

WORD PLAY

You prepared as best you could, **trained hard** & selected the team wisely. Yet here you are, **staring defeat in the face**. With minutes to address (swear at, comfort, plead with) your team, how can you **instigate a change**?

ILLUSTRATIONS: NICOLA JENNINGS



John Timpson, chairman of Timpsons

Motivation comes from the mutual respect that exists between you and your team. And to respect you, they must believe you have what it takes and trust your judgement, whatever the situation. There's no substitute for being the real article.

I don't like the use of fear as a management tool. Your message has to be communicated in a positive way - "you can win" not "you can't lose". As a leader, it's your responsibility to get people to believe in themselves and every other member of the team. You have to take away any reason they might have for not being successful.

When it comes to what has gone wrong or right, I tell it like it is. Whether it was down to you as a manager or poor performance by the team, say so, and be clear about what you're going to do to rectify it. Communicate any faults in a positive way - tell them you know they

are fantastic, but that they haven't yet shown it on this occasion.

Like many businesses at the moment, I'm having to shore up confidence in my team. I'm focusing on our successes and the opportunities that exist, and backing that up with figures. You have to sell yourself and your ideas for the business. But you also have to be totally open about any problems - if people think you're holding something back or doubt your ability to respond to the challenges, they won't give you their best.

Leadership is about personality and passion, honesty and inspiration. There will, no doubt, be pivotal moments when you sense the moment and say the right thing. But, however inspirational the words, if people don't trust and respect you and believe in your message, those words won't work. In that sense, before you've even opened your mouth, the groundwork will have already been done.

“ However inspirational the speech, if **people doesn't trust and respect you** and believe in your message, it won't work ”

Peter Taylor, manager, Wycombe Wanderers

Q How did the team talks you received as a player influence your own approach?

Keith Burkinshaw, my manager at Tottenham, and Malcolm Allison at Crystal Palace couldn't have been more different. Keith was incredibly direct and would tell you if he expected more. As a player, you don't always want to hear that, but I loved him for being so honest.

Malcolm was very different; he made me feel like the best player in the world. He'd say things like "you're too good and too quick for the left back marking you". His approach was to instil confidence, highlighting the weaknesses in the opposition but making you feel ten-feet tall.

My own approach is improving with age. I'm getting better at building players' confidence up and I like to use a bit of reverse psychology. I'll say things like "you realise that you haven't scored for seven games, but you know that today you will". I now understand that players sometimes need a bit of a cuddle.

As a young manager, I probably got too uptight about things. At times, all managers can take things a little bit too personally. I'm calmer now.

Q When do you start planning what you're going to say?

The day before a match, I give myself a good hour to gather my thoughts together. I write a page on the opposition, a page about my team in possession and a page on our defence. But I don't take those three pages into the dressing room; I just take one small piece of paper with a series of bulletpoints.

When I was a player, I liked to know the key tactical information and I took that on board as a manager. Players have

to be clear about what is required of them on the pitch. You have to have a good plan and then trust that your players will do everything they can to make it work.

I like to give my players an idea of how I expect the match to pan out. For example, if an opposing player turns out to be a particular threat, I need the team to be prepared for that and to know how to deal with it.

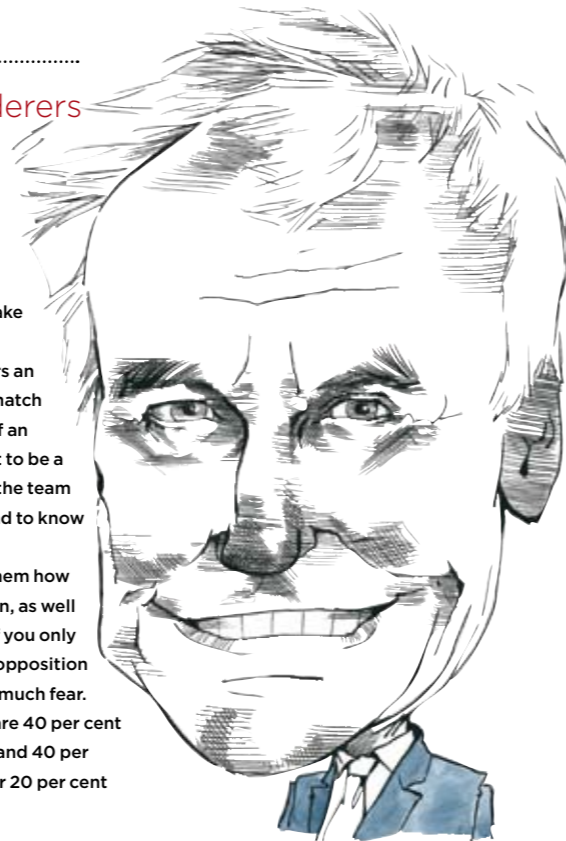
I try to get across to them how we can hurt the opposition, as well as how they can hurt us. If you only talk about how good the opposition are, you risk instilling too much fear.

I'd say my team talks are 40 per cent about tactics on the ball, and 40 per cent off the ball. The other 20 per cent is motivation.

Q Do young, inexperienced players need a different kind of team talk?

Yes, as do teams lower down the Football Leagues or the Conference League compared to in the Barclays Premier League. I only really get uptight as a manager when I ask something of a player and they don't do as you ask. As a manager, you can take that quite personally. But it happens less with seasoned professionals. With less experienced players, you have to talk them through things in more detail, and give them reminders right up to kick off.

I managed the England side against Italy for one game in 2000 and it was probably one of the easiest I've done. I was really up for the experience and knew that I was dealing with very good players. I prepared, as always, the night before. I



didn't need to give a massive motivational speech; it was more a case of strategy.

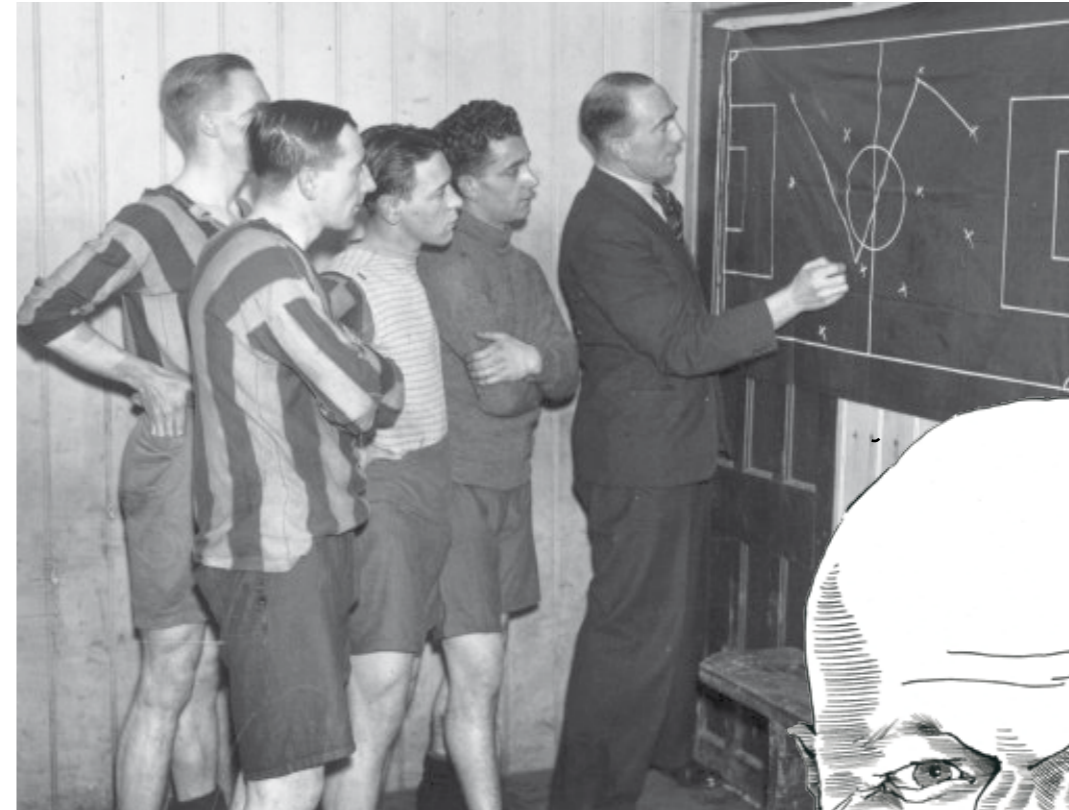
Q What made you give David Beckham his first England captaincy in that match?

Two things influenced my decision. The first was how David handled the criticism when he was sent off against Argentina during the 1998 World Cup. The following season he was getting hammered at every away game, as well as in the press, but he showed incredible character.

Then, when I worked with him as a coach to the England side, I saw just how much he enjoyed playing for the national side and his dedication to international duty. I thought he deserved a chance.

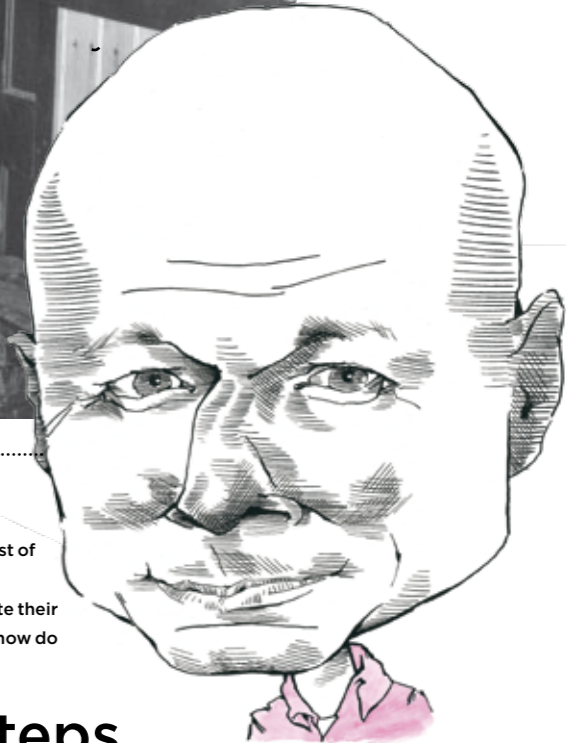
INTERVIEW: SUE MCKELLAR

“My team talks are 40 per cent about tactics on the ball, and 40 per cent off the ball. The other 20 per cent is motivation”



Roberto Forzoni, performance psychologist and consultant

As things start to go pear-shaped, you should be working through a check-list of questions: is your strategy working? Are people in the right positions? Is the competition behaving as you expected? You can then work out how to negate their threat and maximise your opportunities. But once your new plan is in place, how do you instil belief in your team that they can make it work?



Words into action: 10 steps

- 1 Stay calm.** To be able to think quickly, you need to remain emotionally detached from the problem. The team won't respond well if they see you've lost your cool. Perhaps take a few minutes out with trusted colleagues before addressing the team as a whole.
- 2 Listen.** Management is not about having all the answers, and enforcing decisions. Engaging staff and players, asking the right questions and listening can help you make appropriate changes and raise performance levels.
- 3 Don't waste time.** Simply going over what could or should have happened, or passing blame is not the best use of your time.
- 4 Have a clear strategy.** If you make changes, ensure people understand what they are and why you are making them. The team needs to know you are in full control and can make difficult decisions when the pressure is on.
- 5 Be specific.** It's easy to generalise when under pressure. Don't. Give specific reasons why something needs to be changed. Ask yourself what's important now?
- 6 Keep it professional.** Things said in the heat of the moment may be regretted later on. Focus on behaviour or actions - but don't make it personal. And remember that sarcasm has no place in elite level performance.
- 7 Mind your language.** Using absolute terms like "must" and "should" add pressure to an already difficult situation. Let the team focus on what you need them to do.
- 8 Share the blame.** Don't fall into the habit of using "we" when things are going well and "you" when they are not.
- 9 Take pride.** Reminding the team of why they are there can help remove self-pity.
- 10 Give hope.** Be a practical optimist and take it step by step. Remind the team of past success, particularly any similar situations in which they have overcome the odds.