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## CHAPTER SIX

**The Emotional Tank Toolkit**

Individuals who fill other people's Emotional Tanks will be successful in life. People want to work for and with E-Tank fillers. The tools in this chapter are designed to make you a great tank-filling coach as well as a developer of Triple-Impact Competitors who develop leadership skills and make their teammates better.

**1 | Model and Teach the Importance of Filling Emotional Tanks**

Be a frequent filler of Emotional Tanks. Every practice and every game, find things you can use to fill your players' E-Tanks. Model tank-filling so your players will be more inclined to becoming tank fillers themselves.

Jot down some simple talking points to use with your players at the first practice and then come back to them regularly. For example:

- We all have Emotional Tanks.
- E-Tanks are like gas tanks in cars; to go far you need a full tank.
- People perform better with full E-Tanks, so let's learn to fill each other's tanks.
- Thanking people and noticing when they do well fills E-Tanks.
- Helping your teammates bounce back from a mistake also fills E-Tanks.
- If we all become tank fillers, we'll have more fun and be a better team.

**2 | Use the Buddy System to Make Your Players Tank-Fillers**

Get your players filling each other's E-tanks, and your team will go far. Introduce the Buddy System early in the season and use it at least two to three times a week.

Pair up players. Make sure you don't pick the same pairs each time – you want everyone to get used to filling everyone's tank. "You have two jobs here. Do the drill as well as you can and look for ways to fill your partner's E-Tank."

Right after the drill, ask your players who got their tank filled by their partners. At this point you may get blank stares if they forgot about tank filling as they concentrated on the drill. That's okay, because it's not what you teach, it's what you emphasize. You have your players for an entire season, so you can emphasize tank-filling again and again. If you get blank stares, you may want to do the same drill over again right away. This time tell your players to make sure they focus on filling their partner's tank.

Teams whose members learn to fill each other's E-Tanks not only have great seasons, they tend to perform better as the season progresses.

**3 | Develop Player-Coaches**

A sports team is a great place to develop leaders, and individuals become leaders by learning how to make decisions. Coaches who treat their players like trained monkeys and tell them what to do all the time are doing them a disservice. Here are two ways to develop players as leaders who function as player-coaches.

- **Ask rather than tell.** Get in the habit of asking rather than telling players what to do next. "Okay, if they line up in the shotgun, how should we adjust our defense?" This forces them to think and learn rather than wait for you to tell them what to do. It also is great to ask rather than tell after a mistake. "If you are in the same situation next time, what can you do differently?"

- **Ask for input.** When you ask your players for input into your decisions, you fill their E-Tanks and you get them to think. And it can start really simply. “We’re going to do these three drills today. Which makes the most sense to start with?”

Notice here you didn’t give up any real control. You will still do the same drills, but you have now involved them in the decision-making. This can also work in much more crucial situations where you do actually share control with your players.

Ernie Dossa, who I coached against when I was at Fremont High School, involved his Homestead High players in a key decision when they played a more talented team for the Central Coast Section championship. He asked his players which of three defensive schemes they wanted to use for the big game. They picked an unusual 3-2 zone designed to keep the other team’s 3-point shooters covered. I believe they won the game and the championship partly because the players felt more engaged and committed to making their choice work.

#### 4 | Inject Positive Energy with the Two-Minute Drill

I am always amazed at how the energy levels of pro football players pick up at the end of a game when they run their two-minute drill needing a score to win. They know there is only a little time left so they are less likely to hold anything back.

You can do your own Two-Minute Drill whenever the energy level in a practice or game gets low. Pick a time period (an inning, a specific drill, the last 5 minutes of a period) and amp up your positivity level. Look for anything you can be positive about and then comment on it energetically. “Courtney, great hustle! Silvia, nice move! Emily, I like that, keep it up! Lindsay, you showed me something just now!”

This is a time when you intentionally do not critique anyone or anything. Correct mistakes another time. Right now you are giving your players an infusion of positive energy, and you don’t want anything to get in the way of it.

Former Stanford Women’s Tennis Coach Frank Brennan, winner of 10 NCAA titles, shared with me his version of the Two-Minute Drill, which he often used on low-energy Mondays. He’d start at Court 1 and watch until he saw something from each player he could be positive about. He’d comment and move to Court 2, where he did the same. By the time he’d made his way to the last court, it seemed like a totally different team. Everyone was pumped up by his injection of positive energy.

#### 5 | Turn Kids Around with Player of the Day

If we are honest, we will admit that we all have had players that we didn’t relate well to. Some kids just push our buttons. When you have a player like this, make him Player of the Day. Don’t tell the player this, but make sure to get your co-coaches on the same page. “Today, Colin is Player of the Day. Every time he does anything the least bit positive, we reinforce him for it.”

If he runs hard for half a drill, say, “Colin, great hustle at the beginning!” All your attention goes to things he is doing well. Ignore the things he is not doing well.

This tool can make a huge difference with kids who regularly have empty E-Tanks. Many kids have problems at home, in school, or with friends, and they come to your practice with a chip on their shoulder. When you make a player like this Player of the Day, you do two important things.

You fill his tank in a way he is not used to and which he cannot ignore. Even for disturbed, behavior-problem kids (and I have worked extensively with them), this kind of tank filling makes them feel better about themselves.

The other thing that happens is that you begin to see the player in a better light. Cognitive dissonance happens when our behavior and our thoughts are not aligned, and that is uncomfortable. We don’t like acting in ways that are different from our feelings and thoughts, so we change one or the other. When you treat Colin as Player of the Day, your attitude toward him becomes more positive as well. And having a coach who becomes more positive toward him is a very good thing for Colin!

## 6 | Vary the Pace with Fun

Excelling in a sport is a fine balance of fun and hard work. If it becomes too much of either one, it loses some of its power. Make sure you incorporate fun activities into your practices on a regular basis.

PCA's Tina Syer uses the "Shadow Game" with her elite field hockey players, but it works just as well with younger kids. Players pair up with the person who is trying to step on the shadow of the other player who, of course, is trying to keep her from doing just that. Tina's players worked so hard at this game, which they loved, it helped them keep in shape as well as filled their E-Tanks.

You can inject fun into practice by manipulating the degree of difficulty. I had my teen baseball players play tee-ball, and they loved literally teeing off on the ball. Increase the difficulty in soccer by requiring players to only pass or shoot with their weaker foot. Tennis matches in which only one square on either side of the net is "in" are a blast and help develop a short game. Play "Work Up" in baseball or softball with two or three players on a team. One team is at bat with all the other teams in the field. The team at bat has to bring the final player home (to bat again) or that player is out. After three outs, the next team bats, and so forth.

Competition almost always increases the fun for athletes. A paired shooting drill with the loser doing a push-up creates some intensity and excitement in what otherwise might be a pretty routine drill. Even better is a competition between players and coaches, with the coaches doing the push-up if they lose (and savvy coaches lose occasionally!).

If you don't know what your players will think is fun, ask them. Let them pick or even design activities they will have fun with. Fun activities typically get players laughing and fill them with energy that carries into the rest of your practice.

## 7 | Use Positive Charting to Get More of the Behavior You Want

Every time I have used Positive Charting it has paid big dividends, but it requires some planning and a commitment to follow through.

Put a sheet of paper on a clipboard with each player's name and space below for notes for each. (You can make your own form or get a copy from the PCA web site – see page 70.) Put a box labeled "Look-For" next to each name.

During the game, write positive things a player does – the more specific, the better. Make sure you have about the same number of good things for each player. It's easy to note many positive things for talented players and often hard to find anything for weaker players. For talented players, note the difficult things they are doing. For the weaker players, look hard, and you'll find some things you can be positive about. Be disciplined. At the end of the game you want two to five items for each player.

If there is a specific behavior a player is working on (e.g., blocking out for rebounds, hitting the hole quickly, or staying wide on attack) put that in the Look-For Box. Before the game let him know what you will be looking for from him in the game. Remember to look for team-building things like E-Tank filling as well as physical actions.

This is a great tool for involving assistant coaches, parents, and players who are sitting on the bench if you are careful to train them to follow the above procedure. It will help them see the game in a new way.

I used Positive Charting to turn around a horrible beginning to my second season coaching high school basketball, which I describe in my book *Shooting in the Dark*. Here is the experience of a softball coach from Ohio with Positive Charting.

"At the beginning of the season, the only team these girls could beat was themselves... Well, after one mediocre game, I sat the girls down on the bench and instead of reading them the riot act... I mentioned all the positive aspects of the game they played just to show these girls that they were capable of doing some positive things. I did this after each game from then on, win or

lose. Wouldn't you know it, these same rag tag girls lost the last game of the season: the city championship game by one run (to a team that annihilated them by 12 runs in the first game of that season.)”

Positive Charting can seem like magic. If you try it, you won't regret it. Begin each practice with a quick team conversation taking 30 seconds to spotlight each player in turn. Then enjoy the positive energy of your players during the practice!

## 8 | Give Receivable Feedback with Kid-Friendly Criticism

Criticism and correction are important to learning, but they often drain people's tanks, which decreases their capacity to learn. John Robinson, who as football coach at the University of Southern California won a national championship, understood the tank-draining impact of criticism. I love his statement: “I never criticize players until they are first convinced of my unconditional confidence in their abilities.”

Kid-Friendly Criticism provides players with useable information that empowers them to improve while minimizing tank draining. Here are some practical ways to give players Kid-Friendly Criticism:

- **Avoid non-teachable moments.** There is too much emotion in some moments for criticism to be heard or acted upon, no matter how accurate, well-meaning, and perfectly delivered it may be. Discipline yourself after a tough loss or a painful mistake. Wait until the emotion has dissipated before giving feedback.
- **Criticize in private.** Anyone can be embarrassed by public criticism, so wait until you can give a player feedback in private. Praise in public; criticize in private.
- **Ask permission.** Asking permission makes criticism easier to hear and apply, especially for the kind of youth who may not be able to handle feedback. “Judy, I noticed something that might improve your shooting. Are you open to hearing it?” If she says, “No,” honor that and return to it later.

Her curiosity may even cause her to come to ask you about it. But don't use this tool for something that requires immediate intervention, such as poor sportsmanship or safety.

- **Use If-Then statements.** If-Then statements are easier for kids to hear than telling them what to do. “If you bend your knees when you shoot, then you'll get better range on your 3-point shots” works better than saying, “Bend your knees when you shoot,” especially if done in an annoyed tone of voice. If-Then statements help players feel in control, which makes them more open to criticism.
- **Give them a criticism sandwich.** Sandwich a criticism or correction between two positive reinforcements. “I like the way you keep your eyes on the basket when you shoot. If you bend your knees more, you'll get better range. And nice follow through!” You've just given three pieces of feedback and made the criticism easier to take.

## 9 | End Games with Winner's Circle

The end of a game is a crucial time for a team because of the emotion generated by a competition. Right after a game is ideal for focusing on tank filling using a Winner's Circle. Get your players into a circle and open the floor for tank-filling comments. “Who noticed someone doing something to help our team today?”

Generally, it works best if you speak last. However, you can also seed your comments in between players' comments. You can highlight unsung actions or great efforts while also keeping an eye on who is not getting any tank filling so you can mention their contributions.

No matter how poorly your team played, end with a positive. It's a coach's job to motivate players, especially after a tough loss, so find something positive to say to your players to get them to come to the next practice ready to work hard and improve. Your next practice actually starts with the last thing you say to your team after a game, so find something they did that gives hope for improvement.

Developing Winners in Sports and Life

# THE POWER OF DOUBLE-GOAL COACHING



By Jim Thompson



Foreword by Phil Jackson



BETTER ATHLETES  
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