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Empowering Others with "You're-the-Kind-of-Person-Who" Statements

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by Jim Thompson

Children aren't born with a complete sense of self. They develop a sense of the kind of person they are through their experiences and how they interpret their handling of those experiences. How they think of themselves has a lot to do with how capable they are when dealing with life's adversities.

As coaches and parents, we can help our children begin to think of themselves as capable individuals through the use of "you're-the-kind-of-person-who" statements.

For example, when a child demonstrates a lot of effort in practice, you can say, "One of the things I like about having you on my team is that you are the kind of person who gives it all you've got."

When a child fails to make the play in a crucial situation in a game, you can say, "I can imagine you must be disappointed, but I know you are the kind of person who bounces back from setbacks with renewed determination."

If you want to reinforce your child's love of reading, look for a chance to catch him or her reading and say: "I noticed you reading that book. It's great that you are the kind of person who likes to read for pleasure."

You can also use "you're-the-kind-of-person-who" statements to set the stage for the kind of behavior you'd like to see. For example, before a big game against a team that plays rough, you might say, "I'm looking forward to this game because I know you are the kind of players that have enough self-respect that you won't lose your cool even if the other team gets rough."

We have great power to shape the way our children think about themselves. Through the thoughtful use of "You're-the-kind-of-person-who" statements, we can help them begin to think of themselves as capable people with positive character traits.

Jim Thompson is the founder and director of Positive Coaching Alliance (www.positivecoach.org), an ISI partner.

The Double-Goal Coach

Jim Thompson's new book, The Double-Goal Coach, is being recommended for every library in the country. In the Library Journal Review, Tim Delaney says, "At this price, this book is a steal."

PCA is offering The Double-Goal Coach to members and partner organizations at significant discounts to the listed "steal" price of $13.95. To order, call PCA directly at (650) 725-0024. Here's a sneak preview of Thompson's new book:

The Legacy of Coaches

I was speaking to a group of baseball coaches, most of whom were not excited to be there. The president of their league had decreed that they come hear me speak, so they did. But they were not happy about it. Their body language spoke out even as they refused to answer my question: "Tell me about the greatest coach you ever had." Hostile silence from men with their hats down low on their heads, their arms aggressively crossed.

Finally, tentatively, one fellow near the front relieved my anxiety by raising his hand: "I had a coach

in Little League who taught me things I still think about every day of my life." He went on to paint such a saintly portrait that some of the other coaches became uncomfortable. Some of them began to snicker.

"Are you still in touch with your coach?" I asked the lone speaker. It turned out the coach had died many years before.

This man, in his 50s, was still living with the lessons he had learned from a man who had coached him 40 years earlier, a man who had died long ago. Over time, hearing long-ago stories from innumerable men and women in their 40s, 50s and 60s, I came to think of this as the limited immortality of coaches.

What we do as coaches lives on in the children-soon-to-be-adults we coach. And it can live on well after we are gone from this earthly plane. While the impact of this coach was positive, it isn't always so. I remember speaking at a Rotary Club many years ago in the Bay Area. Afterward, a gentleman came up to me with fire in his eyes. "I'm 66 years old. I had the same football coach for four years in high school, and he said only one thing to me in four years."

I was thinking that this must be something special, since he seemed pretty worked up about it. "He told me, 'Try not to be more of a horse's ass than you need to be.'" I guess you could say it was special - so especially distasteful to this man that he has been angry about it for 50 years! The legacy of coaches can hardly be overestimated.

In his moving memoir, Teacher: The One Who Made the Difference, Mark Edmundson describes a schoolteacher who had a huge impact on his life. Many of us can point to a teacher or two who made a difference to us. But someone once noted that teachers have to be extraordinary to have a big impact on their students. By virtue of having a position at the top of the youth sports enterprise, an endeavor imbued by our society with immensely powerful symbolic meaning, coaches have an impact, for good or ill, even if we are mediocre ...

In the many years that I have thought, spoken and written about coaching, I have evolved a personal definition of what it means to be a coach: A coach is someone who draws extraordinary performance from ordinary people; someone who, over time, helps ordinary people become extraordinary.