

Solutions to five common coaching challenges – Part 2

Published 16/10/17 by [Blake Richardson](#)

Know that, at ConnectedCoaches, when the going gets tough we are in your corner.

Several months ago we published a bunch of [five coaching conundrums](#) before delivering chunks of knockout advice from erudite members of the ConnectedCoaches community.

Now it's seconds out, round two, for five more familiar coaching dilemmas that have the potential to derail even the most confident of coaches.

The guidance given here will help you bob and weave your way out of trouble if you encounter a similar scenario in your sessions.

These are condensed answers to what are complex topics, and for more blow by blow accounts of how you might overcome such pitfalls of participation sports, you should click on the links provided, which will take you to the ConnectedCoaches blogs from which the advice was based.

Suggestions for further reading are also provided and, additionally, you can use the search facility to discover what other members have had to say on the themes. Whatever the challenge, there is good chance members have swapped advice in a relevant conversation thread.

If you can't find what you're looking for and you have got a coaching question, why not [start a conversation](#) in the relevant [specialist interest group](#) (click share on the menu > start a conversation).

1. Why are participants losing interest in my sessions?



Take a couple of long deep breaths. Your eyes are becoming heavy. I want to take you deep down, deeper...

Yes, we are going to talk mind control, but not in the way you are probably thinking. This isn't Paul McKenna's guide to Stopping Smoking, it is ConnectedCoaches Content Champion [Catherine Baker's](#) guide to using introspection and the power of emotional intelligence to tackle coaching predicaments.

Tapping into the behavioural and emotional side of coaching can be hugely beneficial for your own personal growth and for the quality of experience and quality of learning you give your participants.

Going below the surface to understand and appreciate the feelings of those you coach will help you spot if any are losing interest in your sessions. As Catherine explains: 'What goes on "under the surface" has a huge impact on what you see.'

One key facet of emotional intelligence is empathy. Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes, and see the situation from their perspective. This ability to gauge your participants' feelings will help you pick up on subtle changes in behaviour and prompt you into finding out why they may be feeling that way. After all, you can't help someone who is losing interest if you aren't aware they are losing interest.

Don't assume it must be because they no longer find your sessions fun, engaging or challenging. One of your participants may be having problems at home, be experiencing mental health problems, bullying or be a late developer whose confidence has been dented by competing against more physically mature team-mates.

Interpreting people's emotionally significant stimuli will only come with practice and Catherine explains that the best way to boost your empathy levels is to ask questions.

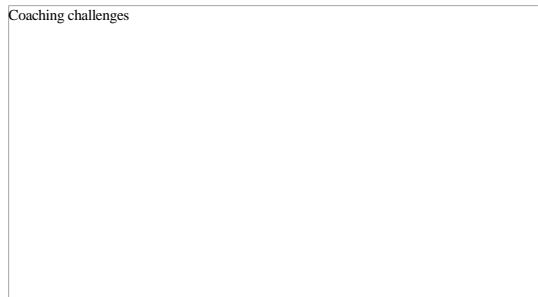
'First of all ask how they are. Depending on how they answer, you might want to probe a bit more. Also consider asking others in the group, particularly those closest to them. Do they know what's going on and what's been causing their change in approach?'

Quotes taken from the video blog: [Emotional intelligence: How to recognise and coach a participant losing interest](#)

See also:

- [Dealing with feelings: The importance of getting your head around emotion perception](#)
- [Emotional intelligence is integral to becoming a great coach](#)

2. How do you improve your players' decision making?



'There's a time and a place for that... and this isn't it!' The phrase is often used by a parent or teacher to admonish a child (or adult) who behaves in an inappropriate way.

Coaches too, frustrated at the questionable decision making of their performers, may well have uttered those exact words on more than a few occasions.

ConnectedCoaches Content Champion [Ceri Bowley](#) heard words to that effect from a coach once and it struck a chord. So much so he uses the recollection as an analogy to illustrate how coaches can improve the decision making skills of their participants.

He tells the story of watching a footballer bamboozle a defender by performing a drag-back and Cruyff turn, before nut-megging them for good measure and setting up a team-mate for a shot at goal. Cue an overjoyed reaction from the coach to this dazzling piece of skill. A similar attempt in the second half ended in the ball ricocheting off the defender's leg and the opposition launching a swift counter-attack. Cue a chastening comment from the sidelines and one bemused player. Faced with a similar scenario, should he attempt the trick again or opt for safety first? The reaction of the coach has had the negative outcome of inducing indecision.

How a coach responds to a participant's successes is more important than how he intervenes following a mistake or unsuccessful execution of a skill, says Ceri.

Praise for good decision making should be followed up with a period of questioning and reflection as soon after the event as possible, so both coach and player understand the reasons for the approach taken in that specific game scenario.

'Helping the player break the skill down and recognise what influenced his thinking is crucial. Without this reflection, very few players fully understand why they did what they did.'

Balancing a decision against such external cues as position of the opposition; position of team-mates; your own positioning; the scoreline; your level of confidence; the weather conditions is by no means fool-proof. The intricate interplay of variables in a match situation means the 'correct' decision can change from one split second to the next. But having a deeper understanding of why your previous decisions in the context of the game were right or wrong should at last help players make the correct decision more consistently.

Quotes taken from the blog: [Coaching successful performance to develop decision making](#)

See also:

- [Decision-making in players at under nines and under tens](#)

3. Lack of time with your participants

Coaching challenges



Imagine a brainstorming session comprising Chinese philosopher Confucius and that titanic trio of Greek thinkers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The discussion is around the problem of how to fit training nights, session planning and match days into a weekly routine that also includes being a full-time working mum or dad with a hectic social life. Not even the wisest souls to have ever lived would be able to deliver a satisfactory solution to that old coaching chestnut.

Reading this segment will not enable you to add an extra two hours to your day, but it might help you manage your time more effectively so that the few hours you do share with your participants is quality time.

The basic premise: Good **planning**, **preparation** and **prioritisation** can save time in the long-run.

As ConnectedCoaches Content Champion [Simon Browning](#) explains, those starting out in coaching soon come to realise that there is a lot more to running a team than holding a training session and supporting the players on match days. Sorting out kit and registration cards, marking out the pitch, managing finances, booking officials, organising a team each week via text, e-mail or WhatsApp and then liaising with opposition managers over start times and last-minute cancellations due to bad weather, is only the half of it. To fully engage and challenge your participants demands attention to detail over session structure. Which takes time.

'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,' says Simon Browning.

And **prioritising** accordingly means understanding the various individual and team goals you want to achieve regarding training and player development.

Early **preparation** is paramount. '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 will reap huge rewards later down the line,' says Simon.

He suggests that, at the start of the season, create a series of templates for all official documents you will use (practice schedules, player reports). 'Having ready-made templates to hand will save time in construction.'

In terms of **planning**, he adds: 'Each time you run a new [exercise, game or drill], use the ready-made templates to draw it up and add it into an accessible library. This will save you time later in the year when you are trying to remember the exercise you ran three months ago. Also, players can access it to see how the exercises work, meaning that practices can be done faster as you remove the need for explanation.'

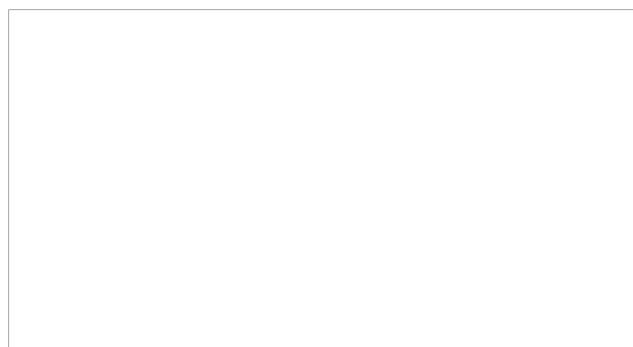
A typical session plan template might include some or all of the following boxes: name, equipment, coaching points, instruction and strategy notes, learning outcome, reflections, player feedback.

Quotes taken from the blog: [Understanding time and how to save it](#)

See also:

- [Juggling act: The challenges of managing a coaching career around motherhood](#)

4. How to coach ranging abilities



Are you an inclusive coach?

Being inclusive means providing equal access to learning, regardless of age, gender, disability, ethnic background and ability level, and adapting and modifying your coaching practice accordingly to ensure the individual needs of all your participants are being met.

In that case, of course you are an inclusive coach, right? No one intentionally discriminates between ability levels. But what about unintentionally?

Large groups can mean a whole spectrum of abilities vying for a coach's attention. Keeping every participant engaged and challenged in sessions, maintaining individual development pathways while being careful not to compromise support to the wider group can be a mighty challenge and can lead to unwitting prejudice.

Not to put too fine a on it, there are coaches who are hell-bent on sustained achievement. Can every trophy-hunter coach say, hand on heart, they focus as much of their energy on the rest as they do the best? There are too many incidents of the same few players warming the substitutes' bench every weekend, under-utilised and under-valued, while the stronger players get all the game time.

There are simple strategies available to coaches to ensure inclusivity. Like imposing interactive games-based constraints that develop a motivational climate for all ability levels to flourish, and using peer mentors to enforce learning objectives.

The constraints approach is a useful method of addressing contrasting development targets within a group setting.

Rugby coach [Jimmy Halsius](#) for example, will impose more restrictions on the better players. So a developing player might only be allowed to run for five steps before releasing the ball to a team-mate while another will be allowed to take ten strides before passing. Or perhaps a more accomplished player is told they can only score a try if they complete a grubber kick first. And be creative. The best ideas come through a process of trial and error.

Using peer mentors is a common strategy in schools, where teachers can be in charge of around 30 children's learning. They will divide the class into smaller groups, and use pupils to monitor and assess the progress of their classmates, having first been given instructions as to the success criteria and how to recognise the learning outcome.

Placing a senior player in each small-sided group to lead the drill is an obvious starting point. But also experiment with using less technically adept players as mentors. By observing, questioning and probing participants and peer mentors to reflect, and providing them with additional feedback, this empowering approach boosts problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. Just remember, in the interests of inclusivity, the focus should be on improvement rather than on individual performance.

Quotes taken from the blog: [How to coach a range of abilities within a large group](#)

5. How to identify if one of your participants has a mental health problem

Mental illness

Everyone over the age of 40 will have fond memories of the long-running series of BT commercials involving Maureen Lipman, aka Beattie Bellman, and those four unforgettable words, 'It's Good to Talk', which was the campaign's slogan.

After being told by her grandson that the only exams he had passed were pottery and sociology, Beattie responded with the punchline: 'He gets an ology and he says he's failed... you get an ology, you're a scientist.'

The underlying message is that a problem shared is a problem halved. Moreover, socialising is fun and relaxing, can be helpful in terms of forming social connections, forging a sense of belonging and combating loneliness, and thereby reducing stress.

Well, those four words have become even more indelibly inked into our minds in recent years, having evolved into watchwords for the new Millennium. The benefits of conversation have not changed, only now the importance of opening up to others is being delivered through the medium of serious statistics, not light humour. Our society is in the grip of a crippling cradle to grave mental health crisis and a reluctance to talk about our feelings has only served to fuel the stigma attached to mental health problems.

Giving coaches the confidence to talk about mental health is key to the care and support process, giving those in need the opportunity to break their silence and the cycle of loneliness.

Mental health charity Mind has a dedicated workforce of staff who work in the sport sector, advising coaches on such matters as how to open a conversation about mental health with a participant they are concerned about. They stress there is no need to possess a specialist knowledge of mental health to help people. Being empathetic and a willing and patient listener can work wonders.

'It's about getting everyone talking about mental health and making it okay to have those conversations,' says Mind's Community Programme Manager (Sport), Hayley Jarvis, who reminds coaches they have a duty of care to their participants.

'It's about them asking what sometimes can be a difficult question – "I've noticed that you don't seem yourself", or, "There seems to have been a drop in your performance" – and empowering coaches to have those conversations and not be expected to have all the answers but to be prepared to give over some time and listen.'

Quotes taken from the blog: [Coaches must put mental health awareness front of mind](#)

See also:

- [Promoting Good Mental Health through Coaching animation video](#)
- [Help us to help others: Coaches need coaching on mental health awareness](#)
- [Mental health awareness: Changing times and focused minds](#)
- [Help your athletes talk their way out of trouble: A single-minded approach to fighting mental illness](#)

What are the biggest coaching challenges you have faced? Try using our search engine to find some solutions that could work for you.

If you can't find what you're looking for why not [start a conversation](#) (click share on the menu -> start a conversation etc) in the relevant [specialist interest group](#)? There are lots of members willing to share their experiences with you who will only be too happy to help.

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tags : planning, empathy, inclusive, decision-making, mental-health, coaching-challenges, prioritisation, preparation, ranging-abilities, time