

Coaching Styles: Proper Usage and Why?

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November 26, 2018

Introduction

For my HOD Internship I have had the privilege to be a part of the fitness program at a local private high school in the Nashville area, Ensworth High School. At Ensworth, they don't have traditional Physical Education classes like most high schools; instead they take fitness classes. These fitness classes include different forms of physical exercises and activities that the students take part in: weight lifting, conditioning, swimming, and along with other different forms of physical activities. The reason why I wanted this internship and pursued it was because I want to go into coaching or a leadership position after my athletic career and this was an outstanding chance for me to develop my abilities that would be needed in a coaching/leadership position. With this being said, it leads me into my learning goal for this semester and my internship. My learning goal is about gaining knowledge over the topic of different coaching/leadership styles to use when I am working with others. Furthermore, I want to know when to properly use each coaching style and who to use them on as well, so that learning for the people I am teaching can be maximized. To show the knowledge I learned about on this subject, I will include some research I did individually to provide back up along with situations that I personally, as an athlete, have experienced in my life and also other situations I have experience as a coach in my time at Ensworth.

General Background

Just to provide some background about the fitness classes and what I experience on a daily basis at Ensworth, there are three different types of fitness classes that the students could be classified in: performance, physical, and access. The performance classes are for the students who are more advanced than others and can perform the more difficult weight lifting exercises. The physical classes are for those who have not had the opportunity to be as experienced and

need more time for development of proper form of these exercises that are being executed by the performance level students. Then lastly, the access classes are for the students who cannot fit a normal fitness class in their schedules because of other classes they are taking at Ensworth. So for these students, they come in during one of their free periods and lift and this class is made up of both performance and physical level students, but mostly physical level. I personally help or can lead any of the three classes but most of my time is spent with the boy's performance classes.

Research on Coaching/Leadership Styles

To start off my research, I first looked into the different types of coaching that I could use for the rest of my time at Ensworth and also for the future. In Chelladurai and Saleh's article over Dimensions of Leader Behavior in Sports: Development of a Leadership Scale (1980), they identify that there are five different styles of leadership used by coaches in athletics: autocratic, democratic, positive feedback, social support, and training and instruction. To quickly define all five styles: autocratic is when a coach is the absolute authority, democratic is when the coach lets the people they are coaching have a voice, positive feedback is when the coach focuses on positive aspects when coaching others, trying to leave out the negative aspects, social support coaching is when the coach helps their students with personal issues and trying to be a friend and not just a coach for those they interact with, and lastly, training and instruction coaching is when a coach focuses strictly on proper techniques and form of those they are coaching. Ultimately, you could group these five styles into two sides, task-oriented and relationship-based. The coaching styles that are task-oriented are autocratic and training and instruction, while democratic, positive feedback, and social support all are more relationship-based.

Going back to topic of different styles of coaching working for different type of people, Turman in his article on Situational Coaching Styles: The Impact of Success and Athlete Maturity Level on Coaches' Leadership Styles (2001) shows an example of this. Turman discusses a case study that was conducted in 1981 on the difference between coaching style preferences between intercollegiate and intramural athletes. The findings showed that the intramural athletes preferred a more positive feedback and democratic style from their coaches while the intercollegiate athletes preferred more training and instruction along with social support styles. Terry and Howe (1984) also found similar results to these, concluding that a majority of the athletes they studied showed an attraction towards the training and instruction coaching style. Democratic and social support styles were also preferred by some of the athletes but the autocratic style was the least supported style.

The other theory that was mentioned in Turman's study was a theory that HOD majors have seen before in our HOD 1300 Small Group Behavior class, Situational Leadership Theory. "According to Hersey and Blanchard (1969), for leaders to be effective, they must adapt the leadership style used with their subordinates. Also, leadership is more dependent on the situation and various chance factors can be indicative of environmental characteristics other than just the situation confronting the leaders." In short, what Hersey and Blanchard are stating is that leaders (or coaches in this situation) cannot just coach one way or style. They must be versatile and adapt on the spot to the people and conditions they are being faced with in that moment. This theory works well into this study because the five different coaching styles are good characteristics to have for a coach or leader to have when they need to be adaptive.

Looking at athletics from a different standpoint, coaching style preferences could differ from what we have seen concluded by other studies depending on the age of the athletes. Martin,

Jackson, Richardson, and Weiller (1999) conducted a study on how coaching style preferences of adolescent youths (ages 10-18 years old) differ from the preferences of their parent's. The athletes participated in summer youth leagues and was then given a questionnaire, along with at least one parent, to fill out about their preferred coaching styles. What they found from the questionnaire results was that the athletes gave a much higher appreciate to democratic and social support coaching styles and the parents gave a higher appreciation for autocratic coaching.

Moving onto a different perspective of coaching that strays away from athletics, de Haan, Culpin, and Curd (2011) conducted a study that focused on executive coaching clients and what they valued as helpful to them when being coached. What de Haan, Culpin, and Curd found was that in all, the coaching was highly appreciated. But, what the clients found most important to them when being coached was the relationship and personal qualities (empathic understanding, positive expectations, positive feedback, etc.) of their coach. There was no emphasis on technique or the approach the coach used by the clients. This reemphasizes the point of how coaching is perceived differently by different types of groups or people.

Personal Life Experiences

To recap the findings from my research I found, it all comes back to the significant idea that different people and personalities are going to prefer different coaching styles and as a coach, you cannot be successful if you only use a couple of these coaching styles. What the research tells us is that elite athletes (collegiate athletes) or athletes that take their sport seriously, want to have their coach focus on training and instruction along with also being a good social supportive coach. Logically speaking, elite and serious athletes having a desire for their coach to train, instruct, and correct them makes sense. Personally, speaking as an athlete, athletics is what gave me the opportunity to get into college. Elite and serious athletes are going to want to be

trained, instructed, and corrected because it is expected of them by themselves and others to get better at their sport because of their coach doing this. These athletes have an internal motivation to want to be good at what they do. But what might not be as clear to a person that is not a collegiate athlete is that Turman also concluded that these athletes prefer their coaches to have the aspect of being socially supportive. From my experiences as a college baseball player, I would say I would prefer my coach to be socially supportive as well and here is why. As a collegiate athlete, at least 90% of your day is spent between academics and athletics with classes, practice, any athletic work you want done before or after practice, study hall, and homework. That is a significant amount of time spent with hardly any relaxation incorporated in there, outside of sleeping. With that being said, it is nice when you have a coach who is understanding of their athlete's schedules and can be socially supportive.

Reflecting back on the case that was presented by Martin, Jackson, Richardson, and Weiller, again as an athlete, these findings are not surprising to me. The adolescent athletes enjoyed when their coaches used democratic and socially supportive coaching styles and disliked seeing autocratic behaviors, while their parents were different and scored the importance of autocratic coaching higher than democratic. As an adolescent, athletics at this time is all about having fun and is not all that serious yet. But to a parent, and this does not just pertain to athletics, they naturally want to see their child succeed. But nowadays, with the chance of their child's college getting paid for by an athletic scholarship, parents are putting an even bigger emphasis on athletic success. With this increased emphasis from parents, it is putting greater pressure on their children, which can be why we see that the findings show that children like democratic behaviors, because it allows them to have a voice and not be order around by an authority figure all the time. Rosenwald of The Washington Post wrote an article on the subject.

“More than 26 million children ages 6 to 17 played team sports in 2014, down nearly 4 percent from 2009, according to a widely cited survey by the Sports and Fitness Industry Association. Total sports played have plummeted by nearly 10 percent.” Now given, Rosenwald does not blame parents completely for the decrease in adolescent sports being played. He also says that the recession and shift to elite competition over the past two decades are also to blame but the increased focus from parents on athletic success has been problematic.

Going back to the article written by de Haan, Culpin, and Curd about the study over the executive coaching clients and their coaching preferences, we established from the findings that they were different from athletes in the area that they would rather have a coach with relationship-based attributes than a coach with task-oriented attributes. I believe you see this difference between athletes and these executive coaching clients because, like I mentioned earlier, athletes have an internal drive to be the best in their sport and have grown up being coached, without it being relationship-based, their whole life. Training and instruction coaching is what they are used to and works best for a majority of athletes. But with these executive coaching clients, I believe they are more attracted to coaches that are relationship-based because unlike sports, they do not constantly need their performance evaluated. I do understand that there are evaluations for people at their jobs, but it is not on a daily basis and therefore, they are not used to the training and instruction style of coaching. But for when they are coached and mentored, it can be easier to open up to a relationship-based coaching style because they are more personal. Task-oriented coaching styles strictly focus on the performances of those being coached and for those not used to the style, it can seem like there is no focus on the actual person themselves and can even seem dehumanizing if the coaching is extreme enough.

Finally, looking into the autocracy coaching style, you can notice that it is not well accepted by any of the groups that we have looked at in these studies. With that being said, I am not saying autocracy is a bad coaching style, but it should not be a surprise that it is not seen well by those who are being coached. The democracy coaching style has been widely accepted by the groups we have discussed and if democracy is seen positively, it's only natural that autocracy is viewed negatively. It is viewed negatively by those being coached because it is only giving the power to their coach. With democracy, everyone has a voice and that includes the people being coached. I believe, although it is not taken well by those being coached, it can work positively when coaching a certain group. This group I am speaking of does not pertain to just athletes or a group of people like our executive coaching clients. If a coach has used the other coaching styles and is not getting positive results from the individual or group they are coaching, then I think autocracy can work well for that coach. If a coach is being ignored or receiving rude behavior in return for their coaching, this would be an example of a time to use autocracy in my opinion. If those you are coaching do not deserve to have a voice in what you are teaching, do not give it to them.

Ensworth Experiences

For this section of my paper, I would like to talk about the five coaching styles and give examples of times when I have had to use them within my time at Ensworth. To start off, I will talk about the autocracy coaching style. When talking about autocracy earlier, I mentioned how I believed it could be useful for a specific situation where the individual or group being coached is not being respectful or receptive of the coach and their teachings. For a majority of my time at Ensworth, I have been more of a helper for the two coaches that teach the Boy's Performance classes and occasionally leading the classes when one of the coaches is absent. There is one class

that fits my description from earlier on when to use autocracy and it's the second period class. The size of the class is the biggest class we have this semester in Boy's Performance and the students within the class are all very high energy people. When the class comes together, they are not well behaved and do not listen well to myself or the other coach. Because of this, I asked the coach of this class how he wanted to handle the students from now on and after a discussion, we came to the conclusion that we were both going to move into an autocracy style coaching. What this consisted of was not letting them have any say in what they do in class, like we do with the other classes, and we are both became even more strict then normal. As a result, we have gotten better results from the class in their work ethic and efficiency.

Next, I will move onto the subject of the democracy coaching style. This is a more common coaching style throughout my day at Ensworth. With students also being athletes and having games throughout the year, this is where the democracy style comes in. If an athlete has a game, we as coaches do not want to make an athlete do a specific workout that could possibly hurt their performance. For these days with the athletes, we as coaches will work with the athletes and discuss with them what they would like to do to prepare for the game individually, as long as it is beneficial for them. Because we let them have some say in what they can do to prepare for the game, this makes it a democratic coaching style.

The third and fourth coaching styles, positive feedback and social support, I will discuss together. Like the democracy coaching style, positive feedback and social support are more of commonly used coaching styles for me personally. With Ensworth having all their students perform strength and condition exercises, there is a majority of students who are athletes or just regular students who have a good background with lifting and are more experienced. But, there is a good amount of students who are not experienced at all and because of this, they are not

comfortable in weight room and its environment. For these students, they can be shy and uncommunicative because they feel like they are not doing the exercises correctly. Because the students are not communicative, this is where the social support comes in. As a coach, with these students you have to be the one to initiate the communication with them and it does not have to be about what you are coaching. Personally, I would say it's better to try and get them to communicate what they are feeling and try to make them more comfortable. If they're more comfortable, they will start communicating more and you can work better and more efficiently with them.

Another way to make them more comfortable is to use the other coaching style I grouped with social support and give them positive feedback. When I say I give them positive feedback, I do not do it excessively. I only do it when they do something correctly, but every time they do an exercise right, I make sure they know. The reason for this is because if they know they did accurately, they will have more confidence and this will hopefully let them be more comfortable in the environment.

For the fifth and final coaching style, training and instruction, I only use when working with athletes. As I mentioned earlier while discussing this coaching style, training and instruction is viewed well by athletes and that is no different at Ensworth. Athletes are spread throughout all of the classes but a majority of them are in the performance classes. With the athletes, I try to focus more on their forms and the execution of the lifting exercises for them. I do this for the non-athletes too, but not to this level. I give the athletes immediate feedback and I do not focus on the relationship-based part of coaching while I am working with them. I work on that part of the coaching when they are not in the weight room. With non-athletes, I do not mind to incorporate some of the coaching styles that are more relationship-based. But this way, the

athletes know that the weight room is a place for their own personal growth and not a place for socializing.

Conclusion

There are many different types of people in this world and there is not one way of coaching that is going to optimize the complete potential for every person. Chelladurai and Saleh presented the five coaching styles that are used by all coaches. Turman then showed us some examples of groups that respond better to certain styles and also introduced the theory of situational leadership and the importance it has for leaders/coaches to have this trait. Martin, Jackson, Richardson, and Weiller also provided different examples to us of coaching styles and even how different aspects, like age, can change how a group prefers to be coached. Then finally for the research, de Haan, Culpin, and Curd then show us the first example of looking at preferred coaching styles from different groups outside of athletes. After the research, I then provided personal thoughts that I have formed from personal experiences from my athletic career and provided examples as evidence. Then lastly, I incorporated my experiences I have had this semester while working in a coaching role with students in the fitness program at Ensworth and gave examples of how I have used all five of the different coaching styles. The information that has been gathered through the research I found is significant for anyone who is looking for a career in coaching and I would recommend every coach knowing this information before they start coaching others.

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