

PHE Manitoba MTS PD Day

Oct 20, 2023

Session S-21: Fitness Coaching Fundamentals (45 minutes)

Presenter: Jethro Bartelings

This session is focused on how we deliver our message as fitness coaches/ PHE teachers when it comes to the context of delivering workouts or teaching fitness skills. These principles translate into other contexts as well but this session will specifically delve into their application in the realm of fitness.

The goal of this session will be to help you communicate clearly.

Delivery

Once you have created your workout, keeping in mind the context and the logistics, you've got your hardest job yet still in front of you - explaining it to your students.

The "best workout" doesn't have a chance if you can't communicate it to your students clearly and communicate *through* the workout clearly.

'Put people in rows, not circles.' (#10)

- Basic but important: set yourself up in a position where you can actually start to deliver your message effectively
- Rule #1 is 'Do no harm'. I need my students to get a clear message so they can train safely and effectively
- Having students in a circle around you means that only some of them get to see what you want them to see and requires you to re-demonstrate things
- There will also be half the class who won't be able to catch all you are saying
- Get them sitting in rows in such a way that you are always in control of what they see
- I have found that even if it takes a few more seconds to get students to gather and sit down, the level of attention you get saves you countless minutes of re-instruction throughout the workout

'Give great demonstrations' (#7)

- The most eloquent explanation will not replace a clean demonstration
- You want to give them the ideal to replicate
- If you are in a rush and give a sloppy demonstration, that's the last example in your students' minds of how the 'expert' - you - does it → you've given them permission to be sloppy
- When students get to see what you want, they will be more inclined to replicate it as best they can → even do this for exercises you know that they know - 5 reps of impeccable bodyweight squats won't cost you much time and will reinforce what they know
- Your words should add to your demonstration and highlight what you are showing them
- If you can't demo for some reason (perhaps injury), recruit a skilled student or show a video → or consider whether this is exercise a realistic expectation for you to have for your students - you don't have to be the strongest but the basic movement should be something you can do
- Regardless of how many times they've done an exercise, I highly encourage you to take a moment to demo it- even if it's brief

'Do this. Not this. This.' (#9)

- The coaching sandwich
 - Demo how to do the exercise properly (*Do this*)
 - Show them common faults you want them to not do (*Not this*)
 - Finish with another good demo emphasizing the major teaching points (*This*)
- Don't finish with a bad demo or with a 'Not this'. Students are more likely to remember and replicate what they saw last
- Squat example

'Use the PAF cue. Position. Action. Feel.' (#13)

- Cue the *Position* you want them to start in, including of the weight if they have one
- Cue the *Action* of the movement.
- Cue where they should *Feel* it.
- **PAF gives students more awareness of what they are doing and accomplishing**
- Squat example

Keep it short and sweet (#14: 'You've got 20 seconds: Say, show, let them do')

- Students want to get moving - not a lecture.
- Avoid information overload. If they have more questions, they can ask.
- **Pare down to what you believe are the essentials needed for getting started with the movement → what are they KEY keys to executing it reasonably**

- You still have opportunities to communicate to them once they start working out - we'll get to that!
- Example. The Squat: Feet hip width-ish, chest proud, keep knees in line with your feet as you pull yourself down
- PRACTICE how you will teach an exercise- this will help you to be concise

NOTE: This might feel like a lot to think about, so just start with one of the recommendations from above. Get practice with it then incorporate the next until you're doing them all. It takes time!

In the Action

Once you've demonstrated and explained the workout, you've only completed half of the coaching task. It's not a matter of 'press play and sit back'. It's time to contribute to their experience and enhance it.

Coaching involves being a constant presence for support and feedback. You are now the hype-person and course-corrector.

Intentional Contact Time (#13: 'The power of three- Three times a workout, athletes should be touched (appropriately), hear their names and be given praise.')

- Throughout the workout, students should hear their name, receive praise, and perhaps even receive appropriate physical contact - big asterisk on that one!

Names & Praise

- Feeling seen and being affirmed are powerful motivators → we know many students are not self-motivated
- Although intrinsic motivation is the most powerful, it sometimes needs to start with something extrinsic
- Although some students shy away from attention, simply walking by a student and letting them know they are doing a great job with XYZ may be a start to them receiving attention in a positive way
- From a performance standpoint, the praise helps reinforce what they are doing correctly to help it stick
- NOTE: Be **specific** with your praise. 'Good job', though well-intended, can come across as incredibly disingenuous and may leave someone being brushed off rather than seen. I catch myself still sometimes doing this, so I make sure to follow up the "Good job" with something
 - "Good job... keeping that kettlebell close on that rep!" (That was a close one! Whew!)
- So there is both the **personal** and **performance** benefits of praise

Touch

- Before we talk about touch, we have to emphasize that it must be appropriate and also done with consent → we need to recognize that there are students who will not be comfortable with any touch for many reasons
- That said, touch has a great deal of power when it comes to giving feedback and helping them build body awareness
 - Example. A student may be performing an overhead press and I ask, “Is it okay if I put my hand on your shoulder blade?” If they consent, I might help guide the glide of their shoulder up and down for a rep or two while I verbally explain what they should do. If they express that they don’t want me to, I need to be prepared to provide the best verbal cue I can.
- Completely understandable if YOU aren’t comfortable with physical touch. In this case, you might use something in your hand
 - Example. Using a yoga block to touch between shoulder blades or for knees to touch when deadlifting
- Touch may also be as simple as being available for fist bumps or high fives for those who want it because along with being helpful from a cueing perspective it may also be a way to connect with students in a positive way.

‘Use external instead of internal cues.’ (#15)

- You may have done a great job with the demo but there are always going to be students who need a bit more → that’s where good cueing can help
- (External cues: a cue that directs the students’ attention away from the body)
- (Internal cues: a cue that directs the students’ attention to parts of the body and how they move)
- **External cue focus more on the outcome of the movement in relation to the environment**
 - Push the floor away from you (on a push up)
 - Jump and try to touch the ceiling (vert test)
 - Stand proud like you just won an award (posture for carries)
 - Try to snap the kettlebell handle in half
- **Contrast this to Internal cues which focus on the outcome of a movement in relation to the students’ understanding of anatomical terminology and personal physical awareness**
 - Depress your scapula as you extend your arm
 - Supinate the wrist as you flex your arm
 - Engage your lats
 - Externally rotate your hip
- **Saying ‘break the handle of the kettlebell’ can replace, ‘depress and retract your shoulders as you contract your lats’**

- For example, someone might say “engage your core” and students aren’t sure what that means. “What does she mean by ‘engage?’” “How do I engage?” Instead, you might use language like, “exhale with a big sigh” after which you might add “stiffen your midsection as though you’re about to get punched in the belly”. This gives them an actual feeling to start with that they might be able to connect to. The trick is finding the expressions that work best for your students.
- This isn’t a hard and fast rule as there are times when someone may benefit from an internal cue if:
 - They are very kinesthetically aware of their body
 - Enjoy using terminology
 - It pertains to the anatomy unit you did and you want to connect back to that knowledge
- However, external cues are found to be much more successful than internal cues as a whole
- **Keep in mind, that a cue that works for one student may not work for another**
 - Example: Deadlift - ‘push the door closed with your butt’ vs. ‘there’s glue on your butt and a \$100 bill on the wall behind you. Get it!’
- Constantly coming up with different ways to say the same thing - different cues - is going to help you and the students

‘Sometimes the best cue is no cue.’ (#11)

- This is one I have to constantly remind myself of because I’m a talker and I used to have it in my head that students should be able to do the technique correctly or even perfectly after my explanation
- The reality is that sometimes less is more
- **Let students perform the exercise after you’ve demonstrated it and try to figure it out themselves → it may take a set or two for them to figure it out**
- As long as the student won’t hurt themselves, they’re going to be okay → you have a responsibility here to have chosen appropriate exercises
- This doesn’t mean you don’t say anything- ever. It just means you don’t need to say something at the first sign of a technical ‘error’ and certainly not every rep.
- **With a large group you can even give a blanket cue that you know some need → for those who didn’t need it, it simply affirms what they are doing right**
 - You can also go to that single student who needed feedback if you think they can handle being singled out

'If you need to cue more than three times to correct, it's either too heavy, it's a mobility problem, or you're not communicating clearly.' (#28)

- Constant correction can be very discouraging → you may simply need an alternative for them

SIDE NOTE: 'Don't mow the lawn when the house is on fire' (#20)

- Don't ask your students go deeper in a push-up if they can't keep their hips from dropping
- In a squat, don't worry about how they hold the weight when they can't even keep their feet flat
- Basically, deal with the foundational things before worrying about having your students do the next cool move or start to increase the weight
- This connects to you having mindful exercise selection

'Body language' (#21: 'When coaching, never cross your arms, lean against the wall, stand over a client, put your hands in your pockets, turn your back or sit down.')

- This applies to regular life as much as it does to coaching
- If you give the impression that you aren't interested in what your students are doing, they won't be interested in doing it
- This connects back to 'Intentional Contact Time' but adds on the layer of what your body is saying
 - Example:
 - Leaning against the wall and watching from a distance says...?
 - Hovering over a student as they work says...?
 - Looking at your phone says...?
- Whether you are leading them in a workout, or they are doing their own, you are always on → both for engagement, teaching opportunities, and safety

BONUS: Stop trying to show how smart you are

- The students don't care how much you know, they want to know how much you care
- Try to connect fitness to the impact on their everyday life and personal goals
- For those of you who enjoy studying fitness, try to avoid over-sharing about all the nuances as this can start creating an intellectual distance between them and fitness as opposed to a personal connection
- Kids who want to know more will ask you

The Sources...

I learned many of these things in my time as a coach a gym called Fukumoto Fitness where I got consistent feedback on how I coached.

Overall, this presentation is based on the book:

'Coaching Rules: A- How-to Manual for a Successful Career in Strength and Fitness'

By Brendan Rearick