**GUIDELINES FOR COMPLETING ASSESSMENTS ON TECHNICAL OFFICIALS**

**Introduction.**

Assessment and feedback to Officials in Triathlon is a critical component in ensuring all Officials are delivering on the requirements associated with the level of competence and learning outcomes.

Herein after, Technical Delegates will be referred to as “Senior Officials”, whether, Assistant Technical Delegates and International Technical Officials as “Officials” or “Candidates”.

An assessment and feedback process should involve more than just assessing an individual performance on the field of play. Particularly for Officials, the preparation before and after the event entails all learning outcomes and hence should be included and will often reflect a successful event.

The assessment and feedback process should not be set up to intimidate or scare an Official(s). Many people are afraid of assessment and feedback because of previous negative experiences, fear of failure, lack of confidence, high expectations or over estimation of the level of performance required. This can affect the performance of an Official and may result in a distorted picture of the Officials real ability.

Assessment and feedback situations can be stressful and tense and Officials (both the candidate and the assessor) will experience a range of feelings. Some important points that can help you become a more supportive assessor include:

* Respect the Officials rights to have views that may differ from your own
* Recognise their feelings be showing consideration and regard
* Evaluate performance, not personality
* Communicate clearly and effectively, in a friendly manner
* Use your own words and not what’s reported
* Ensure to inform the Official they will be assessed and against what criteria

The assessment and feedback process should endeavour to empower the Official to achieve a cooperative relationship. Although ultimately the senior official must make a **decision** on performance, the candidate should be involved in as much of the process as possible. This process can be challenging for both parties.

The result is that the candidate takes a more realistic view of their own level of competence as they have received feedback. Self assessment can also be a great method for the Official to explain their level of knowledge or performance. This could be gauged by asking the Official how they think they performed at the event(s).

Note that the emphasis is on communication and participation.

**Setting up the process.**

The Official should always be considered the most important person in the assessment process. If you take this perspective, then it is logical that you will ensure they have some input into the way the assessment occurs.

While the Official should be involved in as much of the assessment process as possible, sometimes there will be aspects that are not open to negotiation. The context and circumstances of the assessment will determine this. Senior officials should be clear about which parts of the assessment process are open to input and modification and which are not.

Direct discussion with the Official before the assessment and feedback are important in order to set the tone and allow involvement with the process. Setting up the process may include:

* Describing the purpose of the assessment
* Method and type of assessment
* The criteria
* Conditions under which the assessment will take place
* Details such as time and place

Questions and answers are an effective way to share information between you and the Official. This will allow the Official to seek clarification and discuss situations that may have occurred during an event. Try to be flexible and responsive to the Official and be open.

At the start of the assessment be open, encouraging and supportive;

* Ensure the environment is suitable
* Create a positive, friendly, and reassuring atmosphere through your demeanour (see body language)
* Be welcoming and smile
* Allow the official to settle in and be comfortable
* Give a brief overview of the assessment and your observations in simple language
* Check there understanding of the situation with open questions ‘What do you understanding of what occurred today?’
* Invite the Official to ask questions

Giving honest and direct feedback on performance and situations is important to ensure the Official gains the full experience of the event and their **responsibility as being an Official**.

Most Officials will want to know how they can learn from an experience and improve.

Checking with the Official about how they think they performed provides useful information and alerts you to how feedback should be presented. An opening question such as ‘how do you think you performed?’ is a good way to start the feedback process. It also allows you to gauge the mood of the Official, which may assist in structuring feedback.

**During the assessment.**

During the assessment, provide appropriate encouragement and guidance where possible. This might include properly focused and phrased statements or questions where relevant.

It is important that you always behave in manner that makes the Official believe that the process and comments will be just and fair in your judgements. Ensure your attention is focused on the Official, and that there are no other distractions to the assessment. Where possible try to remain unobtrusive and non-threatening while the assessment is taking place.

Communication is a two way process. The Senior Official should ensure that they give clear explanations using language appropriate to the candidate. During explanations, the Senior Official should also look and listen for indications that the candidate is listening and comprehending what is being said. Puzzled expressions, frowns, sighs and body language can give you clues that the communication has not been understood or what you are trying to say.

Encouraging questions can be an effective way to gauge the understanding of the message. If the Official has no questions, but you are unsure they have understood, you can prompt them by putting some questions to them e.g. what is your understanding of what needs to be achieved at the Athletes Lounge before the race start.

Guidelines during the assessment and feedback:

* Choose and appropriate time and place to give the feedback
* Give honest, clear and constructive feedback
* Do not overload the official
* Use the ‘sandwich technique’
	+ Outline the candidates positive achievements
	+ Give constructive feedback on gaps and errors
	+ Finish with a supportive statement
* Explore ways of overcoming any gaps in competency. Focus on behaviours the person can change
* Focus on performance rather than on personal characteristics
* Avoid discussing the difficulties in your role
* Be confident – if your decision is to move to an alternative, do not apologise for the result

Feedback on the outcomes will help the Official to understand the basis for the decision. Feedback should be also identify what further resources are needed for development. Feedback should also be given in person.

Reasons for failure of Feedback

* Participants perceive little benefit
* Participants are uncomfortable with face to face communication
* Participants are not skilled in the process of giving and receiving feedback

The following table illustrate some of the important aspects of giving and receiving feedback:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Giving feedback | Receiving feedback |
| * Encourage openness
 | * Listen objectively
 |
| * Praise good officiating
 | * Take feedback as advice, not as a personal attack
 |
| * Make feedback timely
 | * Summarise feedback
 |
| * State your feedback in a manner that coveys respect and support
 | * Take a problem solving approach
 |
| * Keeps comments impersonal and task related
 | * Ask for suggestions
 |
| * Focus on specific behaviours
 | * Thanks the person giving the feedback
 |
| * Ensure comments are clear and understood
 | * Practice to improve
 |
| * Support negative feedback with data
 |  |
| * Link negative feedback to actions for improvement
 |  |

**Using questions & types of questions.**

Under some conditions questions may be required to gather information that will provide evidence of the situation and how the Official managed the scenario based on their competence. It is important that questions are used to elicit information from the Official that will assist them in showing their level of competence. Questions should not be used to trick the Official or put them down. Similarly the question should be given in friendly rather than interrogatory manner. Give the Official the opportunity to expand on issues and demonstrate their understanding of the topic under discussion.

If necessary a series of questions can be prepared prior to the discussion.

**Types of Questions**

*Closed questions*

Closed questions should not be used as they usually involve a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response. They may be appropriate in some situations but do not elicit information. Examples may include:

* Do you know how to conduct a pontoon start?
* Do you know when yellow cards are given on the bike course?

*Open Questions*

Open questions are valuable during a discussion as they are designed to draw out explanations, information and opinions. They allow for a variety of responses and enable the official to take which ever direction they would like to demonstrate their knowledge of the situation, rules etc. Examples may include:

* How to you normally deal with lapped athletes on the bike course?
* What do you think about wheel sets that have less than 16 spokes?
* When should the swim course be measured and confirmed to the Technical Delegate?

*Questions that encourage a follow-up response*

These are similar to open questions, and also encourage candidates to talk about their experience in the field. Examples may include:

* Can you tell me your design for the transition proposal?
* What do you think about the location of the aid station?

*Hypothetical questions*

Hypothetical questions may be useful in focusing on the understanding of practical procedures and activities, e.g.

* What would happen if......

*Questions to avoid*

* Ambiguous and unclear questions can make candidates feel uncomfortable or unsure of themselves e.g. ‘when are you going to...’, ‘I would have thought...?’
* Asking many questions within the same sentence (double-barrelled questions) as this can cause confusion
* ‘leading’ questions that may influence the candidates response and make the assessment invalid, such as ‘ You wouldn’t stand there, would you?’

*Helpful hints for planning questions*

* Plan the structure of questions if possible based on the scenario
* Think through the order of questions (that is candidates need to understand and make sense of the question you ask)
* Plan some follow up questions that will identify the candidates range and depth of experience
* Do not get sidetracked by an inappropriate response. Bring the official back on track
* Ensure the questions are relevant
* Try not to interrupt the flow of the discussion (turn off your phone)

**Making a decision on an outcome.**

In deciding on the Officials competence or their ability to handle a situation it is essential that the rule of evidence be applied. Look at the evidence which can be provided via various streams and check that it is:

* Valid
* Authentic
* Sufficient
* Current

**Making an overall judgement**

The Senior Official needs to make an overall judgement about whether or not the Official has performed in accordance to their duties. There are 2 stages in the process of making a judgement:

* Comparing the evidence against the outcomes for the role
* Making the decision as to whether the necessary competence has been achieved

No decision can be made in an impersonal vacuum, and a degree of informed, subjective judgement (or gut instinct) on the part of the Senior Official will often be involved. Nevertheless, when making the final judgement, ensure you document the reasons for your decisions. Surprisingly this will form the basis of your feedback.

**Listening and responding**

The skills of listening and responding are very important in the assessment situation particularly when giving feedback.

If the Official is talking to you, actively listen and show that you are interested and comprehending what they are saying. You can use body language, tone of voice, facial gestures and movements in your response.

Look interested and encourage the Official by:

* Maintaining eye contact (but not constant staring)
* Adopting an open an relaxed posture
* Using nods, smile and phrases like ‘I see’, ‘yes’, ‘on on’
* Summarising their statements without adding details they did not mention
* Allowing enough time for them to collect their thoughts before they respond to the questions

Your response to an Official during an assessment situation can influence their performance and affect their feelings about themselves and the assessment process. Try to maintain the positive atmosphere and confidence that you have initially created.

Conclude the discussion with an open ended question e.g. ‘Is there anything else you would like to add, or is there an aspect that we have overlooked?’

At the end, thank the Official for their time.

**Body Language**

The first source of information via communication comes from body language, often reference to as the silent language. Humans establish, develop and maintain relationships using the silent language. Body language including ton of voice accounts for 93% of any message, while the actual words used account for 7% of the message.

Not understanding the importance and power of body language in the communication process only gives us half the message and half the signals of what is happening from the perspective of the Official.

Points to remember concerning body language include:

* Make sure you are aware of your own body language and observe the body language of the Official. Certain signals in body language can indicate a lack of understanding, disagreement, pending conflict, shame and fear, agreement, encouragement or signal support
* Ensure that the body signals you send match and enhance the verbal or written message
* The smile is a universal sign of welcome and acceptance.

**Manage your body language – it’s SO CLEAR**

* **S**ite or stand at an angle and on the same level, ad respect the Officials space zones
* **O**pen gestures and body language
* **C**entre your attention exclusively on the Official
* **L**ean slightly forward to show interest, a bit further forward to apply pressure, slightly back to reduce pressure
* **E**ye contact whilst listening to encourage the speaker
* **A**ppropriate responses to what the mentee has said
* **R**emain relaxed and lanced to make open communications easier

(Adapted from Cole 2004)