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PYEONGCHANG-GUN, SOUTH KOREA - FEBRUARY 13: (L-R) Gold medalist Chloe Kim of the United States and bronze medalist Arielle Gold of the United States pose during the victory ceremony for the Snowboard Ladies' Halfpipe Final on day four of the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympic Games at Phoenix Snow Park on February 13, 2018 in Pyeongchang-gun, South Korea. (Photo by David Ramos/Getty Images)

Message from the
Chief of Sport Performance
Alan Ashley



Welcome back to Olympic Coach! We hope your 2018 is off to a great start. This year has been filled with outstanding performances at the PyeongChang Olympic Games including historic performances in cross country skiing and curling and a “Best in the World” performance by the Paralympic Team winning the overall and gold medal count. We are so very proud of our Team USA athletes in how they showed grit and resilience competing on the world’s stage and continued to inspire generations of Americans with their courage, spirit and love of sport. This was a great way to start 2018 and I am thankful to the athletes, their coaches and the NGBs for such good work in representing Team USA.

In this issue of Olympic Coach, we are excited to share a couple of similarly-themed articles that focus on “getting better at getting better”. Our Team Behind the Team is always seeking ways in which we can support athlete performance – considering how best to meld the science and practice to support the Team USA athletes to achieve their personal bests. We feel that it’s equally important to consider how to improve coach performances. How can we positively impact coach preparation and performance so that those – who typically are behind the scene supporting others – can develop into continual learners and strive for their own personal bests. What we’re going to do in coming issues is address how we can become better at coach development – through programming, networking, educational resources – all ideas considered on ways to improve the level of coach performance in the U.S. We’ll consider this a personal investment in becoming better coach developers. Our athletes deserve it, and so do our coaches.

As always, we’re grateful for your support of Team USA and your interest in Olympic Coach. We look forward to continuing to engage with you in 2018, and more inspiring performances by the world’s greatest athletes – Team USA.

Getting Better at Getting Better

Vern Gambetta, Founder, The GAIN Network

Coaches today face different challenges than I did when I started coaching in 1969. In my 48-year coaching career, the world has changed dramatically, but now it is changing at a faster rate than ever before. More data is being created, and faster, with 2.5 being produced each day! That is the equivalent of 250 Libraries of Congress of new information being created each day. Add the bombardment of social media and instant communication, and there seems to be less time to reflect.

We cannot ignore these societal changes. Some may make our lives better, but we also cannot do what we have always done. Coaches must adapt – not by compromising standards and lowering expectations, but by being more professional and reaffirming values that can be learned through sport.

As coaches, we are change agents. Therefore, we must lead change, not follow or react to change. We must learn how to learn better to get better at getting better. We must get better every day. That is the supreme challenge we face today as coaches.

George Leonard once said, “mastery is not about reaching perfection, but rather comes from maintaining a particular mindset as you move along the path of improvement in building your skills or overcoming challenges in any endeavor.” Getting better is about the path to mastery. Forty-eight years into my coaching journey, I am convinced that our biggest gains in sport – as well as the so-called marginal gains – will come from how we get better at getting better: how we improve our teaching, how we make practice and training more meaningful, and how effective we are as difference makers. Personally, this a major focus for the rest of my career.

Somehow, with the embrace of technology and social media, we have lost our understanding of fundamental pedagogical principles. The coaching process has a deep foundation in pedagogy, supported by science, forged in experience and tested in the competitive arena. Your classroom as a coach is the field, court, track, gym or pool. As a coach, you are a teacher. Coaching is teaching! I fear we have allowed technology to replace the personal element of coaching and teaching. Coaching is a high-touch process of connecting with the athlete to impart the necessary information in a manner they can use.

We must recognize that coaching is a creative process. What differentiates the good from the great coach is the ability to see the same athlete, the same skill, the same movement and see what others cannot or have not seen yet. Coaching is constant iteration, prototyping, tinkering to get it right for the athlete. The coaching process is not a reductionist, paint-by-the-numbers algorithm. A creative coaching process recognizes that the body is smart.

Creative coaching begins with instilling a foundation of basics in the athlete that is then built upon. Once foundations are established in an athlete, the coaching process continues with progressively



more difficult and challenging movement problems for the athlete to solve. The creative coaching process trusts that the athlete will be able to “figure it out,” building their personal answers to movement puzzles on the foundation of basics. The final solution that the athlete comes to may not meet the criteria of “perfect technique” or ideal training, but it works for that athlete. Getting it to work is the measure of good coaching. Use all your senses and follow your instincts to put the athlete in a position to be able succeed in the competitive arena.

The fastest way for a coach to get better and become more creative is to get smarter. Great coaches are learners. Nobody is holding you back. You can learn and get smarter. The learning can be formal or informal, but the key is to keep learning and growing. Arie de Geus said it best when he said, “probably the only sustainable competitive advantage we have is the ability to learn faster than the opposition.”

Know where to learn. Get beyond the hype and marketing and look for substantive material. Be careful of evidence-based claims. Ask yourself where is the evidence? Is there practice to back up the evidence? What is the why? What to do and how to do it are just not good enough. You must be able to reproduce it – to apply it. Always default to training principles and do not forget common sense. Be informed by science but not driven by it. Coaching is a careful blend of art and science. Learn to trust your instincts. If your instincts and experience tell you something is not right, then follow your instincts.

Expand your horizons. The best coaches go outside their coaching specialty and outside of sport to seek continual improvement and find new ideas. I will never forget asking Eddie Jones, the head coach of England Rugby, where he got an idea. His answer was quite revealing: the Belgium women’s field hockey team! Some may ask what that has to do with rugby. Eddie made the connection to make him and his team better. That is why he is a great coach; he leaves no stone unturned in his pursuit of being the best. We must recognize that the coaching journey parallels the athlete journey – trying, failing, getting up again and moving forward. As we grow and get better, our athletes grow and get better.

Great coaches who epitomize coaching excellence innovate; they are open to new ideas and are constantly learning. The coaches who are average imitate. They do what they have always done, and they do not take risks or try anything new for fear of failure. Do not be afraid to fail. Repeating the same coaching process every year – in my experience -- will lead to staleness and lack of success in the long term.

I believe the answer to the most important questions in coaching lies in continuous professional development. Continuous professional development is not just going to coaching clinics or symposiums. It is part of the daily routine of coaching. How much time do you devote each day and each week toward your professional development?

Here is what some of the best have done. Juan Carlos Osorio, after being pushed to resign by the New York Red Bulls, immediately went and spent six weeks at FC Barcelona with Pep Guardiola and then spent six more weeks at Bayern Munich with Louis Van Gaal. He did this to get his career back on track and to get better. Now he is recognized as one of the most cerebral tacticians



in the game and is NOW the manager of Mexico's men's national soccer team. Joe Vigil, Ph.D., is a great track and field coach and mentor to many, including me. He does an hour of professional development reading each morning at 5:00 am. He has been coaching for close to 70 years and is now 89 years old! Nort Thornton, one of the greatest swim coaches ever, shares ideas from books we have read and challenges other's ideas on training on a periodic basis. He has been coaching for more than 60 years and is in his late 70s.

Continuous professional development will help you answer the questions that matter most: what do you know, what do you not know, what is your plan to reconcile what you do not know with what you do know, where do you learn, who do learn from, how do you learn, how do you communicate and are you communicating effectively? Let the examples above inspire you to remember you are never too old or too knowledgeable to keep learning. Keep learning and keep growing. Always remember we coach people, not athletes or sports. We must emphasize the process, not the outcome. Continuous professional development is the way to model those tenets, as well as model the principle of lifetime improvement to all people we coach and influence.

New ideas will arise to challenge you. Just when you think you have it figured out, something new will come along. For me, it is mastering technologies and then figuring out which will make me better and more productive. The only way you can do that is through continual professional development. Christopher Morley said it best: "read, every day, something no one else is reading. Think, every day, something no one else is thinking. Do, every day, something no one else would be silly enough to do. It is bad for the mind to be always part of unanimity."

Never stop learning and challenging yourself to get better. Stay ahead of the curve and be proactive. Do not copy and follow, but rather, innovate and lead. Get out of your comfort zone.



PYEONGCHANG-GUN, SOUTH KOREA - FEBRUARY 16: U.S. Olympians JJ Thomas and Shaun White attend the USA House for Order of Ikkoos at the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympic Games on February 16, 2018 in Pyeongchang-gun, South Korea. (Photo by Joe Scarnici/Getty Images for USOC)

Regardless of how many years you have been coaching, always approach what you do with a beginner's mind ("Shoshin" in Japanese). Never lose this perspective, because it is full of possibilities. It helps to see with a child's eyes. It is seeing what is actually there, as opposed to seeing what we think is there. Erase confirmation bias. Expect nothing, and you will be surprised with what you see.

Getting better, step by step –some practical pointers:

- Have a clearly defined vision and mission statement. Turn the words into action and live them in coaching and in life. The vision statement is a statement of purpose; it is why you do what you do. The mission statement is a clear description of the route; it is how you will do it.
- Practice daily self-reflection, and make it a habit. Debrief after every training session. It can be formal or informal; do whatever fits your situation. Keep a journal and answer these questions: What did I plan to do? Did it get done? Was it exceptional, average or good? Why and why not? What do I need to do better next time? Taking time to answer these questions is a simple but effective way to constantly improve.
- Read everything you can – read books, articles websites and blogs. Learn from anyone you can. Try to have a focus or the theme to direct your reading. Take notes. Discuss your reading with others.
- Write – keep a journal. Tie this to your self-reflection and debrief. Take notes on your reading and things you hear or read.
- Do it yourself –try it and feel it. There is no better way to teach a skill than to learn it yourself. That will give you a feel for what the athlete has to do when they are learning.
- Network & Collaborate –work together with someone. Together is better. Seek diverse opinions and critical evaluation of your work.
- Find a mentor both in and out of coaching. Find someone who has been there before and is willing to share their success and failures.
- Go outside your sport and outside of sport – go far afield. I have found a wealth of ideas looking at design thinking. Look at the performing arts.
- Know what you know, and know what you do not know. Be confident, but never be constrained by either.
- Remember that communication is the essence of good coaching. It is also the cornerstone of getting better. It demands intention and attention: intention that the meaning be shared and attention that it has been shared. Pay attention!
- Observe –watch good coaches coach, and for that matter, watch bad coaches coach. You can learn what to do and what not to do. Watch and read interviews of coaches.
- Specialize in being a generalist –get uncomfortable and go outside your area of expertise. Make connections between seemingly unconnected areas. This will allow you to make more diverse connections to deepen, as well as broaden, your knowledge.
- Practice tech free coaching days
- Leave your iPhone and iPad in the office. Put the Go Pro away.
- Stop! Look! Listen! Heighten and sharpen your observational skills. Don't worry about bar speed; watch the lift. Turn off the GPS and watch the athlete move. See how they generate those numbers that you have been gathering.
- Throw away the wellness questionnaire and talk to the athletes. Get to know them as people.



Forget the triphasic workout, because all movement involves coordinated eccentric, isometric and concentric muscle action. Just coach! You will be surprised at what you have been missing. Use technology to complement what you do, not to replace it. Know yourself and never forget you are coaching people who run, jump, and throw.

- Perfect the eye test – sharpen your powers of observation. See with new eyes. See unfamiliar in the familiar. Know what to look for and what to ignore. Beware of confirmation bias.
- As Seattle Seahawks coach Pete Carroll says, “learn from the learner.” Who better to learn from than the athletes we are teaching? They are doing it. We can get feedback that will make both coach and athlete better.
- As Frank Dick said, practice the Four R’s daily
- Reason –know why are you doing what you are doing.
- Reality – know exactly what you are doing.
- Reflection –know what did you learn from what you did.
- Response – know and take appropriate action on what you will do differently.
- Always remember it always comes back to the basics:
- Learn the basics.
- Understand the basics.
- Master the basics.
- Teach the basics.
- Execute the basics flawlessly.
- Never stray far from the basics.



PYEONGCHANG-GUN, SOUTH KOREA - MARCH 17: Daniel Crossen of the United States competes in the Men's 7.5 km Classic at Alpensia Biathlon Centre on Day 8 of the PyeongChang 2018 Paralympic Games on March 17, 2018 in Pyeongchang-gun, South Korea. (Photo by Maddie Meyer/Getty Images)

From your first day of coaching you can get better. After all, this is what we expect from our athletes. Why should we expect anything less of ourselves? Accept the challenge and start getting better at getting better right away.

Below is a list of resources on getting better at getting better that I have found useful. This is by no means exhaustive, but rather primarily contains books I have in my library that I have read. Use it as a starting point. I am now in the process of re-reading some of these books and going through them all to review the annotations and underlines to put together an action plan of principles that we can all use as coaches. It is going to take some time, and I am interested in hearing from you about other resources and ideas in this area.

Finally, we will all get better at getting better by sharing. Please reach out and connect.

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Vern is considered the founding father of functional sports training. He has worked on product development, athlete and coach development on the national and international levels, with both amateur and professional teams and athletes. He has lectured and consulted internationally and has written extensively in the areas of physical training with a wide array of sports. To learn more about Vern, visit www.Gambetta.com.



This is Coaching

Chris Clements, People Optimization

How often do we take a look in the mirror? How often do we take a hard look? How often do we take a dose of our own medicine? This is coaching.

Coaches must fully accept that the result of an athlete's performance is the result of our coaching. We must pursue improvements in our coaching performance as much as we do in the performance of our athletes. We must be curious, open and willing to be challenged in our pursuit for further knowledge, driving our delivery as coaches and ultimately improving the ability of our athletes and teams to perform.

Personally, this pursuit of improvement started at an early age during my first physical education class. I was intrigued about the process and challenge of 'getting better' at any skill or game – the details, the progressions, the setbacks and the adjustments. My teacher at the time provided me with many strategies daily to be successful in a wide number of tasks and disciplines. As our curriculum changed, so did the task, but the skills he possessed to teach me to be better were consistent and successful.

I wanted to be able to do that too. This resulted in me earning my first gymnastics instructors badge by age eleven. The thirst for learning and teaching was evident. Twenty plus years later, the badges and certificates have accumulated on various levels, courts and fields, all fueled by a desire for 'checking in', a willingness to feel uncomfortable, a drive to challenge complacency, and my own curiosity. These are my performance check-ins.

We often create schedules which make us too busy to even think about taking time to reflect on ourselves and potentially learn. One may think, "what is the point if I am already a great coach? I coach one of the best teams/athletes in the world, country or state." On the other hand, one may think "I was great this season, they just didn't get it" or "I did not have the athletes or team to get the job done." But such results are our fault! Athlete performance is our responsibility

These performance check-ins I had with myself along my career to date certainly did not certify me as an 'expert coach,' even though a piece of paper may have said so. Most, if not all, of these were in classroom settings, under less pressure than my day-to-day, and certainly not necessarily as my athletes see me day in and day out. The real coaching lies within the ability to understand, develop and deliver the art and science of coaching. This does not come wrapped in a three-day conference or course. It takes years and years of experiences and coaching interactions.

This is not to say there is no use in these events. They are necessary, as they form the building block of knowledge of the necessary skills, tactics, theories and science behind the art of coach-

ing. There needs to be a shift, however, in the content delivered. The content delivered at these courses and conferences must be more suited to the actual skills needed to teach people rather than the latest and greatest drills.

We must create learning opportunities to challenge our coaching and teaching philosophies and our day-to-day coaching performance. The certificate is just a piece of paper. Therefore, my most valuable and hard-earned pieces of paper are stacked underneath or on top of these certificates. They are the ones where I took an honest and hard look at myself and asked others to do the same. This happened day in and day out because that was who I was as a coach.



PYEONGCHANG-GUN, SOUTH KOREA - FEBRUARY 23: U.S. Olympians Jessica Diggins and Kikkan Randall (C) pose for a photo with their coaches at the USA House at the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympic Games on February 23, 2018 in Pyeongchang-gun, South Korea. (Photo by Joe Scarnici/Getty Images for USOC)

The drive to earn certificates should be not to immediately update a resume, but to challenge the current coaching status. Performance in a coaching course is far outweighed by a coach's actual day-to-day performance.

This performance – the art and science behind coaching and the implementation of our coaching philosophy – are not easily measured or seen within match results, a competency-based assessment, or a course's performance evaluation. The number of coaching moments that we can have on a daily basis is endless. We must see and seek these opportunities to grow for not just our athletes and programs, but ourselves as well. These moments often do not occur on the field, track, or court – they take place in discussions off the field and passing comments. This coaching complements our athletes' training and competition, allowing us to develop and prepare for those 'big moments' of perfor-

mance coaching.

We should not, and cannot ask our athletes to perform at this level if we are not doing so ourselves in our own coaching performance. We cannot expect it to just happen when we wake up on game day. The daily opportunity we have to rehearse, execute and evaluate our performance on and off the court will allow us and our athletes to be ready for the moment, because we truly took and learned from every opportunity available to us along the way.

Along the journey I also realized that my sport was my topic and I needed to become an expert at teaching and managing people. I feel that a number of people look at this the opposite way and think, "I am an expert at my sport and the topic of teaching, coaching, managing people is one that I am not interested in or good at." We must be both. My background as a physical education teacher fueled my appetite and the desire after graduating for more knowledge across the board extended my interests even further by attending these numerous courses. Outside of the formal coaching courses and conferences, it was the connections with other coaches that motivated me—coaches who were not fixed in their ways, but willing to be present, discuss, share, challenge and test the non-traditional approaches to become a better coach.

Having these conversations, pushing for innovation, taking courses in other languages, applying experiences as a player, filming myself, implementing a consistent self-reflection practice, and understanding myself and others all have added to my ability to deliver as a coach today. These moments reinforced and challenged my abilities, sometimes failed and needed further investigation, but to be honest, they all truly shaped a more well-rounded coach than the one that, over twenty years ago, thought he already qualified as an expert with his first coaching badge.

Today, I am able to work with coaches on a day-to-day basis, helping them look at their performance in the training and competition environment. The process takes an almost forensic look at what coaches are aiming to deliver within their performance environment and the effect that it has on the performance of their athletes and programs. To be the best in the world, we must look at and look after ourselves as coaches with a supporting network that allows for performance gains that are not measured by wins and losses, but by delivery of the richest possible learning and performance environment for our athletes and ourselves.

Chris is currently an independent contractor for the United States Olympic Committee working within the team sports division as a teaching coach. He was the former U.S. Men's Field Hockey Team head coach, is an elite coach and coach educator for the Federation of International Field Hockey. He has also coached within the NCAA. Chris has a bachelor of education specializing in physical education and a graduate diploma in teaching and learning. He is also a graduate of the USOC National Team Coach Leadership Education Program. He runs his own performance coaching company, People Optimization.

Muscular Strength and Recovery

Kyle Skinner, University of Notre Dame
Tim Pelot, United States Olympic Committee

Introduction

At the elite level in modern day sport, there has been an increase over the last 50 years in the number of competitions played in a season. In sports like basketball, baseball, soccer, hockey and many others, athletes must withstand the stress and strain from playing over 60 games in a competitive season, which often requires competing in multiple games per week. Athletes competing in many sports are asked to compete for multiple teams (professional and international) year-round. This increased number of competitions and longer competitive seasons require elite athletes to remain in peak shape for longer than their predecessors. Because of these factors, along with the increased financial implications of elite sport, there is a heightened importance of recovery within and between matches during the competitive season.

This article will explore the link between muscular strength and physical recovery from high intensity sporting competitions. To better understand this relationship, there are several topics to dissect: sport quantified in the form of physiological load, the role of strength reserve, ability to repeat performance and neuro-mechanical efficiency. For the purposes of this article, strength will be defined as an athlete's ability to produce, absorb and reutilize force.

Sporting Actions and Load

In simple terms, physiological recovery is a process. Like all processes, recovery requires time to allow the body to bounce back to its normal homeostatic state, following the fatigue and wear and tear from high intensity training and competition. This process can include repairing damaged tissues, restoring energy stores and enzymes utilized for energy production, and restoring the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems. Recovery can be categorized in three terms: 1) immediate recovery between exertions, 2) short-term recovery between repeats and 3) training recovery between workouts, including competitions (Bishop 2008).

While physical recovery is quite complex, this article is only going to discuss how muscular strength may impact an athlete's ability to recover between high-intensity training bouts and high-intensity competitions. To better examine this relationship, it is worthwhile to view sporting actions as a metric of load and examine the effects they have on muscle function. In many field and court-based sports, athletes encounter numerous high-speed accelerations, decelerations and changes of direction. During these movements, enormous forces are being produced, absorbed and overcome. In a professional soccer match, players perform an average of 76 accelerations and 54 decelerations (Dalen et al. 2016). These actions ask players to overcome and produce forces in ranges of



three to 12 times an athlete's body weight. Such loads are extremely stressful on the athlete's body and a major source of fatigue and muscle damage. A sprinter will be exposed to forces equal to five times the athlete's body weight during the ground strikes that happen during early phases of acceleration. Mero and Komi (1987) found that sprinters can produce up to 48 watts per kilogram of body weight during the propulsive phase of sprinting at maximum velocity. For athletes that land from high-elevated positions, such as volleyball players, the athletes must overcome and absorb very rapid deceleration forces often when landing from their maximal jump heights. These forces can range of five to 13 times an athletes body weight. Such examples provide great insight and help us better understand the amount of force loads that athletes are exposed to during training and competition.

Many sporting actions are eccentric in nature and take place when a muscle contracts as it lengthens during of the absorption and reutilization of forces. Eccentric muscle actions are able to produce more force than both isometric and concentric muscle actions. As a result, eccentric muscle actions may be a source for both increased muscle soreness and damage (Eston, 1995). This relationship displays the potential for acceleration, deceleration and change of direction to be a possible mechanism for significant fatigue during a competition. Young et al. (2012) examined the relationship between movement demands as an indicator of muscle damage in Australian rules football. Using GPS to track movements and speed during matches, the authors concluded that the primary cause of muscle damage stems from high-intensity running, high acceleration/deceleration movements, and running with change of direction. Creatine Kinase is an enzyme found in the heart, brain and all skeletal muscle. CK levels in the blood have been associated with muscle damage, and as a result, CK is used to indirectly measure muscle damage (Baird 2012). Young et al. (2012) also used CK to indirectly assess muscle damage and found higher CK levels in athletes who performed more accelerations, decelerations and changes of direction during match play. By looking at sporting movements as a source of muscle damage, fatigue and load, connections between muscle strength and its potential to aid in recovery can be established.

Efficiency

When athletes perform heavy or ballistic strength training, the neuromuscular system adapts, and the nervous system improves its ability to better withstand force. This is done through improved neuromuscular signaling to specific muscle fibers, as well as the amount of signaling from the nervous system to the muscle. As a result, there is an increase in maximal force production and rate of force production. With specific training tactics, the body can learn how to activate larger muscle fibers at lower thresholds of signaling (Sale 1988). Training can also bring about positive changes to muscle and tendon interactions, allowing eccentric force to be reutilized, which can improve movement efficiency. This increased efficiency allows force production to be produced and maintained at a lower energy cost, improving endurance and recovery. Improving movement economy allows an athlete to have the power of a V8 engine while having the gas mileage of a 4-cylinder hybrid. This can allow a soccer player to maintain their speed for the duration of a 120-minute match, and such efficiency can heavily influence the outcome of the game.

In sports that combine high-speed and powerful movement and also require the athlete to have a large work capacity, efficiency provides the athlete the ability to conserve energy and have the fuel to repeat the high-intensity movements. Often in these sports, coaches will try to improve economy



and efficiency through endurance-based training means. While this may seem like a logical approach, it does not stress the musculature in the same way that high-speed sprints and changes of direction will during play. Endurance based training methods are not seen as sport-specific and coaches may not receive the performance improvements they are striving for with their athletes. To improve anaerobic running economy, it is recommended to address neuromuscular abilities. Mikkola et al. (2007) investigated changes in running economy in distance runners substituting 20 percent of endurance training for training aimed at improving neuromuscular performance (strength training). Their findings concluded that endurance training alone cannot improve anaerobic running economy, and that targeting improvements in neuromuscular performance are more essential at the higher velocities. Being efficient at high intensities and velocities allows athletes to recover better within matches as they can perform the same work without redlining.



GANGNEUNG, SOUTH KOREA - MARCH 18: The team United States celebrate winning the gold medal over Canada in the Ice Hockey gold medal game between Canada and United States during day nine of the PyeongChang 2018 Paralympic Games on March 18, 2018 in Gangneung, South Korea. (Photo by Buda Mendes/Getty Images)

Strength Reserve

Strength reserve is defined as the difference between absolute strength and the amount of strength required to perform a skill under competitive conditions (Bompa 2015). Athletes who possess a lower strength reserve will be operating at a higher intensity relative to their maximal. Because fatigue is highly related to the intensity with which exercise is performed, it is highly probable that these weaker athletes will experience more fatigue than their stronger counterparts. Strength reserve provides athletes with the capacity to continually perform high-intensity movements. During soccer matches, up to 18 percent of the game can be comprised high-speed accelerations, decelerations and changes of direction (Akenhead 2013). As a game progresses, fatigue accumulates during these actions. As a result, athletes must continually tap into their reserve to perform these highly demanding movement tasks.

Rosenblatt (2017) found that athletes with higher levels of relative strength were able to maintain their peak power output longer, could maintain their peak running speeds longer and had better neuromuscular function in comparison to their weaker teammates during tournament play. Being able to maintain high speed running and power late in games and during tournament play gives a team a significant advantage over their opponent. Additionally, high relative strength values may allow a team to play more aggressively during high-speed style of play. When an athlete lacks a large reserve, they will quickly burn through their abilities at the start of a match and will be forced to perform in competition closer to a true max intensity throughout the match. This higher intensity causes fatigue to accumulate faster, thus significantly decreasing performance at a faster rate and increasing the risk of injury. Being able to play at very high speed while working at a slightly lower intensity not only allows for improved recovery between high intensity bouts during games, but also improves an athlete's ability to recovery between competitions.

Repeatability

In field and court-based sports, athletes are often asked to perform numerous high-intensity bouts followed by incomplete rest periods. Volleyball, tennis and soccer are a few examples of sports where it is important to maintain performance of high-intensity movements with short rest periods. Being able to repeat high-speed athletic actions places a large load of stress on the neuromuscular system. Performing high-speed maneuvers in a fatigued state may ultimately be the deciding factor in the outcome of the competition. The ability to accelerate, change direction and jump has been significantly correlated to muscular strength, where strength is relative to an individual's body weight in addition to explosive strength. This relationship provides the ability to look at results when testing repeatability, as an assessment of strength and power repeatability. Repeatability is often assessed by having an athlete perform several maximal sprints with short reset periods; this allows the percentage of drop-off in performance to be assessed. Sheppard and Gabbett (2007) created a specific test for volleyball using specific movements found in the sport jumping and lateral running. The authors observed that athletes who possessed a higher maximal output maintain a better performance throughout the test of repeatability over their counterparts who had a lower maximal output. This result highlights the benefit of having a reserve, as discussed in the preceding paragraph. Athletes who have a better force-producing ability will continue to produce more force than their weaker counterparts during a match, since they will both be asked to compete at similar intensities.

The results of the study above are reinforced by Buchheit et al. (2010). This study investigated improvements following speed/agility training (neuromuscular improvements) compared to interval sprint training (improvements in endurance). This study tested high-level handball players and found that improving speed and agility was a superior method for improving repeat sprint ability over a more endurance-based training intervention. As a result of the relationship between speed/agility and neuromuscular strength and power, this may indicate that athletes who are stronger have a profound advantage to their weaker counterparts in sports where high volumes of high-intensity movements are followed by brief incomplete rest periods. By increasing the maximal force producing thresholds (strength), athletes can repeat high-intensity movement better, thus recovering more efficiently given shorter rest periods.

Proactive Recovery

Recovery is often viewed as a reactionary process that is done after a training session, practice or game. Modalities such as myofascial release (foam roll, massage, etc.), stretching, cryotherapy (ice baths, contrast showers, etc.), and many others are often applied after sessions with the goal of getting the body back to its previous state quicker. These are viable methods to promote recovery and aid performance but are reactionary in nature. By increasing muscular strength, a proactive approach to recovery is taking place. If an athlete's tissues have the resiliency to hold up during sporting actions, less damage is taking place. By exposing the tissues to eccentric exercises, the body can build a tolerance to the muscle damage and soreness associated with eccentric exercise. This can have a profound effect on the athlete's ability to bounce back during tournament settings that involve multiple competitions during a brief period.

Jones 2008 found that trained weightlifters have a significantly higher force/muscle cross-sectional area(CSA) in comparison to untrained lifters. This investigation provides good support for the need for athletes to be strong. In this study, stronger athletes were more capable and efficient when tolerating and accepting high forces. Greater has been attributed to greater force generating ability. As a result, athletes who possess a greater muscle CSA may be better equipped to tolerate and accept high forces than weaker athletes. This repeated-bout effect has shown that through repeated exposures to eccentric exercise, there was a reduction of muscle damage and soreness, along with a better ability to maintain force production abilities (Chen et al., 2009). Because of this, the body does not have to spend as much time repairing tissues between sessions. With the tissues being strong enough to handle the stress of training and games, athletes can be exposed to more training volume, which can have a positive effect on performance and injury prevention (Gabbett, 2016).

This increased strength can be thought of as adding money to the athlete's savings account. Every training, practice and game withdraws money from this savings account. If an athlete starts with \$10 in the account, as opposed to \$100, they will find themselves broke in no time. Increased muscular strength provides a proactive approach to increasing an athlete's ability to recovery by providing them the ability to not be broken down as easily from intense training. Clarkson (1988) investigated the impact of maximal eccentric contractions and found that after exposing a muscle to high-intensity eccentric exercise over time, the muscle will adapt, and it becomes more resistant to the damage caused by eccentric loading. This enhanced ability to tolerate load leads to muscle tissue being more robust and resilient. Rosenblatt (2017) discovered that elite athletes who are weaker and considered "unfit" may suffer from a lower quality of sleep when faced with training or competitions that are performed at higher loads than an athlete is currently exposed to. If sleep suffers, recovery will be significantly affected, causing significant decreases in performance. This is not to discount the benefits and use of reactive modalities to aid in the recovery process of athletes, but to highlight the usefulness of a proactive, strength-building approach in conjunction.

Muscular strength and strength training can have a profound effect on the ability of an athlete to recover from high-intensity bouts of exercise or when faced with playing multiple games during a week. By improving efficiency, strength reserve and repeatability, they can outwork their opponents as well as outlast them. Having higher strength threshold allows tissues to suffer less damage and repair themselves more quickly. These factors allow athletes to be able to get more out of their training, as



they will be able to handle a higher practice volume (reps), recover more quickly between practices, increase the number of quality sessions completed and avoid pesky overuse injuries that can lead to more days missed. As such, it would be advised to view strength and strength training as a key component to improving an athlete's ability to recover.

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PYEONGCHANG-GUN, SOUTH KOREA - FEBRUARY 12: Silver medalist Chris Mazdzer of the United States poses during the medal ceremony for the Luge Men's Singles at Medal Plaza on February 12, 2018 in Pyeongchang-gun, South Korea. (Photo by Adam Pretty/Getty Images)

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Getting Better at Getting Better: Coaches Ensuring the Success of Their Athletes – and Their Sport – Through a Commitment to Continuous Improvement.

Wayne Goldsmith

Change a life...become a coach.
Change the nation...coach the coaches.

Introduction

What is coaching? In a word, coaching is change.

People visit a financial coach to change their saving and spending habits, i.e., to make their financial situation better.

People book an appointment with a business coach to help change their business behaviours and practices, i.e., to make their business better.

People spend time with a life coach to change something about their life, i.e., to make their life better.

Athletes go to a swimming coach to change something about their swimming – to change a physical, mental, technical or strategic aspect of their planning, preparation or performance – i.e., to make their swimming better.

Players register to play basketball with a local club so that the coach can change something about their game, i.e., so they can play better.

It therefore follows, that coaches –and by extension coach educators – must be masters of change. Understanding change and how to inspire, encourage, grow and evolve change is at the very cornerstone of what coaching and coach education is all about.

Coaching is an art. It is the art of inspiring change through emotional connection. It is the capacity of a coach to connect with athletes – to understand them and their motivation for training and competing – that opens the door for the coach to be able to inspire meaningful change.

In this article, I will explore the concepts of “coaching” and “change” and how they are directly and intimately connected. In addition, I will discuss how coaches must develop a deep understanding of change through a commitment to continuous improvement, honest personal reflection and daily learning, which has the potential to inspire their athletes to achieve remarkable things.

Everyone Wants to Get Better

Competitive athletes want to get better. That is it. Period.

Competitive athletes have a drive, an instinct, a passion, a burning desire to be the best they can be. They are motivated to learn more, train harder, improve sooner and win often.

Coaches understand this competitive desire – this winning motivation – and understandably want to do all they can to help their athletes achieve success through the implementation of effective change.

There are countless books available on all aspects of change, change management and the change process. However, in spite of the best efforts of change management professionals to educate people on the importance of change, change still frightens people. It challenges people. It scares people and, as a result, people will often resist and reject change.

Yet everyone wants to get better. No one will resist or reject improvement. No one refuses an opportunity to become more than they are.

Athletes want to get better; and coaches are the agents of change to help athletes get better.

Understanding this, it is essential that coaches master the art of change – and to be able to inspire change in their athletes through a commitment to learning, continuous improvement and performance enhancement.

The Art and Science of Coaching: Two Sides of the Same Coin

Coaching – as is the case in many professions – is both an art and a science.

A person may learn the notes and understand how to play a piano, i.e., they've learned the science of playing a musical instrument called a piano. But a true pianist – someone who doesn't just play the piano, but who "feels" the rhythm and "hears" the melody – is demonstrating the art form of music.

You can learn how to paint a landscape by attending art courses or by studying art online, i.e., you can learn the science of mixing colours and of brush stroke techniques and how to use shades and shadows in painting. That is the science of painting landscapes. An artist, however, sees and feels the landscape. They try to place themselves into the image and become part of the landscape itself to gain a deeper understanding of its true nature.

In all professions, there's a blend of science – the "what" of the profession – and art - the "how."

In coaching, the science of sport – the sets, repeats, workout design, periodization, training load measurement, drills and skill development sessions – the "what" of coaching – is relatively easy to learn. The science of sport can be seen, can be measured and, most importantly, can be readily

taught to coaches through a range of traditional coach education and coach development activities such as courses, conferences, workshops and accreditation programs.

The *art* of coaching however – the subtle, intangible, difficult to see and hard to measure qualities of effective coaches and the very core of quality coaching – is far more challenging to teach, instruct and impart to coaches.

Yet it is the art of coaching which by and large underpins and drives the effectiveness of the science of sport. It is the coach's understanding of the "how" and the "why" – knowing when and how to apply the science of sport – that makes all the difference.

And this is the challenge for all coaches and indeed for coach developers.

If the art of coaching – which encompasses the aspects of coaching which are the most difficult to see, to hear and to feel – is so critically important, how do you master it?

Getting Better Never Stops: A Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Human beings are wired to learn. From our first breaths and our earliest steps, we are a learning species. It is our capacity to experience the world and to learn quickly and effectively from those experiences that enhances our capacity to survive and thrive on the planet.

It is also in our nature, once we have learned anything, to make it "our" thing. Once we learn something, we tend to seek to own it as the way that "we do it." It becomes that thing that we do – that we always do – and over time our resistance to changing "our" thing becomes greater and greater.

Coaches search tirelessly and continuously for "the" secret. They're all looking for "the" way that they can help all athletes and all teams in all situations be successful.

They attend courses, conferences and conventions always looking for that advantage, that edge, that new technique, that revolutionary technology that will transform their coaching, their program and their athletes.

And once they've found it – or once they believe they've found it – and it becomes "their" thing, then they become resistant to notions of change, improvement, enhancement and betterment.

Yet over the course of human history, we have learned time and time again that success is moving target, that looking backwards only slows down progress and that resisting change only holds back the endless possibilities that lie ahead.



GANGNEUNG, SOUTH KOREA - FEBRUARY 22: Team United States players pose in the goal prior to the Women's Gold Medal Game against Canada on day thirteen of the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympic Games at Gangneung Hockey Centre on February 22, 2018 in Gangneung, South Korea. (Photo by Frank Franklin II - Pool/Getty Images)

Why Getting Better at Getting Better is More Important Now than Ever

In the past, getting better was not all that important in coaching. You came up with a winning advantage: a new idea, a few tricks, a secret practice routine, an innovative new tactic or a smarter play. You won a few games – maybe achieved success for a season or two – and *your* way became “the” way to do it.

Times have changed. Now, the proliferation of the internet and smart technology means that every coach can get anything, anytime, anywhere and usually for free in the palm of their hand.

Everyone knows what you know.

There are no more secrets. No more miracle plays. No more magical practice routines.

Everyone knows what you know.

The one reason above all others that coaches must get better at getting better is that unless you are moving forward – unless you are learning and accelerating your rate of learning and improvement faster than your opposition – you and your athletes will be left behind.

It is pointless searching for “the” one and only answer – it doesn’t exist. There is no end point to improvement. There’s no finality in learning.

Getting better never stops. Not now.

Coaching successfully demands an understanding of how to think, to learn, to create, to innovate and to change faster and more effectively than ever before.

Where coaches once may have considered continuous improvement as possessing a casual or occasional interest in attending courses and reading biographies, it is now essential that coaches make a deliberate, purposeful decision to include learning in their daily routine.

Ten Ways Coaches Can Embrace Continuous Improvement

1. Apply the same standards and commitment to continuous improvement as you expect from your athletes. Read something new every day. Listen to a podcast. Watch a short video. Be committed to learning one new thing every day. You expect your athletes to improve every day – apply that same standard of learning and improvement to yourself.
2. Reflect constantly. The first and most important learning commitment all coaches must make is to have honest, sincere daily reflection. After each training session and following every workout ask yourself: Did I coach at my best today? What did I learn today that will make me a better coach tomorrow? Did I make a difference to my athletes today?
3. Expand your learning horizons – look further. You learn from three places: Within your specific sport; Within the sports industry but outside your specific sport and; Outside the sports industry. By far the greatest scope for learning, growth and development is to be found outside the sports industry. If you are looking to improve your understanding of creativity, learn from coaches and other professionals in the arts. If you need to master leadership, schedule some time to learn from people in the military, in business and in politics. Broaden your learning experiences.
4. Be the change you want to see. If you want to see your athletes learn faster, grow sooner and improve more rapidly, apply those same standards to your own coaching and development. Dare to be different! Try new ideas in your program. Experiment. Take a few safe and ethical calculated risks and find new and better ways of doing things. Let your athletes see that you are tireless in your search for ways to help them achieve their goals.
5. Forget best-practices – be better practice. Stop searching the Internet for best-practices. Become the best-practice in your sport, then seek daily to make your best –practice an even better practice. Live a lifestyle of continuous improvement. Best practices are only the starting point. It is the place where great coaches start their learning journey with a commitment to making best practices even better.
6. Forget benchmarking – copying kills. Coaches learn and copy. Great coaches create and innovate. Try new ideas. Think different things and think differently. The only people who leave “benchmarks” are those who sit on their butts doing nothing! Leaders learn – and learning is leading!
7. Treat winning and losing in the same manner. If your team loses, learn from it, get out of bed the next morning and try harder than ever to be an exceptional coach. If your team wins, learn from it, get out of bed the next morning and try harder than ever to be an exceptional coach. To a learning coach, there’s no difference between winning and losing – there’s only learning, improvement and change.



8. Become a visionary. The great coaches “see” things. They see a future of limitless possibilities and opportunities. They see it with such clarity, certainty and detail that it feels as if it has already happened. Being a visionary gives coaches the power to lead their athletes – and their sport – towards an exciting and successful future.
9. There is always, always, another way. Great coaches do not talk in absolutes. There is no “never.” There is no “must.” There is only the endless and continuous search for new ways of learning, improving and getting better. That old saying “if it ain’t broke – don’t fix it” should be changed to read “if it ain’t broke – and you want to be an outstanding coach – pull it apart and do it even better.”
10. Avoid people who hold tradition above progress. When innovative coaches try new ideas and experiment with new ways of doing things, there is always a group of coaches who will resist and reject this “newness” and do all they can to stand in the way of “what could be” in order to maintain the “what was” and “what is.” Getting better means changing. Changing means daring to be different. Daring to be different means running into people who cannot see what you see, and who will never be what you are: exceptional.

Conclusion

- Everyone wants to and wishes they could be better.
- However, getting better, by necessity, means change. And change can be challenging– even terrifying – for most people. Yet change is critical for success and is at the very heart of excellence and achievement.
- Coaching is change, and great coaches are masters of the art of change. It is the art of the effective coach to lead athletes through the change process and inspire them to see the unknown, to achieve the impossible and to reach for the seemingly unattainable.
- It is the coach’s ability to see a clear vision for the future – and their ability to lead athletes towards that vision – that creates success and delivers greatness.
- For a coach with an unrelenting commitment to learning, a passion for discovery and an unquenchable thirst for improvement, their future success – and that of their athletes – is assured.

Additional Learning Sources:

Videos:

- RSA Presentation – Sir Ken Robinson – Changing Paradigms (In Education)
- <https://www.thersa.org/discover/videos/rsa-animate/2010/10/rsa-animate---changing-paradigms>
- Ted Talk – Richard St John – Success is a Continuous Journey
- https://www.ted.com/talks/richard_st_john_success_is_a_continuous_journey
- You Tube Channel - Wayne Goldsmith – Coaching and Continuous Improvement
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFFgC6Sv3T4&t=12s>

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Quality Coaching: 3 Principles Learned from USA Surfing's Joey Buran

Nadine Dubina, USOC Coaching

It was the final heat. Team USA had never lost the lead throughout the entire week-long competition. Tensions were rising; the competition was fierce. The top three podium spots had the potential to change with every surfer dropping in. It all came down to the 377th heat, on the final day of competition, with the final group of athletes. The competition was so close that the championship title was decided by the performance of the last athlete, riding his final wave. Would Team USA come home world champions? Their fate rested on the board of the last Team USA athlete to be named to the junior world team. What happened when he needed to have the ride of his life?

He nailed it to secure team gold.

Introduction

I first learned about this junior world surfing team in the fall of last year when I was introduced to their coach. I had no idea walking into the conversation that it would be one that would stand out amongst all the rest. I not only learned about this coach's background, values and coaching style, but about his athletes, the sport of surfing, and lessons that I can apply to my own life. I want to share my perspective on our conversation as to me this coach truly exemplifies the definition of quality coaching and brings the entire United State Olympic Committee's recently published [Quality Coaching Framework](#) (2017) to life.

This coach is USA Surfing's Joey Buran.

This article will first share a brief background on USA Surfing, Joey Buran and the 2017 World Junior Team. It will then get into the heart of the article by sharing three quality coaching principles that Joey modeled throughout our conversation: Love, Growth Mindset and Incremental Freedom.

USA Surfing

USA Surfing is the official National Governing Body for surfing in the US, being recognized as such by both the USOC and the International Surfing Association (ISA). USA Surfing's mission is "to promote the growth, competitive success, and positive image of surfing in the USA and to provide the best possible experience for all participants by encouraging, developing, advancing, and administering the sport-while producing champions" (Surfing America, 2018). After many years of growing and developing surfing around the world, surfing was approved by a unanimous vote to be included in the Olympic Games in August 2016. Learn more about USA Surfing [here](#) and surfing in Tokyo 2020 [here](#).

This past year, USA Surfing competed in two international competitions: the ISA World Surfing Games held in Biarritz, France in May and the ISA World Junior Surfing Championship held in Hyuga, Japan in October. These were the first major international games since surfing was announced as a Tokyo 2020 Olympic sport – events where many countries were looking to make a statement for the current



Olympic Quad.

This is where my conversation with Joey begins.

Coach Joey Buran

Joey Buran, with a lively yet laid-back tone, started off by telling me about his storied career in the surfing industry, which spans over 40 years. Joey started surfing at age 12 after moving from Ohio to California. A few years later, he was nicknamed 'the California kid' as he burst onto the professional surfing scene at age 17. He would compete on the circuit for a few years before winning the Pipeline Masters in Hawaii in 1984, one of the most highly respected and coveted titles in the sport. He retired from competition soon after and took some time away before returning to coach. He now has spent over 20 years coaching, first serving as USA Surfing's head coach in 2007, then later transitioning to coaching the Chilean surfing team – where he took a last place program and turned it around in three years – and finally coming back once again at the beginning of 2017 to help lay the foundation for the U.S. junior development team, which is now hoping to develop athletes for future Olympic Games.

It is reminiscing for Joey to think about how his career has come full circle, from being a rookie athlete on the pro tour in 1978 to being a rookie coach on tour for the first-ever Olympic Games cycle. While he may not have known it at the beginning of the year, 2017 would be a year that he will never forget. During this time of great transition and change for the sport, Joey helped coach and lead a team of junior level athletes who would go on to earn their place in history.



On October 1, 2017, Team USA won team gold at the ISA Junior World Surfing Championship. Team USA athletes also won five individual medals, including one gold, two silvers, one bronze and one copper. In the history of the championships, the U.S. has only won a medal twice: once in 1984 and once again in 2015, when the team had the home water advantage.

What makes this story so iconic is that going into this competition, there were no expectations for the athletes or team to medal...at all. Being hit with a myriad of political and environmental problems in the weeks prior, along with having what other sports would consider their “junior varsity” athletes competing, the goal going into this competition was to gain more experience. But something happened to this team while they were there. It was something that all of the great sport teams talk about, something that carries momentum and draws out best performances. The team had chemistry.

And who was the lead chemist? Coach Joey Buran.



Quality Coaching

I left my conversation with Joey inspired to share about his team, re-energized to continue working in the coach development space and grateful to him for sharing his time and story with me. The hour I spent on the phone with him was truly like a roller coaster ride; Joey is an incredible story teller, building up the backstory before dropping you into the action and, at just the right time, throwing in the twists and turns. It truly is exhilarating listening to him recount his experience at this championship – you feel as if you were there with him. Since I wouldn’t be able to retell this story with the justice that it deserves, I decided to instead draw out three quality coaching principles, three ingredients for success, that we can all learn from and integrate into our own coaching practices, ultimately paying tribute to Joey and continuing to positively impact the lives of our athletes day after day.

Principle 1: Above All, Love

“Love is the most powerful four-letter word. The most important thing in the world is family and love.” - Coach John Wooden

John Wooden was named “Coach of the Century” by ESPN and is highly regarded by many as the greatest coach of all time. He is known for many esteemed qualities and practices, but the first word that I associate with him is expressed in his quote above: love.

One of the most significant impressions a person can leave on someone else is the feeling of love. Even though I only talked to Joey on the phone, I could feel the love that he has for his athletes in each story that he told and every word that he spoke. It was as if love was pouring out of him; he did not want to just share his love for his athletes and his passion for surfing directly with his team, but with anyone with whom he interacted.

Joey brings his life experiences and lessons learned throughout the years to his coaching. He has coached the full spectrum of athletes: girls and boys, beginners to pros, the most talented, the least talented, and everything in between. He has also coached other sports and draws upon his life skills as a parent to do what is best for the athletes at all times. He is truly a ‘player-centered coach.’ He is not there because he wants to win, or to satisfy his ego, but instead because his athletes success and happiness is his success and happiness. He believes in meeting every one of his athletes where they are, not where he wants them to be or where he thinks they should be. This was evident as he spoke to me about the ‘teachable moments’ that happened in the car rides to the beach, in the moments after a disappointing performance, when a fight between teammates broke out or when the pressure continued to increase. He knows each of his athletes on an individual level and is able to use this to channel their thoughts and beliefs more effectively. He knows their likes and dislikes, when they need to be pushed, and when they need some space. He defined roles for everyone so that everyone was working towards one common goal and so no one was left out, whether they were done surfing or not. He remembers doing very little coaching during the nine days of competition. He instead was mentoring, teaching and managing. He believes a part of his role is not to tell his athletes that they have potential, but instead to help them realize their own potential throughout the process.

Joey never actually used the word love when recounting his experience at the World Junior Surfing Championships, but he didn’t have to. His actions, day after day, teachable moment to teachable moment, spoke loud and clear. This is a great lesson for all of us to reflect upon. What do your actions say? Can an outsider identify your values just from talking to you or watching you coach a practice or game?

Principle 2: Developing Growth Mindsets

When major competitions are on the line and athletes are under extreme pressure to perform, having a strong mental game can help edge an athlete out over their competition. Mental training is recognized as being an important component to an athlete’s holistic development, but sometimes more weight is placed on coaching technique and strategy, rather than mental skills. This is evident from feedback collected from athletes and coaches after three Olympic Games. When asked what they would have done differently in preparing for the Games, both the athletes and coaches answered, “more mental training” (USOC, 2014). Having a formal background in sport psychology, I believe that coaches see the value of incorporating mental training into their coaching, they just simply do not know how to. In my conversation with Joey, he spoke to a mental skill that he integrates into his coaching that, in my mind, played a role in their success at the World Junior Championships. This skill is having a growth mindset.



The concept of growth mindset was popularized by Carol Dweck in her work studying school children as she tried to answer the question of why some of the brightest students never seem to achieve success (Dweck, 2006). Coaches are often puzzled over the similar issue of why some of their most talented athletes, who seem to have everything, never make it to the top of their sport. According to Dweck, these athletes don't have everything because they don't have the right mindset – a growth mindset.

Athletes with a growth mindset believe that their talents and abilities are things they can develop. Athletes with a fixed mindset believe their talents and abilities as unchangeable – they have a certain amount and that's it. Research has repeatedly shown that a growth mindset fosters a healthier attitude toward practice and learning, a hunger for feedback, a greater ability to deal with setbacks, and equates to significantly better performance over time (Dweck, 2009).

A coach has the opportunity to set the tone for each individual athlete's mindset by first adopting a growth mindset of their own. By leading by example, along with utilizing growth mindset-oriented feedback, a coach can help shape the beliefs that each athlete and the team as a whole takes on. It is extremely easy to praise an athlete and say "you're a natural" or to jump in and provide insight when an athlete is having trouble figuring out a challenging play. These seemingly small moments compound each other and reinforce a fixed mindset. Joey's seemingly insignificant phrases, that emphasized giving their best effort, persevering through challenges, and taking risks and learning from the outcomes both on and off the waves, reinforced the opposite. He consistently coached from a growth mindset perspective.

In the few weeks leading up to the junior world championship, several political and environmental happenings had the team on alert for potentially not being able to make the trip overseas. North Korea threatened Japan and fired missiles over the country, and Japan was also hit with a typhoon. This created a great deal of instability, but Joey's beliefs kept the team stable and focused. He was also aware that his 'JV' junior athletes would be competing against some of the best junior surfers in the world. His athletes would be competing against the powerhouse countries in surfing: France was the reigning world champion, Japan is known for technical perfection and Brazil's culture breathes surfing. This did not change his unwavering belief in each of his athletes. He made sure that his team was not focusing on any of the turmoil and pressure, but instead on what they brought to the table. In his own words, they brought some good old 'American swag.' This was a strategy to help Team USA take the focus off the external pressure and return it to the team's attitudes and mindsets, which were in the athletes' control.

This also translated to the performance side of surfing as well. He instilled a positive attitude at all times and found every opportunity possible to reinforce this. They practiced reframing negative sentences into positive ones during conversations in the car. They cheered for, congratulated and comforted each other after their heats. They had real conversations addressing, not ignoring or downplaying, issues that athletes were dealing with. When an athlete was eliminated from the competition, Joey defined specific roles for each athlete to keep them engaged and carrying the positive momentum forward. When other teams tried to provoke them and get into their heads, they came together to respond by 'whooping their butts in the water with Team USA on the back of their jersey' rather than retaliating. He encouraged the team to take risks, to surf their own style, and to let it rip. He was



coaching from a focus on strengths, not from a place of fear, and his athletes trusted him enough to rise up to this challenge during some of the highest-pressure situations they've experienced. He encouraged them to 'surf with swag,' which is not arrogance, but a level of confidence based on preparation, trusting their training and abilities, and attacking every wave.

Joey used every moment that he was in his athlete's presence to reinforce his values and beliefs. The growth mindset outlook became the norm because Joey set the example and continued to coach his athletes as people, rather than shutting off after a surfing heat was over. Reflecting on your own coaching, how aware are you of your own mindset? Do you praise your athlete's performance or their efforts? How do you respond when an athlete is operating from a fixed mindset?



Principle 3: The New Freedom is Incremental

When I was a student in graduate school, I learned about complex family systems. I can still recall my professor quoting Marie Montessori and saying, "a child needs freedom within limits." In today's sometimes overprotective world, it can be easy to forget this notion and constantly provide structure and control, with no freedom and choice. I had forgotten about this quote until Joey mentioned his approach to building trust with his athletes with a concept he coined 'incremental freedom.'

Montessori school curriculums are structured around this concept of freedom within limits (Egbert, 2017). They believe that freedom and structure do not live in contradiction to one another, but instead are complementary. In order to process and grow, structure needs to be in place. And in order to self-actualize, choice and will needs to be present. This falls in line with the psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1970). Having a balance of both structure and freedom creates an optimal mix for evolution, or the gradual progression of simple to complex.

Now, you may be wondering, "what does this have to do with coaching?" My answer: everything – but I am going to put a bit of a spin on it.

Joey had 48 athletes in the junior development program, with twelve on that junior world tour team. For this competition, Joey and his staff implemented a new rule: no parents would be traveling with the athletes. For some, this may seem incomprehensible – travelling, without parents, with athletes under 18, for the biggest competition of their lives? How? It's not impossible and, in fact, it was one of the key factors Joey believes led to the team's success.

His approach? Incremental freedom. This doesn't only concern the athletes, however. We actually have to bring another stakeholder into the picture: parents.

Your freedom as a coach starts with parents. Just as coaches need to build relationships with their athletes, they also need to build relationships with their parents. Why? Because they get to decide where their child trains and with whom their child trains. They decide how much freedom they are ultimately going to hand over to you. Joey engages with the parents of his athletes uniquely, positively and individually. This doesn't mean that he always sees eye to eye with them, but instead decides to take an approach of 'engage to disengage.' He addressed issues in a professional manner before they gained any traction, he communicated clearly and effectively, and when needed, he admitted to mistakes showing vulnerability. This is what builds relationships. Joey's relationship with his athletes' parents is built on knowing that he has the highest regard and intentions for their child. They know he is a quality coach, having earned their trust, respect and incremental freedom.

Asking the families to cheer from home was part of Joey's strategy to create a positive performance environment for the team. This event is the only one that features a team competition, so every message was deliberately focused on representing Team USA together. He took the factors of performance that were within his control and developed plans around them to optimize the team culture. Joey gave small roles and responsibilities to different athletes at different times, to allow them to earn more of his trust. He set forth clear expectations and helped facilitate athletes working out solutions to problems together, rather than jumping in and telling them what to do. He had real conversations with the athletes when the moment presented itself. He set intentions to teach the athletes self-governance, loyalty and to have each other's backs. As the athletes earned his trust, he made a conscious effort to actually give it to them and not micromanage. These are the lessons that translate into life. They don't happen automatically just from participating in sport. They happen from providing deliberate opportunities to earn incremental freedom. Culture is always a topic of conversation when it comes to the best teams in the world. Joey has created a performance culture around teaching athletes about life through surfing, and the results are taking care of themselves.

Incremental freedom is a complex concept and requires a strong, reflective leader. Looking at your own coaching, why is it important to build relationships with your athlete's parents? How might you approach a conversation with a parent differently from taking this concept into consideration? How do you provide structured freedom to your athletes? Finally, when they earn your trust, do they know it?

Final Thoughts

Every athlete was at their best when their best was needed, on and off the waves. They shared a growth mindset and believed in each other. In the only competition of the year with a team event, they were able to put aside their own agendas and unify for the common good. They became USA Surfing.



And they all came home World Champions.

Congratulations to Coach Buran and all of USA Surfing on their accomplishments in 2017. For me, this was a conversation that I will continue to reference and use examples from for years to come. With the hard work, dedication and skill level of the athletes and coaches, there is no doubt in my mind that Team USA Surfing is headed for greatness.



Follow Joey Buran on Facebook @officialjoeyburan, Instagram @joey.buran and Twitter @joeyburan.

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On the cover: PYEONGCHANG-GUN, SOUTH KOREA - MARCH 14: Oksana Masters of United States celebrates in the Cross-Country Skiing - Women's 1.1km Sprint Final, Sitting on day five of the PyeongChang 2018 Paralympic Games on March 14, 2018 in Pyeongchang-gun, South Korea.

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