

Practical Persuasion Manual
Persuasion in Context: Sport Communication
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Table of Contents

Summary of Persuasion..... 3

Rationale for Chosen Context..... 4

Annotated Bibliography..... 5

Helpful Theories..... 7

Practical Advice..... 8

Conclusion..... 9

References..... 11

Summary of Persuasion

Persuasion is a tactic that is always prevalent in our daily lives. We use persuasive techniques to get what we want, and persuasion is used on us to shape the way we think and behave. Persuasion is defined as “any message that is intended to shape, reinforce, or change the responses of another, or others (Stiff and Mongeau, 2016). The dimensions of persuasive activity are: response shaping, response reinforcing, and response changing. Response shaping is the creation of favorable beliefs, images, and attitudes when none existed previously. Response reinforcing is when there is maintenance and strengthening of previously held attitudes, and response changing is the alteration of previously held attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Stiff and Mongeau, 2016). The use of persuasive techniques can result in a change of attitude or behavior. Persuasion can also be pure or borderline. Pure persuasion has a few different qualities—the intent must be clear, there must be a change of some sort as a result, the receiver of the message must have choices, the symbolic action used must be understandable, and the message must be transferred directly from person to person. Borderline persuasion, on the other hand can be unintentional, it might not result in change, someone could be influenced without his or her consent, the peripheral cues used might be persuasive, and the message can be intrapersonal, rather than interpersonal. Pure persuasion is the ideal way to persuade someone because it is more ethically sound.

The study of persuasion is a very valuable area of study for a few different reasons. Being well informed about persuasion can increase your communication competence and your awareness of when you are being persuaded. It can also strengthen your persuasion literacy and make you more prepared to counter unsupported persuasive claims (Stiff and Mongeau, 2106). All of these benefits to studying persuasion would, without a doubt, benefit your life in just about

every aspect. Being more aware of when someone is trying to persuade you and possessing knowledge on how to persuade others more efficiently is a skill that will enable you to get more of what you want in life.

Rationale for Chosen Context

Sport communication is a context of persuasion that I experienced a lot as I was growing up because I have played sports all my life. My coaches would employ the use of both prosocial and antisocial techniques in the way that they would try to persuade me to perform a certain way. I started playing tennis when I was five years old and continued to play all through high school. Throughout that long road of non-stop tennis, I was able to train with a variety of different coaches, some more effective than others. I had one coach in high school who actually pushed me so hard in all the wrong ways, which resulted in me quitting the sport in the middle of the season during my senior year. It took me two years to get back to playing tennis again after that. I believe that my high school tennis coach could use a very in-depth lesson on persuasion, because had he not driven me to hate the sport, I would have likely played college tennis. I had other tennis coaches that were fantastic at motivating me in very positive and uplifting ways, but the one I had in high school was the one I was around the most, so his condescending behavior truly affected me. He would often be aggressive verbally and make hurtful comments, calling me “lazy” or questioning my ability to play for our team. (I was the number two girl on our team.) He would also constantly make me feel guilty if I did not perform as well as I could and made sure to always point out my mistakes in front of the rest of the team. His behavior truly impacted me by making the sport unenjoyably for me, as well as giving me a tremendously unfavorable view of him that still remains to this day.

I am certain that there are a lot of coaches out there that do not fully understand the best and more effective ways to communicate with their players, so a lesson in sport persuasion would be very beneficial to those coaches. If he or she becomes a better communicator, then they will be liked more, their team will be more satisfied with the sport and will perform better, and the team will be more successful as a whole.

Annotated Bibliography

Gau, L., & Korzenny, F. (2009). An examination of values associated with sports attitude and consumption behavior: An exploratory study. *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal*, 37(3), 299-305. doi:10.2224/sbp.2009.37.3.299.

Gau and Korzenny (2009) studied the things that affect the ways that people interact with sports—primarily, their attitudes and consumption practices. This article tested three different hypotheses in its studies: people who spend money on sports find sports more important, people's perceived importance of sports relates to their personal values, and those who spend more on sports have different values than those who do not spend as much. Through a series of different tests of a large group of individuals, Gau and Korzenny (2008) found that their first hypothesis was supported fully, while their second and third were only partially supported by their evidence. Their results depicted the differences in personal values between those who enjoyed sports and enjoyed spending money on sports compared to those who do not. The level of importance sports has on a person might affect their personal values. Of the values measured in the study the group who found sports to have a high importance exhibited more of the typically ideal characteristics.

Watson, R. (n.d.). In it to Win it: How Motivated Players feel to Perform Based on Perceived Coaches Communication Competence. *Human Communication*, 14(2), 85-104. Retrieved December 6, 2017.

Watson (2011) examined the relationship between female athletes and their coaches—more specifically, how the coaches' communication techniques affect the women's motivation to succeed in their particular sport. This article found that of those who participated in the survey, the ones who reported to be motivated by their coach had coaches that utilized prosocial behaviors. Those who said they were not satisfied or motivated to do well in their sport had coaches that would more often exhibit antisocial coach behaviors—i.e. yelling, cussing, screaming. Watson (2011) found that all male coaches in the study were reported to have used

verbal aggressiveness during practices, while not all female coaches did so. She suggests that male coaches use that technique more often because they personally find it to be more effective. Of the athletes who took the study, the majority of them reported that their coach exhibited less than perfect communication competence, though.

Kassing, J. W., & Infante, D. A. (1999). Aggressive communication in the coach-athlete relationship. *Communication Research Reports, 16*(2), 110-120.

doi:10.1080/08824099909388708

Kassing and Infante (1999) studied the influence of coaches' behavior on their players' performance, ability, motivation, self-confidence, and perceptions of competence. They used questionnaires to retrieve answers from a group of 192 former football, basketball, or hockey athletes. Their studies found that athletes were not fond of coaches that demonstrated more aggressive communication tactics. The athletes typically would have poorer sportsmanship and were less successful as a team. Also, they found that disliking their coach's forms of communication results in less than ideal outcomes for the athletes. Kassing and Infante (1999) speculate that coaches might be using the most effective form of communication to garner maximum performance, but by doing so, results in a decrease in sportsmanship and sport satisfaction.

Turman, P. D., & Schrodt, P. (2004). New avenues for instructional communication research: Relationships among coaches' leadership behaviors and athletes' affective learning. *Communication Research Reports, 21*(2), 130-143.

doi:10.1080/08824090409359975

Turman and Schrodt (2004) examined coaches' leadership behaviors in relation to their athletes' learning of the sport being studied (in this case, wrestling). Their studies found that athletes learned more when their coaches exhibited characteristics such as positive feedback, social support, and democratic leadership styles. When coaches gave their athletes positive feedback, the athletes were more likely to perform and learn better. Of the five leadership behaviors studied (autocratic, democratic, social support, training and instruction, and positive feedback), they all showed positive results except for the dictator-like approach to learning. A dictator-like style on behalf of the coach resulted in less successful information consumption in the athletes that were being coached. Turman and Schrodt's (2004) study also found that the team's success relied less on individual performance and more so on the behaviors the coaches used, prosocial being the better option.

Beckner, B. N., & Record, R. A. (2015). Navigating the thin-ideal in an athletic world: influence of coach communication on female athletes' body image and health choices. *Health Communication, 31*(3), 364-373. doi:10.1080/10410236.2014.957998

Beckner and Record (2016) recently studied the effect coaches have on their female athletes' perception of body image. Their study was done through interviews being conducted on female athletes, and their results showed a few different things. Female athletes believe that the way their coach communicates with them in regards to body image has a significant relationship to how they perceive their own bodies as well as their personal athletic abilities. Also, all of the athletes' diets, health choices, and exercise routines were impacted in some way by their coaches. Beckner and Record (2016) found that coaches play a significant role in the way their female athletes perceive themselves, and this power held by the coaches is not always used in a positive and reinforcing way. The coaches could employ more prosocial behaviors in regards to the way they discuss athleticism with their female athletes, which would result in the women having more positive body images in themselves.

Helpful Theories

Regarding persuasion, there are many different theories that explain how and why people communicate with and persuade one another. One of which is the Goals, Plans, Action Theory. This theory states that the arrangement and ordering of messages is very important to successful persuasion and that communication begins with a single thought. Through the creation of goals, a plan can be created, and actions can accomplish that plan. This can be applied to regular persuasive communication in order to succeed in convincing someone of whatever you are trying to convince him or her of. To elaborate in the context of sport communication, this theory could be applied which would result in more effective communication from the coach to his or her athletes. If a coach decides on a goal that they want to communicate to their athletes, like to give advice for example, they should create a strategy that would allow for them to communicate that goal effectively. A secondary goal would also come about after the formation of the primary goal—the coach would likely have an identity goal in that they desire to be seen in a certain way. Being aware of their goals will help to ensure that they have an initial plan and a contingency

plan for communicating their message should the first plan fail. No matter what though, they should consciously think about their goal while they are delivering their message.

Another theory that sports coaches can and should apply to their communication with their athletes is the Communication Accommodation Theory. This theory explains how people use communication to adapt to the receiver or the context being communicated. Accommodation can be used to make someone more or less similar to others—also known as convergence or divergence. A coach should always communicate with their athletes in a way that they can understand fully. They should not use language and terms that are not recognizable or understandable. This would create ineffective communication and would likely lead to the coach being seen more unfavorably. If a coach talks to their players in an overly professional way (as opposed to a more relatable and friendly way) the athletes are less likely to connect with that coach. If they are not emotionally connected to their coach, they are more than likely, not going to be as motivated to succeed and perform well in their respective sport. The employment of this theory is likely to help the coach motivate and bond with their team more, instead of being someone that the players do not relate to in any way.

Practical Advice

Persuasion is something that we are involved in regularly, and being aware of and understanding persuasive strategies, tactics, and messages relating to that are crucial in successful communication. In the area of sport communication, there are a few things in particular that are very beneficial to utilize regularly in order to create a positive persuasive environment. When a coach communicates with an athlete, there are a lot of things that they can do wrong and those wrongs can have a significant influence on the athletes individually and as a

team. While communicating, a coach should always try to limit their verbal aggressiveness—no yelling, cussing, insulting their players, etc. They also should not ever try to make their players feel guilty or regretful if they perform badly; instead, words of encouragement are much more likely to result in improved behavior from the players. Instead of performing these antisocial behaviors, a coach should provide social support for their players, positive confirmation, and communicate with their athletes using individualized communication. An example of confirmation could be a coach saying to a player “You did well! Nice job!” after a game or competition or telling them “You are an important member of this team. We need you.” Those would be positive things that would likely result in improved performance. If a coach uses more positive and uplifting communication tactics, it will foster the relationship between themselves and their athletes. If this relationship is strong and both parties mutually respect each other, everyone will all around be happier.

Conclusion

Persuasion is everywhere, and there are many different facets of it that affect us in very different ways. Being well informed about persuasion tactics and being able to understand them to the best of your ability is a skill that will benefit you throughout your entire life. It’s difficult to be completely informed on every type of communication, but one in particular that affects a large portion of the population is sport communication. Sport communication is the communication between athletes and their coaches, and this type of communication can greatly impact your perception of yourself and how motivated you are in your particular sport. If a coach practices negative and antisocial behaviors in their coaching strategies, then their team is less likely to succeed, their athletes will be less satisfied with that sport, and the players will not

necessarily like the coach. Instead of using antisocial tactics, they should instead use prosocial tactics that have shown to result in higher sport satisfaction, higher performance levels, and more favorability shown to the coach. Coaches should understand the benefits to communicating with their players in a better way, and they should understand the power and influence that they have over their athletes. They should use their power in a constructive and inspirational way, rather than using it in a way that negatively affects their team. Should more coaches become better at communication within their sports, a lot more people might be inspired to start playing and continue playing sports throughout their entire lives.

References

Stiff, J. B., & Mongeau, P. A. (2016). *Persuasive communication* (3rd ed.). New York: Guilford Press