
Ann Quinn.

Quinnessential Edge, London, UK.

ABSTRACT

This article summarises some tips to help you maximise the most important person of all – you, so that you can enjoy the journey to your success both on and off the court.

INTRODUCTION

Research into coaching has increased considerably over the last two decades but an area that is still in its infancy has been that of the well being of professional coaches. Much is expected of you as a coach. On any given day, you may play the role of a coach, educator, physiologist, business executive, psychologist, administrator, and so the list goes on. You are always busy planning and giving lessons, organising teams and competitions, running the pro shop, or watching matches, and that is just at work. On top of that is often family, community and a host of other commitments and often the last on the list is You! Does that sound familiar? Well you are not alone.

1. EVALUATE YOU!

We evaluate our players, their strengths and weaknesses and prepare regular report updates but what are you doing for you? Do you really know how healthy you are? How long is it since you have had a blood test, checked your cholesterol and blood pressure, or had a full medical check up? Have you been to the dentist or had your eyes checked recently? Just because you are fit and active and on the court, does not mean you are invincible and nothing will happen to you. Tennis coaches on average suffer from levels of burnout similar to those of other helping professionals. (Eklund, Kelly & Ritter-Taylor, 1999). The pressure and stress levels juggling your own business and other obligations can be enormous. You are no help to anyone if you are sick, stressed and exhausted. The most valuable asset you have is your health.

2. CREATE AN EXCITING VISION – FOR YOU AND YOUR BUSINESS

Create the vision of exactly where you want to go so you can get excited to move towards that direction. Make those goals inspiring and compelling. See it day in and day out. What you would like to achieve for your players, for your business? Set your goals and create that vision plan for that exciting future because that is where you are going to spend the rest of your life. Working towards such important life goals is associated with increased well being. (Klinger, 1977; Sheldon, Kasser, Smith & Share, 2002) Make it happen!

3. PREPARE TO COACH

We all tell our players to warm up and prepare for their matches and training but do you prepare to coach or do you just walk on the court and start coaching? The time taken to warm up is much better than spent off the court injured. Likewise, do you put on sunscreen and a hat if you working in a hot climate? Not too many coaches could say they do this properly. Sunscreen should be reapplied every two hours, or more often if it is wiped, washed or sweated off. Skin cancer is the most easily preventable form of cancer and yet in Australia, more people die from skin cancer each year than are killed in road accidents. Remember, prevention is better than cure. Prepare to win for you.
4. BE INNOVATIVE

We all want to be the best we can be? What can you do to be innovative? With the plethora of information available through the Internet and the capacity for coaches (and athletes and parents of players) to get any information they need anywhere, anytime, how can you be innovative? Be creative. Think outside the box. Olusoga et al (2009) highlighted the importance of psychological skills training for coaches to help them cope with the diverse demands of world class coaching. Also look to what other sports are doing. Create an effective learning environment for you and your players, read, talk to other coaches, find a different way. Get excited. Engage with your players and inspire them to be all they can. It is the little differences that make the big difference.

5. CONTINUE TO LEARN

A commitment to continuous improvement and accelerated learning is essential for coaches at all levels. There are so many ways to do this, from attending conferences, reading, watching videos, on the internet, talking to other coaches, and letting your life experiences become your own coaching lab. Stimulate you. The best way to learn is by doing. Be one step ahead all the time. Have fun and get creative. Sometimes it is our mistakes that teaches us the greatest learning.

Don’t focus on win-loss records. Coaches have been found to be more likely to burnout if they focus on wins and losses. Focus on your own coaching performance such as teaching more effectively, strategizing, optimizing training, developing mental toughness and emotional control, and creating a motivational environment for players Duda et al (1999). Look at things differently. Find a mentor to support you.

6. ENERGISE YOU

Do you practise what you preach? Coaches are always telling their players to drink up and eat to win. Do you lead by example? Do you have energy snacks and a drink close by all the time? The same principles apply to you, as to your players.

Be a role model for your students. Inadequate fluid intake and/or excessive sweat losses mean that you work harder, your intensity is lower, you fatigue faster and you react slower. You cannot win. Energise you!

7. RECHARGE AND RECOVER

A sign that you are overworking is irritability, hypertension, impatience and a loss of your drive and determination. Working too hard is not good for your health or your lessons. Be sure you plan to recover too. Learning how to shut down, turn off and re-energise is as important to success and well being as firing up, and ready to win a big match. It is as much a physical as it is emotional rejuvenation. Getting a great night’s sleep goes a long way to help you recuperate and recharge. Some passive recovery activities include massage, hot baths, ice baths, meditation, naps, deep breathing, reading, watching television, or some quiet down time. Active recovery activities involves movement of the body, such as walking or jogging, yoga, stretching, pilates and recreational sports. Taking regular breaks between your lessons also helps to sustain full engagement as does a short break away. Now there are no excuses!

8. LIVE WITH GRATITUDE

A great way to achieve well being is simply just taking time to be grateful. How lucky are we that you get to play tennis for a job, travel the world, and can have life long impacts on so many around players. Notice, appreciate, feel, experience and anticipate all the good that currently exists in your life. Go and write them down now. Embrace the massive blessings around you every day. Live with an attitude of gratitude.

9. CREATE A WINNING ENVIRONMENT

Contrast the difference between practicing on the Centre Court at a Grand Slam versus a court with pot holes, broken fence lines and dull lighting. Your environment really does make a difference to your well being and to all those around you. What could you do to improve your environment? This might include
not only where you teach, but also your office, your home, your
car, your clothes, and everything all around you. In well
designed environments, you are more creative and productive
(Leonard, 2000). You have more energy, and can accomplish
things so much easier. Having the right equipment puts you in
a position to do your best and makes you feel great too. Create
an atmosphere where your players’ talents can flourish.

10. MAKE TIME FOR FUN

It is especially important to plan time out to have fun. When
you are consumed by your work, you suddenly lose contact
with everything else that is meaningful in your life. Block out
time for fun. Rekindle your intrinsic fire. Make your rejuvenation
just as important as work. Your health depends on it. Some
ideas include making time for dinner, getting together with
friends, or getting a massage. Keep your blackberry or your
phone turned off! Get present to the experience in the
moment. Fun should be a central theme for your players and
for you! Life is a journey, not a destination.

As lucky as we all are to be involved in such a great sport day
in and day out, remember it is only one part of your life and
one facet of who you are as a person. Establish your priorities,
set your goals and never stop learning. Constantly energise and
recharge you to keep the balance. Live with an attitude of
gratitude and enjoy the journey winning the game of your life.

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