



Dear "Stupid" Player

By John Kessel, USA Volleyball Director of Education, Disabled, Grassroots and Beach Volleyball

Last night my phone rang, with a dear friend calling to say his daughter, a player training with our national team, had missed her flight and could I go get her. Team players that we are, we know the answer is of course yes, as my own kids now have a reason to get out of the pajamas and into the car for yet another adventure. When we picked her up, she was very apologetic and all...while we were simply happy to see her.

Then she said a phrase I hear far too often..."I am such an idiot." Followed by a call to her folks, wonderful people I have known for decades, to let them know she was with us, when she said, "I know you will hate me, but I forgot the telephone number."

These two sentences set off the frustration bells in the parent/teacher/coach part of me. Here is one of the best talents we have in the USA, and she is calling herself an idiot...and using the word hate about a small mistake? What is up with that? She comes from a family who I would be happy to raise my own kids, but there seems to be a trend where kids talk negatively about themselves, and use powerful/blanket statement words that are not accurate at all.

*If you are not for yourself
Who will be?
If you are only for you,
What's the purpose
If not now, when?* Rabbi Hillel

So, some lessons from the land of things I wish I knew then, that I know now.

1. *Separate your mistake from who you are.* That you mishit a ball, or forget something, does not mean you are an "idiot/stupid/other self-derogatory" phrase inserted here.
2. *Use powerful words, like hate, when they fit the cause.* For instance - "I hate Hitler," that is a person worthy of the word "hate." I hate lunch, I hate my hair, I hate losing...these are all places where more appropriate words/phrases would include...dislike, am not fond of, would like to change...etc.
3. *Use words like ALWAYS or NEVER, only when accurate.* It may feel at the time that such an event always or never happens, but it is highly unlikely. It is important to be realistic and accurate, in that half the time, or three out of the last ten times, even though it is easier to just say always or never.
4. *Remember, give yourself and your teammates powerful, strengthening nicknames and terms.* You are not a slowpoke, you are not lazy, or an airhead; you are a Junior Olympian working personally to be swifter, higher, and stronger.

5. *Use your temper, don't lose it.* - It is an emotion that can give power, if you. Same goes for fear, getting your butterflies to fly in formation, and knowing it too is an energy source, not something that stops you from playing your best.

6. *When in doubt, check it out.* - Ask directly of your coach and teammates when you hear things that are negative, unbelievable or unclear. Too many let things fester, or talk to many others without confronting the person or person directly.

And the most important thing...You just never talk to yourself in such weakening, disparaging ways. This is a place that the word never fits. Never belittle yourself. Better put, in positive terms, "Talk only about your dreams and accomplishments and success."

Sure there is a time to talk about your errors. You might do it:

1. Only to others, never to yourself, looking for specific information (precision criticism) and;
2. When self depreciation is helpful to making others comfortable with your perhaps intimidating achievements.

Dr. Carl Rogers wrote many years ago - "If I were to search for the central core of difficulty in people as I have come to know them, it is that in a great majority of cases they despise themselves, regarding themselves as worthless and unloveable."

Yet the words of Theodore Roosevelt, "*It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; because there is not effort without error and shortcomings; but who does actually strive to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who knows at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly. So that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat*"

So get out there and smile, and believe in yourself, as your teammates and coach already do, even if they hide it. And remember -- *If you play the game, love the game. Some don't. The best do.*