

Why Do You Coach?

The influence and guidance of Greg Lalor, along with a book he introduced me to written by Jika Travers on the principles of war, have shaped and continues to shape many of my coaching philosophies.

Objective

When coaching an individual or a team, or more importantly both, there must be a clear and well-defined objective. There must be an objective in every training session and every lead-up competition to achieve the desired outcome.

Basically, if it is not done in training or preparation, there is little chance that the desired outcome can be achieved under pressure in competition.

Security

To maximise performance, sport needs unity under pressure. The strength of the athlete will be the team. The strength of the team will be the athlete. The strength of the bond is the coach, and the strength of the coach is the coaching team. The ability and potential of the team are the attitude, enthusiasm and commitment of all to an identified process and outcome.

This aspect of performance is based on each member of the team having a clear view of their role and their ability to successfully carry out their role, and to also offer assistance to other team members. Any individual or team must have the ability to both prepare for, and perform in, adversity, knowing that they can make the environment — whatever it might be — work in their favour and not allow the environment to make them victims.

Surprise

Athletes and teams must be provided with an element of surprise in every training session so that the stimulus for improved performance is ever present. It is when athletes and teams can handle distractions and take surprise in their stride that the winning ability to seize the moment, regardless of what that moment is, is paramount.

To take your opposition by surprise tests leadership and the ability of the team or individual to be innovative and creative in preparation. Always pursue the opportunity to have an element of surprise and stimulus, as predictability relates proportionately to vulnerability.

Flexibility

There is no one way to achieve success — there are many ways. The best way

is your way. Unconditional confidence in your ability and the team's ability is essential for elite performance. The program must have the ability to work within an ever-changing set of goal posts. There must be an understanding that 60 per cent of all plans can and will change, and that life is not always fair.

Every program must have a Plan A, Plan B and Plan C that are all equally as strong as each other, and will not detract from the others. 'Always believe that you can be the best, never believe that you are the best' (Juan Fangio, ex-F1 racing driver).

Within the cocoon of a team, the coaching staff must ensure they understand the importance of taking care of, and looking after, themselves as well. This should cover their continued education, professional development (across a wide front of exposure, not just their own sport), personal health, personal wealth, family and so on.

Coaches who wish to move forward must allow significant time each week for creative and innovative thought. How a coach thinks is far more critical than what a coach knows. It is important to have the right coaching team in terms of skills and how they think and operate. The head coach or team leader must have a strong creative aspect, otherwise potential points of difference may never surface. All great innovative and creative people are well versed in creating chaos because of the way they think.

Great leaders embrace and are open to change. A lot of great coaches close their minds to change given their podium record and knowledge at the international level, but in fact for truly great leaders, the reverse applies. They obtain and stimulate results because they have changed enough to be a leader in change. This all comes down to how a great leader thinks.

Mobility

A decreased performance away from home base indicates poor preparation. Maintenance of performance or improved performance indicates superior preparation.

Concentration of force

An individual or team will perform successfully because of its strengths and will under-achieve due to its weaknesses. Preparation and performance must be directed and led by the strengths of the team or individual. Maintaining strengths while eliminating or improving weaknesses has to be the key focus for the team or individual.

A successful team comes about due to strong leadership based on developing a cocoon of similar-minded people who, with little interference from the outside, commit to a single focused, multi-dimensional, fully integrated

concept of performance.

Economy of effort

Winning without effort is a result of being superior in every possible way, and having addressed preparation under pressure as well as performance under pressure.

Morale

Maintenance of morale is key to great performance. Confidence can hide a multitude of sins. Great coaches can have tremendous empathy, especially where athletes are giving unconditional support and effort.

Maintenance of morale through criticism and tough times is a major challenge, and it takes many years of exposure to truly appreciate the value of this aspect. Always praise the athlete; criticise the performance or fault if necessary, but never criticise the athlete. The athlete and team staff — in particular the athlete — must know unconditionally that they have the full confidence and support of the team and the team leadership, even when there is a lack of performance or an issue of redirection. This is crucial for maintenance of morale throughout the team and its preparations.

Coaches will know and understand that to be the best coach you can be, there are many years of mistakes and experiences that make you fully appreciate this article. To be a great coach, you have to have a certain wisdom about you due to previous successes and failures. You must also be in a state of readiness to be the world's best coach or to be the best that you can be.

The true art of coaching is the art of 'feel' that marries perfectly with the qualities required, both mentally and physically, of the athlete. I see each athlete as two individuals: 'the person' + 'the athlete' = success. The best coaches in the world allow for, educate, consider and plan for the person as much as the athlete. Every athlete should expect to come to training and leave the person behind. Every week, the athlete must be put aside for a period, and provision of time must be given to the person. If both the athlete and the person are fresh and happy when the big day comes — that is, when it counts — then both win!

Communication

Keeping everyone informed of the strategies and concepts you wish to explore and the objectives and processes you wish to pursue are the marks of a truly great leader who understands the value of building disciplined teams where standards and committed attitudes are shared.

Each team member must be cultivated as a team leader. They must be valued,

be appreciated and have constant supportive feedback, but at the same time continually challenged to lift performance to match the appropriate competition being targeted.

Everyone will have slightly different views and values regarding each of the above principles. I believe that if you can attach your own values to each of the nine principles, and then apply them with minimal compromise, you will have success both with the individuals who you nurture and the team you develop.

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