

What to Say and When to Say it

I've seen many...way too many...father/son and father/daughter relationships strained because the dad addresses timing related flaws with form related corrections which makes just as much sense as addressing a timing related issue when hitting from the tee. A hitter never has to wait for the ball a little longer when hitting on a tee to improve form and you never keep your back elbow down to address a timing issue.

Hitters will get through the timing issues that arise much quicker and the hitter/coach-parent relationship will be MUCH better if all the hitter hears from the coach in regards to game and BP mistakes are "You understand how to do this, just stay relaxed, confident, and hit out of your zone. Match the plane of swing with ball and the timing will come. You got this." Instead of "rotate over front foot heel, blast with the hips, flex your abs, hold the bat on the bones of your hands, keep your head still, get your back arm to line up with your spine, rotate around your spine, keep your back leg straight up and down, keep the bat straight up and down, and so on...." When hitters hear that latter stuff they just think the coach/parent is an idiot for thinking the hitter is an idiot by inferring that he doesn't already know that stuff. If he hears the former stuff he will think the coach/parent has confidence in him and that you think he is smart.

Affirmative Simple and Clear Language

The key to teaching rotational hitting is simply knowing what (1) timing related issues are, (2) what form related issues are, (3) what visual rotational lingo is, (4) what feel rotational lingo is and (5) what timing lingo is...then using each in the right place at the right time and with a person who wants to learn. Kids get confused when the appropriate language isn't matched with the appropriate correction. Or when the language is so confusing that the player must perform strenuous mental calisthenics to figure out what the coach is trying to say. The kids will not progress fast and will get frustrated if they

are told varying and conflicting things from one drill to the other or if they are told abstract ridiculous instructions like “squish the bug.” That term is typically used to describe the back foot rotating and nothing more. When the hips rotate the back foot naturally rotates so it makes little sense making this more complicated than need be and teaching a lesser included mechanic.

The last thing these kids need is numerous people telling them what *not to do* or *weird things to do*. If that happens their eyes will just glaze over and they will shut down. Abstract terms are a meaningless unless the player can attach a mechanical association with the term. But why make the player go through the trouble in deciphering the code? These terms can be beneficial for coaches who are learning new techniques for the first time in that they provide an association tag for memory recall but they should be limited to that, if used at all. Put another way, does combining the verb squish with the noun bug elicit a clear picture in your mind about how a swing is supposed to look like? What about terms like “stay back” or “wait for the ball.” Those sound like things we tell our dogs when we don’t want it going outside or when we play fetch. The kids shouldn’t be forced to do mental calisthenics to understand what coaches or parents are saying or treated like they have the same mental capabilities as dogs. On the contrary clear specific language like “crush the ball in your strike zone” provides the kid with a strong verb next to the noun followed by an attributive adjective and the accompanying noun that ALL RELATE to baseball...assuming they know what a strike zone is.

One Thing at a Time

Have you ever tried to do 50 things at once and just find yourself spinning your wheels going 100 MPH in park? Players who try to focus on everything get frustrated because they focus on nothing. Kids with high mental faculties tend to be the over-thinkers. Over-thinking creates mechanical hesitation and emotional frustration. Coaches and parents can help these players slow down to speed up by encouraging the player to work on one thing at a time.

To Speak or Not to Speak, That is the Question

Occasionally you may go to a ballpark and find four or five coaches all giving instructions to the kids and the scene resembles navy seal training. Think for a minute how we best learn. Is it really beneficial to be constantly spoon fed with what it is we need to be doing and reminded of what we aren't doing right? If we are constantly spoon fed with information then we never learn to think for ourselves. When this happens the player performance becomes dependent upon the person giving continuous instruction. However, when we truly understand how to do something but we are having difficulties doing it sometimes the best thing to do is keep doing it until we get it right. Often players just need the opportunity to work through some issues.

If coaches read their players' eyes they will quickly pick up on whether the hitter is confused on what he is trying to do or whether the hitter knows what to do and he is working through it. If the coach is confused on whether the hitter understands what he is supposed to do all the coach has to do is ask that exact question. If the hitter understands the instruction he will be able to tell the coach what he is supposed to be doing.

This instance comes up often when a hitter is transitioning between a linear swing and a rotational swing. It also comes up in any situation where the player is trying to find ways to calm his nerves. Sometimes the best thing to do is let the players fail at something and then see if they repeatedly make those same mistakes. If they make the same mistakes because they don't understand how to properly do something then the coach can instruct them on the mechanical issues. If the player makes the same mistakes because nerves are getting in the way or they are rushing themselves or freezing then instruct them on playing relaxed and focused. Baseball is a game of failure and coaches must help the players accept that mistakes, errors, and strikeouts will come and that is just part of the game.

