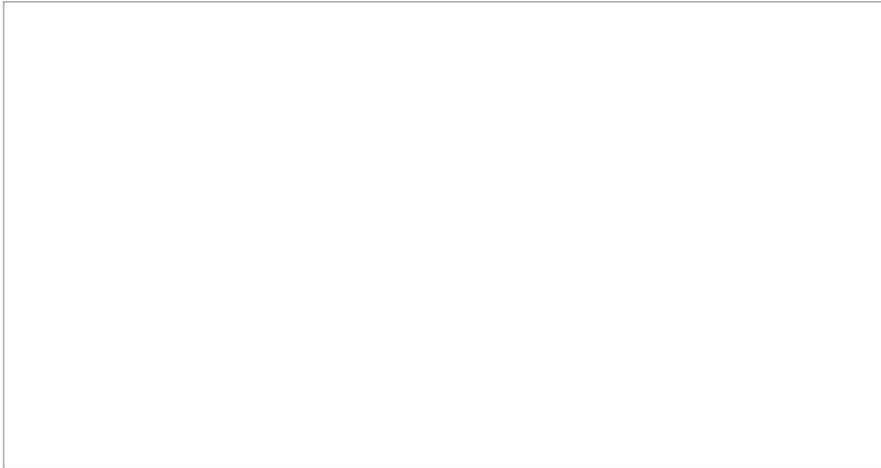


Robots

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It's been said many times before that coaching is all about relationships, and positive relationships are built on communication, trust and engagement.

As I have written in a previous blog post, ([CLICK HERE TO READ IT](#)) great athlete-coach relationships don't always happen organically, they may have to be worked on just like any other relationship we encounter.

I love the sport of gymnastics and it's one of the main reasons I coach, but I also value the time spent with the athletes. Why? Because kids are fun! Many of my fondest coaching memories are linked to times of happiness and laughter with the athletes and not always the medals and accomplishments on the way.

That is why I struggle to understand why some coaches wish for their athletes to train like **robots**. Perhaps this isn't a conscious decision, but it is inevitable considering the conditions and manner in which they are coached. Let me explain ...

Robotic athletes appear sterile of emotion, drained of personality and with a fear of being expressive and creative. They can't communicate with their coaches. They are very good at doing one thing, following instructions. Depending on your coaching philosophy, this may appeal to you, but I can't think of anything worse than spending my days with athletes who aren't expressive, fun, or show great character. Robotic athletes have been manufactured to behave a very specific way, with endless limitations, restraints and rules, and they often lack self esteem as they are not able to be themselves. They fear consequences of their behaviour so prefer to remain sterile than to risk getting in trouble.

It's tragic.

I'm always shocked by how many coaches associate creativity and character with poor discipline and carelessness. 'I'm often told, 'but if I coached that way then we wouldn't get any work done.'

Personality, character, fun, laughter, smiling and happiness does not have to be at the detriment of work ethic, dedication, commitment, discipline, structure and codes of conduct. Some of the best clubs I have had the pleasure of working with have a great balance of all those components. It is in fact the laughter and happiness that strengthens the athletes' passion for the sport and desire to come back each day.

I always say, 'morale comes before medals,' not the other way around. Good morale makes for a positive environment and culture, and we all know that a positive environment makes for more enjoyable work, which in turn leads to more productivity. Quite simple really. Happy people perform better.

I firmly believe that character is one of the most important traits required to survive our difficult sport. With few athletes making it 'all the way,' it's crucial that as many athletes as possible embrace our sport positively.

If your kids are miserable, crying often, lacking in expressing their personality or character, there could be a missing 'ingredient' in your recipe, or perhaps an ingredient within the recipe that needs to be removed.

Let's encourage diversity, personality, character and creativity amongst our athletes.

Some questions for you to reflect on:

How do you want your athletes to remember their training in years to come?

How do you want them to remember the time you spent with them?

Would they have positive memories, or negative thoughts?

Are you suppressing character or allowing it to flourish?

Are you facilitating creativity or restricting it?

Do your athletes regularly laugh and smile whilst training?

Are you having fun whilst you coach?

Do you enjoy the time spent with your athletes?

Do they regularly laugh and smile whilst training?

Most importantly, does the thought of spending another ten years in your current conditions and environment scare you or excite you?

Food for thought as always ... have a great week.

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