

## Developing a High School Coaching Mentorship Program

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### Abstract

Mentoring has become an important aspect of professional development for young coaches. Too often young coaches are left on their own to develop their coaching skills once they leave college. For first year coaches, all the duties and responsibilities that go along with being a coach can seem overwhelming. Where does one turn for help? This paper provides a model mentoring program that can be adopted for use by high school coaches.

### Introduction

According to Swanson and Deutsch (2017), young coaches find it challenging to take on coaching responsibilities. The transition from being a high school athlete, to a college student in training, to a teacher/coach leaves one wondering if they have what it takes to be successful. Many aspects of coaching are difficult to replicate in college or university coach training programs leaving coaches to struggle through the induction phase (years 1-5) of the profession.

Swanson and Deutsch (2017) found that 71% of the coaches in their sample had less than 15 years of coaching experience and 20% had more than 20 years of experience. This leaves less than 9% with between 16-20 years of experience. Swanson and Deutsch suggest, “we could be fast approaching a coaching situation where the days of high experienced, life-long coaching careers are coming to an end, and all of the experience and knowledge they have with it” (p. 1161). For female coaches, close to 80% have less than 10 years of coaching experience.

A number of questions were raised by Swanson and Deutsch (2017): Should young coaches with minimal experience be expected to handle all aspects of a head coaching position? Is it fair to put a young coach in this position without the tools to be

successful? Is it right to put the same expectations on a young coach that are put on a veteran coach? Whom do coaches go to in time of need?

### A Starting Point

As a starting point, one might review research on coaches’ perceptions regarding mentoring and where to find help. Swanson and Deutsch (2017) found that a majority of their subjects (high school coaches) would prefer to talk to the athletic director regarding legal issues in coaching and parent/player issues but would prefer to talk to another coach regarding coaching topics/philosophy.

In addition, 80% of coaches agreed or strongly agreed that there is a need for coaching mentoring programs at the high school level. Close to 90% agreed or strongly agreed that there is a benefit to discussing coaching issues with another coach and that it would be a benefit to assigning a young coach with a veteran coach as a mentor.

### Why Be a Mentor?

Interest in mentoring has grown over time as the benefits and positives of mentorship are recognized. Mentoring is a leadership activity that can benefit everyone involved. As well as helping the mentee develop and advance, the mentor will gain extra skills and understanding from the relationship (Cronin, 2019). In addition, a school district or club will benefit from improved retention of the coaches (Naim & Lenka, 2017). Below are listed some of the benefits to the mentee, the mentor, and the organization.

### Benefits of Being a Mentee

A mentee will gain practical advice, encouragement, and support, and will learn from the experiences of others. The mentee will become more resourceful and better able to cope with the critical incidents that are sure to happen during a sport season.

As such, the mentee will develop social confidence, communication skills, and personal skills and will be more empowered to make decisions. And further, the increased on-the-job learning will reduce off-the-job training costs.

### **Benefits of Being a Mentor**

As a mentor, one will develop leadership and management qualities which lead to increased confidence and motivation. As a mentor, one engages in a volunteer opportunity that is valued by others. From serving as a mentor, one benefit from self-fulfillment, personal growth, and satisfaction in being able to contribute to someone else's growth

### **Benefits of Mentoring to an Organization**

Organizations that adopt mentorship programs also notice benefits. For example, the enhanced transfer of professional skills leads to improvements from the mentor. Mentorship can serve a stabilizing factor in times of change. As new coaches are hired, the mentors can help them learn and adjust to school, department, and team culture. Similarly, a structured mentorship program can help in coach retention as frustrated coaches have someone to talk to when times get stressful and they are thinking that things would be better in a different setting. As mentioned previously, an internal mentorship program increases on-the-job training with reduced on- and off-the-job training costs.

### **Defining Mentoring**

Although many people in various fields agree on its value, mentoring in coaching, as in other areas, seems to lack a clear definition, with people assuming it means different things to different people at different levels. These different definitions are hindered by the belief that mentoring should be described in terms of the person (mentor) and their characteristics (knowledge, attributes, skills, experience), while others choose to describe it in terms of the relationship and the bond between mentee and mentor. Despite this, mentoring is gaining acceptance as a means of developing high quality practitioners (Eby et al., 2005).

Mentoring is an ongoing, prolonged process that includes regular interaction between the mentor and mentee ( i.e., face-to-face contact, email, phone, session observations, workshops and networking) (Oshinkale, 2019). It is recognized as offering both structured and unstructured support for coach learning and is the most visible example of a practice where formal and informal learning meet.

That leads to the question of what is a mentor?

One can describe a mentor as a provider of opportunity not normally extended to coaches. A mentor is a supplier of insider information that is often privileged and generally not known to others. One can think of a mentor as a challenger who inspires deeper thinking and believes in untapped potential.

### **The Mentoring Relationship**

Whether the most successful mentoring relationships are those that are naturally occurring, self-selecting, or formally allocated is still up for debate (Straus, 2013). What is clear is that each and every mentor/mentee relationship is unique. Seen as a helping relationship, it involves the ability and desire to understand a person's meaning and feelings (their situational context) without being overly emotionally involved.

To be effective, relationships should be holistic in that they emphasize both positive growth and development of the individual as a coach and person. Basic ingredients such as respect, empathy, honesty, acceptance, responsiveness, cooperation, and positive regard are all important. The emphasis within the relationship is placed on listening, questioning, and enabling, as opposed to telling and directing. An ideal relationship for mentoring is the reciprocal relationship in which both parties gain from the experience. Characteristics of a positive, reciprocal relationship are sharing, mutual respect, mutual trust, reciprocity, and care and concern for each other. These qualities will lead to comfortable, open communication.

Reflecting again on the work of Swanson and Deutsch (2017), subjects identified the main traits their mentors had demonstrated towards them. Five themes emerged: 1) positive leadership, 2) role model on and off the field, 3) knowledgeable of the game and situation, 4) organization and management of games and practices, and 5) the caring relationship that went beyond just being at the sport coached.

In a similar vein, subjects were asked to identify what they thought were the main issues they deal with as a coach. The main themes, in order of response, were: 1) parent issues (complaints, unreasonable expectations, over involvement, playing time, entitlement), 2) athlete issues (participation, entitlement, lack of work ethic, injuries, off-season dedication and commitment), 3) coaching job responsibilities (budget issues, transportation, time commitment, dedication of staff, legal rights, paperwork, scheduling and discipline, 4) other (cell phones, society, social media, performance and participation with outside teams, video games, community support), 5) administrative issues (Swanson and Deutsch, 2017). These items can easily

form the basepoint around which mentoring occurs.

### **Mentorship Program Structure**

There are generally three individuals (known as a triade) involved in the mentorship activities, a mentee (young, inexperienced, or new coach), mentor (older or more experienced coach), and an administrator who is typically the athletic director. Below are described the various duties and responsibilities for each member of the triade in a structured mentorship program.

#### **Coach (Mentee)**

- Attend informational meeting with Athletic Director and mentor to determine goals and outcomes.
- One on One Conferencing - 5 hours during the season in which you coach - 10 half hour sessions-can count up to 4 hours as informal or digital hours (texting, email, phone calls).
- Observed by mentor - 4 practices, 2 games
- Recorded coaching during practice-2 times
- Meet with AD post season

#### **Mentor**

- Attend informational meeting with Athletic Director and mentee to determine goals and outcomes.
- One on One Conferencing - 5 Hours during season - 10 half hour sessions-can count up to 4 hours as informal or digital hours (texting, email, phone calls).
- Observe mentee - 4 practices, 2 games
- Record and watch recording of coach during practice - 2 times
- Meet with AD post season

#### **Athletic Director**

- Select mentors
- Lead informational meeting with mentor and mentee to determine goals and outcomes.
- Support mentor and mentee during season
- Verify that all materials and requirements of program are met.

#### **Program Timeline (12-week season)**

The mentorship program will typically follow a structure timeline with preseason and in-season activities. Mentor/mentee conferences will usually occur after observations and recordings and when scheduled during the season.

- Preseason:
  - Meeting with Athletic Director, Mentor, and

mentee.

- In-season:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> week of season-conferencing/setting goals, plans etc.
  - 4<sup>th</sup> Week - practice observation and recording
  - 6<sup>th</sup> Week - game observation
  - 7<sup>th</sup> Week - practice observation
  - 9<sup>th</sup> Week - practice observation and recording
  - 10<sup>th</sup> Week - game observation
  - 11<sup>th</sup> Week - practice observation

#### **Tools to Ensure Program Quality**

A number of tools that ensure program quality are provided in the figures at the end of this article.

- Development Plan Form – Figure 1
- Conference Log – Figure 2
- One-on-One Record Form – Figure 3
- Coach Rating Scale Sheet – Figure 4
- Practice Observation Checklist – Figure 5
- Observation Time Record – Figure 6
- Practice Plan Evaluation Form– Figure 7

### **Summary**

As suggested throughout this paper, all age coaches value having a mentor who can help them grow as a coach. Attending conferences and clinics can certainly help young coaches better understand how to address a number of coaching issues; however, having an identified mentor who can provide one-on-one advice and counsel is invaluable. As such, it is incumbent upon athletic/activity directors to ensure that their coaches get the coaching education via mentorship that allows them to grow and be successful.

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Figure 1 – Development Plan Form

**Personal Development Plan**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Sport: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Long-Term Coaching Goal:

Short-Term Goals (Improvement Areas):

Action Plan to Achieve Short-Term Goals:

Support Needed from Mentor:

Timeline for Completion:

How Will You Know When Your Goals Have Been Achieved?

Figure 2 – Conference Log

**Conference Log**

Coach: \_\_\_\_\_ Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_ Duration: \_\_\_\_\_

Progress From Last Conference:

What do You Feel Good About?

What is not going so well?

Focus for Today's Conference:

Possible Solutions for Issues Faced:

Coach's Next Steps:

Mentor's Next Steps:

Next Meeting Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 3 – One on one record form

### One-on-One Record Form

**Instructions for Mentors:**

1. Using this form, document all one-on-one sessions with coach. Use more than one sheet as necessary. <sup>[[1]]</sup><sub>[[SEP]]</sub>
2. When the time requirement is fulfilled, submit to Athletic Director for review. <sup>[[1]]</sup><sub>[[SEP]]</sub>

Date	Time	Duration	Location

Signature of Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 4– Coach Rating Sheet

<b>Coach Rating Sheet</b>		
Long-Term Development Goal:		
Timeline to Complete Goal:		
Coach Capabilities	Definition	Rating-Current rating - O Goal at end of season - square
Skill Knowledge	Knowledge of skills involved in sport	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Experience	Experience coaching sport	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Strategy Knowledge	Knowledge of game strategy	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Biomechanics	Understanding body movements in the sport	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Long-term Athlete Development	Understanding/vision of athlete improvement	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Strength & Cond	Ensuring athletes in proper condition for sport.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Program Vision	Knowledge of where to take program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Practice Planning	Experience in planning own practices	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Observation	Experience watching others' practice	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Feedback	Experience getting feedback from others	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Developing People	Knowledge of instilling confidence in athletes	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Figure 5 – Practice Observation Checklist

**Practice Observation Checklist**

As coaches, we constantly analyze the athletes we work with to help them further develop their skills and be the best that they can be. The coaching checklist below can be used to help your mentee identify the kinds of coaching behaviors they exhibit, which will enable them to:

- A** get a view or idea of their coaching behaviors
- B** compare those coaching behaviors with their desired coaching behaviors
- C** identify strengths and areas for development
- D** plan to address those areas for development.

Did the Coach have objectives and goals?	Outcome-	Comments-
Show Logical Progression	Outcome-	Comments-
Have Coaching Tips or Points	Outcome-	Comments-
Ensure Safety of Environment	Outcome-	Comments-
Maintain control of group at all times	Outcome-	Comments-
Maintain control of equipment	Outcome-	Comments-
Check on participants during session	Outcome-	Comments-
Talk to participants before session to outline goals	Outcome-	Comments-
Provide Variety and Challenge	Outcome-	Comments-
Maximize Athlete Involvement	Outcome-	Comments-
Motivate and Inspire	Outcome-	Comments-
Stay composed, even under pressure	Outcome-	Comments-
Cater for all abilities	Outcome-	Comments-
Manage Time Effectively	Outcome-	Comments-
Manage Space Effectively	Outcome-	Comments-
Manage Conflict Effectively	Outcome-	Comments-
Group athletes appropriately	Outcome-	Comments-
Explain skills/strategies	Outcome-	Comments-
Use clear and accurate demonstrations	Outcome-	Comments-
Gain Attention before Directions	Outcome-	Comments-



Continually check for understanding	Outcome-	Comments-
Ensure adequate voice level	Outcome	Comments-
Maintain effective body language	Outcome-	Comments-
Maintain Awareness for group when dealing with individuals	Outcome-	Comments-
Provide Constructive Feedback	Outcome-	Comments-
Ask for Feedback	Outcome-	Comments-
Manage Success and Failure	Outcome-	Comments-

Figure 6 – Observation Time Record

<b>Observation Time Record</b>		
<b>Name of Mentor:</b>		
<b>Name of Mentee:</b>		
<b>Type of Observation:</b>		
_____	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Time of Observation:</b>
_____	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Time of Observation:</b>
_____	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Time of Observation:</b>
_____	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Time of Observation:</b>
_____	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Time of Observation:</b>
_____	<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Mentee Signature</b> _____	<b>Date</b> _____	
<b>Mentor Signature</b> _____	<b>Date</b> _____	
<b>Athletic Director Signature</b> _____	<b>Date</b> _____	

Figure 7 – Practice Plan Evaluation Form

**Practice Plan Evaluation \*Attach practice plan to this form**

<b>Coaching Session Self-evaluation</b>	
<b>Personal coaching goals: By the end of the session, I will have:</b>	
<b>Description of situation:</b>	
<b>What went well?</b>	<b>What did you do to enable this?</b>
<b>What went less well?</b>	<b>What did you do that may have caused this?</b>
<b>Information and feedback from supervising coach:</b>	
<b>What I learnt/want to improve in my coaching:</b>	
<b>Action plan to improve my coaching:</b>	
<b>What support do I need?</b>	<b>Who will provide this support?</b>
<b>How will I measure my improvement/success?</b>	