

Effective Coaching Attitudes

By Rev. Dr. Marshall R. Coffman

At the YMCA International Judo Camp in Huguenot, NY (a great camp!) while preparing a sermon for the following Sunday back home, I pondered the text from Philippians 4:1-9. Out of this emerged an outline for effective coaching, based on three attitudes:

Adopt an Attitude of Praise

Perhaps another title for coach should be “cheerleader.” Win or lose each student/competitor should be able to walk off the mat to a coach with a smiling face and outstretched arms. A hug or pat on the back with words like “you did good” or “I am proud of you” go a long way in building the confidence in our judoka.

One aspect of jita kyoei (mutual welfare and benefit) that often get set aside rests in the fact that one learns through both winning and losing. This remains difficult to get across to anxious parents wanting their child to win and coping when losses occur. Unfortunately, many coaches have dismissed this aspect of jita kyoei. I witness yelling, scolding coaches at nearly every shiai (tournament). A student leaving the mat after a loss already feels bad about losing, why compound that by yelling and/or scolding? I cannot tell you how many students my club has acquired from other martial arts clubs because of yelling, scolding coaches.

USJA Code of Ethics states; “To be in compliance with the USJA Code of Ethics all members are to contribute to a positive and rewarding experience for all participants in Judo. This includes the following responsibilities: ... Respect ... Orderly Behavior ... Proper use of Influence of Position.” Yelling, scolding coaches violate respect, orderly behavior and proper use of influence of position. The resolution to this remains very simple, “Adopt an Attitude of Praise.”

Abandon Pessimism

Again, at nearly every shiai, I witness too much negative criticism directed towards officials, other coaches and other players. I recall a time when a coach pulled me aside to tell all the things that my student did wrong in contest. I knew what my student had done wrong and had taken notes to use in coaching. His mistakes amount to my mistakes as an instructor. The notes were just as much for me as they were for him. However, I refuse to dwell on the negative. My notes also included what he had done right.

Accentuate the Positive

Effective coaches recognize that progress is not measured by wins and losses. Instead, they look for improvement in the many aspects of Judo, for progressive skill development. At every shiai, I give each student an assignment of what I am looking for such as: grip & go, number of strong attacks, etc. I never give a win assignment; everyone knows that is the ultimate goal. When a student walks off the mat with a loss, instead of digressing to the wrong, accentuate the positive. Try this, “You did well. I am proud of you. You know what I liked about your match? In the last tournament your attacks were weak and timid but today your attacks were strong and confident. That is what I asked you to do and you did it. Good job! Now would you like to know how to beat that guy the next time?” You can correctly guess the response.

I have been teaching and coaching kids since 1966. My own sensei's example was one of never scolding but instead always positive reinforcement and instruction. I have purposed to never yell at or scold a student for losing but instead to be a cheerleader. I have “Adopted an Attitude of Praise, Abandoned Pessimism and Accentuated the Positive” and will continue to do so. *Join me!*