

The Join

Simon Harling chat – continued

“And it's at that junction - The join - that interests me. Where coaches have been told what to do and how to do it to the best of their ability and now it no longer works.

That join is where good coaches are created. And I'm ok with it not being called mindset. I'm ok with it just being what we do. But, if we look at where that join occurs it is at this point that we need to take on a new perspective, take on new information, with an open and curious mind and be persistent with it until it works.

And that is what interests me. Creating good coaches with mentors who know the shift in perspective will work, in time, with persistence and good grace.” Simon Harling

Now we are getting down to the nitty-gritty of Coaching and Coach Development. If we can arm coaches with a toolbox of options the next question (and the one that you have intimated) is how and when do they change the learning tool? When do they choose a new word or target or analogy or task to try to overcome a problem in progress? Best to get straight to the point here – there is no ‘*Chapter 12 – what to do next*’ that will set out this answer.

The ‘junction’ or ‘join’ that Simon mentions is the central factor in all teaching. We are seldom challenged as a coach when progress is consistent and appropriate. The problem is that in my 57 years I have never had periods of consistency in progression that last more than minutes, hours or days. Every individual attempt at an activity by an athlete will result in a multitude of outcomes. Some will be mighty close to what is being sought, others will be near catastrophic. As time unfolds and the movement patterns slowly (yes – slowly!) begin to be consistently better, the outcomes will trigger another ‘join’ or ‘junction’ where the coach will have to decide whether to stay put and consolidate or move forward.

How can we support and encourage coaches to be well placed to be effective under these circumstances?

Certainly in their certification and ongoing courses and workshops, the content should illustrate as many of these tools as possible in a practical setting. Get them out of their chairs and get them coaching with the other attendees. Keep returning to the delivery elements of the information in a practical setting. Set up the in-house and local workshop series that must, very quickly, follow the central courses (check out my thoughts on this in the *Club Director of Coaching* article, November 2021). Regardless of what infrastructures are put in place as support mechanisms, the bottom line is that the coaches simply have to try something different at some stage.

I would suggest that it might start by setting up a dialogue with the athlete that creates the overall philosophy or atmosphere or background to the relationship. Here I refer to the things that have worked for me (no guarantee they will work for anyone else) such as existing through *“we either win or learn.”* and *“next time.”* If things don’t progress as desired in a session the spectre of persistence, determination and patience quickly materialise as these two elements are activated. Academics could see this as effective use of ‘reflective practice’ where there is a near-continuous assessment going on during the session and beyond.

Let me expand this a little more. I have always suggested that after a fairly short time in the session when the athletes have spent some time in their activities the coach should ask - *“Is this working?” “Are they all engaged?” “Who needs my attention the most?” “Does each athlete have an appropriate prescription?”* At the end of the session, the same questions should be raised as the coach journeys home. I always found that the two aforementioned elements of reflection are really good to share with the individual athlete if there is time. What do they want to try again ‘next time’ or what have they ‘learned’ today, even when progress was less than expected, are great topics for them to own.

No matter how thorough the planning and how accurate the prescription there will be many things that slip through the net and it must also be accepted that anyone and everyone will have an ‘off’ day. I only trigger serious questions when a trend starts to take shape. Step in too early when something is a little awry and you may well interrupt a learning cycle that is underway. Step in too late and things might be a little tougher (but never unsurmountable).

Don’t be disheartened if it doesn’t quite go to plan this time. Forgive yourself and try again, and again. Your athletes are worthy of your perseverance.

Kelvin B. Giles MA, CertEd, AS
January 2022