

MY ATHLETE ISN'T LISTENING. NOW WHAT?

Before you assume an athlete is ignoring you, figure out whether they heard you, understood you, or could act on it.

WHAT TO DO

"Not listening" describes what you see. It doesn't tell you why it's happening. The mistake is treating every situation the same way. Before you correct the athlete, diagnose the problem.

1 DID THEY HEAR YOU?

This sounds obvious, but it's often skipped. Consider distance, noise, and whether they were positioned where they could actually hear you.

INSTEAD OF "Why weren't you listening?"

TRY "Did you hear what I said?" Or "Come over here for a second."

Coaching principle: don't treat an access problem like a behavior problem.

2 DID THEY UNDERSTAND YOU?

Hearing an instruction and understanding it are two different things.

INSTEAD OF "Do you understand?"

TRY "What's your first step?" Or "Show me where you're going."

An athlete can easily say yes without actually understanding.

3 GIVE THEM TIME TO PROCESS

Repeating an instruction louder before the athlete has processed the first one just adds more information on top of the problem.

TRY Instruction → Pause → Rep. Give them a moment, then let them show you.

Silence isn't always disengagement. Sometimes it's processing.

4 ASK THE ATHLETE TO SHOW YOU

One of the best diagnostic tools available. If they execute it, they understood. If they have no idea, that's an instruction or access problem, not necessarily a motivation problem.

INSTEAD OF "Were you listening?"

TRY "Show me what you're supposed to do."

What they show you tells you more than what they say.

5 KNOW WHEN IT'S A CHOICE

The framework isn't an excuse. Sometimes an athlete heard you, understood you, and can do it, and is choosing not to. That's a behavior issue, and you can address it directly.

The framework exists to make sure you're solving the right problem.

BEFORE YOU RESPOND

MOVE CLOSER Remove the distraction first.

ASK THEM TO SHOW YOU Confirm understanding, don't assume it.

PAUSE Give them a moment to process.

THEN DECIDE If skill, instruction, and access check out, it's a behavior conversation.

ASK THE 3 QUESTIONS

When an athlete isn't listening, ask:

Can they do it?

SKILL ISSUE

Do they understand it?

INSTRUCTION ISSUE

Can they access it?

ACCOMMODATION ISSUE

If all three are yes, now you can talk about behavior.

QUICK COACH CHECKLIST

- ☐ Did they hear me?
- ☐ Did I give too much information?
- ☐ Did I demonstrate it?
- ☐ Did I give them time to process?
- ☐ Can they show me what to do?

The goal isn't to eliminate accountability. **It's to hold the athlete accountable for the right problem.**