

Debbie Thompson 00:15

In this rerelease episode we're going back in the vaults to the start of 2020 and the first series of this podcast to a conversation between Pete Catterall and Sid Sinfield. The topic is coaching philosophy, how you begin to create and develop one of your own and importantly how it can help you in your coaching. If coaching philosophy is a topic you'd like to explore more, we made an entire mini-series on this topic in 2021 with episodes with a really fantastic range of coaches such as Jenna Sanders, Chris Brain so do take a look at those if you're interested. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this episode.

Pete Catterall 00:55

Welcome to the coaching podcast. My name is Pete Catterall, the talent Coach developer for British Canoeing. And today I've got Sid Sinfield with me who's the performance coach developer. Morning. How are we doing. Yeah so, we could just to then get a bit of information on you Sid a little bit about your background where you come from how you've ended up here and then we'll get stuck into the podcast itself.

Sid Sinfield 01:20

Yeah. So, I suppose once, as with any coaching pathway, it's never been quite straight. I started coaching myself first qualified as a coach back in 1989, which for those people who haven't seen me, that means I'm old. And then I spent most of my career coaching non-competitive paddle sports, actually, White Water canoe, and then I did a bit of a competitive surf kayaking, a bit of coaching of that and then in the last 15, 20 years, I've been predominantly focused around coach education, developing coaches at all levels.

So, I've been heavily involved with the coaching scheme for British canoeing for the for a pretty long time now. And yeah, written parts of the coaching scheme. I've been set for years and years and so the performance coach job came up and it was a new fresh challenge for me and yeah, so that's why I'm in this chair.

Pete Catterall 02:24

So, it's a quite diverse background really. So, this morning we're going to chat around sort of where coaching starts and how coaching develops and how we as coaches sort of build our own thinking about our own coaching, if you like, with that.

Sid Sinfield 02:40

Yeah, I think you've opened with a good one there. If we're thinking about our coaching, that's probably a good place to start.

So, I suppose for me, I think as a coach you really need to have, to be an effective coach and to be the best coach you can be, but you really need to have given coaching quite a bit of thought,

although it's a quite spontaneous interaction with two people, it's actually it is quite a cerebral and cognitive kind of process as well.

So, for me, if you've given a bit of thought about why you, you know why you do it the way you do, then it's probably a good starting point. For me personally, I always think it's got to start with the person you're coaching. So, though I'm going to think about my coaching, it's going to start with them. So why are they there?

What do they want from this coaching, whether it's this one-off session or is it this program? Why have they, why are they, why are they there? What's their motivation? Because if I don't know why they're there, it's much harder for me to, to accurately set some goals and help them achieve those goals. So, the if I clarify that a little bit further, I'd like to a little analogy I kind of like to think is I'm not making widgets, right? So, I'm not putting the same thing in all the time and then producing the same thing all the time, regardless which I might be if I was literally making widgets in a factory. I'm also not training a racehorse in that I'm not got, you know, a piece of flesh that has no real drive or goal itself and I've set it a target and I'm going to train it and it's going to win the Grand National.

So, I'm not training the racehorse either. I'm actually training a human being and they've got their own motivations, motives, goals in life. And I'm helping them achieve that rather than the racehorse kind of analogy, which I think for me that's the real key for coaching is I start with the person and their wants and then shape that into how we're going to get there.

Pete Catterall 04:49

Okay. Yeah. It's funny I've worked with you for 12 years I've never heard that analogy before in my life. Okay. So how does that, but where does that, how does that actually start as it is if I'm just saying a new coach coming into a coaching relationship, I've got my beliefs on what my job as a coach. Yeah. How do I start that?

Sid Sinfield 05:11

The key word you've just said there is relationship. So as if I was training a horse, it would be quite straightforward. I've written a program, the horse is going to go through that program, but I'm not. I'm training the human being, so therefore I need to talk to them. I need to have that relationship. And for them to be able to talk to me, I need to build trust. I need to build empathy. There's lots I need to get to know that person. So, the coach/ athlete, relationships, once you know what they want from the, from the coaching, it's then a case of connecting with them and making an effective relationship with them, partly because that as they go through, their journey, you're going to need to be able to pick up on their sensitivities of when they're doing something particularly well and when they need a bit of a boot, when they need some praise or when they need some constructive criticism.

And you need to know the person to know exactly how you're going to do that. And the other the other thing about really knowing the person is if you're going to engage them with an engagement, I think is a real that's a really important factor in coaching. If you're going to engage them, you've got to know what fires them up, what what. So, so once we know what their maybe aspirational goals are, what their goals are for the coaching, you then need to know them as a person and that takes,

to do it really well It takes up quite a bit of time, but in some coaching sense that, you know, we've worked in ourselves is sometimes you might only have that day to form that relationship.

I suppose in the setting I'm working with now, the coaches I'm working with now have got a longer period of time to develop those relationships. But until you get those effective relationships, you're not going to get the performance gains that they want and you want.

Pete Catterall 06:52

Yeah, absolutely. I guess some athletes resign they want, they expect as a coach that you going to come in with quick fixes and you're going to change it all instantly I guess you sort of alluded to the fact there that that might come later once relationships are built, which coach / athlete understand each other where they're going. And you know, we all have different views on things and.

Sid Sinfield 07:15

yeah, but equally sometimes that quick fix gives you the way in for them to trust you. So, trust again is another, I know this analogy the other day, which I thought was really, really nice as well. So, if you were to start a relationship, you start coaching relation, somebody is like having an empty jar and we want to fill that jar full of marbles and every time you do something that builds trust, you add marbles to that jar. And if you do something that undermines their trust in you, it's like taking marbles away from that jar. So early on I need them to buy into what I'm doing and to believe me and trust me. And so, i might do some quick wins to start chucking some marbles in the jar, and then once I've got them where they we've got a pretty functioning relationship, then every day we're probably going to be adding marbles to the jar. But equally I can start to challenge them in a way that might require them to think more critically about themselves. And that's, can only do that when you trust somebody. Yeah, that makes sense.

Pete Catterall 08:18

Yeah. Yeah. It does yeah. You know there are the people out there are going to be in in this long-term coaching relationships and people who are going to be, there'll be coaches listening that maybe do one-off sessions. Yeah. That's how we. We want the same outcome one might be in the morning session; one might be over a 4-year cycle but it just come back to that saying what you making is going to get in there quick and build that trust.

Sid Sinfield 08:43

Yeah. And say outside of the beginning knowing what they want from the coaching and then once you've had a chance to spend some time with them, you'll probably have a fair idea of maybe what you think they need, but that's not necessarily what they think they need. So, we're going to have to, we may have to give them some of what they want in order them to trust me enough to then be raising the well that's all well and good, but maybe this is what we need. And if I can change the need into exactly what they want, then I've got engagement and then they're going to they're going to believe me and they're going to go with what we're doing and buy into the program that you're going to deliver and that what will happen on, If you've got somebody for a day, you've got to get

some quick wins for them to believe you and say this person, this coach knows what they're doing and I trust them enough to go with this area that that they've opened up otherwise they'll think it's a training course. Which is different. So, if I go if I go on a training course, you know, I just turn up and we deliver the product I think oh brilliant. And I will take from it some of what I can, but that's for me, not performance coaching or coaching at its best. It's a training course.

Pete Catterall 09:55

Yeah. Yeah, sure. And so, it sounds like you've got quite a good handle on how you'd like to coach and what you believe coaching is, how's that developed over the years?

Sid Sinfield 10:09

Right so, for me, I think there's two things is I've given coaching a lot of thought. So, I've, I've given it a lot of thought because I've studied it a lot, I've done a lot of coaching. But I think on all of that, I've thought about the coaching I've done after I've done it. I've been really reflective on that and I've probably thought more about the things that went wrong than I did about things that went right, because that's the that's just the way I think we are. We tend to focus on that. But that reflection and also knowing what we might call your coaching philosophy, knowing what you think coaching should be, unless you've got a clear image in your mind of what you think good coaching is, it's very, very hard to do the reflection on it, to then go, what was that session any good?

Because what you're going to compare it to, what were you aiming to do? What would have good look like? if you haven't given yourself a bit of time to think about what good looks like, then it's quite hard to to look back on your session to see whether you've achieved or not, you know. So that kind of considered coaching philosophy I think is really important and it has to be your own, not one that you've just taken off the shelf because that might get you going that kind of might get you going in coaching, but I think you have to really know what you fundamentally as a coach are trying to achieve every day that you go out there and how you ideally would go about achieving that and that sets quite a high standard for yourself to achieve. But therefore, you're you've got something to reflect against to see whether you did that.

Pete Catterall 11:49

So, I'm going to rewind you a little bit, cause there's a different level, there will be different levels of coaches with different experiences listening. So firstly, I'm going to ask you two things here, what is a coaching philosophy? Okay, just to sort of break that down to make that, cause philosophy. So, what's a Coaching Philosophy for?

Sid Sinfield 12:10

Okay, so for me, coaching philosophy is simply in its simplest form it's how you think good coaching's done and I mean how you think it is, not what somebody else has told you. And maybe it might have been formed, you might have formed this opinion based on having received good coaching, you might have formed it having received bad coaching because we're going to go I definitely to be like that, but I want to be more like this.

Yeah, So So I think that in its simplest form, it's simply you haven't thought carefully about what you think good coaching is to you, you know, so, so in my example, I personally strive for all coaching to be individualized. So that it is trying to help, and I say trying because it doesn't always go brilliantly, trying to help the athlete, the paddler, the learner whatever you want to call them because it's pretty inter-changeable terms. How can I help them be the best that they can be? And if I've got a group of four people, I'm not just doing I'm not doing the same thing to all four. So, so for me, that's an example of my coaching philosophy is I think all coaches should be individualized and I should be working with each individual to help them achieve their goals.

And those goals will be different because each of those four people would be different. Does that answer that question?

Pete Catterall 13:31

Yeah, that clears it up, so part two to that question then is your your coach philosophy is developed since 1989? Yeah. Back in the day, do you think it's changed, do you think the way you think about coaching has changed? If it has, what what do you think caused those changes? And if it hasn't, I'll be amazed.

Sid Sinfield 13:51

Yeah. No. Well I think it has I think because early early on when I was, actually in 1989, I was an instructor, you know, in the days of BCU Instructor award and I um and I tried to mimic people that I thought were good. And what I thought at the time was if I if I can teach strokes, if I can know all the ways to teach, draw stroke or sweep stroke or forward paddling, and I have these little formulas in my head of how you forward paddle and how you draw stroke, then I would just simply learn lots of scripts.

And then the more scripts I had and I would just then deliver. Okay, you've come, I'm going to teach you to go sideways, this is how I do it. And regardless of your, of how you do it, this is what I'm doing, and this is a game that links with that. And I think over the years I've now got to the stage where more I'm happier with my ability to look at somebody, look at where their potential is and and shape that as opposed to going, no, this is what I do when I go in sideways and and you're going to receive this.

So, I think, so that's the individual bit that's really changed. I think that's changed because I never, I noticed that those sessions weren't, they didn't, they weren't good for everybody. So, if I was doing a, if I had six people when I was going and here's my ideas model for going sideways, here we go, you're going to have it, and then I'll do it and then I think that person didn't get that much better in that session and they might have been able to speak back to me how to go sideways, but they weren't doing it. So, when I reflected on those sessions, I was thinking I must be able to do this more effectively. And I suppose that's how they evolved by me trying, reflecting, and going no it's different.

That's one of the main reasons my philosophies changed. And then the other reason is I've actually done quite a lot studying and I really like to learn from as many different sources as possible. And I've been really fortunate to watch lots of coaching, not just in paddle sport, but in all sorts of paddle

sports. And and I really enjoy watching a good coach work and trying to work out what it is that worked for them and what can I steal.

So, so so that's why I think my philosophy has been pretty stable now for the last, I'd say ten years in terms of where I think I'm going with it. But, but that's only because I'm at a stage now where I like to challenge it, but it seems to stick. It seems to have a robustness that I quite like. You mean in that I still think it's fully individualized. I've changed a little bit about how people vary and how skills are acquired, but fundamentally I still still go about my process the same way.

Pete Catterall 16:39

Yeah. And do you, do you find, do you now work in which you really experience coaches who are in a very long-term coach /athlete relationships have been working to develop there. Do you feel that all your user experience of coach education and in your own coaching, your own reflection on coaching and your studying of coaching is really sort of set you up to be able to watch other experienced coaches and help them develop their philosophies, Challenge their philosophies? And does that challenge your philosophy?

Sid Sinfield 17:10

Yeah. So, I think, I think the most, the bit that benefit the most is watching coaches and then knowing that I'm going to have to give them feedback. That's really different to just watching somebody because I can just watch somebody go, I'm just watching. If they go, if I'm expected to give them feedback, then I've got to really think carefully about what it is I'm looking at.

So, when I'm looking at the coaching watch, looking at their coaching and I'm looking really carefully, and then what I can, only when I watch somebody coach, I can only see what they do. I can't see what they're thinking. So therefore, I've got to think very carefully about what questions I need to ask them, because if I, if I have an idea therefore, what they were trying to do and I've seen what they actually did, then I can help question them on that, on that development. And the biggest challenge for me is if I have a philosophy that's very, very different to mine and therefore if I don't know what my philosophy is, then it comes down to, I'd say, subjective things. Well, I would have done that differently, but I can't verbalize why. I can only say I wouldn't do that way because I don't like it that way.

And that's pretty subjective and judgmental, and I don't think that's going to help a really experienced coach look at an aspect of their practice, you know, So So yeah, I'm not sure that answered the question you were asking, but if that's the way if I'm looking at experienced coaches, I want to know why they're trying to do what they're doing. Yeah, because I can see what they've done, but I can't see why

Pete Catterall 18:47

So that sort of complete the circle of the chat really just now about why it's really important to know why you coach, how you coach so that you can develop as a coach later, and I know that we've got another chat coming up. Yeah. Which is about how we continue to develop as coaches so I do think you've answered that.

So, what as we sort of get towards the end of this this chat, how would you how would you give a new coach some advice on how to build a coaching philosophy that is actually there's and It isn't just, they haven't just robbed it off someone else and copied what what you do or what any other coaches does. Where do they start?

Sid Sinfield 19:28

I think I can only, I suppose if you know, you've got to coach, right? So fundamentally that's what you got to do because the rest of it, you aren't going to get good at anything if you only watch other people do it or you read about it, you have to actually go out there and do it right. So, so the mileage is where it is and actually realizing that you're going to make mistakes, but you got to learn from those mistakes, reflect on them and think carefully about what other reasons it might be that didn't particularly work, yeah.

So so but initially, I think we all like to just go and steal ideas. So, steal tools, so and then steal the tools, try them out, see which one's work. And if they don't work, you go right well that didn't work. Well, that did work, I'm going to keep that. But more importantly, why did it work? And that's when you're going to start developing your philosophy is when you start thinking, why did that work so well? And then if you you take from that you go oh right, I think is because of this. And then that will start to colour in your little picture that is coaching philosophy. Do you know what I mean It will be right, I think coaching seems to work best when I do these sorts of behaviours and then I connect with people in this sort of way you know what I mean and that will be yeah, that will be how it develops fundamentally doing it and fundamentally thinking about it and not just the bits to work but didn't work. Yeah, that's important, but you need to really develop your own philosophy of why did that work, why did that session seem to go absolutely brilliantly.

Pete Catterall 20:53

Yeah. You do see people coaching in particularly going oh that didn't work, that didn't work thinking, well, what did work? So, it does work. We need to we need to be able to repeat it again.

Sid Sinfield 21:02

Yeah. And then likewise, if you're fortunate enough to work in or be in a position where you can watch other people coach, is Why did that work? Ask those questions. Why did that work? Because if it's working, then if you can get to the nubbins of why it was working, then you're much more likely to be able to steal that then use it more accurately than what, I'm just going to that activity. I'm just going to transform that activity into these other people and see if it works, which is probably less likely to happen.

But it will do if you actually go that worked because they connected with the people or they their explanations were clear. There wasn't too much verbal information. You know, those kind of parts of it would be worth encourage people to go right

Pete Catterall 21:44

Sid that's great. Is there any resources people could look at to to go further with this or put you right on the spot there.

Sid Sinfield 21:52

Yes. Well, I would go to the British Canoeing's digital library. Yeah. Because you can go to the coaching self-analysis tool. And there's whole heaps on there. So that's where I would. Because people may listen to this podcast in a year's time and and that would have been updated since then so let's go there

Pete Catterall 22:11

Great just thanks so much.