How Coaches Can Learn Quickly When Put In A New Coaching Position

This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.

"Hello, I am going into me third year of coaching high school cheerleading after coaching at the grade school level for 16 years. This change has brought so many different dynamics that I struggle with how to adjust. Do you have recommendations on things you could share or that I could read that would help me be a better coach? Thank you!"

PCA Response by PCA Lead Trainer, Joe Terrasi

For starters, you're already doing the most important right thing to improve: You're adopting a "growth mindset" and a learner's disposition. One of the things I've noticed that truly great coaches have in common is that they are insatiable learners. To put it another way, great coaches hold themselves accountable for improving as more or more as they hold their athletes accountable. We all tell our athletes how important it is to continually improve; great coaches model that in their own approach to their work.

Before we get to books and specific resources, let's talk about some important resources that might be right at your doorstep. One of most useful learning tools is our local network of coaches. Having formal or informal meetings and conversations with local coaches you admire is one of the greatest resources we have. One great idea is to strike up a conversation with a rival coach whom you respect. In cheer and dance, if you see a squad that is consistently expert at a certain skill, it's worth the time to have coffee with their coach and ask their approach to teaching that skill.

It can also be amazingly beneficial to learn from great coaches of other sports at your own school. If you have a hall-of-fame softball coach available to you, you might get a lot out of asking how she maintains a great team culture year after year. I often find that coaches of sports other than my own have a useful perspective that I missed. For example, our speed coaches (track, swim, etc.) often have a great approach to using athletes' "personal best" as a standard against which to compete.

For veteran coaches, there can also be a lot to learn from brand new coaches. While they might not bring the year of varied experiences, they often have a way of seeing the sport as fresh. This can lead to approaches that get of out of the rut of doing "what we know (think) works."

continues

When it comes to books, I'm always excited to find great material that is not ostensibly about sports, but which intersects in helpful ways. Carol Dweck's Mindset is a great example. While Dr. Dweck did not set out to write a book on coaching, her book is the most transformational I've read in years. How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character by Paul Tough is another such example. I've also gained useful insight from The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults by Frances Jensen (this is also a great one to suggest to high school parents!) One more worth checking out as a coach is The Power of Our Words: Teacher Language that Helps Children Learn by Paula Denton. This one definitely caused me to rethink the impact of the phrases I choose (and to remove some altogether).

I'm sure you see the theme here. The longer I coach, the more I realize that, while it's important to understand my sport, it's far more important to understand my athletes and their needs.

Now tie it all together. Find a couple coaches as dedicated as you are, and start a great conversation around any of these. I'm incredibly fortunate that I get to talk to thousands of coaches. I have something to learn from all of them.

To read more questions and answers like this, or to submit your own question to the Ask PCA blog, visit:

www.positivecoach.org/our-tools/ask-pca