

How to Become a Model

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OK, so we just came up with a title to make you curious enough to read this article. And yes, it does relate to tennis. We will attempt to outline in this article some key coaching cues to help you communicate successfully with your players. The modelling theory is based on research by famed Stanford University Psychologist, Albert Bandura. The components of being a good “model” for your players hold true for tennis as well as many other sports. Let’s take a closer look at these components:

A. Attention

Of course you expect your players to pay attention to you when you are coaching them. But do you really know what they are paying attention to? You may be showing them the latest and greatest in stroke technique; meanwhile your students are thinking how funny your outfit looks today. Characteristics of the coach-player relationship such as how much players like or identify with you as a coach as well as the players’ expectations and levels of emotional arousal will influence the extent to which the players attend any modelled behaviour you may present. It follows

that players are more likely to adopt a modelled behaviour, if the model is similar to, or admired by the player and has functional value.

So, in presenting a model or teaching a tennis skill, try to make sure that your players pay attention to the critical components of that skill. Show it visually, reinforce it verbally and if necessary guide them through it kinaesthetically.

B. Retention

How can you best help your players retain the skills they have learned? In most cases this depends on the players’ ability to code or structure information in an easily remembered form, or more commonly in tennis, to mentally or physically rehearse the model’s actions. In this way, one of the most overlooked areas of coaching is the repetition of a previously learned skill. When working with a player, don’t forget to spend some time, usually early in the session, on the important skills you worked on the last time you practiced.

C. Motor Reproduction

Suppose your player has a continental

grip on the forehand, and has some trouble with high forehand groundstrokes. If you, as a coach, just show how to hit that forehand with a semi-western grip, make sure your player can actually imitate and execute that stroke. That is, it is one thing for the player to watch you but it is quite another for him to hit the practice courts and repeat your acts. As coaches we sometimes forget the limitations of our players. Players should be able to execute the swing patterns with appropriate grips based on what we show them. If not, we need to modify our coaching to the needs of the player.

D. Motivation

Does the player truly have the motivation to learn or make a change in stroke technique? Does the coach create the right type of working/learning environment so that a lack of motivation doesn’t become an issue? If the motivation is not there, your job as a coach becomes a lot more difficult. If the player is motivated however, making changes and learning new skills becomes a whole lot easier. By providing incentive as well as a supportive environment during practice, coaches can assist players sustain their motivation.

Conclusion

The component processes of attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation underline the modelling theory based on Bandura’s work. As coaches we need to understand that a distinction exists between players “acquiring” a skill and players “performing” a skill. In this way, we need to be able to adapt our coaching to optimally provide for attention and retention (the acquisition or learning of a skill), as well as motor reproduction and motivation (the control of the performance).

References

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Coaches need to provide players with sufficient repetition of previously learned skills.