



Using Feedback to Enhance Your Performance

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Feedback is information about your performance that helps you improve. This article discusses the importance of receiving feedback from coaches and applying it to your training in order to take your game to the next level. It explains how to distinguish feedback from criticism, providing examples of feedback, criticism, and athletes' responses to a coach's feedback. It also discusses suggestions for how to handle a coach's criticism to maintain focus, motivation, and performance. By listening to and accepting feedback, you, as an athlete, can learn from both your mistakes and achievements, and work to take your game to the next level.

Target audience: athletes

Introduction

As an athlete, you develop relationships with your coaches as you learn from them and seek information from them to help you improve. During training sessions and games, your coach may provide you with information and comment on what you do well and what you need to improve. On the other hand, you might ask for advice and feedback from the coach on a skill that you want to develop. In either case, your coach might provide you with feedback, or with criticism. It is your responsibility to decide how you respond to it and what information can help you improve.

Feedback vs. Criticism

Feedback encourages and challenges you. When your coach gives you feedback, he/she is giving you information about how to improve your performance. Ask your coach to give you feedback that is specific and

focuses on areas of improvement so that you know what you need to do to make progress. At times, your coach's tone may be stern and direct. Although this may make you feel uncomfortable, remain positive and remember that he/she is supporting and encouraging you to improve. A coach may also give you feedback when you have done something well. This kind of feedback compliments your skill and encourages you to continue performing at that level. In this case, similar to after a mistake, the feedback remains specific, challenging, and focused on the task. In time, this exchange of receiving feedback and learning from your coach could lead to a strengthened relationship between you and your coach.

Criticism, on the other hand, does not focus on a problem or provide specific information, but instead targets you personally. It provides general information, which fails to teach you what you need to do to improve. This

could lead to a distant relationship between you and your coach if you constantly feel like you are not meeting your coach's expectations, but do not know how to make adjustments. For example, say you are a defender on the soccer field who goes in for a tackle, and as you step in, the striker dribbles around you and finds an open shot on goal. Notice the difference between your coach reacting to the play by screaming, "Toughen up out there! Play like a man," and saying, "Get back and defend. Next time, don't step in; hold your position until he makes a move. Force him out to the sideline. You don't want to give him the option to shoot." As you can see, the second response – the one telling you to get back and defend – is an example of feedback. Your coach is focusing on the task and giving you instructions for what to do differently next time. This demonstrates that feedback helps you learn.

How to Effectively Respond to Feedback

Feedback is beneficial to your growth as an athlete if you know how to receive it. Receiving feedback includes listening and paying attention to feedback and then applying it to your performance. In doing so, you are able to challenge yourself to develop your skills and work toward improvement. But, this is only possible if you respond effectively to feedback.

Effective responses include:

- Listening
- Asking questions
- Putting the feedback into action in order to learn from it

These responses allow you to evaluate your own performance, notice your strengths and areas for improvement, and make plans to develop your skills based on applying the feedback.

Ineffective responses to feedback include:

- Making excuses
- Taking your coach's comments personally by either getting upset or mad, or talking back to your coach

If you do not listen to or simply disregard your coach's feedback, room for improvement is limited. If you respond this way, both your relationship with your coach and your own performance is likely to be negatively impacted.

When your coach gives you feedback, acknowledge it as a challenge and as a learning opportunity. For example, in soccer, perhaps your coach notices that every time you shoot the ball, it goes over the goal. Your coach might instruct you to keep your head down when striking the ball. To help you improve, view this as a challenge – it is up to you to accept it. To accept it, you could come to practice twenty minutes early so that you have access to an open goal. Take the time to practice your shooting technique, being mindful of your coach's feedback. This deliberate practice could help you make progress improving your shot. The extra effort is an effective response to receiving feedback because you accepted the challenge and applied it to your training. It also demonstrates to your coach that you respect his/her feedback and have the desire to improve.

How to Handle Criticism

If you feel like your coach is criticizing you rather than challenging you, bring it to his/her attention. Find a time when you can talk with your coach before or after a training session. Respectfully explain that you would like to improve but you are having trouble understanding what to do. Be calm and specific when communicating with your coach so that he/she listens to and understands what you are saying. Ask your coach for instructions on how to improve. Ask what you could practice at home and in training that would help your performance in a game.

While this conversation might help your coach realize that he/she needs to be clearer with his/her feedback to you, you cannot control how your coach chooses to talk to you. But, you can control how you choose to respond to your coach. If you have already asked for clarification and explained what you need, and your coach still criticizes you, your next step is to learn how to filter your coach's feedback and criticism. Doing this can help you remain focused in the moment and motivated to keep improving, which will help your overall performance.

Identify what helps you and what does not. Then, pay attention only to the information that helps you and use that to improve your performance. After you identify criticism, filter it out by saying a phrase like, "Let it go" or "Focus on the next play" so that you can stay focused on the present moment as you play.

To try to handle criticism in between sessions and games, objectively evaluate your performance and reflect on your strengths and weaknesses after you play. You can use this evaluation to help you plan what you want to focus on

in upcoming sessions. In spite of not getting helpful feedback from your coach, this objective evaluation can also help you maintain your motivation to keep working hard to improve by reminding you of what you are doing well and helping you identify new goals to focus on.

Remember, feedback provides specific information about the task and challenges you to get better, while criticism targets you personally and does not provide information about how to improve. As an athlete, make an effort to receive and apply your coach's feedback, and to filter out the criticism, to help you grow as an athlete and develop your skills.