Problem-Based Learning to Encourage Active Learning and Teamwork Among First Year Medical Students – Student Reports –

What Words Push Your Motivation Switch?: Making You a Great Motivator
(Course name: The Power of Words)

MAI TAMURA*, HANAKO TSUCHIYA*, KAHO FUJII*, KEIKO ASANO*
*Faculty of Medicine, Juntendo University, Chiba, Japan

Objective: Following the Tohoku Earthquake, residents of the disaster area were encouraged more to "Ganbappe", which means "Hang in there" in their local dialect, than to "Ganbatte", which has the same meaning in standard Japanese. This led us to examine what comprises effective words of encouragement.

Design: We first examined what types of words are related to motivation. The words found in previous studies were too simply and obviously differentiated from among those words. Therefore, in this study, we selected words that might have different effects depending on a person’s character and examined how motivations changed as a result.

Method: To verify our research, we sent questionnaires to 142 university students via the Internet and examined how their motivations changed when presented with various motivational phrases. The questionnaire comprised 11 short phrases purporting to contain words uttered by school teachers or athletics coaches. Students evaluated the motivational effects of each phrase by allotting it points from -50 to 50.

Results: We established a hypothesis that the influence of encouraging words would differ by sex and educational background. However, the data demonstrated that a similar tendency occurs regardless of sex and major. Although different words and phrases are used, the data suggest that participants’ experiences and how they have been brought up affect the results.

Conclusion: For this reason, in order to encourage and raise motivation, many factors need to be considered when using motivational words.

Key words: motivation, encouragement

Introduction

1. Background
Victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake were displeased when told to "work hard" in standard Japanese after the earthquake, because they were already working hard. However, they did not feel displeased when encouraged to "work hard" in the dialect of the Tohoku Area. Having heard this story, we decided to research the relationship between words and motivation.

2. Prior learning
There are three steps in how people address someone: I. Expressing affirmative concern, II. Communicating with sympathetic understanding, III. Querying by promoting internal self-speech1). It is said that what unlocks motivation are positive words, such as encouraging and praising words2). Giving encouraging words is important for

Corresponding author: Keiko Asano
Faculty of Medicine, Juntendo University
1-1 Hirakagakuendai Inzai-shi, Chiba 270-1695, Japan
TEL: +81-476-98-1001 (ext. 341) FAX: +81-476-98-1011 E-mail: keasano@juntendo.ac.jp
[Received Mar. 1, 2017] [Accepted Apr. 26, 2018]

Copyright © 2018 The Juntendo Medical Society. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original source is properly credited. doi: 10.14789/jmj.2018.64.JMJ17-WN09
communication and is useful when one wants to become friendly with somebody; that is, such words satisfy one’s “desire to be understood, sympathized and praised by others”. A survey targeting athletes to research what words most motivate people showed that encouraging and praising words motivate female athletes more easily than male athletes. 3.

3. Setting the assignment

We decided to research how much the environment in which people are raised and their experience of sports activities influence the way they receive words. Based on the results of the research, we demonstrate our opinion regarding “what provides the switch in motivation”.

Method

1. Procedure

Using the website “creative survey” to make our own questionnaires, we received responses from 142 students (M = 84, F = 58) in their first year in the Faculty of Health and Sports Science (N = 55) and Faculty of Medicine (N = 87) of Juntendo University. The survey contained 11 motivational items based on the results of previous research surveys, and included both our own ideas about motivational speech and the motivational words of great people. In each question, students checked the number that most reflected their idea about a phrase, from “−50: It makes me desperately lose my motivation” to “+50: It gives me high motivation”. For each item, all the numbers were added together and shown as an average for each gender and department.

Results

The results are shown in Figure-1. The 11 questionnaire items are shown below and the numbers on the horizontal line represent the phrases used in the survey (1. Do your best; 2. You made it; 3. That was close; 4. It will bear fruit if you do your best; 5. Mottainai (Don’t let your opportunity go to waste); 6. Hang in there, nobody has ever died by going for it; 7. Let’s work it out together; 8. You have unlimited potential; 9. No matter how you feel, do it; 10. I said it for you; 11. This is not what you do “best”). In each group, the phrases that were most motivating were items 7 and 8, while those that were least motivating were items 10 and 11.

Discussion

Regarding the overall results, it can be said that the students in the Faculty of Medicine group had fewer tendencies to increase their motivation and more easily lost their motivation than students in the Faculty of Health and Sports Science. One of the reasons for these results is that the students in the latter group had received strict training as athletes,
and tolerated the use of strong and severe words by coaches. In addition to the results, since the students in the Faculty of Medicine group marked questionnaire item 7 (Let’s work it out together) as highly motivational, they might be more easily affected by others’ words, in a process of so-called “Sympathetic Understanding”, and have experience studying and working as a group through their preparation for university entrance examinations.

From the perspective of gender difference, female students have a greater tendency to bring out their motivation than males, which corroborates the results of some previous studies. However, the result that male students tended to lose motivation easily differs from the results of previous studies. In particular, questionnaire items 6 (Hang in there, nobody has ever died by going for it) and 9 (No matter how you feel, just do it) received remarkably different responses than other items because the male students as a group disliked arbitrary orders from others.

Conclusion

Increasing motivation through use of words has a great influence on others. Although the same words may be used by the same person, the results may differ greatly depending on how differently the target person interprets the words. To motivate someone, it is important not to force excessive expectations on them, and to consider their character, experience, gender, et cetera. Thus, appropriate encouragement is very useful as a “Switch for Motivation.”

References

5) 高田康典: びわこ成蹊スポーツ大学卒業研究抄録集, 2013. http://hdl.handle.net/10693/1370/1/85%20%E9%A8%B%99%E7%94%B0.pdf