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THE RELATIONSHIP COACH

I've learned that people will forget what you said, they will forget what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou

Seeing the world through the eyes of your players is fundamental if you want to get the very best from them. Each player is unique, with a different profile, personality, and purpose. True empathy unlocks your ability to relate to their tensions, anxieties, frustrations, and ambitions. When you understand the person, you get double from the player. We are human beings; we all feel the need to be valued and loved, to contribute, and to feel connected.

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This book was written from the perspective of attempting to understand the practical experiences of coaches. It was written so that they may apply the principles within it to improve their coaching and themselves.

There are two fundamental truths at the heart of effective modern day and future coaching – leadership and management – and, of these, the very best coaches think *forward*. To stay ahead of the game, they operate in the present, but they think in the future. What worked yesterday won't work today. What works today will not work in the future. Here's why.

- Yesterday, hierarchy was the model; today, successful teams are bred on equality.
- Yesterday's leaders commanded the ship; today's facilitate their crew's synergy.
- Yesterday's managers demanded respect; today's encourage self-respect.
- Yesterday's employees waited for orders; today's teams innovate.
- Yesterday's senior status signified superiority; today, collaboration is king.
- Yesterday, results drove value; today, your core values drive the results.

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- Yesterday's leaders commanded control. Tomorrow's leaders must inspire and empower.

And nowhere do you see these things more than when working with your players.

Let's explore this in more detail.

Dictatorial leadership is dying. High-performance engagement and training in the modern football world is based on effective negotiation underpinned by an appreciation for human personality and motivational values.

The coach of the future is not an X's and O's strategist (though this is, of course, a non-negotiable foundation), they are a developer of people, and will require an unparalleled knowledge and appreciation for the nature of human development. This is true for coaches working with players at all levels of the game, from the grassroots community and academy to the senior professional and international stage.

The stupid footballer is dead. The availability of information through the internet means that players (like people) don't blindly follow anyone, anywhere, anymore. They learn and gain knowledge independently. Accordingly, the leaders who only know how to dictate will die.

The Winning Mind and The Relationship Coach

The future coach is a coach who recognises the importance of building psychological confidence through task clarity and emotional connection. Creating effective winning relationships with players is, as research teaches us, a unique blend of affection and authority.

**People don't care how much you know until they
know how much you care.**

Theodore Roosevelt

In 2009, educational research from professors Judy Dunn and Richard Layard presented some key findings associated with creating effective learning environments. They surveyed more than 25,000 children from schools in the UK, in order to address the question "*What makes the most effective teaching style?*"

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Ultimately, they found two factors that defined the effectiveness of each teacher. The first they labelled *control*, a characteristic that reflected the ability of the teacher to maintain order and task progression within the learning environment (e.g., keeping students' behaviour in-check and on task). The second was *warmth*. This quality reflected the level of affection and positive energy the teachers elicited whilst teaching, typified by inter- and intra-personal qualities and characteristics.

From these two factors, four main teaching styles were categorised and rated for their corresponding effectiveness within the learning environment. The first style was labelled as *Militant*. This type of teacher has complete control in the environment, dictating with precision and power. Students corresponded with compliance and clear non-negotiables in terms of behaviour were established and corrected immediately. High in control, but low in warmth, this type of teaching style was effective but not found to be optimal. Although task compliance was very high, students did not always feel they could ask questions relating to the task as they felt afraid or nervous about asking a 'stupid question' or feeling negatively judged by their teacher.

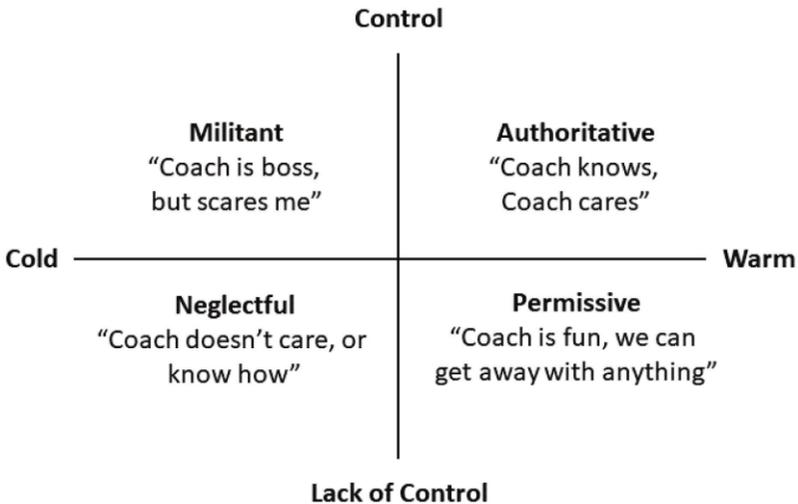
The second teaching style highlighted was *Neglectful*. This type of teacher – low in *control* and low in *warmth* – created an unstructured learning environment in which the students did not feel cared for.

The third teaching style identified in this ground-breaking educational research was labelled as *Permissive*. Typified by high levels of *warmth*, students loved having fun in the classroom, but whenever the teacher needed to take control or move the lesson forward, they struggled. Locked in a perilous fight to shape the structure of the lesson, students became unruly and unfocused.

The fourth and final teaching style that was identified, unequivocally, as the most effective was labelled *authoritative*. Layard and Dunn found that the central components of an effective learning environment was one where the teacher had complete *control* with a clear demonstration of *warmth*. Students knew what they had to do and also felt cared for enough to ask questions, make mistakes, and be secure with the teacher's trust. An *authoritative* teacher has sound subject knowledge and understanding backed up by a range of human relationship skills which builds emotional connection and psychological confidence.

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The Control Warmth Matrix



When considering these fundamental teaching/leadership qualities, and the influence they elicit in the classroom learning environment, it becomes apparent that we can apply them in coaching. After all, great coaches are great teachers.

Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.

Aristotle

A coach's great privilege is to realise that they are more than the tactics, strategies, and systems they create to execute a winning game plan, although these are, of course, paramount. In recognising the importance of building healthy positive relationships to create winning attitudes, coaches gain the opportunity to become much more than an expert in strategy. They gain a capacity to enrich the hearts and minds of their players, assisting them in transforming previous levels of performance. They foster the mental, emotional, and social qualities required to create the winning player and – more importantly – person of the future.

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Inside Out Coaching

In his brilliant and profound book *Inside Out Coaching – How Sports Can Transform Lives*, author Joe Ehrmann, an ex-All-American and NFL championship defensive lineman, articulates the difference between two kinds of coaches: transactional and transformational.

According to Joe, most coaches fail to recognise the true power of their platform to help, teach, coach, and inspire their athletes to live happier more empowered lives. This type of coach is transactional. This type of coach uses their players as a ticket to validate their own personal needs of self-importance, status, and identity. A transactional coach uses their power and influence to manipulate players in order to exert dominance, driven by an unfulfilled need to feel superior. Whilst this type of coach can sometimes be successful in terms of competitive outcomes, their achievements are often short-lived and unsustainable, normally due to an inability to get out of the way of their own egos as well as failures in nurturing human relationships.

I remember a coach at a professional academy who was known for ‘over-coaching’. Each 90-minute session was taken up with countless coach interventions and mini-lectures. At each staff event, this coach took the time to persuade other coaches that he was the reason for a specific win or a player’s improvement. One evening, the Academy manager decided to make some coach observations and offer some constructive feedback. Having watched the coach in question, he noted that the players were stood still for 57 minutes out of the 90. The Academy manager handed the coach his feedback form with the following phrase underlined in bold: “Remember who you’re there for.” Later, he explained to him that coaches who coach for themselves end up losing their players.

The transformational coach, by comparison, uses their platform to unleash the power and potential of their players by appealing to their sense of self-worth and value to the world. Transformational coaches possess the ability to place their players’ needs above their own, becoming what Joe calls ‘*Inside Out Coaches*’. Operating from a drive to create empathy, connection, and guidance, inside out coaches work to build a sense of inner purpose, value, and inner self-worth in their players. Joe offers the following tips on how to become a *transformational* coach:

- Put yourself in your players’ shoes and ask what they need first.
- Reflect back on your own experiences of success and failure and ask how these experiences have had an impact on you as a coach.

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- Place your players' needs above your own.
- Recognise the power of your influence as a role model to positively shape a young person's life, forever.
- Ask yourself these questions:
 - *Why* do I coach?
 - *How* does it feel to be coached by me?
 - *Why* do I coach the way I coach?

Coaches who understand their own world, and who can make sense of their lives, maximise their chances to impact the lives of the young people around them positively. Tracing back the unfulfilled needs they have as athletes gives them the best opportunity to transcend their own search for personal validation through their players. Unshackled from their own insecurity, an inside out coach infuses the spirit of inspiration and love that goes far beyond winning and losing.

The Human Being

Successful high-performance cultures and environments are based on the effective art of negotiation and an understanding of human needs. Every player has become a brand in their own right at the highest level. The future player will be like managing a limited company, and an appreciation of individual needs will be critical. Technology and financial freedom brings an independence of thought in society and understanding the human elements of each person in the team (to maximise their potential and 'talent') will be paramount. Team aims and objectives must be central but connected to the personal agendas of each player.

What are Leadership and Management?

Only by knowing yourself can you become an effective leader.

Vince Lombardi

There are many different interpretations of leadership and management. It has been suggested that "Management is more about *what* and Leadership is more concerned with *how* you do." Mark Proctor.

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Without a doubt, the great coaches of the past have taught us over and over again that only through knowing yourself, and having a solid understanding of your own personal values, can you develop character and integrity. Through *being* the example, a true leader unconsciously transfers their character and signposts their integrity.

The effective leader creates the right environment for the best behaviours to occur and evolve based on their key values. This is important when we think about the implications and changes required to meet the identified future needs of the coach's changing leadership, and management landscape.

Advances in information technology, communication and multi-cultural diversity create for a world that is faster and more connected than ever before. Consequently, we must become familiar with these changes if we are to capitalise on our future.

Jeanne Brett, Kristin Behfar and Mary Kern

So, what does the future look like? What traits must the successful future leader have?

Telecommunications progressed from telegraph to telephone, from copper wires to fiber-optics, from analog to digital, from wireless to satellite. I believe the industry will change more in the next five to 10 years than it has in the last 50.

Mary Barra, Chairman and CEO of GM

The future will be faster, and people will be able to gather information from multiple sources rapidly. By 2025, it is predicted that 95% of children from eight years of age, and above, will have their own handheld telecommunications device. This will influence modes of communication and coaching strategies and change the very nature of social interaction.

Leaders of the future will need to empower players to self-manage and become better equipped at facilitative capabilities. The new era of tomorrow's coaching world will require coaches to foster and support creative independence. Independence of thought, decision making, and action. The new successful performance culture of the future will witness a power shift from coach-led player support, to player-led coach support.

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The successful coach of the future will:

1. Understand and integrate technology to engage, stimulate, and retain attention.
2. Create deep and meaningful relationships with players based on authentic trust.
3. Facilitate coaching practice by creating independent, co-created decision-making opportunities.

The future coach must possess an ability to learn fast and apply knowledge from multiple sources. They must have a strong sense of leadership but retain an openness for new knowledge and be prepared at any moment to change in favour of an improved way of working. Above all else, they must be mindful of the multi-disciplinary nature of high performance and consider themselves both a master and a student in the same breath.

Leadership and management are about knowing yourself inside out. Although times change, the principles of success don't. Being unselfish, curious, hardworking and humble are admirable qualities that have caused me to engage with, and follow, the leaders who have guided my own career. As well as sticking to these principles, we must always question the norm to find new ways of doing things better. We must keep wanting to improve, all the time.

The future coach must be able to work across multiple disciplines, and become a reader and enthusiast for the expertise that enables learning, growth, and improvement. Technological advances will mean that the future high-performance environment will be data rich. Analysis of that data and intelligent selection will play a huge role in creating and sustaining a successful culture and environment.

We already live in a world where we receive things instantaneously. The way we communicate via our handheld devices allows us to send and receive information straightaway. That changes the way people think, act and behave. The support resources surrounding the players now are on the verge of being overwhelming. We are in danger of being the most over-resourced yet under-resourceful generation. The leader of the future will need to be an outstanding *curator* of the many resources available to maximise potential, efficiency, and development – both at staff and player levels.

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We live in an age of instant gratification and that is only going to get faster. We must evolve with the modern modes of communication but retain the stoic moral values of our heritage and tradition.

Dan Ashworth, Director of Elite Development,
The English Football Association

Effectively utilizing the abundance of resources at a technological, data, and staffing level requires a clear and prioritized understanding of your players' immediate, short- and long-term needs. For instance, the endless match analysis data presented pre, during, and after a match can swamp any player. Knowing what you want to measure, when, and why, is as important as how much of it is delivered.

Arsène Wenger, Manager of Arsenal FC, is well known for his beliefs about a coach's ability to deliver concise information at the right times. For example, at half-time he will only focus on three points in possession and three points when out of possession so as to avoid information overload. He does this to appeal to the players' needs in the context of the situation.

Knowing his players, the emotions at that time, and the short window to communicate key messages, Wenger is able to adapt his management style to cater to his players' needs. As a coach, he has selected key information presented by his analysts, digested it himself, and publically communicated the relevant messages to the team in a language and tone that fits the context and the culture.

Whilst a coach communicates with his team publically, they are also aware that connecting with individuals before and afterwards can be as valuable as the group message. Some players need a quiet one-to-one to clarify information and boost confidence, others need to be left alone to self-manage. Some need a kick up the backside, and others require a pat on the back. What's most important here is that, as the coach, you have a very good understanding about what works for each of them. This understanding is only gained through time, patience, and the creation of opportunities for constant communication.

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Specific actions

A central theme running through this book is empathy and understanding. As a coach, see the world through the eyes of your players. Understand the challenges each player is facing. We will re-visit a multitude of exercises, similar in nature, to emphasise and reinforce alternative methods of achieving particular traits and underlining their importance for coaches as a cornerstone in their players' development.

Open the door

Every player needs to know that there is always an opportunity (should they need it) to come and speak with their coach. When players are young, this also goes for parents. Reassurance is like medicine and sometimes just knowing the door is open provides a sense of security and connection.

One-to-one player meeting

Create an opportunity to invite a player to meet with you privately.

Take the time to get to know something about them that you didn't know before. This could be where they live or where they were born, which team they support, or their favourite player in the world. The simpler the better.

Share something of yourself

Effective relationships are built on trust. Make sure the player leaves you having learned something about you too. This will ensure that they feel they know you a little better. This could be a favourite musician, food, or family fact.

Co-create the goal

Know your players' ambitions and motivations to achieve their goals. This is the essence of seeing the world through their eyes. Create development goals *together* rather than imposing them.

The player profile

Take the time to build a performance profile in which the technical, tactical, physical, and mental traits required to succeed are logged. These traits should be the ones the player (and you as coach) believe are needed

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to be the very best in their position. This will help you build the player's job description and offer a vital tool for measurement and accountability.

Ensure that the player takes ownership (under your guidance) to list their traits and set their goals.

For example, a striker may label:

- Physical: Strength to hold defenders off, Acceleration to break away from defenders.
- Technical: Close range finishing one-on-one.
- Tactical: How to play as a 'false 9' in a 4-3-3.
- Mental: Staying confident after missing key opportunities.
- Emotional: Staying calm and composed in 1 v1 situations.
- Social: Speak at the team meeting and offer opinions.
- Personal: Create time for my family, call mum and dad once a week!
- Lifestyle: Ensure I'm in bed before 11 pm each night. Replace nutritional plan every week.

The Player Performance Profile

The player performance profile is a tool to measure, manage, and monitor specific traits required to succeed in each position. It is a collaborative method for facilitating performance development and improvement.

The profile can be used to both write and record performance goals in each category, and track progress over time. There is a sample blank profile, below.

Under the category of "Emotional", for example, the coach and player can assess player components such as:

- The ability to stay composed under pressure.
- Energy to motivate himself/herself.
- Remaining calm in conflict.

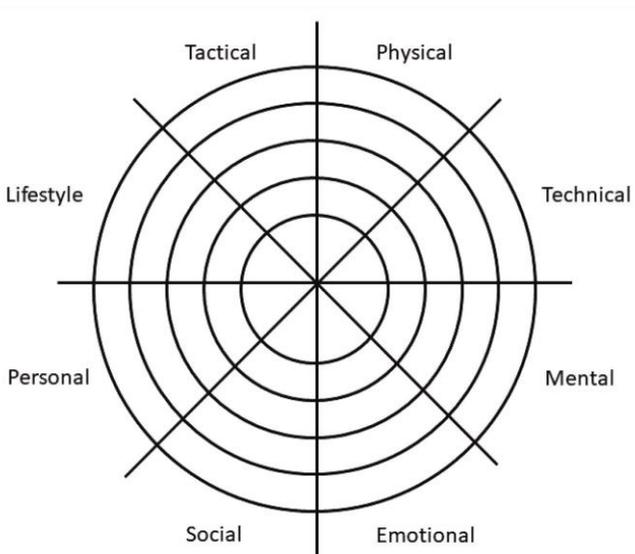
When making an assessment:

1. Coaches ask their player: "Where do you think you are now, between 0 and 10?"
2. Coaches then offer their own assessment of the player: "This is where I think you are."

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3. Both parties examine the differences between scores/viewpoints.
4. Both parties try to work out why there are differences in perceptions.
5. The coach and player then calculate a score, and work out what can be done to improve the score, for this player, in this situation.

The current score – between 0 and 10 – is then marked on the profile wheel (0 = low grade, 10 = high grade; 10 is the outermost ring).



Understand the Barriers

When you understand the things that can get in the way of a player achieving their goals, you can effectively help to remove them. For example, travel to training in the evening may be a problem due to lack of transport options. Providing transport removes the anxiety associated with the problem and creates more time to focus on the goal of constant improvement.

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Personal De-Brief / Effective Intervention

During a de-brief, make a short list of the player's strengths and areas for improvement. If you have access to the stats on their performances, or video clips, they are excellent tools. Sandwich the feedback, presenting a key strength, then an area for improvement, followed by another strength. This structure reassures the player that there were good things in the performance and that there are also areas to improve on. Crucially, end any interaction on a positive note!

Summary

What worked yesterday won't work today and what works today won't work tomorrow. The future coach will continue to innovate, recognising and adapting to the constant developments in technology and society which are changing the way we live and engage with the world around us.

The way information is shared and taught in educational institutions will rapidly be aided by an emerging trend of virtual online advancements.

Despite the rise and benefit of information technology, and the need to incorporate teaching methods accordingly, the future coach *must* appeal to the connection and relationship with the human being. Inevitably, relationships will be defined in an age of independence by a coach's capacity to see the world through the eyes of their players, placing players' needs above their own.

The future coach must work toward sustaining high-performance environments that allow for co-created independent thinking, both on the pitch and off it. Modern-day winning cultures will evolve to allow constant interchange between player-led coach-supported, and coach-led player-supported, working dynamics. The future coach will need to be an architect of *affectionate authority* riding the crest of innovation whilst remaining grounded in the foundation of their core values. In an age when dictatorships will continue to fall, collaboration will be crowned the new king, and the future coach will rise.