

Commitments - Never preach values



In today's sport: teaching noble values possible, or leaving young people to their fate. A critical view with the university lecturer university lecturer for philosophy and media theory and publicist Ludwig Hasler.

Never preach values

What associations does the term "commitments" trigger in you? Ludwig Hasler: Contradictory ones. On the one hand, sport needs such normative agreements if it wants to save its old idealistic role of a "counter-world": i.e. health, fair play, performance justice instead of the "Darwinian" duel. On the other hand, real sport is slipping away from this lovely ideal - somewhere between the eroticism of movement and the primitive desire to be stronger, between physical artistry and the brutality of competition ...

All the more challenging becomes the work on basic attitudes. How can children and young people be inspired for this? Children and young people get excited about many things as soon as they realize that it is in their interest. So these attitudes and values must bring them a benefit - at least a good feeling. The easiest way to instill this is in team sports: Fairness, no rough fouls, one for all - that boosts team spirit. This in turn raises the self-esteem of each individual ("I am indispensable, recognized"). And with self-esteem comes sporting success. It is certainly a difficult task to gain this interest. It is most likely to succeed if values are plausibly communicated as a life gain and success stimulus. For God's sake, never preach values instead of success!

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Why are shared value attitudes necessary in sport? As long as sport is not to become a circus, it thrives on such attitudes. If sprinters inject themselves with anabolic steroids, they ruin - in addition to their health - the sport. The comparability of performances is the be-all and end-all of modern sport. If it's no longer the best who wins, but the one with the best pharmaceutical company, then the whole basis of sport collapses. It's about sport, not about being good or nice. We don't even have to talk much about "ethics". The insight into "mutual egoism" is enough: If I play sports, I have to want values like abstaining from drugs, fairness, adherence to rules in the sense of equal opportunities.

Commitments should be determined by everyone together. What value do you place on agreements that are worked out by a small, interested group for the whole team? What matters is how the group is composed. If any well-intentioned proposals come from a club of the good or weaker, the others just sneer. Then it is clear that the purpose of the commitment is to protect the weaker ones. That never works out under earthly conditions.

In my earlier work as an editorial director, I always picked a few "leading lights", plus a couple of "notorious ricochets". I then had this group draw up an editorial statute - an agreement without

strict legal force, in other words a kind of commitment. For the most part, the proposals met with unproblematic approval. So it is crucial to involve the so-called "troublemakers" right from the start.

What suggestions would you give to volunteer sports leaders to adjust to the challenge of joint agreements? It is easy today to exaggerate this common and grassroots democratic. That commitments are not imposed from the outside remains crucial. Yet young people want a "chief." A friend told me how, as a middle school teacher, he took over a class that had previously forced two teachers to quit. He offered the class a written challenge on the first day of school: "Bring your bike, running shoes, swimming trunks. We're doing a triathlon." When the time came, he greeted everyone individually, briefly informed them of the day's schedule, and led the way on his bike. The cheeky boys followed him - even all the following days at school. They had found their chief.

The example is meant to illustrate the following: Viable commitments never emerge from a leaderless bunch. First the bunch must grow into an interest group - i.e. be led - , only then can young people become independent and develop group-serving initiatives.

Is there a "learning path" for working out attitudes and values together? The "learning path" works best via negative experiences. There's this neat bon mot from the anti-authoritarian '68 days: In kindergarten, the little ones greeted their kindergarten teacher in the morning with the exasperated question, "Miss, do we have to play what we want again today?" The joke of the question makes it clear: Always having to choose and decide for yourself is a strain, a torment, an excessive demand. A group must have experienced this overstraining in the hullabaloo of values and attitudes - only then does it appreciate the benefit of commitment.

Commitments can supplement rules, school regulations, learning contracts, etc., but not replace them. How do you see this supplementary function? Both are rules. One comes "from above" - from school administrators or employers - Commitments come "from below". With them, young people experience for the first time the feeling of giving themselves rules. They experience it as a stimulus to invent their own collective behaviour. At the same time, they experience it as a burden to be responsible for group life themselves.

Functionally, I imagine the complement between orders and commitments like the "corporate identity" in companies. Football is all played according to the rules dictated by FIFA. The juniors of FC Herisau, however, agree never to deliberately straddle an opponent in the shins. And this is not a noble ethic of renunciation, but a profile-building commitment: "We don't need to sabre others, we win like that. We are special!"

If agreements are to have a lasting effect, they must be entered into voluntarily. But what to do when commitments are not kept? For such cases, you need rituals. The group - not the leader - must make it clear to the offenders that they have excluded themselves from the collective with their behaviour. Depending on the severity of the offence, the group must decide on a punishment (suspension, drudgery as compensation). Of course, this only works if such punishments and penalties have been determined in advance, if they have been approved together with the commitment.

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