

What you need to be a coach

5 great coaches – common denominators (Sir Alex, Pep, Klopp, TenHag, Mourinho)

1. Has most important voice
2. Players know their place
3. Certain element of fear
4. Brutal honesty at all times
5. Too much autonomy given to players leads to disorder

Below are some skills that you also need!!!

These transferable skills and abilities can be applied to any sphere of coaching. They will help you build rapport with the people you coach and will contribute significantly to maximising their experience, ensuring it is both enjoyable and rewarding.

In coaching circles, there is a phrase that crops up time and time again. It is prevalent in handbooks, coach education courses and online learning platforms and is a favourite expression of coach developers:

Don't mistake this for a banal coaching cliché. Its frequent use should not detract from its value or its truth. Coaching is a people business and people are complex.

People's incentives for engaging in sport and physical activity are wider than the sky. Their lifestyles and backgrounds are equally diverse. And what's more, people's individual wants, needs, goals and interests are in a constant state of flux. They are adapted, modified, discarded and reborn at regular points throughout their journey.

With the coach's role to nurture and inspire people to perform and improve in accordance with their ever-changing needs and impulses, it is imperative coaches make a concerted effort to

get to know every person they interact with, to understand what drives them to want to come back week after week, so that they can respond appropriately.

And to do this, they must possess a **toolkit of essential skills and behaviours** that strengthen their **versatility** and thus their ability to flex and tackle any coaching challenge that comes their way.

The good news is that these indispensable qualities are **transferable** – meaning they can be applied to any setting.

To become the best coach that you can be, and to help the people you coach achieve their best there are some areas of focus.

1. Communication

- Communicate clearly. Whether you are transmitting information verbally, non-verbally (visual gestures or facial expressions) or in writing, ensure the people you coach understand the message.
- Communicate just one message at a time and, where possible, give an example to support your message.
- Don't assume that your participants know what you want.
- Say 'please' and 'thank you' when talking within your groups. This is a powerful way to establish rapport.
- Communicating with the people you coach should be a dialogue not a monologue. Seeking to understand first is the key to great relationships and to great coaching.
- In terms of **communicating your broader philosophy**, share your beliefs, strategies and expectations for the coming season with your participants – and parents – before the start of every campaign.
- Have you thought about sketching out what is important to you as a person and coach? It provides a great starting point for conversations with fellow coaches,

athletes, parents and the wider support network.

- Taking the time to explain why you are following certain coaching approaches and tactics is important, but making sure it is a **joint effort** through **two-way conversation** is just as important.
- And revisit topics at points throughout the campaign. For example, re-establishing role clarity and agreed selection policy; winning and development ethos; individual, team and performance-related goals.
- If you are a children's coach, always talk at their level. If they are on one knee, you go on one knee. Try to communicate face-to-face instead of talking down at them.
- Use language and imagery that children can understand, and ask questions to make sure that they have listened and understood. Allow them to summarise. A story is a great way to capture an important message and make it 'stick'.
- Ask participants what practices, ideas and terminology works best for them and adapt your delivery accordingly.
- Signpost external resources. Don't let your participants rely solely on you. And ask them to share them with you. Learning is two way!
- Have confidence in your ability. You must believe in what you are doing and saying if you want to assure others.
- Don't raise aspirations or hope through false promises. Be truthful to yourself and your participants when communicating feedback. A crucial conversation often prevents a difficult conversation.
- Creating time in your coaching sessions, often informally, will provide fertile ground. Remember, effective communication is an essential requirement of coaching as it will help you ascertain people's individual wants and needs, relay information and provide constructive feedback.

2. Questioning

- Encourage questions. Give your participants the confidence to ask why and challenge things. This could be challenging your thinking or your tactics, or asking questions when reflecting after a session. This gets them into the habit of thinking creatively.
- Asking questions and being curious is the key to gathering more information about your participants. The more you find out about them, the more you will understand their individual wants and needs. Before a session and 'pick-up time' at the end of a session is a good time to do this.
- Taking the time to understand and connect with individuals by embracing a person-centred philosophy is also a tried-and-trusted method for establishing rapport, as your participants will soon begin to feel you have their best interests at heart.
- Make a habit of questioning people's answers rather than answering people's questions.
- Asking 'why' questions as opposed to questions that have a yes or no answer is a powerful development technique. Simply pose a question and then step back. A good coach will let the learner lead, not rush in and tell them everything themselves. Provide a hint or a nudge only where appropriate behaviours do not emerge.
- However, don't use this technique excessively, as constant 'why' questions have been seen in research as challenging and threatening. Sometimes a 'what' is better.
- This style of open-ended questioning allows the participant to take ownership of their learning as it puts the onus on them to make decisions, self-coach and lead under your guidance. Over a period of time, you get independent learners and thinkers.
- In other words, if you are a chatterbox by nature, learn when to speak and when to keep quiet. Temper that

feeling of wanting to get involved and get accustomed to giving your participants the floor and the encouragement to express themselves. Try counting to five. It may feel uncomfortable but it will pay massive rewards to your coaching.

- Knowing when to remain silent can itself be a powerful communication strategy.

3. Self-reflection

- Self-reflection is key to developing as a coach. There is a saying: Ten years of coaching without reflection is simply one year of coaching repeated ten times.
- Reflective practice is where you learn from information extracted from the past – after competition, a match or a training session. Being wise after the event may not allow you to rewrite history, but it **will** help you prevent history from repeating itself.
- You cannot expect every idea to work first time. Use self-reflection to find ways to tweak and tune your delivery and your sessions until they give you the results you want.
- Reflect on you and your behaviours, not just the practice. A deeper reflection provides greater learning and a better understanding of your coaching practice.
- There is **always something you can learn from an event**. It might only improve things by a few per cent, but collectively, over a period of time, this can make a big difference.
- Without reflection, you can never hope to change, and if you don't change, how can you ever hope to improve?
- For example, if you don't ask yourself questions about your coaching practice, how do you know if you are making progress. Ask yourself: what are my strengths and how can I improve these? What are my areas for development and how can I turn these into positives?
- In terms of reflecting on matches, competitions and

tournaments, try asking the following questions: If we were to enter again, what would we do differently? What were the stand-out lessons we learnt, and therefore what actions do we need to apply for future events?

- Reflective practice can be a challenge for an inexperienced coach if there is no support network there to help them devise new strategies or guide them as they learn to experiment in their sessions and evaluate the results.
- It can be a huge help to bounce ideas off other coaches in the club or to join a **community of practice** that encourages thinking and reflection and affords you the opportunity to develop at your own pace and discuss issues most important to your coaching practice.
- Regarding **group self-reflection** meetings: approaching them in a negative way could deter people from opening up, thereby diminishing the potential benefits of reflective practice. The focus therefore should be on celebrating progress and embracing personal development as opposed to isolating problems and dwelling on dilemmas.

4. Knowledge

- We use information to learn, to help us solve problems, to aid our decision-making processes and to understand each other more clearly.
- If you are knowledgeable it feeds into being confident.
- A smart coach doesn't know everything... but they do know where to find it! Work out your gaps in knowledge and be proactive in seeking help. As a coach, you should embrace knowledge from other coaches **and from other sports** as everyone has different strengths and new ideas that can only help you develop.
- Sometimes you can be too involved in your own sport, which closes you off from some potentially illuminating advice.

- A great deal can be gained from observing more experienced coaches and establishing a more formal mentoring relationship.
- Meetings, communities of practice, conferences, courses, workshops and webinars provide structured opportunities to learn and discuss current and future developments and to challenge your own thinking and approaches.
- Reading is another good source of knowledge, but you cannot learn everything you need from books, online resources and social media.
- Reading and listening to other people's experiences, in other words, will only take you so far. If you want to learn how to swim, sooner or later you will have to try it for yourself. Or, to use another analogy, you wouldn't enter someone for a driving test if they had never sat in a car.
- The Disney film Aladdin sums it up best: "You can read books but you cannot read experience."
- Coaches, then, should dip into the extensive menu of learning methods at their disposal as they negotiate their coaching journey.
- Keep up to date with news from the sector. Research findings, coaching frameworks and legislation is constantly being added to and updated. What may be 'right' today may not be tomorrow.
- Start a session with key points from the previous session to evaluate the retention of the information. Checking for understanding doesn't always have to be questions. The best way to check is in an activity.
- If you can film yourself coaching, do it. It may be the most uncomfortable thing you do but it may also be the most rewarding.
- As a coach, **you will always be learning**. This is not because you are a good coach but because you could be better.
- Be willing to evaluate your own skills and knowledge,

and constantly work to develop and improve them. The coach who says they know everything is either deluded or fibbing. Either way, they are wrong

5 – Organising

- Do not be afraid of organised chaos. It doesn't have to always look pretty. Learning isn't linear and doesn't take place in 'boxes'.
- Plan the detail of your sessions and consider the 'what ifs': establish how you will affect each player within your session and how you will achieve their outcomes.
- Sport and physical activity is an ever-changing environment. Participants, game developments and facilities evolve. So, while muddy pitches and cold showers might have been deemed 'character-building' in the past, coaches are in the business of talent building and creating environments for enjoyment, learning and self-improvement.
- Organise and plan sessions to meet people's needs and guide their development and be prepared to modify the activities if necessary so that everyone gets a turn.
- Understand the **coaching models and principles** that can guide your approach and inform session design. They can be particularly useful in ensuring that your sessions are inclusive.
- Try to structure practice to keep people moving; no standing around in queues. That's when people get bored – especially children. Suddenly you aren't watching practice, you are dealing with children messing around!
- Active people are engaged, and learning. Plan so that everyone can be busy. It is often as simple as setting up multiple practices or games areas.
- A useful soundbite to help you remember the importance of good planning and preparation: By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.
- Building up an understanding of your participants'

strengths and weaknesses will guide your session planning. For example, some people may struggle with an exercise and others might find it simple; some will be nervous, others will be bursting with confidence.

- This knowledge, derived from connecting with your participants, will help you adapt activities to fit people's skill level. Make a note of these, they can help with your reflections and planning.
- Keep a 'knowledge log' of your participants. Remember, as a coach you must cope with a complex set of characters in a complex environment. A knowledge log will help you record progress, measure success and come up with some concrete goals set within time limits. The log can be wider than skills and techniques, including motivations, preferences, social groups, family situations. All great insight to help you maximise people's experience in your session.
- Be transparent in your planning and preparation, and make as much of it available to your participants as possible.
- Take advantage of new technology in the form of online coach planning tools and mobile apps that help you stay organised. They can save you time by making it easier to schedule events and manage communication with players and parents.

6. Enthusiasm

- No one wants to turn up to a session and see a glum face.
- Projecting enthusiasm throughout a session is important as enthusiasm is contagious. Where you observe enthusiasm and energy, you will most likely observe fun and enjoyment.
- Don't be too serious. Coaching is an enjoyable role to have, so enjoy it and look forward to each session you have with your participants.

- Repetitive, regimented routines and drills will chip away at people's enthusiasm.

7. Sense of Humour

- As with enthusiasm, a sense of humour is infectious, and the more people laugh, the more they have fun. It is surely no coincidence that the word funny contains the word fun!
- Adding more laughs to your sessions will also increase camaraderie and a sense of social belonging.
- In more relaxed situations, coaches can use humour to decrease the distance between themselves and their group, making them appear more human in the eyes of the participants.
- An injection of humour can also defuse tension, optimise performance and create a stimulating learning environment, as the more people feel relaxed in your presence, the more they will be likely to listen to instruction and be eager to please.
- That said, humour is a balancing act and coaches should handle with care. What one person may find funny, another might find offensive. People respond to humour in different ways. Remember: always with the group, never at the group.
- Be mindful that self-deprecating humour can put you on the receiving end of 'banter' once your participants feel like they have the green light.
- A coach's ability to use humour productively is a direct reflection of their ability to read the person rather than the player.

8. Creativity

- Always allow your participants to be creative during training, and never stifle that creativity. Children are naturally curious about their environments – they want to explore. Let them explore and feed their inherent

curiosity and be explicit with this so it becomes infectious. Seek, encourage, reward.

- Refusal to deviate from the same methodical, unchanging and regimented routines can make for boring sessions and are an impediment to unlocking people's inner creativity. Remember your time at school or work when you had a repetitive task, how did you feel?
- Don't be afraid of failure. That goes for you as a coach as well as your participants. If a creative games-based activity doesn't work, so what? Keep adapting and trying new things.
- Creating an environment that is a safe place to fail also gives people the confidence to "push the boundaries" and challenge themselves; a licence to express their creativity.
- A problem-solving environment allows people to create their own tactical solutions. In contrast, the upshot of prescriptive coaching is that when something happens that is off script during a match or competition, your participants won't be able to cope because they haven't got a vocabulary of experiences to prompt them what to do in that situation.
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- Do your coach behaviours in a practice and training environment match your behaviours in a competition environment?
- Copy, repeat, copy, repeat: treat children like robots, and they will act like robots.

9. Active Listening

- Listen to your athletes. No, really listen. Strain every fibre to hear what they are saying. Active listen is hard and tiring. Just like other skills it takes practice, so start practising now.
- Learn to listen to verbal and non-verbal messages, including body movements, gestures and tell-tale physical and mental signs of emotion and mood.
- Coaches have a valuable role to play in supporting people who are experiencing any type of personal problem, including mental health problems, bullying or safeguarding issues. Talking is great medication. However, coaches will struggle to pick up on the subtle signs if they do not give their participants their undivided attention.
- You are not expected to have all the answers, but just being prepared to give over some time and be a willing and patient listener will show those struggling with a personal issue that someone is there for them.
- Allow your participants some input into sessions. They will tell you so much, from aspects of training they enjoy to things that might not have worked for them. Their responses will help you create and foster an environment for everyone.
- Let the participants 'unload' and chat to their teammates before a session. But still actively listen. It's a great way to hear about their day or week, the type of mood they are in, or pick up on a personal goal, and you can then use that information to fuel their motivation.

10. Emotional Intelligence

- The more you know your participants and the better you are at interacting with them, the better you are going to be at coaching them. And fundamental to helping you accomplish this is your ability to understand and control your own, and others people's, emotions.

- Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to identify, assess and control your emotions to help you and other people perform to their absolute potential – based on the premise that emotions strongly influence actions and behaviours.
- Two key components of EI are self-awareness and empathy. Other are happiness, optimism, self-esteem, emotion regulation, impulsiveness, stress management, relationships, assertiveness, social awareness, emotion perception, emotion expression and emotion management.
- A good tip for developing your behavioural agility is to think of each facet of EI as a volume dial. In each situation you encounter, figure out where you are on a scale from 1 to 10. If the scenario requires, for argument's sake, empathy (the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes and see things from their perspective), decide if you need to dial up, or dial down, your empathy level.
- Self-awareness is a conscious perception of your character, motivation, feelings, emotions and behaviour. Being self-aware helps you understand how other people perceive you as well as help you recognise other people's personality traits and emotional needs.
- All facets of EI can be honed through practice. The more time you spend doing it, the better you will become at adapting your behaviour to suit the person or people you are coaching.
- An emotionally intelligent coach will be able to manipulate people's emotions in various situations and turn potentially negative outcomes into positive ones.

Do not forget the roles that you have to deliver (thanks to @Todd Beane)

1. Mentor
2. Educator
3. Counselor

4. Advisor
5. Physical Trainer
6. Tactician
7. PR Manager
8. Nutritionist
9. Nurse
10. College Advisor
11. Mediator
12. Analyst