

Speaking to Your Class

The way you speak to your class will in no uncertain terms effect their experience and success in class. Not only will it effect how they feel about you, it will effect how hard they work for you and how much they understand the concepts and movements you are teaching. Let me tell you exactly what I have learned from 13 years of wearing a head mic for 10 hours or more a week.



1 - Never Say 'Don't.' When giving directions, corrections, or queues, always say 'do this' instead of 'don't do this'. I like to compare this concept to dealing with my kindergartner. If we were standing in a room containing 100 sharp tools hung on the walls and he walked over to an large axe with his hand extended, my first reaction would be to say 'Don't touch that ax.' The problem is, that statement leaves 99 sharp tools still in play. If I say 'Stand in the center of the room and be still' he has no other options. Nothing is left in play.

The same can be true when dealing with participants. Let's say you are trying to correct improper squat form. Saying 'Don't push your knees forward' is a correct movement queue, but now instead of pushing their knees forward they aren't bending them at all and are instead bending at the hip. Instead say 'Push your tush back and down.' That movement queue is concise and positive. It leaves your participant no other options than to perform the exercise exactly the way you described it.

2 - Use Visual and Feeling Queues. Let's revisit the squat scenario from the last paragraph. You tell give your participant the movement queues without using the word 'don't' and they perform the movement correctly. Hooray! You have crested a hill, but you have not yet conquered the mountain.

In order to ensure that you participants maintain correct form over their entire exercising career you must make them understand the how and why of the movement.

However, participants are not in class for an anatomy and physiology lesson, and we are not about to give one. Instead, we are going to tell them what the movement should look like from the inside of their brain, and where they should feel the work being done.

So, in the squat scenario you already have a proper movement queue, 'Push your tush back and down.' An added visualization helps cement the concept. 'Push your tush back and down like you are going to sit in a chair that is positioned 12 inches behind your heels.' Or 'Imagine a waitress with a tray full of food trying to open a door with her tush - start the movement like that.' You are using an imaginary chair or tray full of food to cement the concept of the movement.

Finally, the participant knows they are performing the movement correctly when they get payoff. Tell them where they should feel the work (upper and not lower quads as well as tush, hamstrings, and inner thighs.) If they feel it there, they know their form is correct.

3 - Always stay positive. When you walk in to your classroom you set the pace and tone for everything that goes on there for the next hour. Imagine a preacher walking up the aisle on Sunday shuffling notes in a panic. He gets to the podium and says 'I'm sorry I'm a minute late, traffic was terrible. Oh, and by the way, I'm not going to be singing with you today because my 3 year old was up all night sick and I am tired.'

If he had not excused himself for being a minute late, chances are 90% of the congregation would not have noticed that the sermon started at 11:23 instead of 11:20. Further, how many people would be offended if he did or didn't sing.

There is no need to start a performance (yes, your class is a performance) off on a negative note. If you are late, just get class started as soon as possible. If you know people noticed that you are a minute late, apologize at the end of class as you thank them for coming and tell them when you are teaching next, but never do it on the mic at the beginning of class. It just starts things off on the wrong foot by calling attention to something that may have gone unnoticed.

If you are feeling well and want to use no risers in step class, then just do it. Don't apologize for it. If have taught 4 times that day and want to coach this class, that's fine. But don't excuse yourself and draw attention to it. An announcement that you are sick just gives your participants a reason to slack off. An announcement that you have taught 4 classes gives them an unhealthy idea about how much exercise they should be doing. Just coach through class and don't say why. Let them think that you planned to coach in order to give them some one on one attention.

4 - SMILE. I like to say 'Make them think you are on drugs.' Smile at the dead faces in the middle. Smile at the front row divas. Especially smile at the beginners in the back of the room. Ask you participants to smile a few times during class too. Did you ever hear the saying 'Fake it until you make it'? Act like you are having a great time - this may just help everyone believe that your class is fun. :)

Remember, participant retention is all about their experience in your class. You have to make them believe they were successful in class, and that they had a great time doing it. This will keep them coming back long enough to reap the long term benefits that they can see!

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