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It's half time and we're getting thrashed. What do I say to the players?



A few years ago I worked in the Premier League. During the course of the seasons, I sat in on many half time team talks. Often, the manager would sit the players down at half time and explain to them where they were going wrong. He'd then send them out for the second half and was always amazed that they didn't simply go out and put things right.

I used to see the constant frustration in the manager. The problem was, the manager had made a common mistake. He assumed that pointing out the errors would automatically lead to the solution. The fact is, as human beings, we often need more than that. Understanding where we went wrong is fine, but is not enough. We also need to know how we should be performing and we need to be able to practice it! Practicing is absolutely crucial if we're going to change our performance.

Often the manager would ask the team to change their tactics or their formation on the field, to counter what the opposition was doing. The problem was, our players hadn't practiced doing that. They'd never played in the formation before or practiced the new tactics. It was not simply a case of switching to something they knew and were confident in. Therefore they tried it for a while, found that it didn't work very well, and they reverted back to what they did know. As the manager moaned at them for making the same mistakes time after time, the players' confidence started to drain away. The players didn't know what to do or how to do it,

I'm sure you will have seen it, been on the receiving end of it, or maybe even fallen that trap yourself at some point. So, what's the alternative? How do we turn around performances during a 15 minute half time interval?

Let's start with some basic principles.

Firstly, the players will only retain a few key pieces of information. Over 90% of most team talks are forgotten by the time the players walk back down the tunnel. So, make sure you focus on a couple of key elements.

Secondly, players normally perform well when they have three things:

- **Focus**
- **Confidence**
- **Motivation**

Fortunately, these three feed off of each other. Very simply, when we have a simple, clear focus we tend to execute our tasks well. When we execute our task well, we become confident and enjoy what we're doing. As we become

confident and enjoy what we're doing, we are motivated to do it again.

If we want to start this positive spiral of increasing focus, confidence and motivation, we normally need to start at the beginning; focus. Make sure the players know their job and understand what they need to do, in order to do that job really well. There will be some simple processes that they can focus on. Once they know these (and they are focused on them) we can start to evaluate players by looking at how well they execute those processes. Coaches and managers often make the mistake of judging the players according to the results, rather than evaluating how well they are delivering the processes. Former England Rugby coach, Clive Woodward, was often heard commenting on areas of the game that his team performed well in and those areas that they needed to improve. If they won 70-0, he'd still highlight the areas that were working well and those they needed to work on. If they lost 70-0, he would do exactly the same. This kept his team focused on ensuring they delivered the processes. Woodward knew that when the processes were delivered well, the results would follow!

Although there are no magic wands, making positive changes in how players think and feel can have a significant impact on performance. There are very few things in sport that can change in a very short period of time. We don't suddenly lose or gain skill, or suddenly become more or less athletic. The things that tend to change more quickly are tactics and mind-set. If we can take control of mind-set, we're in a far stronger position.

