

Communicating with Athletes



Why have I chosen a sieve?



Remember

- Many athletes perceive you to have all the “power”
- You must aim to adjust this imbalance and help them recognize how they can help themselves
- Aim to use power with not power over



Communicating with Athletes

On each issue assess where the athlete stands along this continuum

Disempowered

Diminished Ability

Diminished Motivation

Empowered

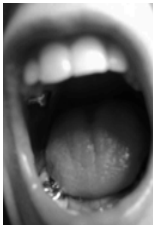
Recognised Ability

High Motivation



Bring hope -
help the
athlete move
in small steps

Challenge to
check that
athlete
decisions are
sound

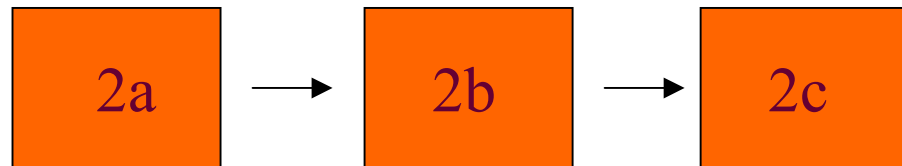


Tactics....a 9 stage approach

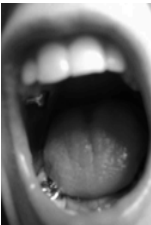
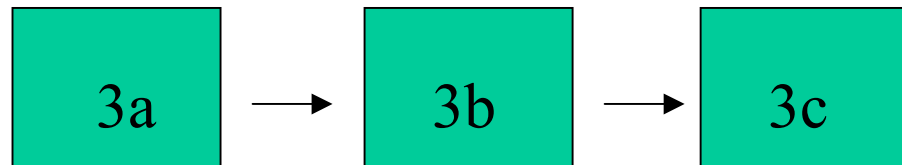
Review current scenario



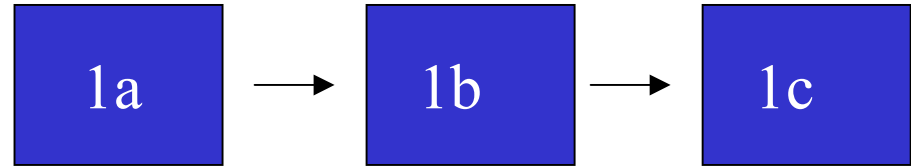
Develop preferred scenario



Getting there



Review current scenario



1a STORIES - encourage the athlete to tell their “story”

1b BLIND SPOTS – look for attitude, behaviour, thinking or actions that the athlete is unable to recognize, or chooses to ignore

1c LEVERAGE – help the athlete assess the cost of remaining in their current situation versus the benefit of resolving the situation



Exercise

How can you encourage the athlete to tell their story?

Task

Think of ways to encourage disclosure.
Make a list.



- Open non-specific questions
- Start where the athlete starts – let him lead
- Be attentive, genuine, use non-verbal techniques e.g. eye contact, use of minimal encouragers e.g. nods, I see... etc.
- Summarize at intervals to communicate understanding



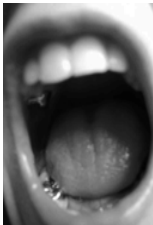
Develop preferred scenario



2a POSSIBILITIES – Brainstorm / role modelling

2b CHOICES – consider consequences of each possible choice or work back from ideal end goal to identify small steps to make this happen

2c COMMITMENT – consider how athlete's network will react / make sure athlete's goals are SMART / make sure the end goal really appeals to the athlete



Exercise

How can you help the athlete to brainstorm?

Task

Think of a method.

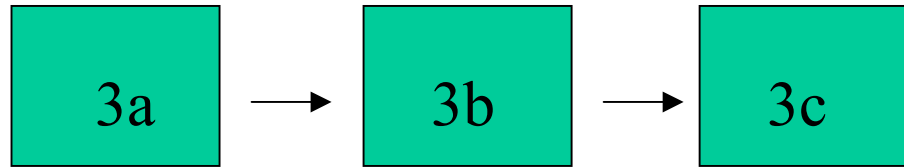
Share with the group.



- **MIRACLE QUESTION:** If you could wave a magic wand to sort this all out what would it look like? Once clarified then examine each constraint – how fixed are these?
- **ROLE MODELS:** Look for role models who are currently or have dealt with the sort of issues that the athlete has – how did they cope; how could you find out?



Getting there



3a STRATEGIES – skilful questions to identify resources and skills that are required to move forward on the issue

3b BEST-FIT STRATEGIES – challenge the athlete to select realistic, robust strategies that fit with their own personal values

3c PLANS – Use template action plans



Exercise

Design a template action plan suitable for helping athletes

Task

Think of suitable headings and sketch out a layout

Compare with the group.



- Headings such as
 - Issue
 - Desired outcome
 - Resources (people or information source)
 - Key actions
 - Achieved by



Next section will
focus on skills to develop.....



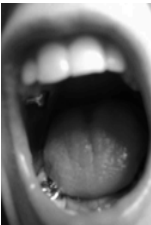
What is the distinction between hearing and listening?

Hearing

Be aware of and receive sound

Listening

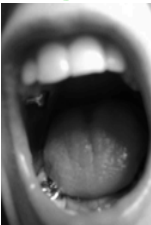
Receiving and accurately
understanding meaning



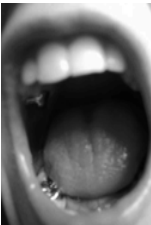


What are the distinctions between social and athlete conversations?

- Social conversations
- Meet needs of both participants
- Athlete conversations
- Emphasis on meeting athlete needs
- Reward athlete by listening and showing understanding



Active Listening

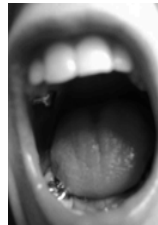


Consequences of Active Listening

- Establish rapport
- Bridge differences*
- Gather information
- Create influence base



**Remember perceived power imbalance !*



Skills of Active listening

1. Tune to athlete's internal viewpoint
2. Send good voice messages
3. Send good body messages
4. Openers / rewards /questions
5. Paraphrasing
6. Reflect feelings
7. Avoid listening blocks



1. Tune to athlete's internal viewpoint



Exercise

What makes it easier to tune to the athlete's view?

Task

Think of how you would answer this Q.

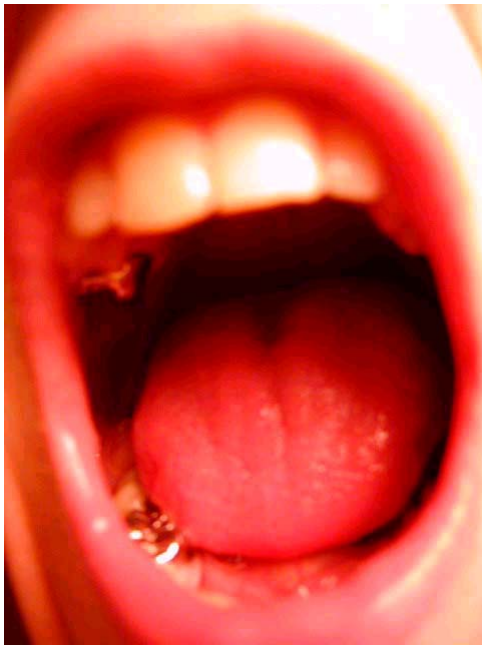
Share you views with the group.



- Look at their body language
- Listen to their voice messages
- Having observed the athlete over a period of time
- Having knowledge of the internal and external factors that affect the athlete
- Having experienced emotions similar to those they are experiencing



2. Send good voice messages



Volume
Articulation
Pitch
Emphasis
Rate



Exercise

Remember that many athlete interactions take place in changing rooms, corridors etc.

What is the implication of this for voice messages?

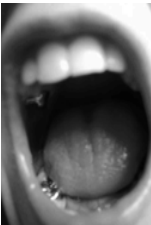
Task

Discuss with the group.

Can you identify some points of good practice



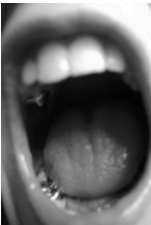
- Be careful of timing – errors can easily be made when emotions are high
- Some conversations are so crucial that time must be made to expand them later in a stable setting
- Learn the power of extended silence to ensure that the athlete has expressed all he wishes to say



3. Send good body messages



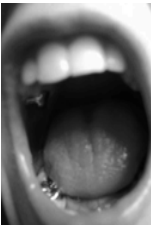
Relaxed open posture
Appropriate facial expressions
Good use of gaze & eye contact
Sensitivity to personal space
Appropriate gestures



4. Openers / rewards / questions



REWARDS



Exercise

What is your repertoire?

Task

Write some examples of how you could open to encourage the athlete to talk.

Share your examples with the group.



- Tell me how things are going at the moment?
- OK, so tell me where are you at, right now?
- Tell me what you think about
- Explain how you feel about



Question styles

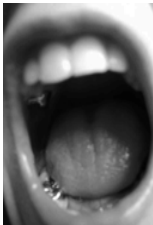
- Open
 - Cannot be easily answered by a single word or phrase
- Closed
 - Answer restricted to a single phrase or yes/no – good for narrowing options
- Probing
 - invites athlete to discuss a certain issue in greater detail



5. Paraphrasing

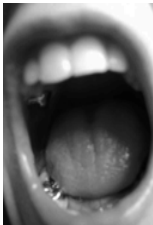


- Rewording athlete's verbal utterances
- Good command of vocabulary needed!

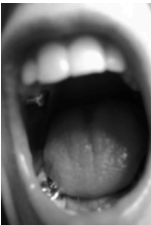


Exercise – Paraphrase the following athlete statements

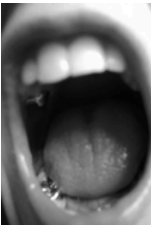
1. I think that he (the manager) doesn't understand how important these exams are to my future....
2. I really put myself out to get there, and then I discover that I'm the only one..... Paul and Kevin just didn't turn up.....
3. I'm the one being targeted, he always has a go at me....the first thing that goes wrong is my fault and its not as if he is playing well.....
4. I was feeling so confident going into this week, felt strong and ready.....now the hamstring has gone againI'm gutted...
5. I'm getting pressure from everywhere....Tommy's on my back, then my Dad starts and now even you are on my case....I just want to be left alone.....



- I think that he (the manager) doesn't understand how important these exams are to my future....
- You're worried that Sean doesn't recognize what these exams mean to you and how they affect your future
- I really put myself out to get there, and then I discover that I'm the only one..... Paul and Kevin just didn't turn up.....
- You made a great effort to turn up and then felt let down because the other two boys didn't bother to show and you were left isolated
- I'm the one being targeted, he always has a go at me....the first thing that goes wrong is my fault and its not as if he is playing well.....
- You feel that your being picked out for unfair criticism by the skipper. You feel that you're first to get the blame and think he'd be better off attending to his own performance



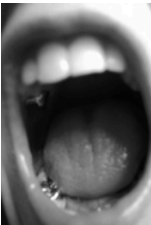
- I was feeling so confident going into this week, felt strong and ready.....now the hamstring has gone againI'm gutted...
- You're really devastated....you were physically set and felt able to make a difference.....now you're faced with the injury reoccurring...
- I'm getting pressure from everywhere....Tommy's on my back, then my Dad starts and now even you are on my case....I just want to be left alone.....
- You feel that a number of individuals are hounding you at present... your dad, Tommy and even me. You find this stressful and it makes you want to be on your own



6. Reflect Feelings



- Paraphrasing
- +
- Appropriate voice and body messages



Exercise

What do paraphrasing and reflection convey to the athlete?

Discuss

Why is this crucial?



- **EMPATHY** – communicating to the athlete that their point of view is understood.
- It involves mirroring what the athlete is saying in terms of content and intensity of emotion
- **Crucial** in order to build rapport and to encourage disclosure



7. Avoid Listening blocks

Directing

Judging

Preaching

Labelling

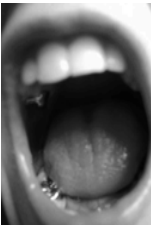
Not accepting athlete's feelings

Interrogating

Discuss why each is NOT good practice !



Next section will
focus on some tools that can be used to help...



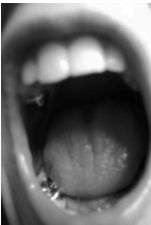
Some tools and techniques

- Card sorts
 - Bear Cards
 - Gauging opinion
 - Measuring change
 - Expressing how you feel within a team
 - Strength Cards
 - Self-esteem building
 - Strength mapping within a group



Some tools and techniques

- Card sorts
 - Bear Cards
 - Gauging opinion



Exercise

Should Croke park be open to other sports?

Look at the range of cards on the ground – without talking, select one that summarises your opinion

When asked –show your choice and explain



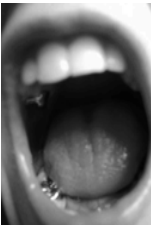
Some tools and techniques

- Card sorts
 - Bear Cards
 - Measuring change
 - Ask the athlete to pick out (and later explain) the bears that best represented them at significant points in a 'journey' e.g.
 - before they first came into the squad
 - After the first month
 - After the first season



Some tools and techniques

- Card sorts
 - Bear Cards
 - Expressing how you feel within a team



Exercise

Imagine the scenario – your team is about to play in a crucial match against your most formidable rivals. Your captain and most potent attacker is injured and will not play. Two other key players have been unable to train all week because of flu. The manager has decided not to start the two players and has made a number of positional switches in order to plug the gaps. The final training session has been lifeless and littered with errors.

Look at the range of cards on the ground – without talking, select one that summarises how you feel

When asked –show your choice and explain it to the rest of the team

Discuss

How could this information be used constructively by the management team?



Some tools and techniques

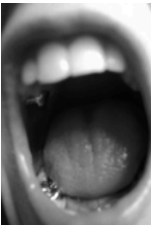
- Card sorts
 - Strength Cards
 - Self-esteem building

Suggested use - ask the athlete to pick out five cards to identify their strengths. Discuss these and then ask the athlete to pick out two more that he would like to develop. Discuss why.



Some tools and techniques

- Card sorts
 - Strength Cards
 - Strength mapping within a group

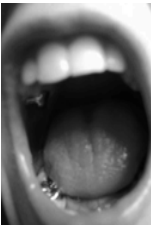


Exercise

**As someone working within a management team responsible for young athletes
- select two of your key strengths**

Look at the range of cards on the ground –
without talking, select two that summarise your
personal strengths

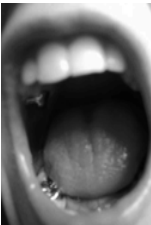
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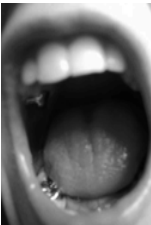
Final Exercise

What is the value of the card sort approach?

Discuss



- Aids to conversation
- Can be good for non talkative athletes
- Facilitate expression of feelings when individuals have difficulty putting these into words



TACTICS

9 step approach / encourage storytelling / encourage brainstorming / use action plans

SKILLS

Active listening / awareness of voice and body messages / skilful questioning / paraphrasing and reflecting / awareness of listening blocks

TOOLS

Use of card sorts to stimulate conversation

