

Tackling Stereotypes and Promoting Diversity In Coaching

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With the [National Coaching Week](#) upon us, I wanted to write an article that resonates with the entire coaching community and speaks to the importance of giving opportunities and access to both women and men coaches.

There is no doubt that women's sport is experiencing growth. Evidence shows that female participation in sport at all levels has increased whereby almost a 50/50 split can be observed between male and female athletes at elite level. For example, in the 2016 Rio Olympics women made 45% women of the total participants [according to the IOC](#). In England and in terms of adult involvement in sport more generally, [results suggest that 40% are males and 32% are females of the entire population](#). The gap is closing due to concerted efforts to address the gender imbalance that historically existed. However, little attention has been given to the gender imbalance that exists in coaching and amongst coaches across the various levels of sport and especially within high performance sport. While a [recent survey by UK Coaching](#) revealed that there are 54% of male coaches and 46% of female coaches actively coaching in various contexts, of these female coaches 62% did not have a formal coaching qualification (54% for men) yet there was an equal proportion of male and female coaches holding higher qualifications at levels 3 and 4 (though the proportion at level 1 and 2 was lesser for females than males).

In UK and abroad, figures would seem to suggest that there are much fewer women coaches operating in high performance sport. Recently, [Australia declared that from the 160 coaches accredited at the 2016 Olympic Games only 15 or 9% were women](#). This percentage of around 10% for women coaches in Olympic Games seems to be representative across the world (Norman, 2014). In Canada, while 33% of women's teams across all sport levels coached by women only 20% of high performance coaches and University coaches are women and in USA only 3% of men's teams at the University level are coached by women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). In Germany 10% of high performance coaches and 13% of professional coaches are women (Robertson, 2016). The bottom line is that female coach numbers when compared with their male counterparts are small and are declining or at best remain stagnant. Recently, [some activity would seem to indicate a positive change to the status quo](#).

There is no doubt that change is needed. Change is needed because sport has the capacity to communicate to the world what is valued and if sport is coached by predominantly males, then this sets a standard for the world to see. A positive action to challenge gender diversity is needed and a commitment to develop a pipeline of women coaches. There is a need to balance the system and increase gender diversity within coaching – especially in high performance. Accelerating such growth in coaching can have significance benefits because it would

- enhance productivity and innovation,
- increase the talent pool,
- promote performance (with financial implications) and
- improve coach retention.

It has been suggested that women coaches are less qualified, less willing to travel and recruit, less likely to apply for positions, lacking confidence and the necessary commitment as they may be more concerned with time constraints imposed by family duties and responsibilities. This is simply not entirely true and perpetuates stereotypical beliefs and gender biased attitudes. Support from sport authorities is mission critical in order to address gender imbalance in coaching. It would be highly valued by all, if such sport authorities make a **strategic commitment to provide access and opportunities to female coaches**. Providing access and opportunities to talented female coaches into high performance coaching – coaches who have the capacity to make a significant and positive difference in the lives of our athletes, will enrich the landscape of sport and coaching. While we are waiting for concerted action to take place, the following provides advice, practical tips, to women who are looking to coach either within participation or within performance sport.

Advice to women looking to coach within the different levels of performance:

From grass roots to high performance

Be Confident to What You Do: Exude confidence; a “can-do” attitude can work wonders. Don't shy away from the opportunities that may be presented to you. It won't always going to be easy. You'll be pushed out of your comfort zone but that's the best way to develop, grow and succeed.

Empower yourself: Clarify your purpose and meaning of your coaching. Clarify who you are a coach and what you would like to achieve within coaching. Showcase your competencies, determination and ability to do well. Feel self-empowered and autonomous even if you operate in a not-so-empowered sport system. You have the power to make a difference.

Ignore Stereotypes: Stereotypes will remain a prominent part of the coaching world if they are acknowledged as a barrier. Such stereotypes need to be broken down: they need to be forgotten about. In the grand scheme of things, if you are good at what you do, how you coach and if you believe in yourself you can't go wrong.

Encourage and empathise with others: This is extremely important as we need to work together to encourage other women into coaching and show them that we understand their issues and barriers. As a collective we are great at empathy so we need to capture this and share our own experiences, fears and achievements so that others who are considering a career in coaching can see coaching as a worthwhile and rewarding career choice.

Develop healthy relationships: The relationships you develop with your athletes and importantly other coaches and staff within the system you work/coach can energise, vitalise and even restore how you feel as well as you think and behave. However, bad, unhealthy, dis-functional relationships are like black holes that suck energy. Be aware and reflective...

Supportive Network: Seek out role models and mentors or others who can support you by giving you opportunities and accessibility in order to become a fulfilled and successful coach in your sport. Identify individuals who are open, honest and available to both challenge and support you.

Your comments, thoughts, feedback is most welcome.

Please have your say in the comments below

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