

TOPIC OF THE MONTH FOR APRIL 2010

SECRETS FOR BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Confidence is defined as: (1) trust or reliance, (2) a state of feeling sure, or (3) those concepts or skills in which the individual places faith. The word "confidence stresses faith in oneself and in one's powers but it does not, usually, imply conceit." Synonyms for confidence are assurance, belief, self-possession, sureness, poise, trust, certainty, security, and positiveness. Athletes of all ages, sizes, and abilities can develop confidence. Learning how to rely on oneself is one of the primary reasons for participating in athletics.

No one can "give" another person confidence. Confidence can be nurtured by creating an environment in which the non-confident person experiences positive interactions and sets and achieves realistic goals. One key ingredient is control of that personal environment. If any person is constantly subjected to demanding circumstances over which others have control, self-esteem erodes. Supervisors, parents, coaches, significant others, teachers, and siblings can, either intentionally or inadvertently, create situations that leave an individual feeling helpless and unable to please anyone. These people do not "give" lack of confidence, but the individual draws that conclusion after experiencing repeated failures to meet perceived expectations.

Keep in mind the following generalizations when analyzing personal levels of confidence in specific athletics skills.

- * Self-doubt arises from negative self-talk about personal capacity to perform.
 - "I wonder if I can make that field goal/punt snap/on-side kick-off/fake punt. This is different from practice."
 - "I missed the last time. What if that happens again?"
 - "I'm afraid to make a mistake in front of my teammates."
 - "If I make a mistake, the team/fans/coaches will blame me."
 - "I don't have enough game experience to work under this pressure. I'll probably blow it."
 - "I haven't had a good week at practice. How can I perform better in a game?"
 - "Coach won't use me again if I fail to make this play work."
 - "Why didn't coach trust me to kick/punt on fourth down?"

- * Focusing on how well (or poorly) others perform their jobs prevents the athlete from paying attention to the details needed for personal skill control.
 - Placekickers who watch the holder cannot make the hold better or faster, but they will lose focus on their plant spot and will slow the timing of the play.
 - Snappers who watch the football arrive at the holder will be unable to secure the line of scrimmage and may allow kicks to be blocked.

- * Unrealistic standards for self-judgment conflict with truths the athlete learns from practice.
 - Doing one's best is not the same as being the best. In a team sport, the individual who performs up to the level exhibited at practice meets team needs. Trying to outshine other players is inappropriate. Defining one's level of success by comparison to other players' performance statistics is a poor grading scale.
 - Goals which depend on the actions of others often lead to false evaluation of skill mastery. Redefine goals to include only the factors over which the individual athlete has control. (Instead of seeking 100% in field goal completions, which involves snaps and holds and field surfaces and weather conditions, set a goal to have perfect balance on each opportunity. This goal focuses the athlete on the process, not on the result, and eliminates factors beyond the athlete's control.)
 - Do not assume responsibility or guilt for things that happen over which you have no control.

- * Anticipating or fearing comments from the coaches focuses the athlete on the coaches and not on maintaining personal control of skills. Fearing failure will produce failure.

- * The overall value of the athlete as a person does not diminish, regardless of the outcome of the athletic event.

Confidence is developed from a variety of activities. Like science experiments, interactions which produce predictable and routinely positive results lead an individual to assume comfort and some degree of mastery. This is why coaches insist on practicing skills repeatedly (called circuit training), assuming that familiarity will lead to execution during competitions. A vaccination is an injection of a weak strain of a disease, forcing the body to produce antibodies strong enough to fight off contact with the real disease. To "vaccinate" oneself for confidence development, an individual could try some of the following:

1. Formulate affirmative statements which counteract negative self-talk thoughts. Practice saying or thinking them each morning or evening and during athletics practices and games. Whenever negative thoughts arise, acknowledge them, then reprogram what you are telling yourself. People are not born doubting themselves; this is a learned behavior. To counteract this condition, the individual affirms value as a person, away from sports, then identifies position-specific competencies already mastered in each sport. Focus on positive thoughts will enable focus on personal productivity.
"I don't need anyone's permission to be good."
"I am well-trained and competent to play this position."
"I trust my body and its movements."
"I am ready whenever the team needs me. I will stay alert and focused when I am not on the field."
"I am relaxed and ready for the play to start."
"I control balance on my plant step by focusing fully on sticking the landing on my plant spot."
"When I focus on the process, I get the results I want."
"I have practiced many repetitions successfully. I expect success on the first repetition."
"I am capable of achieving the goals that I set for myself. They include details under my control."
2. Increase self-esteem through successful completion of ordinary non-athletic activities. Make a point of telling yourself how well you are doing. Save these "success" feelings for reference at times when doubt arises.
 - a. Volunteer for a day at a club, organization, or church.
 - b. Help someone else complete a homework assignment.
 - c. Make a new friendship with someone not involved in athletics.
 - d. Speak knowledgeably about a favorite topic.
 - e. Remind yourself of all the people who trust you, for a variety of reasons.
3. Analyze and document your "typical" athletic product under a variety of weather and field conditions. Anticipate meeting these standards on each repetition. Just like signing your name or combing your hair, these processes will become automatic. Remember, when the process is automatic, each repetition has an equal likelihood of success.
 - a. With a stopwatch, record handle times, hang times, snap times, get-off times.
 - b. With field charts, document degree of accuracy.
 - c. With a camera, observe personal balance, swing path, or ball trajectory by comparison to stationary objects.

4. Write down realistic expectations you have for your own athletic performance. Write down the expectations that others have for you. Include parents, siblings, other family members, significant other, coaches, close friends, the team, and supervisors or employers. Compare how these concepts fit your expectations for yourself.
5. Reward yourself for achieving academic, personal, and athletic goals. A reward could be a piece of chewing gum, a glass of juice, ten minutes of text messaging, relaxing to listen to a favorite song, or sharing your success with a trusted friend or relative. Focus on these accomplishments, instead of on the areas still needing improvement.
6. Each time you practice personal skills (serving in tennis, shooting free throws in basketball, kicking in football), after stretching and warming up, expect a "typical product" on the first repetition. Rather than multiple repetitions from one place, perform one repetition each from multiple places, continuing to expect a positive outcome.
7. Tolerate some fluctuation in day-to-day performance. It is normal to have ups and downs in concentration. No one reaches a personal best every day. When you lose focus, you do not lose the capacity to perform well or to remember the conditions that lead to control. Those "settings" are still within you. If you have once achieved a level of success, you can do it again. Identify contributing circumstances.
 - a. Project confidence even when some underlying factors are temporarily not under control.
 - b. When one activity is not up to your standards, focus on other areas of strength or mastery.
 - c. Remember how you feel when people praise your efforts.

RESOURCES

- Kauss, David R. Mastering Your Inner Game. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2001. ISBN 0-7360-0176-X
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- Orlick, Terry. In Pursuit of Excellence. 4th ed. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2008. ISBN 0-7360-6757-4
- Porter, Kay, and Foster, Judy. The Mental Athlete: Inner Training for Peak Performance. New York: Ballantine Books, 1986. ISBN 0-345-34174-0