



United States Professional Diving Coaches Association, Inc.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE THROUGH MOTIVATION

By Hobie Billingsley – while diving coach at Indiana University

When asked to speak on building confidence, it sort of confused me a little, for confidence appears to me to be like a person who has money in the bank. If you have enough of it, you can buy and do nearly anything you want. To me, confidence is that trait that defines believing and trusting in one's self. It estimates and breeds hope and faith in achieving goals, which lead to accomplishment and success. One thing for sure, confidence is one characteristic all coaches like to see in their athletes.

So, in reference to athletes, if confidence is one of the ultimate goals and necessities to winning or gaining success, then we may ask how it is achieved. Are athletes born with it or is it something that is learned or developed? We have heard the expression many times that so and so didn't win because he lacked confidence or another person lost the game because he was over- confident. Whichever way we look at it, confidence appears to play a dominant role in our world of sports and our lives in terms of just what can or cannot be accomplished.

If confidence is what we strive for in achieving our goals, then how can we obtain it if we don't have it and how do we handle it if we already have it? To answer the first question, it appears that we should, for the time allotted for this discussion, observe those factors that motivate confidence. If we are to understand how certain factors motivate confidence, then we should start with some basic concept of what is meant by motivation. Though there are many definitions of motivation, it may be best expressed for our purpose as "that source which stimulates and instills the desire for an athlete to perform to the best of his capabilities". However, to obtain such a performance requires the athlete to be cognizant of the competitive level on which he can best perform. When the athlete is aware of his performance capabilities, then he can set certain short range and long-range goals. For example, if a diver is aware of his ability to compete in the high school state championships and succeeds in his performance, he will definitely develop confidence in himself in competing at that level. However, if he should attempt to compete at a higher level of competition, such as the national championships, his experience and ability to perform well at this level may not have yet developed which could result in a loss of self-confidence. Conversely, if he should perform well at this higher level of competition, then his self-confidence will most certainly grow. Thus, we observe that confidence in one's self falls within a great range and the amount of confidence acquired does affect performance. It seems obvious then, if two athletes have identical abilities in all categories, the success of their performance will bear much on their self-confidence.

The athlete quickly learns that in order to obtain high goals in performance, he must undergo intensive training which includes proper physical conditioning, consistent and well planned workouts, ample competition, a positive environment, ideal supervision and coaching, etc. Occasionally, an athlete will come along who has the confidence and talent to succeed without following rigid training habits, but, with the present levels of competition found, this brand of athlete is a rare exception. On the other hand, the less talented athlete, who is highly motivated and pushes himself to the very limit, may never realize his intended goal. In many cases, when an athlete is aware that his original goal will never be met, he loses confidence and often changes to a goal less challenging or directs his energies and interests in some

other direction. Whatever the goal of an athlete, motivation influences the success or failure of an individual's performance, which results in the loss or gain of self-confidence.

So, how does one become motivated to perform well? Unfortunately, we coaches find very few self-motivated and self-disciplined athletes these days due mainly to technological advances which have encouraged more and more youngsters to watch television, do drugs, drive around in cars, etc. instead of knocking themselves out in some sport. In all fairness regarding this point, many young people are exposed to a great educational challenge, which requires many hours of studying and so find little time for social and physical activities. At any rate, with such apparent influence that motivation has on the performance of athletes, it is important that we observe the three sources from which motivation is developed:

- a. **THE INDIVIDUAL** - Many athletes need little motivation from other sources to perform well for they have the innate ability to motivate themselves. These athletes usually like the challenge of competition...the head on engagement...and usually perform better as the pressure of the competition increases. This type of athlete usually has little fear or is in control of his fear when competing. Others seem to "clutch" when things get tough and often perform poorer as the pressure mounts. More often, these athletes lack self-confidence and have great fears... fear of losing, fear to do one's best, fear of letting down teammates or parents, etc. Though there is nothing wrong with having such fears, athletes who don't perform up to their capable standards usually have difficulty in controlling such fears.

Apparently, self-motivation has much to do with the way an athlete sees himself. In youth, emerging ideas about oneself are shaped by reference to other people. Throughout life a person is motivated by the desire to behave in the manner consistent with the symbolic role he has accepted of "himself". His clothing, mannerisms, tastes, and opinions all fit his notion of what HIS kind of person should be. These well-etched outlines of self- image usually do not radically change over the years but evolve and take on specific ways of expressing themselves.

In many cases the self-concept is really a social concept and other people are the standards against which the emerging "self" is measured and defined. So, in dealing with others, the athlete soon finds the activities in which he can or cannot excel. Competence begets confidence and vice-versa resulting in a sort of chain reaction, which leads, more or less, to a consistent level of self-assurance (or timidity), which may last a lifetime. The manner in which the athlete competes and the amount of determination offered in the performance has a direct affect on the behavior and personality patterns of the athlete. However, competence doesn't materialize easily without talent so the level of assuredness is directly related to the athlete's talent. In addition to acquiring competence, an athlete also acquires a sense of being awarded for his efforts. Thus, a highly talented person may not perform well because he cares little for the prize while another person with modest abilities may successfully undertake the task with great effort for he feels he deserves the award. Competence and self-worth are commonly consistent with one another. Because of this, some athletes become habitual winners, like Greg Louganis, while others become habitual losers. Still others lose some and win some. The important point is that their expectations become fairly stable.

Naturally, one of the biggest goals of the athlete is winning. Being number one is the big thing but what is really gained by winning? Normally, the athlete who wins has satisfied that particular goal for the moment and tends to relax and/or become complacent over his accomplishment. Self- confidence is maintained but the only motivation derived from winning is

the thought of trying to win again the next time around. But, what of the loser? Many times a person becomes more motivated in defeat for the challenge to win becomes more pressing and important to the person than before. In defeat, the athlete may question his abilities, talent, training habits, attitudes, goals, etc. and if he contains his self-confidence, his desire to compete may be as strong, if not stronger than before.

The feeling of power and dominance over others motivates some athletes. Beating others gives them a sense of being better than the opponent, which offers personal satisfaction.

To induce better performance, the athlete may be motivated through a positive or negative reinforcement and it is not possible to know which approach will offer the best performance at a given time. What motivates an athlete to give a high quality performance at one moment may not motivate him under similar conditions another time. To be more specific, a coach may yell and scream (negative reinforcement) at an athlete during a contest and that person may respond with an outstanding performance, whereas, the coach may again use the same negative approach on the same athlete under similar conditions at another time and the athlete may respond with a very poor performance. Another example of negative reinforcement is that of Indiana's basketball coach who is well known to constantly badger and harass his athletes who respond, more often than not, with a positive performance. These athletes realize that if they can accept such negative abuse, a positive response may result in pro basketball contracts, outstanding press and television coverage, pier identity, and other positive rewards. I would venture to guess that if similar coaching tactics were used in a less popular program, such as diving, the coach would have no team. On the other hand, positive reinforcement does not guarantee positive motivation from the athlete for such an approach may be artificial or be applied too often to have meaning. When a coach tries to psych-up an athlete when it is obvious the coach really doesn't mean what he is saying or when he offers the same praises regardless of the performance of the athlete, then positive motivation has little or no value.

We should also note that the intensity of motivation often influences the quality of performance. When a competition is highly important or a contest becomes extremely intense, the sources used to motivate the individual more often become more extreme. Conversely, when the quality of competition is weak and top performance is not required to win, the sources of motivation are normally mild. Therefore, it appears that the greater the demand for top performance, the greater the need for motivation. However, there has been some evidence that too much motivation can result in an athlete or team reaching a state of panic which can impair performance or stop performance altogether. When motivation becomes this intense, fear and self-control become major factors, which makes performance very complex and often impossible. Such a situation happened a few years ago to the University of Wisconsin's football team. After a terrible lashing from an opponent, a psychologist was brought in to examine the entire team. The doctor publicly stated that the entire team had been motivated to a point "beyond their ability to respond" by the coaches and the media. This condition is sometimes termed as "psyched out".

It is also found that in training, constant motivating practices do not always breed best performances from the athletes. Studies have indicated that offering a mixture of high pressure and low-pressure workouts encourages greater performance than constant high intensive workouts. The reasoning for the intensity change in workouts appears that athletes must have time to relax while performing or at times during practice because they simply can't be keyed up constantly for competition.

b. THE ENVIRONMENT - The environment surrounding an athlete can often affect his performance. A crowd cheering or booing has often influenced a

performer causing success or failure. Many similar types of environmental factors can create a positive or negative atmosphere. There is little doubt that a contest is a lot more exciting if the stands are full, a band plays, there is a stimulating announcer, and friends and fans are cheering. Motivating gimmicks can also fire up an individual or team on one occasion, but then have little or no affect at another time. Whatever the gimmicks, posters, signs, slogans, locker room decorations, music, etc., they all offer positive atmosphere but there is no guarantee they will motivate anyone. Having good equipment and good teaching aids such as video, films, etc., all contribute to a favorable environment but there is no way to measure their values to the performers.

c. THE COACH - Apart from everyone, the coach is in the ideal position to not only motivate the athlete but also influence him in a way that may affect his outlook on life. Many coaches have guided athletes on to become super stars while others have crippled the lives of their youngsters. So, the coach should realize that whether he likes it or not, he is going to create an image of himself with his athletes. The type of image will differ somewhat with each team member and will depend on the association and communication between the two. It is, therefore, important that the coach project the best of himself to his team. The type of image will depend much upon his personal make-up, such as personality, sense of humor, manner of dress, moral standards, leadership ability, reaction to stress and pressure, etc. Naturally, how the coach affects the athlete depends upon many conditions but the kind and amount of motivation to be offered the athlete is really in the hands on the coach.

Since there are so many ways a coach may influence an athlete, it may be helpful to be a little more specific on how the coach may offer his services:

1. If a coach hopes to motivate an athlete, then he must also be motivated. A positive attitude from the coach can affect and inspire the athlete while a poor attitude from the coach can ruin the performance of a whole team. A coach who believes that you should fight until your last breath most certainly demands respect and admiration from his peers.
2. The coach should get to know the athlete well enough to know what it takes to motivate him. Some athletes respond better when yelled at while others withdraw with such negative input. A coach who can adjust his personality and motivating traits to suit the personality of the athlete more often is much more successful in coaching than the coach who treats all of his team the same way. Only through experience can a coach learn when, how, or where a particular coaching technique will work and then he is usually right about half the time.
3. Perhaps one of the most difficult traits for a coach to learn is self-control. A coach out of control certainly cannot expect controlled performances from his team. If he shows temper by cussing, constantly tearing down the opposition, or uses physical violence (like throwing chairs), he can expect similar behavior patterns from his own youngsters. Pressure situations normally do not bring out the best in people and coaches are no exception, so when a coach is out of control little, anything can be offered that will motivate the athlete for a better performance.
4. Being organized is itself a form of motivation for this induces guidance, leadership, and concern for the program by the coach.
5. Playing favorites or being inconsistent in relationships with athletes has prevented many coaches from being good motivators. If the coach cannot consistently enforce

the rules or be up front with his team, then he cannot expect an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect.

6. The coach who forms hasty or permanent negative opinions of his athletes certainly isn't using a very good motivating technique. Some people have difficulty relating to others and cannot express themselves well and if the coach is not perceptive and patient with them, he may lead them in a direction that he may live to regret later. Likewise, the coach should not express negative opinions of his team members to others for such back stabbing often gets back to the people involved which can cause a very poor atmosphere.

I am sure that there are many more motivating techniques used in getting the best out of athletes and we have just offered a few here. But if the coach wishes to motivate with results, he should start early in the season and be consistent throughout the year. The smart coach will seek out those athletes that are easy to motivate and then try to draw the other team members into the fold. Often times, a coach becomes so intense on winning that he tries to hard to motivate his team resulting in all the fun taken out of the contest. Remember, all of this is nothing but a game.

About the author: **Hobie Billingsley** is regarded by many as one of the greatest coach in the history of the sport of diving. He is retired from coaching but still travels around the globe giving clinics and seminars on the sport he loves. When not teaching, Hobie writes articles and books about his diving experiences and adventures. Hobie maintains a home and a boat in Bloomington, Indiana. Look him up next time you are there!