



Words Should Inspire, Not Hurt

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The tongue is often described as the strongest muscle in our body. Actually, it consists of sixteen muscles.

Because much of the surface is covered in taste buds, it is the primary organ of taste. With its wide variety of possible movements, the tongue also assists in forming the sounds of speech.

When used properly, the tongue helps us do things like eating and vocalization, but hopefully, not at the same time. It is used to lick ice cream, blow bubbles, and whistle.

Injuries to the tongue are very painful. Pain caused from the tongue is even worse.

An ancient proverb states the tongue has the power of life and death. In other words, what we say has the power to motivate or destroy, energize or deflate, inspire or create despair.

This is especially true with kids in sports. Young athletes are looking to please their parents and coaches, and positive affirmations will set them forward on the right path. Failure to affirm will produce overachievement to prove worth, or underachievement to prove accuracy of statements.

Let's compare two well-known coaches and their methods of motivation.

Bob Knight has won more NCAA Division 1 men's basketball games than any other coach. With his history of temper tantrums directed at officials and players, you can be sure he hasn't used the most desirable language to express his opinions.

Tony Dungy and the Indianapolis Colts won Super Bowl XLI and it is well-documented how Dungy's approach consisted of praise and encouragement while never raising his voice or using profanity.

Is there a best way?

Renowned psychologist Erik Erikson believed every human being goes through eight stages of life to reach his or her full development. Stages 4 and 5 are the stages that cover the years our kids participate in youth sports.

Stage 4 is the range during which children seek the virtue of competence by doing. From about ages 6-11, parents and coaches need to teach young athletes how to work through difficult situations and make decisions - help kids understand behaviors have consequences attached to them.

Children need to learn from, rather than feel defeated by, mistakes. This is a time in a child's life when they need to feel special, so tell them they are valuable even when they make mistakes. Mistakes are opportunities to learn. Encourage independent thinking – to be strong - but remind them help is available.

Stage 5 ranges on up to about 18 years of age, and is the time when the virtue of fidelity is sought. These adolescent years are when our young athletes are concerned about their identity – how they appear to others. It is a time when kids focus on being accepted.

These young athletes need to know they should love who they are; they are one of a kind. Help them become the person and athlete they are capable of being. Encourage them to be faithful to commitments – to be honest and dependable. Work with children and players to be persistent, so dreams and goals can be reached.

Many well-intentioned parents and coaches strive to provide these environments, but technically fail and cause emotional damage.

If we give our tongue a self-examination, we should be asking these questions.

Do your words give life? Do they inspire and challenge others to greatness?

Lift someone up today with your tongue.