

Informational ,Critical and Empathic listening



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Performance Lifestyle Coordinator Peter McCabe continues his in depth look at listening as a critical skill in the art of communication. There are three kinds of listening that occur frequently in sport. Listening for information, critical listening and empathic listening.

Listening for information means listening for facts. The key is to first identify the central idea being expressed and then the supporting material being offered by the speaker. In sporting context, athletes listening to a coach may process the information by relating key facts to their own experience. Such an internal process helps to generate questions in their minds. The athletes may then chose to ask these questions to clarify their perceptions and if this happens useful discussion between athletes and coach often ensues.

The distinction between listening for information and critical listening is that the listener evaluates and challenges what they have heard. These challenges might take place in the listener's mind or be expressed directly to the speaker. While listening critically it is important to listen for the speaker's motive and mentally challenge the information they are giving. In sporting context much critical listening goes on when a coach delivers his or her rationale for a particular tactical approach in advance of competition. Listening to such persuasive messages challenges the listener to distinguish between information presented as facts and that presented as opinion.

Empathic listening is listening for feelings and is frequently employed during one to one interactions when the speaker needs to develop a coping method for their particular feeling or problem. For example a coach may need to listen empathically to an athlete who has just been deselected. The challenge for the listener is to put aside their own feelings and try to understand the speakers's point of view. The aim of such an interaction is to help the speaker work out a coping strategy. The coach may use skilful suggestion and rhetorical questions to help the person identify options in terms of moving on. Crucially however, remember that selection of the most appropriate strategy is a decision for the person and not the coach.

Athlete relationships are built on the quality of one to one communication. A better understanding of the skills of listening can help make these interactions more effective.