

Watch your Language.

By: John Morrison

A vital element of sport is good communication, essentially because good communication removes anxiety.

With that in mind, consider the following two questions: (a) In any one day how many 'words' would you need, and (b) do you 'talk' to yourself?

The first question is hard to answer but a conservative estimate from me is that it runs into thousands, maybe more, the number of words any of us need in one day.

The second question is usually avoided because people know it usually involves looking into the mind, and 'mental' considerations are to be avoided, so much so that sports people, including gaels, miss the opportunity to use the huge power of their mind.

Commitment is a big word in sport but all it simply means, or asks, is "are you keeping your word, especially to yourself?"

New Year's resolutions never work because the person involved doesn't 'keep their word' to themselves.

So, in future ask yourself the following, especially as a coach/manager/player, "Am I still doing what I said I'd do, long after the mood I said it in has gone?"

Your word, therefore, is the only power you have.

The words we use can also affect emotions and, if used improperly, can hurt deeply.

If your mother, for example, made you and some friends a very special meal, sumptuous and couldn't have been better, how do you think she would feel if, on asking how it went, you answered 'alright' or 'nice'?

What could you have said?

In giving feedback, if something is to be praised, use great words, not good words – spectacular for good, wonderful for fine, excellent for alright etc.

In correction of errors, the two best words are 'spot' and 'fix', accompanied by challenging or stimulating words, not critical words.

Don't use terms like 'stupid, useless, lazy, messing, awful, bad' because the player, especially a young player, may not have understood your words of explanation in the first place.

Remember, use words which suitably target your audience to breed understanding, otherwise 'fear' kicks in.

The words above target the 'person' rather than the 'performance' and fixing of errors is unlikely in such a case.

Even simple words like 'why' can target a 'person', while words like 'how' are 'performance' targeting.

Which of these statements would you prefer to be addressed with:

“Why did that happen?” (used with pointed finger); or “How did that happen?” (used with open arms/hands).

'Don't' is a word to avoid when coaching youngsters as it tends to perpetuate what you are trying to have them not to do.

Use the word 'Do' for example, 'do kick toe down', when getting poor contact in a kick, rather than 'don't do that' or 'don't kick toe up'.

Words, especially when appealing to the memory bank, are involved with emotions

'Fear' is often generated by a misuse of words and is the result of one or more of three things – lack of understanding; lack of faith in oneself; and not being prepared.

Easy to 'fix' when you 'spot' the flaw.

Players, too often, hear more 'negative' remarks rather than 'positives' thus they tend to be manic about fixing weaknesses when it is their 'strengths' which they hear little of, and work less on, that usually win matches.

Self-talk is vital for a player's development and they should be taught to speak positively to themselves and constantly quoting their strengths to themselves.

Talking to ourselves is a natural mechanism to improve self image, replacing words like 'blame' and 'punishment' in the mind with 'responsibility' and 'reward'.

Words often give a coaches intention away.

If they say 'not a championship in them' or 'not much there this year', it suggests to me there will always be little development done, individually or collectively, with that team this season.

When a coach says 'they didn't do what I told them', I wonder what words and experiences players had during the time of coaching.

Words in our life are numerous influential, and can affect our feelings.

So, around young players especially, we must watch our language, remembering that 'children will not remember what you tell them, but will remember how you made them FEEL!'