



Why Do Some PCA-Trained Coaches Still Behave Badly?

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.

“At lunch recently with some sports parents, I mentioned that I was a supporter of PCA. A couple of them were skeptical. They told me their kids had played on teams led by PCA-trained coaches, and they had never seen such badly behaved coaches, abusive to players and parents. Why does that happen and what can be done to improve the situation?”

PCA Response by Jim Thompson, PCA Executive Director

From the beginning, PCA has been about “unfreezing” coaches and refreezing them in new, better coaching behaviors. We discovered that training coaches wasn’t enough. We quickly moved to a “systems approach” to work with leaders, coaches, parents and athletes so that the entire system reinforces the behaviors we’d like to see.

Let’s consider four kinds of youth coaches.

- 1) Members of this group embrace PCA methods and tools and quickly integrate them into the way they coach because Double-Goal Coaching is already part of their identity even if they didn’t have the specific vocabulary down.
- 2) The majority of coaches are well-meaning people who haven’t developed a robust coaching philosophy and thus are susceptible to the pressures of a win-at-all-cost culture. They are inconsistent in their coaching and sometimes step over a line that they later regret (even if they publicly justify it when criticized).

The good news about this group is that they are also susceptible to a positive coaching culture in the organizations in which they coach. And because PCA tools are research-based and reflect best practices of great coaches, when coaches use them, they work. And they then tend to use them even more, which creates a virtuous circle.

- 3) Some individuals initially resist change. Because all coaches depend on having an organization in which to coach, many of these resisters will come around if the signals from their organization are consistent. Many famous successful coaches started out as screamers but learned a better way and transformed themselves.
- 4) People in this category shouldn’t be allowed to coach kids. The best training in the world won’t change them and the harsh truth is that these folks need to be removed from coaching kids.

continues

Whether the abusive coaches described above fall into category 3 or 4 needs to be determined. While an organization must remove any Category 4 coaches, a Category 3 coach may be improved through the tenets of Social Learning Theory.

Social Learning Theory says that people learn how to behave in groups by watching what others do and seeing what happens. So standing quietly by as a coach abuses or bullies players is not going to get us to the youth sports culture we all want.

I caution anyone reading this that I do NOT recommend taking action that might escalate into a conflict. Here are some things observers of abusive coaching can do:

- 1) Register your discomfort with the coach's behavior. This is best done in private. You can simply say as calmly as you can something like, "That is not the kind of coaching that is going to get the best from your players." Or you can politely ask the coach how his behavior aligns with PCA tenets. "Is yelling at your players consistent with being a Double-Goal Coach?" How and whether you have this kind of conversation with a coach depends on many things, including whether you know the person personally. And I emphasize that you should not do this if it runs the risk of escalating the situation.
- 2) If talking to the coach does not help, let him or her know you plan to take this up one level and talk to his or her supervisor. When you talk to the coach's supervisor, whether that is the school athletic director or principal or chairman of the YSO board, say what you saw and ask if that is the kind of coaching behavior the school or organization desires. I have found from past experience that often the supervisor is not aware of the bad behavior. In other cases, the supervisor would prefer to ignore it and hope it doesn't cause a problem. You raising the issue makes it harder to ignore. Even if it doesn't result in immediate action, over time it may lead to change, especially if the supervisor hears from others similarly concerned.
- 3) Ask the organization to implement a feedback process to give players and parents a chance to comment on coaches' behavior.

We have recently begun to use the phrase "Live it. Teach it." It is not enough for a coach, parent or athlete to just live out PCA ideals. If we are to change the culture of youth sports, each of us who believes in the power of sports to create Major League People needs to let others know about our commitment to PCA principles and hold each other accountable. So, live it, yes! And teach it.

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