

AN ANALYSIS INTO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CHANGING MY COACHING BEHAVIOUR TO CREATE MENTALLY STRONGER INDIVIDUALS AND A MORE COHESIVE TEAM

PART 1

BY

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Part 2 of this article will appear in the Technical Journal next week.

There are references to video clips (VC) in the text when they were used at the Leeds club to highlight coaching points.

All players' and coaches' names have been replaced by letters.



When considering this project, I wanted to find a topic that would benefit not only me, but the players as well. I wanted to develop my initial work done in earlier assignments and look to see how far mental strength and team cohesion can be measured or, indeed, how these characteristics can compensate or complement ability; then, could I change and improve my coaching process to enhance these qualities?

Another reason for this choice is that I have always believed that these areas could be the defining factor between successful and unsuccessful teams. By that I mean, what happens if all is equal? What if the physical, technical and tactical development of the players is, within reason, at the same level? This, I would suggest, is the current situation in the Zurich Premiership at the end of Season 2004/05. This was demonstrated in one particular League weekend where the biggest points differential was four points in all six of the Premiership games.

Coaches invest huge amounts of time and effort into the physical, technical and tactical preparation of the players. However, if these differences are so small then I believe that team cohesion and the mental strength of the players is as much a key as these 'physical' characteristics. The overriding influence in the development of these areas is the coach. He is the one person who shapes the mental make up of the team and the individuals in it. In addition to this, he is charged with task of keeping the team in a harmonious state throughout the ups and downs of the Premiership season.

The objectives of this interdisciplinary project are to reflect on my on- and off-field coaching practices at the end of season 2004/05 and to conduct a thorough analysis of where the players are in terms of group cohesion and mental strength. I will be aiming to change my leadership and management strategies used throughout pre-season and the first half of the season and analyse the impact of these changes on individual mental strength and team cohesion within my players.

"Cohesion – The term for the whole being greater than the sum of its parts is cohesion. So if you add up the individual efforts of all those involved they will be less than what has been achieved by their collective effort. People working together can achieve more than they will if they are working individually" – Lee Smith - You Are Who You Are.

Video footage, personal reflection and player and peer group reflection will provide the majority of the feedback to see whether any improvement in my coaching process has taken place. It will allow me to monitor the change/improvement in my behaviour and provide me with the necessary data to aid self-reflection that will form a major part of my coaching 'personality' for the future. I will draw on psychological, leadership and management measures to create the interdisciplinary approach to my research of my coaching behaviour.



The importance of mental strength and team cohesion.

Be Mentally Tough.

Mental toughness means seeking out the pressure that cannot be avoided anyway, and being energized by it. It's not the ability to survive a mistake or failure; it's the ability to come back stronger from failure.

- Keep the pressure on: Good leaders help their troops stay alert and focused. Keep the pressure on, but stay within individual and organizational breaking points.
- Never give in: It's easy to do well when there's no pressure or stress, but how many of us can be poised when defeat is nipping at our heels? Mental toughness is not rigidity in the face of adversity; it's stability and poise in the face of challenge.
- Work at it:

Mental toughness is the willingness to keep commitments you make to yourself. It's singleness of purpose. It's the ability to stay motivated, no matter what obstacles arise in your path.

"The most important element in the character make-up of a man who is successful is that of mental toughness"-Vince Lombardi.

Can coaching behaviour influence mental development and team synergy?

I have always considered mental strength and team cohesion as fundamental elements that need to be addressed in the coaching process. However, it was only during the completion of my Psychology Assignment 2A as part of my Level 5 that I truly saw the importance and effect it can have on an individual. We had a player with great athletic and technical potential but he was not reaching the level of which he was capable. Close analysis of his behaviour and his performance revealed that the main reason for this was the psychological profile of the player. We spent a lot of time together and, with the help of some external partners, he has made great progress so that at the age of eighteen he made his first team debut in the forwards.

Another reason my awareness was raised was through observations during my playing career of what happens to players and team development if the coach gets it wrong. It also raised my awareness of how I had often paid lip service to this part of a young player's development. I have often assumed that the players I coach buy into the same values that I hold. I started asking questions (of players and myself), such as, 'Are the sessions I plan and deliver, the words I use when addressing the group and the behaviour I exhibit having the desired effect on the team and individuals in it?'

The idea that a coach can influence mental strength and team cohesion had risen during the Level 5 course, particularly as I began to understand the need for the coach not only to be a good technical coach, but also a good leader and manager.



"Coaching is about managing people, it is a form of leadership and it is not the same as instruction, simply imparting technical knowledge. Good coaches coach activities. Great coaches coach people" – Geoff Cooke – former England Coach.

In implementing my change process, I set about making the link between my coaching, leadership and managerial styles more effective by getting the players to know a little more about me. I gave the players an idea of my coaching philosophy, as I believe an effective coach should have created a team which is an extension of himself, whilst accepting that there are individual differences within it.

"You recognise and accept that you are all part of the same team. You develop a common vision, so that you are all working towards the same thing. You accept that people are different. There may be different levels of skill, but everyone has something to contribute to the team." – Professor Graham Jones.

Coaching Philosophy

- 1. Create a culture where players feel valued.
- 2. Players are developed in such as way that they think of the greater good of the team over the individual, yet they understand and trust that the coach will balance the team and individual interests.
- 3. Focus on the performance, not the result.
- 4. Empower the players to take responsibility for their own and the team's development, yet make them understand the bottom line, i.e. the Head Coach has the final say.
- 5. Educate the players to allow them to understand the coach's philosophies and to have a greater understanding of their own personality and the impact that has on team cohesion.
- 6. On reflection at the end of the year there should be a balance between coach-led and player-led sessions.
- 7. There will be a no-ego culture.
- 8. Players will be coached to give out positive rather than negative energy.
- 9. Where possible, players are to be consulted on team strategy.
- 10. Players will be encouraged not to humiliate defeated opponents and to appear gracious in defeat.
- 11. The working environment must be challenging to create mentally strong individuals and a collective team.
- 12. Be honest.....without being naïve.
- 13. Keep consistency in approach, do not allow standards to slip as the season progresses and therefore allow people to become complacent as the novelty of the new season wears off!
- 14. We are all in it together...mutual accountability. "Do as I say rather than as I do is not a leadership style associated with high performance" David Whittaker 'The Spirit of Teams'.



I have talked through this coaching philosophy with the players as I believe, from a leadership point of view, there are many qualities that define good leaders but one of the most important is honesty, and by honestly talking to the players about who you are, you are more likely to gain greater cohesion as they understand more easily your point if view.

"I think I have realised I have to be on a level with the players to get a response at the coaching level. I have got to be seen to be on a par with them. I have got to be seen to be understanding their problems and on their wavelength. If I am on their wavelength I will be alright. If not then things get harder and harder." Steve Harrison, football coach, quoted in 'Sports Coaching Cultures' – Robyn Jones.

One of the changes I have looked to implement is to get the players to know themselves a little better. In order to do this I have endeavoured to give the players the type of understanding I have developed through my experiences but, more importantly, the awareness I now have through knowing myself better.

I have done this through consistently passing on my philosophies on leadership, but this can only be done if the coach knows his own personality and can apply his own coaching philosophies in a clear, controlled and consistent fashion. This self-awareness has been, and will continue to be, crucial in my development as a coach and, although personal reflection on my actions and behaviours is one way of raising self-awareness, I have also done it through several personality profiles in order to improve my coaching process. The most recent was through the Thomas International Personality Profile.

The profile suggested that I have a

- ".. calm unruffled manner, consistent and steady under pressure."
- ".. positive overall approach, diplomatic and sensitive to the needs of others."
- "...personality capable of influencing others to my points of view."

Another area of interest from the profile is to understand my potential limitations such as...

- ".. May allow others to take advantage of him."
- " May be over tolerant of non producers."

The key strategy in considering changing/improving my coaching behaviour is to recognise when situations are occurring that could potentially expose my weaknesses and change my behaviour accordingly.

I have not shared *all* the details of my personality profile with the players, as the profile has helped me manage myself without giving the players the tools to manage me!! See Philosophy number 12 – ("Be honest without being naïve!")

In order to gain a greater understanding of the topic, my research over the last twelve months has been broad and diverse. Key influences have come from a variety of sources. Within my own Club, observation of the end of season run-in of the first team squad's achievements was fascinating. In addition to that, observations and interaction with Tony Smith, the Leeds Rhinos Head Coach, and his philosophy that focuses on performance as opposed to results, has given me another perspective on how to handle teams and players in it. Outside the club, books such as 'Mind Games' - Perrin, 'Beyond Winning' – Walton,



'Mind Gym' – Casstevens and 'Lombardi Rules' – Lombardi, have all stimulated my thinking. In addition to these, Pen Haddow's book 'Solo', detailing his individual walk to the North Pole, and others such as the biography of Jose Mourihino by Luis Loucerco have also had significant influence.

I have looked into more academic research and found the paper by Lee Smith, "You Are Who You Are" an excellent source of stimulation and that led me to articles such as 'Does your Leadership Affect Team Cohesion?' – Michael Chu and the 'Group Environment Questionnaire.' Subsequently, this led on to articles on 'Coaching and Leadership Style in Sport', more specifically the 'Leadership Scale for Sports' – Chelladuria 1984.

Of equal importance has been the individual development I have received from outside the club through a relationship I have struck up with a Director of Human Resources (he is my 'rapid reflection force'!), who has supported my development with work in raising my own self-awareness through individual personality profiles, including a Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire on my leadership style and, more recently, a PPA profile, a strengths and limitations report. These have enabled me to be far more self-aware as I have begun to know 'who I am' a little better.

Ask Yourself Tough Questions

You can only become a leader after developing your character – that is, after building integrity, honesty and commitment. The way to develop these attributes is through self-knowledge. You can't improve what you don't understand. – The Lombardi Code.

Get to know yourself: You can't improve upon something you don't understand. The more questions you ask yourself, the better you'll know yourself. – Vince Lombardi.

As I have become more self-aware I have also begun to recognise my strengths and build on them and then work on my weaknesses. This is something I believe to be critical if I am to change/improve my coaching process.

Play to Your Strengths

The trick is to find your own strengths and to play to those strengths. As you start to answer the questions that lead to self-knowledge, certain strengths – and weaknesses – in your own character will begin to become evident. (This is not a bad thing. Strong people tend to have strong weaknesses; as long as you're aware of them, they don't have to work to your disadvantage.) Good leaders will work to combat their weaknesses, and use their strengths to the greatest advantage. – Vince Lombardi.

Change and development.

In order to decide on the most appropriate way I was going to improve/change my coaching, I needed to collect some baseline data that illustrated the effectiveness of my coaching and the impact I had on the Academy players at the end of the season and



throughout the pre-season. One vehicle for this was through the "Group Environment Questionnaire" (see appendices). This gave me a starting point, a chance to reflect on the results but also to formulate how I was going to approach the season and how I could improve my coaching to bring the best out of the players.

Results from the Group Environment Questionnaire, gave me some interesting feedback. Seventeen players of the Senior Academy were questioned anonymously and the feedback I received was positive but it also gave me areas to work on. Examples of the questionnaire I considered central to the theme of team cohesion included (see appendices for full results):

On a scale of 1-9 (1 being "I strongly disagree", 9 being "I strongly agree")

I do not enjoy being part of the social activities of this team – Average 1.2

I'm not going to miss the members of this team when the season ends – Av 2

This team does not give me enough opportunities to improve my personal performance – Av 1.9

I do not like the style of play on this team - Av 1.9

Our team is trying to reach its goals for performance – Av 7.5

We all take responsibility for any loss or poor performance by our team - Av 7.1

If members of our team have problems in practice, everyone wants to help them so we can get it back together again. - Av 6.8

As these results show, there is a strong cohesion within the team and most of the players seem to be aligned with the way in which we play the game. There seems to be a slight issue over the collective desire to improve performance when things don't go our way, although this is still way over to the right side of the scale.

Ten players of the group that filled in the questionnaire, effectively the Senior Academy, had by and large progressed up to the first team during pre-season training and it was fascinating to see how they coped with the physical, technical and tactical demands of training with the senior players.

This gave me another useful opportunity to analyse my processes in producing players with the right mental make up to compete at senior level. These players were, in effect, wholly shaped by me prior to this experience. Thus, feedback from senior players and coaching staff would be invaluable to see if I was on the right lines in developing players of the right mental characteristics. It also gave me the opportunity to raise their own awareness of their personalities through this peer group feedback and, in getting to 'know themselves' a little better, I hoped to achieve an improvement in all areas.



PLAYER ASSESSMENT – LEEDS TYKES ACADEMY

Please mark a Tick against each element and indicate the assessment of the players as measured against current Leeds Tykes Senior Squad.

Current ability: 1 = Low 2 = Inconsistent 3 = Good 4 = High 5 = Very High

Current ability. 1 – Low 2 – In	ICOHSIS	tent	3 – (roou	4 -	mgn .) - VEI	y mgn		
MENTAL:	1	2	3	4	5					
Copes with pressure										
Singleness of purpose										
Stability and poise in the face of challen	ige									
Loyalty										
Professionalism										
Confidence										
						•				
DESIRE:										
Self motivation										
Plays with "no fear"										
Earns coaches' / players' respect										
Comfortable being uncomfortable										
Seeks out pressure										
								ı	l	
PERSONALITY:										
Enthusiasm										
Cynicism										
Balanced ego										
Integrity										
High Energy Drive										
						1		l		
PHYSICAL:										
Pace										
Power										
Strength										
Endurance										
Agility										
2 nd Effort – Resilience & Tenacity										
L						<u> </u>	I	l	<u>I</u>	I
ATTITUDE										
Focused consistently										
Encourages others										
Positive after errors										
Good body language										
Potential leader										



The people who filled in the questionnaire were from as wide a range as possible through the club. There were coaches of various disciplines, a conditioning coach and a physiotherapist as well as senior players.

The results were very interesting and very positive and I arranged a meeting to feed back the results to the players as a group. We met, ironically, the day before seven of them had been selected to go into the first team to play Sale in the Anglo-Welsh Cup. (An excellent demonstration of the quality of the group.)

The aim of the meeting was to reinforce the values I have tried to instil in them as players and to give the players areas they can look to develop with my support. I wanted to create some debate in the meeting as well as give them feedback. We agreed that an average score of 3 (good) in relation to the current first team squad would be the standard the players were aiming for. As can be seen, 76% of the average scores for the whole group were above 3, with one player scoring a maximum of 27 out of 27 above average scores. Interestingly, he was not one of the players who made the squad v Sale and is still waiting for his debut, probably due to his lack of physical bulk at the moment, rather than any other characteristic.



PLAYER ASSESSMENT – LEEDS TYKES ACADEMY

Please mark a Tick against each element and indicate the assessment of the players as measured against <u>current</u> <u>Leeds Tykes Senior Squad.</u>

Current ability: 1 = Low 2 = Inconsistent 3 = Good 4 = High 5 = Very High

MENTAL:	A	В	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Copes with pressure	3.4	3.43	2.8	3.1	3.42	2.4	2.9	4.14	2.4	3.3
Singleness of purpose	3.9	3.71	2.5	2.9	3.2	3.3	3	4	2.6	3.7
Stability and poise in the face of challenge	3.4	3.3	2.6	3.3	3.2	2.4	2.9	4	2.6	3.4
Loyalty	4.1	4	3.3	3.7	3.8	3.6	3.1	3.9	3.2	3.7
Professionalism	3.9	3.14	3.3	3.6	3.8	3.3	4	4.14	3.2	3.5
Confidence	3.3	3.14	2.8	2.7	2.85	3.1	4	3.9	2.2	3.7

DESIRE:

Self motivation	4.1	4.3	3.2	3.1	3.42	3.2	3.6	4.14	2.7	3.7
Plays with "no fear"	4	3.43	3.2	3.1	3	4.1	3.3	4.3	3	3.7
Earns coaches' / players' respect	4.3	3	3.2	3.6	3.57	3.4	2.7	4.6	2.7	4
Comfortable being uncomfortable	3.9	3.14	2.6	3.1	3.2	3.4	2.9	4.14	2.3	3.6
Seeks out pressure	3.6	3	2.3	2.6	2.7	3.1	2.6	4.14	2.2	3.3

PERSONALITY:

Enthusiasm	4.3	3.9	3	2.9	3	3.9	3	4.14	2	3.8
Cynicism	1.6	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.42	1.7	2	1.6	1.4	1.2
Balanced ego	3.9	3.6	3.3	3.7	3.714	3.3	2.7	3.9	3.2	3.6
Integrity	3.9	4	3.3	3.6	3.8	3.6	2.7	4	3.4	4
High Energy Drive	4.1	4	2.8	2.9	3.14	3.4	3.1	3.9	2.6	4.7

PHYSICAL:

Pace	3.3	5	2	2.9	2.5	2.9	3.1	2.8	3.3	4.6
Power	3	3.3	3.2	3.6	2.14	3	2.9	3.1	3.5	3.4
Strength	3	3	3.5	3.7	1.85	3.1	2.9	3.3	3	3.1
Endurance	4.1	3	2.5	2.6	3	3.6	3.3	3.1	3.2	3.8
Agility	3.3	4	2	3	3	2.7	3.6	2.8	3	4.6
2 nd Effort – Resilience & Tenacity	3.7	3.9	3	3	3	4	3.1	4.1	3	3.6

ATTITUDE

Focused consistently	3.9	2.9	2.8	2.9	3.2	3.1	3.3	4.4	2.6	3.4
Encourages others	4	3	2.3	2.1	2.42	3.4	2.4	3.7	2.3	2.7
Positive after errors	3.6	3.43	3	3.1	3.14	3.3	2.6	4.1	2.6	3.3
Good body language	4.1	3.71	3	3	2.85	3.3	2.7	4.3	3	3.4
Potential leader	4.1	2.3	2.3	2.6	2.42	3.1	2.7	4.4	1.6	3.1



As I aimed to improve my process I wanted to enthuse and motivate these young players to believe that they are capable of *more* than competing in the first team environment. I wanted to give them the tools and confidence, individually and as the Academy group, that they will use as the future of the club whilst they are grounded in the characteristics I have come to recognise is important in producing strong individuals and teams. (VC– 1st team coaches feedback session.)

In addition to this, I had taken some data via a psychological analysis tool 'The Hardiness Scale', which, through a variety of questionnaires, sought to establish a player's total mental toughness. This was taken at the beginning of the season 2004/05 and, although some of the players who took the test have moved on, eleven are still senior players in the current Academy or have moved into the first team. By re-doing the test midway through the 2005/06 season, this again give me some good feedback as to whether I am establishing an environment where mental strength is being developed.

The interesting detail is not how they compete against each other; more one of how they have developed individually. This has provided valuable information for use in one-to-one feedback as I aimed to improve my coaching process through raising their self awareness of their personality in relation to mental strength.

The profiles of the players that redid the tests have suggested that the majority of the players have improved not only their PPI – their 'total mental toughness'- but also in the individual sub sections of self confidence, negative energy control and passion. They also showed a positive shift in their thought process for commitment, control and challenge.

Although the results demonstrate progress, they also provided this vehicle for further discussion. The next step they take as young players is the big one and this gave me the opportunity to raise this with them. It is all very well growing in confidence as you begin to realise that you are one of the best players in the country for your age group, but the key to maintaining this development is to prepare for the challenge of becoming one of the elite players in the senior game. Once they leave the Under 19 age group they compete with players up to the age of 35 and from a whole variety of countries! An interesting follow-up study could revolve around retesting those players that make it through into the senior squad in about two years time as the challenges they face through the ups and downs of being a young player could have a marked effect on certain categories, for example 'self confidence'.

I have tried to improve my processes of support for those players that have passed through my hands into the senior squad, trying not to shield them from the pressure, because that is part of the process of becoming an elite player. However, I have tried to support them more effectively through one-to-one sessions as they experience the highs and lows of life in the senior squad.



The Hardiness Scale. July 2004 / October 2005

	SPQPQ	LOT	Com	Con	Cha	PVS III-R	Ob Pa	Ha Pa	Pa	SC	NE	AT	VI	MO	PO	AD	PPI	PA	NA	RSE	GSE
Player																					
	/35	/30					~6	/42	/28	/30	/30	/30	/30	/30	/30	/30	/210	/50	~10	~10	/40
A	29	23	18	13	16	47	35	38	27	21	24	28	30	27	26	22	178	45	15	20	33
	28	26	19	12	15	46	25	37	27	22	17	15	27	23	25	23	152	44	16	13	32
В	27	22	17	11	11	39	22	33	28	26	25	24	25	28	27	26	181	46	18	19	30
	32	31	21	12	15	48	26	39	28	30	27	28	29	28	30	30	202	50	12	15	32
C	29	29	19	12	15	46	34	39	28	28	28	30	24	26	29	28	193	45	11	10	36
	35	32	21	14	12	47	27	40	28	30	29	30	29	30	30	30	208	49	11	10	40
D	23	24	18	6	11	35	22	29	27	19	23	23	19	24	24	24	156	34	25	23	28
	27	24	19	11	11	41	20	33	26	23	25	24	24	23	26	28	173	40	21	14	36
E	24	24	18	11	11	40	25	29	27	20	23	22	26	22	20	21	154	37	16	25	30
	31	25	19	11	12	42	22	28	25	25	22	25	27	27	26	24	176	40	17	15	35
F	29	22	15	10	15	40	22	29	27	28	21	22	20	27	24	21	163	35	17	16	27
	27	27	18	14	17	49	22	39	28	28	20	20	28	29	26	21	172	43	18	11	36
G	29	18	15	8	9	32	19	23	25	24	21	24	25	24	22	20	160	40	11	17	30
	30	20	17	9	12	38	17	22	19	24	21	20	22	23	23	24	157	36	11	16	31
Н	26	21	16	10	12	38	16	30	19	25	21	26	18	23	22	22	157	35	16	17	33
	30	24	20	11	14	45	24	31	23	28	27	30	26	27	29	27	194	41	12	11	31
I	25	23	14	12	11	37	16	28	28	20	19	20	23	25	23	22	152	39	19	18	28
	28	29	17	12	11	40	25	27	28	22	22	23	25	28	26	24	170	40	17	14	36
J	30	25	17	10	15	42	16	30	27	29	21	24	27	27	26	28	182	43	14	14	32
	30	30	18	13	15	46	22	35	28	29	24	26	30	27	27	28	191	47	13	11	31
K	32	25	19	14	14	47	31	37	27	30	27	28	21	27	28	28	189	48	11	10	39
	32	28	20	15	13	48	25	35	27	30	28	30	22	26	28	29	193	48	14	10	35



The key for the Hardiness Scale on the previous page is:

SPQPQ = Self-Perception of Success Questionnaire.

LOT = Life Orientation Test (dispositional optimism).

Com = Commitment.

Con = Control.

Cha = Challenge.

PVSIII-R = Total hardiness.

 $Ob\ Pa = Obsessive\ passion.$

Pa = Passion.

SC = Self-confidence.

NE = Negative energy control.

AT = Attention control.

VI = Visualisation and imagery control.

MO = Motivation.

PO = Positive energy.

 $AD = Attitude \ control.$

 $PPI = Total \ mental \ toughness.$

PA = Positive affect.

NA = Negative affect.

RSE = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

GSE = Generalised Self-Efficacy Scale.

Ist test – July 2004. 2nd test – Sept 2005.

Strategies employed as part of the change process in my coaching.

The baseline data that have been taken, such as the coaches' analysis, the Group Environment Questionnaire and the Hardiness Scale, have given me some positive feedback in terms of team cohesion and mental strength, suggesting some of my processes must be working. However, as with all things, they can be improved and with my increased knowledge in the area I set about my change process in my coaching. I began to raise the players' awareness through their observation and feedback skills as the vehicle for creating the mentally challenging environment I believed to be important.

• Observations of group behaviour.

In order for the players to develop in these areas they must firstly be aware of the importance of the team and individual strength. This awareness was an area I was aiming to improve by encouraging them to observe their own behaviours as individuals or as a group and that of those around them.



I changed my strategy to focus on 'story telling'. I aimed not just to talk to players but to 'engage' them. I tried to achieve this by recounting and showing them real-life situations that are occurring around them every day. The Rhinos and Tykes first team squads have numerous examples of this and have created a culture of hard work, tenacity, positive body language and individual and team toughness. Tony Smith recently said after the Semi Final win against St Helens to take them through to the Grand Final.....

".....they were courageous and very committed to each other, as you would expect from a Leeds team. They play for each other and work hard for each other and they got their reward". (VC on Tykes ethos.)

I aimed to change my coaching so I constantly reinforced the mental and team characteristics required in top performers and teams. There were numerous vehicles for this and it began in pre-season in a variety of guises. One such area was not to allow the players to show the opposition they are tired, even when they are. They must get used to the idea of 'looking comfortable feeling uncomfortable'. These characteristics are best demonstrated on the hills!!! (VC of training on the hills.)

In order to raise the profile and importance of these behaviours still further, a specific session was scheduled that tested them both mentally and physically. The session was filmed with clips taken of group behaviour both in a positive and negative sense. The idea behind it was to paint a picture for the players and allow them to review it, in particular their body language and positive encouragement of each other during the session. VC - review of mentally challenging session.)

In aiming to improve the mental strength and team cohesion through my coaching, I did not want the impression to be given to the players that the only strategy I had was to physically 'beast' them or to be an autocratic coach who used his position to dominate the players. This approach, in my opinion, only gets you so far.....the 'bully' coach has a short shelf life and very often has little or no respect from the players. I wanted to create an environment where it was tough but also fair and the players received encouragement and were allowed to express themselves on the field. I wanted them to feel that we were all in it together and to avoid a coach v player scenario.

"What players didn't want were coaches who were aloof, discouraged questions and refused to compromise"- Michael Chu.

"Performers, in their desire to avoid the experience of being blamed, shy away from accepting responsibility. Their reasoning is sound: why take responsibility for something, which, if it does not go well (even though you may have no control over all the relevant factors), will be blamed on you personally? Sound reasoning yet poor outcome." – David Whittaker - The Spirit of Teams.



• The Preview/Review process.

The foundation work I did in this area during pre-season began to pay off and as I began to change my process, the more positive the reaction became, the more I referred to it in my time with the group. Often I found the pre-match team talk was a useful opportunity to reinforce this. (VC – pre-match v Sale.)

Reviews of the game also proved to be an excellent vehicle, with one particular A team game where we didn't play well, yet even so achieved a positive result which was a great example of how far the group had come, particularly when we had played the same opposition the previous season and had lost by fifty points three times in a row!! (VC of match.)

How am I going to gauge the improvement / measure the change?

I have been careful throughout that the balance in my coaching has reflected many different emotions, sometimes empathy, sometimes encouragement, sometimes a kick up the backside! One of the main skills of coaching is to pick the right ones at the right time. I tried to learn to recognise the emotion of the group and act accordingly; this is where emotional intelligence comes in. I see emotional intelligence as one of the key factors in managing people and it can be split into four areas:

Recognising emotions.

Understanding emotions.

Regulating emotions.

Using emotions.

As part of my change process, I have spent a lot more time reflecting on my use of emotional intelligence, particularly with reference to my 'weaknesses' such as tolerance of non-producers and I have 'pushed' myself to do things that do not come naturally, i.e. confronting players when they have not reached the standards I expect of them. One of the best ways I have found to test myself is by not allowing the first team players to get away with anything that Academy players wouldn't be allowed to when they come down to the A team. I try to be more challenging with the senior players to ensure they buy into the same philosophies as the Academy players. That in itself is a useful process as it develops my personality when dealing with senior players.

I don't believe you can change your emotional intelligence overnight. However, as part of my change process I have tried to become more self aware and aware of the emotions of others. As a consequence I have created time for reflection and this has undoubtedly helped my coaching process.

In order to gauge whether I have achieved this balance of hard work, high standards and empathy and whether I have managed my players' emotions effectively, I have asked the players to fill in another anonymous questionnaire on their perception of my leadership ability using the 'Leadership Scale for Sports'. I felt it was important to make it anonymous as I recognise that the players will also be managing their emotions in front



of me! I also filled in the questionnaire on myself so see if their perceptions were the same as mine!

The results from twenty two players demonstrated that, reassuringly, the players and I had similar perceptions. I felt the feedback reflected the change in my behaviour throughout the course of the pre- and early season, although it again revealed one or two limitations which I will need to work on to improve my coaching process further.

Areas for development included being a bit more reflective over explaining the dos and don'ts in any situation. The players actually feel I do this often, yet my personal perception is that I need to be a little more precise. Perhaps I need to focus on the vocabulary I use to reinforce to myself that I am aiming to improve individuals as well as teams.

The Leadership Scale for Sports also enabled me to break the feedback into categories and again the feedback was useful. It was split into five categories and I was looking for a close correlation between their perception of me and *my* perception of me! As can be seen, this seems to be the case and it is reassuring that I am coming over in the manner I think I am. The questions it left me with concerned whether this is the right way to deliver elite coaching. It certainly gave me plenty of feedback to reflect on.



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