

Understanding time and how to save it

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Coaching can be hard - especially if it is something that you do in your spare time rather than as a career. Does the following sound familiar?

Wake up early. Kids all over the place. Trying to get them ready for school, Drop them off. Then get to work yourself. Long day in the office. Meetings, deadlines, Stress. Leave to get the kids from the after school club they are in. Eldest then has a sports club so race home, get him changed - do you realise how hard it is to get kids just to put some shoes on! - Down to the sports club. Try to watch him play while entertaining the youngest. Back home. Try to calm hyper active kids whilst attempting to cook dinner. Eat. Play something with the kids. Get them into the bath. Then into bed. Then...

...Well then it is late. You are tired. You haven't really had a chance to speak to your wife/husband properly. You just want to sleep as it all starts again tomorrow, but there are the training schedules for the next session to create and send out. Conversations with the other coaches as to the aims and objectives. Speaking to players, answering questions and queries. Talking to other teams about upcoming fixtures. Reviewing the play books. Reviewing film of the last session to see any issues. The list goes on.

...And it is just Monday!

If this, or elements of it, sound familiar then below are some ideas that I have developed to both try and help balance everything out and save time. It still isn't perfect and occasionally things tend to tip too far one way or the other. But overall I hope that these can help you achieve the focus to succeed.

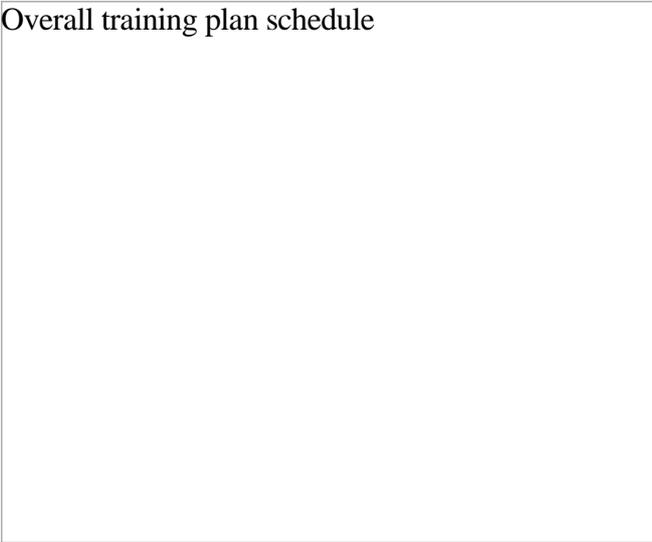
- **Time.** First up, the main thing is understanding realistically what time you have that can be dedicated to the team/player/coaching activity. To do this you need to have a full understanding of all the demands upon your time – family, professional and social. If you are just starting out, it can be misleading to think that coaching starts and finishes with the times attributed to training sessions. There is so much more that goes on around it that there is a need for additional time in the week. Are there certain things that you can't compromise on? Are there things that can be moved? Making a list of all the things that you do in a typical week is the first stepping stone to understanding what time you have at different points.
- **Self evaluation.** Once you have your week blocked out then take a moment to think about how you go about tasks. Are you someone who likes to do a little bit all the time? Or are you someone who works best doing things in one go and then switching off by doing something else? For example, I like to keep things ticking over. So, while I have set times each week that I devote to coaching/team related activities and is when the majority of the work is done, I like to keep checking on things around that as well. Therefore, if I have a quiet 5 minutes I will look at some messages rather than wait. However, this sets a precedent with regards behaviour and can lead players and other coaches to assume that you are available 24/7. As a result care is needed with this approach so that you don't create an imbalance in how you spend your time.
- **A re-understanding of the concept of time.** Remember, this isn't our full time job, we don't have whole days to dedicate to what we need to do. As seen above, we may only have a couple of hours in an evening twice a week. Therefore, time takes on a different meaning. For example, lets say that a task will take you 8 hours to do and it needs to be done in 2 weeks time. If you have all day in which to assign yourself these types of tasks, as it relates to your professional role, then you could leave the task until the second week and do it in a day. However, if you are like the above example and just

have a couple of evenings a week, you therefore need to start immediately to complete it on time. The idea of time has changed. You are no longer thinking in terms of weeks but rather in the chunks you have available to you.

Which then leads nicely onto...

- **Prioritisation.** Not everything has the same priority level. The ability to understand which things need to be done first and which can wait a little is essential to making sure that things get done at all. It can sometimes feel that there are just so many things flying around and you are trying to juggle everything without dropping anything that it can get overwhelming. If you understand your priority listing then you can make sure that you allocate your time accordingly and focus on the truly important items.
- **Milestones.** This is an extension of prioritisation, but is about understanding what the key milestones are in your team's calendar. This can be both on a yearly scale or even a weekly one, but understanding the various goals you need to achieve is vital to then be able to prioritise accordingly. The best way to do this is to work backwards from an end point. For example, the start of your fixtures. This is a set point in time that other tasks relate to. From there, what is the deadline for sorting out kit? sorting your ground? arranging officials? If you know your end point you can then start to create the various milestones leading up to it with regards to training and player development. These can then be the smaller weekly milestones that help to chart your team's growth.
- **Early preparation, better success.** As noted above, time can slip away quickly if you let it. When you just have a couple of hours a week dedicated to club matters it is a precious commodity. Putting the work in early with regards to planning and preparation will reap huge rewards later down the line. Plan out the pre-season as much as possible early so that you have a week-by-week guide to what needs to be done. It might feel slow to start with and that you are "not doing anything" but this preparation will allow you to focus all your energies later in the year on the things that really need attention, rather than continuous planning and reacting.

Overall training plan schedule



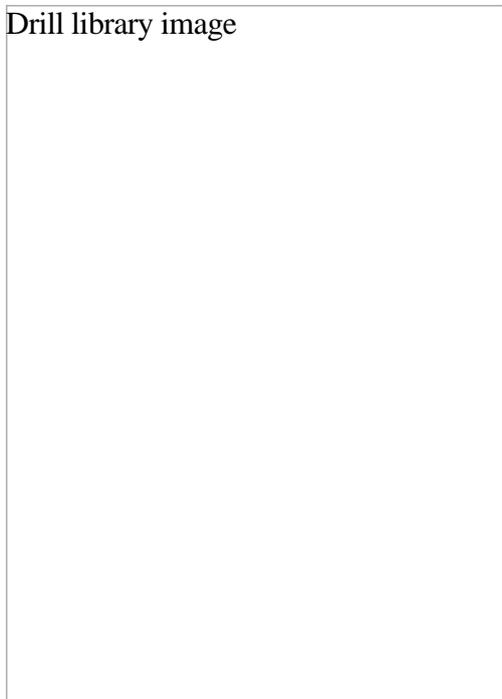
(An example of our training schedule in the build up to Sapphire 2018 with space for the inclusion of focuses and milestones)

- **Templates, templates, templates.** Right at the start of the year - as part of the prep - create yourself a series of templates for all official documents that you will use. These will include practice schedules, player reports, drill illustrations - whatever documents you use within your team. Once you have these templates it serves a two-fold purpose. First it means that you don't have to keep creating them from scratch every time you want one. If you want to draw up a new drill then you have

a ready made template to hand that saves time in construction. Second, with a set of templates it makes everything look the same. This creates a feeling of professionalism within the team rather than having things in different formats or software. Presenting something homogenous helps reinforce the team brand and increases player buy-in. Through the creation of templates, you can also reinforce messages through things like philosophy statements utilised in the header/footer in a word document.

- **Resources and keeping a record.** Following on from the templates, create a set of resources for players to utilise outside of training time. Every time that you run a new drill, use the drill template to draw it up and add it into an accessible drill library. As coaches we are always looking for new drills, or new ways of doing existing ones to get that little extra out of players. By being disciplined and putting the drills into a drill library you save yourself time later in the year when you are trying to remember the drill you ran 3 months ago. Also, players can access it to see how the drills work meaning that practices can be done faster as you remove the need for explanation. In the schedule you can just say that period 1 will utilise drills A, B & C. Indicate that the players then need to make sure that they are familiar with these drills prior to practice. The same can be done with videos. If you find a useful instructional video then save the link in a list for reference later. This can also then be posted to players for them to look at in their own time, but it also saves you trying to find it again.

Drill library image



(An example of a previous drill library template for our flag team. This table based approach can easily be copied to create new drills and the structure grants consistency throughout)

- **Don't be afraid to ask for help.** In these types of roles it can feel that you are the only person that is able to do the tasks. It can get so intense that you feel that you have to do it or it will not get done right, or on time. But it will not work. It is imperative to identify other people to undertake some of the roles that are needed. If you are the only coach, then turn to the players. Don't be afraid to ask some of them to take on leadership roles within the team. Sometimes we can build this invisible barrier between us and the players and we can be reluctant to allow them to "cross over". However, empowering players to take ownership of elements of the club/training can reap great rewards through increased buy-in. It is important to make sure the you select the right players for this, but also just as important to recognise that sometimes they will make a mistake and that this is ok as long a it is used as a learning experience.
- **It is OK to switch off sometimes.** Possibly the hardest thing to do, and one that I always struggle with as it can be hard to let go, but if you have done the above and understood what time you have,

understood your deadlines, prioritised correctly, prepared and then allocated responsibility accordingly then you are in a position to switch off. Everyone needs a mental break. If you are bouncing continuously between work, family and sport then something will unfortunately give eventually. You have to make yourself step away and take a breath, recharge and go again.

In summary, the key items addressed here are:

1. In order to save time, you need to understand time in the context of how much you have to give and its effect on what you can do.
2. Saving time in the season can only be achieved through good planning and preparation beforehand. The more that you can do in the "quiet" part of the year, the more time you will have later on to devote to the important aspects of the team.
3. Make sure that you have support. You cant do it alone. Look to other coaches or players to share some of the burden and workload.

I hope that the above will be of help to other coaches who are trying to juggle personal and sporting lives. Just remember that coaching can be all consuming. It is important to make sure that you retain a balance in your life and these tips are just some of the ways that you can create the right amount of focus to ensure you get what you need to be done in the time that you have available.

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