

Ostracised Newbie or Welcomed Addition? Being the 'New Coach'.

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We've all been, or at some point, will be the 'new coach'. Starting in a new coaching role, or any job for that matter, is an exciting time; whether its your first role or an opportunity to step up a level. New people coming into any kind of organisation bring enthusiasm and different perspectives, but they can also bring unrest and discontent.

Sometimes things go well – really well. Other times, it can bring resentment and hostility. New coaches may meet opposition to their ideas and become demotivated all too quickly.

Often the new coach who faces hostility is a 'whirlwind coach' – who comes in full of ideas and energy, ready to revolutionise (as they see it) the poor practice currently occurring: they have all the answers.

I've been that coach. And that approach was probably more linked to my ego than anything else, and perhaps feeling like I needed to prove to others why I was appointed.

But I've also been a different coach – one with a more thoughtful and measured approach. This resulted in more meaningful changes, which were relevant and important to the players and got buy in and support of other coaches in the club. And it was so much more of an enjoyable and rewarding experience!

Some thoughts to consider:

- Begin with 'why'
- Build relationships and trust
- Add value
- Know your own non-negotiables
- Remember you were excited about coming here!

Begin with 'why'

Its easy to look at things and think 'they're doing it wrong' or 'I've got a better idea'. But the current coaches have probably iterated the curriculum and processes over and over again – what you see now is a result of time and effort put in by the people around you, so being hyper critical may well turn others against you. Some of your ideas may have already been tried, or are being used in a different way. Don't just assume that what you see now is all there's ever been.

And remember, what worked for you previously in a different context won't necessarily work in this one. Instead, begin with 'why'; ask with an intent to listen, to understand why things are done the way they are, and what's gone before. You're then in a much better position to have realistic expectations of which of your ideas to implement first, and how.

Build relationships and trust

Face it – you're currently the 'unknown' – to both the players and other coaches. For the players, you are a key person in their enjoyment of the sport, their development, and in some circumstances, their

retention in a talent development programme. So consider how you can begin to get to know your players – not through data and statistics but by actually talking with them and trying to understand who they are and what’s important to them. Then use this to inform your coaching.

Similarly, you’re an unknown quantity to the coaches now working alongside you. Are you a threat to their position? Will you be easy to work with? Just like you should with the players, find ways to connect with the other coaches.

Know your own non-negotiables

There may be things that you don’t like, but decide they’re not a priority to change yet. It’s not about accepting bad practice, but about choosing what to impact and when, recognising that you can’t change everything all at once. However, you have to be clear about which of your own beliefs and values, that, no matter what, are non-negotiable. These are things that you stand firm with. For me, these include safety and respect – that I will always respect others. These are things that I can control and will not waive on. Be clear on what these are to you and be prepared to say no if current practice breaches them.

Figure out how you can add value

Once you’ve got an understanding of the context, the players and the coaches you’re working with, you’re in a much better position to evaluate how you can add value to the programme. How can you enhance what is already in place? How can you support a process or initiative which another coach is passionate about? Once other coaches see that you’re willing to embrace and support their ideas (and not simply shoot them down), and the value that you can add, they’re much more likely to be open to hearing about and being supportive of yours.

Remember you were excited about coming here!

The first school I worked in, a successful lesson was sometimes simply one where all students remained in the sports hall for the whole lesson without any fights breaking out... it was a steep learning curve and I developed a whole variety of skills through necessity. In my next school, as Head of Girls PE, staff’s main complaints centred around kit - particularly students bringing ‘the wrong type of football socks’. At first it sounded ludicrous to me that was their biggest moan! Yet only a few weeks in, I could feel myself beginning to empathise with petty negatives, instead of focusing on the important aspects and being excited about a new and different challenge. Don’t let others sap your energy or drag you into their negativity. Remember how you felt when you were handed the role – tap back into that when you feel yourself being negative to help put things into perspective.

So keep that energy and enthusiasm. Model good practice – including how you treat other coaches - and recognise that in order to be heard and have the opportunity to begin effective change, others need to be willing to listen. That’s much more likely to happen if you are first willing to understand your context and the people involved, to build trust and add value to what’s already there.

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