The Role of the Coach Developer in Supporting and Guiding Coach Learning

A Commentary

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The impact of the role of the Coach Developer is still emerging. Countries are at varying rates of first realizing their need, and then implementing (or refining) their coach developer systems. The ICCE’s leadership internationally in this area is critical and will expedite the rate of improvement for years to come. Given the emerging evolution of the coach developer role, my greatest desire is that the research community will continue to focus its attention towards conducting further research and sharing recommendations for ongoing improvement.

In my role as CEO of the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC), I spend significant energy envisioning how to create relevant and effective coach development support for the future. The CAC, along with its 67 sport partners and partners representing all Canadian provinces and territories, make up the nationally recognized coaching education standard under the banner of the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP). This shapes a unified partnership entrenched throughout the country. While the NCCP has had a long-standing ‘facilitator development’ system, the NCCP has recently embraced a revised Coach Developer system which is currently being implemented throughout the country (Coaching Association of Canada, 2015).

And so, I turn my focus to three areas linked to, but also somewhat beyond, the ideas presented by McQuade and Nash in their Insights paper. I believe the future success of any coach developer system implementation hinges on the following three areas: (a) next generation and multi-cultural coach recruitment and development, (b) building the profession, and, (c) sustainable coach developer system.

Next Generation and Multi-Cultural Coach Recruitment and Development

Attracting the next generation of successful Olympic and Paralympic coaches is currently an area of concern identified by many performing countries. So too at home, recruitment of coaches for domestic and participation development is also facing challenges. Canada is incredibly reliant on volunteer coaches to make all levels of sport and recreation in our country a reality.

One strategy to attract and retain coaches is through quality coach developer systems, such as the one defined by McQuade and Nash. Yet I wonder how our coach developer process towards Millennials is being directed. In May of 2013, The Conference Board of Canada published Helping Millennials Help You—Managing Your Workforce (Huston, 2013). In the report it states that Millennials will make up 64% of the Workforce by 2020. How are we adapting our systems in order to prepare for that onslaught? Our Coach Developers develop future coaches; what steps should be taken now to prepare for this reality?

The report describes Millennials as technologically savvy, with a global perspective, who seek a great deal of immediate feedback and value group and team learning. I think is an area we must investigate and respond to in preparation for attracting the next generation of coaches. The current Coach Developer systems are being created—for the most part—by Gen X (65-79), defined as trusting themselves and not institutions, don’t like red tape and favour action learning, and Babyboomers (46-64) who can be defined as competitive, idealistic, and good team players who like leadership roles.

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While the generational styles are only one aspect to consider for recruitment and retention of future coaches, I do think they provide some great insight for future system implementation. The logic being that the way we structure our coach developer policies and processes needs to be adapted for the next generation.

Overlaying the generational styles is the need to attract new Canadians and multi-cultural coaches into our system. Canada is a relatively young country with an inclusive citizenship policy. Since 1971, we have embraced the notion that all citizens are equal, and that the retention of identity and pride in ancestry are valued while still having a sense of belonging. Yet we still struggle to engage new Canadians with the NCCP. A successful change in this area will reside in how we adapt our coach developer processes to be more inclusive. This is a significant shift that we will embrace within the NCCP in future years. If you want to be a coach (or coach developer) but you have either English or French as your second language, you may not be so inclined to engage.

Canada has also been facing a decline in national sport participation. A recent Government of Canada General Social Survey found that 26% of Canadians age 15 and older participated regularly in sport, representing a 17% decline over the past 18 years (Statistics Canada, 2013). As a system, we have our work cut out for us in Canada! Of course, it’s not all doom and gloom, and recent international events and government focus on sport, including 2015 the Year of Sport, the Pan American and the Parapan American Games, and the FIFA Women’s World Cup, have electrified the nation which will no doubt have a positive impact on Canadians for decades to follow.

Building the Profession

Ah, creating the profession. As pointed out by McQuade and Nash, the UK Task Force Final Report notes inconsistent education and qualifications have hindered the valuing and, therefore, the development of the profession. Ultimately a robust, performing coach developer system which engages with universities and colleges is part of the solution. Yet, it is only part.

If we are to create a true profession for coaching, we need to complete the picture. Employment standards must meet expectations of valuable employment. Working conditions, including salary, benefits, job security and, not to mention work life balance and burnout, must be addressed. Internationally, some countries have successfully addressed some of these issues, yet it is inconsistent and requires greater attention from many nations.

In Canada we are a work in progress too. We have experienced some great strides. Performing National Sport Organizations (NSOs or NGBs as referenced in the McQuade and Nash paper) have proactively addressed employment conditions to attract and retain the best coaches. And, the Government of Canada, our largest funder of sport, has implemented very successful policies related to improving pay scales aligned with education requirements to positively impact conditions. How do we ensure a robust coach developer system as a significant part of the solution? NSOs must wholly commit to the implementation of the coach developer role within their organizations. For instance, do national team coaches have development incorporated into their job descriptions and performances reviews? Do NSOs have the role of coach developer entrenched into their organizational roles and responsibilities? Is coaching and coach development part of their strategic plan? Without the institutionalization of the role, coach development will never reach its potential.

Sustainable Coach Developer System

In reading the McQuade and Nash paper I was struck by the in-depth role each convener plays within the UK system, considering each role is potentially held by separate individuals. I am interested in exploring the continuity of application of the principles of the system. How do they maintain a consistent philosophy and approach in applying their trade? The quality assurance in the delivery chain within the system, considering the number of people and steps which touch the coach from start to end, is key. The active engagement of the coach in development, designing, and evaluating the efficacy of the coach developer system must be protected.

Further, anyone who knows me will attest that I spend a lot of time talking about sustainability. It is especially important to consider in a country as vast as ours which relies heavily on volunteers to make our sport system viable. I wonder about the ability to implement all of these roles within a country like ours—especially at the community level. The process by which you become a coach—or a coach developer—must respect the realities of the environment within which it is trying to operate. In other words, it must be attainable.

If we are to truly embrace lifelong learning, we must embrace the notion of individuals entering the system with varying knowledge and competencies just as we embrace the notion that development is a never-ending cycle. How do coach developers identify this in potential coaches and how do they address it? We are currently dealing with a system that is sometimes far too complex and confusing to be inviting to the coach.

At the Olympic and Paralympic level, I am inspired by the leaders in our Canadian sport system who are embracing the need to grow and develop their current (and future) coaches. We are currently working on a pilot program to help entrenched the coach developer role within NSOs more effectively at the high performance level with the leadership of Dr. Pierre Trudel. The pilot, which is in the early stages, proposes shifting the focus of coach education away from the existing content-driven approach requiring coaches to follow a prescribed curriculum, to a more needs-based approach that allows coaches to control the pace and focus of their learning by delivering learning experiences when and as they are