



Confidence

Have you been part of a team where the players did not believe in each other? Have you had players on your team who didn't believe in themselves? If so, then you know the difference confidence can make. Confidence is the belief that you or someone else can do what is needed to produce a desired outcome or reach a goal. It is not something that "they either have or they don't". Confidence is built and developed, and it grows strong with the right approach.

When teammates have confidence in each other, they play more together, are more decisive, have greater commitment, and are overall more positive. They make stronger moves down the ice, passes are crisper, second efforts are more frequent and intense. Pointing out a mistake is generally positive, helpful, and over with quickly. Players have told me, "I know she's going to get it right next time," or "Once I let him know, he got right to work on it."

When a player believes in him or her self, they play sharp, generally put out a high level of effort, they take the right risks, they bounce back from things going wrong, and they perform closer to their true ability level than without confidence. They say things like "That's not like me," or "That won't happen again."

Over 15 years ago I learned that any player or team can get to between "good" and "very good" on hard work alone. In order to play consistently between "very good" and "great", the essential ingredient is believing in themselves. Confidence combined with hard work is what has gotten athletes to be their best. When Jerry Rice, one of the very best NFL players ever, retired, the reason given by his teammates, coaches, and opponents for his long-term success was that he worked 100% and believed in himself 100% throughout his career. By comparison, many lesser players teeter-totter between working hard when their confidence is low, and working less when their confidence is high.

When your team or individual players don't look like the descriptions above, one important factor you have control over as a coach is how you believe in them. Consider what effect it has if you get tense for games? ...if you talk too much pregame? ...if you over coach? Doing these things shows that the most informed expert about this team does not believe that they are ready to do well. As their leader, if you don't believe, it will be especially difficult for the members of your team to believe in themselves and their teammates.

True confidence is measured when the breaks are going against your team, you've got losses you could have easily won, a key player or two are injured, you have made mistakes you normally would not make, and other lousy stuff is hounding you. Since anyone can believe when they are winning and things are going well, see if your players have confidence in each other and in themselves when it would make the most "sense" not to.

At one level, confidence is functionally defined as the habit of thinking performance-enhancing thoughts. When faced with a challenge, we think we CAN instead of first thinking we can't. Like any habit, confidence can be built where there is none, and developed where there is only a little. At first it requires practice. Then it gets easier and more consistent. By sticking with it, thinking and acting positive becomes automatic so that even when we react instantly to something (without thinking), it is with the "I can" approach.

You can choose to help your players build their confidence.

- When you evaluate them and talk about how they did, start with positives yourself, and then ask them what else went well.
- Get each of them to write a list of 20 strengths and positive aspects of themselves that they can keep in their wallet, on the refrigerator door, taped to the mirror where they brush their teeth, or on the dashboard of their car. Have the players add to their lists as often as they can.
- Be loose and positive before games. Use language that shows you believe they will do what you've prepared.
- Match goals with preparation. Either commit to accomplishing goals that they believe they can accomplish with the preparation they have, or structure preparation to meet the goals you commit to.

If you have players who are "overconfident", or think they're better than they are, this is a better problem to have. Find aspects of their game that both of you want to see improvements in, help them work hard on them, and the hard work will add to their perspective. When you keep their confidence and increase their work, we're talking about a "Jerry Rice" type player, right?

Many teams have one or two players who, if they were confident, would fill important roles and make a much more competitive team. I encourage you to work with them to build their confidence and see the far-reaching rewards in hockey and in life.

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