

# Reflection

**“It’s really important to reflect!”**

**Does this sound familiar? Coaches are constantly told they need to review or reflect as part of the Plan Do Review model.**

Have you ever wondered how you are supposed to reflect – and reflect well – if you have not been shown how to effectively implement the skill? Reflection after all, is not a simple process. If it was, it would be easy to learn how to do it.

This article explores the process of reflective practice in greater detail and explains how this can impact on coaching practice.

## Consider

**“Doing ten years of coaching without reflection is simply one year of coaching repeated ten times”**

What does this statement mean to you?

Reflection is really just learning to coach from and through experience. However, it cannot be expected that simply by engaging in coaching you learn from these experiences. Learning to become a better coach from your experiences requires the magic ingredient – reflection!

## Building your ways of knowing

Everything that coaches draw upon in the act of coaching that allows decisions to be made quickly and instinctively is their

‘knowing’ (Schön,1983). Therefore, the benefit of this magic mix of reflecting upon experiences is to **build more ways of knowing** – essentially giving a coach more experience or tools to draw upon when coaching.

As Schön suggests, it seems right to say that knowing is in our action.

*Knowing-in-action: “What we know how to do in everyday and professional life” (Schön,1995)*

Knowing in this instance is different to knowledge.

KNOWLEDGE	KNOWING
Static	Dynamic
Abstract	Concrete
About possession	About action
Is a tool for knowing	Uses knowledge to inform

Whereas knowledge tends to be unchangeable and about abstract truths that we possess (eg, you might possess knowledge of the different types of coaching styles), the knowing is in the **craft** of how, when and which coaching style to use in the present activity you are in right now.

Knowing is concrete because knowing is doing, and knowing is dynamic because it is never completed, it is always fluid.

## Reflect

## **Can you think of some areas of your coaching practice you would like to build your ways of knowing?**

Knowing is an ongoing social interaction. Coaches repeat practical application of knowing in an experimental, sometimes improvisational and almost always in an incremental way. Knowing therefore, relies not only on experience but thinking about those experiences to discover what you need, in order to do what you need to do.

This highlights the importance of **doing** in the reflection process. Until you try out the new thing you are learning about in your coaching, you can't increase your ways of knowing about how it can work best for your coaching practice.

Thinking about this article, some of the knowledge presented here might be new to you. Hopefully, having read this article, the knowledge that you possess about types of reflection will be increased. However, this knowledge does not automatically make you a skilled reflective practitioner.

For this to happen, you need to experience those different types of reflection so you can work out whether they do or don't work for you, in what situations and what support you might need to enhance this process.

## **So what does all this mean?**

Now you have some knowledge about your knowing. But as we have learned, knowledge is not enough to increase your knowing-in-action!

## **Your knowing-in-action should be put into practice regularly**

**Example:** If you want to build your ways of knowing about questioning techniques, you need to get out there and **ask questions!** Using your existing experience of questioning and

as you explore new knowledge about questioning techniques and things like types of questions, you should try them out in your coaching. If you work out a great way to ask a question, try it out in different scenarios and with different people to test whether and how it works across contexts.



## **Your knowing-in-action should be reflected upon to grow and develop**

**Example:** To build your ways of knowing about questioning techniques, as you DO questioning, you need to reflect on the questions that you ask (and responses that you get) to work out how to ask them even better. Consideration of what types of questions you ask – how and why, to whom and when to get what kind of responses from different people – will inform your ‘how to do questioning’ skill.

# Have a go

**Try to have a go at something new you have been learning about next time you are coaching. Try to think about how this develops your knowing-in-action.**

Schön also suggests that an individual's knowing-in-action is influenced by the shared knowing-in-practice – the social context it is taking place in.

*Knowing-in-practice: "The agreed ways of working or doing things within the culture of where we are working" (Schön, 1987)*

This shared way of working within your sport, physical activity or coaching community is undoubtedly an opportunity to grow your own knowing-in-action. However, due to the pressure of conforming to these social norms, it can be difficult for a coach to reflect upon and possibly critique some coaching practices that are long-standing and taken for granted within their coaching world.

John Dewey, considered the founder of reflection, proposed that we need to be open-minded before we can engage in reflective thought. Dewey defines this open-mindedness as:

*The active desire to listen to more sides than one and to recognise the possibility of error even in the beliefs that are dearest to us. (Dewey, 1916)*

This approach may be very difficult for some coaches, especially if the total of their coach learning experience has been spent being exposed to views from within the accepted knowing-in-practice.

# Reflect

**Think about how ‘things are done’ in your sport or physical activity, your club or circle of coaches.**

Are there any coaching practices you don’t agree with? Perhaps there is something you have always wondered about why it is done that way? Why not question this practice by asking coaches or doing your own research?

If, as discussed above, knowing is ‘situated in practice’ and cannot simply be ‘transferred’ to work in all situations, then it follows if you observe a coach using a questioning approach, you cannot expect that by copying that exact approach, it will work in your own coaching practice.

The intricacies of the make-up of the group, the task and objectives for the session, to name just a few variables, need to be considered before you use them in your scenario.

# Have a go

Next time you are reading, watching, observing or listening to something new, try to consider the alternate point of view or method – review with a critical eye, rather than conform.

This is not to say of course, that you shouldn’t try to take aspects of their delivery to try for yourself. There could be some golden nuggets in there that could work brilliantly for you. However, going through the process with a critical eye and thinking about their context and your context with a view to working out what might work alongside any tweaks required before you give it a go will be a preferable method.

In summary, knowing-in-action is the coaching craft that coaches do and it can be influenced by the shared knowing-in-practice of the coach’s world. To build your ways of knowing

that you can draw upon when coaching, you need to reflect on those experiences that you do.