



BTS Corner is a bimonthly contribution from Cathy Spencer-Browning, National Training and Program Director for Body Training Systems® (BTS).

In the last installment, we explored some techniques for becoming a more effective coach in relation to the Five Key Elements of Awesome Instruction (...oops, I mean coaching!). Part One covered the key elements of Pre-choreography and Physical Execution. In Part Two, we will explore Instruction, Performance and Communication.

Instruction

Instruction means creating successful participants by delivering the “who, what, when, where, how and why” based on participants’ needs. Coaching, on the other hand, means knowing what to say and when to say it in order to improve performance. Coaches never sound redundant, nor do they say things for the sake of saying them. They thoughtfully approach their classes with the participants’ focus in mind. Great coaches constantly question their instruction. For example, you might ask yourself, “Does this work? Does this resonate with them? Do I get the response that I want? Are they listening? Do they care about what I have to say?”

Remember, coaching is teaching with feedback. Coaches deliver their cues, watch to see if changes occur and are flexible enough to change their strategy, if necessary. As a coach, you must be aware of the fact that while some elements might be important or interesting to you, these elements might not necessarily be important to your participants.

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Positive language is an immeasurable tool for coaching. Therefore, coach by using positive statements, rather than forcing participants to process the negative before changing it into a positive. To better understand this statement, let us first examine the effects of negative language. If I were to ask you NOT to think of a blue elephant, then you probably would not be able to stop thinking about a blue elephant.

Instead of saying, “Don’t go below the knees,” say, “Stay above the knees.” Rather than saying, “Don’t lock your elbows,” say, “Keep your elbows soft.” It is amazing how much the tone of your whole class will change by being positive. Try this experiment during your next class.

Performance

You might wonder what performance has to do with coaching. A coach inspires, energizes and facilitates improved performance. Simply put, a coach’s goal is to encourage people to put forth greater effort, enthusiasm and more vigorous activity.

It is important to stay true to this goal when considering performance. Some of you might have heard me use the phrase “cheesy cabaret,” which is any type of performance that detracts from the objective and authenticity of the class. For example, during a cheesy cabaret performance, the instructor might use props or costumes. This type of entertainment, or “exertainment,” might embarrass, inhibit or negatively affect an individual’s performance.

While one participant might enjoy a “karaoke” style of BODYCOMBAT®, others might dread such a performance because they just want to accomplish the program objectives to work hard and sweat. While one participant might find humor in costumes and props, a more serious participant coming straight to the gym after a hard workday might not want this experience. Once again, be cognizant of your audience’s needs.

Communication

The final key element is communication, which means establishing an authentic connection with your participants. Coaches must communicate in such a way that builds confidence, trust and rapport. Communication is not something that you choose to do. Rather, you are always communicating something. Consider some of the subtle messages you can send through your actions alone:

Positive messages:

- Being well-prepared communicates that you care for and respect your class; it instills trust and confidence.
- Personalizing the class in some way communicates that you are there for that particular audience at that particular time.
- Getting to class early shows that you are present for your participants and open to them.
- Asking them when they would like to change class material demonstrates that you care about their opinions.

Negative messages:

- Being ill-prepared communicates that you are unprofessional and do not care about your participants’ experiences.
- Teaching the same material even if your participants are tired of it communicates a lack of consideration for their experience.

Next time you teach, think about what you might be communicating through your actions. Are you 110% present for your participants? Do you notice the details during the experience? If not, ask yourself what you can do to become more present.

Summary of Parts One and Two

In order to become an effective coach, you must practice pre-choreography, physical execution, instruction, performance and communication. As discussed in the first installment, one means of evaluating and improving upon your skills is to periodically videotape and assess yourself. While watching your video, critique yourself according to these five key elements of coaching. Continual improvement takes time and effort, an investment from which both you and your participants will benefit.



As the National Training and Program Director for BTS, Cathy is responsible for the development and organization of training, programming, continuing education and management systems. Cathy also served on the ACE Faculty Advisory Board and was recipient of Australia’s 2001 Fitness Professional of the Year Award and Can-Fit-Pro’s 2002 Specialty Presenter of the Year Award.

