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Introduction

As a coach, communication is a very important part of my job. I have to be able to communicate with my players on many different levels because of how deep the relationship I have with them is. I have to be able to communicate to them as a coach trying to explain our offensive plays, as a leader to help them when they need to be motivated, and as a role model when they are in need. As a coach, I have to wear many different hats of communication so that they are able to have trust in me to lead them. Even though I am a younger coach, I think I have done very well adapting to the coaching lifestyle and being able to help my players, even though some are only a few years younger than I am, and I am still going through some of the same problems they are facing. I think my biggest area of concern in my communication style is my sometimes lack of clarity and excitement. I spend a lot of time during my day going over film from the previous practice, film for the upcoming week, and plans for the day that by the time I meet with my players in the afternoon I am pretty drained of energy that once we get to the practice plan for the day, I lack energy to speak in the meeting and most of the time am rushing to get them out in enough time to get ready for practice. So my communication skills need to be more proficient, especially when it comes to time management and clarity.

Identifying Strategies

When it comes to my communications skills with my players, I feel I do well overall, but there are still areas that I know need to be cleaned up. In David Eccles and Katy Tran's (2012) article they discuss four communication plans that are useful for coaches to use in their daily interactions with their players. I found the four very interesting because they go

into great detail about how each of the four stages can help to attribute to clear communication between players and coaches.

Within the article they discuss the details of communication in four parts the first being “Use Multiple Sensory Models” this section discusses how the coach should be able to present multiple forms of teaching for the players to understand. The common ones they discuss is, “talking them through, draw things up on a whiteboard, demonstrate them with moveable magnets, and provide a playbook” (Eccles & Tran, 2012). These strategies are some that I use; I even go farther and use film review from previous practices to help show other players performing the actions. I think the multiple concept strategy is very helpful for my clarity issue that I am struggling with currently.

When Eccles and Trans’ begin to discuss their idea of redundancy for the coaches communication, I do not feel that it would help me because my players do tell me that I am redundant, so I have that covered, but I feel I need to be careful with this concept because if I sit there and constantly repeat myself, this eats into my problem of time management and I will not be able to get to everything.

Eccles and Trans’ concept of using an enduring presentation to help coach the players was very interesting. I think this concept can be useful for the players I have so that they are able to access all the installation presentations so that they are able to go back and re-learn a concept if they are beginning to forget how we want to run it. That access could help for me to cut out some meeting times so that they are able to learn a majority of the system at home instead of having to sit in long film meetings each night during camp.

Their final idea “explain why” is probably the strongest concept they put forth for coaches because they believe, “players who learn the rationale behind a given play in

addition to how to execute the play will be more flexible during performance” (Eccles & Trans, 2012). This concept is truly interesting because I had never thought about it before, I usually just explained everything and then just felt longwinded. I give my players a special look behind each play I teach because I do not just tell them what they are doing, I tell them what the quarterback, receivers and offensive line are doing as well, so that they can see where they fit into the concept, or where they will most likely hit the run. I never thought of it as me explaining to them why we do it, I always thought of it as showing them the whole concept.

Overall I think a lot of what Eccles and Tran’s had to say in their article about communication was helpful for me to be able to reflect on and gain new ideas of how to reach my players when talking to them so that they are able to see the concept we run more clearly and so I can be a more effective coach.

Conversation Breakdown

For this section of the assignment I sat down with one of my running backs to discuss with him his goals and plans for the future. For the sake of the paper I am going to refer to him by his initials DN. DN is a redshirt freshman for the team and is our starting running back. He is hands down the most talented player I have ever coached and has an enormous amount of potential if he continues to improve over his four season with the team. I was able to sit down with him this week for roughly 20 minutes (21:18 to be exact). Within the conversation I was able to get a better look into how he is seeing his situation and where he wants to go to in life. For the sake of the length of the document, I will skip the beginning of our conversation and get right to the main part of our conversation.

ME: So, DN in order from 3 to 1 what are your three most important goals you want to achieve while you are here at Limestone?

DN: I would like to be a captain for the team for all four seasons. Be leading rusher in school history. And to finally get my degree.

ME: All right, tell me why you want to be a captain for all four seasons?

DN: For me Coach, being a team captain means more than being able to walk out to the coin toss each Saturday. It means the guys in the position group, on the offense, and the defense see me as a leader and as someone they want to represent them when things need to be brought up to the coaching staff. My mother always raised me to be the one that steps up for the group, and does not just sit behind quietly. She always wanted me to be a leader and she was the biggest help in making me become one.

ME: All right, now why is being the leading rusher number two on the list?

DN: Well, this is a new program and I will have a four-year head start on anyone to set the mark for future running backs. I think it has to do with a pride thing for me because I plan on being the starting running back for all four years of my career here, and I want to give it my all so that the mark is set high enough that it won't be reached until there is another four year starter who could have a chance. I know that sounds selfish, but it is one thing that I know I can achieve and I want to do my best to set it high so DN is a remembered name in Limestone history.

ME: You listed as getting your degree as the number one goal of your time here. Is that because your talking to me and I always tell you guys that the most important thing you can take away from college football is getting a degree?

DN: (DN Laughs) No Coach, as you know I was raised by my mom, and it was always just her and while I was growing up and playing football, she would tell me that if I keep working on school and football, I would be able to find a place that would let me do both at the college level and I could get a degree. So me getting a degree would mean a lot to my mother because I know how much she loves to watch me play football each week, but I also know how happy she will be watching me walk across the stage.

ME: So I'm starting to see a trend here that everything that you have talked about so far has had some connection back to your mother. Has she always been this big of a factor on your life choices?

DN: Absolutely, my mother is my true role model because she was able to raise me and my siblings on her own and she was able to control my crazy a** growing up. I was all over the place as a kid running around the neighbourhood with other kids playing pick up football and basketball, and she was able to keep track of me and keep me out of harms way. She did this for all of us, and she even still tries to do it now that I am in college because she comes to every football game we have home and away. And for the home games she evens sticks around after to make sure the apartment is stocked with food and nothing that would affect my performance on the field.

ME: That sounds a lot like my mother growing up. So I can understand that same pressure. Now that we talked about your goals in that same order explain how you plan of achieving each one of those goals.

DN: I think the best way for me to stay as a team captain and leader for all four years is to continue to lead by example. I think that some of the first year guys look up to me as a

leader because I am a starter, but I have to continue to do better to motivate the guys to play at their fullest potential and to get them excited about playing Saints football.

ME: That is definitely a good approach to take to continue on that path. Now tell me how you plan on being the schools leading rusher.

DN: I think my best option to achieve that goal is to continue to get better and better. Right now we are a very young team and once we begin to get older and the offensive line really begins to dominate more than they already are, it'll make the running lanes a lot easier to see. I have to have great off seasons of lifting and running to get stronger and faster. The most important part is working on the things you see on film and the things you keep telling me to get better at. Keeping a low pad level, running my feet and learning how to make guys miss opposed to lowering my shoulder on them. I think with all of those things together I could achieve the goal of leading rusher.

ME: You mentioned how we are a young team, and you and I both know the amount of talent we have at running back, do you find yourself concerned at all of some of the other guys stepping up into a position to challenge you for the starting spot in the future?

DN: I think that is a definite possibility, and I relish the opportunity for the challenge. We have a great group of guys with DC and QM still learning the system and they definitely have the potential to push for the job and all I'm waiting for is for the competition to begin. I trust you and the other coaches to make the best choice to put us in a position to win. If y'all think I'm the best fit for the job, then that is awesome. If y'all choose someone else to take the reins, that's great too because I want our team to win games, that's the ultimate goal.

ME: it shows a lot about your leadership skills to be able to admit that you would be willing to let someone else be the starter if it was the best overall decision for the team to win. I know that's a tough position to be in, but I can understand your reasoning behind that. Now to your final goal, how are you planning on achieving your degree from Limestone in four years?

DN: I plan on doing everything I need to in the classroom to get the job done. In our first meeting this year back in August you told us "There is a reason the phrase 'Student-Athlete' is not alphabetised." And I have taken that approach to my schooling. I understand that I have to reach a certain GPA to meet my scholarship requirements, also to meet NCAA eligibility and finally need the GPA to graduate. My mother always told me to take my schooling seriously because there may come a day when football may not be there, but my degree will always be there.

ME: That's awesome to hear. There is nothing more a coach like me likes to hear than a player telling them that the degree is the most important part of their college football experience. Between you and me, do you really know what your degree means when you play college football? And what it really says to future job interviewers?

DN: No what does it mean coach?

ME: It tells those people that for four years you were capable of consistently managing your time for the overall benefit of yourself. You were able to attain a four-year degree while also taking on the challenges and time commitments of college classes and football. You are basically telling the employers that you are better than the other applicant because you have a better hold on your time management skills. Its how I got this job as a college football coach because I know how to balance my time to make

sure all my work of recruiting, film breakdown and daily activities are getting done.

The degree is the most important thing you can achieve as a student-athlete because it means more than just a normal student.

DN: I never really thought about it like that coach.

ME: See DN, I am not only good for coaching football; I'm capable of coaching life skills too.

But thanks for doing this for me, it means a lot that you were able to take time out of your day to sit down with me and discuss these things, so now I have a better understanding of what you are looking for in you four years here.

DN: No problem coach thanks for asking me to help you out. Have a good one Coach.

The conversation we had lasted 21 minutes and 18 seconds. From my count DN spoke a total of 11 minutes and 32 seconds whereas I spoke for 9 minutes 46 seconds. The conversation went well overall, and I was able to find out a lot about his goals and plans for his four years at a Limestone Saint.

Analysis

I think during the conversation I was able to get the best information out of DN when we talked about his mothers influence on him and how important her views on his life and his ability to achieve plays a huge factor on his choices. I liked being able to talk about this stuff with DN because for the past 12 weeks all we have really had time to do was talk football and I haven't really had the opportunity to have any of the players open up on this level before. For all that I knew was the he just had a really supportive family for his football career, but to hear him talk about how big of an impact she had on him growing

up and being a single mother was truly inspiring to me because of how great of a man he is growing up to be.

The other point that really had him open up a lot was when I brought up the concept of the possibility of him losing his starting spot. This seemed to be somewhat of a touchy subject because he really has not had any really contenders for the spot just yet, but that's understandable with a new program with a lot of players still learning the system. I was shocked to see how well he handled that idea because as a team leader I expect him to choose to do what is best for the team, and I was pleased to hear him say that. He understands that there can only be one running back on the field at a time and that there is a potential for that change to happen, but he is more than ready for the challenge.

I think the overall conversation worked really well to get him to open up and really share his feelings about certain things. I firmly believe that if I conducted this interview at the beginning of the season because I do not think he would have been as comfortable with me as he is now, after knowing me for a few months and I would not have received the same responses to the questions that I asked.

Reflection

I think my biggest doubts for this conversation were that I did not know what to expect with DN. He has been a great player to coach and talk football with, but we have never really sat down and talked about personal stuff quite yet. So I was concerned that this conversation was going to be mostly me talking and trying to steer the conversation, but I was really surprised and happy that he was able to open up that much and really talk to me about his thoughts and feelings. I think my approach was good, because it allowed

him to set up the conversation however he wanted to with his responses and it worked out really well. I think the only thing I would change about my overall approach would be to have more follow up questions prepared, and do better by creating follow up questions on the spot so that I could try and get the players to open up a little more as the questions become deeper. I think if I'm able to prepare more than I did, I would have greater success with getting to know the players on a deeper level.

I think there is an opportunity in my position meetings for more question and answer approach for when we are watching film because there I can give the players the opportunity to explain why they didn't hit the hole, or why they didn't cut it back. I think if I let them explain why they are doing certain things, instead of telling them that they are wrong, I will get them to feel more confident in my ability to coach them because I would not be constantly yelling at them and forcing them to be the same running back, when they are all different running back types. I think the question and answer approach would definitely help the meeting room atmosphere so that they players are not dreading to talk about a play they now they screwed up on, and it would give them an opportunity to talk it out and they will most likely stumble onto the correct way to do it, instead of me constantly telling them the answer.

I felt this assignment has really helped me to develop my communication skills with my players and being able to record a conversation and listen to it again helped me to be able to realize how I speak to each one. It let me see how I can improve my style of coaching through communication in the meeting room and one on one with the players. I think being able to record the conversations and meetings for later review can really help me become a better coach and communicator.

References

Eccles, D. Tran, K. (2012). *Getting Them On The Same Page: Strategies For Enhancing Coordination and Communication In Sports Teams*. *Journal of Sports Psychology In Action*, 3:1, 30-40.