

Effective Coaching

Questioning Resource

A primary tool in an athlete-centred coaching approach is an ability to ask athletes meaningful questions. Questioning raises awareness of the athlete and encourages internal feedback. When the coach asks questions, athletes must find an answer, which in turn increases their awareness, knowledge and understanding of the purpose of particular skills or tactics in the context of competition. Questioning creates independent athletes, by providing them with a chance to take responsibility for their own interpretations and understandings and make decisions. Questioning creates athlete curiosity as long as the coach is non-judgemental. It is also an extremely powerful means to inspire in athletes, an intrinsic motivation to learn.

An athlete-centred coaching approach is ineffectual without a high level of questioning and clarifying to generate answers from the athletes. Athletes learn well and generate long-term learning, if they are given the opportunity to work out for themselves what to do and how to do it. Effective questions encourage attention to the task, thought and observation. The first question to the athlete to encourage these concepts will often be, 'What did you notice?' As part of athlete-centred coaching, a coach needs to learn to apply an effective questioning technique at training sessions, to enhance athlete learning.

Enhanced awareness, ownership and responsibility come from asking meaningful questions. When the coach poses questions and gives athletes an opportunity to solve a problem, the athletes will generally try hard to solve it. The solution they generate is theirs; thus they will take ownership of it and remember, understand and be able to apply the solution more effectively than if they were told what to do, when to do it and how to do it. Solving problems through coach questioning enables athletes to explore, discover, create and generally experiment with a variety of movement and tactical processes of a specific sport.

The key to effective questioning is the coaches' ability to listen to their athletes' responses, then redirect, prompt or probe for better or more complete answers. The better a coach understands his/her sport, the easier it is to delve in more deeply. However, in situations where the coach may have limited knowledge or understanding, good questioning can encourage both athlete and coach understanding because it enables the athlete to work it out for him/herself.

The following is a structured framework of important considerations in the questioning process, which serves as a guideline to help coaches ask meaningful questions.

Table 1: QUILT Framework for Questioning

Stage 1: Prepare the Question

- Identify the purpose
- Determine the content focus (according to athlete needs)
- Understand the cognitive, physical, social and emotional level of athletes
- Formulate the question for the athletes' level
- Use G.R.O.W. as a framework (explained below)

Stage 2: Present the Question

- Indicate how athletes can respond (e.g. not all shout out at once)
- Ask the question, then 'step back' and let athlete formulate answer
- Select athlete or athletes to answer

Stage 3: Encourage Athlete Responses

- Use wait time to determine whether to encourage responses
- Assist athlete(s) to respond (if necessary)
- Use athletes' cues to encourage responses

Stage 4: Process Athlete Responses

- Listen very carefully
- Pause following the athlete's response
- Provide appropriate feedback (according to athletes' responses)
- Expand responses
- Encourage athlete reactions and questions

Stage 5: Reflect on the Questioning Process

- Analyse questions asked
- Reflect on who and how athletes responded
- Evaluate athlete response patterns
- Examine coach and athlete reactions

(Adapted for coaches from Walsh, J.A., & Saties, B.D. (2005), *Quality questioning: Research-based practice to engage every learner*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage).

Stage 1: Prepare the Question

Formulating meaningful questions is a key element in establishing a great questioning environment. Planning the questions that might be used in the training session is a very important step, especially if questioning is a very new part of the coaching repertoire. Asking the 'right' question is crucial to athlete learning. The 'right' question depends on the needs of the athlete. The questions can be open or closed. Asking an open question like, "What did you notice?", then stepping back to listen is a powerful tool in creating athlete awareness and responsibility for learning. Indeed, once questions become a comfortable part of a coach's repertoire, he/she doesn't need to worry about preparing the actual question, because the process of asking questions will become easier with purposeful practice.

To plan meaningful, clear and coherent questions, an athlete-centred coach might use some of the following strategies:

- consider the nature of the content to be mastered and the athletes' readiness to contribute
- practise the questions for the next training session by writing them down
- ensure there is a variety of open and closed questions
- ensure there is a solution to work towards, where the questions planned lead systematically to a solution (please note that the solution should be owned by the athletes)
- formulate the questions appropriate to the athletes' level of learning, e.g.

*What flight angle will be most appropriate to get the ball through the goal post?' will not suit athletes of **Middle/Late Childhood**?*

*What is the primary significance of the interpretation of Marxism and how it relates to sport?, would not be a suitable question for **Early/Late Teenagers***

*How many points to you get when scoring a try?, would not be a suitable question for **Social/Competitive Adults**).*

- practise by reading the questions aloud.

*For **Middle/Late Childhood** athletes, fundamental motor skills are important to their future physical development. A goal at this age group is to explore movement, so questions should revolve around this exploration. For example, if athletes are learning to run, a question could be, 'Can you go faster?' The athletes then would practise and come up with a solution to run faster, according to their understanding. The next question could then be, 'What did you notice when you tried that?' The solutions would be limitless, e.g., move legs faster, use arms, etc. The next question should build on the words used from the response of the athlete. If he/she picked that his/her head is leaning forward, coaches go with that answer and say, 'OK focus on that head, and do it again'. In the end, the athlete is becoming aware of the lean of the head with no instruction from the coach. This is coaching.*

*For **Early/Late Teenage** athletes, learning more complex skills is important to their future physical development. A goal at this age group is to refine complex movement patterns and learn more advanced patterns. Questions should revolve around this goal. For example, if athletes are trying to look for an open player, questions could be, 'What do you see?' or 'What option could you take?' The athletes then would practise and come up with a solution, according to their understanding. The solutions would be limitless, e.g., 'I saw two defenders on my left', or perhaps 'I could pass it the right where there is no defender', etc. The next question should build on the words used by the athlete. If they picked that they saw two people on the left, coaches build on that answer and ask, 'What did you notice about those people?' In the end, the athlete is becoming aware of where the defenders were and what they were doing with no instruction from the coach. This is coaching.*

*For **Social Adult** athletes, maintaining fitness and social competition are important to their participation. Goals for this group are to learn some advanced patterns, but mostly to participate to have the social contact. All questions should revolve around these goals. For example, if athletes are trying to look for an open player, questions could be, 'What do you see?' or 'What option could you take?' The athletes then would practise and come up with a solution, according to their understanding. The solutions would be limitless, e.g., 'I saw two defenders on my left', or perhaps 'I could pass it the right where there is no defender', etc. The next question should build on the words used by the athlete. If they picked that they saw two people on the left, coaches build on that answer and ask, 'What did you notice about those people?' In the end, the athlete is becoming aware of where the defenders were and what they were doing with no instruction from the coach. This is coaching.*

For **Competitive Adult** athletes, refining technical and tactical skills are important to their future physical and cognitive development. Goals for this group are to learn advanced patterns and be able to analyse complex tactical patterns. Questions should revolve around these goals. For example, if athletes are trying to look for the best attacking option, a question could start: What do you see? What option could you take? The athletes then would practise and come up with an answer, according to their understanding. The solutions would be limitless, e.g., 'I saw two defenders on my left', or perhaps 'I could pass it the right where there is no defender', etc. The next question should build on the words used by the athlete. If they picked that they saw two people on the left, coaches build on that answer and ask, 'What did you notice about those people?' In the end, the athlete is becoming aware of the where the defenders were and what they were doing with no instruction from the coach. This is coaching.

The goals of effective questioning include actively involving athletes in the learning process, and enhancing their task mastery and conceptual understanding. Another goal is to promote both simple (closed) and complex (open) thinking. These two forms of thinking require different types of questions.

Closed Questions

When athletes need to remember specific ideas or concepts, simple or closed questions are appropriate. These questions serve as reminder cues that might be important to a learning sequence. Closed questions are often what? or where? questions asked during drills. Closed questions are factual, generally with only one possible answer.

Examples of closed questions used in coaching could be:

- How many points do you receive for a goal in lacrosse?
- What is the offside rule in rugby league?

Closed questions are sometimes easier for **Middle/Late Childhood** athletes because simplicity is the key at this development level.

At the **Early/Late Teenage** and **Social/Competitive** stages, athletes get limited benefit from closed questions, but on occasions they are necessary for athlete learning, or for checking athlete understanding.

Open Questions

Open questions require higher-level thinking processes. These questions challenge athletes to apply, analyse, synthesise (yes even for Middle/Late Childhood athletes), evaluate and create knowledge and understanding. Research indicates that coaches tend to use more closed than open questions.

For **Early/Late Teenage** and **Social/Competitive** athletes, open questions are beneficial for their understanding and awareness, both tactically and technically. Certainly, in some instances, a closed question is appropriate. However, coaches should strive to ask more open questions to extend athletes' opportunities to enhance their awareness, decision making and tactical problem solving.

For **Middle/Late Childhood** athletes understanding may not be as in-depth and complex, but athletes at this stage are still synthesising in relation to what they understand. Open questions are generally more appropriate for analysing tactics and complex skills. For Middle/Late Childhood athletes, it is advantageous for coaches to formulate the questions according to the athletes' developmental needs. Designing open questions and questioning sequences are more appropriate to encourage independent learning, where athletes are required to think in greater depth about subject matter or contexts that can have multiple answers. Examples of open questions in sport settings for Middle/Late Childhood athletes include:

- What do you notice when doing a handstand?
- How did that throw feel?
- What could you do to get the ball down the court quickly?
- In how many different ways can you balance on the balance beam?
- What could you do to help your team mate to get the ball down the field?

For **Early/Late Teenage** athletes, it is advantageous for coaches to create the questions according to the athletes' developmental needs. Designing open questions and questioning sequences are more appropriate when encouraging independent learning, where athletes are required to think in greater depth about the subject matter or context and can search for multiple answers. Examples of open questions in sport settings for Early/Late Teenage athletes include:

- When athlete performs any technique, 'What do you notice?'
- What could you do to get the ball down the court quickly?
- What are you trying to do?
- What does the pull through in freestyle do for power?
- What could you do to help defend the ball coming from the right?

For **Social Adult** athletes, it is advantageous for coaches to create the questions according to the athletes' motivational needs. Designing open questions and questioning sequences are more appropriate when encouraging independent learning, where athletes are required to think in greater depth about the subject matter or context and can search for multiple answers. Examples of open questions in sport settings for Social Adult athletes include:

- What could you do if there is no one on the wing?
- What is the best way to get the ball to the corner of the court?
- What could you do to help defend the ball coming from the right?
- When athlete performs any technique 'What do you notice?'

For **Competitive Adult** athletes, it is advantageous for coaches to create the questions according to the athletes' developmental needs. Designing open questions and questioning sequences are more appropriate when encouraging independent learning, where athletes are required to think in greater depth about the subject matter or context and can search for multiple answers. Examples of open questions in sport settings for Competitive Adult athletes include:

- What did you notice about the set up of the defence?
- What is the best way to get the ball to the corner of the court?
- What option(s) do you have on the centre pass?
- When athlete performs any technique 'What do you notice?'

GROW questioning framework (Whitmore, 2002) is a simple way for coaches to focus on the types of questions to ask.

- The first question would be related to the goal of the athlete, e.g. 'What are you trying to do?'
- R stands for the reality, e.g. 'Ok, what is happening now?'
- O stands for the options athletes (or coaches when mentoring), might have, e.g. 'What could you do?'
- W stands for the question, considering the options, 'What will you do?'

Technique Questioning

To help athletes to become aware of their technique, formulating questions helps provide them with purposeful feedback. Through this mechanism, coaches prompt athletes by asking awareness questions.

What? where? how far? or how much? questions are useful for athlete's technical awareness (e.g. 'What did you notice when you released the ball?', 'What did you feel when the hockey stick contacted the ball?', 'What do you notice when you balance?'). These types of questions help athletes become aware of their own body movements in executing a skill. If athletes are still unaware of what their bodies are doing, the coach can use 'shaping' questions. Listen to athletes' answers use their wording and explore further based on their understanding.

Next the athletes execute the technique using their knowledge and movement awareness. At this stage, the coach should allow the athletes to experience the technique several times before asking another question. The purpose of such sequences is to enable the athletes to become self-aware in using the technique and to take responsibility for making decisions. In this way, when they perform the technique in competition, athletes can understand how to perform it and when it feels right.

*Athletes from **all communities except Middle/late Childhood** could rate awareness answers e.g. from 1 to 10 (or some other scale). This is a great way for athletes to gain self-awareness of their movements.*

*Having **Middle/Late Childhood** athletes rate answers, e.g. from 1 to 10 (or some other scale), does not work so well. Cognitively they cannot process what the numbers mean in relation to what they are doing.*

Tactical Questioning

Questions that call for decision making and problem solving with respect to the strategies of the sport are tactical questions.

*At the **Middle/Late Childhood** stage of development, athletes have a limited understanding of adult tactics. However, they do have an implicit understanding of tactics as shown in the playground participating in games and activities. By asking athletes to make decisions and design game plans and the like, coaches will know the level of understanding athletes do have and will often be surprised at some of their innovation.*

*At the **Early/Late Teenage** stage of development, athletes are ready to focus on complex tactics. The complexity of athlete understanding is dependent on the level of the athlete, as in the Early/Late Teenage stage, athletes could be at the 'Learn' or 'Participate' stage of the SPARC Talent Development Framework, dependent on previous experience and coaching. By asking athletes to make decisions and design ways of implementing a game plan, coaches will know the level of understanding they do have and will often be surprised at some of athletes' innovation.*

*At the **Social Adult** stages of development, athletes can cope with complex tactics and skills. However, the complexity of athlete understanding is dependent on the level of the athlete. The Social Adult athletes are mostly at the 'Participate' stage of the SPARC Talent Development Framework, though this is dependent on previous experience and coaching. Some Social Adult athletes are still interesting in advancing to 'the Performance' stage of talent development, so coaches should be aware of who their athletes are and why they are there. Social Adult athletes will want involvement in game plans and competition goals and some will want significant ownership in this area.*

*At the **Competitive Adult** stages of development, athletes can cope with complex tactics and skills. However, the complexity of athlete understanding is dependent on the level of the athlete. The Competitive Adult athletes could be at the 'Participate' or 'Perform' stage of the SPARC Talent Development Framework depending on previous experience and coaching. For Competitive Adult athletes it is crucial that they have the ownership of the team/group performance through contributing to the tactical and game plan decision making. Coaches should use problem solving and/or questioning to encourage athletes to create their own game plans and advance their thinking about their own and, where applicable, their team's or group's tactical performance.*

To increase tactical awareness and decision making, coaches should use open questions that allow athletes to create and develop their ideas and explore areas of learning.

In an athlete-centred approach, coaches set up tactical situations as problem-solving exercises. They then ask how? and why? questions to solve tactical problems and enhance understanding. However, coaches should be careful about the potential threatening nature of how? and why? questions. Athletes often respond by thinking 'wasn't I supposed to do that?' or similar. They can become defensive and rationalise rather than learn from these types of questions.

Examples of some useful questions might be 'What would you do to ensure that the ball holder has someone to pass it to?' or 'How would you complete the last 100 metres of the race?' It is important for the athletes to perform the actual movement so they solve problems, seek solutions through practice and try various alternatives, and thus build a better understanding of variable situations, a goal of Teaching Games for Understanding.

Stage 2: Present the Question

Coaches need to choose the moment of athlete readiness to ask questions. The ability to pick this moment is considered a key aspect of effective coaching. There is no formula for the right time to ask questions. The answer is 'It depends'. It depends on fatigue, it depends on 'coachable moments', it depends on individual differences such as intrinsic motivation and it depends on whether the athlete is capable of solving the problem by himself or herself. A coach should read or analyse each situation to determine the athlete's need to solve a problem at that time and in that situation. Often coaches jump in because they feel like they are not doing anything and need to advise. More often 'well coached' athletes can determine their own mistakes and fix them because of their own decision-making ability and self-awareness. When an athlete makes a mistake and obviously knows it, there is nothing so

stressful as being reminded of it by some significant other. In the traditional coaching approach, coaches were expected to be doing all the talking.

All athletes are aware. Coaches should allow them to determine their own needs and have faith in their ability to solve problems. As Rene Deleplace (mentor to rugby coach Pierre Villepreux) says, 'There is no point in coaching unless the teaching you do helps the student to overtake you.'

The first strategy to present a question is to ensure that all athletes are quiet and listening and ready for the questioning sequence. To this end, a coach could get the athletes to make rules to encourage attention for example by asking the question, 'What do we need to do to make sure everyone hears?' The athletes will take responsibility of ensuring the rule is followed if they have ownership of the rule.

Once the coach has the attention of all athletes, everyone can hear the questions. The coach can then make appropriate eye contact, present the question and look for nonverbal signs of misunderstanding or excitement among the athletes. At this stage, the coach can begin the planned segment of the coaching session using questioning strategies.

Stage 3: Encourage Athlete Responses

Verbal Responses

One of the reasons for gaining and maintaining athletes' attention is to provide wait time for athletes to consider their responses to the question. Increasing wait time enables athletes to formulate better responses and encourages them to give longer answers because they have had the opportunity to think. When given this 'thinking time', athletes tend to volunteer more appropriate answers and are less likely to fail to respond. They are more able to respond to open questions because they tend to speculate more. With a longer wait time, athletes tend to ask more questions in return. If they do not understand or they need to find out more information, athletes also feel they have been given an opportunity to clarify the question. With a longer wait time, athletes exhibit more confidence in their comments and those athletes whom coaches rate as relatively slow learners offer more of their own questions and more responses.

Wait time is quite difficult for coaches when they are first learning how to question. Research on teaching suggests that teachers tend to answer their own questions when a wrong answer is given or tend to become impatient. As in teaching, an appropriate wait time in coaching is three to five seconds. Once coaches have mastered wait time, they will find that athletes benefit more from questioning than they do if the coach calls on them for an immediate response.

If athletes are having difficulty with the answer after the wait time, a coach can break down, redirect or rephrase an open question so they can think carefully about what has been asked. However, the coach should not give the answer, as it takes ownership of the problem-solving process away from the athletes.

Coaches will notice that some athletes cannot wait to answer the questions while others prefer to remain anonymous in the background. The athletes who volunteer readily are probably the most confident in their skills and their cognitive abilities. Research in teaching suggests that the teacher tends to neglect the students in the back. This same tendency will be found in sport settings as well. A coach must make a conscious effort to include all members of the team or squad in learning.

A coach should allow some time for all athletes to contribute to discussions within a session.

Middle/Late Childhood athletes are unlikely to get involved in lengthy discussions as they will want to get onto practice.

Early/Late Teenage athletes might get involved in lengthy discussions, but coaches need to monitor this to ensure valuable practice time is not overtaken. These athletes really come to participate.

Social/Competitive Adult athletes might get involved in lengthy discussions, but coaches need to monitor this to ensure valuable practice time is not overtaken. These athletes come to perform and get the most out of the time they have to train, as they are very busy people.

Through skilfully directing and distributing discussion, the coach will provide a fair environment where athletes can contribute equally. Directing questions to athletes in a non-threatening way can encourage those who may prefer not to participate. If a reluctant participant responds to a question, the coach should accept this answer and use the content of the response in further discussion.

To encourage athletes' responses, an athlete-centred coach will:

- listen to athletes' responses (verbal and nonverbal) without interrupting and give them time to think in silence while they are formulating their thoughts
- be careful not to call an athlete's name immediately after posing the question. Once the coach identifies an athlete to answer the question, the other athletes tend to relax and discontinue their thinking process
- show he or she is listening by limiting comments. Also avoid using 'uh-huh' and 'okay' too much as athletes will focus on the voice gestures rather than the content
- avoid a 'Yes but ...' reaction to an athlete's response, which signals that coach rejects the athlete's idea
- allow the athletes to provide the answers.

Movement Responses

Although questioning has always been considered a mental strategy, athletes can learn much through problem solving and questioning involving movement responses. A movement response requires a physical demonstration to answer a question. These questions often come as a result of the athlete response to the question, 'What did you notice?'

A typical example of a response that requires movement is after the athlete has said, "My arms are floppy when I hit the ball", and a coach could say "Hit a few more and concentrating on the floppiness of your arms". Even though the coach does not express either of these statements as a question, the athletes must provide answers by showing the coach how they understand.

Posing movement questions is an effective tool to enhance physical technique and tactical learning. In providing movement responses, athletes can identify faults or determine correct skill technique for them. If athletes have input into correcting skill performance, along with appropriate self-awareness, they tend to retain the information they have discovered.

Stage 4: Process Athlete Responses

With any questions, there are no 'wrong' answers as the athletes generally interpret the questions at their own level of understanding. Coaches need to listen closely to the answers, interpret the significance and respond accordingly. Often athletes come up with answers that coaches may find useful to elaborate on or adapt to their own thinking. In other words, by listening, coaches can learn much from their athletes.

Prompting

Prompting is where a coach uses cues to 'remind' athletes of something that they have learned and help them to answer a question. Examples are 'What did you determine about using a fake on offence?' or 'How have you been putting the shuttlecock on the floor?' 'What did you notice about your swing.' It is important that in giving cues, a coach does not give athletes the whole answer. The purpose of prompting is to encourage athletes to provide a response. Prompting can help them gain the confidence to answer the question. If there is a response, to further prompt, ensure to use the athlete's words. The wait time after an athlete's response is also important. Coaches need to process the response showing that they have listened to the athlete and interpreted the answer from the athlete's point of understanding.

Assisting an Athlete's Response

As athletes offer solutions, either verbally or through a movement response, a coach should encourage any innovative ideas—no matter how silly or inadequate the coach may perceive those ideas to be. If athletes find no sincere support for answers (either verbal or nonverbal), they will be less likely to respond next time they are questioned. If the response to an athlete's answer was 'What a stupid answer', how would the athlete feel? Would the athlete feel respected by the coach? Thus part of the process of questioning is to encourage athletes to continue to try for a solution, even though they may appear to be a long way from it.

It is important to establish an environment in which athletes feel confident to volunteer responses. The difficulty, when a coach is deciding how to handle an inadequate answer, is to determine whether the athlete is off task or deliberately trying to be silly. If the response is off task, the coach should refocus or ignore it, then reinforce the athlete's next attempt to respond. Sincere positive reinforcement will be more likely to motivate athletes to respond enthusiastically to later questions. It should also be noted that different individuals respond to different types of reinforcement.

For effective reinforcement, an athlete-centred coach will:

- praise based on the athlete's answer—for example, 'Great, can you tell us more?'
- praise with the focus on reinforcing the athlete's response
- praise honestly and sincerely
- give nonverbal reinforcement such as eye contact, thumbs up, smiling, nodding, and clapping hands—all extremely useful as forms of praise.

Probing and Guided Discovery of a New Skill

Probing is a questioning strategy in which a coach asks follow-up questions so that athletes can extend, amplify or refine their answers. Probing questions work extremely well when trying to reinforce concepts for the athlete to discover and understand.

Many coaches believe that they must tell and show their athletes exactly how to perform a correct technique. In contrast, through Teaching Games for Understanding athletes learn technique through guided discovery (and through self-awareness). The coach gives guidance with a series of meaningful questions (including probes) about the athletes' technique (while recognising that athletes are capable of participating in sport without being taught the perfect technique). Athletes then learn by discovering how to do the technique themselves. Learning is a result of self-discovery rather than of watching a demonstration.

Techniques do not have to be taught explicitly as athletes at all levels can often figure out the approach needed. A good example is found by observing children in action in the playground, where they are highly capable of discovering how to perform the 'game' without being told by someone else. To use guided discovery as a coaching tool, it is useful to plan the line of inquiry. The coach should first understand the possible outcome that might be achieved, then arrange the questions for the athletes to discover an answer(s).

This process of guided discovery using probes and the GROW framework may be illustrated through the following examples. The following questions are simply an example to guide coaches, as the athletes' responses will be the lead of how the follow-up questions are formulated to probe further. Athletes then provide demonstrations of the techniques or tactics as they discover a solution.

Note that the G or R or O or W in brackets after some questions relate to questions about setting goals, establishing the reality, considering options or what the athlete will try to do, as in the GROW approach.

For Middle/Late Childhood Athletes:

- Coach: How can we get the ball down the court? (G)
Athlete: Dribble it.
Coach: Let's try that. (R)
Coach: Is there a way you can get it down faster? (*probe*)(G)
Athlete: You could run faster.
Coach: That's a great answer (praise). Let's try that. (R)
Coach: What other skill have we been learning to move the ball around?' (*probe*)(R)
Athlete: Passing.
Coach: Great (praise). Let's try that (R)
Coach: What worked best? (*probe*) (O)
Athlete: Passing.
Coach: Now what is it about passing the ball that gets the ball down the court faster? (*probe*) (R)
Athlete: When you pass the ball to a person, the speed of the ball is faster than when you dribble.
Coach: OK, great strategy (praise). If the ball is faster when passing, what does that mean for the defender? (*probe*)(O)
Athlete: The defender can't catch up coz the ball moves slower than the runner.
Coach: Fantastic (praise). So what will we do to get the ball down the court faster? (W)
Athlete: Preferably look for the pass before dribbling.

For **Early/Late Teenage** and **Social/Competitive** adult Athletes (Volleyball example):

- Coach: What do we want in attack today? (G)
- Athlete: Trying to get the ball on the floor of the opposition.
- Coach: How do you do it now? Show me. (R)
- Coach: What do you notice? (probe)(G)
- Athlete: Every time I hit the ball, it flies in a direction that I don't want it to go.
- Coach: Great (praise). So, this time try to notice what is happening when you hit it. (R)
- Athlete: I never hit it in the same place on my hand.
- Coach: What part of the hand do you want to hit it on? (probe) (G)
- Athlete: In the middle.
- Coach: Great. So this time try to hit the ball in the middle of your hand. How does that feel? (probe) (R)
- Athlete: I feel like I am hitting it stronger.
- Coach: OK, great (praise). Is that a useful strategy? (probe)(O)
- Athlete: Yes, there is more power behind it and it will be harder for the defense.
- Coach: Fantastic (praise). So what will you do now? (W)
- Athlete: Aim for the middle of my hand.

Probing and reinforcing promotes learning through extending current thought processes and encouraging athletes' responses.

Notice that in the above example, the coach never provides an explanation or demonstration. Instead, the athletes figure out for themselves how to get the ball down the court the quickest way or the best way to improve their technique. With any method where athletes have to figure out how a technique or tactic is performed, they will not only retain and understand that concept more fully, but also get more practice opportunities and take control of their own learning experience. Athletes tend to remember more because they are doing it, rather than watching a coach explain and demonstrate.

Stage 5: Reflect on Questioning Process

As part of this module, coaches are required to practise their questioning. The last stage in ensuring that coaches practise becoming better questioners is to reflect on how their questioning is going. One of the learning activities that coaches can choose for this module is to use reflective questions to self-evaluate. By answering these, coaches will be able to analyse the questions asked and reflect on who and how athletes responded. Evaluation of athletes' response patterns and examination of coach and athlete reactions will also help coaches' to reflect on their questioning strategies.

The following are questions that have been posed in one of the learning activities Coaching Module Outline (suitable for all communities):

- How simple, meaningful, clear and coherent were the questions that you asked your athletes?
- When asking questions, did you have all the athletes' attention?
- Was your pause or wait time long enough (3-5 seconds)? Compare the answers by the athletes when you waited and did not wait.
- Did you listen and accept athlete responses?
- What reinforcement strategies did you use for athletes' responses? Were they relevant for your athletes' stage of development?
- After listening to the answers, were you able to probe to extend the athletes understanding? List examples of your probing questions and analyse them.
- Analyse how your questions encouraged athlete awareness.
- List the questions that you asked during the session. How did they encourage athlete learning? How did they set up problems for the athletes to solve?

Questioning is a key coaching strategy within an athlete-centred coaching approach because it is about encouraging athletes to enhance their awareness and learn in their context. The questioning strategies listed here are samples of what might be used within the sport setting. 'It depends', is still the underlying principle here as the whole strategy will depend on athletes' needs at that particular time in that particular situation.

Summary

- The QUILT framework is a useful guide for coaches to practise their questioning techniques.
- GROW is a great framework for coaches to help in learning the questioning process.
- Questioning is an important coaching strategy. Educational research has shown that the real struggle is making the change from a directing approach to a questioning of athletes approach to enhance their learning.
- To improve questioning, to 'just do it' and keep reflecting on how your questioning approaches are being applied.
- Effective questioning requires preparing the questions, presenting them, encouraging athlete responses to the questions, processing athlete responses and then reflecting on the questioning process.
- Questioning does require commitment to keep developing, but the outcome for athletes is exceptional.
- The benefits of a questioning approach for athletes are to develop awareness and understanding within the sporting environment and this is a key to performance success.

References:

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