

This is not a guide on what to coach but a guide on how best to “coach” (the generic name I’m going to use for what we do).

There are three general forms of coaching:

Instructor: As the name suggests someone giving out instructions. More appropriate in the early phases of paddling but still needed throughout what we do. The “coach” is in charge and there is little independent thought or questioning from the participant. This style doesn’t encourage independent thought or people to learn other than by experiencing or being told what to do. They won’t question why or form their own ideas. **An example:** “*there’s a rowboat coming- I want you to move to the right side of the river*”. Instructor makes the decision on what to do and where to go.

Coach: Can still be an instructor (on occasions) but would introduce scenarios for the participants to learn independently. They should allow questions back and forth “why did you do that? What could you have done instead?”, rather than giving answers/instructions. This should eventually lead to self-discovery (“*I worked it out*”). A good coach should cater for different ways people learn or process information – some need clear boundaries (*in this situation I’m going to do this*), others might like to experience doing and process the experience and then do it correctly, in the moment, then and there.

Others may need to process away from the situation and comeback and practice. Whilst some athletes need to question, understand and discover for themselves (these can be frustrating as it can be more time consuming for them to believe and learn rather than just do what they’re told but ultimately they usually have a greater understanding and belief in what you are teaching them). Certain athletes are going to need to have it explained, then see it, either in a demo or from others, then experience it themselves before they can learn. We are all somewhere along this learning spectrum and people have varying levels of these traits and it can change in differing circumstances.

A coach should be a role model, able to challenge both physically and mentally (in safe ways) and build a relationship with their athletes. They should be able to push the athlete beyond what they thought they were capable of and develop independent thinking athletes. **An example:** “*there’s a rowboat coming*” Athletes are given information but make their own decision on what to do and where to go.

Mentor: A critical friend, someone the athlete trusts to bounce ideas off, to allow them to work independently (self-discovery) but allows them to question the outcomes.

A mentor usually works with someone who is further along in their sporting career, someone who is independently motivated, self-aware and accepting of being questioned/challenged. A mentor may just question their athlete to get them to independently think, they may provide expertise and answers or provide situations to allow the athlete to experience and learn.

Hopefully you can see, as coaches, we move from one to another of those three depending on who we are with and what we are doing.

Sometimes we are still **instructors** saying “*go, stop*” in a situation set up for guided learning by you the **coach** (mixed K2 wash hanging) where we may **mentor** at the end or during, “why did you do it like that, what else could you have done?”

We need to be all things to all people.

Structure of the coaching: Instead of thinking “what efforts are we doing?” we need to move to “what do they (our athletes) need to achieve?” Clubs (and by extension marathon races) have always been very good at setting up sessions/races for self-discovery and opportunities to learn. What arguably has been lost is the understanding of what those sessions aims/race outcomes are and how to achieve them.

A simple phrase to help us is **Plan, Do, Review.**

This can be done in multiple ways – within one effort, one session, one week, month etc.

- **Plan** your desired outcome- as complex or as simple as you need.
- **Do** - the **how** you/they are going to achieve the outcomes (this is the basis for your session and longer-term plan).
- **Review** the outcomes. Did it meet your athlete’s needs? Are they making progress towards your/their stated aims? Do you need to adjust the sessions and for what reasons?

Session: Check list

- Have you explained what you are doing and why?
- How do you know your athletes understand? If you ask a group, “do you understand?” the answer is usually “yes” because who wants to admit they don’t? Getting them to repeat back only shows who was listening and not whether they understand. Getting them to explain back would be better.
- Recap after a few efforts to make sure everyone’s understands, or better still get the athletes to tell you what and why to check again for any misunderstandings.
- Get feedback – no closed (yes or no answers) but open questioning – “how was that?” and ask “why?” for deeper questioning and understanding. Why is a very powerful teaching/questioning tool and stops “ok” being a stock athlete answer.
- Wrap up – What went well? What went wrong? What could be better next time? Not just for your athletes but also as the coach planning the sessions. This doesn’t have to be on the water it can be after the session, during the warm down or on the journey home.

Feedback:

Critique not criticise. In other words, take apart the actions and the reasons behind it, but not the person performing those actions.

Feedback should be done immediately if possible or flag up that you are going to refer back to this if not possible then i.e. race/10K or the middle of an effort/set.

However, whilst wanting to give feedback as soon as possible it isn’t always appropriate (after a bad race and your athlete is upset or in a mood) choose the most receptive time for feedback– you’ll know how to judge this usually from a relationship built over time (so be careful in the beginning).

Is there anything positive to say before the critique or to end on?

Scott Hynds Kaytech *paddle sports coaching* 2019

Rather than giving your athlete the negative points could you ask them was there any areas they think they could improve on? The two might be vastly different and highlight a mismatch of understanding.

Don't always expect or demand a coherent answer then and there, people may need time to process/reflect and answer later.

How to motivate?

Different people respond to different ways of motivating and at different times. As a coach you need to be self-aware and aware of coaching bias, i.e. treating athletes differently because of gender or speed or skill set or work ethic.

Pressure is not bad, in fact it's very important to expose athletes to pressure and our system is very good at this, however this needs to be done in a controlled and positive way. So, strong emotional responses to pressure (from coaches as well as athlete) are not necessarily bad. If you didn't care, you wouldn't be there!! But overly negative responses from both should be avoided ("I'm rubbish" – "you were rubbish today").

Paddlers who feel positively challenged are focused on what they can achieve, those paddlers that are threatened (by challenge) are focused on what might go wrong and the resulting criticism.

Good or controlled pressure is an important part of a high-performance environment (we are building this again). A high challenge/low stress approach to pressure usually leads to greater achievement.

As coaches we are supposed to teach, support, nurture, drive, push, make life hard, counsel, mentor and all whilst keeping it fun or enjoyable/rewarding – so no pressure there then...

However, pressure comes in many forms:

Internal: from the athlete themselves with a desire or need to do well – sometimes for external validation too (that's one to be careful of, especially in the social media age).

External: from other's expectations of how they can/should do and a perceived hierarchy (think divisional system or sprint rankings), unrealistic expectations that can't be fulfilled leads to negative pressure.

Uncontrollable: worrying about things that can't be controlled – weather, other people's performance, other people's reaction/expectations or being judged.

Confidence is key to a good performance. Self-belief in your own ability to perform (at or above expectations) is vital in being able to perform under pressure (a high level of confidence, born from realistic expectations rather than delusional belief, is important for a positive challenge, i.e.

"I know I'm gonna smash this" = self-confidence

as opposed to "I need to do this" = stress or negative challenge).

Confidence comes from being previously successful at the given task, it's hard to be truly confident doing something you've never done before!! Therefore, coaching is about building confidence through successful experiences which gradually gain in demand and difficulty.

Next is a feeling of control. People who experience a lack of control but are judged on the outcome are highly stressed and negatively challenged. Believing you have control or some influence over

Scott Hynds Kaytech *paddle sports coaching* 2019

how you perform is important for a positive challenge. Believing you have **NO** control or influence over how you perform or how your performances are judged is certainly a negative experience. Going into pressure situations focused on factors that cannot be controlled, creates a threatened athlete, wherever possible this should be mitigated (being able to achieve that with selection etc. isn't easy).

Finally, being focused on what **can be** achieved. Individuals who are positively challenged are focused on what can be achieved while those that are threatened are focused on what might go wrong. For example, Roland Lawler's philosophy of "just go 'til you blow" or "live with it as long as you can" is high challenge (positive) but removes the negative stress of the outcome being important and so you can focus solely on the challenge aspects.

Safeguarding: Coaches responsibilities – There are so many areas to go into here that it would be impractical time wise, however just a quick note that you must protect yourself as much as your athletes.

Think about the situations you are in from an outsider's point of view. Never leave yourself open to an accusation through ignorance. Remember you are in a position of responsibility and authority.

1. You should never be alone in a 1-2-1 situation with a Junior.
2. You should never be alone in a closed room with a Junior – if you must be, then leave the door open and let other people know where you are and what you are doing or invite them to observe.
3. Never stand between a junior and the exit or stand over them whilst they are seated.
4. You can **never** promise confidentiality if asked.
5. Car sharing & lifts: Unfortunately, probably best not to.
6. Communications: **Never** contact a junior/juniors individually either by social media or phone/text. Set groups up with parents. Never meet alone/ 1-2-1 externally to your coaching sessions
7. Clothing: your athletes clothing should be appropriate – especially indoors.
8. Changing areas: Race/Regatta – Don't be near or alone with Juniors getting changed or change near Juniors. Hopefully obvious but at away races easy to get caught out.
9. Be aware of paddling machine/technique sessions where you might physically move a person into the correct position, correct posture etc. asking permission does not make physical contact ok, try to have another adult present, never 1-2-1.
10. Never run a 1-2-1 session or even small group without other adults/coaches knowing; never arrange to meet a junior on your own.

Duty of care: As a coach you are in **loco parentis** of the junior whilst in charge

1. Do they have appropriate kit for the session and for afterwards?
2. Never leave them on their own after a session, don't assume they've been picked up.
3. Age inappropriate behaviour needs reporting to the safeguarding officer.
4. Any concerns should be shared with the safeguarding officer but not always with other adults, i.e. if parental pressure was the concern or another coach pushing them, you wouldn't share with those parties.

5. Signs of aggression or depression, a change of personality or mood swings should be reported to the safeguarding officer.
6. Sudden weight loss. Again, if concerning should be reported to the safeguarding officer
7. Self-harm: any evidence or concerns should be reported to the safeguarding officer, evidence might be wearing leggings and long sleeves (inappropriate to the conditions), not wanting to show limbs, never changing at the club, lots of bangles, bracelets and coverings.
8. NEVER ask about cuts, bruises or weight directly to the child.
9. Report to the safeguarding officer if a child is overly eager to please, seeking adult affirmation, overly familiar or seeking praise in a way that might seem abnormal.
10. Remember you are just one part of a picture and you might be the final part of a jigsaw. Never think it doesn't matter or I'll do it next time.

Our aim should be to have happy athletes who enjoy what they do (at whatever level) who are robust, resilient and confident with a skill set they didn't have when they started with you (be that kayak specific or life skills). Therefore:

"You were crap today" – a statement of fact but probably not helpful to both parties

"Any idea why you were crap today?" - better but still potentially negative.

"You weren't as good today as before, any ideas why?"

Avoid false positives:

"it could have been worse"

"you may have been last, but you looked good"

"don't worry they're bigger than you/been paddling longer/older etc."

Instead:

If "it could have been worse", what were the good points? Are they worth highlighting?

"you may have been last, but you looked good" could be **"Your technique is coming on we just need to work on..."**

"don't worry they're bigger than you/been paddling longer/older etc." could be **"look what you are already doing against the bigger, older, more experienced paddlers, just think where you'll be when you're that age/size or experience"**.

Lastly and most importantly make sure you are getting something out of it. Find out what it is you enjoy about coaching, what drives you and keeps you happy and motivated.