Silence may appear on the surface to be an unappealing moment of coaching practice to make when we think of power or effectiveness. However, when considering our own coaching practice, I can imagine a time where silence can find itself as a most prevalent behavior. Initial reactions to this may be if you stay silent are you actually coaching? However, when considering the potential of silence to enhance and develop the coaching climate, it is necessary to see the potential of multiple behaviors and how such varied inputs and considerations can impact the coaching moment.

Take controlling on the role of psychology (for example, how certain coaches silent by not interrupting a client on their experiences to express their emotions, which allows them to express and experience what’s relevant to them. Through allowing for these thoughts, struggles, and emotions to be the focus, we can examine and allow for people to express themselves at their own pace, which provides the build-up to a big moment for the athlete. The impact of silence is equally important when we pay respects to a cause or individual and use this time to allow. Additionally, in advertising or following a top event, silence may be the best option to allow time for emotions to play their role and be meaningful to the digested reflection practice in support.

Consequently, we are required to read and respond to an infinite list of moments or instances, which occur to us, our athletes and often other stakeholders involved with the coaching process. In a session, not one of my athletes had sadly recently lost their grandparent. Instead of asking upfront how things were, my reading of this situation was then coupled with praise, positive feedback and sometimes corrective feedback at what I felt were key moments. I was able to use these opportunities to create a context and construct a coherent response. Eventually, the power of silence again became apparent, as we are not interrupting a thought or idea. On the contrary, I allowed silence to be present in the coaching session, and the athlete’s thoughts to build into a powerful constructed question.

When we ask questions to our athletes, we are often looking for answers or inputs, and not necessarily always to understand. However, if athletes are often silent, the question we ask can become more and more what we need to understand rather than elicit a response. Instead, when implementing evidence-based recommendations, we must be responsive to the ever-changing conditions and political factors which can define the very effectiveness of our practice as coaches.

Critical moments for innovation generally come when we ask questions, and when interrupting (i.e., probes, too, back, fast forward) silence is typically our most prevalent behavior during conversations. Should there, our practice as coaches within learning sessions replicate these types of environments? My argument would be yes, in a joint coaching session we are a crucial opportunity for us to develop a multitude of outcomes with our athletes, therefore constant silence would most likely require important moments to occur.

When silence is actively and directly contrived against and interacted with, often a coaching practice, however, the opposite can occur across our effectiveness. I would argue, generally, that silence must be coupled with observation, and even the careful consideration of our physical positioning in a coaching session, or at matches. If we are positioned too far away from our athletes, this can easily become understood that we are not observing, or interested, in what is unfolding.

Similarly, in the world of sports, when athletes are under intense pressure, even a smile or a ‘keep going’ gesture can go a long way in showing they care and support. Their experience with us becomes your business card. When athletes are often silent, we can feel that we are not doing enough to support them. We can feel that we are not providing enough opportunities for them to express their emotions. When we question athletes the power of silence can often be neglected. How many times, when we ask a question to our athletes, do we probe with another instant question? In many cases this perceived awkward silence is only awkward for the coach. Our athletes are often silent because they are uncertain, or unsure, of how to respond. This can result from a poorly constructed question. As for many questions from the athlete, and our athletes are often silent, which can lead to a big moment for our athletes. Equally, if athletes are finding it impossible to understand their knowledge, and this often results from a poorly constructed question.

Many of us will have experienced a similar situation from a coach when we were under intense pressure. When athletes are very good, some coaches have the ability to understand their intentions and construct a clear coaching contract in which we operate day to day. Similarly, when implementing evidence-based recommendations, we must be responsive to the ever-changing conditions and political factors which can define the very effectiveness of our practice as coaches.

As with any theory, as research driven practical applications are being combined, a scholar, or an athlete, often expects what does not occur. For the instance, individualized training and complexity of each coaching contract in which we operate day to day. However, when implementing evidence-based recommendations, we must be responsive to the ever-changing conditions and political factors which can define the very effectiveness of our practice as coaches.

Consequently, we are required to read and respond to an infinite list of moments or instances, which occur to us, our athletes and often other stakeholders involved with the coaching process. In a session, not one of my athletes had sadly recently lost their grandparent. Instead of asking upfront how things were, my reading of this situation was then coupled with praise, positive feedback and sometimes corrective feedback at what I felt were key moments to make the player feel as if it wasn’t different to any other session. This highlighted to me, the need for and importance of moments to intervene, not only to support them, but to keep moving on the actual talent and body language.

The power of silence may appear to be an unappealing moment of coaching practice to make when we think of power or effectiveness. However, when considering our own coaching practice, I can imagine a time where silence can find itself as a most prevalent behavior. Initial reactions to this may be if you stay silent are you actually coaching? However, when considering the potential of silence to enhance and develop the coaching climate, it is necessary to see the potential of multiple behaviors and how such varied inputs and considerations can impact the coaching moment.

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In summary, silence is not necessarily a ‘best approach’, nor is it a ‘quick fix’, it is instead hoped that ideas and challenges posed through some critical reflections in this blog, stimulate thought around the articulation and effectiveness of silence. After all, it can be one of the most prejudice tools in our armoury. At the same time it can also be one of our most powerful.

Final quote

I hope you enjoyed reading my first ConnectedCoaches blog. All feedback welcome please add a comment below.

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tags: coaching, context, athlete-outcomes, coaching-practice, critical-moments, effectiveness, politics, silence