

# Creating a culture of coach support and development

Like playing, coaching is not always an exact science. Even the most experienced coaches are learning every day. While having all your coaches undertake formal or accredited coach training is a great move forward, it is still only the first step.

The next step is to explore how clubs can create a culture of coach development and support.

What actually is culture anyway?

In her review of the poor results of the Australian Swimming Team at the 2012 London Olympics, ethical leadership expert Dr. Pippa Grange included perhaps the best explanation of what defines culture:

*"... a complex, multi-faceted and multi-layered phenomenon that is socially learned and transmitted between people. It is about behaviours, beliefs, symbols, norms and expectations. It grows over time and can be directed and shaped with strong leadership and sound methodologies."*

It's a complex definition but if we identify the key points it becomes a little easier to get our mind around and start to apply the definition to your club:

- Culture is about the behaviours of our club
- It is shaped by club leaders
- It is strong processes and methodologies

A club with a strong culture of supporting and developing coaches is one where the committee and club leaders put in place resources, processes and methodology to support and develop coaches that is adhered to and improved over time.

So, apart from putting coaches into formal coach accreditation training how else can committees create this culture where they are continually supporting and developing their coaches?

## Coach development objectives

One sport that has done a significant amount of research into how to create a culture of developing and supporting coaches is Netball Australia.

Netball Australia have published two reports – *Netball Australia Coaching Blueprint* and *Netball Australia Coach Approach* – under their Netball Coaching Blueprint and can be accessed through the Netball Australia website.

Many other sports have also spent significant amounts of time and money developing resources for coaches so make sure you have a look at the websites of your State and National Sporting Associations to see what resources they have available. Don't be afraid also to contact your Association, State or National body to talk you through the resources your sport already has in this area.

Remember, significant work has already been undertaken about how to support and develop coaches so don't re-invent the wheel, tap into the resources and experienced coaches already within your sport.

## **Netball Australia – Four steps of coach development and support**

Netball Australia have broken their coach development strategy down into four steps:

- Recruit
- Train
- Support
- Retain

While your club is likely to apply this framework differently to Netball Australia as they are coming at the coach development from a whole of sport perspective, the principles are easily transferable to club level.

### **Recruit**

When recruiting coaches it is important to understand that most are simply volunteers and as such will have the same barriers and apprehensions as any other volunteer.

*The Market Segmentation for Sports Participation – Volunteers 2012 -2013* Research commissioned by the Australian Sports Commission explored how “to develop targeted and effective volunteer recruitment and retention strategies ... by understanding the attitudes, motivators, needs and barriers that underlie the decision of Australians to volunteer in sport ...”

One of the biggest barriers to volunteering identified in the research was the emotional barrier that people often felt a fear, shyness and uncertainty about their ability to undertake the role successfully.

People not knowing how to undertake a volunteer role is a major barrier and when you consider the responsibilities of a coach it is little wonder that many people are daunted and subsequently decline to take up a position because they are unsure how to undertake the role successfully.

So it is really important for clubs when recruiting coaches that clubs allay the initial fear, shyness and uncertainty of the potential coach by not only having a clear understanding of the role and its expectations, but that they also have a clear vision of how the club will train, develop and support the coach on their coaching journey.

Not only does a great culture of coach support and development overcome the very common emotional barriers many coaches have, but it also significantly raises the profile of coaching within the club. Again this will make it significantly easier to recruit coaches year-on-year and develop your club's recruitment pathway.

### **Train**

The second stage of the Netball Australia Coach Development objectives is to train the coaches. We have already covered formal accreditation training programs ([which you can find here](#)) and qualifications offered by most sports but this once off training should not be the end of your club coach training program.

Your club's internal coach training and development can be undertaken in many different ways but ideally your strategy would include the following:

- Induction
- Ongoing training on the different facets of their role
- Review and feedback by more experienced coaches

## Induction

Each year there should be a formal “induction” for each coach where somebody from within the club provides as much of the information as possible required by coaches at the start of their season. For all volunteer roles, but especially coaches, clubs need to reduce the amount of learning on the job, especially for information that can easily be transferred from year to year.

The information to be provided to all coaches at the beginning of each year is diverse but could include:

- Committee expectations around performance, culture and behaviour
- Background information about the club and the team
- Information about players and their progress through their own personal development plans. This is really important for juniors as they progress through the age levels but is equally important for senior players. For example, if a player is unable to undertake a specific skill, then if the new coach knows this they can start to immediately focus on the skill. However, if it takes them half a season to discover what the previous coach already knew, then this is time lost and an opportunity cost to the club.
- What are the resources the club has to offer and who can help them in their role? So often it takes new coaches time to work out who can help them, which again, is time lost instead of being able to go directly to the person and invite them into the program for the year.
- Who are the different stakeholders the coach needs to communicate with and how do they prefer to receive information and when? For example the committee may wish to have a quarterly report whereas some parents like to get weekly feedback so it is so much more productive if the coach knows this information from the outset.

There is also a lot of information about your competitors that often is not passed on from coach to coach, to the detriment of the team. This is just a sample of the information that coaches would love to know about their:

- Club
- Team
- Players
- Competitions
- Opposition and rivals

Successful clubs create a coach induction process that simply becomes part of the culture of your club.

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