

Ten top tips for motivating your team

Mike Bassett's hapless comedy rants are the stuff of legend, and yet even more notorious and considerably less funny is the legend of Sir Alex Ferguson's 'hairdryer' treatment. Behind both lies a common aim: how to motivate your team to perform at their best when it counts.

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At the University of Worcester, our Sports Coaching Science lecturers are constantly researching how best to make a team tick. With the increasing use of coaching in business and the work place, motivating your team is as much a part of the board room as it is the dressing room these days.

Whether you're an individual athlete, part of a team, or looking for inspiration at work, University of Worcester [Sports Coaching Science](#) expert [Julia West](#) has come up with 10 top tips that should help you pick things up a level, without having to pay for a motivational speaker to serenade you with Tina Turner's 'You're Simply The Best'.

1. Be enthusiastic

As a coach it's vital to be enthusiastic and energised when working with your team. After all, how can you expect them to warm to the task if you are down-beat? It's important to get this balance right though. Any self respecting player will sense immediately if you're faking it, and they'll probably laugh at you behind your back if you go too far and stray in to David Brent territory.

2. Sessions should be challenging, not just fun

Enjoyment is important, but training for maximum performance is about adaptation. If you want to go further than before, you'll have to challenge yourself to do more than before. That's progression, and responding to challenge is the only way your team can prepare themselves for the heat of fierce competition. Besides which, if your team are the right kinds of competitive animals, they'll find this challenge stimulating and respond to it positively, because good teams hate coasting.

3. Time to play and develop uninterrupted



As coaches, we all like to step in and give feedback. It's important, but no matter how sophisticated our coaching models are, they'll never cater for every individual out there. That's why it's important to build in time for players to develop their own approaches and find their own way. Sporting history is littered with greats whose unorthodoxy held the key to their success.

4. Vary your warm-ups

No one likes warmups, they're just a necessary evil, the egg mayo sandwiches you had to eat as a kid before you were allowed some cake. But they are important. If you vary your warmups, running different routines from session to session, your players will stay alert - arriving at the business part of training ready to go, rather than half asleep having just spent ten minutes going through the motions. You'll know you've got it right when your players turn up on time!

5. Get to know your players



It's important to understand each individual in your team, what drives them, what their goals are, and what they want to work on. Take the extra time to find this out, and even to keep a record of it so you don't lose track and get confused. This kind of attention to detail can make all the difference.

6. Set goals, but focus on how to get there

Goals and targets are important, and you can't do much better than aiming to win, but if you focus entirely on winning, you will wear yourself out and crush your player's souls in the long term. Instead, encourage each player to choose individual goals, things they want to work on both in training and in matches. As a coach, you can help by providing the opportunity for them to work towards their goals, and to ensure they're not just choosing things they are already good at. It is too easy for players to set goals in areas they are already strong, but it's also too easy for the coach to set all the goals. This way, everyone moves closer to the goal of winning, but without so much stress. A good question for players is 'what do you want to achieve today?' After all, without a specific aim, what's the point in training? And if your players have more ownership, you might find you have to shout a bit less!

7. Learn when to put the stick down and break out the carrots

Some sports are legendary for coaches who launch in to their players - on the training pitch and in the changing room - with all the ferocity of a honey badger taking down a lion. This is a high octane approach that can yield immediate and sizeable gains, and the stick has its place, but its a high risk, time limited strategy. Over time your players will switch off if you are always hounding them. It will also grind them down emotionally, and they'll really seriously start to dislike you, which means they might stop trusting you. Long term, it's not sustainable to draw on solely negative emotions and fear as your source of fuel. Make sure you find the right balance between stick and carrot, and don't forget, players are competitive, they naturally want to get better. If you can't harness this drive without throwing cups around, maybe there is a flaw in your approach.

8. Promote independence in your players

Coaching is hard. The temptation to jump in again and again is strong. You are only trying to help, but maybe you are too big a presence in your player's minds, too loud a voice? Helping your players to know their own job, make their own calls, and to trust that their team mates are able to do the same, will create a strong and flexible unit that can respond to pressure. "Once they cross that white line, there's little I can do" is an oft' heard coaching cliché, and yet it doesn't stop many managers from leaping around on the touchline like maniacs. Hard though it is to imagine, sometimes players don't need our help!



9. Be selective with praise

Only praise performance that is really good, not just blanket generic praise. Your players will soon switch off and stop listening if you are constantly throwing out false positives and bland catch-all clichéd praise. Make sure you have gears to go through, from sincerely annoyed to positively enthused, so your players know, whatever your feedback, they can trust you to mean what you say.

10. Cliffhangers are for TV, not training

Let your players know what they'll be doing next time they turn up for training, and try and make sure it sounds like something that's worth getting out of bed for. It helps form continuity between sessions, but it also gives them time to reflect and prepare for the next challenge. If the next session is something you suspect they won't be so keen on, like fitness testing, don't hide it from them, but find a way to make it more positive.



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