

GOOD COACHES KNOW WHEN TO SAY NOTHING

Good learning involves a mixture of watching, listening, thinking, imagining, talking and trying things out. To be a good coach, the first thing is to get these ingredients in the right balance and in the right order.

Research has found that the more people try to remember what they have been told, when under pressure, the more their performance gets rigid or falls to bits. So a creative coach's job is to nudge and guide learning, not to force it.

The best thing the coach can do is know how to do that skillfully. They can't make learning happen, however much they show and tell and correct, or however loud they shout. Great coaches know that less is often more, when it comes to learning.

So a good coach needs to be sparing with their 'good advice'.

Not many people can make mayonnaise these days. If you do, you will know there is one cardinal rule. You put the egg yolks and a bit of mustard in a bowl, and then you add one drop of oil, and beat it like hell. When that drop is worked in, you add another drop, and beat again. Only after you have added many drops one by one can you start to add the oil faster. If you don't follow this rule, your mayonnaise curdles.

Good coaching is like making mayonnaise.

With young players especially, you add instruction very slowly, and allow them enough time to incorporate it through practise and experimentation. If you teach them too much too quickly, their minds will curdle, and in a game they will be trying to remember what you have told them, rather than having had the time to blend it into what they already know and can do.

Time spent consolidating stuff is usually time well spent.

Learning is 90% about what is going on at the learners' end and only 10% about what a coach is doing. The learner is responsible for their mistakes and their successes. Effective coaches understand this principle and less effective coaches are very busy, noisy and often domineering, but rarely create the conditions for players to learn, as they don't understand what is involved in the learning process and how their actions help or hinder it.

Any coach in any sport who believes an understanding of how their players learn is irrelevant is misguided and is unlikely to be effective.

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