

A Coaches' Guide to Winning at the Motivation Game

by Dr. Alan Goldberg

Introduction

Motivation is a critical ingredient to success both on and off the ice. After a failed effort, it is an individual's drive and determination that allows them bounce back and continue in the pursuit of their goals.

There are many facets that comprise a person's motivation to achieve success.

1. Each individual must accept the responsibility to self motivate themselves to achieve their goals. However, it is very helpful if parents, coaches, and the community can provide a positive and nurturing support system.
2. It is the responsibility of the individual to have a vision of the goal they would like to achieve. As a coach you can to help/inspire athletes to share the vision and direction represented by figure skating.
3. Explaining how exercises or drills help skaters become one step closer to achieving their goal. Another essential part of a coach's job is to convince athletes that their sacrifices and sweat are worth the price to achieve their goal.
4. Motivation does not just naturally occur. Even professional athletes require outside motivation from their coach. Many coaches assume that the athlete should already have the motivation to succeed. It is a big mistake to assume the athlete will be motivated.
5. People need to be motivated every day, not just on the day of testing or competing. 90% of motivation happens in practice from day #1. 5-10% of motivation gets done just before the big game/race/match. Unless you are working everyday at being a motivator, the gimmicks and talks that you pull out on game day will be ineffectual.
6. The Heart of Motivation is Developing a special relationship with your Athlete. The kind of relationship that you develop with each athlete from the beginning of the season will largely determine how motivated that individual will be to learn from and perform for you.
7. Relationship/Motivation Building Guidelines Treat your Athletes with Respect - Deal with your athletes the way that you would like to be dealt with. Respect them and they will respect you, be able to learn from you and will go to the ends of the earth to perform for you.
8. Avoid Comparisons - Comparisons almost always make athletes feel badly about themselves, kill their motivation and engender intrasquad rivalry & unhealthy competition. Compare only to model (i.e., "Look at the way Janice executes that trick... especially watch what she does with her upper body").
9. Deal with your Athlete as a Whole Person - Take an interest in your athlete beyond his/her athletic abilities. If you care about them as a person rather than just what they can do for the team, they will reward you with high motivation, increased intensity and great performances.
10. Listen/Be Empathetic - The heart of effective communication is listening. The way to make an athlete feel better about themselves is to listen to them when they speak to you and to at-

- tempt to understand them from their perspective. Be silent when they talk, don't plan your next comment and try to step into their shoes. Your efforts will pay off in a strong relationship and a motivated athlete.
11. Do Not Equate your Athletes' Self-worth with their Bad Performances - Bad performances don't mean bad people. Let your athlete know that you are even more there for them when they have a bad performance than when they have a good one. Don't be a fair weather fan to your athletes!
 12. STEP SEVEN MOTIVATE BY CHALLENGES RATHER THAN THREATS If you really want an athlete to go to that next level, challenge them. Encourage them to go for it and let them know that you believe they can do it. A challenge is positive and motivational. A threat is negative and gets the athlete preoccupied with the consequences for failing, punishment.
 13. BE POSITIVE Nothing good comes from negativity. It's a real demotivator. Consistently getting down on your athletes will not make them feel good about themselves or you. Be positive, no matter what, and you'll be a successful motivator.
 14. USE RECOGNITION Recognition is one of the most powerful motivators there is. Every day let your athletes know that you know they're there and giving an effort. Even simple comments like, "good job", or "nice hustle" will go a long way to motivating them.
 15. HANDLE FAILURES AND MISTAKES CONSTRUCTIVELY Teach your athletes that failures and setbacks are a necessary part of the learning process and not a cause for embarrassment or quitting. Model this attitude and you'll motivate your athletes to take risks and really go for it. If you jump in an athlete's face whenever he messes up you'll demotivate him and get him worrying about failing.
 16. MODEL MOTIVATION IN ALL OF YOUR INTERACTIONS If you want to be a motivator you have to be motivated! If you can't get excited about practice and always seem to just "go through the motions" forget about motivation. Motivation starts with you. Display enthusiasm and passion to your athletes and they will start to pick up on it!
 17. HAVE A BIG ENOUGH "WHY" Motivation is all about having a big enough "why" or reason for doing something. If you have a big enough why, you can always find the "how" to accomplish it. Help your athletes develop a big enough "why" to train and pursue excellence. Remind them daily of this "why".
 18. USE GOAL SETTING THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF THE SEASON Clearly defined goals help you take your dreams and turn them into reality. Work with your athletes at the beginning and throughout the season on specific, measurable, clearly defines goals that they can break down into long term, intermediate and short term pieces. help your athletes make sense of every practice in relation to their long term goals.
 19. HAVE FUN Create an atmosphere of fun on your team and you will motivate your athletes to train harder and longer. If practice is nothing but uninterrupted drudgery your athletes will quickly lose interest. If you really want your athletes to be serious competitors and come through in the clutch for you, introduce humor and fun regularly in practice.
 20. REST Rest is part of good training. If an athlete does not get a chance to rest he/she will ultimately burn out,

either mentally or physically. Short breaks in training over the course of the season will keep your athletes physically and mentally fresh and insure that they stay.

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