

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

What is Effective Communication?

Communication is any form of information that is relayed between two interfacing entities. Whether it be audible, visual, hand signals or even just body language if it sends a message to be received it is deemed as communication.

Goalkeepers are in that precarious position of play developing in front of them and as such they must communicate with field players effectively. It is vital that they are confident in relaying game information, commentary, patterns of play and team structures to both their teammates and management in a timely manner to allow for adjustments to be made.

A goalkeeper must also be able to both Praise their teammates for playing well and Challenge teammates whenever they are not playing as instructed or whenever mistakes have been made. They must also be able to understand the play in front of them and decide upon operative instructions to communicate to the rest of the team to counteract the opposition.

For a keeper there are three categories for effective communication, and these are the three C's:

- 1) Concise – What you say.
- 2) Clear – How you say it.
- 3) Constant – When you say it.

Concise – What You Say

When communicating with your teammates, it is best to be specific and direct to the point as much as possible. With the game developing in front of you in milliseconds, it is vital that you use short commands that are easily understood so field players can act upon them. Using 'buzz' words like press, tackle, drift or shape allow you shorten your instructions to a minimum while maximising their understanding. By adding a name to instructions, you can give specific commands to individual players or by calling an instruction for a particular part of the pitch you can offer guidance for groups of players in that area for example 'hold the wings' or 'cover the centre' or 'press the ball.' Be mindful of what you say and be careful not to overload players with information. Remember, communication is about helping your team mates not impeding them.

Clear – How You Say It

Confidence is key whenever a goalkeeper is learning to communicate with teammates. The more confident the calls sound the more trust your teammates will place in the calls given. A strong commanding tone of voice gives your instructions authority meaning they will be more inclined to be followed by teammates.

Make your words short and sharp but ensure they are clear for players to understand especially on a noisy field of play where hearing instructions may be more difficult. Be conservative in how you speak to your teammates as they may already know what needs to be done and your commands may be used as reinforcement for their actions.

When offering criticism always be constructive, while being careful not to be condescending or judgmental with your tone. Accept feedback and understand if this feedback conflicts your criticism.

Constant – When You Say It

Know when to communicate and when not to communicate. Offering instructions early is far more productive than offering them as the play is happening e.g. – calling for a block while the shooter has begun to shoot. By this time, it is too late for the defender to do anything meaningful. Relaying your commands early also allows more processing time for team mates to make decisions.

Although Constant is implied, knowing when not to communicate is just as important as knowing when to communicate. You should not give a command if a player has already decided and is in the act of completing that decision as this only causes indecision which always leads to mistakes. For example, you would not tell a defender “don’t dive in” once committed to the tackle. Similarly, if an attacker is about to shoot for goal you wouldn’t shout instructions to players as they shoot, as you need to focus fully on the shot and ready yourself to react.

When wanting to offer criticism in game it is best done during a break in play and/or when the play is at the opposite end of the field and your team are in comfortable possession. If play was to break down, then defensive instruction becomes priority and should be communicated immediately to minimise the effect of the evolving attack.

My Advice for Effective Communication

There are many goalkeepers that find this part of the game daunting and never feel totally comfortable in “shouting” at their teammates. But it is a vital part of being a goalkeeper and without using it correctly it greatly affects your performance.

For those goalkeepers that want to improve their communication skills what I would advise you to do first, is to begin with praising your teammates whenever they do something well. Offer praise both during games and after games to reinforce your use of communication. You may even use hand gestures like a thumbs up or clapping to show your praise as well.

This allows your team mates to become accustomed to the sound of your voice on the field of play, because let’s face it everyone loves to hear they’re playing well. Examples of some phrases you can use are – Good tackling, well-marked, great pass, good defending etc.

Once you feel more comfortable with praising your team mates and feel they are comfortable with you communicating with them, then you can progress your skills further by adding in game instructions and game commentary as well the praise so that you are beginning to introduce an element of telling the players what you want them to do. For example, if you call ‘press the ball’ and if they press the ball well reinforce this with your praise ‘good pressing’ or ‘well pressed’ which strengthens your communication with that player.

The third and final step to introduce is the criticism. Once your teammates are comfortable with your communicating the first two steps add in criticism when and where you feel necessary. An example of this would be if you call ‘Press the ball,’ the player presses but not quickly enough. You can then say, ‘Well pressed, but, next time press quicker.’

One last important tip to always remember when communicating with other players is that communication is a two-way thing. Do not assume that a player has understood or even heard what you have said to them. If you feel that you need to repeat your call, or the player has not shown any sign that they have heard you then relay your command again and/or request a sign that they have heard you.

After you have completed all three of these stages you will be far more competent in your communication skills and your confidence will grow and your goalkeeping ability will improve as a direct result of the work you have put into this area.