



Coaching Culture Podcast Coaching Notes

Episode 141: Coaching Tools for Mental Health

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Coaching the mental side of the game should be about more than just performance enhancement. It should also include preventative strategies to help players attend to their mental health.

Our first effort was to create “More Fun Wednesdays” where we intentionally created time during the week for our team to have FUN. That might include relay races, stuffing the team into a VW Bug, etc. during the last 20 minutes of our Wednesday practices.

As we began to value FUN we started to see our relationships, team morale, and communication all improve.

That evolved into the “deliberate maintenance of our mental health” which we called “Mental Health Wednesday”

When we think of physical health - we want to get enough sleep before we are tired. We want to drink plenty of water before we get dehydrated. We apply these same preventative concepts to our mental health.

Our “Mental Health Wednesdays” evolved from “More Fun Wednesdays” - a 30-45 minute session every week to help build our team’s culture, teach mental health skills, and to improve the relationships within our team.

We strive to create an environment where people feel they are seen, heard, and loved.

Principle #1 - Name it to Tame It



When people describe an emotion the intensity of that emotion begins to subside in the brain. In this sense, emotion is like an alarm inside the brain. It's initial job is to alert you to be aware of a threat. However, once that threat is acknowledged, the alarm begins to quiet down.

The challenge is to create opportunities for players, coaches, children, spouses, etc. to describe what they are feeling that will begin to reduce some of the stress associated with that emotion.

One way to make these interactions less threatening or uncomfortable is to **do an activity** with the other person during the conversation (go for a walk, shoot hoops and rebound, play a mindless game, etc).

Journaling can offer the same outlet for the brain's alarm system to be heard. Players can write about their successes, but also their challenges. Writing down their story can help them to "Name It to Tame It".

Approach emotional conversations with genuine curiosity. Ask great questions. Listen intently. Don't listen to fix, correct, or explain. Just be fully present with that person.

Mark Madsen, in his book [Everything is F*cked](#), describes how the Thinking Brain and Feeling Brain have to align when we tell our stories. In other words, the Thinking Brain has to explain why the Feeling Brain feels as it does.

Principle #2 - Reframe It

Reframing - Can I tell myself a different story that explains the way I feel?

Coaches need to be able to ask good questions that provide perspective so that the others can interpret their stories / experiences it in a different way.

- Julian Edlemen during the Patriots comeback against the Falcons in the Super Bowl kept yelling at his teammates, "[It's going to be a helluva story boys!](#)"
- In a conversation with a player whose playing time was diminishing I challenged her with the quote from Josuha Medcalf's book [Burn Your Goals](#) where he encourages readers to embrace every situation with this phrase, "*This is for my benefit.*"

Journal Activity - List the three biggest problems you face right now. For each, identify "What is the opportunity in each of these challenges?"

This can be done with teams as well:



- Have players write down their biggest challenge on a notecard.
- Pass the notecard to someone else and have them try to give advice / solutions to help address the problem.

Principle #3 - Examine Expectations

Disclaimer - Expectations and standards are not the same. We have high standards within our program, but need to be mindful of our expectations (what we expect from the future) to manage our mental health.

Expectations are what you think is going to happen, what you hope happens, or what you want to happen. They are a projection of the future that may or may not come to be.

Brene Brown often says, “Our expectations in life are tied directly to our expectations of the future.”

Expectation Audit - Too often we are unaware of our expectations until they are not met. Prior to an event, ask yourself:

- What are my expectations?
- Are these expectations realistic? (consider probabilities for each outcome)
- What outcomes do I control in this situation?
- Are my expectations tied to anything I cannot control?

Can I let go of, or at least acknowledge, those outcomes that I do not control?

Would you want to stake your emotional well-being on the unpredictability of the weather?

Awareness of expectations in advance begins to undermine their potential to cause disappointment.

For example: When Brene Brown first started public speaking her goal was that everyone in attendance would walk away with something that would affect their life. Is that realistic? Does she have complete control over that outcome? Probably not.

Over time, her expectations changed to be rooted in something she can control. Now her goal is to look back at her performance and say, “Brene, I’m so proud of you because you worked so hard to prepare for this.”

She has control and awareness over her preparation.



Practical Applications

- 1) A way to mitigate the weight of expectations is to ground them in your process rather than the outcome.
- 2) Create a culture where players are seen, known, and loved.
- 3) Review your mission and purpose consistently - what effect do you want to have on the lives of your players? Root your expectations in the answer to that question.
- 4) Practice having these conversations with your captains which empowers them to have similar conversations with their teammates.

Adjusting Expectations - From the Canadian National Government to Employees

WORKING REMOTELY - COVID-19 PRINCIPLES

1. You are not "working from home", you are "at your home,during a crisis," trying to work.
2. **Your personal physical,mental, and emotional health is far more important than anything else right now.**
3. You should not try to compensate for lost productivity by working longer hours. 
4. **You would be kind to yourself and not judge how you are coping based on how you see others coping.**
5. **You would be kind to others and not judge how they are coping based on how you are coping.**
6. **Your team's success will not be measured the same way it was when things were normal.**

