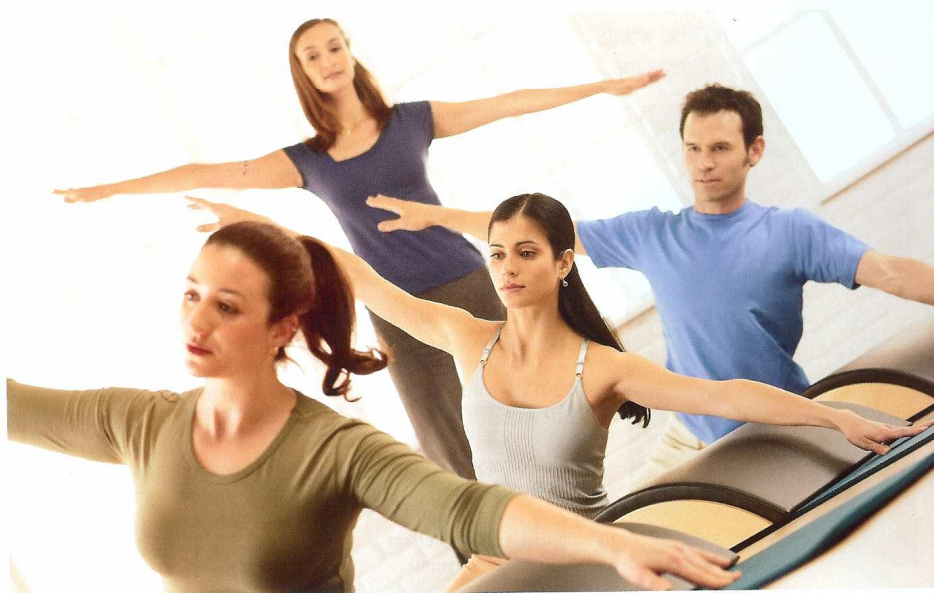


Refine Your Cuing

Communication involves more than simply speaking into a microphone.



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Regardless of our roles within the realm of fitness, communication unites all of us. Defined in Neuro-Linguistic Programming™ (NLP™) circles as “the response you get regardless of your intention” (Andreas & Faulkner 1996), communication takes place in the verbal, visual and kinesthetic arenas. It can be broken down to approximately 7% words, 38% tone and 55% body language (Bandler & Grinder 1975). The following refresher will help you hone your communication skills in these key areas.

Verbal: Solution or Pollution?

Verbal cuing uses words and intonation to express thought. Avoid falling into the habit of cuing similar moves in similar ways. A fresh approach ensures that everyone lis-

tens *each* time. No longer will people tune you out because your style is repetitive.

Effective verbal cuing involves spoken instructions, including counting, directional cues, education, and safety guidelines. Carol Scott, 2003 IDEA Program Director of the Year, encourages instructors to use words wisely. “Observe the room first to avoid cuing just for the sake of cuing,” she says. “Cue just to where [people] need assistance.”

In addition to being concise and specific, an effective verbal cuing style is

- authoritative without being bossy;
- clear and precisely spoken with or without a microphone;
- instructional and educational without being didactic;
- positive and focused on solutions (e.g., “Keep breathing” instead of “Don’t hold your breath”);

- illustrative and inventive (e.g., during a lunge, Allison Mantia, certification specialist for the Aerobics and Fitness Association of America, cues, “Think of moving up and down like an elevator instead of diagonally front and back like an escalator”); and
- specific (e.g., instead of “Come on and do it,” a cycling instructor may say, “Begin your climb now” or “Raise your resistance 5% now”).

To improve verbal skills, think of cuing to someone who cannot see you. Search for specific words.

Visual: The Eye’s the Limit

Visual cuing uses body language to convey movement. Tenets of NLP teach that this is often more important than verbal cuing; therefore, develop detailed visual

cuing skills. This approach will reinforce your communication style.

Effective, positive visual cuing includes having:

- arms uncrossed;
- hands free of distractions like mobile devices;
- eyes open and focused;
- a body position at the same level as class participants, so you are cuing neither “down to” nor “up to” others; and
- a facial expression that conveys both interest and energy.

Visual cuing reinforces verbal cuing. Every time you cue “left,” for example, point to the left. This illustrates direction for visual learners. When you mention different muscles, touch those muscles on your own body. When counting out repetitions, in addition to cuing “four more,” hold up four fingers to add a layer of visual communication. To complement and underline alignment cues like “shoulders back and down,” demonstrate the move yourself, perhaps with a bit of exaggeration. Finally, give encouraging visual feedback to help others understand how

much you care about their progress. A thumbs-up sign or a sincere smile helps to anchor verbal positive reinforcement.

To improve visual skills, think of cuing to someone who cannot hear you. Search for specific gestures that convey meaning.

Kinesthetic: Sensory Expression

Kinesthetic cuing addresses all five senses. The kinesthetic learner wants to grasp a complete sense of sensation and understand how a movement should feel. With a kinesthetic approach to cuing, you tell participants both *where* they should feel movements and *how* those movements should feel. As long as it is in keeping with your club and state regulations, a gentle touch on an exercising body part (with permission) can be used to further enhance kinesthetic learning (Rothenberg & Rothenberg 1995).

Some effective kinesthetic cues include

- light touching when appropriate;
- complementing any experience with appropriate sound, smell, sight (and taste), where appropriate; and

- incorporating words like *feel* and *sense* into cues.

Constantly update your personal repertoire of verbal, visual and kinesthetic cues to keep your students’ experience fresh. These suggestions for effective communication skills will decrease the confusing gaps between what you mean to convey and how your participants respond. ■

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A Quick Fix

Variety keeps your cuing fresh. Here are some uncommon cues to substitute for common standbys that group instructors tend to overuse (excerpted from *Cream Rises: Excellence in Group and Private Fitness Education* by Lawrence Biscontini).

Instead of saying, “Engage your abs,” try these:

- “Bring your navel closer to your spine.”
- “Imagine you have a lemon behind your bellybutton and when you squeeze it against your back muscles, you make lemonade.”
- “Hold your nose, close your mouth and blow out to feel the transversus abdominis muscles contracting.”
- “Zip up your internal corset.”
- “Squeeze in your center as you zip up a tight pair of jeans.”

Instead of referring to participants or moves as “beginner, intermediate” or “advanced,” try these:

- beginner: “new-to-fitness” or “first-timer”
- intermediate: “someone who

wants to try a more challenging version”

- advanced: “athlete,” “fitness superstar version,” “most challenging progression of an exercise”

Instead of saying, “Don’t hold your breath,” try these:

- “Keep breathing.”
- “Use your prana to assist you.”
- “Align yourself with your breath.”
- “Train your breath as well.”

Instead of saying, “Keep your spine straight,” try these:

- “Keep your spine neutral/extended/tall/lengthened/long and strong/proud/neutral/lifted and elongated.”

Instead of saying, “Go!” try these:

- “I invite you to begin!”
- “Let’s start the movement.”
- “Begin!”

Instead of saying, “Contract your pelvic floor,” try these:

- “Think about the muscles that control elimination of liquids from the front and solids from the back; now contract and close them.”
- “Zip up the muscles you can control deep between your legs all the way up to the bellybutton.”
- “Activate the muscles you use in Kegel exercises.”

Instead of saying, “Show me good posture,” try these:

- “Stand up like a rock star.”
- “Imagine that your pelvis is a bucket of water: fill it to the top and balance it.”

Instead of saying, “Bring your shoulders back and down,” try these:

- “Put the shoulder blades in the back pockets of your jeans.”
- “Open up the front of the body.”

Instead of saying, “Squeeze!,” try these:

- “Connect, contract and compress.”
- “Think of your muscle as a sponge full of water, and contract the muscle to get out all of the water.”

Instead of saying, “Come on! Turn it up!,” try these:

- “Let’s begin!”
- “Here we go, team!”
- “Make me believe it!”
- “Make this worth it!”