

Common Coaching Challenges

Coaches often face situations in which they have little to no experience or that they're not sure about. It can be nerve-racking and even demoralising, if the outcome isn't as expected. The new Coaching the Person in Front of You workshop, now available, offers a new approach that promises to change this for good.

The crux of it is: understand and connect with the person behind the player to help them thrive.

Not only will this help you develop a better relationship with your participants – it will also help you, clarifying your approach, and giving you the confidence to improve and grow your coaching practice.

To explore what this might look like in practice, members of the UK Coaching team were given seven different scenarios to consider. Their responses offer:

- solutions to coach queries and concerns
- suggestions as to how to incorporate person-centred principles into your sessions
- some reassurance that sometimes the best approach is simply an open mind – all based on the principles of Coaching the Person in Front of You.

Scenario 1: Building Relationships as a Children's Coach

I coach children. I'd like to build good relationships with them, but I'm concerned about it being a safeguarding issue.

Nick Levett, Head of Talent and Performance:

While it is understandable that there may be concerns around safeguarding, achieving this is just about being a good person. When getting to know your participants, concentrate on

how you show empathy, respect and friendliness.

Here's an example:

One of your participants misses a big shot in a game or makes a mistake that allows the opponent to score or even win.

How should you react? Not by getting angry or upset, but with empathy. Your participant is relying on you for support – and to understand that they're feeling just as bad about it as you are, if not worse. While it can be challenging to manage your emotions, particularly under pressure, letting them loose won't help your participants. It may even damage a developing coach-athlete relationship. It's important to be on their side, and just as crucial to ensure that they know that.

Ultimately, try and see things from their perspective and offer what may be helpful to them, not what makes you feel better!"

Reflect

How do you react when things go wrong? Are you able to manage your emotional response?

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Scenario 2: Finding the Time to Talk to Every Participant

My sessions are really popular, but I feel bad sometimes as I haven't got enough time to talk to everyone there.

Craig Blain, Development Lead, Physical Activity:

Feeling under pressure to pay all your participants the same amount of attention in your sessions is a common anxiety for coaches. But it's not necessary to try to deliver that. Instead, work towards the understanding that connecting with your participants doesn't just mean talking to them, and that the little things go a long way. You'll transform your

coaching practice!

Take the time to reflect on the ways that you already connect with your participants, without talking.”

Perhaps it’s when you smile to make someone feel welcome? A subtle nod to reassure? There will be lots – many more than you think! These interactions add up to ensure that your participants feel noticed and supported in your sessions.

Then, as you come to understand your participants better – over time, not all at once – it will become easier to identify ways in which you can support them, using methods that work for them specifically. Understanding and connecting with them is the first step to creating an environment in which they can thrive.

Consider

Are you giving yourself the chance to connect non-verbally with your participants? Try it in your next session!

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Scenario 3: Coaching Quiet/Private Participants

Some of the people I coach are very quiet and private. I’m never sure if they get much out of my session.

Sophie Hartley, Relationship Manager:

You won’t always receive the same kind of observations and feedback from all your participants.

Personally, I am not someone who shouts the loudest or asks lots of questions in a group situation. I feel more comfortable when approached privately after I have had time to reflect.

It’s not a confidence thing, it’s my personality and my self-

protection mechanism.

Take the time to get to know your participants. An in-depth understanding of how they would prefer to discuss their achievements and receive feedback will help clarify your approach.

Mark Bateman, Coach Developer – Talent:

Try to see the session through the participant's eyes.

Ask yourself:

- Why are they quiet?
- If something is preventing them from being more vocal, how can I help?
- Can I design a session that would allow them to flourish and begin to develop more social interaction skills?
- Getting to know – and understand – your participants will enable you to build rapport. That will help them feel more comfortable in your sessions, meaning that they will be more likely to contribute.

How well do you know your participants? If you have participants that are quiet during sessions, do you know why they don't contribute as regularly?

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Scenario 4: Coaching a Mixed Ability Group

My group is mixed ability so meeting all their individual needs is tricky. How do I make sure I can provide the right level of challenge for them all? What strategies can I try?

Chris Chapman, Development Lead Officer (Talent and Performance):

Recognise their differences. You could try providing your

participants with autonomy within your sessions by allowing them to select which activity they want to try, they enjoy the most, or that they find the most challenging.

You could achieve that by presenting participants with a choice of three activities, or something as simple as acknowledging achievement and setting them up for the next step: "Well done, that was excellent, I challenge you to do that three more times in the game."

Female coach demonstrates technique to participant while in the background other participants practice independently



Jenny Coady, Coach Developer – Talent:

Break the problem down into individual points, then put it all together after.

Ask yourself: Who are my audience, and what journey are they on?"

Knowing that, what are my proposed learning outcomes? Keeping

in mind the impact of self-efficacy, use different mediums to engage and prime them.

Plan, plan and then plan again!

Then, during or just before the session, think about your delivery. Introduce and direct where necessary. Use open questions to allow development. Give a strong, vibrant welcome, with ice-breakers, to create the right environment.

Provide various ways for the participants to ‘open the door’ (watch, listen, reflect and share).”

Develop different learning outcomes for different participants. It’s important to acknowledge that they have individual skills and individual motivations.

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Scenario 5: Communicating at the Swimming Pool

I’m a swimming coach. How can I connect better with people when they’re in the water and I’m poolside?

Mark Scott, Modern Learning:

You could give yourself some extra time at the start of sessions to try to connect with your participants, but it can also be worthwhile to work on this outside your sessions. You could use an app, such as WhatsApp, to encourage conversation and to learn more about your participants as people.

Following sessions, you could spend time with participants individually, not only to discuss the session, but also about the rest of their day – or the weekend! Again, you could use WhatsApp to follow up. Sending positive messages such as ‘good session’ or ‘well done’ only takes a moment.

Alan Rapley, Coach Developer – Talent:

You can achieve this by making sure that each participant feels and thinks that they are at the centre of your coaching attention.

Let them take the lead in what they want to achieve and when – but be ready to intervene during sessions to ensure that they are staying on track and are heading in the right direction. Conducting specific interventions during sessions also gives you the opportunity to connect with your participants individually.

Following sessions, it can be useful to ask your participants to suggest one thing that they would like to work on during the next session.

Esther Jones, Development Lead Officer – Workforce:

When communication is limited (in this case, due to the water), it is important to think about other ways of communicating.

Think about your positioning. How would that change for each stroke? You may need to move around the area a lot more, or even change the pace of something in the session to ensure that you keep that communication going. Consider hand signs or gestures that both of you could use to reference a specific coaching point (or intervention) that you have discussed. That can enable you to communicate in the moment. Discussing it at length can happen later.

Develop alternative methods of communication to use in your sessions. They can be as simple as basic hand signals. Be creative!

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Scenario 6: Engaging with Participants

from Different Cultures/Religions etc.

I've just started coaching a session that is predominantly attended by people from a local mosque. What are your recommendations for engaging them?

Mat Glasson, Head of Workforce:

With any group of people, the best place to start is by talking to them. Most people are more than happy to talk to you about their religion/culture/background, and if you approach them honestly and from a true position of interest, you will find out all you need to know.

Remember, as the coach, you can adapt your sessions to meet their needs. Just be creative!

You are coaching people, not a sport, gender, religion, culture etc. Make sure you get to know about that person in front of you!"

Why not develop some key strategies to use to get to know any new participants that come to your sessions? You're likely to find more common ground between different groups than you think.

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Scenario 7: Understanding and Managing Sporadic Attendance

A young woman that I coach is sometimes really engaged in my session and sometimes not, and her attendance is a bit sporadic. Any suggestions for how to get her to attend more regularly and be more engaged?

Nicola White, Development Lead Officer:

Try to identify her motivation for attending. Once you know what it is, then you can make sure that your sessions always

tap into it.

Ask open questions, such as:

What is she hoping to get out of coming along?

Which parts does she enjoy?

You could try asking at the end of sessions if there is anything different that participants would like to see included in next week's session. You could also ask who is available to attend next week to encourage a mental commitment and the idea that they're a team.

Finally, if she has close friends at your sessions, you could ask them if they know why she is absent, and if there is anything that you can do to help.

That said, there will likely be reasons outside of your immediate control that are having an impact on her attendance. That doesn't necessarily mean that she isn't engaged or motivated. A one-on-one conversation could help here, facilitating trust and showing that you are ready to offer your support.

If, for example, it is revealed that she can't afford to attend regularly, think about what you can do to help. Can the club/organisation support her attendance?