

The Power of Why

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power of why Nick Ruddock

Let's cut straight to the chase ...

Why?" is one of the most powerful words in the human language.

The question 'why?' can provide you with answers to questions you believe you don't know the answer to.

But 'Why?' can also be one of the most confrontational, aggressive words too, and as a result of this, it is often used poorly in coaching.

Let's look at some good and bad use cases for the word 'Why?' and how you could be using it every day to reflect and learn.

Starting with the bad ...

'Why' can be a threatening word, particularly when providing feedback or questioning an athlete. It seldom provides a great answer in response. Here are some examples ...

- *Why* are you bending your legs
- *Why* are you doing it like that?
- *Why* are you not concentrating?
- *Why* are you late?

I've witnessed many coaches use this way of providing feedback and communicating with their athletes after each and every repetition. *Why* did you do this? *Why* did you do that? *Why* didn't you do this? It's a poor question, particularly as athletes who actually respond are often seen as argumentative. The question is likely rhetorical, and what's the point in asking rhetorical questions when you are trying to increase understanding and engagement?

Coach: 'Why are you bending your legs?'

Athlete: 'Because I wasn't tight enough on the springboard'

Coach: 'Are you answering me back? Do you think you're smarter than me now?!'

(If the above chain of events seems unlikely to you, it's a situation I have witnessed on a number of occasions!)

Whilst it's great to empower an athlete to think for themselves, and have a greater understanding of their own performance, there is a better way of doing so than use of the word 'Why?' in this context.

The language '*Why did you land on your back?*' could be better phrased as '*Any idea what caused you to fall onto your back?*'

Same intentions, but less threatening, and creates an encouraging platform for communication and discussion. It's the little hacks like this that help to build rapport between athlete and coach.

This slight adjustment is great for empowering the athlete to independently be aware of their errors, and understand the corrections required so they can (to some extent) be able to coach themselves.

Now, in contrast, the question 'Why?' is great when used in a personal, reflective context.

At a young age, we're often taught the 'Who? what? when? where? why? and how?' philosophy, to ask questions which give a clearer understanding of a given situation, and for good reason too. The best way of finding great answers is to ask great questions.

The better your question, the better your answer.

Let's look at some GREAT 'why' questions that you can all ask yourself, some on a regular basis too:

- *Why* do I deserve success?
- *Why* do I coach?
- *Why* did my athletes underperform today?
- *Why* were we so successful/unsuccessful this season?
- *Why* do some coaches repeatedly produce fantastic results?
- *Why* am I not achieving my goals?
- *Why* do I always make poor food choices?
- *Why* should an athlete choose for me to work with them?

Additionally, asking the question 'why' multiple times from the same root question is a great way to dig down to the actual source of a problem, as in the example below:

1. *Why* have I not achieved my goals?
Because I haven't had time to work on them
2. *Why?*
Because I've been busy doing other things instead
3. *Why?*
Because these other things are more interesting
4. *Why?*
Because my goals are boring and uninspiring (*BINGO – This is the answer you needed. It's not about time, it's about prioritisation, and we tend to prioritise the things we value or need most.*)

Consider your use of the word 'Why' in your coaching and make sure you're optimising it to give the response you want!

If you have any great 'why?' questions please share by leaving a comment below.

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