

Skills and Qualities of a Coach

Coaches come from a variety of backgrounds and possess a range of qualities and experiences from which they develop their coaching skills and unique coaching styles. Coaches then adapt these qualities to the specific needs of the performers with whom they work. Yet, in spite of such individual approaches to coaching, it is possible to identify certain skills and attributes that underpin effective coaching. For example, all coaches need to:

- communicate effectively with performers to ascertain their needs and ambitions, relay information and provide constructive feedback
- plan and organise sessions and programmes to meet performers' needs and guide their development
- analyse and evaluate performance (their own and that of their performers) to gauge and direct progress
- create a safe environment in which the well-being of the performer is paramount
- be open-minded in developing their coaching skills and knowledge. This is perhaps the most important attribute of good coaches: the ability and willingness to evaluate their own skills and knowledge, and constantly work to develop and improve them.

Communication

Effective coaching is not just about developing skills and improving performance; it is about building good relationships with performers, other coaches and administrators, and parents when working with young performers. The skills of good communication are therefore a central component of coaching. Communication is a two-way process where listening is equally, if not more, important as talking; this is

especially true when attempting to establish each performer's needs and goals. Coaches are often good at talking and giving information, but not so good at listening. They need to develop good communication skills both within and outside of the practical coaching situation, not just with performers, but with parents, other coaches, officials and administrators.

Planning and Organising

Performers can soon become bored and disillusioned with poorly structured coaching sessions and programmes, so the ability to plan and organise effective and meaningful activities is vital to improving performance. This can only be done if coaches first identify each performer's needs and goals and then use these as the basis for session and programme planning. Where the plans form part of a series of sessions, a season or annual programme, the goals of the specific session should represent one step in the overall plan. Such systematic planning is crucial to ensure progress and for performers to achieve their goals. It also offers performers an appropriate level of challenge and ultimately promotes self-confidence and a sense of achievement.

Analysis and Evaluation

Analysis is another component central to the coaching process and therefore a key coaching skill. Coaches need to analyse (within the session initially) the technical and tactical aspects of performance, the physical condition and mental skills of the performer; the extent to which goals have been achieved, as well as their own coaching performance. The skills, knowledge and experience of the coach are often required to revise practices to meet the changing needs and demands of the performers

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(eg more or less demanding activities) and/or the environment (eg hot or cold conditions; hard or soft surfaces).

Analysis is also an important part of the overall evaluation of the coaching session or programme, which strongly influences the planning of future sessions and goals.

Keeping an Open Mind

An open mind is crucial to effective coaching and can be defined as being receptive to new ideas and amenable to change or different ways of doing things. Coaches should acknowledge their own strengths and weaknesses. Meetings, conferences, courses and workshops provide structured opportunities to learn and discuss current and future developments. In addition, a great deal can be gained from observing more-experienced coaches and establishing a more formal mentoring relationship. All coaches, regardless of age and experience, should constantly strive to improve their knowledge and skills.

sports coach UK has developed a programme of workshops and resources that provide coach education and development opportunities to coaches of any sport. Further details can be found at www.sportscoachuk.org/workshops or www.1st4sport.com.

Sport-specific training and qualifications will be provided by individual governing bodies of sport.

Creating a Safe Environment

The well-being of the performer should be of utmost importance to all coaches. Therefore, coaches need to be aware of their legal responsibilities, especially with regard to child protection, negligence, risk and duty of care. They also have an obligation to conform to accepted ethical codes of practice in terms of competence, responsibility, confidentiality, relationships with performers, fair play and drug abuse.

Further Information

sports coach UK – Become a Coach
1st4sport – Coaching for Beginners
Australian Institute of Sport

Related sports coach UK Workshops

Safeguarding and Protecting Children
Equity in Your Coaching
Analysing Your Coaching