

## Reflection

Coaching is a complex, dynamic social activity that requires coaches to have technical, teaching, communication and management skills. Coaches learn these skills through a variety of methods including formal qualifications like the RFU Level 1 and 2, informally through Continuous Personal Development courses, learning from their playing days and by observing other coaches.

Research has shown, however, that one of the most common, and most effective ways of learning is by doing – experiential learning - as academics call it. Learning by doing is how most adults learn most things – we do something, think about how we did it, then do it better the next time. The 'thinking about how we did it' is known as reflective practice and research from other fields such as healthcare and education suggests reflection is the most effective way to learn and for many of those disciplines it is the primary learning method employed by learners.

To be fully effective however, reflective practice must also be critical. By that we mean the reflection has to go deeper than simply describing what happened in a session. Coaches need to analyse the outcomes of the session or game, compare it with the intended objectives, and ask themselves whether those objectives were achieved. Often in coaching we get 'surprises' – things that didn't go according to plan – and it is these surprises that can kick off our thought processes.

In order to be truly effective though, reflection has to question the underlying assumptions about what you do and how you do it. That's not easy – by definition assumptions are often hard to uncover and discuss. To help coaches do that they can ask themselves a series of questions in a reflective conversation – questions like:

- What happened?
- How do I feel about that?
- What was good and bad about it?
- What sense can I make of it?
- What else could I have done?
- If it happens again what will I do?

Club Coach Coordinators can encourage reflective practice by promoting the concept of reflective practice to their numerous club coaches. Encourage them to ask themselves the above questions and find out how it went.

There are many tools available to us that can facilitate reflection, including coaching diaries, video, and coaching clinics. These will work in different ways for different people but research in other fields has shown that talking about what we do to others – coaches, partners, players – is one of the most effective ways of having those reflective conversations. In reflective practice then 'talking to myself' is not the 'only way to get any sense'.

Finally, you might ask 'why should I try to change what I do? I'm pretty good!'

Here's Wayne Smith, All Blacks coach, on the qualities needed to be a good coach:

"The key thing I think is the openness to learning. I think coaches need to look at things on merit and understand that just because they've played the game, they don't know everything about it. Having a passion to improve is important. Knowing that you are part of the problem means that you can also be part of the solution."

If you would like to know more about reflective practice please feel free to contact me at [johndpeel@yahoo.com](mailto:johndpeel@yahoo.com)

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