

COACHING EDUCATION

Tools for a Formal Mentoring Program: A Guide Every Mentee in Coaching Can Use

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Abstract

Mentoring is crucial for the development of competent coaches (Jones, Harris, & Miles, 2009), and athletic departments and sport organizations are encouraged to use this process that links an inexperienced coach with a veteran mentor coach (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 1995). Mentored coaches benefit from gaining insight and wisdom into their profession and from building important relationships with significant others in the department or organization (Pastore, 2003). In this paper, we provide an overview of mentoring and give practical tools for implementing or strengthening a formal mentoring program. As such, relative worksheets for use by mentee and mentor coaches have been included in the appendices of this paper.

Much has been written about the mentoring process that occurs in educational settings (Burden, Harrison, & Hodge, 2005; Dodds, 2005; Jones, Harris, & Miles, 2009; Sambunjak, Straus, & Marusic, 2010), including the sport and athletic context (Cardone, 2010; Pastore, 2003; Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002). In most of these published articles, the focus has been on defining what mentoring is and what roles are common for the people involved and on articulating attributes, characteristics, and expectations of the mentor teacher

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or coach (Dawson, 2014; D'Abate, 2009; Kram, 1983, 1988; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Ragins, 1997). The purpose of this paper is to provide further insight into the perspective of the mentee in coaching, including a description of assessing his or her basic competencies and future goals. Finally, we provide useful templates that can be used as how-to guides for those newly or actively engaged in the process of formal mentoring in their current athletic coaching location and situation.

Within the realm of sports coaching, the practice of mentoring has been commonly used to enhance mentee coaches' expertise and knowledge base (Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, & Salmela, 1998) as part of the integral process of "developing high-quality practitioners" (Jones et al., 2009, p. 268). This mentoring of coaches is only possible because of the experience and perspicacity of expert coaches who were mentored themselves in areas ranging from tactical and physical skills to coaching philosophies and values that govern the mentee coach's relationship with other people (Bloom et al., 1998; Jones et al., 2009). In the most rudimentary sense, then, mentee coaches receive on-the-job training from mentor coaches who provide regular conversational interactions as well as modeled actions indicating how various responsibilities and tasks ought to be handled.

At least one group of scholars has noted that beginning athletic coaches, who are often inexperienced teachers in an unfamiliar school, regularly "encounter challenges and demands," especially as they pertain to navigating the many new relationships with students, parents, and school administrators (Rikard & Banville, 2010). The novice coaches who are also academic teachers have previously had at a minimum a mentor teacher who helped them develop their organizational and technical skills in a relatively controlled student teaching classroom setting. However, the first-time coach who is not a classroom teacher may never have had a coaching mentor before, let alone a controlled context in which to practice skill development germane to the art and science of coaching. Therefore, it is essential that new coaches have the opportunity to be formally mentored by experienced coaches who have walked in the shoes of the mentees early in their own careers.

Theoretical Framework

The process of mentoring is grounded in Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which argues that individuals learn through observing the actions and behaviors of influential role models. Social learning theory can also be a powerful tool for shaping desired behavior through positive or negative reinforcement that is given to mentees from people who are more experienced. To this end, Megginson and Clutterbuck (1995) noted that mentoring is usually understood as an intraorganizational social relationship in which a more experienced person serves as a role model and friend to another less experienced person. The mentee is a person who can learn from a knowledgeable mentor in a relationship that requires "trust, respect and a genuine interest in each other's lives" (MacLennan, 1995, p. 41), and a mentor helps the mentee avoid mistakes and gives the protégé the opportunity to meet and forge relationships with those in more powerful or influential positions (Pastore, 2003).

Appendix A illustrates the various ways in which the mentoring can occur formally or informally in almost any athletic department or sporting context. Regardless, though, of whether coaches are mentored in a formal or informal setting or program, the process can potentially lead to the procurement of personal fulfillment and professional evolution for both parties involved. In this mutually beneficial bidirectional relationship, scholars have noted that mentees have someone to invest in their total growth as professionals (Jones et al., 2009) and that mentors are rewarded with personal satisfaction that comes with helping another person in the vocation (Pastore, 2003). In support of this claim, in sport survey research, Weaver and Chelladurai (2002) indicated that male and female mentored athletic administrators are "more satisfied with their work than their non-mentored counterparts" (p. 96). It stands to reason, then, that mentored coaches at all levels of athletics may be more satisfied with their work, too, which can only help to influence positively the overall coaching experience and growth of the persons taking part in such an important relationship. In turn, the positive coaching experiences of mentored coaches will strengthen the overall success of the entire athletic department of the school. Hence, not only is mentoring potentially beneficial for the mentor and mentee directly involved in this social learning process, but the entire school

and its sport organization may also be strengthened and improved (Flannery & Swank, 1999).

Pilot Program

Once a person is hired as an athletic coach, he or she is suddenly confronted with various aspects of the job that must be learned to perform the duties of the specific appointment well. According to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory and his subsequent theory of self-efficacy, people often learn how to act in certain social situations through observing the actions and role modeling of others. He also noted that these same people are capable of developing a sense of their own abilities to control courses of action that lead to the successful attainment of goal and performance outcomes (Bandura, 1977). With this perspective in mind, it is certainly possible to assert that many novice coaches will quickly adapt to their new position and acquire essential job functional knowledge by witnessing the behavior of and asking questions to the other coaches in their school and sport-specific school context. The formal mentoring program presented in this paper is intended to assure the mentee coach that there will be at least one primary mentor coach who can be counted on as a role model for demonstrating appropriate coaching behaviors and for answering inquiries (Flannery & Swank, 1999).

To help guide the process of learning and the advancement of self-efficacy for the new coach, three forms appear in appendices that can be used to help govern the overall process of formal sport coach mentoring in any school setting. The "Mentee Coach Skill Assessment Sheet" (see Appendix B) is intended to be an initial self-assessment for the mentee coach that ought to be filled out prior to performing any job-related duties. This form is guided by the foundational work of Zachary (2000) and MacLennan (1995), who noted that an initial assessment can be useful in helping mentees state specific goals and objectives that they would like to accomplish with the assistance of their mentor. The use of the skill assessment sheet here is not intended to report or establish a level of self-efficacy for the mentee coach, but rather it is geared toward ultimately helping the coach determine the best possible ways to use successfully the skills that the mentee already possesses (Bandura, 1986) through an enumeration of strengths and weaknesses in a wide range of skill ar-

was associated with coaching job functions. Mentor coaches should be prepared to share the results of this preliminary assessment with their assigned mentor coach at one of their first scheduled mentoring meetings.

The “Mentee Coach Open Observation Sheet” (see Appendix C) should be used at least two to three times by the mentor coach during the sport season for which the mentee is an inexperienced coach (2 years of coaching or less for that specific sport). The mentor coach needs to make every effort to share observations and reflections with the mentee coach in a timely fashion, during which the two coaches can gather without distraction for at least 15–30 min to discuss and ask questions regarding the particulars of the recorded observation. This observation form and the conversation that follows are not intended to be an evaluation tool of the mentor’s performance of particular skills, but they are intended to serve as a tool for reflection based on the observation of a more experienced coach in the same sport. Because coaches often serve a role in influencing someone’s interpretation of the sport experience (Duda & Balaguer, 1979), it can be assumed that a mentor coach can help guide the learning of a mentee coach as each person shares and responds to the written notes from the observed coaching experience.

The “Mentee Coach Summative Evaluation Tool Sheet” (see Appendix D) is grounded in the work of Zachary (2005), who noted that the process of mentoring should primarily be oriented toward the learning process and stated improvement needs of the mentee. This mentoring form was also constructed in part to serve as a reflection tool for those involved in the mentee coach’s work progress. To this end, Rhodes, Stokes, and Hampton (2004) wrote that open reflection is an essential component to furthering professional development. As such, this form is recommended to be used at the completion of the sport season specific to the mentee coach (i.e., if the mentee is a ninth grade basketball coach and his or her season ends a month before the mentor varsity coach’s season ends, both coaches should make every effort to meet with the athletic director in a timely fashion to meet and fill out this form together). A form that is filled out too long after the season or by only two members of the recommended triad of professionals is likely to seem stale or unhelpful, especially if the mentee coach has moved on to coaching

another sport. Thoughts, ideas, and reactions that are soon after the season has ended give the coaches and athletic director the opportunity to recall more easily instances and examples of situations that were or were not appropriately or positively handled during the season, which allows for healthy discussion on the mentee coach's skills in various stages of development.

SWOT Analysis of Pilot Program

The useful tools set forth in this article for helping to establish a mentoring program for coaches have shown promise in serving as useful guides for schools and coaches who want to introduce or formalize their athletic coaching mentor–mentee program. During the 2013–2014 school year, this program received administrator approval for use by a Midwestern K–12 school. Therefore, following a consultation with the authors of this work, an introductory meeting was held at this school in the summer of 2013 between the school's athletic director and its coaches. At this meeting, coaches received an outline to the mentoring program and those who wanted to participate immediately were guided through the early stages of engagement with the materials presented in the appendices of this paper. It was noted that most coaches preferred to select their mentor coach to work with as opposed to having one assigned to them, and several more veteran coaches offered to try and mentor more than one inexperienced coach. In the end, though, all mentees had a mentor coach (even if this was an administrator who also coached), and at a minimum, each less experienced coach had the chance to articulate initial areas of strength and weakness. Furthermore, mentee coaches expressed well-defined goals for their increase in coaching aptitude, including their desire to receive more frequent feedback from their athletic director or other school administrators.

The most positive reported benefit of the mentoring program for this school appears to be the establishment of a postseason meeting between coaches and school administrators. In this pilot case, mentee coaches noted that they were thankful they now had a chance to sit down and talk with a school administrator about their sport season and overall coaching growth and effectiveness. We believe that this type of big-picture, positive consequence is the result of a more natural line of communication between coaches and administrators that results from de-emphasizing a vertical hierarchical structure

that often exists among school personnel. Further use of these mentoring tools at other schools and in other athletic settings is needed to confirm whether this is most often the case.

The pilot testing of this program was not without its challenges either. For example, the school experienced coaching resignations and dismissals during and immediately after the fall and winter sport seasons, which led to difficulties following through on mentoring program commitments for those directly involved. This unanticipated challenge may have been amplified further at this school because of its relatively small size and lack of paid assistant coaches for use by a Midwestern 7–12 school. Thus, it is recommended that schools or community athletic organizations wishing to adopt a mentoring program similar to this consider their overall coaching stability before beginning a formal mentoring process.

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Appendix A

Comparison of Features for Formal & Informal Mentoring Approaches

Key features	Informal	Formal
Common Descriptors	Casual, serendipitous, spontaneous, natural, idiosyncratic	Organized, structured, facilitated, strategic, planned
Finding a Mentoring Partner	No eligibility requirements Self-initiated Voluntary Chemistry and accessibility valued Individual asks for or offers advice or guidance	Eligibility requirements established Facilitated selection process Voluntary Learning fit and compatibility Person who makes first contact is stipulated
Accountability	Lack of expectation No formal agreement Commitment not required Accountability harder to maintain Self-managed	Roles and responsibilities predefined Structured or negotiated mentoring agreements Commitment required Mechanism for accountability built in Program-managed
Relationship	Personal Unstructured Evolves naturally over time Lack of formal commitment Communication is sporadic	Partnership Structured Milestones defined for each phase of relationship Commitment to each other Communication is ongoing

Key features	Informal	Formal
Learning Goals	Broad goals Goals tend to change or evolve over time Just-in-time goals	Broad, generalized goals become more specific and focused Goals are evaluated regularly Development goals
Training	No training required	May be training sessions for mentors or mentees individually as groups or combined sessions
Duration	No expectation as to relationship time frame Relationship organized around immediacy of need Relationships can go on indefinitely or be purely situational	Relationship finite; has a beginning and an ending point Relationship organized around time frame or completion of learning goals Relationships renegotiated
Evaluation	No formal mechanism Goal achievement ad hoc No required reporting to a third party	Formal mechanism Relationship progress toward goal achievement is measured regularly Required reporting on a programmatic basis

Appendix B

Mentee Coach Skill Assessment Sheet

Mentee Name:
 Sport(s) Coached:
 Years of Experience:
 Mentor Name:

Instructions: Review each skill and indicate how comfortable you are in using it by checking one of the three boxes: V = very comfortable, M = moderately comfortable, U = uncomfortable. Then identify an example that illustrates a concrete situation in which you were either comfortable or uncomfortable using that skill. Check each skill that you feel you must improve to develop a level of comfort. Once you have completed the skill inventory, rank your overall comfort level with all eight skills on a scale of 1 to 5.

Skill	V	M	U	Examples	Needs work
1. Asking for feedback					
2. Brainstorming					
3. Communicating					
4. Fostering accountability					
5. Managing conflict					
6. Problem identification					
7. Problem solving					
8. Building positive relationships					

Overall rating: 1 2 3 4 5
Not very comfortable to very comfortable

Source: Adapted from *The Mentor's Guide*, by L. Zachary, 2000, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Appendix C

Mentee Coach Open Observation Sheet

Mentee Name:

Date & Time:

Mentor Name:

Sport:

Context of Coaching Observation (location, age and skill level, practice or game, before/during/after practice or game, etc.):

Primary Areas of Focus for Coaching Observation:

Comments:

Important Issues to Pay Attention to:

Observable Aspects of Coaching Performance:

Practice/Game Planning and Preparation ____

Teaching Techniques ____

Coaching Knowledge and Application ____

Management and Control ____

Appendix D

Mentee Coach Summative Evaluation Tool Sheet

Mentee Name: _____

Sport: _____

Mentor Name: _____

1 = Effective

2 = Needs improvement

3 = Unsatisfactory

4 = Unable to observe

Skill	1	2	3	4
Commitment to the team				
Communication with players and parents				
Knowledge of sport				
Teaching ability				
Ability to motivate players				
Energy and passion for coaching players				
Managerial ability				
Ability to establish rapport with other coaches				
Accepts responsibility for actions				

Overall evaluation of mentee coach: _____

Other comments: _____

Mentee coach's signature: _____

Date: _____

Mentor coach's signature: _____

Date: _____

Athletic director's signature: _____

Date: _____