

Daniel Thompson 00:00:13

Hello, welcome to the coaching podcast. Today's podcast episode is brought to you by the England Talent Programme. During today's podcast will be exploring the topic of helping paddlers to understand their why. So to quote English American author and motivational speaker Simon Sinek, he said 'Every one of us has a WHY, a deep-seated purpose, cause or belief that is the source of our passion and inspiration.'

Here we will look at the research around why it's important for paddlers to understand why they paddle whether this is any paddler from a recreational perspective or from a competitive perspective. We also discuss how paddlers understanding their why can be useful for goal setting and we explore the role that coaches and parents can play in this.

My name is Daniel Thompson, I'm the Slalom Foundations and Support Lead for Paddle UK. Joining myself with discussions on this topic area today is Ciara Sampson. Ciara is a volunteer psychologist with our Canoe Slalom Talent Programme with the Southern Regional Development Squad.

Hi Ciara,

Ciara Sampson 00:01:27

Hello.

Daniel Thompson 00:01:28

It's good to have you with us and I look forward to chatting to you about this topic today.

Ciara Sampson 00:01:33

Yeah, I'll be great.

Daniel Thompson 00:01:34

Yeah, we'll go straight into this and it's a big topic area and firstly when we're talking about helping paddlers to understand their why the first thing I think about is why is it important for us to understand our 'why'?

Ciara Sampson 00:01:52

Understanding our 'why' is helping us to focus? So ultimately when we have our 'why' it's relating to our sense of purpose and that purpose is gonna shape the goals that we set ourselves. It's going to shape our decisions over what actions we take and what behaviours we exhibit in order to reach the goals. And when we see individuals who have a sort of sense of why and a purpose in what they're doing, the kinds of behaviour traits we will notice in them are things like commitment and motivation.

Daniel Thompson 00:02:32

I know that we're going to discuss a little bit around how that sense of why can be useful for goal setting in this podcast episode and I know that there's times when

knowing your why can help the expectations also be a bit more realistic and so recognizing that in sport particularly there can be many hurdles along the way and there can be a lot of ups and downs and that's important to actually understanding their 'why' (which) can help them navigate through those type of challenges.

Ciara Sampson 00:003:09

Yeah, definitely. As you said, progress is never linear, especially in sport. And when we are talking about those traits like commitment and like motivation they are the traits that are going to help individuals get through inevitable bumps in the road that will come their way and keep this idea of intrinsic motivation. So when an athlete has a strong sense of purpose they have an intrinsic motivation to get through the bumps in the road, through to the other side and they are kind of aware of that long-term journey and process in where they want to get too.

Daniel Thompson 00:03:50

Yeah, absolutely and I've kind of been thinking a bit more around that intrinsic motivation piece and also how it can be useful for paddlers to help set their goals. And so that's something that understanding their 'why' is a useful thing for paddlers?

Ciara Sampson 00:04:13

Yeah, your goals are heavily related to your why and purpose. So once you've understood your why and your purpose you're going to be able to set goals, which you feel like relates to those things and that's going to be very unique for each individual, the why they're in this sport the way that their sport relates to their values, their sense of self their beliefs, that's the meaning that they get from their sport and that's gonna be feeding into the goals that they make, and the reason why they do challenging things within their life in sport and their life beyond sport.

Daniel Thompson 00:04:57

Yeah I remember talking to an athlete awhile ago and I asked them 'why do you do the sport', this athlete was a canoe slalom paddler and basically they get up at 6am to go training in the morning before school and then go to school and after long day at school they would then go back to the course in the afternoon for a second session that day.

I thought that's a lot of commitment and this got me thinking why do they do that? And for this particular person I was chatting with said that it was that challenge of navigating a canoe slalom course, going through the gates and that sense of challenge was something that they really liked and they said that they knew that challenge each morning would be completely different and when they did that they really enjoyed it and then that's pretty much set them up for the day knowing that whatever challenges they would have throughout the day then they could overcome that because in a way they've done that in the morning through their sport, which I thought was quite a nice link in terms of why they do things and how that can sort of link in with their everyday lives.

Ciara Sampson 00:06:15

Definitely. I think that sounds like just such a nice conversation to create with the athlete as well. definitely athletes that are always setting goals and motivating themselves to like you say get up every day at six o'clock or maybe miss out on a social event that they have to in order to make training and sometimes it's really nice for the athlete to understand and have the opportunity to kind of explore and talk about why they made that decision and how it relates to something that is actually very important to them. So through that conversation you had with an athlete, they understand that they really value challenge and they want to build a lifestyle for themselves in which they have the opportunity to do challenging things every day is an important value to them and therefore when they wake up at 6:00am it's not just because their coach set the training session for them, then it's actually because they have a purpose to find challenge and create challenge for themselves in their life and the same can be said for any value in how it can relate to your sport and help you with your sense of purpose. So maybe you really value having positive relationships with your coach or your peers and your sport and knowing that you value your relationships or you value having a positive relationship with your coach is going to give you a lot more purpose when you choose to show up five minutes early to practice to help your coach to set up the course.

Daniel Thompson 00:07:58

Yeah, and that's a really good point to kind of conclude with that. I know we talked a little bit around why that's important and what I'm keen to sort of think about or talk a little bit more about is how we can begin to do that and what things are important here for us, because what we talked about there sounds quite simple, but for some people that can be quite difficult and they can find it quite challenging to kind of navigate and understand their 'why'.

Ciara Sampson 00:08:34

Definitely, and everyone's doing this whether they're an elite athlete or whether they're just figuring out their purpose in whatever field they work in or whatever stage of life you're in, so it's an ongoing process. and it's sort of up to each other to support each other and facilitate environments where that ongoing process can exist.

So for the athletes working out their identity which we already touched on, working out their values and how that relates to what drives their motivation, that's how we're developing their 'why' and their purpose and obviously for our paddlers a lot of that is formed as part of their athletic identity. And so that might be a nice area to sort of touch on now in terms of the role of the parents and coaches.

Daniel Thompson 00:09:43

Yeah, yeah, I'm glad you actually brought that up as I wanted to touch on that athletic identity and we'll talk a little bit around the role that the coaches and parents play in that, but kind of on that athletic identity, I wanted to press you on why that's important to have that and if a paddler doesn't kind of have that athletic identity or kind of think about that what kind of issues could occur because of that?

Ciara Sampson 00:10:18

So the athletic identity is a really nice way of having a social identity, which is going to be hugely significant on how an individual behaves. So when we have this athletic identity, we feel a part of a community and we feel this social identity that we want to be a part of so we want to be recognised as an athlete. So we are going to decide to act accordingly, we're going to decide to not have a lie in before school and get up and train and that is a decision we make because for us our identity as an athlete is important and we see associated behaviours as kind of being part and parcel of getting to be a part of that and so in terms of an organisation like Paddle UK this is going to be really influential on young people's formation of their own sense of self and sense of identity and part of that is going to come from their environment at Paddle UK, what kind of person is part of that environment, what kind of behaviours, what kind of things they value and that's going to be internalised by our young people who are forming their sense of self. So everyone has an important role in demonstrating what the values are that are exhibited when you are part of this organisation.

Because this group identity is such a powerful determinant of sporting behaviour. It's really one of the most powerful ways that we can get individuals to act is by giving meaning to what it means to be part of this group and how one acts when you are and so this is why it's really really very important.

Daniel Thompson 00:12:12

Yeah, I definitely agree. That environment piece is really really crucial and making sure it's an environment that is right for that group of individuals, we'll go on to that in a little bit with how the coaches role plays in that. I know that the coach plays a massive role in that environment.

On the athletic identity, talk to me about some of the issues that could develop if someone doesn't really have that?

Ciara Sampson 00:12:45

So if someone doesn't have such a strong sense of maybe relatedness to their environment then it can impact on their wellbeing, because feeling like we relate to the people around us and feeling a part of a community is really important in overall wellbeing.

It's one of three components when we look at wellbeing which is having autonomy, being related (so that's part of your social identity and feeling competent about what we do.) So it really satisfies one contingent of that and it's also important to remember that whilst this athletic identity in this part of being a part of this athletic group is so important and athletes are still multifaceted individuals and so having this really lovely related supported positive influence of the athletic identity can be extremely helpful and beneficial, but it's also important that for example parents and friends realise that there are more facets to a person than just that their sport. So having a really strong foundation of this athletic identity, but also having values and values and beliefs that kind of supersede sport can be found within sport, but can also be found in other things they do is gonna make for a really well-rounded, well supported young person.

Daniel Thompson 00:14:31

Yeah I agree, and I think that's some really really important, for other influences being able to be able to understand that, so by that I mean other people that play a key role within a paddlers journey such as a coach or parent.

Which kind of brings me onto my next question and point around what role you kind of alluded to a couple of bits already, around what role does a coach or parent play in that and how can they help someone through that?

Ciara Sampson 00:15:07

So definitely giving an athlete autonomy, so autonomy is something we just touched on during those three points is really important for athlete wellbeing and in terms of what an athlete feels is their 'why' and therefore what goals they want to set should feel like an athlete wants to feel that those are their decision, and they are innate, they're allowed to set goals which relate to things that have meaning to them and we see that goals are hugely more effective when the person feels autonomous to them. So this is sort of twofold: it supports their being but also it makes a person much more likely to take the steps and have that intrinsic motivation towards their goal. If they feel they've had autonomy in creating them and so part of that comes down to the coaches' communication and there's a really nice opportunity there for coaches to sort of foster meaningful relationships with their athletes by probing, asking them what's important to them and understanding their values, their motivators, their 'why' and having the opportunity to feed them in to sort of a co-creation of goals, which are just a marriage of what the coach sees as the development needs of the athlete but also the athlete feels really intrinsically motivated towards getting there.

Daniel Thompson 00:16:48

Yeah, I'm glad you brought that point up around the communication, I think that communication piece is one key piece really for a coach and also parent and it's important that the language those individuals use is appropriate and kind of links. So for instance if an individual's purpose is all around learning and developing but a coach is talking more about winning then that's clearly a non alignment between the two there and that's not going to be very well there, but actually when there is alignment, when they're communication is the same and that connection piece runs through and it kind of can help foster a really good relationship between paddler and coach.

What other bits can coaches and parents play as well?

Ciara Sampson 00:17:49

I think definitely coaches and parents can both have a role to play in demonstrating some of these values which an athlete can learn and watch and decide whether they also feel that they are important to them.

So if we're thinking about positive values in sport and in life, things are really important in sport are values of things like perseverance and diligence but also friendship and positive communication, and the idea of respect. These are all values

which can be exemplified by everybody in the environment. And so, coaches and senior athletes are often a huge point of aspiration and kind of an appreciation of what is important and what might be a purpose and a driver, as well as coaches for younger developing athletes, so kind of realising that is really important and it's also a really self-fulfilling thing to do to realise that you are important in co-creating this environment and a positive environment for someone to help to develop a strong sense of purpose and what they do and it can actually in turn fuel your own sense of purpose.

So it's a nice mutually beneficial thing to think about the way that our own actions are also influencing others.

Daniel Thompson 00:19:28

Yeah, I would strongly agree with that. I think that when there's alignment and understanding around that then that can really be a powerful thing and I'm glad you brought that environment up, and this goes back to the relatedness piece of the paddlers feeling that they belong in that environment.

A good example, I suppose, is if you know that an individual's purpose is all around fun then coaches will need to think about how they're creating that environment that's fun for those individuals to train in, so I think that's a really important piece.

I'm going to bring this podcast to a close very shortly, but what are you take homes and key messages to coaches and parents for paddlers being able to understand their why.

Ciara Sampson 00:20:26

I would say knowing that athletes all have a different 'why'. So they're all going to have a different 'why', which is motivating them, driving their behaviours and relates into what goals they set themselves. So understanding this and then using it as a sort of powerful tool in your communication, the language you use and the goals that you choose to set with your athletes hopefully is going to be a really effective way of getting desirable behaviours, but also make it a lot more enjoyable for the athlete along the way.

Daniel Thompson 00:21:05

I think that's a fantastic point to finish up on and it really hammers home the points that you mentioned in this podcast episode. Thank you Ciara.

Thank you all for listening. This podcast is available on the awarding body page and also on our talent parent programme webpage on the podcast section of the Paddle UK website.