

Ten things every young (swimming) coach should know

by Wayne Goldsmith (a few adjustments to offer Wayne's recommendations to coaches in other sports)

Wayne is one of the most articulate of writers on sports issues
Google: Moregold Sports

1. Learn from the guys (and gals) who have been there

The best way to learn is by doing. Next best is to learn by working with those who **do the doing.**

Find yourself a mentor: A senior coach who has experienced the ups and downs of coaching. If you can't find a suitable senior swimming coach, seek out a senior coach from another sport. If you want to learn how to coach from someone who knows – **coaching skills are generic across all sports.**

- Find a senior coach who has strengths you lack.
- Find one who will be honest and sincere: one who is open in sharing the benefits of their experiences. One from whom you can listen to and accept honest criticism.
- Look for one who disagrees with your philosophy – who will challenge you – who will argue with you – someone who stimulates you to think, learn and grow.

A few hours a month with a great mentor is worth a hundred seminars, workshops and lectures.

2. It's not all about the science

Sports science has made significant contributions to swimming in the past fifty years.

However, it is not the defining element of the sport. The day to day of coaching is more about dealing with parents than periodisation, more about politics than physiology and more about pool space than psychology.

Learn the sports science you need to do your job well.

As you develop and improve, continue to learn about and experiment with sports science. If you get to national / international level, develop a network of outstanding sports science professionals to support your coaching program. But ultimately it is your coaching – the intangible factors and inherent qualities that you possess as a coach which will drive the success of the program.

Heart – not heart rate is the key

3. Keep it simple

Don't get too hung up on VO2 Max, heart rate monitors, lactate testing, blood testing and DNA testingkeep it simple. Don't go looking for short cuts, easy answers, quick fixes, miracle supplements, amazing new swimming aids, the latest strength training toys.....**keep it simple.**

One of the biggest mistakes made by young coaches is to over complicate their coaching.

What do you really need to be successful?

1. A coaching philosophy that makes sense to you and you can live by.
2. Passion, enthusiasm, commitment, dedication, compassion and great communication skills.
3. A pool.
4. Some athletes with the same passion and enthusiasm to be successful as you have and the desire to get the most out of themselves.
5. The leadership skills to inspire those around you to work together towards achieving common goals.
6. A basic knowledge of swimming technique and skills.
7. A supportive partner / family / friends to provide balance and stability in your life.
8. A basic understanding of planning and programming.
9. A strong imagination – with this, you can achieve anything.
10. The ability to think laterally and creatively.
11. The ability to deal with tough times and to overcome hardships with a smile.
12. A love of coaching.

Many young coaches believe that the “fancy stuff” will solve all their problems. They suffer from the “**IF ONLYS**”.

“If only we had a long course pool”.

“If only we had twenty heart rate monitors”.

“If only we had a brand new gym”.

“If only we had the latest FINA standard starting blocks”.

“If only, if only, if only.....”

The limiting factors in coaching are **not** these material elements.

A coach with passion and determination, working with a committed group of motivated people can achieve anything. A coach without these things but the latest and greatest technology has to offer is only capable of looking good – and even then not for long.

Keep it simple. Stick with the basics and doing them well consistently.

4. Politics and Personalities

If you live on this planet, life is about dealing with personalities and politics. Learn to deal with it. Learn to manage it. Learn to be comfortable dealing with difficult people and political situations **but don't let it define you.**

Dealing with difficult people and political situations causes more coaches to drop out of swimming than any other factor. Issues with club and committee. Fights with parents. Battles with pool owners and local councils. Brawls with other clubs over turf issues. These are the things that can make or break young coaches.

When faced with difficult situations young coaches will often say, "I am not interested in politics, only coaching".

Get interested!

Learn how to deal with conflict. Learn how to control meetings. Learn how to work effectively with clubs and committees. Set up clear lines of communication with parents and supporters.

Master the political domain and learn to deal with difficult people effectively and you can coach with the confidence of knowing your coaching environment has been managed effectively.

5. You will never stop learning

You will learn everyday as a coach.

You will learn from athletes.

You will learn from other coaches.

You will learn from winning.

You will learn from losing.

You will learn **ONLY**....if you are ready to learn.

The essence of learning is **humility**. That is, admitting you don't know everything and being open and enthusiastic to learn more.

It's what you learn after you think you know it all, that counts

There is no coach – no person – in any field of endeavour who knows it all. In fact, the most outstanding coaches, business people, athletes, academics and other leaders, spend more time and energy on learning and ongoing professional development than anyone. Once you commit to life long learning, your coaching will be a life long adventure and your improvement is guaranteed.

6. Who you are determines the outcome of your program – NOT just what you do

Who are you? John Smith? That's just a name.

Who are you? A (swimming) coach? That's just a job.

Who are you? A dad. That's just one role in your life.

Who are you really and what do you stand for?

***If you don't stand for something ..
You'll probably fall for anything***

This simple question rarely has a simple answer.

But developing a coaching philosophy is critical to be successful and to develop a coaching philosophy you need to understand who you are and what you stand for.

Why?

Because who you are underpins your philosophy to coaching and this in turn underpins every thing you do as a coach.

If you stand for nothing, you will fall for anything.

In other words, if you don't have a meaningful coaching philosophy, you will change with the ebb and flow and compromise every time a new idea or new challenge comes along.

If you stand for something – if you embrace values like integrity, honesty, humility, courage, discipline, empathy, compassion, determination and sincerity – these values not only define you but they will be reflected in every element and aspect of your program.

**The challenge is for you – right now – to sit down and write what it is you believe and what it is you stand for.
This one simple act will make all the difference in your coaching career...and your life.**

7. Do not compromise for talent

One of the biggest mistakes young coaches make is to “worship” talent.

They have a vision and a plan. They have a good program. Then some talented kid walks in.

The kid is tall, strong, athletic – seems to win easily.

The young coach thinks, “Here is my chance – my chance to prove to the world what a great coach I am”.

So the young coach compromises. The young coach bends the rules. The young coach adjusts the program and their vision to meet the needs of this one individual talented swimmer.

Do not compromise for talent – particularly young precocious talent.

Young athletes with talent – those who win easily because of genetic gifts rarely make it to the top. They rarely take advantage of that talent and even more rarely make the most of their opportunities.

Yet, young coaches invest time and money and effort on precocious talents believing these kids are the “ticket” to get them the coaching recognition they deserve.

If you get a talented kid who believes in you and your program, who wants to work hard and commit to the vision and philosophy of your program and support the team and team culture – great.

If they want to come in and change the rules, miss workouts and generally have a negative influence on the team because they just won the State under 10 years 50 breaststroke – give them the phone number of another coach. Better still drive them to another coach’s pool - and fast.

8. Communication skills are what it is all about

Some coaches have a strong sports science background.

Some coaches were athletes themselves with a great understanding of the sport and an empathy for their team.

Some coaches come from teaching backgrounds and are highly skilled educators.

Some coaches were parents who decided to get more involved in the sport.

Coaches come from all backgrounds and walks of life.

But if there is **one skill** common with all great coaches it is the **ability to communicate effectively**.

You are not in the sport business – you are in the people business and your sport is just the vehicle.

You change lives. You inspire people to do things they can’t see or feel. You influence the hearts and minds of everyone you work with.

And you do it through your communication skills.

Master every element of communication – verbal language, body language, eye contact, written communication – all of it.

9. Develop a culture NOT an athlete or a program

The aim of coaching is not to produce a successful result. Well, ultimately it is, but the result comes as a consequence of developing a winning culture.

The **real aim is to create a culture around your program**, your club and your team which increases the likelihood of a winning result.

Most young coaches will throw their energies into an individual athlete or a single season and sometimes achieve a single successful performance. The following year, the “star” athlete moves to another town or things change and the success of last season is only a memory.

The most noticeable thing about the leading coaches is their **consistency**. They develop systems, structures and a culture around their team which ensures high standards every year. Some years they get really lucky and have an outstanding season. Other years they just have good seasons. But they rarely have times where everything goes wrong and if they do, it doesn’t last long.

Leading coaches work on a principle called **MAXIMUM AVERAGE**. In other words, if you develop a structure, system and culture which ensures that on **AVERAGE**, the fitness, speed, skill, technique, attitude and strength of your team members is the highest it can be; then, you are significantly increasing the likelihood of achieving success.

10. Accept the concept of coaching “evolution”

You will change as a coach.

Your ideas, your thoughts, your “magic training sets”, your “secret drills” that only you understand will all change....you will change.

Once you accept this, and embrace change as a natural part of your coaching life or even actively seek and invite change, you are on the path to coaching greatness.

One of the worst things that can happen to a young coach is to get success too easily.

This creates the biggest enemy of successful coaching – **THE INFLATED EGO SYNDROME or T.I.E.S.**

Once a coach has developed this condition, characterised by a belief that they have all the answers and they are the only coach in the world who really understands the sport, they are on a one way ride to failure.

Accept change.

Invite criticism.

Thank people for offering advice.

Get excited when people attack your program.

Listen, learn and evolve.

There are no limits to the coach who accepts and welcomes evolution.
