

## Culture

Team culture is often driven by the coach and leadership group but built upon by the athletes. All share a common belief in expected behaviour and consequences, team values and goals, creating an environment of respect and unity, no matter what the outcome.

One of the most oft referred to cultures in the NBA is the one at the San Antonio Spurs.

<https://youtu.be/T3y7cWmoBCI>

After watching this video, consider the following bullet points and see if they are all accurate in your environment.

- Culture is not just one thing, it's everything.
- Culture is dynamic.
- Coaches set the tone and drive the culture.
- Everyone on your team creates the culture, including the parents.



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## Four C's of creating your culture

**Choices:** Allowing players the freedom to make decisions with real, but not overwhelming consequences

- The choices you make shape who you are.
- Emphasize good choices on and off the court.
- Teach players that fairness is something that is earned.

**Comfort Zone:** Encouraging players to be confident enough to step outside their comfort zone and learn new things.

**Communication:** Teaching players to communicate effectively both on and off the court

- Players must be taught to communicate effectively.
- Proper communication requires good eye contact and loud voices.
- Hearing feedback from teammates helps players to understand their role and build trust.

**Compete:** Helping players to embrace competition and strive to do their best

- Teach players to compete on every possession.
- Add competition to drills by incorporating time and score goals.
- Give up technique in exchange for playing hard.

## Engage the Brain before the body.

Use a short phrase that serves as the thought of the day to start practice. Some players may turn up distracted by thoughts away from basketball and can use this method to help them focus mentally before starting on court. The coach can use this as a discussion tool to start practice and discuss how different players use it and how it applies to the team for motivation.

“A comfort zone is a beautiful place, but nothing grows there”.

Watch this video for an example of Thought of the day - <https://youtu.be/dx01Ghh8yvo>

## Does good culture equal success on the court?

It isn't a straight line from one to the other, but it doesn't hurt! It gives your team the best chance at achieving their goals and improving both as a group and as individuals.



Consider teams which aren't selected, like school PE classes. A team can have one player who is more developed in terms of skills and carries that confidence to consistently lead their team to victory. What was the culture around that "team" like though? Did the "lesser" players get opportunities to make plays or handle the ball in a significant way? Though the team might have won games any momentum or ongoing success will be short lived.

If we consider the pinnacle of the Basketball team at a world level in terms of star quality, you think of the USA Dreamteam. Even the Dreamteam lost as well and required Coach K and the Redeem team to fully focus on the "culture".

*"Putting a bunch of superstars and their egos together on the same team could cause a major dogfight regarding who's the alpha, however, a focus on team culture has helped make them an unbelievably successful group."*

At the top levels if there is no belief in the collective or feeling of belonging often players will struggle for a sense of purpose or a wish to drive and improve their game. At the lower levels or youth game, some players may even become withdrawn, too afraid to speak or act out of character so as not to embarrass themselves or the team!

The culture does not move with the player either, as players move grades or clubs they need to listen, adapt and start again. The coaches' values, benefits and expectations from athletes can remain consistent and aligned with their overall coaching philosophy.

As a coach at a youth level, culture creation has to expand off the court as well into the stands. Positive involvement of the parents, equal playing time, managing training loads and being inclusive across genders and cultures are all significant aspects of a coach's role in interactions with parents that can have an impact on the overall culture of the team.

- Establish a set of core values.
  - Thinking point - **What are your top 3 core values?**
- Give your best effort every day and enjoy the process.
  - Thinking point – **How would you convince your players this is important?**
- Build your program around your core values.
  - Thinking point - **How do you implement them?**
- You can't always control what happens to you in life, but you can control what your attitude is the next day.
  - Thinking point - **Give examples to your team of areas they cannot control on the court and areas they cannot control off the court.**



## How can the coach impact culture?

**Teaching skills** – actively find ways to become a better teacher of the game.

**Communication skills** – stay relevant to the modern athlete.

**Organizational skills** – pay attention to detail.

**Motivational skills** – encourage players to have a cause and strive for success.

**Under pressure skills** – advanced preparation allows for confident decision making.

A coach must allow creativity but have clear goals, values and team behaviours right from the start. This should be done in full view of the parents to ensure they know alongside their kids what the expectations are and what the focus of the coaches will be.

The coaches and leaders need to be prepared to constantly refer to these throughout the year both in times of success but also in periods of failure or doubt (injuries etc).

Make it an emphasis for teammates to get to know one another off the court. Use the little-known facts exercise to encourage players to open up and embraces each other. Sharing things no one knows about you builds trust within a team.

When a team appoints leaders or captains, it is crucial they have a say in the culture and all the leaders are on board with the direction the team is going as it only takes one who doesn't believe or support the culture for it to fall down.

One of the most common considerations in junior sport is should Coaches Pick Captains? The right hardworking, likeable, dedicated captain can effectively bridge the gap between the coach and team. They will support the coaches message. But often captains appointed by the team themselves are the popular, talented player who doesn't have leadership qualities, disrupting team dynamics.

Former Texas coach Mack Brown said early in his career he received advice from former LSU coach Paul Dietzel about naming captains that he stuck with for three decades. Brown had been having coaches pick captains before the season. Dietzel told him it was better to have game captains that change from week-to-week.

"If you pick them before (the season) you can have one get hurt and he's not as powerful," Brown said. "You can have him get in trouble and you lose who you are because you'll probably have to strip him from being a captain. And that's worse. "If you name captains in preseason, you've diminished some of the other guys' ability to lead. And if (the players) get it wrong you've hurt some of your best leaders."



An interesting thought you don't hear spoken about very often is age. When is the right age to elect a captain? If you are coaching a youth team where the kids are so young, they don't really understand what leadership is just yet, it's probably not a good move.

## Embrace Failure

As a coach you need to create and nurture a culture where players, regardless of ability, aren't hampered by the fear of what will happen if they don't achieve and let the coach down or their teammates down or even themselves.

The messaging should be around respect for the player trying their best and trying to make that play or choosing that decision. As long as the play or decision is in line with the established expectations of the team culture then players should be encouraged and supported to feedback and be brave enough to try.

Coaching points to consider.

- Practices should be tougher than games.
- The best learning happens outside of the comfort zone.
- Coaches need to step outside their comfort zone too to adjust to your team personnel each year.

Wayne Gretzky – “You miss 100% of the shots you never take”.

## Empower the athletes to build the culture.

The coach can set the foundations and dig the base for the culture, but it will only be sustainable and effective if the players then are heavily involved in the building and developing. Some suggestions include;

- Review sessions where players are given the opportunity to “get things off their chest” in a respectful and constructive way to help the team succeed.
- Have players drive off court events to build team cohesion.
- Remain open minded about how pre- and post-match is structured and listen to players thoughts and comments.
- Consult with the team on the environment for practice e.g. music during practice and use of nicknames.
- Gauge player energy levels before starting practice. Be considerate of other things going on in their lives that can affect energy and effort. Check in with a player running on an empty gas tank to show them you care.



## Positive reinforcement

- Change negative behaviours by highlighting positive ones.
- Give most of your attention, feedback and energy to the players who do what you want them to do during practice.
- Don't give negative energy or attention to players who aren't working; praise them with positive energy and attention to those who are deserving.
- Understand that athletes place a great deal of pressure on themselves. Coaches need to alleviate that pressure.
- Always encourage athletes to better themselves

## The Respected Leader

- You can be demanding without being demeaning.
- Great is the action that you want repeated – Dean Smith

Coaching is about building relationships. Create joy by doing something for someone else. Need some inspiration? Watch the following video. It's about the New Zealand All Blacks. How they have sustained a winning history through the development of a strong team culture.

[https://youtu.be/282zt5Z4\\_g](https://youtu.be/282zt5Z4_g)

## Creating the culture

Many groups decision-making meetings can be doomed before they begin. Here are some simple steps to ensure you jump some of the most common pitfalls!

1. Involve the right people. Make sure your decision makers are not too similar (all coaches, all new players, all senior players etc). Difference in people will have a higher chance in bringing difference in views. If decision making teams are homogenous than there is a chance the team will suffer from an inclusion gap.
2. Be comfortable being confident. There is nothing worse than people being unsure of their opinions or being ambivalent and then decisions end up being decided by the loudest voice in the room.
3. Ensure everyone feels equal and leave any titles at the door so there is the "safety" to share ideas and opinions freely. You can help to accomplish this by defining ground rules for discussion, such as:
  - i. Every team member has a chance to share an idea before all ideas are discussed.
  - ii. Senior members speak last to avoid dominating the discussion or influencing others.

- iii. Ideas are fair game for discussion, not individuals' qualifications or experience.
  - iv. Listen actively and don't interrupt.
4. Do not limit discussion before it has even begun. If you only consider one alternative to the status quo you drastically reduce the quality of your decisions. Instead aim to be clear about the destination but open minded as to the possible routes to reach there.

*"People will rise to a challenge if it is their challenge. They won't necessarily rise to other people's challenges." Wayne Smith – All Blacks coaching legend.*

### **#CAUSEOVERSELF**

This is an example of a "compass" that a coach can use to guide a program instead of an exhaustive list of rules. Root the foundation of your program in genuine love and care to have a lasting culture.

Sherpa Culture / Gratitude

<https://youtu.be/J-bJCSZFITU>

A sherpa culture is one built on compassion and selflessness. Teach your players to help their teammates reach the top of the mountain.

[https://youtu.be/4J93pi0Hg\\_s](https://youtu.be/4J93pi0Hg_s)

A great culture expresses genuine happiness for the success of others.

### Responsibility

It starts with you. Encouragement is powerful.

How you treat others matters. Your actions as a coach influence how your players act as well.

Learn from all mistakes. Take responsibility as a coach and also as a team for mistakes, "Responsibility over fault" A culture of fault is counterproductive.

### Making Choices

Effective Decisions = Quality of Analysis x Level of Acceptance

Here is a simple example of the above equation in action within the sporting context. The benefits of athletes being hydrated has been extremely well researched AND there is a high acceptance within most levels of sport that athletes have an adequate amount of fluid intake. In this example, you can see that ensuring athletes are hydrated during practice and competition is an effective decision.





## Quality of analysis

The first element of making a quality decision, is the level of analysis which has gone into the decision. Analysis is the process of defining what the actual problem is (not just addressing symptoms), defining the outcome desired (goal) and then addressing the unique elements of the problem to be solved. After this is done, all the available solution options are weighed up and defined in terms of their respective pros and cons. Following this analysis, the most useful options associated with goal achievement are put forward.

The impact of not having quality analysis is obviously a decision which does not fit the goal to be achieved.

## Level of acceptance

The next factor is the level of acceptance the various best options are likely to attract. What is meant by level of acceptance is the degree to which the members impacted by the decision are going to find the decision acceptable to them. Obviously, this factor is highly situational in terms of assessing the level of agreement. In the heat of the moment during a competition, asking for everyone's opinion is not possible. However, this is best dealt with in the practices prior to the competition. In the training environment, choices are available, and the team can consult and involve themselves with dealing with various situations that they are confronted with during a competition. When it is 'practiced' in training, the level of agreement has already been established come game time. Or of course, the opposite is also true when none of this happens in practice, individuals act in isolation to the team and make decisions on their own – likely to have a low level of acceptance. The impact this has can be significant even if the decision is found to be the right one based on the outcome achieved.

## Skills you need for effective decision making.

1. Listening empathically to all viewpoints and respecting others when they see things differently.
2. Be willing and comfortable to hold a different opinion and value the difference that this can bring to create effective decision making.
3. Support other views and ideas by giving them time to be encouraged and fleshed out, not just immediately rejected.
4. Make sure all participants in the process are seeking to solve the same problem and striving for a result they can all support.

## Managing the controllables

Championship coaches are always selling the controllables. Coaches cannot say a word if players miss a shot but lose their minds if a player doesn't box out.



Here are some examples of controllables.

- Boxing out
- Talking on defence
- Taking a charge
- Deflections
- Diving for loose balls
- Sprinting the floor
- Setting good screens

Controllables level the playing field of talent. Everyone can do these and control their commitment and intention to what the team decides.

### Culture in competition

In all sport ultimately everyone's eyes drifts to the record and the wins and losses. So how do you have a good culture in an environment that has competition at its core?

1. Don't make competition the core as that can be suffocating and hard to maintain consistently but if you don't acknowledge it then complacency can set in, and players aren't encouraged to problem solve. The sweet spot where you have a balance is just right.
2. Competition can still be collaborative. Anytime you can have healthy competition within your team it improves the return, motivates teammates to work together, coach one another and cheer on each other's successes.
3. When you pair or group players together for drills, random pairings can be successful, but you may also benefit from strategically pairing co-workers for competitive endeavours. Whether you match high and low performers or the experienced player with the new recruit, these competitions give you the ultimate opportunity to utilize mentorship and one on one coaching from your top performers. Plus, it allows more people to get involved, share ideas and put on their creative caps.

Here is an extract from a Q and A with 4 x Olympian Bo Hanson.

Q- All players have their own personal ambitions. If you're a bench player, the natural thing is to become a starting player. I was just wondering how coaches manage that as far as making sure that bench players don't undermine the starting players in training and during games as well?

*Bo: I actually think that's an excellent question because it's a real-world issue that teams that have a significant bench are going to have. One of the philosophies that we talk about when we're trying to establish a quality foundation for any team is, and it's one of the first things that we'll speak of aside from our models, it's how you be the best player for the team instead focusing on always being the best player on the team.*

*Personally myself, I recall my rowing days and in particular training for the 2004 Olympics which was the first time I was exposed to that philosophy by a man called John Eales. He was the captain of our (Australia's) rugby team and is regarded in Australia as being one of the greatest sporting captains*

*and leaders in the corporate world also. John said to me, because I was very much of the opinion that I just needed to focus on my performance and try and be the best athlete that I could be and every time that we went out to train I was competing against the other guys and they were competing and against so ultimately what we were doing was, whilst we were training hard, I personally found that very tiring. So, John said to me, “Bo it’s not so much about you trying to be the best, it’s about how can you add value to someone else? And how can you be the best player for the team?”*

*That really resonated with me and completely changed my focus and my philosophy as to how I conducted myself. As opposed to being a bench player, I was always in the boat, I always made it a focus of my own – even if I was injured or fatigued – to never give up my seat because I know that once you give up your seat you give someone else an opportunity.*

*The reality is for players that are occupying those bench positions, it’s about the coach really focusing as a philosophy on how can everyone make a quality contribution to the team? And having that resonate around, that concept of being the best player for the team, not just the best player on the team.*

*For example, if you do create that safe environment where people are valued, where people feel like they’re making a contribution, whether it’s on the court or off the court, they know there are equally important ways to make contributions.*

*If the coach really does focus on that then people really do feel safe in their environment and you get a healthy competition in sports teams where “I’m pushing you, but I’m going with you.” I’m not trying to beat you as such. I think if you do that, if you get the Circle of Safety right as a concept what you’ll end up with is cooperation and trust. If you find that those two qualities are part of your team, then not only is your bench going to be contributing to the maximum, but the players on the court are going to feel massively supported by those bench players.*

## Parents in culture

Thanks to Balance is Better for the following resources.

Creating an environment where parents and family feel welcomed, valued and supported means they are more likely to contribute positively to school or club sport.

It’s important to acknowledge that parent behaviours can be informed by the structure and systems around them. Often, we find negative parent and family behaviour is more prevalent where there is a greater emphasis on winning, and/or a highly competitive selection and deselection environment.

This is particularly evident when these types of structures are not appropriate for the age and stage of the young people. Ultimately, while it is expected that adults should be able to regulate their behaviour, particularly their emotional responses, it doesn’t always play out like that.



## What are some of the implicit and explicit messages?

Taking a critical look at what implicit and explicit messages are being sent to parents is an important step in understanding what kind of culture or environment is being created.

- Are there family or social events early in the season that give everyone the opportunity to get to know each other and sets the tone for the season ahead?
- Are there opportunities for parents and family to contribute to the club or school environment as a volunteer?
- Are parents and family aware and do they understand the school or clubs' philosophy or approach to sport? Are parents provided key messages around what positive youth and athlete development in and through sport looks like?
- Do you discuss with parents' what success in youth sport looks like (if you don't – short term measures such as points tables and results will fill this void!).
- Are the structures in your club or school sending parents contradicting messages (e.g., you share messages with parents about encouraging their children to play multiple sports, but your sport's programming doesn't allow young people to take a break from the sport / overlaps into other sport seasons).

## Building a positive culture and environment with parents

- Language– consider the language and tone used when talking about parents (dealing with parent's vs engaging or working with parents). Is it positive or negative?
- Establish a parent liaison or key contact in the club or school that is proactively engaging with parents.
- Provide learning opportunities for parents. Importantly, these environments should be inclusive, safe and supportive. The focus should be on ongoing connections and support rather than simply transmitting information.
- Establish clarity around roles and responsibilities for everyone involved (coaches, parents, administrators). This could include specific rules or guidelines regarding engagements following on from things like selections/de-selections. Often, this might need to be communicated in a number of ways.
- Role model positive match day and training environments and clearly communicate what is expected from everyone involved.
- Create social events (such as BBQ's and quiz nights) at the start and/or through the season where parents, coaches and children can interact and get to know each other better. This has the added benefit of parents getting to know each other and providing additional support networks.





- Review how your programmes impact parents, explicitly and implicitly – seek feedback from parents on their experiences and gather suggestions from them around improvements.
- Show gratitude to parents. Explicitly thank them for their support and what they do to facilitate their child’s involvement.

If you want to read more of the Balance is Better resource on creating a positive parent culture for your club, click here. [https://balanceisbetter.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Creating-a-positive-parent-culture\\_A-guide-for-schools-and-clubs.pdf](https://balanceisbetter.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Creating-a-positive-parent-culture_A-guide-for-schools-and-clubs.pdf)

### Build effective Coach – Parent Relationships

If coaches only had to consider their relationships with players, they would be busy enough but the addition of parents to that mix presents additional responsibility. In most junior coaching roles, the coach will be expected to engage and, in some cases, will have to deal directly with disgruntled parents. These parents will come with all the differences we have outlined earlier in terms of personalities, motivations, expectations and desires. You do not have to look far through tournament reports or social media to see examples of parents coaching from the sideline, those who constantly analyse and second guess every decision made or accounts of inappropriate behaviour ranging from verbal to physical misdemeanours. All clubs have to deal with the challenge of bridging the gap between allowing the coach a certain degree of freedom to coach the team and acknowledging the needs and wishes of the parents responsible for their children.

The first step to ensuring a strong and meaningful collaboration is ensuring that parents have a right to and often want to be informed about all aspects of their child’s sporting experience. Depending on the resources and structure of a team/club this can be left to them drawing their own conclusions from the stand during practices and games or a game of Broken telephone with their child at home. Neither of these ways provide the parent with the full picture or understanding of the coach and child’s interactions or the reasoning behind decisions the coach has made.

In order for everyone to be fully informed, their needs to be a communication triangle where both the parent and the coach can work in partnership to ensure the child understands and learns the key messages and skills to be successful. Ultimately, in 99.9% of the cases, both the coach and the parent have the same end goal of the best interests of the player. By working together in this partnership, the parents and the coach will better understand each other, how their coaching and parent philosophies gel together and what each ultimately believes the child is capable of and how to help them attain that.

Coaches’ relationships with athletes can improve through the knowledge that parents can provide to a coach. They have an understanding of what does and doesn’t not work when trying to motivate and educate their child at home that can be used by the coach on, and off court and the coach can provide specific knowledge, skills and pedagogies to the parents to help them support the basketball development at home.





## Shared Understanding

It is very rare that in your whole team you will have parents, coaches and players who all share the exact same belief system and have a harmonious relationship straight from the bounce. In all walks of life changing what someone believes is incredibly hard and most likely not possible in the limited interaction time you have. Instead, what a coach and club must work on doing is being explicit and straightforward about what they can control and convey to the player and the parents. As stated, this is unlikely to cause permanent change in any strongly held opposing beliefs, but it should ensure that the parents enter the environment aware and can display appropriate behaviours and interactions.

The most common example of where this is really important to establish is in the sideline behaviour of parents. This has been shown in multiple studies to influence the dropout rate of adolescent players and their ongoing participation. The club/coach must outline their expectations on parents at games and during practices. The reasons as to why it is not beneficial to both the player and the coach should be explained and parents who continue to display these behaviours will not be welcome. This may result in parents continuing to believe their actions are appropriate and benefit their children but since they have been explicitly asked, they will either stop or at the least greatly reduce their actions.

Any common bone of contention between coach and parent is around playing time. It is safe to say this is not a matter where consensus should be the name of the game, as that suggests parent can lobby and negotiate on behalf of their child for a better result. A shared understanding in this matter is when the parents understand how the coach is allocating playing time and the parents understand that if this is deviated from, they can approach the coach to discuss and hold them accountable.

## The First step

Many coaches when introducing themselves to parents naturally default to sharing a potted Basketball CV with them, outlining not only their personal playing career but also their coaching accomplishments and achievements. A coach who shares their coaching philosophy will be much better placed however as they will have told the parents what they value and believe and give the parents an idea of what they can expect for their children during the coaches tenure.

If this idea is giving you cause to reflect on your philosophy, here are some key areas you might want to have included.

1. Be honest and reflective.
2. What do you value as a coach?
3. How your behaviours align with your values
  - a. If you say you value hard work, you should reward it.



## Trust

One factor that contributes to team success is trust. Every coach should know the roles that trust has within their team and how they can develop it. Similar to using effective reinforcement, trust leads to strong team cohesion and enhances a coach's ability to develop their athletes and team to reach their full potential. A lack of trust can disrupt the team's focus, decrease performance, and contribute to the loss of a player's confidence in the team, the coach, and one another.

Everyone will have a definition of trust that they use in their own life and by their own morals and values but what does it mean in a team environment?

1. **Team's trust in the coach.** The athletes must be able to trust in the coach's ability to develop them as athletes and individuals. Sport and competition at any level will test the participants physically and mentally. The mental challenges will come in doubting their own performance and the physical in competing against those potentially bigger, stronger or faster than them. Especially at a younger age where players are lacking in lived experience they will need to 'trust' that their coach will be there to offer them the technical/physical guidance to succeed and the psychosocial support if they do not.
2. **Coach's trust in the team.** If the players are putting their trust in you, you need to be able to trust that your messages are being listened too as often the result will fall at your door and decisions you have made rather than the players. This only intensifies as you move up the levels. This trust is most obvious in the fact that you can't be on court with them to run plays, strategies or ideas you have chosen/directed them to implement. So, the trust needs to be there that they have listened, understood and agree with the direction and instruction.
3. **Players' trust in one another.** Athletes need to trust one another to work together as a team and trust each other's abilities during competition. In team sports the success of the team is a function of the player's being able to perform collectively. Often players have different roles and responsibilities and therefore every player needs to 'trust' that everyone else will do what they need to do when they need to do it.
4. **Players' trust/belief in him/herself.** Players need to have a belief in their ability to execute the technical and tactical aspects of the game necessary for success. This is sometimes known as self-confidence or self-efficacy. Players who have low efficacy or confidence do not perform as well as players who have 'trust' in their abilities.

## Coaches' role in building trust

What comes first the culture or the trust? Does a coach need the trust of a strong culture or does the strong culture provide the trust? It's a debate with no clear answer but one thing is certain, the coach is a central figure.

Athletes are able to trust that their coach can develop their physical skills and help them reach their potential when the coach has expertise in techniques, tactics, and strategies of the sport. Coaches also need to make the psychological development of their athlete's a priority. Athletes should feel

that they are valued as both an athlete as well as an individual. They should feel confident that the coach values them as a person and not just by their performance in sport.

Here is Bo Hanson again, 4 x Olympian and Coaching Consultant

*A critical element in creating a more positive relationship with your athletes is the concept of behavioural predictability. Essentially this is about behaving in a consistent manner. For example, when the team wins or loses, your athletes should never be concerned about your likely behaviour. Your athletes should know how you are going to respond to either situation.*

*When coaches behave in a predictable manner, athletes feel as though they have a better understanding of their coach. This helps the athlete to know where they stand and how to best approach the coach or not.*

*Often, I talk about the concept of a trust account. In a similar concept to a bank account, a trust account has a series of deposits and potential withdrawals against it. For example, when we are talking about creating a trusting relationship with our athletes consider what constitutes a deposit or a withdrawal. A deposit from an athlete's perspective is when the coach takes time to meet their unique coaching needs in a respectful and patient manner. This helps the athlete feel valued. The more often this is done the greater the trust which is developed. The trouble with the trust account though is the ratio required to remain in the black. It may take ten deposits to outweigh one withdrawal. From a coach's perspective, what builds their trust of an athlete could be when the athlete executes the race plan or strategy according to what was agreed. Alternatively, when the athlete neglects to communicate a change to the coach, the coach often feels as though some trust has been compromised, as now there is doubt over what the athlete is likely to do next.*

*As a basic exercise, think from your coaching perspective what you rate as behaviours which are deposits in your trust account with an athlete or the team in general. For example, I count my athletes turning up on time and professionally preparing themselves for a practice without me telling them to do so as a deposit. I also count as a deposit when the athlete comes to me with their goals for the practice and the technical commitments they are working on. However, these actions must be without prior instruction. The message this gives me is that the athlete cares, takes ownership and is responsible for themselves and their performance. This gives me faith that come race day they are likely to do the same.*

## Coaching Behaviours

Here are 5 key coaching behaviours you can keep front of mind that will help build trust with your players.

1. Don't take things personally. Any comment or feedback from a parent or player, maintain an objective perspective and refocus it on the real issue.
2. Be a master listener. Make it a priority to understand your players before making sure your communications are understood as one will influence the other.



3. Understand acceptance. It isn't being happy with losing or giving up. It is acknowledging that nobody can get a positive outcome everytime, that's life and its ok. Acknowledge it but move on yourself and do so with your team.
4. Display the trust you want. Do what you say and say what you do. If you can be trusted to that then a culture of trust forms around you.
5. Find the positives. What are the learning points from adversity, not the negatives or the mistakes but the areas that excite you to put some hard work into to improve and change the outcome?

**"To be as good as it can be, a team has to buy into what you as the coach are doing. They have to feel you're a part of them and they're a part of you."**

**– Bobby Knight**

### What does an effective Coach-Athlete Relationship look like?

Coach-athlete relationship - a mutual trusting and respectful relationship that exists between the coach and their athletes.

They deal with each other in a predictable, understandable and effective way designed to maximise ability to reach agreed outcomes.

When this is in place and strong, safe, trusting relationships are formed, Athletes are more likely to feel secure, push themselves to achieve more, take safe risks to improve performance, and give 100% effort.

In basketball, we see examples of coach-athlete relationships that aren't working every day.

For example, in all levels of basketball, you will often hear about a player being unsuccessful in their current team, so they transfer to another club and most importantly, a new coach. While the player is the same technically and physically, if they develop a quality relationship with their new coach, their performance improves substantially.

Coaches are ultimately a member of their players "family" given the amount of time they spend with them and the actual and perceived responsibility that is placed on them for their participation and potentially success. So, it is not just something that is a consideration it is an actual factor influencing performance and enjoyment.

If the coach-athlete relationship breaks down, or doesn't develop for any reason, the resulting outcome is often underperformance. If there is no connection, there can be no engagement, and the result of this is poor commitment, disharmony, lack of enjoyment, and general distrust. Ultimately, poor performance is the outcome and no amount of money spent on better equipment, facilities, or support staff will overcome a poor coach-athlete relationship.

**NO ONE WILL CARE HOW MUCH YOU KNOW, UNTIL THEY KNOW HOW MUCH YOU CARE**





## Leadership Groups

These are a relatively new concept that have come about for a variety of reasons and as is the way, have flowed down from the professional game to the community level.

In any group of people more and more people are wanting to have a say and more and more organisations are understanding that by empowering more voices they can become more inclusive, in most cases.

It makes sense. Players have to solve problems and make decisions on the field that determine the outcome of the game. Coaches can coach off field and at training, but they have limited impact on the field in the heat of battle. Better problem solving and decision making occurs when people “own” their performance and have to take responsibility for the outcome.

One impact of the Internet and the electronic literacy of players is that they have access to ideas, techniques and skills that once were hidden away in coaching education texts.

In a coaching talk delivered by Eddie Jones the England Rugby coach, he spoke of only needing 2 meetings with his players a week, one at the start and one at the end. In between the players lead each other but follow the coaches structure / guide. He wants the players to be accountable to each other in the main not to him as the coach.

***“If your kids look at you with blank eyes, the problem is not them it's the coach. Find a way to engage them.”*** Eddie Jones – England Rugby Coach

## Leadership Skills

Here are some qualities great leaders and coaches share.

1. Master Communicator
2. Quality Listener
3. Highly Knowledgeable
4. Passionate about the game
5. High Intensity
6. Trustworthy
7. Respectful
8. Positive attitude
9. Enthusiastic
10. Character – has to be unquestioned.
11. Competence – Don't have to know everything but you have to strive to know everything about your own team at a minimum.
12. Humility – Vital. Basketball will make you humble.
13. Patience – Players need a coach who is patient.
14. Process – Value this over outcome





A lot of coaches can find empowering their players as challenging as they feel it as an attack on them if a player raises something but often you should take it as a compliment as your players feel comfortable with you and suggesting an opportunity to improve the practice or team.

What are some ways you can, through your actions empower your players?

1. Your choice of language. It is human nature to hear a word with negative connotations such as mistake and latch onto it. If as a coach your focus is always on “mistakes” then your players will either become fearful of making mistakes at risk of drawing your ire or become so conscious of the concept of mistakes they will increase their errors, a vicious cycle. If you simply use the word missed opportunity or simply miss, it removes the negative connotation, and your players know that nobody means to miss, and the choice is now binary of miss or make.
2. Following on from this, you can always promote and highlight the strengths and successes. Encourage the players and positively reinforcement the behaviours you want to replicate. An example is, “I like the way you drove to the basket” or “I liked the way you kept finding space to give your teammates an option”.
3. In games don’t get sucked into constant critique. It can be very easy to be, “we need to stop doing that” or “why aren’t we doing this”. If possible, have one of your assistant coaches monitor how many critical statements you make when talking to athletes or even within earshot of those on the bench and make sure you outweigh them with positive ones.
4. In trainings, have a period of time where you make it clear you will be focusing on the attempt not the outcome and rewire not only their thinking but your own to consider how you are approaching elements of the game.
5. Promote independent thought. How often in a game have you seen your players look over to you for the answers to what an opposition are doing? As a coach you want to develop independent athletes, increase their self-esteem and lift their resilience to increase their chances of success both on and off court. Consider how much feedback you give during practice and if this is making your players over-reliant on you in games.  
“Tell me and I will forget, show me and I may not remember, involve me and I will understand.” Native American Proverb
6. Don’t be afraid of players expressing their emotions. This doesn’t mean you want teams hurling water bottles when they lose or refusing to shake hands. But it is important that athletes can express frustration and anger in an appropriate way and communication is key in this practice. If you take the time to listen to the athletes in the good and the bad times, then you will help them learn what healthy relationships look like in basketball and away from sport.
7. Wayne Smith, ex All Blacks assistant coach, is a great advocate to empowerment coaching. During his stint coaching Northampton in the English premieriership, whilst in a pre-season camp, Wayne facilitated a four-hour session which involved planning for every aspect of the game. The squad workshopped possible moves from each situation using their own previous knowledge (bearing in mind there were 14 internationals in the squad) and then went through each option with the whole group looking at their pros and cons. Each move was

then listed in an order of merit, a name was then discussed and decided upon for the move with the whole group. The moves developed on that day were then adopted for that season, with every one of the squad members knowing what options was to be used, where and why. Wayne already had his prescribed moves prior to the session, and not many changed as a result of the session, however the exercise did gain the buy-in and ownership of the entire team.

8. Trust and respect are a two-way street and have to be earned as both a person and a coach. Be patient and persistent. It takes time, attention and intention. Players must know you are there for them and their development.

### **5H's that can open the door to meaningful dialogue and conversations.**

**History/Heritage** – where are you from or who is your family?

**Hopes** – what are they? In the game and the life

**Heart**- What has disappointed you?

**Heroes**- Who are they, who do you look up too and why?

**Honey** – Who is important to you in your life? Partner/family/etc

### **Summary**

Although an empowerment approach offers many advantages, it also brings challenges to coaches who wish to make use of it. One challenge is that the approach is very time consuming. It takes time for athletes to become accustomed to being coached in a different way. It also takes time to develop athletes into thinking athletes. Athletes who have a coaching interest welcome the concept with open arms, others might have the opinion that “You are the coach, you tell us what we are doing wrong and what we have to do to put it right.” Yet the long-term advantages ultimately override these challenges, as athletes begin to make informed decisions, have fun and increase their self-esteem. There is no better team than a happy team, in respect to playing, coaching and supporting.