

Essential Communication for Officials

An important talent of a successful lacrosse official is good communication skills. Unfortunately, not everything an official says is productive – abrasive comments can lead to further escalations. Also, not all communication is verbal – hand signals can work just as well.

Officials should restrain themselves in their desire to communicate everything they can to prove they are right. Excessive verbal communication is comparable to a machine with extra parts.

Good officials will use non-verbal communications to avoid creating unnecessary friction points with the coaches and players. Hand signals or short, rehearsed verbal phrases are better than long-winded explanations. Build and practice your vocabulary of hand signals and short stock phrases, which will eliminate unnecessary words and still communicate your message.

Tenets of Good Communication

Below are a few notable non-lacrosse quotations that are applicable to the philosophy of how to communicate better as a lacrosse official.

Idea or Quotation	What this means	How this applies to lacrosse officials
Those who throw dirt lose ground.	Don't use insulting language with the coaches, players, or fans.	Be professional in how you interface with coaches and players. Especially, don't have a debate with the coaches. Explain, but don't debate.
<i>"When I first started racing, my father said, 'Win the race as slow as you can.'" -Richard Petty, NASCAR's winningest all-time driver</i>	Avoid behaviors that create accidents. Avoid taking unnecessary risks. Don't instigate arguments.	Officiate the game having said as few (unnecessary) words as you can. Officials who run at the mouth during games are like race car drivers – speeding with no sense of purpose and inviting accidents.
The emperor: <i>"Too beautiful for our ears, my dear Mozart, and monstrous many notes."</i> Mozart: <i>"Exactly as many as are necessary, Your Majesty."</i>	Include everything that is necessary. Exclude all that is unnecessary.	Only communicate the "good communication" and get rid of all the bad communication.
An experienced English Premier (soccer) League official once likened refereeing to <i>"being the conductor of an orchestra..." -Mike Riley, EPL official and GM of the PGMOL, which trains the professional soccer officials in England.</i>	<i>"You have set parameters, which are the rules of the game, but it is your role as the conductor to try getting the best out of all the people playing the instruments, and on refereeing terms, that's getting the best out of the players on the field of play."</i> -Mike Riley	Lacrosse referees should think of themselves as orchestra conductors. Try to get the most out of players, coaches, and table staff to produce a beautiful result [Note: Once the orchestra starts playing, everything the conductor does is nonverbal.]

<p><i>“Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.” – William Strunk, The Elements of Style (1918)</i></p>	<p>Good communication is concise and should contain no unnecessary words.</p>	<p>Less is more. Include only the good communication. Games with unnecessary communications are like a drawing with extra lines or a machine with extra parts.</p>
<p><i>“Don't write anything you can phone. Don't phone anything you can talk. Don't talk anything you can whisper. Don't whisper anything you can smile. Don't smile anything you can nod. Don't nod anything you can wink.” -Earl K. Long, former Governor of Louisiana.</i></p>	<p>Communicate only as much as necessary to get the job done. Sometimes nonverbal communication works better than verbal communication.</p>	<p>Use nonverbal communication, if it will suffice.</p>

Things to Ask Yourself Before You Speak

Think of all the things you spoke aloud during a game:

- How much of what you spoke was really essential?
- Was anything you stated unnecessary?
- Could anything you have said been replaced by either non-communication (ignore it) or by non-verbal communication (visual)?

Before you speak, consider the following:

- Is it even necessary for you to speak, or can you find a better way to communicate the same message without speaking?
- Are your words likely to invite additional banter from the coaches, officials, fans, or players?
- Is there an opportunity to state nothing and perhaps send a message that nothing further needs to be said?

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