

# ***Coaching Philosophy***

Assuming that you are a coach you presumably carry out your role based on your experience, knowledge, values, opinions and beliefs. This in itself is a philosophy and you likely do this unconsciously. The question is - do you actually know yourself well enough to understand what your core values and coaching methods are? A coaching philosophy that is well thought through clarifies many aspects of the coach's delivery and presents a consistent and positive message to the athletes being coached. One of the strongest benefits arising from a consistent and sincere approach to coaching is trust. A strong bond between coach and athlete leads to higher levels of commitment and athletic performance. With that in mind, it is the wise coach that takes the time to think through and formalize his or her personal coaching philosophy.

## **Developing a philosophy**

In developing a formal philosophy, the coach can take three key components and to his or her best ability formulate a coaching philosophy document with the aim to be a better coach, to improve coach/athlete satisfaction and to achieve superior athletic results. These three components are:

1. Knowing yourself, your strengths, weakness and areas requiring improvement
2. Knowing what you are up against and the obstacles you may encounter
3. Understanding your athletes, their personalities, abilities, goals, and why they are in your sport

## **Know Yourself**

It takes honest assessment to admit to having weaknesses but we all have them. We just do not want them to interfere with good coaching judgment. By focusing on your strengths, you will be able to identify consistent ways to coach that utilize those strengths. Are you a good teacher, or motivator, or academic, or communicator or a former athlete? Are you dynamic, or easy going, or hard nosed or open and friendly? Use your strengths to your advantage. By taking time to make a serious assessment of your strengths and weaknesses and recognizing your morals, values and beliefs you are better able to adapt your own style to the athletes being coached. In addition, you will answer the important questions on why you are a coach, how you actually deliver as a coach and what objectives you are trying to accomplish. Self-knowledge leads to self-confidence and you want to exude what you believe in. One other point to consider here is - how do others perceive you?

## **Know what you are up against - your coaching context**

As important as it is to understand what makes you tick, it is equally important to understand the confines of your coaching context. By this, I mean: A good understanding of the age, gender and training level of the athlete's you coach. How much time you and your athletes have available to train and compete? What is your development program based upon and how far can you take it by enhancing and incorporating other aspects such as sport psychology, nutrition education or sophisticated technique analysis? What funding, facilities, services and equipment are at your disposal? In addition, what are your short medium- and long-term goals for your athletes?

There could be other restrictions that will affect your coaching delivery. These include laws or policies on safe practices, club or school rules of behaviour, competition with other sports, school pressures and outside activities, parental interference, or performance standards to qualify for teams and competitions. Knowing what you are up against enables you to tailor your annual training program to the specific needs of the athletes you have under your charge. By understanding the outside influences that will affect your program, you can incorporate those that are good practices. Such as policies on safety and behaviour, adapt to others that restrict your ability to be the 'do it all coach' such as lack of funds, equipment or services, and minimize negative obstacles that will affect you personally or an athlete on your team or your team in general. Dealing with parents can be a stressful situation and a clear philosophy on how you will deal with an irate parent will minimize or avoid the knee jerk reaction that often makes matters worse. By adapting your coaching philosophy to reflect the coaching situation you are dealing with you become more effective and productive and you minimize obstacles and other difficulties.

### **Understand your athletes, their personalities, abilities, goals and why they are in your sport**

Communication is a vital aspect in coach/athlete relationships. It is very important to talk to your athletes individually to determine what their values and beliefs are, what their goals are and why they are participating. Without this knowledge, you might be delivering a coaching bag of apples to athletes wanting a bag of oranges. The program just will not work properly. As a coach, you are a powerful role model and can have a tremendous influence on your athletes if you and your athletes are on the same page. Take the time to get to know each of your athletes just as if you examined your own values, beliefs and habits. Once you know and understand each of your athletes, their strengths, weaknesses abilities and skills, then I suggest you develop an approach to coaching them. Will you focus on the stars? Will you treat everyone equal in terms of your attention and help? Perhaps the teamwork approach will work for you.

### **What is your attitude toward teamwork?**

By developing a TEAM philosophy (Together Each Achieves More) as well as your personal coaching philosophy, you bring together ingredients for superior success. By knowing your athletes, you know how each fits in with the TEAM philosophy. Some may have values or behaviours that undermine the team and you can work out solutions to change the athlete's behaviour to fit for the good of the team. Knowing your athletes enables you to identify your leaders and role models that the rest of the team will respond positively. By getting athletes to buy into the 'TEAM' concept you will aid in streamlining a consistent approach to training and competition by each athlete. This makes coaching much easier and hopefully more rewarding.

### **Process versus Outcome**

In my opinion, every coaching philosophy should have a major statement on how the coach views the results of both training and competition. I cannot stress enough the importance of educating athletes that it is more important to focus on their process of development and how they performed in competition rather than the results or outcomes that they achieved. In a race or game there can be only one winner. Does that mean everyone else is a loser? If you

read the newspapers that is what you would think. Therefore, to build confidence and see measurable progress and to learn positively from mistakes made I urge all coaches to focus on the process and not the outcomes with their athletes. It is important for the athletes to do the same.

## **Conclusion**

All coaches operate under a coaching philosophy of some kind. It may be by instinct or it may be formally documented and well thought out. The advantages of a well thought out coaching philosophy are threefold:

1. You learn about yourself, how you tick and what strengths you have, why you are coaching and how you can effectively go about enhancing your coaching delivery.
2. You gain an understanding of your coaching context, the obstacles you have to face and how to deal with limitations, appropriate and safe training methods, and the goals you are trying to achieve.
3. You get to know your athletes on a more intimate basis and therefore can tailor your training to meet their needs, strengths and limitations.

With this knowledge, it is possible to develop a team approach that achieves superior performances. Linking the aspects of the three segments of a coaching philosophy will create a coaching roadmap for you that is realistic, satisfying to both you and your athletes, and rewarding in the form of improved performance.

Coaching is all about helping athletes achieve their dreams. It should be done positively and smartly and with passion. The positive coach and role model, following a well-defined coaching philosophy will be a key ingredient in the success of his or her athletes. For that reason alone, the development of a formal coaching philosophy statement is essential for all coaches.