



Elevating your life

Coaching is essentially a human experience. The interaction between the coach and player in building trust and maintaining a good relationship is a major element of the success of coaching. We don't need to be best friends with our players but it is vital that coaches are sincere. If players feel that their coaches are not interested in them as people or that the coaches ego causes them to treat their players unfairly then they are unlikely to blossom in that environment. The winter months offer us coaches a chance to evaluate where we are at the moment, what has gotten us to this point and how can we become all we dream of becoming.

I recently heard a quote by self-help guru Jim Rohn which states that "you become the average of the five people you spend the most time with". The purpose of the statement is twofold. If the five people we spend most time with are highly motivated, positive and self-reliant there is a good chance we become that type of person. However if the five people in our circle are negative or critical that can cause us to become more like them. Similarly the people we spend time with, may often take on board many of our traits in their own personalities. Our children, our spouses, our sibling, work-colleagues, team mates, players, fellow coaches and club administrators may take some of our good and bad stuff.

It calls to mind a poem made famous by American college coach John Wooden entitled, The little chap who follows me:

A careful man, I must always be
A little fellow follows me
I know I dare not go astray
For fear he goes the self-same way

I cannot once escape his eyes
Whate'er he sees me do he tries
Like me he says he's going to be
This little chap who follows me

He thinks that I am good and fine
Believes in every word of mine
The base in me he must not see
This little chap who follows me.

I must be careful as I go
Through summer sun and winter snow
For I'm building for the years to be
The little chap who follows me

Without doubt there is good stuff and bad stuff in each of us. There are two wells where we draw our thoughts, words and actions from. The good well has kindness, calmness, humour and positive energy in it. The other well has things like bitterness, anger, sarcasm and jealousy in it. We can draw on either well everyday especially in tough situations. Hanging around with people who draw from the good well gives us a better chance to be better than we used to be. Reflecting on our words and actions after difficult situations can help us to pay fewer visits to the bad well.

Some of us are fortunate enough to continually meet really positive influences on a daily basis. It is essential for coaches to have a network of mentors or other coaches to help deal with problems that arise. Conversing and engaging with other coaches helps us to come up with new ideas and to simplify problems. There is so much knowledge out there available to us.

American author and teacher, Neville Goddard once said “that if we wish to elevate our lives to a higher place, then the only thing we have available to us to do that is our self-concept”. By self-concept he means, everything that we believe to be true about us. Most coaches want to elevate, not only their lives, but also the lives of their players and the life of the club. What we believe about ourselves to be true is what has gotten us to where we are now. So here we are at the end of another playing -happy or sad, healthy or unhealthy, patient or impulsive, a good communicator or otherwise. What we and our players believe about ourselves to be true has us where we are at this point.

We often hear coaches talk about the need for belief. The thing is that everyone has belief. Some of those beliefs are positive and some are negative. Some believe that they have no skill or are poor at making decisions while others believe they are good enough, they are fine, they fit in, and they will be able to cope with a difficult situation. Recently I spoke with Mary O’Connor, director of Camogie Development from Cork. She said that even though she wasn’t the fastest she always believed that she could still get to the ball before her opponent. She believed that she had developed great anticipation skills. A few years ago at one of our award 1 courses a well-respected hurler said that he overheard a coach saying that he was slow when he was 12 and because of that comment he always believed that he was slow. He realised that day how that belief had restricted his whole playing career up to that point. Both players could have thought they were slow but one believed she could draw on speed from another source while the other always held the belief that he was slow. Mary O’Connor has 13 All Ireland medals in camogie and ladies football.

So what are the beliefs that hold us back? They can be anything from being too slow to being no good under pressure. Some people believe that they have a short temper and there is nothing they can do about it. Others believe that it’s not possible for them to consistently have a healthy lifestyle. Holding on to those beliefs stop us from becoming what we have the potential to become. Many children believe they are not good enough, that they don’t belong or that they don’t fit in. These children need the presence of a mature adult to help develop a better self-image. Otherwise that belief can manifest itself into deeper problems later in life.

When Ireland recently played South Africa in rugby, many questioned if Robbie Henshaw and Jared Payne would be able to cope. Would they be too young? Would they be good enough? Many people believe that players need time before being thrown in at the deep end while others believe if you’re good enough you’re old enough. All that mattered was what two players and their coaches believed. Often coaches continually go to coaching courses to try to upskill so that they will get to a high enough level sometime. Something – the fear of failure perhaps- prohibits them from taking on a big challenge.

Sometimes we need to just grasp the nettle and accept that although it might be daunting and tough we’ll be ok. We might fail or make loads of mistakes but if we have a mentor or a network we can get help. Coaches in general love helping. Surely that is better than always waiting and wondering and striving and never arriving. As Dr Wayne Dyer often quotes “when you advance confidently in the direction of your own dreams and endeavour to live the life that you have imagined for yourself, you will meet with a success unexplained in common hours”.