

# GENERAL COACHING STRATEGIES

## Intrapersonal / Interpersonal Awareness

Continuously monitor your own levels of energy, focus, enthusiasm and other personal factors which have a direct impact on your interactions with students, their engagement, participation and the overall class environment (e.g. tonality, expression, rate of speech, intent behind your messaging and congruence with your body language).

## Getting Students to Follow Directions

- **Use least invasive form of intervention**

*Nonverbal correction:* Gesture to or establish eye contact with, off-task students while doing something else, preferably when instructing or supervising others e.g. You might gesture to a student to sit-up and lean forward when their energy starts to dwindle.

*Positive group correction:* Make a quick verbal reminder to the whole group about what each student should be doing (not what they shouldn't be doing).

*Private individual correction:* When necessary, correct privately and quietly. Example: "John, I've instructed everyone to keep their eyes on the screen, and I need to see you doing it too."

*Consequence:* If a situation cannot be addressed quickly and successfully without a consequence, the consequence must be given so that instruction is not interrupted.

- **Rely on firm and calm finesse**

*Catch it early:* Effective coaches catch off-task behaviours early, as eyes or hands begin to wander and before students have locked onto and begun to engage with a distraction.

"Thank you" is the strongest phrase: Saying "thank you" with your instruction, sets the expectation that the appropriate action will occur. Again after a student has done what you asked, not only underscores civility but emphasises to the class that the particular student did what you asked. This normalises compliance and makes you seem calm, civil, and in control.

- **Emphasise compliance you can see** – Find ways to make it easier to see who's followed your directions by asking students to do things that you can see. When you ask for compliance, make sure to look for it and be seen looking for it.

## Clarifying Instructions and Directions

- **Specific** – Effective directions are specific. They focus on manageable and precisely described actions that students can take. Instead of advising a student to pay attention, for example, you might advise them to lean forward and keep their finger close to or just above the response button.
- **Concrete** – Effective directions are not just specific but involve clear, actionable tasks that any student knows how to do. If you tell your student to pay attention, they may or may not know how to do that, but if you tell them to lean forward and keep their finger close to or just above the response button, no student can misunderstand or not know how to do that.
- **Sequential** – Since a complex skill like paying attention is rarely a single, specific action, effective directions should describe a sequence of concrete, specific actions. In the case of a student required to pay attention, you may advise them to lean forward, keep their finger close to or just above the response button, using their eyes to quickly scan across the screen, and call out all the targets that they see.
- **Observable** – It is important to describe observable actions. By asking them to do things that you could plainly see them do. *This is critical.* The observational component of your directions leaves them with very little wiggle room in terms of their accountability.

## Normalise Error

- Error followed by **correction and instruction** is the fundamental process of learning. You get it wrong and then you get it right. If getting it wrong and then getting it right is normal, teachers should normalise error and respond to both parts of this sequence, as if they were completely normal.
- **Don't use errors or mistakes to demean** as this creates an environment of caution and unwillingness to try. *Failure is normal and not an indicator of a lack of a skill.*
- **Don't flatter or fuss over the right answer.** Champion coaches show their students they expect both right and wrong to happen by not making too big a deal of either. Of course, there will be times when you want to sprinkle in stronger praise ("Such an insightful answer, Carla. Well done!"). Just do so carefully so that such praise isn't diluted by overuse.
- Encourage people to **challenge** themselves and push beyond their performance plateaus by taking calculated risks in practice.
- **Don't minimize or ignore errors**, or they will become too ingrained and people won't learn from them.
- Help performers **identify their own errors** so that they can improve them independently.

## Praise the Work

- **Normalise effective praise** that encourages good practice and efforts of actions.
- Praise effort, diligence and behaviour, not traits or achievements.
- Positive actions can be praised publically, if you need to be critical do so quietly.
- Make sure it's **genuine**, so as to not undermine your intent.
- Be as **specific** as possible and focus on exactly the behaviour/s and action that you would like to see more of.

## Shorten the Feedback-loop

- **Speed is critical** – In behavioural change, it's clear that speed of consequence beats strength of consequence every time. If you want to change behaviour and changing behaviour *strategically* and *intentionally* for the better, which is what practice is—then shorten the feedback loop. Give participants feedback *immediately* where possible. This will improve performance much faster than giving more extensive feedback later on.
- **Make sure feedback has been understood** – Get the students to summarise feedback and/or ask them to prioritise the key steps, so that they can be implemented correctly.
- **Give small but most important feedback** – Telling a student that they are doing 6 things incorrectly, is both overwhelming and very hard to act upon. Choose 1 or 2 things that will have the *greatest impact on performance*, if corrected.

## Describe and Model

- Explain in simple and clear terms your objective or actions to be followed and demonstrate these to students so that the actions are observable and replicable. Once shown, be sure to see it being implemented and done frequently and correctly, correct if necessary.
- When describing and modelling use the following sequence of actions:
  - ✓ Show and demonstrate behaviour **without a verbal description** to help learners replicate what is to be done and to avoid distraction.
  - ✓ Demonstrate again supplementing this **with a verbal description** to ensure learners can flexibly apply what is to be learnt.
  - ✓ Check back – ask students to **explain in their own words** what it is to be done and physically show that they have listened and clearly understood your instructions.

## Coach from Simple to Complex

- Break down the task or a skill you're teaching to **bite sized chunks** and practice it in the simplest form. *Progress only when the student is ready.*
- Initially engage students to think about the task or training in a **concrete way** (i.e. what they did) and then push them to think more deeply and broadly about real life implications for using that ability (i.e. how do these abilities help at school, sports game, etc). This will embed the importance and hopefully increase enthusiasm and motivation for training. This is best done at the end of the training session for a few minutes, and if students get stuck give them a relevant example to kick start the discussion.
- Engagement can be improved by getting students to answer questions (that most should know the answer to) in order to build energy and positivity (e.g. Coach: what ability did you train just then, Student: visual spatial memory, Coach: and what is visual spatial memory, Student: prioritising between tasks quickly and accurately).