

Relating to today's

STUDENT- ATHLETE



**BETSY, THE COACHES' COACH
& COMMUNICATION SPECIALIST**

GENERATION Z

Born during or after 1997, the young people we are coaching have never known life without the Internet.

This iGen has been dubbed the first true “digital natives”, and most learned to operate some form of technology before they could form complete sentences.

WHAT COACHES & ADMIN ARE SAYING...



"They have such short attention spans."

"So much texting, it's wild! They text each other when they're in the same room."

"It's like they can't accept criticism...even if it's constructive. They can always cite a reason for failure that absolves them of responsibility."



"There's this constant need for reassurance and validation..."

The more we know about
who our athletes are, the more
effectively we can support them.

WHO IS GEN Z?

QUICK FACTS ABOUT
TODAY'S STUDENT-ATHLETES



WHAT THE EXPERTS ARE SAYING...

"Studies show that constant exposure to screens changes the neural circuitry of developing brains, leading to shorter attention spans, stunted social skills, and a heightened need to multi-task." (The Center for Generational Kinetics)

"Research suggests that their brains have evolved to process more information at faster speeds... but, getting and keeping their attention is a challenge." (National Center for Biotechnology Information)

"Looking at the popular apps, you can see that we are raising a generation now of tremendous visual communicators. It's the most powerful form of communication." (Dr. Pamela Rutledge, Director of the Media Psychology Center)



52%

**CITE 'HONESTY' AS THE MOST
IMPORTANT QUALITY IN
LEADERSHIP**

Generation Z was raised in a post 9/11 world; an age of school shootings, terrorism, global recession and climate change.

As a result, studies have found that Gen Z is overwhelmingly more realistic than optimistic

61%

DESIRE A CAREER IN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Though seemingly autonomous, Generation Z is highly collaborative and loves to co-create. Technology has allowed them to contribute original ideas to the larger collective

79%

**DISPLAY SYMPTOMS OF EMOTIONAL
DISTRESS WHEN KEPT FROM THEIR
PERSONAL ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

Generation Z routinely multi-tasks across 5 screens, with 55% of Gen Z spending more than 5 hours per day on their mobile device.

GEN Z AT A GLANCE

SHORT ATTENTION SPANS,
STUNTED SOCIAL SKILLS

SKIM READ & DIGEST BITE-SIZED
AMOUNTS OF INFORMATION AT
AN INCREDIBLE RATE

VISUAL COMMUNICATORS
ACCUSTOMED TO CHAT-BASED
FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

HIGHLY EDUCATED, INDUSTRIOUS
& COLLABORATIVE

MORE REALISTIC THAN
OPTIMISTIC; VALUE HONESTY IN
LEADERSHIP

DATA-DRIVEN & ACCUSTOMED TO
INSTANT, EXPERT FEEDBACK



Oh, and one more thing...

Social media platforms have given Gen Z a high exposure to extrinsic motivation in the form of "likes" and "shares"

EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION

MINIMAL EXPERIENCE WITH
INTRINSIC MOTIVATION



GREAT.

NOW

WHAT ?

Let's take what we know and talk
strategy for connecting with today's
athlete

8 seconds

Skim Read

Chat-Based

Co-Create

Data-Driven

Feedback

Extrinsically

Motivated

Instant

Gratification



8 SECONDS

This is the attention span of Generation Z.

Your challenge is to communicate in short bursts while making the learning process visual at every opportunity.

8 seconds

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Gratification

8 SECONDS

- Ping-pong speakers (think Prezi)
- Interject questions (Socratic method)
- Specific example (use their names)
- Incorporate movement (individual or team)
- Utilize technology (short video clips)
- Visual representation (modeling or drawing)

8 seconds

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SKIM READ

Gen Z consumes bite-sized chunks of information.

Your challenge is to stick to facts, stats, summaries, tendencies and key points (especially in written communications).

8 seconds

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SKIM READ

- Bullet points (key points)
- Lists (top 3)
- Infographics (visuals for facts/percentages)
- Prioritize information (most relevant)
- Haiku test (5-7-5)
- Linguistic cues ("here's what you need to know")

8 seconds

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CHAT-BASED

Accustomed to chat-based forms of communication.

Your challenge is to operate in their conversational comfort zone while providing opportunities to engage in longer form written and verbal communications.

8 seconds

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Gratification

CHAT-BASED

- Utilize technology (individual/group texts)
- Invitations to connect (optional longer format)
- 5-minute meetings (touching base)
- Physical positioning (relatability)
- Conversational comfort (location 3x)
- Letter of Recommendation (larger perspective)

8 seconds

Skim Read

Chat-Based

Co-Create

Data-Driven

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Motivated

Instant

Gratification



CO-CREATE

Highly educated, industrious, and collaborative.

Your challenge is to find opportunities to co-create with them... to allow for *customization* of their sport experience through having agency in the process.

8 seconds

Skim Read

Chat-Based

Co-Create

Data-Driven

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Gratification

CO-CREATE

- Team rules (propose fair consequences)
- Warm-up drills (individual or partner led)
- Meeting schedule (optional vs. mandatory)
- Athlete's practice (athlete led practice or drill)
- Individual skill work (what/why/when)
- Pre-competition goals (keys to success)
- Drill work debrief (athletes tell you)
- Community service (they choose)

8 seconds

Skim Read

Chat-Based

Co-Create

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DATA-DRIVEN

Generation Z sifts to find the most relevant data.

Your challenge is to make things immediately relevant - lead with the "why" and illustrate current value in relation to a larger purpose.

8 seconds

Skim Read

Chat-Based

Co-Create

Data-Driven

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DATA-DRIVEN

- Lead with the why ("for the sake of what?")
- Support with stats (KPI's, percentages, metrics)
- Connect the dots (compound effect)
- Scale it back (Big picture --> current piece)
- Make it real (recent example illustrating value)
- Customize when appropriate (athlete specific)

8 seconds

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FEEDBACK

Generation Z values honest, immediate feedback.

Your challenge is to use metrics and visuals when possible to give objective feedback* in real-time.

(*While being *calm, caring, and encouraging*).



four main themes emerged for Generation Z's view of a "great coach." These themes reflected the desire for a coach that:

- 1) does not yell and remains calm,*
- 2) is caring and encouraging,*
- 3) has knowledge of the sport, and*
- 4) involves the team in decision making.*



THE PREFERRED COACHING STYLE OF GENERATION Z ATHLETES:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY (GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY)

8 seconds

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FEEDBACK

- Criticize + Connect
- Framing (what you want based on what they value)
- Be specific! ("Good job" vs "Great pass, [name]")
- Public ovation (Trust Factor - successes and failures)
- Controllables & Uncontrollables (Outside My Boat)
- Truth + Action
- Contrasting statements ("Don't ___/Do ___")

8 seconds

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EXTRINSICALLY MOTIVATED

Disproportionally focused
on obtaining peer validation.

Your challenge is to help athletes
develop an internal drive for success by
strategically praising effort and intent;
illustrate value separate from "likes".



EXTRINSICALLY MOTIVATED

8 seconds

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Gratification

- Validate (failure and success)
- Support (acknowledge their effort)
- Challenge (make it safe to fail)
- Reinforce value (their unique contribution)
- Celebrate roles (connect individual to the group)
- Peer-evaluations (accountability to others)
- Peer-acknowledgement (platform for recognition)

8 seconds

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INSTANT GRATIFICATION

Generation Z is used to getting what they want.

NOW!

(Google, Amazon Prime, YouTube)

Your challenge is to help athletes practice working towards a desired outcome over time, while keeping them engaged and informed.

8 seconds

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INSTANT GRATIFICATION

- Now & Later (what can they do today for tomorrow?)
- Scheduled feedback (weekly forms)
- Progress towards goals (individual & team metrics)
- Controllables & Uncontrollables (Outside My Boat)
- Yoga/Meditation (intentional breath work)
- Diversity (innovation = engagement)

practicing your skills

**START
SMALL**

Pick one challenge
Pick one tool
Pick one practice
Pick one person

MORE RESOURCES

Active Communication
Technique videos (40)
YouTube

youtube.com/@BetsyButterick

Blog Posts / Substack
[@betsybutterick on Substack](#)

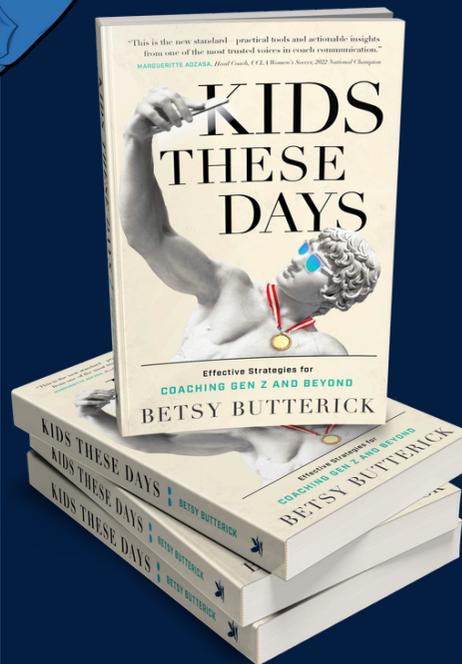
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