COACHING LEADERSHIP FOR SPORT PERFORMANCE AND ATHLETE SUCCESS: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Coaching involves teaching, training, instructing and more. It is not simply about helping people to learn sports skills, improve performance and reach their potential. It is also about recognizing understanding, respecting and providing for other needs of athletes. These needs are many and cover a wide range such as social and emotional needs, as well as the more obvious needs related to athletics success and completion. As a good coach you should have a code of behaviour based on a code of ethics which places the rights and needs of your athletes before those of yourself. You will need to develop a caring and continuing relationship with the athletes you coach. Participation in sport is a social process. Your coaching will therefore have great power to shape the lives of your athletes through this social activities and leadership process. Aside from numbers in the wins column or improved performances during competition, it is difficult to gauge just how important coaching is to sports and athlete success. Attributes such as ambition, competitiveness, and work ethic take centre stage when it comes to success. Coaching effectiveness, much like the aforementioned attributes, is just as important and equally as hard to quantify. Is a coach merely a manager just overseeing one or more athletes or is he integral to athletic success? What attributes or characteristics do successful coaches possess and what are some of their roles? Are coaches leaders? If so, what leadership styles do they practice? All of these questions will be discussed in greater depth throughout this work.

Keywords: Coaching Leadership; Sport Performance; Athlete Success

INTRODUCTION

The term coaching is often used to cover wide range of activities, usually to help someone prepare for something. Coaching in sports has been described as the organized provision of assistance to an individual athlete or group of athletes in order to help them develop and improve. Coaching is pervasive throughout the life course, from childhood (e.g., a parent helping a child learn to ride a tricycle), through schooling (e.g., a teacher coaching a student in the proper conduct of a chemistry experiment), and into adulthood (e.g., a fitness coach helping with an exercise regime or a supervisor coaching an employee in improving his or her job performance). The main body of research about coaching is found in the training literature, and it focuses almost entirely on individual skill acquisition. Except for the many popular books and articles that extract lessons for team leaders from the experiences of athletic coaches, relatively little has been published that specifically addresses the coaching of task-performing teams. The coach is responsible for five key areas of performance coaching tactical, technical, mental, physical and lifestyle and also social outcomes as a result of their coaching behaviour. This can have a positive or negative effect on the performance of the athlete and the team. Coaches need to be aware how each of their actions can affect the team dynamics. Sadly, most coaches themselves seem to be fairly oblivious of the kind of effect their behaviour has on their team.

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OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To investigate coaching leadership in sport performance and athlete success.
2. To identify the role of coaches in sports activities.

REVIEW OF LITRATURE

This section will describe the literatures which describe the topic, what is coaching, leadership and its relationship to athletes, the role of the coach, developing coaching philosophy, discovering coaching leadership style and player performance are reviewed.

What is coaching? is often used to cover a wide range of activities, usually to help someone prepare for something. Coaching in sports has been described as the organized provision of assistance to an individual athlete or group of athletes in order to help them develop and improve.

Coach: is the person who takes care of the coaching and training of a team and who prepares them for performance, to achieve the result.

Coaching an Art Or A Science?

Science- To support the coach, there is a wealth of scientific information based on research conducted with athletes. Information is available to support the coach and athlete in all areas of training and development including nutrition, biomechanics, psychology, physiology & medicine. There are a number of scientific methods to measure and analyze the athlete's performance e.g. computer-aided analysis of VO2 max, lactate levels, running technique etc.

Art- The art of coaching comes when the coach has to analyze the scientific data and convert it into coaching and training programs to help develop the athlete. This analysis process relies heavily on the coach's experience and knowledge of the event/sport and the athlete concerned. By understanding the science, which is the foundation of training, a well-designed training program can be developed that will help an athlete reach their full potential. So is coaching the art of understanding the science and then applying it?

Leadership and Its Relationship to Athletes

A strength and conditioning or fitness coach will definitely need leadership skills, especially as he guides his athlete or client to his desired outcome. Communication is a vital aspect in coach/athlete relationships. It is very important to talk to your athletes individually to determine what their values and beliefs are, what their goals are and why they are participating. Without this knowledge, you might be delivering a coaching bag of apples to athletes wanting a bag of oranges. The program just will not work properly. As a coach, you are a powerful role model and can have a tremendous influence on your athletes if you and your athletes are on the same page. Take the time to get to know each of your athletes just as if you examined your own values, beliefs and habits. Once you know and understand each of your athletes, their strengths, weaknesses, abilities, and skills, then I suggest you develop an approach to coaching them. Will you focus on the stars? Will you treat everyone equal in terms of your attention and help? Perhaps the teamwork approach will work for you.

Roles and responsibilities of a coach

Manager: Managers are viewed as an integral piece to the success of a person and/or an organization. Appointing the right manager is crucial, and research indicates that there is a direct link between manager/coach behavior and an athlete’s performance (Crust 2006). A manager is charged with the responsibility of making decisions for the team or athlete and plays a fundamental role in the operation of a team.

Friend: Coaches also work to build rapport with their athletes, sometimes befriending them. They may lend support to their athletes and provide them someone to confide in. Relationships shared among coaches and athletes will be further discussed in this work.
Planer: Coaches develop strategies to achieve desired results. They assess talent, organize and develop the content of practices and specific drills.

Motivator: Coaches also serve as motivators to maximize an athlete’s full potential. Coaches utilize supportive behaviours such as providing choices within specific rules within the sport, providing a rationale for tasks and limits, and acknowledging their athletes’ feelings.

Advisor: Advising athletes on the training to be conducted and suitable kit and equipment.

Assessor: Assessing athletes performance in training and in competition.

Counselor: Resolving emotional problems on the basis that sharing anxieties can be both relieving and reassuring.

Demonstrator: Demonstrate to the athletes the skill you require them to perform.

Facilitator: Identify suitable competitions for them to compete in to help them achieve their overall objectives for the year.

Fact finder: Gathering data of national and international results and keeps abreast of current training techniques.

Fountain of knowledge: This may be part of the advisor role in that you will often be asked questions on any sporting event, events that were on the television, diet, sports injuries and topics unrelated to their sport.

Instructor: Instructing athletes in the skills of their sport.

Mentor: When athletes attend training sessions you are responsible, to their parents and family, for ensuring that they are safe and secure. You have to monitor their health and safety whilst training and support them should they have any problems or sustain any injuries.

Role Model: A person who serves as a model in a particular behavioral or social role for another person to emulate.

Supporter: Competition can be a very nerve racking experience for some athletes and often they like you to be around to help support them through the pressures.

Teacher: - imparting new knowledge, skills and ideas.

Trainer: - improving fitness.

Disciplinarian: - creating an environment for each athlete’s self control.

Administrator: – dealing with the paper work.

Publicity agent: – promoting within society and possibly with the media.

Scientist: - analyzing, evaluating and problem solving

Student: - always willing to listen, learn and look for new knowledge.

Developing a Philosophy

One commonality in successful leaders is they all have philosophies a system of beliefs that they firmly stand by. Possessing a clear cut philosophy prevents ill- advised decisions from being made and doesn't irritate athletes or clients with ambiguity. Have a defined goal and a thoroughly mapped out plan for getting there. Having a concrete philosophy in place puts things in perspective. The philosophy of strength and conditioning coaches should put a premium on winning and developing athletes, and the philosophy of personal trainers should include a commitment to empowering your clients and helping them get the results they desire. A successful philosophy is one that is achievement driven, measurable, and realistic. It brings out the best in individuals, thus fostering a winning attitude,
and is tailored to the needs and goals of the individual. A philosophy must be established before one can consider choosing a leadership style.

In developing a formal philosophy the coach can take four key components and to his or her best ability formulate a coaching philosophy document with the aim to be a better coach, to improve coach/athlete satisfaction and to achieve superior athletic results. These three components are:

1. Knowing yourself, your strengths, weakness and areas requiring improvement
2. Knowing what you want to achieve. (knowledge of objectives)
3. Knowing what you are up against and the obstacles you may encounter
4. Understanding your athletes, their personalities, abilities, goals, and why they are in your sport

Knowledge of Yourself

It takes honest assessment to admit to having weaknesses but we all have them. We just do not want them to interfere with good coaching judgment. By focusing on your strengths you will be able to identify consistent ways to coach that utilize those strengths. Are you a good teacher, or motivator, or academic, or communicator or a former athlete? Are you dynamic or easy going, or hardnosed or open and friendly? Use your strengths to your advantage. By taking time to make a serious assessment of your strengths and weaknesses and recognizing your morals, values and beliefs you are better able to adapt your own style to the athletes being coached.

Knowledge of objectives- knowing what you want to achieve

If you ask coaches what they want out of coaching, the answers usually include:

- Winning
- Fun
- Athlete development

All are important, however; an athlete’s development is affected by the importance placed on winning or losing. Striving to win is always important. A ‘win at all cost’ attitude, however, ignores the development of the athlete. It is an attitude frequently used by those coaches who judge themselves by how well their athletes finish. By contrast, the view taken by many successful and experienced coaches is to place the long term development of the athlete as the single most important consideration. An emphasis on the development of the athlete is more likely to produce better performance, greater consistency and more satisfaction for the athlete and coach than an over emphasis on winning.

Competition then becomes merely challenging and satisfying way of measuring personal development. This philosophy has been expressed many times as ‘Athletes First, Winning Second’ which means:

- There is respect and appreciation of the coach and his/her work.
- Athletes decide with the coach the importance of performance and strive to meet their joint expectations.
- There is for the laws and spirit of fair competition.
- Athletes reaching their potential are seen as success.
- There is respect for opponents, other coaches and officials.

Knowing What You Are Up Against - Your Coaching Context

As important as it is to understand what makes you tick, it is equally important to understand the confines of your coaching context. By this, it means that a good understanding of the age, gender and training level of the athletes you coach. How much time you and your athletes have available to train and compete? What is your development program based upon and how far can you take it by
enhancing and incorporating other aspects such as sport psychology, nutrition education or sophisticated technique analysis? What funding, facilities, services and equipment are at your disposal? In addition, what are your short medium and long term goals for your athletes?

There could be other restrictions that will affect your coaching delivery. These include laws or policies on safe practices, club or school rules of behaviour, competition with other sports, school pressures and outside activities, parental interference, or performance standards to qualify for teams and competitions. Knowing what you are up against enables you to tailor your annual training program to the specific needs of the athletes you have under your charge.

Discovering Coaching Leadership Style

There are numerous dimensions of leadership behaviors that a strength and conditioning or fitness coach can draw from that are sensitive to the situation, sport and/or activity, and skill level of the athlete or fitness level of the client. Six behavior dimensions of leadership exist, including autocratic, democratic, positive feedback, social support, training and instruction, and situational consideration (Zhang 1997).

Autocratic leadership: Autocratic leadership limits the involvement of its participants in decisions. The use of commands and punishments are prevalent as is the prescription of plans and methods for activities (Zhang 1997). With autocratic leadership, a coach or trainer will map out a plan with very little, if any, input from the athlete or client. The autocratic behavior dimension is a prime example of a coach or trainer giving the athlete or client what the coach or trainer thinks she needs.

Democratic leadership: Democratic leadership allows for the participation of athletes or clients in decisions, and coaches are respectful of their rights (Zhang 1997). Under this dimension, athletes or clients are allowed to set their own goals and are permitted to provide input about their training program. According to Coach Wooden, coaches should “consider the rights of others before [their] own feelings and the feelings of others before [their] own rights” (ESPN 2010). This form of leadership engages the athletes or clients that they are working with, making them feel needed and important (Zhang 1997).

Positive feedback: Positive feedback is based upon a behaviourist approach and is also known as positive reinforcement (Zhang 1997). Coaches and personal trainers will compliment or reward their athletes or a client on their successes, which maintains motivational levels (Mageau 2003; Zhang 1997). The athlete or client will be rewarded for a good performance or effort (Zhang 1997).

Social support: The dimension of social support, which is a humanistic style, satisfies the interpersonal needs of athletes or clients by remaining sensitive to them and helping them with their personal problems (Zhang 1997). A high degree of emotional intelligence (Goleman 1998), specifically empathy or having the ability to understand the emotional makeup of people and treating them according to their emotional reactions, will be required to effectively carry out this dimension (Zhang 1997; Goleman 1998).

Eventually, the characteristics of the three styles are compared in the following table.

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<tr>
<th>philosophy</th>
<th>Authoritarian</th>
<th>Cooperative/democratic</th>
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<td>Task objectives</td>
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<td>Judged by athlete and coach</td>
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Training and instruction: Another dimension, training and instruction, is utilized to bolster the athlete’s or client’s skill set. Here a strength coach may help refine an athlete’s Olympic lifting technique or a personal trainer may guide his client through some mobility drills or flexibility exercises that were just introduced.

Situational consideration: The last dimension is situational consideration, which is based on the maturity of an athlete and current skill level.

**Situational Leadership**

The situational leadership theory, which was originally developed in the early 1960s by organizational psychologists Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard while they were members of the Ohio University faculty, has continued to evolve and remains popular because it’s easy to understand, relatively simple to apply, and works with most people and work environments. Different leadership styles can be adopted depending on the situation (Hersey 1977). These styles include directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating.

**Directing:** In directing, leaders define the roles and tasks of the ‘follower.’ The followers are closely supervised, and the leader makes all decisions. All communication is downstream originating from the leader. Usually the individuals being directed possess low skill levels but have a high level of commitment (Hersey 1977). In sports, this style is employed with youth athletes and predominates with the novice personal training clientele in the fitness community.

**Supporting:** The supporting style embodies a high supportive behavior but is low directive as the follower has more control of decisions (Hersey 1977). People who are led under this style have moderate to high levels of competence. This style is best used with intermediate athletes or clients who need guidance to get to the next level.

**Delegating:** Lastly, the delegating style is of low directive and support, as its constituents are competent and highly motivated (Hersey 1977). Leaders are still involved with decisions but to a far lesser degree. Leader involvement is decided by the follower. This style is best used when you’re working with an advanced athlete who may already be near or at the pinnacle of his game or the client who has shattered her previous fitness goals. The improvements made under this coaching style are comparatively minuscule but much harder to attain. A coach’s or trainer’s expertise is called upon in these instances to address these relatively small deficiencies to improve performance.

**Transactional Leadership versus Transformational Leadership**

Two common leadership theories exist transactional and transformational. Transactional leadership is based on the exchange of valued outcomes and behaviors among followers and leaders. Literature has shown that not all outcomes are equally reciprocated (Lievens 1997; Judge 2004) and that low quality exchanges could be detrimental to the morale of followers (Judge 2004). The downfall with transactional leadership is that it only develops the followers’ extrinsic motivation, largely due to the fact that it rewards them on outcomes. Conversely, transformational leadership improves stimulation and morale due to the four characteristics that compromise it charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Lievens 1997). Research has shown that transformational leadership results in higher job satisfaction rates and performance (Judge 2004).

**Servant leadership:** Authors, executives, and coaches alike have been inspired by the leadership skills of Coach Wooden. Dozens of books and documentaries have chronicled Wooden’s legendary leadership abilities, which netted his UCLA teams a record ten NCAA basketball championships.
Wooden also authored nearly a dozen books on coaching and leadership development. His works reveal characteristics of a servant leader. Ten characteristics compose the servant leadership style. The most notable of them, which were traits of Coach Wooden, include conceptualization, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Joseph 2005).

Conceptualization: According to Joseph and colleagues (Joseph 2005), conceptualization is the servant leaders seeking to nurture their abilities to dream great dreams. Before his success at UCLA, Wooden was a marginally successful high school sports coach and briefly served as Indiana State University’s basketball coach. There’s no doubt that Wooden dreamt of successes that would compel him to rise through the coaching world and lead a team to a championship.

Commitment to the growth of people: “Servant leaders are deeply committed to the personal and spiritual growth of each and every individual within the institution” (Joseph 2005). Wooden was someone who was committed to developing his players and assistant coaches. Many who played under him, including Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (formerly Lew Alcindor), wound up playing professionally. Abdul-Jabbar is the NBA’s all time leading points scorer and a six time NBA champion (NBA 2011).

Building community: “Servant leaders seek to identify means of building community among those who work within a given institution” (Joseph 2005). Think about what Wooden has done not only for the UCLA Bruins basketball program but for UCLA and the sport of basketball. He’s an iconic figure that also revolutionized sport coaching and leadership theory.

Leadership styles, much like sport strategy and strength and conditioning and fitness programs, can't be adopted with a one-size fits all approach. Research has indicated that a blend of leadership styles may also be effective (Judge 2004). However, the success of one’s leadership depends on a multitude of factors, which may include the skill level of the leader and his followers, the goals of the team or the individual, or the leader’s credibility.

Establishing Credibility

According to Kouzes and colleagues (Kouzes 2008), “credibility is the foundation for leadership.” The leader must demonstrate values that prospective followers admire, which motivates them to trust the leader (Kouzes 2008). The followers must trust the leader enough to accompany him on a challenging journey, be it getting to post-season competition or surpassing a personal record on a lift. Seven characteristics that are required to gain and maintain credibility were outlined by renowned sport psychologist Gregory Dale (2005).

Caring: The old adage goes that people “don’t care what you know until they know how much you care,” and in sports coaching, this holds especially true. Dale and colleagues (Dale 2005) suggest that caring coaches take a genuine interest in the lives of their players, forging long-term relationships with them and doing anything for them regardless of their talent (Dale 2005). Wooden exemplified this characteristic, as he was a servant leader.

Competent: Competent coaches have extensive knowledge and continue to sharpen their tools and add new ones as new research and trends emerge. These coaches most likely have the experience. They’ve “walked the walk” and have “been in the trenches.” They’ll also be the first to concede that they don’t know something, deferring an issue to another coach or expert. They’re also human enough to admit when they are wrong (Dale 2005). Research has shown that a coach’s competency level can affect the athlete-coach relationship (Kajtna 2009).

Character: Coaches who are viewed as being credible have character. They follow up on promises; are honest with athletes and other coaches, especially as it pertains to their roles within a team (Dale, 2005) or organization; and embody a strong sense of integrity.

Consistent: Credible coaches are also consistent. They are consistent in the way they administer punishment and how they handle themselves. They create an environment where their athletes know
what to expect from them (Dale 2005). It could be said that consistent coaches don’t deviate from their philosophy and core values.

**Relationships**

One key cog to the success of an athlete and his coach is the relationship they share. Volumes of literature support the need for a good coach-athlete relationship to achieve goals (Zakrajsek 2007). Coaches’ leadership styles have been shown to have a great effect on team success and athlete satisfaction (Bin Nazarudin 2009). Team cohesion, also affected by the coach-athlete relationship, is a determinant in a team’s success (Ramzaninezhad 2009; Zakrajsek 2007). Additionally, the leadership behaviors of the athletic administration and head coaches impact the job satisfaction (Kuchler 2008) and cohesion (Zakrajsek 2007) of their subordinates. Research has indicated that effective leadership is required for a collegiate athletic program to be successful (Tucker 2009).

Literature has indicated that the type of relationships that coaches and athletes share is based on the coach’s leadership style, which impacts performance. Preferences of leadership styles vary based upon gender (Grenier 2005), the sport played, and the level of competition (Beam 2004). An athlete’s maturity (Carron 1983; Turman 2001) and skill level (Beam 2004) may also affect leadership preference. It should be noted that athletes’ perceptions of their leaders and leadership preferences can change throughout the course of a season (Carron 1983). Relationships shared among coaches and athletes can be impacted by personality disorders (Arthur 2011), similarities and differences in passion (Lafreniere 2008), success levels (Trzaskoma-Biscredy 2007), and the task dependence and variability of the sport (Beam 2004). As it pertains to the field of strength and conditioning, differing leadership styles were identified among collegiate and professional basketball strength coaches (Magnusen 2010), although the fundamental strength training principles remained relatively similar (Simenz 2005).

**CONCLUSION**

The literature, which includes accounts of history’s most successful coaches, demonstrates that a variety of leadership styles can be effective. Instead of trying to find the leadership style that works for everyone and in any situation a style that doesn’t exist coaches should instead adapt their philosophy to the given situation, pulling from one or more theories at once to effectively lead people. Knowing when to apply leadership styles is of the utmost importance. Leadership is an indispensable quality that can be developed with hard work. Leadership is a process and a lifelong journey and is an around the clock responsibility. Leaders develop and hone talent, take action, take accountability for their mistakes, and share their successes with the team or individuals they’ve developed. Leaders are made, not hired, and no, they don’t clock out after a long day.

**REFERENCES**


