

# **Chapter 1: The essence of coaching**

**by Jenni Banks**

Coaching is a complex and varied pursuit. Coaches play a pivotal role in sport, and operate in a range of different environments and capacities, from a part-time volunteer to a full-time professional. The most effective coaches seek to improve their own performance, and ensure that they continually evaluate and develop themselves as a coach. A combination of self-reflection and professional development activities assist in this pursuit.

A coach's impact can extend beyond the sporting environment into everyday life. If a coach is to positively influence the performance and behaviour of those in their charge, both inside and outside the sporting environment, then they must have a sound understanding of their role and potential impact. Coaches need a healthy, well-developed coaching philosophy and must ensure that they exhibit the professional standards and behaviours expected of a coach.

## **Evaluating and improving coaching performance**

Effective coaching is not only about helping athletes to improve, it is also about constantly improving as a coach. Good coaches build on the things they do well and learn from their mistakes.

The importance of observing athletes and providing them with feedback is clear to all coaches. It is a vital part of helping athletes to improve, but who helps coaches to improve? Who observes the coach in action? Who provides the coach with feedback on their performance? In short, who coaches the coach?

There is a variety of ways coaches can learn and improve. These can range from formal coach education and accreditation programs, to informal learning and development activities.

Coaches can learn by:

- . watching other coaches in action
- . working with a more-experienced coach (mentor) to seek guidance and advice
- . participating in a 'community' of coaches (for example, discussing issues with other coaches in their club)
- . working as an assistant coach to a senior coach

- using self-reflection and evaluation, making use of video and self-analysis techniques.

## Evaluating coaching performance

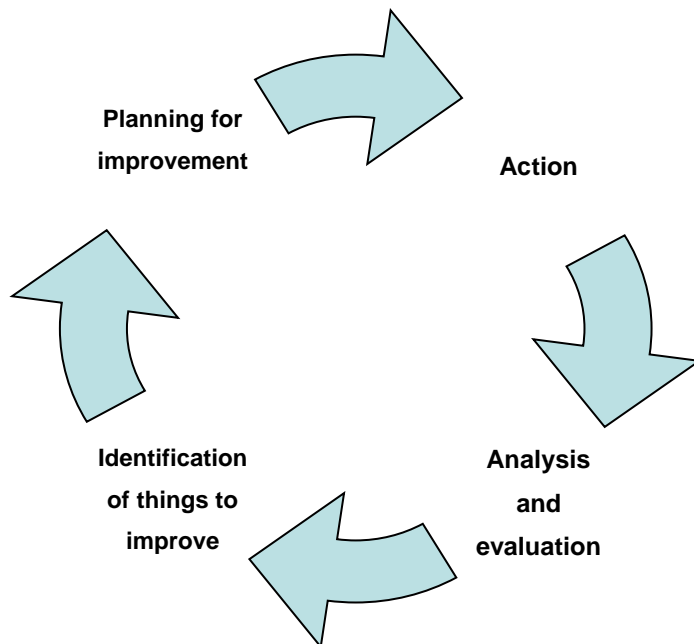
There are a number of practical methods that can be used for evaluating coaching performance. Some involve self-reflection and self-evaluation (that is, the coach evaluates themselves); others require feedback from others, generally the coach's athletes, peers or a mentor coach.

### *The self-reflection process*

Consultation with athletes, mentors and peers can be a good source of feedback, but ultimately coaches need to take responsibility themselves. They need to develop the capacity to monitor and critically evaluate their own performance, and design and implement appropriate strategies for improvement.

Self-reflection is a mental activity, but in order for it to be of any benefit to a coach's performance, it needs to be linked to action. The overall process can be visualised as a continuous loop (see Figure 1.1 and Table 1.1). It is a cyclic process that encourages a coach to analyse their actions, consider their impact, identify things to improve, and plan and implement strategies to improve the effectiveness of their coaching.

**Figure 1.1: The self-reflection cycle**



**Table 1.1: Example of self-reflective stages**

<b>Self-reflective stage</b>	<b>Football example</b>
Action	Coach demonstrating an instep pass
Self-reflection	'Could they see what I was doing?'
Things to improve	'I need to position myself better so that everyone can see.'
Planning improvement	'I'll ensure that everyone is in front of me and can see the pass before commencing. If necessary, I'll demonstrate the skill several times from different angles.'
Action — implementing the changes	Demonstrating the new instep pass from a position that is easier for the players to see, and repeating the demonstration from a different angle
Follow-up reflection	'That worked much better, but I need to develop better activities to check that they have understood.'

### ***Methods of self-reflection***

All coaches self-reflect, but rarely in a deliberate and systematic manner. The value of the following three methods is that they help coaches structure their reflection and relate it directly to the goal of improving their coaching effectiveness.

#### *Coaching diary*

Keeping a diary that focuses on the coach's performance is one method of self-reflection. Coaching diaries can take a variety of forms, such as the example shown on page 10. The advantages of using a coaching diary for self-reflection are that it:

- . is a simple method that can be used by anyone at any time
- . provides a written record that can be referred back to
- . can help the coach remember and keep things in perspective.

To be most useful, the diary should be completed as soon as possible after the coaching session that it evaluates. Entries should be kept simple and to the point (as clear and precise as possible) and should describe performance before judging whether it was good or bad. In addition to recording what could be improved, it is also important to record what was done well.

When evaluating performance it is important to explain why the performance was good, needs to be improved, or whether another approach would be better. If a solution is not clear, a range of solutions can be recorded and, if improvement is slow or a solution does not work, then the coach should not be afraid to try again or consider other solutions. Change does not always happen immediately.

## Coaching (self-reflection) diary

Date:	Session time:	Athletes/team:
Session description (including aims):		
Focus area:		
Things to improve:	Things to implement in the next session:	
	Follow-up evaluation after next session:	

### *Video self-analysis*

Video self-analysis, whereby the coach arranges a video recording of their coaching in order to review their performance, provides an excellent way to assess and improve coaching effectiveness.

Some of the major advantages of this method are:

- . the coach gets the opportunity to see themselves in action, as others see them. This can often help identify areas to improve
- . the video provides the coach with very detailed feedback; a real-time record of events rather than the coach's memory
- . video is very flexible. A coach can review their performance any number of times, analyse a sequence in slow motion, freeze-frame an instant, and send it to another coach for further feedback and advice.

Disadvantages include the need to have access to a video camera, tripod and, ideally, someone skilled in its operation. The video operator should be briefed on how they should record the session (what they should look for, whether they should remain static or mobile, etc.).

Key steps in video self-analysis include:

- . record a training session
- . self-reflection — view the tape, then identify things to improve and devise plans for change
- . record a subsequent training session in which the plans for change are implemented
- . follow-up self-reflection — consider how well the changes were implemented and what else needs to be done.

### *Mentor coaching*

Mentoring involves a coach asking a more-experienced or senior coach to observe them in action, if they have not already, and then discuss their performance and advise what they can do to improve. It is a highly effective way for a new coach to learn the 'art' of coaching and put theory into practice, but can also be equally useful for an elite coach with many years of experience. Obtaining a different perspective from a more-experienced coach may help identify areas and strategies for improvement that might not otherwise have been identified.

One possible issue may be trying to identify an appropriate mentor who is willing to act in a mentoring capacity.

A mentoring relationship can be a formal or informal arrangement, and mentors might include a coach with more experience and greater technical expertise in the same or another sport, or in an area that the coach is interested in improving. In addition to their greater experience and technical expertise, mentors should:

- . have strong communication skills, especially one-on-one communication skills
- . have the willingness and time to be involved
- . adhere to and promote the Coach's Code of Behaviour
- . ideally be available for first-hand observations and face-to-face discussions.

### **Aspects of coaching to consider**

Most coaches probably already have a good idea of the kinds of things that need to be considered. The following check list may help a coach identify aspects of their coaching that need improvement.

**Table 1.2: Check list for aspects of coaching to improve**

<b>Coaching aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Preparation:</b>	
Session plan developed	
Equipment organised	
Introduction to the session	
Dynamic warm-up	
<b>Group management:</b>	
Involvement of all athletes	
Attention-gaining skills	
Control of the group	

Organisational skills	
<b>Teaching:</b>	
Adequate demonstrations provided	
Skills broken into sequential steps	
Key teaching points stressed	
Error detection and correction	
Progression	
Overload of information	
Variety of teaching methods	
Individual needs catered for	
<b>Communication:</b>	
Clear instructions provided	
Check understanding of instructions	
Non-verbal cues	
Individual feedback provided	
Group feedback provided	
Listening skills	
Questioning skills	
Professional manner	
Enthusiasm and positive attitude	
<b>Safety:</b>	



Use of protective equipment	
Checking the environment for hazards	
Safety instructions	
Adequate supervision of all athletes	
<b>General:</b>	
Appropriateness of session	
Sequencing/progression/flow	
Variety	
Appropriate time on task	

### Improving coaching performance

Once coaches have evaluated their performance, there are a number of different ways that they might make improvements. The path or paths chosen will be determined by the strengths and weaknesses identified in their evaluation. They might include undertaking technical and professional development activities, observing and working with other coaches, or seeking further information or support on particular aspects of their coaching.

- . **Technical and professional development activities** — these might be sport-specific or generic, and should be pitched at a level appropriate for the needs of the coach. Activities might include a strength and conditioning course, further coach training programs (generic or sport-specific), or personal development workshops (for example, communication or people skills, time or stress management).
- . **Observing and working with other coaches (mentors)** — in addition to helping a coach evaluate their performance, mentors can be tremendously beneficial in the ongoing development of a coach. Relationships might be established with different mentors to work on different areas.
- . **Seeking further information or support on particular aspects of coaching** — this might include internet searches for coaching or related websites, or accessing books,

magazines or journal articles on areas of interest. It could also include accessing professionals in areas in which improvement is sought.

Further information about evaluating and improving coaching performance can be found in the Australian Sports Commission's *Coaching Better: becoming a more effective coach* Workbook and DVD.

### **Case study**

Michelle has been coaching a squad of athletes for a few years. Recently Tom, an athlete who has a hearing impairment, joined her squad. Michelle felt capable of varying the way she provided instructions or used demonstrations in order to include Tom, but felt she could improve. Michelle contacted Deaf Sports Australia to see if they could identify a suitable mentor coach in her city. Deaf Sports Australia identified a suitable mentor and also identified some other resources that would assist her. The mentoring partnership proved to be very effective and Michelle's efforts to improve her ability to coach and communicate with Tom were successful. Michelle also found that improving her ability to coach and communicate with Tom actually improved her ability to coach and communicate with all squad members.

## **Professional standards and behaviours expected of a coach**

Our society expects high standards of behaviour from all people involved in sport, and it is vital that these expectations are met if the integrity and enjoyable aspects of sport are to be maintained. Codes of behaviour can be used to outline expected professional and behavioural standards and, ideally, should be developed with input from those affected. This creates a greater sense of ownership and awareness of the code.

In order to assist sporting organisations to develop a code of behaviour, the Australian Sports Commission has developed a Code of Behaviour for sport participants (at Appendix 1). This code replaces the Australian Sports Commission's Coach's Code of Ethics and is underpinned by four guiding principles: fairness, respect, responsibility and safety.

By introducing and consistently enforcing a sound code of behaviour, sporting organisations can assist in the provision of safe and appropriate environments and quality services to their members, stakeholders and customers. The coach's role is to ensure that they are aware of, exhibit and reinforce expected behavioural standards. Consciously or unconsciously, athletes, especially children, model the behaviour of significant others in their lives, including coaches. Coaches must act as role models.

## **Dealing with difficult situations and ethical dilemmas**

Coaching can produce the 'highest of highs and the lowest of lows'. Throughout their coaching career, coaches may be faced with a number of difficult situations and ethical dilemmas.

Coaches must be prepared and equipped to deal with these.

Following are some examples of difficult situations and ethical dilemmas that coaches may face and their role.

### ***Reporting child abuse***

Child abuse is a too-common occurrence in today's society. It is not a coach's responsibility to find evidence that abuse has occurred. However, coaches must be aware of the signs of child abuse, which can include:

- . bruising, particularly in the face, head or neck region
- . differing versions about how an injury occurred
- . a child not relating well to others
- . disruptive or aggressive behaviour and bullying.

Coaches must know where to get advice or report concerns. This is an ethical and, in some states and territories, a legal responsibility of coaches.

### **Case study**

Jack noticed that one of his young athletes, a normally bubbly and outgoing girl called Jasmine, was becoming increasingly withdrawn. He also noticed some bruising on her arms. Concerned, Jack spoke to Jasmine after a training session. Jack told Jasmine that he had noticed she was less bubbly than usual and seemed a little withdrawn and asked if there was anything worrying her. Jasmine said, 'No!', but Jack was not convinced and asked her about the bruises on her arms. Jasmine told Jack that she had fallen off her bike and that she was fine. Jasmine was not convincing and the bruises seemed inconsistent with a bike accident; however, Jasmine was not prepared to discuss the matter any further. Jack expressed his concerns about Jasmine to the club's member protection officer before leaving training. The member protection officer advised Jack that she had also noticed Jasmine's change in behaviour and had asked about the bruises. Jasmine told her that she had got them after falling from the monkey bars at school.

There was clearly something wrong. The member protection officer told Jack she would report the matter to the relevant authorities and seek their advice about what to do.

### ***Inappropriate demonstration of a skill***

There are occasions where a coach needs to physically demonstrate a skill with an athlete. This must be done appropriately — ask the athlete's permission first; perform the demonstration but keep it short; and touch the athlete in a way that is least intrusive. For example, if demonstrating an 'arm bar' to an opponent in basketball, a male coach might lower his arm to the female player's stomach instead of placing it across her chest. Clubs should provide coaches with clear guidelines about demonstrating skills and other times when physical contact might be necessary (such as dealing with an injury) and coaches should be aware of these guidelines.

### ***Use of appropriate language/verbal abuse when coaching***

The coaching environment can be frustrating at times; however, coaches must be able to control their temper and find constructive ways to assist their athletes. In instances of abuse, concerned parents or others should take action by talking to someone in authority or the club or organisation member protection officer. Coaches should be given guidelines to help them provide a safe and fair environment for all participants.

### ***Abuse of officials***

There is never any justification for abuse of an official. Even if their decision costs a game or a medal opportunity there are avenues for addressing officiating concerns. Abuse of officials is the main reason officials drop out of sport. The future of sport depends on recruiting and retaining officials. Everyone involved in sport needs to show support and respect for officials and to work with them for the betterment of sport. Young officials need to be encouraged and coaches and parents need to be good role models for athletes in their dealings with officials. Sport should be enjoyable for everyone.

### **Case study**

In recent weeks, officials in a local club competition have been regularly abused by players for decisions that did not go their way. A number of the officials feel their efforts were not appreciated and were threatening to quit and spend their limited spare time on more enjoyable pursuits. Recognising the key role that officials play in the local competition and the need to act

to overcome the problems, Sal, a coach at one of the local clubs, organised a meeting with the officials and encouraged coaches at other clubs to do the same.

At the meeting, Sal recognised the key role that officials play in the conduct of the competition and identified the concerns of players and coaches in a calm, objective manner. Sal then encouraged a discussion about how officials, players and coaches might work together for the betterment of the competition and the enjoyment of all concerned. It was decided that the officials would provide an open forum at the club to discuss rule changes, decision-making and the role of all concerned (players, coaches and officials) in ensuring a strong and efficient competition.

This proved very effective, not only in the education of players but also in creating a better understanding and appreciation of the needs and roles of all parties. Separately, Sal also encouraged her team members to thank officials after each game and arranged for officials to be invited to key club functions. Over the following weeks, the 'them and us' feeling that had been present in previous weeks dissipated, and all parties found the competition more enjoyable.

### ***Disability discrimination***

Disability discrimination can affect self-esteem and is unlawful. Unfortunately, in sport discrimination is a common experience for people with a disability. Sports should try, where reasonable, to support participation. Coaches can assist this process by offering suggestions as to how an athlete with a disability might be included. For example, a junior netball club might refuse to include a young netballer because she has a hearing impairment. However, simple changes are often all that is necessary to safely include someone with a disability. In the case of the netball player, the umpire can wave a white handkerchief when they blow the whistle, and ensure that the player can see them when making decisions.

### ***Racial discrimination***

Racism damages sport and brings it into disrepute. It can affect athletes' lives and stop them becoming involved in sport. It is also unlawful under federal, state and territory anti-discrimination legislation. Racism is difficult for sporting associations and clubs to deal with. They need guidelines and procedures to prevent racism and deal with issues when they arise. Associations and clubs should encourage athletes who experience racism to report it. They should also have fair processes for dealing with complaints, provide athletes with codes of

behaviour and provide officials with training on how to deal with racism. Coaches must support these measures and ensure that their own behaviour is free of any racial intolerance.

### ***Giving all athletes fair attention***

A common complaint in sport is that some athletes (for example, a very talented athlete or an athlete with additional needs) get all the attention at the expense of other athletes. Sometimes, however, the reverse is true. For example, a talented athlete might receive little or no attention because the coach (or management) feels they do not require assistance; or an athlete with additional needs might be excluded because the coach does not have time or does not know how to assist them. It is important that all athletes receive fair attention. If one athlete requires more attention than others and there is a risk that other athletes will receive insufficient attention as a result, then other measures (for example, assigning a 'buddy' or helper to assist the athlete) can be employed to ensure that all athletes receive fair attention.

### ***Treatment of injured athletes***

Athletes who are injured deserve and require the attention of the coach, but are frequently given little or no attention in favour of athletes who are able to train and perform. Coaches should involve injured athletes wherever possible (for example, in off-field roles if they are not able to train or compete) so that the athlete continues to be an included and valued member of the group. Coaches should also ensure that the athlete is getting appropriate medical care and does not return from either injury or illness until they have a medical clearance to do so. The health and safety of the athlete must always be paramount, no matter how important an upcoming game or event is.

### ***Dealing with bullying or personality clashes within a team***

Sporting groups are comprised of athletes with different personalities and backgrounds. From time to time bullying or personality clashes may occur within the group. Clearly, this is unacceptable and it is important that a coach takes action over these issues. The coach has a responsibility to ensure that all athletes are able to participate without fear of intimidation or abuse, whether physical, verbal or emotional. Depending on the severity of the incident, the coach might tell the athlete/s (the bully, or both athletes if it is a personality clash) to take 'time out' to give them the chance to calm down. The coach should make the athlete/s aware that their behaviour is not acceptable and remind the athlete/s of the relevant code of behaviour and their responsibility for maintaining a harmonious group environment.

The coach should also discuss with the athlete/s alternative ways of dealing with their frustration with other athletes. Another option is to empower the athlete group to manage group behaviour and to deal with minor indiscretions. A coach may find that the athletes will adequately manage situations such as this without the need for intervention by coaching staff. If the athlete group is empowered to deal with these issues, then athlete behaviour should be monitored by the coach to ensure that the rights of all athletes are observed. More serious indiscretions should be dealt with at a higher level (by coaching staff, team management or sporting organisation management, as appropriate). In the case of bullying, the coach should also talk privately with the 'bully' to determine the reason for the bullying. Sometimes bullying is a response to abuse. If the athlete has been abused, then the coach should seek further advice or report the abuse to relevant authorities.

### ***Doping in sport***

The use of prohibited methods and substances, as defined by the World Anti-Doping Code Prohibited List, is banned in sport because they meet at least two of the following three criteria: they risk the health of the athlete, have a performance enhancing effect, and/or are against the spirit of sport. Coaches have an obligation to:

- . be knowledgeable about, and comply with, all anti-doping policies and rules that are applicable to them or the athletes they support
- . support and assist anti-doping organisations, including the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority, to conduct doping control
- . use their influence on athletes' values and behaviour to foster anti-doping attitudes. This includes reporting any suspected violations of anti-doping rules to anti-doping authorities (for example, in Australia, to the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority).

Difficult situations can test a coach's resolve and be tremendously draining. However, they can also present opportunities for personal growth and development as a coach. A sound, well-developed coaching philosophy will greatly assist a coach to make appropriate decisions consistently.

For more information on any of these areas, a coach can visit the Play by the Rules website ([www.playbytherules.net.au](http://www.playbytherules.net.au)); the Australian Sports Commission Disability Sport unit and Sport Ethics program websites ([www.ausport.gov.au](http://www.ausport.gov.au)); the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority website ([www.asada.gov.au](http://www.asada.gov.au)); the World Anti-Doping Agency website ([www.wada-ama.org](http://www.wada-ama.org)); or

contact the relevant state or territory child protection agency, state or territory sport and recreation department, state or territory Disability Education Program coordinator, state or territory anti-discrimination agency, or the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

## **Coaching philosophy and coaching style**

### **Case study**

Joe is a young coach who just wants to get out there and coach. He has completed an entry-level coach training program and has started the next level. Although the importance of a sound, well-developed coaching philosophy was discussed in the first program, he really had not taken much notice. Joe thought it was a bit of mumbo-jumbo and that it could wait until later, if at all. There were more important things to be done, such as planning and delivering training sessions and winning games.

Unfortunately, Joe's lack of a sound, well-developed coaching philosophy means that he coaches like 'a ship without a rudder'. He lacks direction and readily succumbs to external pressures from the athletes and parents. He is inconsistent in his application of training rules, style of play, discipline, codes of behaviour and competitive outlook, and this is frustrating and confusing for his athletes. A number of them have left Joe's squad and the sport as a result. Joe also does not enjoy coaching as much as he thought he would.

What is it that guides a coach's coaching and governs their actions? How can a coach ensure that they have a positive influence on those in their charge?

A coach's performance and behaviour is guided, consciously or unconsciously, by their coaching philosophy — that is, the set of personal guidelines they have about how they will operate as a coach and what they expect from and want for themselves and those in their charge. A coaching philosophy consists of:

- . the coach's major objectives (the things they value and want to achieve)
- . their beliefs or principles about how these objectives should be achieved.

Each coach's philosophy is individually determined and lifelong in its development. It is generally shaped by the coach's own experience (including the quality of the coaches or teachers to which they have been exposed) and knowledge, and generally evolves throughout their career as they gain further experience and knowledge, and face situations that test their philosophy.



Many coaches, however, never consciously consider their coaching philosophy. As a consequence, some coaches lack direction, have an inconsistent approach and/or succumb to external pressures (for example, from athletes, parents and administrators). Others have inflexible philosophies that limit the achievement of their objectives, or philosophies that are incongruous with society's values.

By taking time to develop and write down their coaching philosophy, a coach can clarify their objectives and better understand the values, beliefs and principles that guide their coaching and govern their actions. A written coaching philosophy also provides a tangible reference point that can be revisited to ensure their behaviour is consistent with their philosophy, and periodically reviewed to ensure that it remains consistent with current values, knowledge and experience. It helps a coach make choices, set priorities and ensure a consistent approach at any time, but especially when faced with difficult situations or ethical dilemmas where they may feel uncertain about the correct decision to make.

It is a coach's responsibility to develop, communicate and embrace a positive philosophy that will help those in their charge achieve their goals. The development of a sound coaching philosophy should be given as much attention as the development of technical knowledge of the sport.

### **Developing a coaching philosophy**

To develop a coaching philosophy, a coach should ask themselves the following questions:

- . Why do I coach?
- . What am I trying to achieve as a coach?
- . Why do athletes and others involved in sport (for example, officials, administrators, support staff, parents, partners, carers) participate? What are they trying to achieve?
- . How can I achieve my objectives and help my athletes and others achieve theirs?
- . What values, beliefs and principles are most important to remember in striving towards those goals? What qualities are most important to me?
- . How do I want to be seen as a coach? What do I need to do to achieve that?

Once these questions have been answered, the ideas should be developed to produce a complete (written) philosophy.

Coaching philosophies will vary from coach to coach depending on their objectives, past experiences, beliefs, values and principles. However, some common elements of healthy coaching philosophies are:

- . They are athlete-centred — the coaching objective is to assist athletes (regardless of their goals, age, gender, ability level, cultural background or socioeconomic status) to develop to their potential and to provide an environment that will allow the athletes to grow, not only as athletes but also as people and as a team. Athletes are provided with an environment in which they are motivated to do their best, empowered to make decisions, take ownership of their learning and responsibility for their performance, own the team culture, and enjoy the whole experience.
- . There is a concern for the holistic development of the athlete — that is, not only their development as an athlete, but also their development as a person. There is recognition and consideration of the athlete's life both within and outside sport and, in the case of elite and professional athletes, preparation for life after sport.
- . The importance of teamwork and collective effort in order to achieve objectives is understood and embraced.

An example of a healthy coaching philosophy is:

... to create within the athletes an interest and enthusiasm for the events ... then direct that interest and enthusiasm along the lines of sound fundamentals, taught imaginatively, intelligently, purposefully and even inspirationally. It sounds rather simple, but it isn't.

(Kidman and Hanrahan 1997)

### **Working within a club or other sporting organisation structure**

In developing their coaching philosophy, it is important that a coach not only considers their own objectives, beliefs, values and principles, but also those of the club or other sporting organisation with which they are involved. Clearly, if that relationship is to be successful, the philosophies of both the coach and the club or organisation must be compatible.

Typically, a club or other sporting organisation will have their guiding principles outlined in the sports policies that guide the organisation (for example, in their codes of behaviour, junior sport policy, member protection policy and/or disability action plan). Sometimes, however, there may be an unwritten agreement. A club may have a particular approach as to how juniors are rotated on and off the field in team sports, or a policy regarding the amount and/or type of training

undertaken by juniors. They might have a plan with regard to the inclusion of athletes with a disability or masters athletes. There might also be expectations with regard to member duties. For example, it might be part of a coach's duties to help with fundraising activities or to provide advice on uniform requirements or equipment purchases in addition to 'normal' coaching duties. Importantly, however, if a club or sporting organisation is to function effectively and achieve its objectives, it should operate through the collective efforts of a number of people who have different roles to play rather than an expectation that a minority of members will do a majority of the work. Coaches should be aware of the requirements of their club or sporting organisation and be able to work within them.

Once a coach has developed their coaching philosophy, it is important to communicate it to those in their charge and establish a mutual direction. In the case of junior sport teams this might include parents, helpers or carers, and administrators, as well as athletes. In the case of more senior teams it might involve support staff, administrators and helpers or carers, as well as athletes.

### **Coaching philosophy and coaching style**

The coaching philosophy that a coach adopts will influence how they see their role as a coach and, subsequently, their coaching style — that is, the way they approach their coaching and deal with people and issues. It might be in an authoritarian, business-like, 'nice-guy', intense or easygoing manner or a combination of these styles. Different combinations of coaching philosophy and coach personality will result in different coaching styles and coaches. This is beneficial, firstly because different coaches suit different athletes, and secondly because it would be boring if coaches were all clones of each other. What is most important is that all coaches provide an environment that has a positive impact on their athletes' performance and behaviour, both within and outside sport.

### **Creating a welcoming and supportive environment**

#### **Case study**

Craig runs a talent development program for a local sports club. Parents, club officials and administrators have all commented that the athletes love his sessions, and are always talking about him and the sessions he runs. They always look forward to the next one. Why do they

love Craig's sessions? Craig is always happy to see all the athletes (and they him!). He always acknowledges them on arrival in a friendly and enthusiastic manner. Craig knows the names of the parents as well as the athletes, and is interested in them and what else they do, not just the program he provides. Craig is careful to ensure that the activities he provides are appropriate for the athletes involved. He is also good at varying the activities so that all athletes within the group are included and challenged. He empowers and engages the athletes by presenting them with questions and asking them to come up with solutions, either by themselves or by working in pairs or groups. Craig regularly praises the athletes in public and makes any corrections in a discreet and positive manner. The athletes thrive in this environment and not only improve their sports skills but also their ability to work cooperatively with one another, to include everyone, to focus on a task and to make decisions for themselves. The athletes and their parents love Craig and his sessions, and Craig gains a tremendous amount of satisfaction and enjoyment from working with the athletes.

All athletes, no matter what their background, learn and perform better in, and gain more enjoyment and satisfaction from, positive environments in which they feel welcome, valued and supported. The ability to create a welcoming and supportive environment is an important attribute for all coaches.

Welcoming and supportive environments have some consistent features:

- . They are open to all participants — everyone is welcome. There is no discrimination based on age, gender, disability, ability level, ethnic or religious background, or socioeconomic status. In addition, the role of significant others (including parents, partners, and/or carers, where relevant) is acknowledged and embraced.
- . They are safe — as a result of diligent risk management (for example, ensuring safe playing surfaces and equipment, appropriate warm-up and cool-down, demonstration of correct technique, appropriate matching of participants, and correct injury management) and adherence to expected professional and behavioural standards, participants are protected from physical as well as psychological and emotional harm
- . They are supportive — support is provided when and where it is needed. This support can take many forms, including:
  - positive reinforcement (which can increase athletes' feelings of self-worth, competence and motivation)
  - informational support (for example, advice or suggestions)

- tangible or instrumental support (for example, equipment, transportation, facilities, additional funding for day-to-day living costs)
- social support (positive support from coaches and other participants that creates a sense of connection and belonging, and enhances feelings of self-worth).

There is regard for participants not only as athletes, but also as people, and concern for the wellbeing of participants both within and outside the sporting environment. Negative behaviour such as ridicule, silent treatment, sarcasm and anger are absent in a supportive environment

- . They are empowering — athletes have the opportunity to make decisions, take responsibility for their own performance, and own the team culture. This develops a greater sense of ownership, independence and self-belief.
- . They are consistent yet challenging — there is consistency in terms of rules, expected standards and safety; however, variation in activities and experiences means that athletes remain challenged and do not become complacent or bored.
- . They allow and cater for individual difference — the fact that different athletes bring different things to a group and have different needs is recognised and embraced. Coaches plan and provide activities that can be varied to accommodate all needs, and participants feel comfortable challenging themselves and trying new things. The focus is on each participant's improvements rather than how they compare to others.

Effective communication is also a key to providing a welcoming and supportive environment.

Coaches should:

- . be approachable and supervise sessions in a positive and enthusiastic manner
- . provide clear, concise instructions
- . check for understanding
- . provide constructive feedback and corrections in a positive manner
- . encourage feedback, and actively listen to and respond to questions.

Coaches must also be perceived as being honest and fair so that an atmosphere of trust is developed.

### **Individual versus group needs and inclusive coaching practices**

In order to meet and balance the needs of the individual as well as the needs of the group a coach should:

- . accept that there will be a range of ability levels within any one group, acknowledge that all athletes have a right to participate, and recognise that with careful planning and a bit of lateral thinking, it is possible to include and challenge athletes from a wide range of ability levels
- . develop an awareness of the range of ability levels of athletes within the group. In doing so, the coach should never make assumptions about what a participant can or cannot do. Instead, they should ask and work with athletes to identify what is possible
- . plan and deliver training sessions and activities that are appropriate for the athletes within the group. Be prepared to vary elements within activities (make them easier or harder) to accommodate the range of ability levels among athletes. Some of the elements that the coach can change include:
  - coaching or teaching style — for example, use of demonstrations, questions, role models and verbal instructions
  - how the game is played — for example, rule changes, number of players and/or number of turns each player has, number of bounces or passes, time limits
  - equipment — for example, different types, sizes, weights and materials, softer or larger balls or lighter bats with a bigger hitting surface
  - where the game is played — for example, the size, shape, surface or location of the playing area

These changes can accommodate the wide range of ability levels and backgrounds of athletes, including athletes with a disability and athletes from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

- . maintain the integrity of the activity — in other words, do not change activities so much that they are no longer the same activity
- . only maintain changes to an activity for as long as they are needed. For example, sometimes it will be possible to progress to harder variations of an activity
- . provide positive and constructive feedback, and reward effort. Recognise that different people learn and progress at different rates, and allow for this

- . assign a buddy to assist if an athlete requires one-on-one support to understand and engage in an activity
- . try, try again (if at first they do not succeed). Sometimes it is not immediately obvious how activities should be varied to include and challenge everyone. Learn from any mistakes and continue to work with participants to develop solutions.

## **The role of sport and the coach in society**

Sport and coaches play a significant role in society. Sport has the power to bring people together, break down barriers, build new bridges of understanding between cultures and nations and within communities, and shape behaviour and values. It can inspire patriotism and the pursuit of excellence, and can teach responsibility, fair play, teamwork, and how to overcome adversity and win against the odds. It can also provide recognition, hope, a chance to dream and grow, and a pathway to a better life.

The power of sport to unite people and change people's lives for the better, both on and off the sporting field, is illustrated in the recent history of South Africa, where sport has been used as an instrument in the fight against apartheid. It is further demonstrated through the work of international agencies such as the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation, whose worldwide program of sport-related community projects use sport as a vehicle to promote social change and inspire hope in disadvantaged communities.

The power of sport, however, is not limited to disadvantaged communities. Elite and professional sporting events around the globe inspire patriotism and collective effort, create talking points and provide role models for people of all ages, genders, abilities, cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic strata. They are important not only to athletes, coaches, sporting organisations and fans but also to governments, business corporations and the media, as evidenced by the significant resources that are channelled into the preparation of national sporting teams and the staging of major international sporting events.

While sport clearly plays a powerful role in society, coaches — as the drivers, guides, directors, developers and facilitators of sport performance — also play a critical role, influencing not only performance but also behaviour inside and outside the sporting environment. Coaches have a significant influence on the athlete's achievement of their potential, and determine whether an athlete's experience of sport is positive or negative and whether they gain or lose self-esteem.

Although some of a coach's specific roles may change throughout their career — perhaps as they progress from coaching at club level to higher levels, including representative teams, or as their athletes become more experienced — their role as an influencer of performance and behaviour and the requirement to maintain high professional and behavioural standards, no matter who they are coaching, remain constant throughout their career.

## **Summary**

Effective coaching is not only about helping athletes to improve, it is also about constantly improving as a coach. There are a number of practical methods that can be used for evaluating coaching performance. Three simple methods are keeping a coaching diary, video self-analysis and mentor coaching. Once areas for improvement are identified, appropriate improvement measures can be implemented. They might include undertaking technical and professional development activities, observing and working with other coaches, or seeking further information or support on particular aspects of their coaching.

Codes of behaviour provide benchmarks for expected professional and behavioural standards for all involved in sport, including coaches. Given their powerful role, coaches must act as role models at all times.

Throughout their coaching career, coaches are likely to be faced with a number of difficult situations and ethical dilemmas. Coaches must be prepared and equipped to deal with these. A sound, well-developed coaching philosophy can provide direction in these circumstances.

A sound, well-developed coaching philosophy is a set of personal guidelines about how a coach will operate and what they expect from and want for themselves and those under their charge. This helps a coach make choices, set priorities and ensure a consistent approach at any time. A coach's philosophy should take into consideration any requirements of the club or other sporting organisation with which they are involved.

All athletes, no matter what their age, gender, ability level or sport, learn and perform better in, and gain more enjoyment and satisfaction from, positive environments in which they feel welcome, valued and supported. The ability to create a welcoming, supportive and inclusive environment is an important attribute for all coaches.

Sport and coaches play a significant role in society and the impact of both frequently extends beyond the sporting environment into everyday life.



## References and further reading

Australian Sports Commission 1996, *Coaching Better and Video Self-analysis* Workbook and DVD, Australian Sports Commission, Canberra.

Kidman, L and Hanrahan, S 1997, *The Coaching Process: a practical guide to improving your effectiveness*, Dunmore Press, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Layton, R 2002, *Making Mentors: a guide to establishing a successful mentoring program for coaches and officials*, Australian Sports Commission, Canberra.

Martens, R 2004, *Successful Coaching*, 3rd edition, Human Kinetics, Champaign, Illinois.

Play by the Rules website ([www.playbytherules.net.au](http://www.playbytherules.net.au)) and DVD.

## **Appendix 1:**

### **Australian Sports Commission Code of Behaviour**

This Code of Behaviour is intended to be the minimum standard for anyone involved in sport.

- . Operate within the rules and spirit of your sport, promoting fair play over winning at any cost.
- . Encourage and support opportunities for people to learn appropriate behaviours and skills.
- . Support opportunities for participation in all aspects of the sport.
- . Treat each person as an individual.
- . Display control and courtesy to all involved with the sport.
- . Respect the rights and worth of every person regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion.
- . Respect the decisions of officials, coaches and administrators in the conduct of the sport.
- . Wherever practical, avoid unaccompanied and unobserved one-on-one activity (when in a supervisory capacity or where a power imbalance will exist) with people under the age of 18 years.
- . Adopt appropriate and responsible behaviour in all interactions.
- . Adopt responsible behaviour in relation to alcohol and other drugs.
- . Act with integrity and objectivity, and accept responsibility for your decisions and actions.
- . Ensure your decisions and actions contribute to a safe environment.
- . Ensure your decisions and actions contribute to a harassment-free environment.
- . Do not tolerate harmful or abusive behaviours.

#### **Athletes**

- . Give your best at all times.
- . Participate for your own enjoyment and benefit.

#### **Coaches**

- . Place the safety and welfare of the athletes above all else.
- . Help each person (athlete, official, etc.) reach their potential. Respect the talent, developmental stage and goals of each person and compliment and encourage with positive and supportive feedback.
- . Any physical contact with a person should be appropriate to the situation and necessary for the person's skill development.
- . Be honest and do not allow your qualifications to be misrepresented.

### **Officials**

- . Place the safety and welfare of the athletes above all else.
- . Be consistent and impartial when making decisions.
- . Address unsporting behaviour and promote respect for all people.

### **Administrators**

- . Act honestly, in good faith and in the best interests of the sport as a whole.
- . Ensure that any information acquired or advantage gained from the position is not used improperly.
- . Conduct your responsibilities with due care, competence and diligence.
- . Do not allow prejudice, conflict of interest or bias to affect your objectivity.

### **Parents**

- . Encourage children to participate and have fun.
- . Focus on the child's effort and performance rather than winning or losing.
- . Never ridicule or yell at a child for making a mistake or losing a competition.

### **Spectators**

- . Respect the performances and efforts of all people.
- . Reject the use of violence in any form, whether it is by spectators, coaches, officials or athletes.