel like rewards to those receiving them. If you see someone doing something you like, make a positive comment about it and you'll likely see more of it. If you want to see something positive, say something positive to make it more likely to happen.

EMOTIONAL-TANK TOOLS FOR TEAMS

Positive Charting with Look-For (This also works great in practice!)

Write each player's name on a pad with space to note the positive things they do in a game. To the right of each name, write "Look-For" where you will note a specific thing you want each to work on during the game (e.g., hustling back on defense). Try for about the same number of positives for each player (3-5 is good). Keep track during the game and start the next practice by reading aloud the good things each player did in the last game.

2-Minute Drill

Great when energy is lagging or E-Tanks are low! Set a time period and say only positive things during this time. Ignore things that aren't going well and work hard to find anything positive that you can truthfully say about their play. This is an injection of positive energy for your team.

Buddy System

Pair players up before a drill and ask them to fill the E-Tank of their buddy. Then bring the team together for a short team conversation about who had their E-Tank filled by their buddy. They may take awhile to catch on to this so don't give up. Do this once each practice all season and soon every player will handily fill E-Tanks.



Tools from PCA Workshop on Positive Motivation, continued



BETTER ATHLETES
BETTER PEOPLE

Winners' Circle

At the end of every practice and game, gather your team in a circle and ask for people to recognize teammates for the things they did during the practice or game that helped the team. As the coach, make sure every player gets some recognition even if it comes from you.

Mistake Ritual ("Perhaps the most powerful tool for improvement!")

A gesture-phrase, ideally chosen by the team, that athletes can use to transform the fear of making mistakes so they don't play timidly. Players flush mistakes down the toilet ("Flush it!"), "No sweat!" (wipe hand across forehead), "Brush it off!" (brush dust off one's shoulder). This allows athletes to quickly "reset" for the next play without beating themselves up with negative self-talk. A Mistake Ritual is powerful because it produces more aggressive players, and the more aggressive team usually wins.

EMOTIONAL-TANK TOOLS FOR HARD CONVERSATIONS

Teachable Moment Alert

Rather than dread hard conversations, coaches should welcome them as opportunities to change the trajectory of an athlete's life – when done without draining a player's Emotional Tank.

Negative Feedback Gently Delivered

"Calm & Positive" is the goal. We can handle criticism and act on it more easily when it is delivered gently. If you are the kind of person who gets upset easily, develop a Self-Control Routine to calm yourself before delivering negative feedback. It can be simply counting backwards from 10, taking 2 deep breaths before allowing yourself to say anything, etc. You may even want to observe a 24-hour cooling off period in some situations.

Receivable Criticism

Criticism is only valuable if it causes people to change. Some ways to make criticism more receivable:

- **Avoid non-teachable moments** – wait until a player has had time to recover emotionally from making a mistake.
- **Criticize in private – but not out of sight** (praise in public).
- **Ask permission** – "Judy, I noticed something that might improve your shooting. Are you open to hearing it?" If she says, "Yes," then great! If "No," honor that. Her curiosity may make her open to hearing it next time. This is not for something requiring immediate intervention, such as bad sportsmanship or safety.
- **If-Then Statements** – Research shows that If-Then statements are kid-friendly: "If you bend your knees when you shoot, then you'll get better range on your 3-point shots" works better than telling them what to do. If-Then statements help players feel in control, which makes them more open to criticism.
- **End with a positive** – A truthful and specific statement to send the player off with something to feel good about so he or she will be more likely to act on the feedback.

Criticism Sandwich

Sandwich a criticism or correction between two positives. "I like how you keep your eyes on the basket when you shoot. If you bend your knees more, you'll get better range. And nice follow-through!" You've just given three pieces of feedback and made the criticism easier to take.

For help dealing with any high school or youth sports issue, go to PCADevZone.org