

Mark Morrissey



Coaching Tips

Mark Morrissey - 2017

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Introduction

Over the past 15 odd years, I must have seen thousands of games, played in hundreds, witnessed dozens of breathtaking moments and even scored a few times myself, but I have just one abiding memory that will live with me forever. It was the day my 6 year old son scored his first try in the team that I coached.

The range of emotions was like nothing I'd ever felt before and even now brings tears to my eyes.

Firstly there was the joy that he had scored. Then came the pride that all fathers feel, "that's my boy out there". As if that was not enough, this score hit me square between the eyes with the realisation that I had made a difference.

The team had been together for about five months, including the "pre- season" training and contained several kids who had played at least part of the previous season as our "Under 6's".

They had trained hard, picked up one or two new players and had begun to show more than just a little bit of promise.

This article is hopefully more than just a diary of the transition from Under 6's to Under 11's or even an attempt to claim any of the credit for myself. This is simply an attempt to document a few of the basics:-

1. How, given a particular group of individuals, we have produced a team which has accomplished its goals.
2. How children of a very young age can adapt to and play to a simple game plan.
3. How all coaches, regardless of experience, must look to the juniors in order to see the future?

This article represents my personal views, thoughts and beliefs about the training, development and coaching of young players and does not necessarily reflect the views of any other organization.

PART 1

1. COACHING PRINCIPLES

1. Whatever age group you are coaching, you need to:-
 - a. Know what your Personal Principles are.
 - b. Know what your Coaching Principles are.
 - c. Know what your abilities/ strengths are.
 - d. Know what "honesty" is.
 - e. Be prepared never to compromise or sacrifice any of the above.

Fine words, what do they mean?

2. PERSONAL PRINCIPLES

By this I mean that you must take a long hard look at yourself before you take the job and question yourself:

1. Will you turn up to coach the team?
2. How many times per week?
3. How long is the season?
4. Are you fit enough?
5. Knowledgeable enough?
6. Why do you want to coach?
7. Does your child play in the team?
8. Will you treat everyone equally?

There are dozens of similar questions that you will ask yourself before you start and if you have the slightest doubt that you are either unsure about your ability or durability, then perhaps you need to give it some more thought.

3. COACHING PRINCIPLES

OK, so you think you've got the personal qualities. What next?

What do you believe are the most fundamental values in the game of Rugby League? Is it speed, endurance, aggression, "killer instinct"? Or some other combination?

I believe in the following coaching principles. My belief in them is unshakable and underpins everything that I teach.

1. Children are the key to the future of Rugby League and I believe that we should encourage our children to support "their" team, but teach them to appreciate good Rugby League, whoever plays it. Good Rugby League may be played by the team you play for, a team who beats you or any of the professional clubs.

One thing remains constant, **GOOD RUGBY LEAGUE IS GOOD RUGBY LEAGUE**, and is a joy to watch.

2. If we can attract young people into the game now and treat them properly, we will have them for life. I accept that not all kids will stay with playing the game through to adult grade and only a very few will ever play first grade, but, if we nurture our youth today, they will love Rugby League forever.

3. No player should ever take the field until the coach is confident that he can successfully complete Front, Reverse and Side Tackles. Anything less is risking either serious injury or putting kids off the game for life.

4. Discipline - I teach my young players that many things win matches, only indiscipline loses them.

We aim for the full time whistle without having conceded a penalty, knock on or any other form of mistake.

The self-discipline of high personal standards helps to raise the quality of Rugby League being played. Our "stats" seem to confirm that the best games to play in and watch have been the ones with the fewest mistakes.

5. Training Discipline - All training has a purpose and every week we try to introduce a new concept. As a coach I will not accept or allow messing around during training.

This should not be confused with enjoyment and being able to have a laugh. I tell all new players:-

- * If you want to fight - take up boxing
- * If you want to play "solo" - buy a 'Play Station'.
- * If you want to mess around - I'll give you a bucket and spade to play in the mud.

6. Behaviour - Both on and off the pitch. No swearing, no sledging, no answering back to an adult.

No elbows in tackles, no "high shots", no knees. Anyone who does this will be removed from the game.

This is an area where the professionals could do so much to help. Kids naturally model themselves on their heroes and copy what they do.

What the pros do this weekend, the youngsters try to do next week. I try to show them that it's neither "cool" nor clever to copy such antics.

7. Losing is OK - I believe that no team can win every match.

All children love to win but there are some times when you can't. It does not matter whether you win or lose as long as you did your best and played with pride.

I still feel that all teams must be coached to compete and play with passion and pride. If the team does its best on the day and is beaten by a better side, there is no disgrace in losing.

If the team loses because they didn't try or they gave up trying, they deserve to be told so.

8. There is no "I" in "TEAM" - I believe in the team.

I believe also that a team needs individuals with talent and that individual talent needs to be coached to bring out the best.

The team, however, must play as individuals within the team, for the team, for the benefit of the team.

Look at some of the top club sides, over the years they have bought some of the best individual talent ever to play Rugby League and still won no major silverware prior. Only when a coach arrives who makes them play for each other do they start looking like a team.

I try to show people that each player has a position and that each position has a role to play within the team.

If that were not true, then the position would be obsolete and the game would be very different.

That does not stop any player from overlapping and interchanging with another at some point in the game, although young players need to get used to and be confident in one position before coach's start "mucking about" too much with the positions. I can hopefully expand on this theory later.

10. Praise - Lots and lots of praise. Never, ever make a negative comment about any young player's performance, ability, or lack of athleticism.

You must use phrases such as "hard luck", "nearly caught that ball", "you just need to put your arms out a little further".

Kids perform better when they are being told about the things they are doing well. No one produces their best efforts when all they receive in return is abuse.

I have heard coaches at other clubs call their players such things as "useless fat pudding", "donkey" and "***** little *****". All of which I find unacceptable.

On one occasion whilst refereeing a match I gave a coach a final warning about the tirade of four letter abuse directed at two of his players. I was even less amused to be told that it was OK as they were his sons!!

I treat all my players as if they were my own children and praise them constantly.

The golden rules should be: -

- * If you can't find something good to say, then don't say anything.
- * There's no such thing as a bad player or poor team, there's only coaches who have failed.
- * If another coach was insulting your son you would certainly not like it. So don't ever let yourself down by being "that other coach".

Children are like a blank canvas. The "finished article" directly depends on the picture that we choose to paint. It is down to us as coaches whether we build the picture slowly, patiently and skilfully to become a masterpiece or do we simply throw a load of paint around (along with the insults!) hoping that one of the "rejects" might one day be worth something.

KNOWING YOUR ABILITIES AND STRENGTHS

Successful people in all walks of life know their strengths and the limits of their abilities. It helps if you know your weaknesses, but that is much harder for many people to identify.

So what are your strengths? - More importantly perhaps would be to ask, "What strengths do you need"?

The simple answer is that most people have something to give that will be valued which may be as simple as "time", or may be a 20 year record as an international player.

The key is to be able to pass information from one person to another in order to improve the performance of the person who is learning.

This may be brought about by any of the following:-

Patience - Ability to explain clearly and precisely what to do over and over again.

People Management Skills - The ability to inspire confidence so that people do as you ask. Always ask, never order.

Persuasion - the ability to convince people that what you are asking is the right thing to do.

Experience - Your background and proven ability speaks for itself and commands respect.

Respect - Treat other's as you would wish them to treat you.

Lead by example - you must show people that what you are asking for can be done and is achievable.

Perhaps the most important strength for any coach, or teacher, is the ability to listen. Coaches spend lots of time "telling" and some of the time hearing what is being said.

How much time do you spend really listening to what is being said instead of just hearing it?

For example, when you ask in front of the team why Bill didn't pass the ball. The answer you hear will almost certainly be "I don't know".

The listening coach would ask the question away from the group and would probably hear "I don't know how to". We must listen to what people are telling us, so that they can be heard. If not, what right do we have to think that anyone will ever listen to us.

Try completing a SWOT analysis of either your team or your coaching job.

Draw four Columns on a piece of paper titled * **Strengths** * **Weaknesses** * **Opportunities** * **Threats** Write in the columns the things that come to mind in the four categories.

By using the model you can work to overcome weaknesses and remove threats whilst seizing opportunities and utilising strengths.

HONESTY

This is a concept which is so very simple, but which causes more problems than any other. You must be honest as a human being otherwise you will never gain the respect of the players, their families or other coaches.

Honesty works on many levels, including the issues of theft and dishonesty.

The honesty I am talking about is a little more basic. Was it a forward pass? was there a double movement? In both cases you might argue that if the referee did not pull you for it, then it must be OK!

Let's put it another way, you score the winning try with a double movement, the referee awards the try.

The opposition are upset at the decision and appeal to you to be honest! How do you feel now?

Is it still OK?

Does the win seem just a little bit hollow?

A young player on the other team starts crying because he just let in the try that lost them the match and his "mates" are giving him a hard time.

Are you still jumping for joy? Let's turn it round a little bit.

The opposition is awarded a try from a blatant "double movement" in the dying seconds of the game, you lose the game and are watching the other team celebrating, and do you still think it's fair?

NO, of course you don't, so don't let it happen in the first place!

I try to show my team that it takes more of a man to admit a mistake than it does to cheat.

Honesty should pervade everything that the coach does, from team selection, through using the subs to giving feedback on performance.

Bear in mind that you should be always looking to give praise before you even think about saying anything which is less than complementary.

Junior Coaches have a duty also to be honest with the parents of the players.

All parents want the best for their children and sometimes their closeness prevents them from taking a more balanced view.

It will not help anyone if you tell a parent that their son Bill was not selected because he is not good enough no matter how much you claim you are being honest.

Why not try thinking about why Bill has not been good enough?

Is he too thin, small, slow or bulky? Or is it because he's missed quite a bit of training and needs to catch up with some of the "set moves"?

It does not take a genius to work out how to say some of the more difficult things in a way that offends none.

There will always be the parent who "can't hear, won't listen" who is out to give you a hard time.

When this happens, all you can do is to LISTEN. After all, the buck stops with the coach.

Where players are concerned, never tell them lies. If you do they will never trust you.

Your team scores a last minute try after an obvious forward pass. You are "happy", opposition parents are "upset". How do you feel now? Is the win just a little bit hollow? How do you handle it? Well you concentrate on this decision, and this decision alone, and be honest to all –"Yep, I think that the last pass was forward". If there was another decision in the game that favoured the other team, then that is a separate issue. Hopefully, the other team would say "Yep, it was a knock on". Then "*sporstmanship*" would be the winner in both these situations.

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Why not try thinking about why Bill has not been good enough?

Don't say things such as "c'mon get some tackles made, that big guy won't hurt you". Making tackles can hurt you, and in my experience "big guys" hurt you just as much as the little ones!

Remember love the game and enjoy what you are doing.

Mark Morrissey - 101 Coaching Tips

1. Plan
2. Develop communication skills and never stop trying to improve them.
3. Learn to effectively utilise the Internet and email.
4. Never stop learning. Learning is life
5. Be open minded. Never say never.

6. What you may lack in knowledge, make up for with enthusiasm, desire and passion
7. Be a role model for your athletes
8. Accept constructive criticism as a positive. Learn from mistakes, take steps to improve from the experience and move on.
9. Allocate time every day for personal health and fitness.
10. Keep a detailed diary and record work actually done by athletes not just what was planned to be done.
11. Embrace effective change.
12. Use sport science wisely. The art of coaching drives the science of performance.
13. Seek out information - don't wait for the "secret to success" to fall into your lap.
14. Coach with your heart but don't forget the basics. Secure adequate training facilities, keep good records, observe O.H. and S. principles, and maintain a commitment to safety and equity. Having the 'nuts and bolts' organised allows you to focus on what you do best - working with athletes.
15. Believe in your athletes - they believe in you.
16. Steal ideas from other sports (& improve on them)
17. Strive to make yourself redundant - develop independent athletes
18. Listen with your eyes and watch with your ears.
19. Attitude + application + ability = achievement
20. Coach the person not the athlete. Coach the person not the performance
21. Develop a network and support structure. Be a resource manager
22. Best, better, brilliant - there's always room for improvement
23. What you believe will happen will happen. What the mind can conceive it will achieve.
24. Persistence pays - never give up
25. Learn basic business skills. Understand the basics of insurance. Be familiar with legal liability. Understand the basics of taxation and the GST. Make coaching your business.
26. Give an ounce of information and a ton of practice
27. Communicate - clearly, concisely, calmly, constructively, consistently and cleverly.
28. Seek out a critical friend - they are your greatest asset.

- 29.** Help develop your sport not just your current athletes.
- 30.** Mix with successful people - success breeds success
- 31.** Delegate, delegate, delegate - give athletes, assistants, parents and officials responsibility for aspects of your (their) program.
- 32.** Enthusiasm, encouragement, energy = excellence
- 33.** Look for things to improve in yourself.
- 34.** Have fun - life is short. It takes 20 years to become an overnight success. Successful coaches have a combination of experience, skill, education and practice, developed ways and means of getting the best out of themselves and their athletes.
- 35.** It's easy to coach athletes when they are performing well. Do you have the ability to help athletes deal with the tough times?
- 36.** Focus on the long term even when trying to achieve in the short term.
- 37.** Contribute to the development of other coaches. You may learn from teaching and students are often the best teachers of all.
- 38.** Listen to your athletes.
- 39.** Develop peripheral vision - in your mind.
- 40.** Present information at coaching courses and workshops. Be willing to share.
- 41.** Treat athletes like customers - coaching is the ultimate in client service.
- 42.** Read journals from alternative industries and seek out principles that you can apply to sporting situations
- 43.** Be flexible in your methods.
- 44.** Embrace the principle, 'For the love of it, not the money in it!'
- 45.** Athletes develop confidence through competence. Nothing develops confidence like a thorough preparation.
- 46.** Constantly challenge yourself and your athletes
- 47.** Create a safe, stimulating, interesting training environment where athletes enjoy training.
- 48.** In preparing athletes: leave nothing to chance, nothing untested, don't rely on luck, and make your own!
- 49.** Subscribe to Sports Coach!!!
- 50.** Do your homework. Know the strengths and weaknesses of your athletes, yourself, your opposition. Know the standards - what are the world records, national records, state records, regional records, and club records - what are your goals?
- 51.** Look to help athletes achieve their best - no matter what that level is. Not all athletes want to be the world champion.
- 52.** Be innovative. Be creative. Dare to be different.

- 53.** Try not to over coach. You don't need to talk all the time.
- 54.** Never lose confidence in yourself. You can do it!
- 55.** Encourage your athlete to have ownership of the program.
- 56.** Maintain good appearance - look like a professional.
- 57.** Technology is your ally not your enemy. Use it wisely.
- 58.** When the going gets tough, the tough get going. Mental toughness is still a key component of competition.
- 59.** Adopt the D.R.A.M.A. approach, 'Do, Record, Analyse, Modify, Act.'
- 60.** Confront problems calmly by talking directly with the athlete - don't rely on rumour, relayed messages or other second hand methods of communication. If a message CAN BE misinterpreted it ALREADY HAS BEEN.
- 61.** Empathise don't sympathise.
- 62.** Keep the reasons you coach at the forefront of your mind and your goals close to your heart.
- 63.** Desire - keep the dream alive - every day. Motivation is a lifestyle not a one-off event.
- 64.** What makes a great coach? - Great athletes!
- 65.** Be firm and fair.
- 66.** Build your program around the five Es: EQUITY - ENJOYMENT - EXCELLENCE - EMPATHY and EMPOWERMENT.
- 67.** Share a joke - not sarcasm - just a funny joke when appropriate.
- 68.** Field questions and throw back answers. Challenge athletes to discover the answers for themselves and to learn lessons.
- 69.** Observe, ponder, respond - be an observer of human behaviour.
- 70.** Share experiences willingly.
- 71.** Establish open and effective communication with all stakeholders - parents, athletes, administrators, officials and important others.
- 72.** When in doubt, pause and check it out. Don't be afraid to say 'I don't know.'
- 73.** Employ actions that minimise risk. The primary responsibility of all coaches is the SAFETY of their athletes.
- 74.** Encourage your athlete recovering from injury involve them in the program in some capacity.
- 75.** Be aware of and carry out your legal responsibilities.
- 76.** Efficient coaches take responsibility for their own effectiveness.
- 77.** Self-reflection is your constant companion: be your own best critic but strive to be objective rather than self-destructive.
- 78.** Recognise the contribution of others - players, parents, officials, assistants - everyone enjoys being appreciated.
- 79.** Recognise, publicise and reward. Praise in public - criticise in private.

- 80.** Lead front the front and support from the rear.
- 81.** The coach is the creator of positive experiences.
- 82.** Proper prior planning prevents pitifully poor performance.
- 83.** Praise and positive reinforcement are tools for the coach.
- 84.** Think about what you say before you say it. Then watch for reactions to your words before saying anything else.
- 85.** Body language replaces many words: it's not what you say but how you say it.
- 86.** A nod is as good as a wink.
- 87.** Coaching is a two way process: The athlete feels but can't see - the coach sees but can't feel.
- 88.** Get to know something personal about your athletes. They are people who have chosen to play sport: not just sportspeople.
- 89.** Holistically challenge your athlete - mental skills can be developed just like physical skills.
- 90.** Athletes listen when the coach listens to them.
- 91.** Know when to say NO.
- 92.** Demonstrate, explain, demonstrate again, practice and give constructive feedback.
- 93.** Concentrate on the performance not the outcome.
- 94.** Process goals (how to achieve) should predominate over outcome goals (what to achieve).
- 95.** Facilitate motivation by allowing athletes to fulfil their goals in some way at every session.
- 96.** Coach your athletes to distinguish between attainable and unobtainable but to never stop dreaming of what's possible.
- 97.** Buy a video and refine your filming and reviewing skills.
- 98.** Sports officials give your athletes the best opportunity to achieve the best result - work alongside them
- 99.** To coach well you'll need to know the CURRENT interpretation of your sports rules and regulations.
- 100.** Coaches have a great opportunity to easily expand their social circle - you'll never be lonely.
- 101.** Last year's programs produce last year's results. Resist the temptation to coach by routine or habits