



YOUR PRACTICE / BUSINESS

10 Ways to Be the Coach Your Staff and Patients Deserve

Perry Nickelston, DC, FMS, SFMA

Basics matter. Fundamentals build champions. Little things make big changes. Coach [John Wooden](#) said, "It's the little details that are vital. Little things make big things happen." The longer you are in the coaching world, the easier it becomes to get lost in the glitter of the latest and greatest tips, tricks and strategies. What you learn after getting your butt kicked by life and the competition is that mastering fundamentals is the creamy filling for winning. Go back to the beginning and appreciate the world of coaching from the eyes of a rookie. A refresher in your perspective can make all the difference.

Here are 10 simple ways to help you get back on track or keep moving along your current one.

1. Keep It Short and Sweet

Keep your instruction short, simple and to the point - and then stop. Hack away the nonessentials. If you cue movement, don't blabber on. The brain can only pattern four things at once before retention levels start to plummet. Shorten it up.

2. Follow the Rule of Three

Compliment people on three good things you see about their performance before you ever go into the negative. It's the Rule of Three. Build them up. Make it genuine. Make it positive. Then be constructive with the negative.

3. Show Them How

Create independence. You don't want people overdependent on you. Your job is to bring out the best in each person you are working with and show them how to be great without you. Overdependence is not coaching.



4. Ask More Than You Tell

Ask more questions and do less telling of what to do. Truly get to know what the patient wants and help give them that, plus what they need. You can't do both until you ask questions. Maybe you are telling them the wrong thing. How can you know? Ask them. Questions establish connection and caring.

5. Be Willing to Adapt

Build a resilient system. Have a backup plan in place if the first one doesn't work out. You need to always have an alternative route. Resiliency tolerates change. Have a system that can adapt to the specific goal. The dirty little secret is the goal always moves.

6. Give Patients Your Full Attention

Be mindful. We are what we give our attention to. When you are with a patient, be no where else. It's called PTC: [present-time consciousness](#). Be in the moment. Be present. That means not doing anything on your phone. Coaching means caring. Care enough to be there in the same space mentally, not just physically.

7. Let the Patient Share

Ask every patient AWE questions. "And what else?" questions are the quickest and easiest way to uncover possibilities. For example: "What's on your mind?" When the patient answers, ask, "And what else? What's the real challenge here for you?" After they answer, ask, "And what else? What's important right now?" It shows you actually care.

8. Make It Fun

Work without joy is drudgery. Drudgery does not produce champions or great teams. Most things in the beginning are more fun because we take ourselves less seriously. The further you go deeper into the game, the easier it is to lose that fun energy.

9. Never Assume

Lock it in. Don't assume that because you gave feedback, the patient interprets it as you intended. Confirm understanding before moving on.

Here are three ways: 1) Ask patients to summarize what they heard you say. 2) Ask them to prioritize the most important parts of the feedback you gave. 3) Ask them to identify the next action they will take to implement the feedback.

10. Motivate, Don't Denigrate

Correct instead of critique. Always maintain a teaching mentality and focus on the solution, rather than the problem. For instance, tell the patient, "Run faster out of the block" as opposed to, "Your push out of the block wasn't fast enough." See the subtle difference? They will feel the difference.

Master the list above and you will inspire change. Coaching is one of the most rewarding endeavors you can pursue. Show it the respect it deserves. Own the basics. That's how you make a ding in the universe and succeed where others fail.