

Coaches as leader

CCE keynote presentation to ICCE Conference November 2009

### Slide 1 – title slide

Introduction

As introduced my keynote is about coaching and leadership.

During this presentation I will cover the following

### Slide 2 outline slide

### Slide 3 – “Athlete Centred, coach led, administration supported”

In Australia we are very clear about our philosophy of being “Athlete Centred, coach led, and administration supported”

I am confident that philosophy or something similar is one that many of you or live by on a daily basis. And it clearly positions the coach in a leadership role.

But before we look at the coach in the leadership space and what leadership roles a coach may play I would like to quickly look at each part of this philosophy to tease out the respective meanings:

### Slide 4 – athlete centred

Athlete Centred – in summary this is about making sure that as administrators, coaches, sports scientists, parents etc we always keep the needs and abilities of the athlete at the forefront of our thinking and planning. A good example of this approach is that implemented here in Canada and known as the Canadian Sport for Life policy built upon the Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) framework.

### Slide 5 – athlete centred, coach led

Coach Led – our interpretation is that the coach is the key driver of any athlete development program whether this be at the grass roots community level, the Olympic medal winning level or the professional sports environment. Accordingly the coach must be competent in a range of technical, management and leadership areas.

### Slide 6 – athlete centred, coach led, and administration supported

Administration supported – if we have athletes and a coach to lead the program it is critical that all the ‘back room’ functions are attended to in order that the coach and athletes have the opportunity to get on with what they are best at – training and competing.

Although you may all have a variation or different interpretation of this overarching philosophy I doubt there would be much disagreement that the coach has a pivotal and central role in the success of any athlete development program.

### Slide 7 – Australian sport new directions emerging challenges

This importance has been highlighted by our Australian Government in the paper – Australian Sport Emerging Challenges, New Directions This paper makes a very clear statement regarding the importance of coaches and officials:

*“In many ways Australia’s future sporting success is up to our coaches and training officials.”*

If coaches are so pivotal and if coaches are the key leader of an athlete development program it is important that we briefly explore some of the leadership roles a coach may play.

### Community level coach:

- Role modelling - passion and love for the sport  
Respectful behaviour – other players, referees etc  
Inclusive practices etc
- Conflict resolution - parents, club administration, player selection
- Recruitment - recruiting parent volunteers to assist with team support

### State / Provincial Coach:

- Mentoring - identify and develop assistant coach/es
- Policy development - selection policies, player recruitment policies
- Communication - feeder clubs and coaches
- Staff - identify and recruit support staff

### High performance coach:

- Operational Planning - generally quadrennial cycle planning, but can also include longer term
- Strategic planning - program vision, player recruitment strategies, national player development strategies, succession planning (support staff, athletes, coach)
- Staff management - specialist service provider input eg physio, strength coach, physiologist, performance analyst

Although there are leadership requirements at all coaching levels it is probably fair to say that the identification and development of leadership skills and competencies is limited in many of our sporting

systems. I think it is also fair to say that selection of a coach into a senior role is as often as not based predominantly upon the results of their athletes and it begs the question:

Slide 8 – Coaches as leaders

[Click again to get next line](#)

Or leaders as coaches

Whilst it is important for a coach to demonstrate the capacity to achieve a result, especially at the high performance level, more and more organisations are looking for coaches that can not only achieve a result, but can contribute to the development of the sport nationally; create an environment of continuous improvement; harness the resources and inputs of multiple support staff; leverage resources from their host institution; manage egos not only of athletes but also support staff; and create a succession plan that leads to sustainable success.

Some of this relates to the science of coaching but equally a large part of the potential for a coach is embedded in the leadership space.

If we agree that leadership qualities are important to being an effective and successful coach then it is logical to expect that the identification and development of these qualities would be important for our sports and our respective sporting systems to pay attention to.

At the Sports Commission we have over the last few years recognised this need and have worked towards taking our education and training programs to provide a better balance between the science of coaching and the art (including leadership) of coaching. This is especially important at the higher levels of coaching where our coaches are expected to do much more than just improve those athletes directly under their charge.

As part of our work we have not only refined some of our generic coach education programs but we are also engaged in a high performance pilot project with one of our leading National Sporting Organisations.

## Slide 9 – ASC / NSO pilot project

This pilot is planned to achieve the following:

- Effectively assess our top coaches against a relevant success profile
- Determine targeted development opportunities both as a group and as individuals
- Better allocation of coaches to crews based on the coaches strengths
- Assessing coach development needs against a determined framework
- Profiling coaches more effectively through our recruitment processes
- Ensuring the broader coach education system is consistent with, and supports the development of the successful coaching characteristics.

In order to achieve the above we have stepped out of the sport environment and partnered with an international company very much in the business leadership space. We believe the advantage of this approach is that it will bring a higher level of sophistication and business maturity into our system.

I read just recently about Jack Welch who was the 20 year CEO of General Electric until he stepped down in 2001. In a Harvard Business School article published in 2005 reference was made to GE being the “Most Admired Company in the World” and Jack Welch being regarded by Fortune Magazine as the “Manager of the Century”.

## Slide 10 – Jack Welch

In the leadership space Welch described his 'A' players as characterised by the 4E's

- Energy – excited by ideas and attracted to turbulence because of the opportunity it brings
- Energize others – infecting everyone with their enthusiasm for an idea and having everyone dreaming the same big dreams
- Edge – the ability to make tough calls
- Execution – the consistent ability to turn vision into results

I am sure that all of us can relate to these qualities and would look for these in our leading coaches.

In this article it also talked about Jack Welch focusing on a three part globalization strategy;

- Global markets
- Global sources
- Globalizing the intellect of the company

Clearly Jack Welch saw the need for the identification and development of his people as a critical success factor for his company.

## Slide 11 – ASC / NSO pilot 5 stage process

And it is along these lines that we are conducting our pilot project. This is a five part process including the following stages:

- Establish the key drivers for international success
- Develop a "Success profile"
- Assess coaches against this success profile

- Determine targeted development opportunities for coaches currently in the system
- Identify and nurture those coaches most likely to have a positive impact upon future success

The work to date has been to establish the key drivers and the “success profile”.

#### Slide 12 – business driver to competencies

This is still a work in progress but as we can see on the slide it is very clear that the key drivers are about building the culture, partnerships to support that culture and alignment and accountability across the sport and system to realise the vision.

#### Slide 13 – success profile [\(multiple clicks to show definition of each profile quadrant\)](#)

The success profile is built on a four quadrant analysis. These four quadrants include:

- Knowledge,
- experience,
- competencies and
- personal attributes

The main focus of our ongoing work with our National Sport partner will be in the Competency quadrant as we believe these are the key factors that will deliver upon the drivers we just spoke about. This next slide helps in showing how the key competencies are aligned to the drivers.

#### Slide 14 – business drivers to competencies

With regard to stages 3 and 4 of this project; assessing coaches we will be using a sliding scale assessment process as shown on the slide. Our medal winning coaches will complete an extensive assessment process over the course of about 2 days whilst at the other end of the scale a 360 degree assessment will be used as part of a general screening.

#### Slide 15 – profiling options

This process will commence in early December and January with the results to guide the 360 degree assessment process that will be undertaken in the first half of 2010 once the pilot has been evaluated.

I would now like to focus on the 5<sup>th</sup> stage of the pilot project – identifying and nurturing talent in coaches.

I think it is fair to say that most sports and most organisations would recruit coaches on the basis of the results of their athletes. Whilst this is a valid marker to use I am sure that there would be many highly talented coaches who may not be recognised or identified by their sport.

If we go back to what Jack Welch identified when he talked about globalising the intellect of the company, basically he identified that to be successful it is essential to have the best possible people in the organisation.

It is no different in sport, and especially so in the global / international arena.

I read another interesting article published by Development Dimensions International who are global business development company. This article talked about “Optimising Your Leadership pipeline”.

#### Slide 16 – leadership pipeline

They defined their leadership pipeline approach as

“a critical business process that provides organisations with a sustainable supply of quality leaders (at all levels) to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow”

In this article they talked about business needing to create a leadership acceleration pool. In essence groups of high potentials who are fast tracked to assume growing leadership responsibilities. They are typically a subset of the total leadership population so organisations can devote precious resources to those most likely to succeed over time. Their development is intense and may be aimed at preparing them for a variety of roles rather than filling the shoes of a specific position.

I wonder how many sports proactively and strategically adopt this type of business approach.

In closing I hope I have given you some sense of our approach to the Coach as a Leader.

### Slide 17 – Conclusion

I hope also that I have challenged your thinking about how you develop the leadership skills of your coaches and also challenged you to also think about how you might find good leaders in your coaching ranks and escalate their development so that between both approaches there is a sophisticated approach to developing your leadership pipeline.