

'SILENCE IS GOLDEN'

THE MOST OVERLOOKED COACHING BEHAVIOUR?

"Never miss a good chance to shut up!" Will Rodgers

If I am not doing something I am not coaching?

As coaches all we want to do is help our learners develop, we have so many ideas we want to share, so much knowledge we want to impart and so little time to do it. We get on the water with our learners and away we go, the more things I can get across to my learners the better they will become, I can't help myself I just want to give them as much as possible. I don't want to waste any of the valuable coaching time with them. Surely if I am sat doing nothing it is a loss of some of that valuable learning time, I'd better coach them some more.

The above sentiments are familiar to us all, the question is are we really helping our learner by giving so much? Are we giving them enough time and space to actually develop?



"Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn."
Benjamin Franklin

Involving the learner

For a learner to be involved they need time and space to think and question, they need time and space to reflect and they need time and space to work things out. As a coach we need to create this time and space, and from this support their thinking, questioning, reflecting and practice. It may come as a surprise but the Mad Hatter from Alice in Wonderland can provide us coaches with a valuable insight on how to do this:

"I don't think....." then you shouldn't talk said the Hatter.

Whenever we are talking as a coach then it is impossible for the learner to think; if they are not thinking they are not reflecting, questioning or working things out, all they are doing is listening. One of the best thing we can do as a coach to allow our learners to be fully involved in the learning process is simple – shut up!

The most successful coaches are silent

Silence has long been identified as a key coaching behaviour (Lacy & Darst, 1984), but it has been a surprise to many just how important it is. Through research of more and less successful coaches it was clearly identified that less successful coaches 'instruct' more and successful coaches are silent more; 25% of their time was spent being silent (Claxton, 1998). In a further study of top level golf coaches it was identified that of all coaching behaviours, silence was used most (43%).



How do I be 'successfully silent'?

The key thing is that the silence must be 'on task', that is as a coach you are monitoring what is going on and maintaining eye contact to show involvement. This accepted here are a few ways we can successfully shut up!':

- Set practices and wait for the learner to come to you, letting them practice in silence for as long as they want.
- Set practices and questions that allow learners to work things out, comparing and contrasting differing options, wait for them to come to you with answers/questions.
- Allow yourself plenty of silent time, this allows you to think (remember the Hatter!). Use this time for observation, planning, reflection and working things out.
- Question as opposed to tell, then wait in silence listening to the answer.
- When asking questions allow silent thinking time, try not to jump in with the answer too soon.
- Be efficient with your words, say what you want to say clearly and concisely. Waffle just eats into silence!
- Create a 'practice zone' and a 'feedback/talk zone'. Allow the learners to choose which zone they want to spend most time in.
- Encourage learners to reflect on what they have done and then come to you with their feedback on what they have learnt, as opposed to you always giving/telling them feedback.

Conclusion

As a coach then often the less you do the more they learn – if it is structured in the right way! Silence is critical in this, if the learners don't get it then they can't involve themselves in their learning. So next time on the water coaching monitor how much time you are silent and how much time instructing – remember what the Mad Hatter has taught us and never forget, 'silence is golden'.

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