

# Cut out new ideas, work on real coaching

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Economic forecasters aren't doing too well at the moment. Nor political pollsters.

We all recognise it's tough to predict human behaviour. Ask a bunch of people what they are thinking and they will rarely give you an accurate answer. Who wants to admit they would vote for Donald Trump in a public forum? Many didn't but still voted for him!

Does scientific research do any better? Not particularly. John Ioannidis, writing in *The Atlantic*, said that 90% of medical research turns out to be wrong. Even if this is perhaps an exaggeration, the statistics don't give us an enormous amount of confidence.

In the coaching world, based on "new" research, we've moved away from static stretching before competition, started and stopped using ice baths, reduced sugar in our diets and, well, the list goes on.

And just recently, England Rugby's eye coach, Dr Sherylle Calder, has said that rugby players' skills have reduced because they spend too much time on their phones. The evidence? I'm still looking (with others) for the science behind this.

Meta-studies seem the way forward. That is drawing together plenty of studies to understand where the direction of evidence lies. Even then, the conclusions can be skewed. For example, global warming may well be happening. Okay, let's say it is. That has costs and benefits. It's even possible to argue that the benefits outweigh the costs (like fewer droughts or fewer winter deaths).

If it is hard to reach a conclusion on the evidence, should you embrace more ideas? Should we have more games, fewer drills: more athlete-centred coaching or more directed practice?

As one of my bosses said to me: Don't give me problems, give me solutions.

So, I say, don't get bogged down in trying to find the next new idea. There are better ways to keep your training fresh, invigorating and relevant.

## 1. APES

Keep your training Active, Purposeful, Enjoyable and Safe. It's a great checklist to make sure you are on track. If you've been on a UKCC Level 1 rugby course, you will have certainly learned that.

Active – your players will be doing stuff. Not listening to you too much. They will discover solutions which work for them.

Purposeful – the training must be aimed at improving their performance for game days. It's purposeful if both you and the players think so.

Enjoyable – that means competitive in my book. The right sort of competitive to make the players seek better ways to win, though not at all costs.

Safe – and that doesn't just mean they don't get injured. Safe from bullying and safe to make mistakes.

## 2. Believe in what you believe

You've come into coaching for a reason. Think what those reasons are. If it's to give back something to the game, then do that. If it's to improve individuals, then believe in that.

Keep on track with those beliefs and try to align your coaching to that. It's very easy to get bogged down with changing your mindset or following a new path. Changing your mind is fine, as long as you go back to what defines you.

For example, I've always wanted to give as many players a chance to play. Though I want to win, I want more players to share being involved in the processes that might lead to winning. Sometimes, to do that, I've been a player-centred coach. Other times, it's been better to be coach-centred. It's about freeing up time to move to what's important.

## 3. Standing on the shoulders of giants

The best and effective new ideas evolve from years of experimenting, mistakes and experience. They don't suddenly appear. They are tested, evaluated and retested.

The same goes for your coaching. Once a team is up and running, you are constantly adjusting training and tactics to suit the development of the team. Throw in a new idea and it's difficult to work out whether any improvements come from what you've introduced or from other factors around the development of the team. No scientist or researcher can prove that with your team – you can't set up a control group to ascertain the differences.

Real coaching is about adapting tried-and-tested methods to your team. Some may work, some won't. Just because a clever technique or tactic worked before doesn't mean it will work again. Instead, you should be encouraging to keep trying, keep wanting to improve.

Isaac Newton said his theories on physics came from the centuries of research of other great minds. He had learned from them, tried and tested his own theories based on theirs. He said he was merely standing on the shoulders of giants.

Your coaching is the same. It's real. It's not always ground-breaking but it does make a difference. The things that make the most difference have come from years of your experience and the years of other coaches' experience. Make small changes that you believe in.

### Conclusion: Not ideas, not facts, just experience

The best coaches have been coaching for a long time. Listen to them. They won't be saying anything new. It might just be new for you. Real coaching is about getting out there and using what you know in the best way possible. Don't just be suckered into using new ideas that other coaches haven't been using for a long time.

It's a not a fixed mindset approach. You are simply filtering out the fly-by-night ideas that haven't been proven to work. Use practical applications that work most of the time. Keep to what you believe in and not because someone recently told you so. The best coaches rarely seem to bend with the wind, so neither should you.

## What do you think? Please let me know your thoughts by adding a comment below

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