

# BASKETBALL COACHES' FEEDBACK: THE SCIENCE AND ART BEHIND

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Mar Rovira gave a theoretical introduction to giving feedback and the fundamentals of operant conditioning, a learning methodology. In the second part, she conducted an exercise with conference attendees to help them implement it in practice.

Coaches are teachers who must teach skills, strategies and behaviors by providing the best possible feedback.

**Positive reinforcement:** If we add something useful or pleasant the Player will repeat it again. Every time the Player does a good defense, a good effort, the trainer reinforces/rewards him by clapping, cheering or with simple phrases such as 'very good', 'well done', 'bravo'. This is a simple and cheap tool for creating a powerful, empowering and honest environment.

**Negative reinforcement:** I remove something unpleasant after good behavior such as removing bus trips and replacing them with plane trips.

**Conditioning shaping.** It is critical in training young Players to get closer to the right behavior. Rewarding the approximation of the final conduct helps to develop the Player's attitude. General encouragement fosters a positive work environment, but players interpret it in terms of motivation or emotion rather than learning.

We spend 90% of our time correcting and pointing out mistakes, and only 10% rewarding good behavior. However, at the end of the game, the Player would feel useless and unworthy rather than positive and motivated. A 60% to 40% ratio would be ideal.

**Positive punishment** means that I add something unpleasant after a bad behavior, which means as a social punishment I yell, I insult, I make fun of the Player or I would be sarcastic. Surprisingly, many coaches use this tool. This should

be avoided because it can lead to aggression. Never attack Players self-esteem.

**Negative punishment:** Taking away something they enjoy, for example, the Player should pay every time he is late for training. Nobody will show up late in a week. Negative punishment can be beneficial, but if it comes with the explanation of the right behavior we want to implement.

People do things depending on the consequences. They do something if it's useful or significant for them or if that allows them to avoid something unpleasant. The way we use reinforcement and punishment can drastically alter behavior.

Punishment is effective for decreasing and/or eliminating attitudes and behaviors. Our behavior improves or has the potential to improve or remain stable when we use our rewards.

Punishment with a technical instruction is ineffective since you want the correction to be done; instead, make the correction on its own or with reinforcement.

**The lack of reinforcement:** In order to foster self-training, the coach must know when to provide feedback and when to remain silent. Players must also learn how to train themselves. Following an unsuccessful behavior, the coach can offer contingent congratulations so that the Player understands why he has been appreciated. It is more difficult to do when the coach is under pressure, but it is worthwhile. Alternatively, he can ask, 'What's the problem?' to make the Player consider the action and therefore generate clever Players. Following mistakes give reflection, technical instruction or guidance.

Ignoring mistakes that are unrelated to the purpose of the practice can be highly beneficial in making the Player be-

lieve that he is wonderful and that he can progress.

Having conversations with Players and knowing their personal issues help to establish relationship based on trust and to create a 'carrot list' that helps to integrate their personal preferences in the rewarding system avoiding the development of an autocratic leadership.

Four steps of providing effective feedback:

1. Demonstrate what is well done. Give encouragement. Praise the Player for what he has already accomplished.
2. Describe briefly and clearly which of their actions is nicely done.
3. Identify the appropriate consequence from the Player's carrot list you can use.
4. 'Keep going'. 'You're good'. "Keep it up like this'. Say something that inspires optimism and and a desire to continue developing.

Good examples of supportive feedbacks:

- Great job. You made a great cut with excellent timing. You didn't get the ball, but we just made the wide open space as a result. So keep doing a great job.
- It was a very difficult layup because you use your body very well. Keep going because you were the main reason why we win the game.
- I admire your shooting technique because you extend your elbow and snap your wrist. This is the most effective way to score. So keep doing that.
- Your first step was wide enough to allow you to reach the rim. Keep going.
- That was a great shot that allowed us to win the game.