

Lachlan Tighe
Manufacturing team emotion

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Years ago I did a program at Ringwood Bowls as an experiment in players observation of what was good and bad practice in body and verbal language on the green in normal bowls competitions.

What amazed me is that the 30 odd squad members reacted favourably to the scenarios, where I had a few of them do a role play of a good supportive setting and a role play of a deplorable non-supportive setting.

So why do we not have more of these demonstrations at the clubs to help reduce and aim to eradicate the bad examples. The other aspect of amazement to me was that everyone had experienced and understood the role play setting(s), agreed with what was favourable and unfavourable, yet no one had thought to introduce, or encourage to introduce, a training session that shows what is and what is not an acceptable way of behaving, if teams wish to win.

In 2018 I did a winter program on the same theme of communication, but the focus was mainly on the skip. My invitees to this 10-session program were all premier level bowlers, so they had skill and experience. Most of them had never experienced such a training session and found it revealing, in as much as they had not perceived the behaviours they and others do automatically, which would be construed as negative.

I referred to this program as an exercise in emotional intelligence (borrowing from the latest buzz words around); simply it is common sense or common use of your senses, that is, you and I can see or hear when someone in our team is giving off sheer unadulterated negativity.

Worse, any opposition worth its salt can hear and see this. So why do we allow one of our team to join the opposition – because that is what happens when we do not intrude to stop a team member (be they lead to skip) being negative during the game, they emotionally

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have deserted the team and added ‘playing numbers’ to the opposition for the time they remain, or are allowed to remain, in a negative state.

Hell, I witnessed it in the pennant finals over the weekend where experienced players, especially the skips, were serial offenders. They had no idea they contributed to the opposition in their behavior.

Now, an effective team is one where the members trust one another, each feels part of the team and there is a group cohesion and effect in what the four of us are trying to do on our rink. And multiply that feeling by four for a pennant competition, as four rinks make up a side. For us to be our most effective, the team, the side, needs to connect emotionally so the attitudes and behaviour are habitual.

I witnessed it in one final March 2020 where one skip took overall responsibility for all the players in the entire team, the side, and drove them on to victory by dint of his language, verbal and body. It oozed positivity.

Guess which team won the day.

And like I observe in professional sport teams, we can train to be emotionally intelligent, better communicators in the game, for us poor old humans to learn how to minimize our drop or lapse in emotional support to our team mates.

Harking back to that Ringwood program all those years ago, I stood alongside the players at various times after the mini-demonstration I gave, and sure enough, they forgot all the input they gave me earlier to reinforce that what I had presented rang true to them. Lesson being, that like all our skills it has to be trained and tried and feedback given on how well it is progressing. Once I commented on what was overlooked or what was done well, there was a noticeable evidence of them practising these ‘one percenters’ that hopefully will hold sway one day in the future.

The Harvard Business Review journal featured a relevant quote ‘... Inevitably a team member will indulge in behaviour that crosses

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the line and the team must feel comfortable calling the foul,' reminds us that it is not all plain sailing in teams as we deal with people. However, the strength of character of the team and its individual members is up for testing when someone strays from the perfect setting and is the typical '...men behaving badly'.

At this stage I hope your mental skill training, in my version of emotional intelligence being for the benefit of the whole (team), might work.

If not try, try, try again, truth will win out one day.

Lachlan Tighe, 2020