

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Effective/timely communication.

Defusing key moments with conflict strategies.

SESSION STRUCTURE:

This is a questions-based approach to learning with the aim of stimulating group discussion around...

- Communicating effectively and in a timely manner.
- Building/maintaining key relationships.
- Conflict strategies when defusing key moments in a game.

It will also be an opportunity to develop some conflict strategies when dealing with key moment within the game.

This session can be run in smaller groups (2-3) or one larger group, depending on numbers and the amount of time you have available.

Equipment needed:

Whiteboard for the session leader. Flip charts with pens for the groups.

Goals of the session:

- Gain a deeper understanding/appreciation as to why communicating effectively is vital when it comes to building positive relationships.
- Understanding what is needed in order to maintain these relationships.
- Develop some conflict strategies in order to effectively manage key moments before during and after the game.

KEY MESSAGES:

1. Effective & Timely communication – Picking the best time to give the best message.
2. 'LISTEN' to understand! It is a powerful communication tool... Use it!

START

Session Introduction.

(Introduce the session topic and organise working groups)

These are a few sample questions to generate some thinking/discussion within the groups...

- Why is communication so important for us as a referee?
- What tools do we have available to us?
 - *Verbal, body language, whistle.*
- Who would you consider 'key people' to communicate with on game day?
 - *AR's, coaches, players, team managers etc.*

PART A: Effective Communication – Why is it so important?

Before, during and after a game of rugby we make 100's of decisions. From the time we arrive at the ground to the time we leave again we are constantly making decisions, some of which may be right, some may be wrong, but either way, there will be learning to take away from every situation we encounter. A common theme that is often spoken about when separating *good* referees and the *great* referees is their ability to effectively communicate their decisions, build positive relationships with key people/stakeholders of the game and their ability to conduct themselves in a professional manner both on and off the field.

One area that can be challenging for referees is having the ability to build positive working relationships with key people in the game. This is due to a combination of two things, our inability to clearly communicate our message and failing to understand what others are trying to tell us. We are often guilty of 'Listening to respond', rather than 'listening to understand'. Frustration is driven not through a lack of listening on our part (some of us are very good listeners) but through a lack of understanding!

Group learning exercise:

With the above information in mind, carry out this group exercise and discuss any observations that are picked up along the way. Following this exercise will be some strategies to improve our ability to listen and more importantly understand the message.

- Participant 1 (Referee) will leave the room with a set of instructions. He will be given a game scenario by you (the person running the session) where he has to deliver a message to the captain of a team who have been penalised three times at the scrum in the first 20min for "collapsing under pressure".
- Participant 2 (Team Captain) will stay in the room and be given a different set of instructions. He/she will speak to the referee about the illegal angle of the opposition TH who they believe is causing the collapsed scrums.
- The task for everyone else in the room is to observe the conversation and take note of what they see and hear.
- Bring the Referee back into the room and let the conversation play out.

- As this is a simulated exercise, don't let the conversation go any longer than 1min. Remember we want to keep this scenario similar to what would take place in a game.
- Review: In smaller groups discuss...
 - What did you notice?
 - *Clear message?*
 - *Tone of voice?*
 - *Body language?*
 - Was the Referee and Captain able to get their message/point across?
 - *Yes/No?*
 - *Why/Why not?*
 - How well did Referee and Captain understand the message that was being put across?
 - *How do you know this?*
 - Any other observations?
 - What could have been done differently?
 - **What were the key learnings from this exercise?**
 - *NOTE: It would be a good idea to repeat this exercise with different people acting out these two roles and a different 'rugby' scenario. This will allow the group to witness other types of communication.*
 - *Give each group an opportunity to write down their learnings and then report back.*
 - *Summarise the key learnings on the white board.*
- *'Listening to understand' and 'Listening to respond'. How well do we really listen when spoken to? How well do we get our own message across to others?*

Strategies for effective communication:

- Create space:
 - Create space by moving away from other players. This demonstrates that you are interested in what they want to say and reduces the chance of being interrupted by other players or opposition captain.
- LISTEN!!!:
 - You cannot speak and listen at the same time so if you can clearly see that they want to say something give them the opportunity to do so without interrupting them. Show them you are listening by maintain your eye

contact. If your eyes drift away this may be seen as a sign that you are not interested or don't agree with what they have to say.

- Reframe:
 - Summarise and repeat back your understanding of what it is that they are saying. This will prove to them that you have listened and understood what they have to say.
- Speak last, speak with purpose!
 - When it comes to you getting your message across, make an effort to speak last. This is a powerful way to get your message across as this is the last one that everyone hears before the game restarts.
 - There is no point making an impact by speaking last if your message is going to be vague, so speak with purpose! Give a clear, simple message and ask for their understanding. They may not agree with you but they need to understand what the message is you are giving. "Does that make sense?". "Is that clear?". "Do you understand?"
- Time:
 - Give them an opportunity to relay the message to their team. If this is the final warning before you issue a yellow card, then the entire team need to be aware of this.

What are some other strategies we can use in order to build and maintain a positive relationship with team captains and key players?

- Team changing room before the game:

This is where the teams will meet you (potentially for the first time) before the game so it is important you go with PLAN of what you are going to say and UNDERSTANDING of the environment you are walking into!

- Understanding the environment. There is nothing worse than walking in with your chin up, chest out telling them how things are going to be done today only to find out that they currently haven't won a game all season and a club member passed away that morning.
- Check (with coach/manager) to see when is a good time to speak and 'knock' before entering.
- After giving your message about what you need to see from them during the game it is always a nice touch to ask front rowers,

team coach and/or captain if there is anything that you can do for them! It is a nice way to open up two way conversation.

- Don't be in there too long. Remember, you have been invited into their environment so don't hang around longer than you need to because this can potentially upset a team.
- Check in during down time:
 - There are times during a game when you have opportunities to 'check in' with players. This can be done at a stoppage in play (injury break, penalty shot at goal, on the way back to half way after a try has been scored, at half time before teams get into a huddle. This doesn't necessarily mean you need to speak with them at EVERY stoppage but you may feel the need to pass on a message or see if they have anything that they need to speak with you about.

PART B: Defusing key moments in the game – Conflict strategies.

We will often encounter games where we have excellent both team are very positive, and they just want to play rugby. These are the game where we may have to do very little as a referee but there also the games where it can be very stop-start, teams and be negative and frustration can get the better of players or us at times. Believe it or not but it is actually these games where we become much better referees, IF we are willing to learn from them!

Below are a few situations that we will encounter from time to time, both on and off the field and a few strategies we can use in order to defuse them.

Group learning exercise:

Split the room into 4 groups to discuss one of the four scenarios below.

Ask them to work out a 'best practise' way of resolving the situation you have given them.

If time allows it you may like to role play one of the scenarios.

Scenario 1: Delivering a message successfully when tensions are high.

- In a premier game, time is up on the clock and team A have been awarded a PK 10m from the try line. Needing a try to win the game so they opt to kick to touch and set up a lineout maul which has been previously successful.
- Team B have already been penalised for collapsing team A's maul on two occasions prior to this.
- Before the lineout a player from team B takes a knee to tie a bootlace so you blow 'time off'. During this time the two captains (in the lineout) exchange words in a heated discussion about illegal maul tactics which then becomes physical. Players from both teams rush in to join what appears to be just 'push and shove' at this stage.
- How would you defuse this situation?
- What message/s (if any) do you need to give? And who would you give them to?

Scenario 2: Repeat offending.

- During a 1st XV game, just before half time team B are guilty of two high tackles in quick succession. Both resulting in PK's.
- While time is off to treat the ball carrier of the second high tackle you speak to the opposition captain, asking to see a more positive tackle technique.
- With 10min left to play the scores are level. A substitute player from team B has just come onto the field and is penalised for a high tackle in the middle of the field.
- As you blow your whistle for the PK the captain from team A (14) rushes over to you with his arms in the air demanding that a yellow card be given. He remains standing on the mark where the PK was given, which means play cannot continue until he moves off it.
- How would you defuse this situation?
- What message/s (if any) do you need to give? And who would you give them to?

Scenario 3: Sideline issues.

- During an u12 game there is a breakaway down the touchline and the winger from team B runs around and scores under the posts.

After you award the try you notice players from team A pointing back at the touch judge who is standing on the 22m line with their flag raised.

- The touch judge the mother of a boy playing in team A.
- There are some parents/supporters from team B who are now beginning to make comment as they do not agree that the player was in touch. This then starts an abusive exchange of words between the touch judge and the parents/supporters.
- How would you defuse this situation?
- What message/s (if any) do you need to give? And who would you give them to?

Scenario 4: Scrum issues.

- 15 minutes in to a Premier game and there has been four scrums, all have consisted of resets. It is starting to get untidy!
- Team A are complaining that the opposing pack are pushing early (hit and chase).
- Team B are complaining that Team A are pulling back (not taking the hit) on the "set".
- Everyone is getting clearly getting frustrated.
- How would you defuse this situation?
- What message/s (if any) do you need to give? And who would you give them to?

- *Give each group an opportunity to write down their learnings and then report back.*
- *Summarise the key learnings on the white board.*

Strategies to defuse conflict: Here are some ways that we can understand, resolve and prevent conflict?

- **Keep coming back to your message.**

- Ensure that the clear/simple message you have given to the players before the game is the same one you are delivering on the field.
- If this is set up well before the game it gives you something to a focus to keep drawing players attention back to.
- Example: *"We have already spoken about the importance of STABILITY before the game. STABILITY is what I need to see please!"*
- **PAUSE: Take a breath, then decide.**
 - This is an opportunity for you to address the 'conflict' in a calm and professional manner.
 - If there is a scuffle between players it would pay not to go rushing in and impose yourself physically on the situation. Blow your whistle to stop play (if it hasn't already) and then decide what the best course of action needed to resolve this. If you go rushing into the issue head on you are unlikely to portray a referee who is dealing with the situation in a calm and professional manner.
- **Use "I" or "we" statements, rather than "you" to get your message across.**
 - This suggests that you want to work with them, rather than a ME vs YOU relationship.
 - Rather than pointing the finger and telling them what it is they are doing wrong (negative) try explaining the positive picture it is that you (the referee) need to see from them.
 - Example:
 - *"I need to see stability on the SET".*
 - *"I need to see more height on this side of the scrum, so LET'S work on that picture please".*
- **Try not to be dismissive.**
 - There will be times in a game where a captain comes to speak to you and, for whatever reason the timing is not right, but do your best to listen and understand what it is they need to say. If you don't give them an opportunity to speak or dismiss what it is they have to say then they are very likely to become frustrated which will only have a negative impact on your relationship with them.

- You may not always agree with what it is they are saying so create statements to show understanding without making it look as though the team captain is the one running the game.
- Example:

- Captain: *"It seems at every breakdown there is always one of their players on our side, and it is slowing our ball speed!!"*

REF: *"So what you are telling me is..."* (reframe the message to show understanding). *"Is that correct?"* (seek clarity if need). *"Ok, well I will work a bit harder around that area for you".*

- You may not necessarily agree with him, but you are showing that you understand their message and you are telling him what you are going to do about it.

- **Compromise.**

- Following on from the example above. A team captain has come to you with an issue. You have listened, you have understood and you have given them reassurance that you will address it. This is a great opportunity to get your message across (if you have one that is). Before the captain walks away follow up with...
 - *"I am happy to take a look at that issue for you, but before you go can you do something for me?"* He will be far more willing to hear your message if you have just listened to his. *"Could you please have a word with your number 7 and ask him to show me a really clear release of the ball carrier before getting on the ball?"*