

Coaching Philosophy – what is it

One of the fundamentals of coaching is to have a philosophy. As a coach, you should have a series of guiding principles for your coaching practice and managing your athletes/group. It is a lot more than a few scribbled notes, your favourite practice and some cones!

For example,... mine is to develop people first who participate in hockey next and learn and progress to be the best they can be. In this process they are developing the mindset that helps drive them forward whilst learning how to operate in a team environment.

The word 'philosophy' comes from the Greek word meaning 'love of wisdom.' This is a powerful concept as it suggests to me that the role of the coach is to impart wisdom to help an athlete improve as a person, rather than to focus on winning and success in its traditional sense. For many coaches these are combined within their philosophy and the age and stage of their athletes will influence the balance.

Your philosophy underpins everything you do as a coach; from how you design your practices, create and maintain your environment, to how you speak to your athletes, work with your parents/carers and support network and communicate your coaching approach to others.

It's much more than how you want to 'play the game'. Your coaching philosophy will provide you, your colleagues and athletes with insight into what you are all about.

A coaching philosophy is built upon a set of standards by which a coach influences, teaches, and models. The coaching philosophy you live by is a reflection of you; you own it.

So, what is it?

Coaching philosophy is a set of beliefs, values and governing principles which determine why you do what you do and how you behave/act in the context of your coaching (and usually life in general). You have to ask yourself: why do I coach?

Your philosophy is a long-term project, in which you never stop learning and keep adding to and refining along the way. Having your 'true north' will ensure you have clarity and focus, which will benefit you.



Accepting that your philosophy evolves is all part of the coach learning journey.

Your philosophy combines your personal values, based on your experiences, family values and beliefs as a person; along with your views on how you should coach, such as communicating to athletes, approach to practice design, leadership and empowerment.

When you add your experiences with your personal approach to how you think your sport should be played (model of performance) you have the ingredients for your philosophy.

Knowing the way you want your athletes to perform and behave provides a clearer line of sight on how to design your

sessions, challenge and support them, and create an environment which engages them and your behaviours to enhance this. And it enables you to observe how the athlete develops over time.

Having a plan for the year will give you a clearer idea on what goals you want to achieve as individuals and as a group/squad/team. Two helpful ways to consider this is to have a quality coaching conversation with a peer. Someone who you are open to and is willing to supportively challenge you and ask why. The second approach is to enlist the help of your athletes and fellow coaching team and ask them whether you do what you say. Do you 'talk the talk and walk the walk?'.

A coach who is curious, on a learning journey themselves and keen to improve their performance is in a very strong position to progress as they will have the key tools in their toolkit, sharpened by:

- reflecting on their practice, actions and the people around them
- considering the impact their behaviours have on others
- creating an environment where everyone can thrive and be the best version of themselves.

Stay true to your core values

Having a philosophy will guide you on your journey when things become challenging (true north).

Your philosophy guides success in many different ways: getting a group of people to bond together, reach their potential and maximise their current performance.

As you gain more and more experience as a coach, your style of 'play' might change, as will your coaching practice, however it unlikely that your core values and beliefs as a person will change.

You can Google coaching philosophy and be swamped by the number of webpages, articles and videos where everyone talks about their coaching philosophies. Adopting someone else's won't give you your own identity. If you start to use words and actions taken from other coaches, that are not consistent with your own, the players will expect the same in the future.

The greatest coaches in the world all stick to what they believe in and instil this philosophy into their athletes, repeating the same things over and over again until the approach and their philosophy is adopted across the group.

Let's get started

Developing a coaching philosophy is very much a journey of self-discovery. Your philosophy should be aligned with the core values that underpin how you live your life.

As a coach, you need to be thinking about some of the more complex aspects of coaching, including the socio-behavioural and the socio-cultural elements which could impact on you communicating and practising your philosophy.

Consider

No player, coach, manager or member is bigger than the club.

The philosophy of FC Barcelona is, 'the team is most important, the team is more important than any player and the players have the obligation to meet and defend the ideal of the club'. They recruit coaching, management and playing staff based on this philosophy.

So, what is your philosophy? Imagine you're talking to your family over dinner; how would you describe your coaching philosophy to your family and friends? Unless you have thought about this before, keep reflecting and building upon it.

Have a go

Take a moment with your phone and try and capture your philosophy in video format.

This will act as the foundation as you start to develop your thinking further in the second part of this series. It's okay, it's a first go and may not last much longer than 15 seconds, but it's a start.