

LIFELONG LEARNING — OF THE COACH —



INTRODUCTION

Irrespective of your coaching experience, you as the coach need to evolve. It is expected of you from your athletes and their parents. It is expected from your provincial and national federations. You should expect it from yourself...but where do you find the time to do any type of coach education, unless it is usually linked to your CPD requirements. Sad, but true. Coaches are practical beings and learning from practical experience or in a practical manner from a fellow coach is so much more fun and time efficient than spending another Saturday attending a sport-specific workshop about “old sport science” topics or “the latest trends in technique”. This has been seen in the last 5 – 8 years, but more specifically after Covid. Time is everything and it is limited. It should not be wasted on compliance, but on pure, great experiences.

This is quite a dilemma for the coaching industry. But it should not be. Everything should not be structured in such a way that it fits into the 9 to 5 framework. Your time is your own and you should be able to utilize it the way you need to. Agreeing to this, coaches should be able to use 5 or 10 minutes that they are standing in the grocery isle to read up on something interesting about their sport or watch a quick video clip on why certain methods are been proven ineffective.

The first remark most coaches will make is....”But where do I get this information so quickly?” and secondly “Is this information verified?”. All valid questions. But what if there is a platform for coaches that could speak to all of these needs and allow them to control or direct their own learning at their own pace and in their own interest field, whilst improving their coaching profile step by step?

If we look at the characteristics of an effective coach, the same old information pops up...the coach must be positive, the coach must be enthusiastic, the coach must be supportive and the list goes on and on. It is not to say that these characteristics are not important, but will they give you the edge so that your athletes can receive better coaching, I'm not 100% convinced. We all know the saying that knowledge is power, but in our day and age time is limited and knowledge often times gets left behind. It is all about getting the lesson or the session done, it is about finishing on time and often times it is about making it financially viable to coach full time, should you be so lucky. The new characteristics of a coach should be dynamic, always changing, staying a step ahead of the competition, making yourself a specialist in specific areas. It should be about constant self-improvement.

To be able to improve yourself on a daily basis, you as the coach need to understand the 5 critical areas of the modern coach:

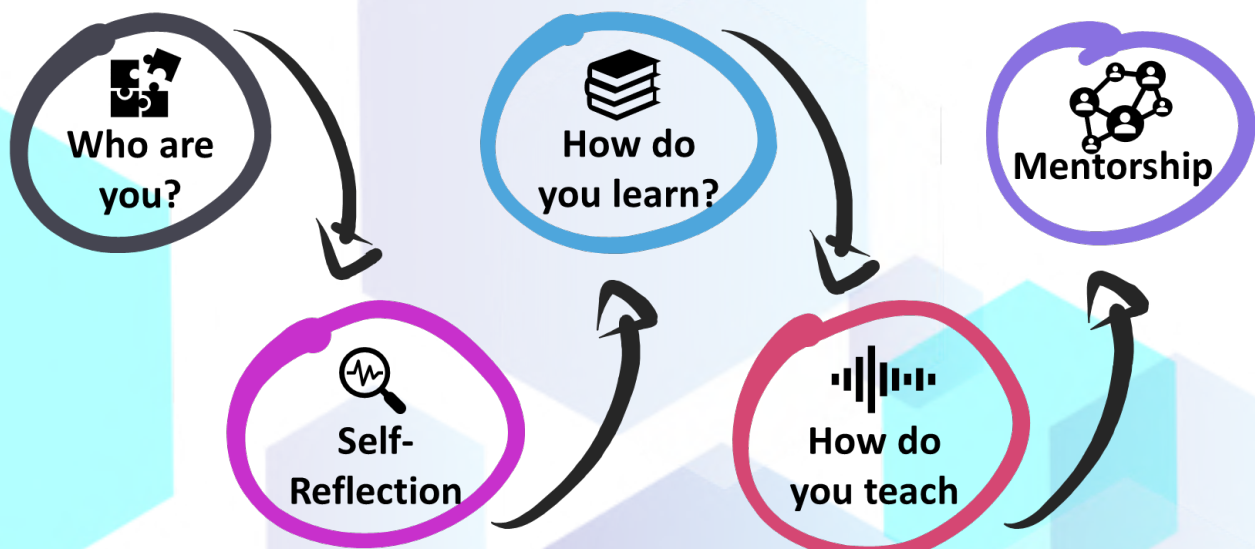


Figure 1: 5 Critical areas of a modern coach

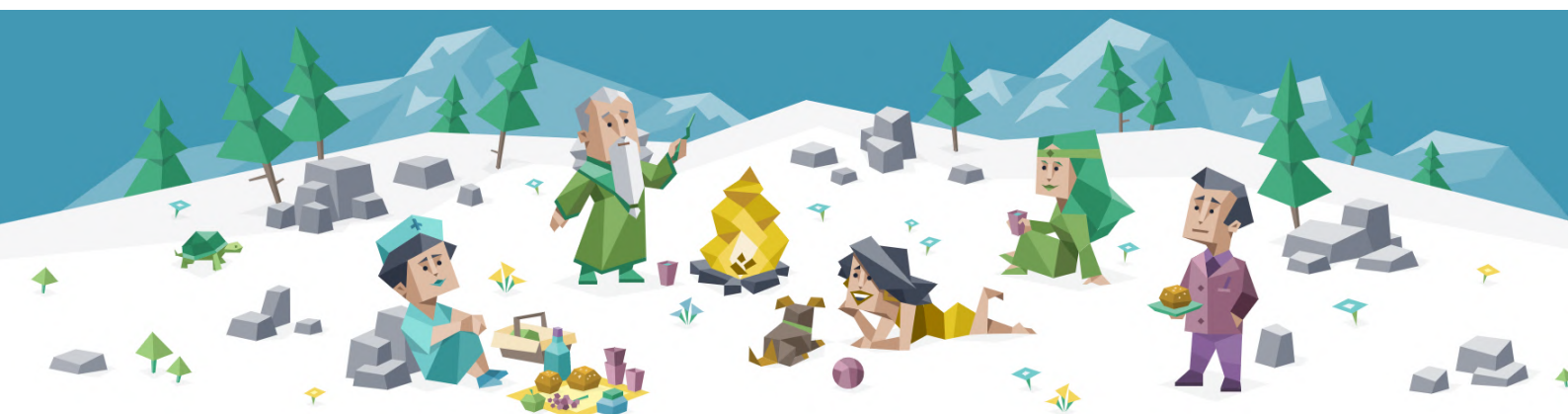
WHO ARE YOU COACH?

If you think of your ultimate coach....it should be a better version of yourself. This is what lifelong learning is all about. You empower yourself to the level that (1) athletes benefit optimally and results are seen (2) parents are satisfied with your plan to develop their child athlete (3) fellow coaches want to make you their mentor. Tough act, but this is an ongoing process which should take place daily. Before you can develop into this ultimate coach, it is needed that you get to know yourself much better and then obviously to understand each of your athletes on an individual basis.

One would think you know yourself, but often times an objective perspective of your personality type is so rewarding and explains why you like certain things and dislike other things. Some coaches expect athletes to be at practice at least 15 minutes beforehand whilst other coaches don't mind athletes being a few minutes late. Who is right? Does it matter? Well, for athletes to perform optimally they must be able to understand their coach optimally. What a lengthy exercise this will be. But what if you could give your athletes a quick summary of your personality type so they understand how to approach you with certain situations? This would surely eliminate conversations which start with "I wonder what coach will say if he/she hears....". In the same breath, coaches will fare so much better if they understand their athletes on a deeper level. Fewer miscommunications, misunderstandings and assumptions.

I was recently introduced to a great personality type test, called 16personalities (www.16personalities.com) What a resource!

Just to emphasize the popularity of this test, let's look at the graphic below:



206K+

Tests taken today

1M+

Tests taken in South Africa

758M+

Total tests taken

91.2%

Results rated as accurate or very accurate

Figure 2: 16 Personalities stats in South Africa

THERE ARE 4 CATEGORIES AND 4 TYPES IN EACH CATEGORY, HENCE THE 16 PERSONALITIES. THE FOUR CATEGORIES ARE DIVIDED INTO:

Sentinels



Logistician
ISTJ-A / ISTJ-T

Practical and fact-minded individuals, whose reliability cannot be doubted.



Defender
ISFJ-A / ISFJ-T

Very dedicated and warm protectors, always ready to defend their loved ones.



Executive
ESTJ-A / ESTJ-T

Excellent administrators, unsurpassed at managing things – or people.



Consul
ESFJ-A / ESFJ-T

Extraordinarily caring, social and popular people, always eager to help.

Explorers



Virtuoso
ISTP-A / ISTP-T

Bold and practical experimenters, masters of all kinds of tools.



Adventurer
ISFP-A / ISFP-T

Flexible and charming artists, always ready to explore and experience something new.



Entrepreneur
ESTP-A / ESTP-T

Smart, energetic and very perceptive people, who truly enjoy living on the edge.



Entertainer
ESFP-A / ESFP-T

Spontaneous, energetic and enthusiastic people – life is never boring around them.

Diplomats



Advocate
INFJ-A / INFJ-T

Quiet and mystical, yet very inspiring and tireless idealists.



Mediator
INFP-A / INFP-T

Poetic, kind and altruistic people, always eager to help a good cause.



Protagonist
ENFJ-A / ENFJ-T

Charismatic and inspiring leaders, able to mesmerize their listeners.



Campaigner
ENFP-A / ENFP-T

Enthusiastic, creative and sociable free spirits, who can always find a reason to smile.

Analysts



Architect
INTJ-A / INTJ-T

Imaginative and strategic thinkers, with a plan for everything.



Logician
INTP-A / INTP-T

Innovative inventors with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge.



Commander
ENTJ-A / ENTJ-T

Bold, imaginative and strong-willed leaders, always finding a way – or making one.



Debater
ENTP-A / ENTP-T

Smart and curious thinkers who cannot resist an intellectual challenge.

Table 1: 4 categories with 4 sub-categories (16 personalities)

THE TEST IS BASED ON 5 PERSONALITY ASPECTS:

- MIND
- ENERGY

- NATURE
- TACTICS

- IDENTITY

Mind

This aspect shows how we interact with our surroundings:



Introverted individuals prefer solitary activities and get exhausted by social interaction. They tend to be quite sensitive to external stimulation (e.g. sound, sight or smell) in general.



Extraverted individuals prefer group activities and get energized by social interaction. They tend to be more enthusiastic and more easily excited than Introverts.

Energy

The second aspect determines how we see the world and process information:



Observant individuals are highly practical, pragmatic and down-to-earth. They tend to have strong habits and focus on what is happening or has already happened.



Intuitive individuals are very imaginative, open-minded and curious. They prefer novelty over stability and focus on hidden meanings and future possibilities.

Nature

This aspect determines how we make decisions and cope with emotions:



Thinking individuals focus on objectivity and rationality, prioritizing logic over emotions. They tend to hide their feelings and see efficiency as more important than cooperation.



Feeling individuals are sensitive and emotionally expressive. They are more empathic and less competitive than Thinking types, and focus on social harmony and cooperation.

Tactics

This aspect reflects our approach to work, planning and decision-making:



Judging individuals are decisive, thorough and highly organized. They value clarity, predictability and closure, preferring structure and planning to spontaneity.



Perceiving individuals are very good at improvising and spotting opportunities. They tend to be flexible, relaxed nonconformists who prefer keeping their options open.

Identity

Finally, the Identity aspect underpins all others, showing how confident we are in our abilities and decisions:



Assertive individuals are self-assured, even-tempered and resistant to stress. They refuse to worry too much and do not push themselves too hard when it comes to achieving goals.



Turbulent individuals are self-conscious and sensitive to stress. They are likely to experience a wide range of emotions and to be success-driven, perfectionistic and eager to improve.

Your Personality
Turbulent Defender
(ISFJ-T)

Defenders You May Know



Captain America
Captain America



Kate Middleton



Vin Diesel



Queen Elizabeth II

Figure 3: Example of how the 5 personality aspects are used to get to your personality type.

OUT OF THESE 5 PERSONALITY ASPECTS, PERSONALITY TYPES ARE CATEGORIZED INTO ROLES AND STRATEGIES.

ROLES ARE BASED ON THE PERSON'S GOALS, INTERESTS AND PREFERRED ACTIVITIES.

Role 1: Analysts (Intuitive and Thinking [_NT_] types, both Assertive and Turbulent variants)

Analysts embrace rationality and impartiality, excelling in intellectual debates and scientific or technological fields. They are ferociously independent, open-minded, strong-willed and creative, approaching many things from a practical perspective and being far more interested in what works than what satisfies everybody. These traits make Analysts outstanding tactical thinkers, but also cause problems when it comes to social or romantic pursuits.

Role 2: Diplomats (Intuitive and Feeling [_NF_] types, both Assertive and Turbulent variants)

Diplomats focus on empathy and cooperation, shining in mediation and counselling. They are supportive and creative, often playing the role of harmonizers in their workplace or social circles. They are sincere, empathic and persuasive individuals, but also cause issues when there is a need to rely completely on cold rationality or make tough decisions.

Role 3: Sentinels (Observant and Judging [_S_J] types, both Assertive and Turbulent variants)

Sentinels are helpful and highly practical, embracing and creating order, security and stability wherever they go. They tend to be hard working, thorough and traditional, and excel in logistical or managerial fields, especially those that rely on clear hierarchies and rules. These personality types stick to their strategies and do not shy away from problematic tasks – however, they can also be very obstinate and unwilling to accept diverse points of view.

Role 4: Explorers (Observant and Prospecting [_S_P] types, both Assertive and Turbulent variants)

Explorers are the most spontaneous of all and they also share the aptitude to link with their environments in a way that is beyond reach of other types. Explorers are useful and practical, shining in circumstances that need quick reaction and ability to think on your feet. They are leaders of tools and techniques, using them in many diverse ways – ranging from mastering physical tools to convincing other people. They are irreplaceable in disasters, crafts and sales – however, their personalities can also push them towards undertaking risky endeavours or concentrating exclusively on physical preferences.

STRATEGIES ARE OUR PREFERRED WAYS OF DOING THINGS AND ACHIEVING GOALS.

Strategy 1: Confident Individualism (Introverted and Assertive [I___-A] types)

Confident Individualists prefer doing things on their own, choosing to rely on their own skills and instincts as opposed to seeking interaction with other individuals. They know what they are good at and have high self-assurance. They firmly believe that personal responsibility and trust in yourself are significant standards. Confident Individualists do not pay much attention to other people's sentiments and prefer to trust themselves.

Strategy 2: People Mastery (Extraverted and Assertive [E___-A] types)

People Masters pursue social interaction and are inclined to have very good communication skills, feeling at ease in social proceedings or in situations where they need to rely on or direct other people. They are self-assured in their aptitudes and do not waver to express their sentiments. Playing a dynamic role in the society and knowing what makes other people tick mean a lot for People Masters; however, they are not too worried about what other people think about them.

Strategy 3: Constant Improvement (Introverted and Turbulent [I__-T] types)

Constant Improvers are quiet, individualistic individuals. They are inclined to be perfectionistic and success-driven, often spending a lot of time and exertion making sure that the outcome of their work is the best it can be. As their name says, Constant Improvers are high attaining individuals devoted to their skill – however, they also fear too much about their performance.

Strategy 4: Social Engagement (Extraverted and Turbulent [E__-T] types)

The last strategy is adopted by friendly, energetic and success-driven types. Social Engagers tend to be fidgety, perfectionistic individuals, disposed to experiencing both very positive and very negative emotions. Their inquisitiveness and preparedness to work hard also mean that they are typically high-achieving, even if quite sensitive people. They place a lot of importance on other people's sentiments; they value their social status and are keen to prosper in everything they do.

Once you have completed the test which takes about 10 minutes, you will be able to see the following as an example:

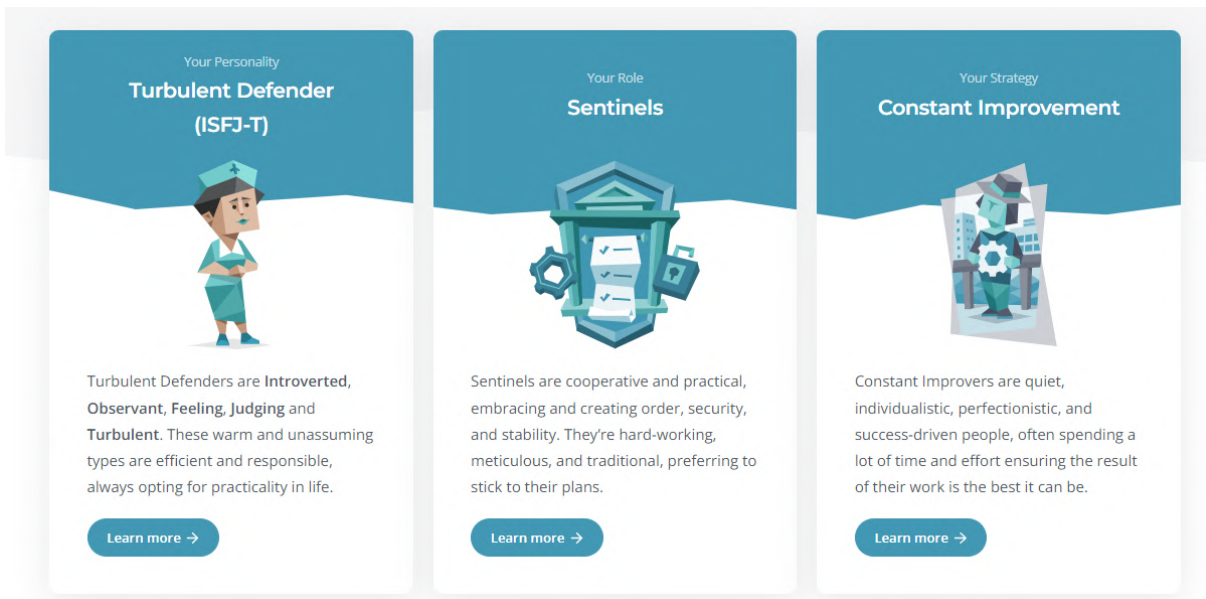


Figure 4: Summary of your personality type (e.g. ISFJ-T), your role (e.g. Sentinel) and strategy (e.g. Constant Improvement)

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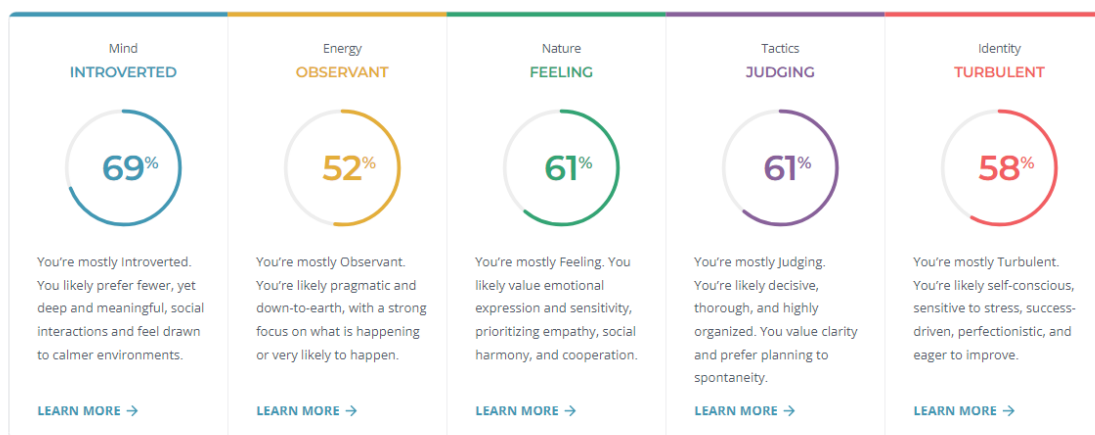


Figure 5: Your score in each of the 5 personality aspects (out of 100%)

Now, for a second just imagine if you have all this information about yourself within a couple of minutes, what progress you can make about your individual lifelong learning pathway but so much more importantly, you will be able to understand the athlete who you are coaching in so much more depth. You will be able to get the best out of them and help them attain their goals. What an excellent tool for coaches!

COACH COMPETENCIES:

INTRAPERSONAL KNOWLEDGE (SELF-REFLECTION)

Sport coaches are expected to have a wide range of competencies and skills in order to fulfil their coaching responsibilities efficiently when working with different athletes. Coaching frameworks around the world speaks about 3 layers of knowledge a coach needs to possess:

- **Professional knowledge (the sport, athletes, coaching pedagogy)**
- **Interpersonal knowledge (social context of the sport & relationships with stakeholders/participants)**
- **Interpersonal knowledge (coach's beliefs, values, attitudes and skills that form influence coaching practice)**

Through formal coach education programmes professional knowledge and to some degree interpersonal knowledge is taught quite well. Interpersonal knowledge is also picked up along the way coaching different types of athletes and interacting with their parents. **But so little emphasis is placed on intrapersonal knowledge.** Although the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) promotes intrapersonal knowledge, very little coach education programmes have adopted this suggestion and coaches are almost left to their own devices to develop this component. One of the reasons for this might be that formal coach education programmes are already filled with so much information about sport skills that there simply is not space and time for intrapersonal knowledge development. So, what now? Will coaches never develop this aspect? It should not be like that – federations who draw up their coaches education programmes need to include more intrapersonal knowledge curricula to ensure it is well practiced and through practice it becomes mastered.

When we speak about intrapersonal knowledge, REFLECTIVE PRACTICE & CRITICAL REFLECTION are considered essential aspects of coach learning. It is seen as a key tool for understanding and enhancing coach learning and raising the standard of coaches. Self-reflection has the potential to provide a link between knowledge gained from professional experience, observations, coaching theory and education. There is a saying which is so true: "Ten years of coaching without reflection is simply one year of coaching repeated ten times" (Gilbert & Trudel).

Coaches who deliberately engage in reflection can:

- Promote critical thinking
- Improve quality of coaching experience
- Develop leadership capability
- Improve learning
- Increase self-awareness

There are two categories of reflection: Reflective Practice and Critical Reflection. Let's have a look at what it entails:

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Can be described as (present focused) reflection-in-action or (delayed) reflection-on-action

Both are used with the aim to improve athlete and coach outcomes

CRITICAL REFLECTION

It refers to a deeper and more personal reflection level. It requires coaches to look beneath the surface and reflect on their own values, beliefs, coaching philosophy, strengths, deficiencies & motivation

The goals are to question the way they think (though processes), shift their perspectives and identify new and creative ways of thinking

Critical reflection is seen as a tool to equip coaches with a mirror in which they can see their own programmes and practices

Critical reflection will help the coach to become more responsible for their actions



Figure 6: Reflective Practice vs Critical Reflection

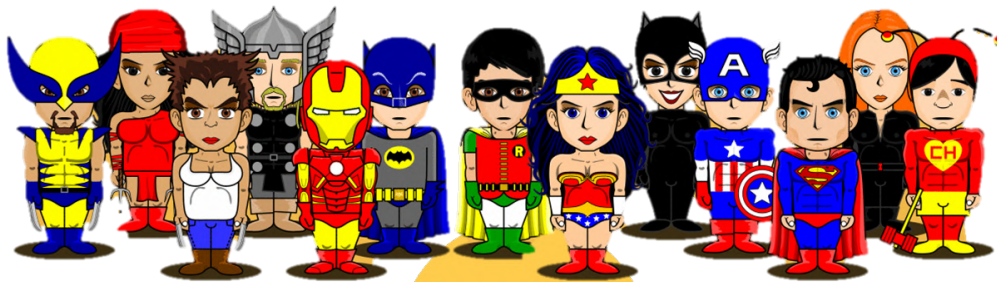
Some coaches do apply reflective practice without actually knowing they are doing it. Let's take an example: you started with a couple of new drills and is not 100% sure how they will turn out. You pack out the equipment and the athletes start the drills, but after a couple of rounds you see that the drill needs adjustment. This is reflection-in-action so that your coaching can become better instantly. An example of reflection-on-action is when you have a couple of minutes at the end of the day and you contemplate about an athlete that needs to compete at a national championships in a few weeks and you are still struggling with a specific aspect. You think of changes which can be made in the next training sessions.

Critical reflection is so much deeper and intense and is not something an app or an article will teach you how to do. Coaches need a structure to guide the complex process of critical reflection in their own learning experiences. **Critical reflection is a skill that should be taught rather than assumed.** There are very limited information on critical reflection for sport coaches in South Africa. It should be the role of coach educators to make it part of coach education programmes as soon as possible.

COACH, HOW DO YOU LEARN?

Yes, coaches are supposed to learn every day. But isn't that what formal coach education was all about when you did it 10 or 20 years ago?

The question you should be asking, are your coaching methods still valid in today's day and age? Will you use your coaching methods to coach the best in your sport code? Why? Why not? Learning should be fun, continuous and even relentless! The way you learn information should not be boring and masses of information all at once. Let's have a look at how much information your brain can hold, but more importantly retain!



THINK
OUTSIDE
THE BOX



DID YOU KNOW?

1. The memory capacity of the brain is around **2.5 million gigabytes of digital memory.**
2. Humans forget approximately **50% of new information within an hour** of learning it.
3. **Within 24 hours, that number goes up to an average of 70%!**

Figure 7: How much information does your brain retain after a coach education workshop?

Now you know the reason why you cannot retain information from your coach education programmes which are organized on a yearly basis. It is quite a pity. But there must be another way in which information can be retained. Yes there is. When you want to master a specific skill, it is about the small, consistent steps taken every day. Why don't we approach coach education in the same manner? Why should it be limited to a levels course or a CPD workshop once a year? What if you were able to learn information about your sport, sport science, mental toughness, self-reflection etc. on a platform which is designed specifically for coaches? I would certainly subscribe for this. However, it should not only be reading work as all of us learn in different ways. There are different learning styles and coach educators need to take into account that coaches learn differently:

- **Verbal** - You learn through talking.
- **Visual** - You learn through pictures / videos / images.
- **Musical** - You prefer sounds or music to help you learn .
- **Kinaesthetic** - You learn with your hands, body and sense of touch .
- **Logical/Mathematical** - You learn through using your logic, reasoning and sequences.
- **Social** - You like to learn new things as part of a group. Explaining your understanding to a group helps you learn.
- **Solitary** - You like to work alone - you use self study and prefer your own company when learning.

By taking into account that coaches need a wide variety of learning modalities when planning their coach education programmes, coach educators will be able to reach a much broader base of coaches and the coaches will actually be able remember some of the information, never mind apply it to their daily practice.

COACH, HOW DO YOU TEACH?

This is probably one of the most difficult questions a coach can answer. If you think carefully about your answer, you will never get to just one answer...and you should not. A couple of decades ago, the authoritarian manner of coaching was the only way of coaching, but luckily many coaches have walked away from this type of coaching. This is partly due to the client which is standing in front of you. The athlete is the one holding the power nowadays. If the athlete is 'not gelling' with the coach, the coach is dropped and the athlete moves to another coach. This is the world we live in and the generation we are coaching. So, what does that mean? **You should be like a chameleon when you coach an athlete.**

Let's look at some practical tips:

- Most importantly, **understand the athlete you are coaching** - Ask as many questions needed about them understand them and know a bit about their sporting and social background.
- Ask them about their **favourite subject(s) at school** - Why? Kids who like mathematics are your analytic athletes and they will learn differently than the ones who like languages for example.
- In addition to knowing if they are predominantly left or right brain, you also need to figure out which **method they prefer to learn a new skill** - For example when you teach a skill, you can teach it verbally, visually, kinaesthetically, or logically. Some athletes will not respond to words, but when you show them a video they immediately associate with what you want to convey
- **Find common ground** - An athlete will feel more comfortable with you as a coach if there is some common ground between you - for example you both like to watch the Winter Olympics. This allows you to create bond outside of the sport you are coaching.
- **Make sure they understand your 'coaching language'** - Many times coaches are using 'adult coaching language' and athletes are just not understanding what you mean. You need to speak on their level and use examples which they can relate to - use your imagination and get down to their level.

- **Speak to your athlete about what they expect** - Coaching is a two- way street - the athlete should express what they want to achieve in the sport and how they will be able to get there - then it is your responsibility to explain to them the pathway to get to this dream. The athlete will then either follow or deviate from this pathway.

- **Unique opportunity to instill sportmanship** - As a coach you have the unique opportunity to teach athletes about sportmanship and how to handle difficult situations during competitions. How do they handle cheating? How do they handle defeat? How do they handle winning? How do they handle comments made by other players/athletes? How do they handle comments made by parents? It is your responsibility to guide them through these situations with the hope they will remember your advice when adversity strikes.

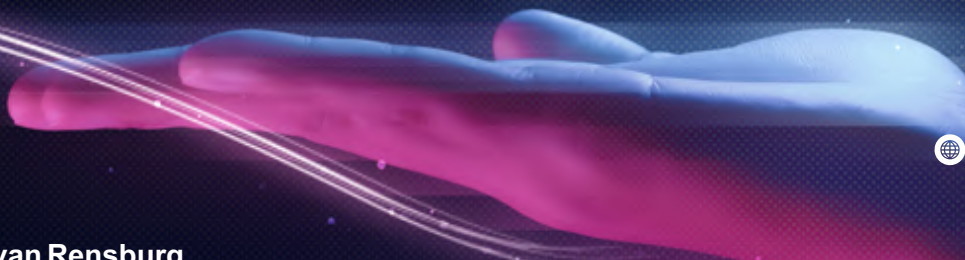
These are only a few aspects which you can use when teaching your athletes. Obviously each sport has their own set of moral values which should also be taught by you. It is always a good idea to broaden your knowledge on the topic of teaching. The more knowledgeable you become, the better your athletes will understand and ultimately the better they will be able to manage their sporting careers.

COACH, ARE YOU A MENTOR FOR OTHER COACHES?

Mentorship in South African sport has come and gone for many years, but still we are not much further. It is such a basic principle, but yet South African coaches are really struggling with this concept. It might be that coaches don't want to share their 'special secret' and eventually improve another coach and lose athletes to this coach. It might be that coaches are just not into sharing information as it takes time away from themselves. It can actually be a variety of factors. In some sports, there are good mentorship programmes which are quite effective. It depends on the people who run the project. If they want the project to succeed, it will. Coaches are always saying that they 'want to give back to the sport' – isn't mentorship part of giving back to the sport? Will you as a master coach not be able to make the sport better by providing young coaches with direction? You decide. Imparting your wealth of knowledge onto young coaches who lack experience is a rewarding feeling, especially if you are nearing your retirement. Yet, you should not have to wait that long. There are many young coaches that already have many national athletes and can share their experiences with other coaches who are still trying to get to that level. Coach educators should make mentorship part of the coach education programme in an informal manner, i.e. sharing success stories of a coach with other coaches as part of a circular or in a more formal manner as part of a mentorship programme for your sport. In my opinion, every coach can teach something to another coach and in the same breath, learn something from another coach. This is what lifelong learning is all about.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Coaching. What a great occupation. Many call it a 'calling'. It should be a calling. If you see it as work, you have somewhere along the way lost your passion for your sport. You should be excited to impart knowledge onto your athletes and fellow coaches. In the same breath, you should also be excited to empower yourself even further. Don't get stuck doing the same thing every day. Challenge yourself to new ideas, new teaching methods, new information, new science. Don't be afraid of change, embrace it. Keep your eyes open for new learning opportunities around the corner!



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