



DEVELOPING YOUR COACHING PHILOSOPHY

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The first week of June, US Figure Skating and the USOC sent me, and PSA sent Kelley Morris-Adair and Carole Rossignol to the National Coaching Educator's Conference. We attended many wonderful presentations designed to create programs within sporting organizations with the purpose of continuing education for coaches in all sports. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education has published the National Standards for Sport Coaches "to provide direction for coaching educators, sport administrators, coaches, athletes and their families, and the public regarding the skills and knowledge that coaches should possess." Over 100 sport organizations agreed that a core body of knowledge existed from which to develop coaching expertise. The 37 STANDARDS, grouped into eight DOMAINS, identified the scientific and practical competencies.



The first DOMAIN identified is Philosophy and Ethics. The National Standards state that "it is imperative that the coach establishes a coaching philosophy that focuses on the safety, development, and well-being of the athlete. As a key leadership figure, the coach must model and teach appropriate behavior in all aspects of coaching and maintain ethical conduct during practice and competitions." This article will focus on the development and implementation of an athlete-centered coaching philosophy, which is the first STANDARD.

"A well-developed coaching philosophy provides expectations for behaviors that reflect priorities and values of the coach. An appropriate coaching perspective focuses on maximizing the positive benefits of sport participation for each athlete."

- NASPE National Standards for

Sport Coaches, 2nd Edition

The National Standards BENCHMARKS for developing a coaching philosophy are:

- Identify and communicate reasons for entering the coaching profession.
- Develop an athlete-centered coaching philosophy that aligns with the organizational mission and goals.
- Communicate the athlete-centered coaching philosophy in verbal and written form to athletes, parents/guardians, and program staff.
- Welcome all eligible athletes and implement strategies that encourage the participation of disadvantaged and disabled athletes.
- Manage athlete behavior consistent with an athlete-centered coaching philosophy.

A coaching philosophy that is well-thought out clarifies many aspects of the coach's delivery and presents a consistent and positive message to the athletes being coached. Coaches carry out our roles based on our experience, knowledge, values, opinions and beliefs. With that in mind, each one of us that coach need to take the time to think through and formalize our personal coaching philosophy. So how do we develop a coaching philosophy?

START AT THE VERY BEGINNING, A VERY GOOD PLACE TO START

According the experts in the field of coaching, to develop a formal coaching philosophy, start by creating a coaching philosophy document that states the goals of: improving coaching skills, improving coach/athlete satisfaction, and improving athletic results.

The late great Canadian coach, Frank Reynolds teaches us that, to be successful in the coaching field, use three components to guide you, and adapting them to skating, they would look like this:

1. Know yourself as a coach: your strengths, weakness and areas requiring improvement.
2. Know what you are up against and the obstacles you may encounter in coaching.
3. Understand your athletes, their personalities, abilities, goals, and why they are in the sport.

WHAT KIND OF COACH AM I?

It takes an honest self-assessment to admit to having weaknesses, but of course, we all have them. It is just best that they do not interfere with good coaching judgment. If you emphasize your strengths, you will be able to identify consistent ways to coach that best utilizes those strengths. To find out what your coaching strengths are, you can ask yourself a few questions: Are you?

- A former athlete, a natural teacher, or dynamic motivator, or efficient communicator?
- Easy going, energetic and dynamic, serious and strict, or outgoing and friendly?
- Perceived by others the same way you perceive yourself?

The opportunity to make a full assessment of your strengths and weaknesses and recognizing your morals, values and beliefs, you are better able to adjust your style of coaching to the athletes you are coaching. At the same time, you will answer the important questions on why you chose to be a coach, how you communicate and produce as a coach and what goals objectives you have as a coach. The saying is that "Self-knowledge leads to self-confidence", and you want to radiate what your values are.

WHO AM I COACHING?

With regard to your background and experience and the athletes you work with, it is equally important to understand the parameters of your coaching context. You need to have a good understanding of the age, gender and training level of the athletes you work with. You can ask yourself several questions to answer those questions:

1. How much time do you have to devote to coaching?
2. What is your coaching commitment level?
3. How much time do your athletes have to devote to train and compete?
4. What is the level of commitment that your athletes have?
5. What are the stages that your developmental clientele currently in?
6. What resources do you have available to help your athletes by enhancing and incorporating other aspects such as sport psychology, nutrition education or sophisticated technique analysis (i.e. Dartfish, etc.)?
7. What are your short-term, intermediate and long-term goals for your athletes?

Undoubtedly, there may be other restrictions that will affect your coaching effectiveness, such as competition with other sports, school pressures and outside activities, even parental interference. Knowing what else is out there enables you to create your annual training program to the specific needs of the athletes you work with. By understanding the outside influences that will affect your coaching, you can incorporate into your coaching some policies on safety, training habits, and behavior, and adapt to the fact that others make decisions that affect you and your athletes.

Relationships with parents can be stressful, and a clear plan on how to deal with an irate or manipulative parent will minimize or avoid a reaction that might make matters more difficult for you. By developing your coaching philosophy to encompass the coaching environment you are in, you can become more effective, productive, and minimize obstacles and other difficulties.

Communication is a vital aspect in your relationships with your athletes. 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. As a coach, you are a powerful role model and can have a tremendous influence on your skaters if you and your athletes are on the same page. Just as you examined your own values, beliefs and habits, take the time to get to know each of your athletes.

Once you know and understand each of your athletes, their strengths, weaknesses abilities and skills, then develop an approach to coaching them. Will you focus on the stars? Will you treat everyone equal in terms of your attention and help? Are you into the team coaching approach, or do you prefer to be a solo act? Questions like



these are important to identify your unique style of coaching.

THE JOURNEY IS THE PRIZE

How you as the coach view the results of both training and competition should be a major point of every coaching philosophy. Not many athletes are realistically "Olympic-bound," and educating athletes that it is more important to focus on their process of development and how they performed in the competition, rather than the results that they achieved, cannot be emphasized enough.

In an athletic competition there can be only one first place. Does that mean everyone else is a loser? Of course not! Therefore,

to build confidence and to see measurable progress, and to learn positively from mistakes made, coaches should focus on the process and not the outcomes with athletes. Encourage the athletes and parents to follow your lead. Because the outcomes are obvious, it takes extra effort from the coach, parent and athlete to see the benefit and results of the process of preparing for the competition.

CONCLUSION

Whether we take the time to design a coaching philosophy or not, all coaches operate under a coaching philosophy of some kind that is defined by our actions and beliefs. It can happen by default, or it can happen by a plan that will create a coaching roadmap for you that is realistic and rewarding for both you and your athletes in the form of improved performance. Coaching is all about helping athletes achieve their dreams. It should be done positively, intelligently and with dedication. 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 an essential first step for all coaches.

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