

11 Characteristics of Great Coaches

So what characteristics do the best coaches share?

1. **Keep Vision and Values Front and Centre.**

The coach is visionary and lives life by adhering to core values. He should have very real strength of character and commitment to personal integrity and honesty. Winning at any point should never come at the expense of values.

2. **Think Deeply about and Pursue Holistic Education**

The coach sees himself as preparing people not only for achievement in sport, but through sport for a life of personal fulfilment and for the enrichment of community.

3. **Dedicated to Life-Long Personal Development and Professionalism**

The coach tirelessly pursues personal education, formally and informally, both in the performance related sciences and in liberal arts. He sees the journey to coaching excellence as a never ending story; seen not only in terms of a chosen sport and coaching theory and practice, but in understanding how to successfully live a balanced and full life, while facing tougher and tougher challenges in the chosen field of endeavour.

4. **Mentally Tough**

The coach is focussed, determined, tenacious, hard – even ruthless- but never cruel. His resolve to overcome all obstacles and challenges in pursuit of the agreed goal is unshakeable. No matter how many setbacks, he has the resilience to keep coming back, to keep fighting. He always has heart for the fight. He persistently seeks for the advantage and no matter how small that is, he will seize it and maximise its value. He is devoted to passing these qualities on to everyone he influences as coach. That means driving them to go beyond what they think they are capable of, even when this means tears and pain.

5. **Meticulous in Preparation**

The coach takes the advice of Abraham Lincoln:

“If I had eight hours to chop down a tree; I’d spend six of them sharpening the axe.”

He is a master of strategic thinking and quality control, and is guardian of good order throughout the coaching process. He is thorough in briefing and preparing his athlete, team, coaching colleagues, management and performance services experts for the specifics of a given competition or campaign; he constantly seeks new and better ways of doing so. In this aspect of his role, he is thoroughly disciplined to system and method. His approach to preparation includes anticipation and coping with uncertainty.

6. Excellent Communication Skills

The coach makes the complex simple and ensures that what is heard, seen, understood and translated into action is exactly the intended response to his verbal, visual and kinaesthetic messages. He communicates as much through the emotions as the intellect, and leans as heavily on anecdote, metaphor and simile as on data and drawing board.

7. Relationship Management.

The coach exercises excellence in initialising social interaction and persistently applies best endeavours to ensure that relationships work effectively for the individuals concerned and for the collective purpose. This means taking time to understand each person in their sphere of influence; what they need from the relationship; what they bring to it; and how they can connect in learning, in performance, and in delivering the strength of interdependence. The coach is always visible, accessible, and approachable.

8. Decision Making

The coach has exceptional decision-making abilities. These range from decisions which determine the route to achieving long-term goals, to resolving situations under pressure and at speed, selecting the right course of action in a crisis. So he is very competent in making the judgement to change direction from an agreed game plan in order to seize the opportunity of success for the enterprise. He knows his most important decisions are selection of his team, from athlete to support staff. His operational network to facilitate this is part of such selection. He is well aware of his areas of strength and recruits people to make these even stronger. He is equally aware of his areas of weakness and brings in those who will compensate for these. While challenging each person in the team to raise their game, he also expects to be challenged to raise his. He creates a culture where correct decisions are based on what needs to be heard, which may not always be what is wanted to be heard.

9. Self-Knowledge and Awareness

The coach knows himself. He never underestimates his leadership role, responsibilities and accountabilities, yet he may understate his leadership value. He is acutely aware of his limitations and measures himself persistently and more harshly than he measures others; 99% of his best he considers failure, even when in others he would see 51% of their best as a win. He is true to himself and naturally to those professional standards of excellence for which he is known. In being true to himself, he knows that, being human, he is imperfect and even fallible! Achievement, for him, is only in part reflected in performance and results in the competition arena. Rather, it is in what he did and how he did it in his leadership and coaching roles, and, in the longer term, in his legacy to those whose life he touches, to the sport, and to his community.

10. Belief, Faith and Trust

The coach radiates self-belief, belief in his people and belief that the agreed goals will be successfully achieved. Those around him respond to this by believing in themselves and in him more. A shared sense of personal value grows, fuelled by his passion, pride, patience, persistence and powers of persuasion. Yet he has personal humility and an inbuilt sense of belonging to a great scheme of things. He sees trust as pivotal in that scheme: his trust in others sharing the struggle to reach the goal, and their trust in him. It is a trust where each knows the other will do the right thing, and, whatever the outcome, all will learn to be even better in meeting challenges that will follow. He has great personal strength of spiritual faith according to his beliefs. And, finally, he has an unshakeable conviction that even in those ruthless arenas of life where facts and figures conspire to set limits to human performance, it is the intangible but irrepressible power of the human spirit to go beyond those limits, that is the winning difference. The great coach fans the flame of that human spirit.

11. Passion

The coach is passionate about life, people and coaching. It is this that is at the root of his capacity to motivate.

‘You won’t sweep anyone off their feet if you can’t be swept off your own.’

(Anon)

That passion is infectious; however, he is also instinctively compassionate when occasion requires.