

The art of the Coach

In any field of education there are coaches and then there are top coaches, what are the differences and what defines a top coach? In this article I will outline the differences I believe between good coaches and great coaches, the things they have in common, the character traits they share and most importantly how to differentiate between the good ones and the cowboys. Then I will define what I believe my role as a golf coach is.

I don't label myself as a top coach, because part of being a coach is the belief of continued improvement or "Kaison" in Japanese. I have however been coaching Golf for over 17 years, and during that time I have read hundreds of books, watched hours of films, documentaries and programs from the top coaches in my sport, and participated in years of further education in an attempt to become the best coach I can be. This has become a life time habit and not just a work habit and I believe strongly that the quest for more knowledge and the never ending journey of self development is one of the key characteristics of a top coach. However knowledge alone doesn't make a coach a top coach.

Top Coach Definition –

Top coaches get consistent results year on year with the majority of their students at the very highest level of their field.

Top coaches build lifetime relationships with their students built on mutual respect.

The very best coaches go above and beyond the minimum to help their students improve.

Communication is one of the key differences between the very best coaches in the world and the average coach.

Knowledge is extracted from the student by the top coaches, not taught in a one directional manner.

The greatest coaches help their students become not only better athletes but better people.

The student is the most important person in the relationship not the coach.

More common traits of a top coach -

- The top coaches' use questioning as the primary form of communication, the solution to the problem comes from the student not the coach.
- Understanding the person behind the athlete is the goal of the top coach, the more he or she knows about the student the better he can advice and guide them.
- Sound-boarding for ideas is one of the key methods of the top coach, communicating ideas looking for the students reactions and then discussing them to find an effective solution.

- “The student owns the idea” the concept that the coach helps the student to come to the correct conclusion by his or herself, the student will always remember and trust information he or she has worked out. This is one of the key defining traits of a top coach.
- The very best coaches help motivate and aspire their students to reach heights they never thought they could achieve. Their information is relevant, and they understand what to say, when to say it and how to say it.
- Expert coaches have a very relaxed, confident, open manner of coaching. They use stories, metaphors and relevant examples to convey their messages.



What is my role as a Golf Coach?

The Learning Environment

The correct learning environment is one of the keys to coaching, this is an environment free of judgment and criticism, which enables a student to develop, test and integrate new ideas. If a student has found the answer to a problem through his or her own trial and error then they are much more likely to trust it and commit to it. The environment is where this process happens.

Building Relationships

I believe it is critical for the coach to build a strong relationship with the golf student, which enables me to understand how best to extract useful information out of the student. How does he or she think? What inspires them? And how do they react to stressful situations?

Help the golfer understand the person

As in many other sports the student is effectively alone during the moments of high pressure and stress. Therefore it is my job to prepare them to the best of my ability for these moments. The process is regarded as Golf IQ, and it is giving the student a complete understanding and overview of how they react and deal with stress as people, then building the tools to overcome their bad habits.

The tools for improvement

It is the job of the coach to give the student all the tools necessary to learn, develop and perform to their best under pressure. The student must have a tool box filled with relevant solutions to deal with their habits and any obstacles they may face.

Motivation and Confidence

One of the most important traits a sportsperson can have is confidence, and this can only be created through practice. Practice must be structured in a manner which is challenging, fun and rewarding, which helps to build micro steps of improvement. These small steps build momentum and confidence and encourage the student to leave his or her comfort zone in order to develop. This process is only possible if there is a clear objective in place.



Structure and Analyses

The coach is responsible for creating the structure of improvement, firstly by defining the vision and the goal, then by determining the time frame and plan of action. This plan must be flexible and realistic, it must also be measurable and an experienced coach understands what feedback the student needs to hear, and what information can be harmful to the improvement process.

Added value through content

The coach is one the key sources of information for the student and for the golfing community as a whole. With the modern access to YouTube and other media outlets information is easily accessible. Therefore it is vital the coach produces his or her own information in the way of videos, articles and content to share knowledge with the golf community and position his or herself as an expert in the field of golf.

History and Traditions

All coaches are ambassadors for sport, and they are responsible for the teaching of the traditions, values and the history of the game. Through this understanding golfers appreciate the rules and etiquettes which are associated with the sport and feel like they are part of something bigger and unique

Social Aspect of the Game

Golf can be played alone, in a group or as part of a competition, but what is special in golf is the social aspect it offers for making new friends and meeting new people. I feel it is part of the coaches' responsibility to help people enjoy this aspect of the game. This can be in the way of organizing events and opportunities for golfers to meet each other. Events such as group tuition sessions, practice clubs, group après and golf trips bring golfers together.

Lifetime commitment to learning

The coach should be a healthy example to golfers, especially the younger players who are very easily influenced. Setting examples of sportsmanship, healthy lifestyle and a quest for improvement are in my opinion paramount to being a goof coach. I believe a healthy mind is only possible with a healthy body, and a lifelong quest for self improvement and happiness.



Create a vision and dream

Although never really spoken of an important role of a coach is to help create a vision and a dream for his or her students. By setting a goal the ball starts to roll, and motivation and intention gathers pace. Without the vision and the dream it is impossible to find the motivation, and without motivation there will be no action. The role of the coach is to ignite the passion inside of the student and make them begin to believe what they are capable of with no imposed limits, fears or doubts.

Conclusion

When we think of coaches and coaching we often think of the role of a teacher who gives information in a one directional manner to the student. Coaching is of course much more than that it is about sharing knowledge, but in a way which challenges the student and empowers the student to achieve a defined goal. It is creating the correct environment in which one can learn, grow and make mistakes without being ridiculed or embarrassed. It is to inspire others to achieve something much bigger than they ever believed was possible. Coaching is a lifelong ambition to help others become better people, better athletes and of course better golfers.

Happy Golfing