

Good and Effective Communication: Forming A Successful Partnership

By Coach Jean

The key to a successful partnership between coaches and parents is the establishment of a line of good and effective communication.¹ Generally, communication involves a speaker and a listener, involving in a two-way beneficial exchange. That is, the exchange between the sender and the receiver is about transferring and understanding of meanings and ideas, and vice versa. Good and effective communication takes it a step farther, it allows the individual to feel valued and understood, and therefore, enriches both sides of the process.

In the world of youth sports, particularly youth soccer, the coaches have the responsibility to communicate effectively with the parents. That is, the coach ought to be able to communicate incisively with the parents. After all, coaches are like managers. As such, they must have the ability to work with, understand, mentor, and motivate the players. The ability to work with and understand applies not just to the players. These interpersonal skills must be mastered in order to establish a successful relationship with the parents.

Good communication is essential because coaches and parents are in the business of caring for the well-being of the child/youth player. Good communication skills will inevitably reduce tensions and misunderstandings between coaches and parents. Effective communication will reinforce the notion that the coach cares and values each and every child. The end result is a greater level of trust and leads to the development of a mutual understanding between coaches and parents.

The idea of good communication does not mean that coaches and parents will necessarily agree on everything. There will be communication differences, such as disagreements over differing role requirements, or conflict in some functional aspects of the team. However, because of the mutual trust, already established through the process of effective communication, those areas of disagreements will be less contentious. Both sides may in fact get a greater appreciation of the situation.

What are some of the parameters of this communication process? On the one hand, the coach, among other things, ought to effectively communicate his/her philosophy and expectations for the child. Parents must be made aware what the philosophy and expectations means in relation to the development and well-being of the child. On the other hand, the parents ought to be able communicate their understandings or concerns about the coach's philosophy, expectations, team rules and guidelines, or on matters relating to the best interest of the child, such as discussing ways to help the child improve.

For these parameters to work effectively, the coach must create a climate of openness and trust. Parents must know and feel comfortable that they can go to the coach with their questions

¹ While stressing the importance for a coach to master some of the interpersonal skills needed to create a positive relationship with parents, it should be noted that for a variety of reasons an adversarial relationship may come to exist, and thereby creating a tense and poisonous atmosphere. One of the ways for a coach to deal with such situation is to disidentify with the need to be right or wrong. That is, be clear and firm in your communication, but without the need to be aggressive or defensive about your position.

and/or concerns. To achieve this aspect of the relationship, the coach ought to be a good listener when parents are communicating their concerns. The key is to listen to what the parents are telling you, and not what you want to hear. If at all possible, and this is crucial, try to see the situation from the perspective of the parents. As a result, you will be more effective when you give your feedback, and ultimately, both sides will feel their inputs are valued and understood.

In conclusion, it is worth remembering that coaches and parents have a common bond: serving the best interest of the child. As for the coach, it is worth remembering of an old saying, “take care of the children. Just because they don’t come from you doesn’t mean they don’t belong to you.” Developing a good relationship with their parents is one of the ways to take care of your youth players, and that process starts with good and effective communication.

*Jean currently coaches U11 Boys Soccer with Santos F.C., and is also a Goalkeeper Coach.
For any questions or comments, he can be reached at jcledor@hotmail.com.*