

Is the Player always right?

The customer is not always right – but the customer does come first. A friend of mine, Phil Cox standing in the middle of Football Park on 6th July 1996, said the following:

“Never let your emotions overrule your judgment when the emotions of the players are at a peak.”

That is, the players and the game come first, but they are not always right.

So how do we develop the skills and attributes to handle the wide varieties of conflict that occur between personalities on the field?

What is conflict?

Definition:	The fight, collision, struggle or contest between the player or competitor and the official.
Explanation:	Opposition of opinions or purposes and can cause mental strife.
What is it?	Actual or perceived

To answer the question of conflict we need to understand the strategies that can equip you and help you better resolve conflict on and off the field.

Strategies for dealing with conflict

Avoid the conflict

It is impossible to avoid dealing with conflict. We need to adopt **PREVENTION** strategies to help reduce the amount and type of conflict you face during a competition.

Smooth over the situation

By employing the correct conflict resolution strategy – each situation has a different solution to the particular situation – often you can smooth over the conflict.

One or both parties compromise

Resolution strategies should provide common ground to negotiate compromise.

Confrontation

Be firm, not aggressive or arrogant in heated situation. Use the laws and playing conditions to assist, not in a confrontational manner.

Address the problem not the emotions

Addressing emotions only inflame situations and increases the level of conflict.

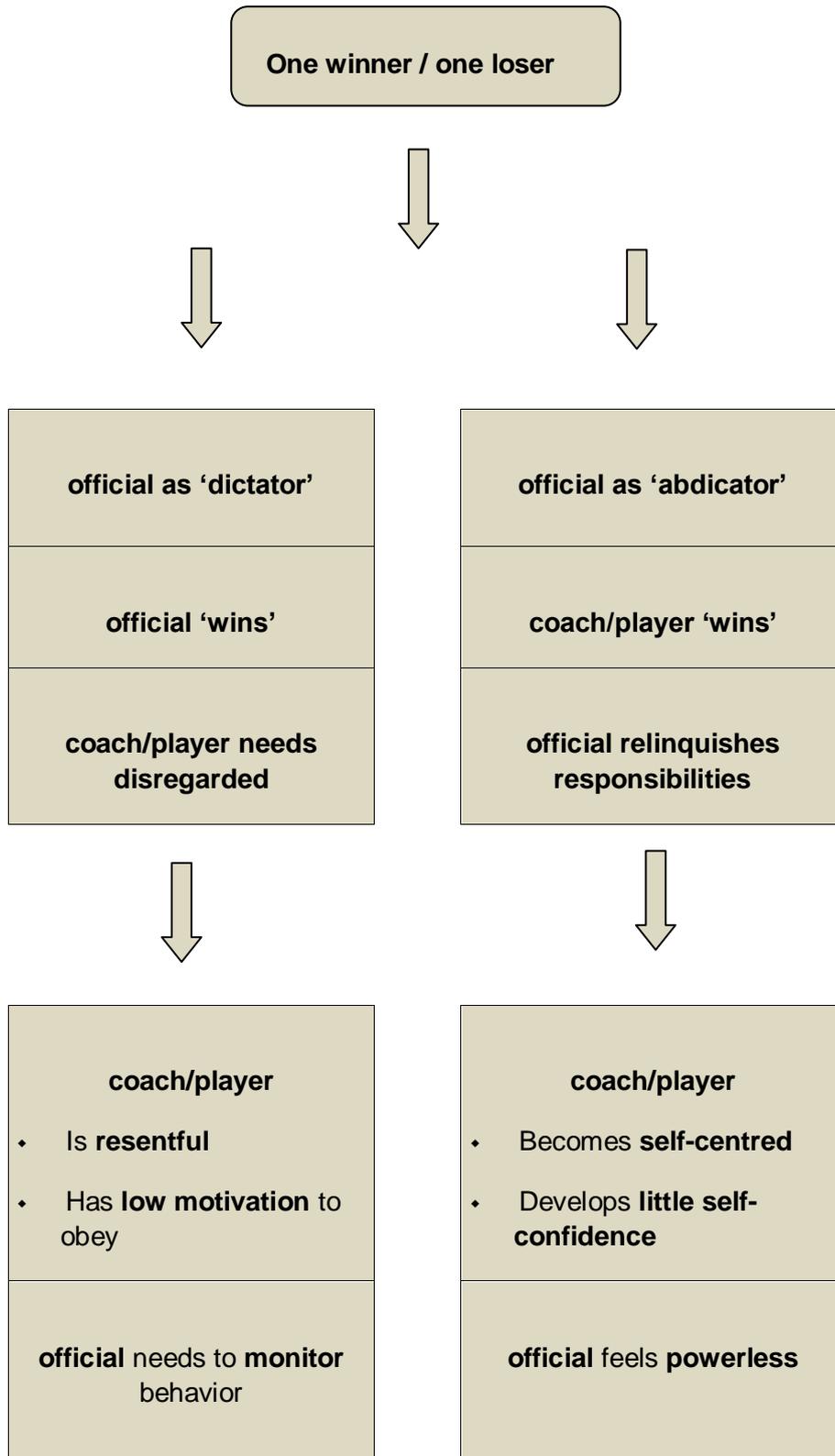
Focus on the person

Treat others as you in their situation would want to be treated.

- Don't treat them as objects
- Don't be officious
- Show empathy for them
- Know a little about them personally

Conflict Resolution

Power Struggle



Prevention is better than cure

Start a dialogue with the competitors

Essential to ensure game has structure and guidance, and clear lines of communication and dialogue. That is, acknowledge cricketers abilities, experiences, emotions etc.

If it starts to get a bit hot

- Don't overreact
- Don't try to bluff your way out of unjustified rulings
- If possible adopt a low key posture
- Be factual and honest
- Maintain composure under pressure
- Work together with your colleague

Involve the group

- Seek assistance from the captain
- Seek support from umpiring colleagues
- Get captain to accept responsibility for offending player

Consensus: *A decision that players are comfortable with and will reasonably accept and support.*

Remember 50% of conflict occurs not with the decision but what was said and the tone in which it was said.

Conflict resolution strategies

Isolate facts from emotions

It has been said 'sport is simply life with the volume turned up'. Statements like this help to demonstrate just how emotional sport can become. It is easy for the official to get caught up by the emotion, but they must try to remove as much emotion from the decision-making process as possible. Only by demonstrating that your decisions are based on the facts and the evidence available, can the official be recognised by the competitor as having made a fair and accurate decision.

Task versus relationship

An official's support for a particular team or individual can never impact on the final decision. Officials are human just like spectators, coaches and players and will support a particular team or individual. Decisions must be made according to due process and the laws of natural justice, while all personal relationships and feelings are set to one side.

Listen more

The officials who listen to both the competitor's verbal and non-verbal messages tend to gather more evidence by which to make accurate and fair decisions.

Try to empathise with the person

Officials who show empathy for competitors' concerns usually receive reciprocal understanding by the competitors of the official's role in applying the rules. The reverse applies to the official who is not prepared to show empathy for competitor's concerns, with competitors showing little respect for the decisions the official makes.

Don't be defensive or try to justify your actions

Clarifying decisions made during a competition should be a simple process when the decision is based on the facts and evidence presented. It is only when an official makes a difficult decision with no facts or evidence to back up the decision that officials will find it difficult to provide clarification.

Strategies for dealing with difficult situations

Situation

Strategy / Action

Know-all's

- Acknowledge, but seek other opinions
- Use as a resource if they are part of a team
- Use them to assist you in game management

Get the official

- Take the professional path and continue to treat the person with courtesy. Don't react or make a big deal out of it. If the situation continues and is disrupting the group, then go straight to the competitor and ask: "What's the problem?"
- Remember that by confronting an individual, you may isolate them from other members of the team. So try and involve one other person such as the captain.

Talkative competitors

- Don't panic. One or two competitors can add to the dynamic of the competition.
- Use their peers to help quieten talkative persons.
- If this doesn't work you may have to cut in and talk directly to the offender.

Off the point or long answers

- Short cut the discussion by focusing on the decision.
- Seek an indication that the competitor will try to prevent the situation arising again.

Wrong answers

- When applying the rules, some decisions are black and white. When clarifying such rules, try not to embarrass the competitor.

Three steps for handling conflict

- Eliminate the source of the problem
- Change the perception of the problem
- Use your personality, skills, knowledge, human understanding – i.e. your coping resources
 - Flexibility
 - Communication
 - Closeness – but not familiarity
 - Problem solving

Key personal attributes for managing conflict

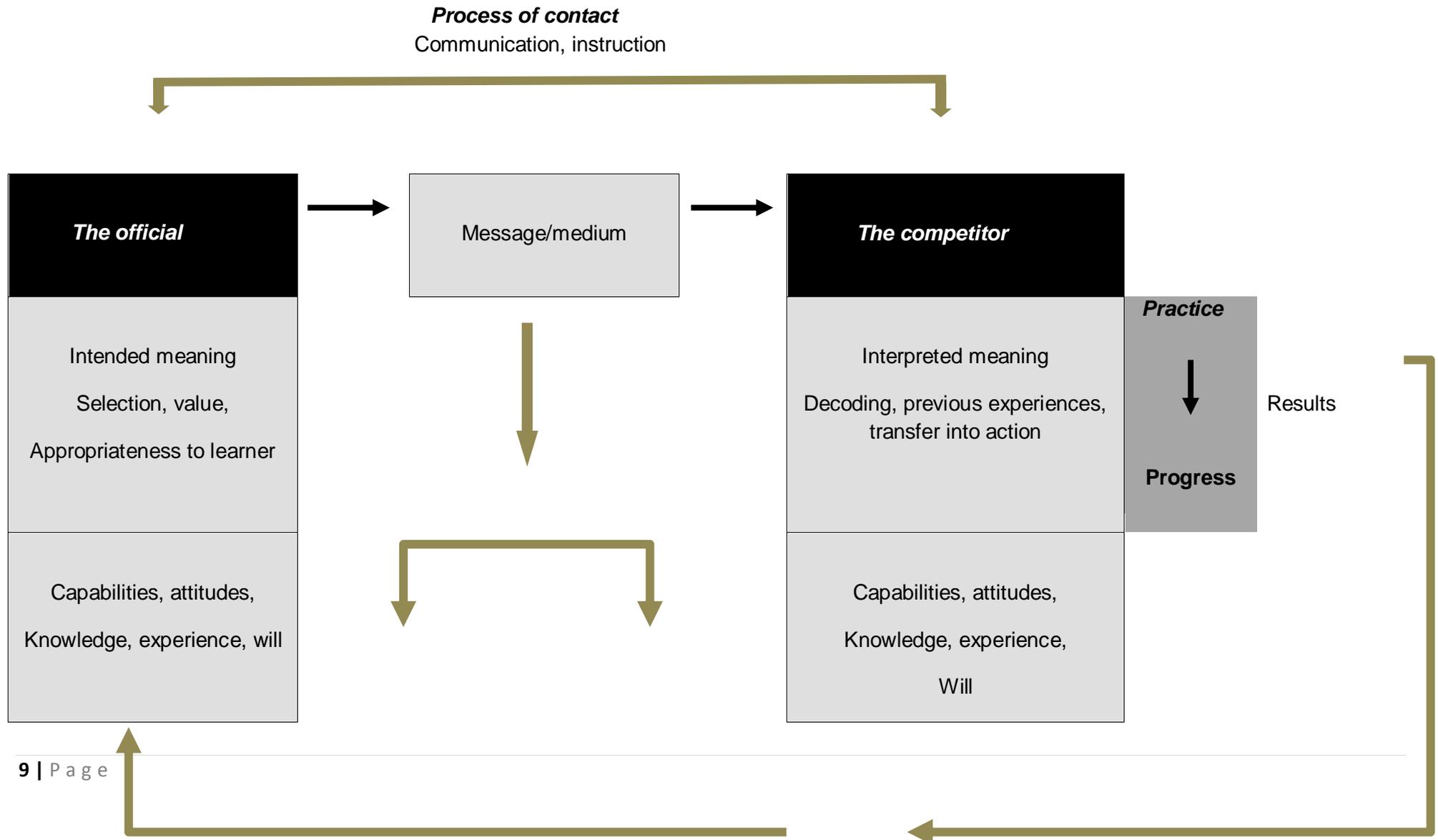
Communication skills

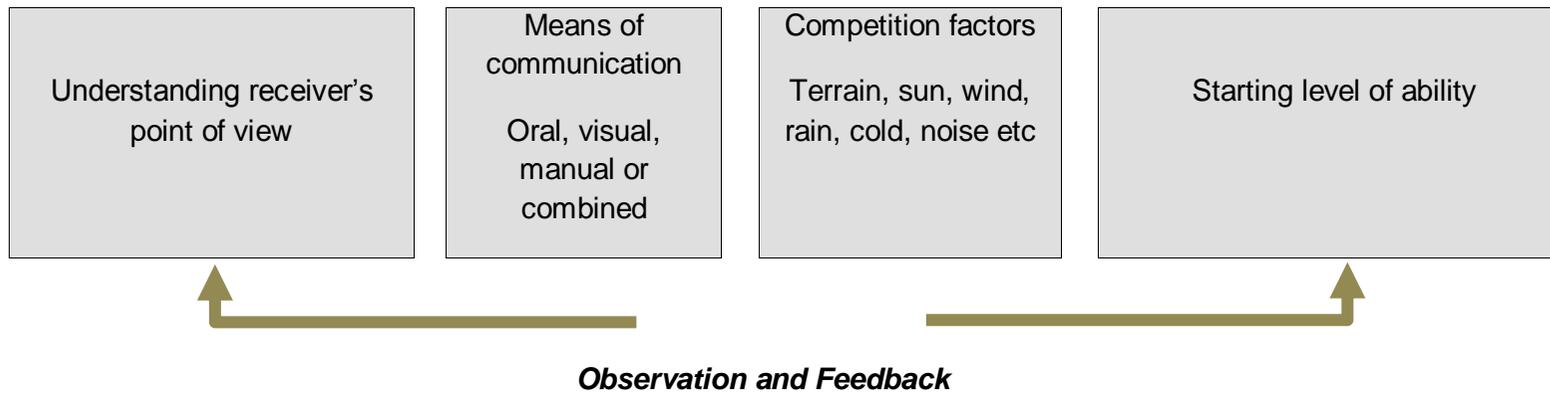
To become effective communicators, officials need to be skilled in the following areas:

- **Written communication**
- **Verbal communication**
- **Active listening/talking**
- **Self-awareness/reflection**
- **Awareness of the barriers to effective listening**

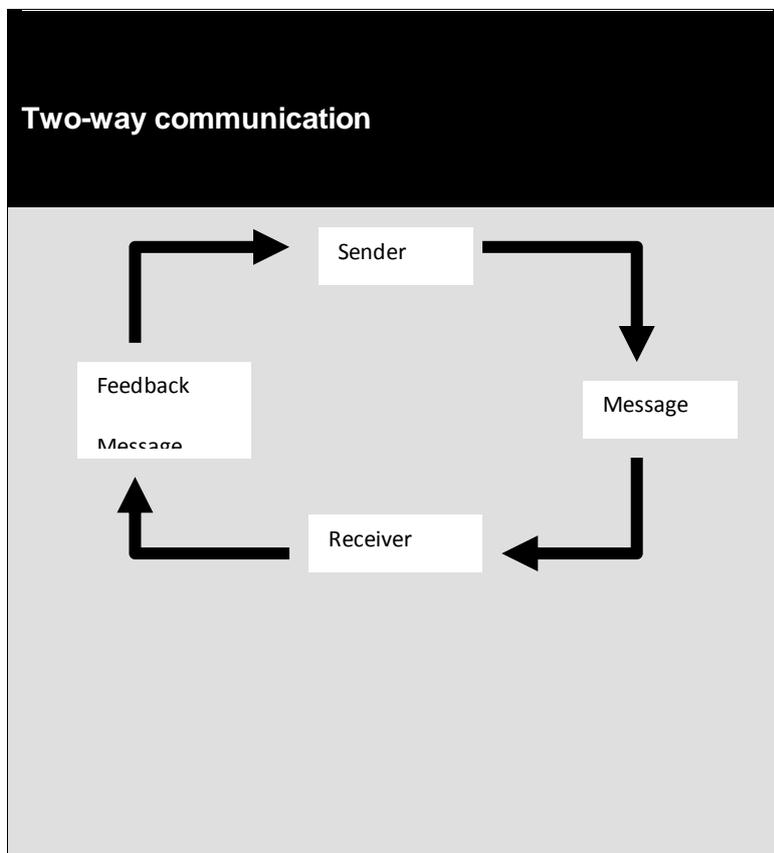
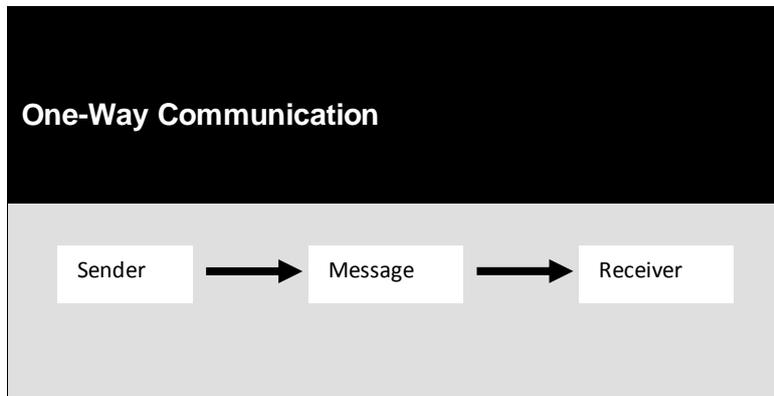
- **Strategies and techniques to improve communication**

The communication process





Communication methods



Barriers to effective communication

1. Criticising
2. Name-calling
3. Diagnosing

Judging

4. Praising objectively
5. Ordering
6. Threatening
7. Moralising
8. Excessive/inappropriate questioning
9. Advising
10. Diverting
11. Logical argument
12. Reassuring

Sending solutions

Avoiding other concerns

More barriers to effective communication

- Our personal 'cages' - *People have different perceptions of words and actions*
- Filtering information - *Hearing only what you want to hear*
- Emotions blurring the message - *Responding to body language*
- No common language being spoken - *Use of jargon*
- Conflicting verbal and non-verbal messages - *Ignoring information that conflicts with what we know*
- Comparing this person to others - *Evaluating the source of the information*
- Reading the other person's mind - *Looking for personal agenda*
- Rehearsing what you are going to say - *Not responding to questions*
- Judging - *Determining your response before*

reviewing evidence

- Identifying with the other person's problems - *Demonstrating some bias*
- Rescuing - *Asking leading questions*
- Sparring - *Asking antagonising questions*
- Being right - *Not being open to other views*

Blocking phrases – road blocks to communication

1. Ordering, directing, commanding
 - *You take this*
 - *You get me the ball*
2. Warning, threatening
 - *If you do that one more time I'll send you off*
 - *Okay, now you've had it*
3. Preaching, moralising
 - *Some people never seem to know when to stop*
 - *I wish somebody would teach you a bit more respect*
4. Advising
 - *Why don't you try and play the game?*
 - *How about getting your players on side?*
5. Judging, criticising, blaming
 - *I would have though you would have known better*
6. Name calling, ridiculing, shaming
 - *You clumsy idiot*
 - *You ought to be ashamed of yourself*
7. Interpreting, psychoanalysing, assuming
 - *How come you're so penalty prone?*
 - *You were just trying to get back at me for what I did last game*

8. Teaching, instructing
- *How would you like it if someone did that to you?*
 - *I wonder if you know how much that annoys me*
9. Rescuing, intervening
- *I guess I'll have to stop you doing that*
 - *You'll look ridiculous to everyone if you make that error again*
10. Expecting too much
- *It's so obvious that you should read your rule book*
 - *Other players remember to plan things before they do them*

More blocking phrases

Which of these phrases would you commonly use and how often would you use them?

1. *No*
2. *Can't (with a shake of the head and an air of finality)*
3. *That's the silliest thing I've ever heard*
4. *Yeah, but if you did that – (poses extreme or unlikely result)*
5. *Our business is different. You can't do that here*
6. *Our system isn't set up to do it that way*
7. *We tried that years ago*
8. *Look, you can't teach an old dog new tricks*
9. *That's not in our area*
10. *We've done all right so far, why do we need to do this now?*
11. *I don't see anything wrong with the way we are doing it now*
12. *That doesn't sound too practical. Or That sounds too theoretical*
13. *We've never done anything like that before*
14. *You're talking about changing the whole way we do things!*

15. *Let's not get off on a tangent*
16. *Let's get back to reality*
17. *We've got a deadline to meet, we don't have time to fool around*
18. *It's too expensive to do it that way*
19. *It's not in the budget*
20. *They will never buy it*
21. *Let's take that up some other time*
22. *Are you kidding?*
23. *Let's set up a committee to look at it. Or We'll deal with it next meeting*
24. *We'll be a joke if we follow this path*
25. *I've got the whistle*
26. *I'm the boss*

Improving communication

Like anything, interpersonal communication can be improved through practice. Use the following tips to improve your interpersonal communication skills.

1. Use feedback

Two-way communication allows both sender and receiver to search for verbal and non-verbal cues (eyes, body movement etc) in order to establish understanding.

2. Use face to face communication

Accurate feedback is nearly always achieved more efficiently through face to face communication rather than over the telephone or through written means.

3. Be sensitive to the receiver's situation

Individuals differ in their values, needs, attitudes and expectations. Empathising with those differences will improve our understanding of others and make it easier to communicate with them.

4. Use direct simple language

The more accurately that words and phrases are tailored to the receiver's situation, the more effective the communication will be.

Communication openers

How often would you use these phrases?

1. *May I ask a question?*
2. *Before we make a decision, let's review the options*
3. *I suggest we do not eliminate any options at this point*
4. *Can we stop for a second and look at the way we're approaching the problem?*
5. *I'd like to go back a step and clear up something I don't quite understand*
6. *I hope we don't have a case of group think here*
7. *I've been hearing about (x) recently. Do we have any information on it?*
8. *I don't know much about that. How about you?*
9. *Were you aware that?*
10. *Maybe we should reconsider your approach*
11. *This idea might sound a little strange, so let me explain the whole thing first*
12. *I have an idea I'd like to share sometime*
13. *Would you tell me more about what you just said*
14. *Let me ask for some ideas on how I can go ahead with this*
15. *Here's a half-baked idea. I don't know how it will strike you but I'll share it with you*
16. *What other ways can we think of?*
17. *If we followed your idea through, what difference would it make?*
18. *I hadn't thought of tackling it that way. I'd like to know more about it*
19. *What strengths in what we are doing does your idea tap into?*

20. What sorts of options might our competitors be thinking about?

Possessing good interpersonal communication skills is one of the great strengths of an effective official

Listening

Active listening is more than just hearing.

Attending

- Builds **closeness** and **trust**
- Sends signals without words

Consists of the following behaviours:

- S** face the other person **squarely**
- O** adopt an **open** posture
- L** **lean** slightly toward the other person
- D** at a **distance** apart of about 1 metre
- E** keep good **eye** contact
- R** try to be **relaxed**

Understanding

- No word(s) mean exactly the same thing to any two individuals.

→ Paraphrase

eg *This is what I understand you are saying ...*

or *I think you mean ...*

Note: responses should take account of their **feelings** i.e. don't just repeat their words like a parrot.

- Beware not to send your own message

Five good listening tips

1. Listen attentively

All gestures and facial expressions should show acceptance and attention.

2. Listen reflectively

Repeat what was said. The official, by restating in ordinary speech what the competitor said, is able to check that the content of the communication was understood. It also enables the official to check the feeling of the competitor's message was correctly interpreted.

3. Avoid emotional responses

Have you ever noticed how listening stops when an exchange gets heated?

4. Try bridging

A nod of the head, a throaty noise without words or an occasional "yes" helps the listener to know you're tuned in.

5. Don't interrupt

Don't interrupt means don't interrupt!

Mental Fitness

Concentration

Concentration is closely related to stress. Without some degree of tension one may find it difficult to concentrate.

Tension can bring an increased level of awareness in the body and can increase the ability to concentrate. In overload situations our concentration may fail. As is sometimes the case for maximum performance, maximum concentration requires an optimal level of stress.

We know from the psychology of perception that it is relatively easy to concentrate on three or four items. But it is impossible, for example, to take in 11 or more items at a single look. Thus there are limits to the ability to concentrate. The limits are set by our perceptive ability, i.e. our ultra short-term memory. This ultra short-term memory is used, for example, when one person is listening to another. At the end of a sentence the listener must recall what was said at the beginning – several seconds earlier.

Similar demands are made on memory during a competition. Words in a sentence or the features of a competition only remain in memory for a very short time.

A person who can focus their short-term memory or their concentration on the important features of a competition has one of the characteristics of a good official. Concentration can be improved up to a certain point by training, but innate ability is also involved. Not every lower level official is capable of becoming a top class official. It is possible with the right attitude a good preparation for an official to improve awareness and concentration. Good officials can take in the important features of a situation faster with improved levels of awareness and concentration.

Some officials will also have a certain pre-competition routine, which will help achieve the optimal mental state for the start of a competition. This can verge on the superstitious, for example thinking: 'When I wear these shoes, I always do a good job'.

Arousal Levels

Just as there exists in the performance of competitive sports skills an optimal level of arousal for maximum performance, levels of arousal and anxiety also influence how receptive people are to learning new motor skills. If arousal is too low, insufficient energy and attention is devoted to practicing the new skill, whereas if arousal is too high the learner's attention may become too narrow to pick up all the cues needed for good performance. In addition, performers fatigue more quickly than normal, reducing the total amount of practice that is possible. Optimal levels of arousal for both learning and performing motor skills vary with the complexity of the task and with the personalities of individual officials.

Pressure Control

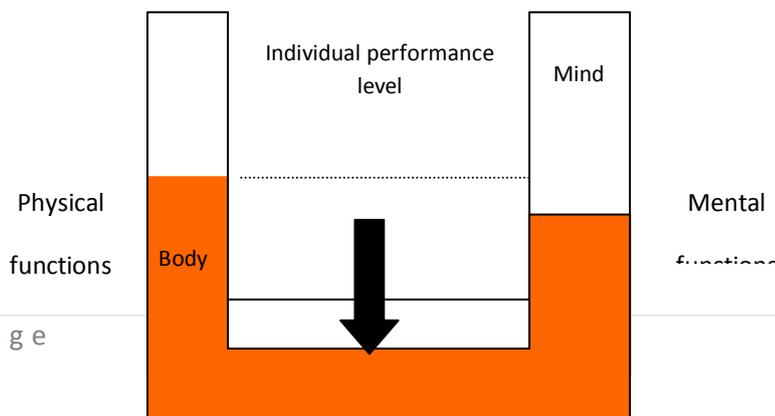
Ability of officials to deal with pressure can frequently be linked to how well they can control their levels of anxiety. Controlling anxiety in 'clutch' situations during a competition is what can distinguish a good official from a great official.

Anxiety may also be associated with the concept of fear, or more specifically for officials the fear of incorrect decisions leading to unsafe situations. An official who manifests anxiety before and during competition can experience an elevated level of arousal and feelings of tension and apprehension.

Body – Mind

The following diagram shows a mechanistic relationship between body and mind, but it indicates very clearly that both are dependent on each other.

In this model a lack of mental strength would limit physical ability too.



Psychomotor functions

Specific knowledge, which includes knowing the rules and generally understanding the sport, form the foundation of a top official.

Knowledge of the rules can be trained to perfection.

Physical ability (stamina, speed, reactions etc) can be well trained up to a certain level.

Via **mental training**, etc, areas of the mind can be improved, eg the ability to concentrate, which is essential for an official.

Leadership qualities are hardly trainable. To all intents and purposes, these have to be regarded as given factors.

Working with colleagues is also a question of character; a leader comes to the fore.

Stress

Stress is a word in common use today. Basically stress simply means load, but in current usage it implies overload.

Bodily stress is part of daily life, and this is really where the expression comes from. Noise, heat and work are stresses on our systems, but in the mental area we feel stress too, and in social interaction strains and tension are even more apparent.

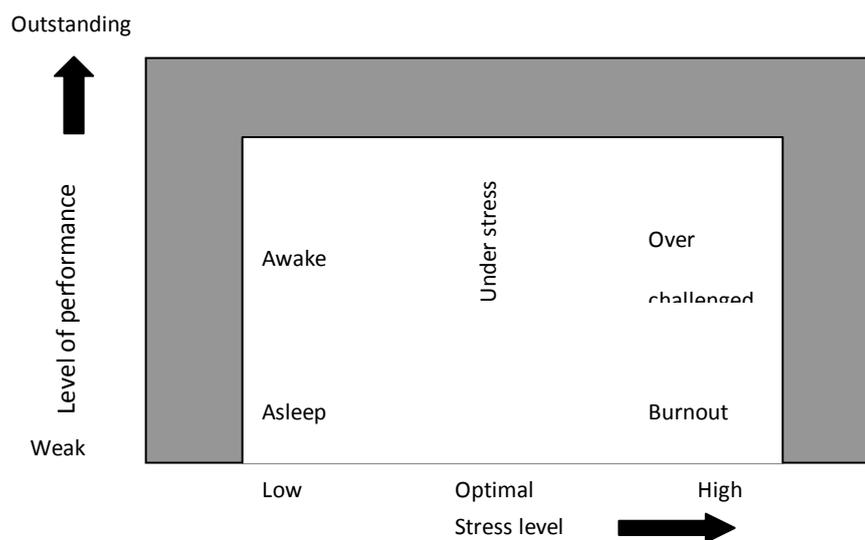
As humans we react to loads and tension by making an adjustment. At first we try to endure the load and call on a kind of defence mechanism. Our heart beats faster and body temperature rises. We are ready to make an effort.

Under pressure we achieve more than we normally do in everyday life. But stress can also have a negative effect. When we reach the point at which we cannot deal

with stress anymore, i.e. when we are overloaded, then a sharp drop in performance follows. In such situations we cannot even reach our customary performance level.

Overload does not allow us to make any more extraordinary efforts. However, for an extraordinary effort a certain degree of stress is necessary. For a good officiating performance, an increase in the state of tension is essential, in other words a level of stress. Only when this stress level is optimal can an above average performance result.

Thinking back on successful performances does not bring to mind those performances where the level of challenge was too low, or those in which the challenge was too great. In an overload situation the ability of the system to perform would collapse. But it is also just as bad to be under challenged. The secret of good performance is an optimal load level. This brings maximum performance.



Psychological skills (mental toughness training)

Developing the ability to control emotions and mood states by applying a few simple psychological skills is beneficial for all sports persons. In particular, improving self awareness and motivation, and decreasing reactions to stress are essential life skills. Recognising the complex interaction and strong relationship between physical and mental states is important for recovery and training. This is evident when muscle relaxation is complemented by lowered heart rates and blood pressure, and improved mood states. The term used to refer to the techniques and skills employed to aid an individual's emotional and psychological state in this way is mental toughness training. Relaxation techniques, meditation, breath exercises, music, relaxation massage and flotation are the most frequently used techniques.

Meditation

Although passive rest is an important component of recovery practices the time spent during passive rest can be used to include one or more of the above relaxation techniques. Meditation trains the athlete to relax by controlling the parasympathetic (calming) nervous system by reducing *noise* or stimulation to the brain. By controlling this system the official can lower blood pressure and heart rate, slow down breathing rates, relax muscles and calm the sympathetic (excitatory) nervous system. This technique is useful for controlling stresses during a game, after training or competition, particularly if the official has had to control a very explosive game. Meditation skills take some time and plenty of practice to acquire and they are most readily learned by younger individuals.

Progressive muscle relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) can be done at the end of training or before going to bed. The technique involves tightening and relaxing specific muscle groups so that the individual identifies the sensations of muscle tension and muscle relaxation in that body part. This results in a reduction in muscle tension and helps to improve body awareness so the individual can recognise muscle tension and focus on reducing it. When this skill is used regularly in training it can lead to significant improvement in training and competitive abilities

Imagery and visualisation

All individuals have an imagination that can be developed to contribute to their training potential. Imagery relaxation and visualisation involve using the imagination to create a vivid scene. Four senses are used to generate the image – sight, smell, sound and touch. The image created by the individual should evoke feelings of comfort and relaxation.

Breathing

Breathing exercises are used frequently in the martial arts. Learning breathing techniques and focusing on relaxing tense muscles leads to a more relaxed state. Exhaling while applying static stretches also helps produce a relaxation response in the body.

REST and flotation

Other psychological techniques revolve around the concept of REST (restricted environment stimulation therapy). Some skills are as simple as closing the eyes to reduce stimulation while other techniques require training (eg meditation) or specialised equipment (eg flotation). Reducing the amount of stimulation to the brain enables the official to focus more effectively on relaxing and becoming emotionally calm. Flotation tanks provide an environment of minimal stimulation by blocking sight and sound (unless the client relaxes to music or to an affirmation tape) and reproducing weightlessness. It usually takes two or three trials for most individuals to learn how to relax completely, but flotation is remarkably effective in reducing stress and preventing burnout, particularly after or during stressful periods.

Music

Music as an adjunct to training is underutilised. Although it is sometimes used in the gym to provide a motivational atmosphere conducive to hard work, it is equally effective in evoking a relaxation response if the appropriate music is selected. It is useful for individuals to create a bank of tapes to generate a range of emotions and atmospheres, either stimulating or calming. These can be used in training and, because tape decks and walkmans are quite portable, they are an excellent tool for pre and post games and competition, or when you are in an unfamiliar environment and finding it difficult to relax. With practice any individual can learn to manipulate mood states for optimal arousal or relaxation.

Apart from flotation, all of these techniques can be practiced daily without the need for any major specialised equipment or facilities. An ideal time for rehearsing these skills is immediately before going to bed. Learning how to switch off from the day's events will also promote a good night's sleep.

Emotional recovery

At key times during the year, such as competitions and tournaments, school or university exams and Christmas, individuals are often excessively stressed. If a game or tournament was very intense, or the individual's performance was below their expectations, they can gain considerable benefits from emotional recovery techniques. Mood lifting activities can include watching an amusing video or comedy show on TV, reading an escapist or adventure novel, or going to a fun park, zoo or light entertainment centre. During periods of extended competitions, such as overseas tours planning these activities as part of the tour is essential.