

A COACH'S LIFE: WORRY, ANXIETY AND THE UNKNOWN.

CAN PLANNING HELPS US?

I look at the clock next to the bed, it's 2am and I've not had a wink of sleep yet. My head is spinning – I'm coaching tomorrow....

What am I going to do? How am I going to do it? Are the weather conditions going to help or hinder? It's now 3am – I'm coaching tomorrow....

I'm walking to meet the group and chat through the day. What are the learners going to want? Will I be good enough to help them? Will they like me? It's 9am – I'm coaching soon.....

I arrive at the water and stare out at the whitecaps and windy conditions. Where is the best coaching venue to use? Are the conditions going to be too difficult for the group? How can I help them best in these conditions? – It's 10am – I'm about to coach....

I'm on the water, the group loves it, I love it, learning is happening; but what am I going to do this afternoon? I'm coaching.....

Does this story sound familiar? I dare say to a more or lesser degree it does. Is it because we care so much about what we do? The above is often a typical day in my coaching life, so how can we help ourselves and reduce the 'worry, anxiety and unknown'?





It is said that planning can help manage the uncertainty of the environment and it can help support the difficult balancing act of performer needs with optimum learning conditions (Taylor, 2006 in the BCU Coaching Handbook). So perhaps this is the answer to our 'worrying' problem, but in the complex and dynamic world of paddlesport coaching where everything is continually changing – how on earth do we plan? Flexibility is key; the learners' needs and environmental constraints must lead the way. Here are some things to consider...

Systematic Plans – in most other worlds this form of well prepared and thought out plan that seamlessly unfolds in a systematic way is the norm. In our world they just don't work – let's move on.....

Recipe Plans – This is a way of supporting the contingency planning and having plenty of 'piste' options alongside something to fall back on when going 'off-piste'. They also make the 'off-piste' easier, giving you something to instantly apply when reacting to an unexpected learner/environment need. Your 'recipes' are the coaching sessions you have run before; they are your store of things that have helped learners in the past and how you delivered them. The more experience you have, the more recipes you will evolve. To support this you may need to 'capture' your previous sessions so as not to lose your 'recipes'. Making notes of the sessions you deliver could support this, thus forming your own 'recipe book'. We do need to 'check and challenge' our recipes though, it is about evolving them to meet learner/environmental needs not just doing the same thing again and again.

Contingency Plans – this is the one for us, we need to plan for the variables, we need to expect to adapt, we need to have a whole host of options and be ready to use any of them or adapt them to work. We don't go armed with just a 'plan A' we need to throw the alphabet at it!

I think of it as a 'skiing piste map' plan; I know where I am going to start but then I have multiple 'pistes' mapped [planned] out depending on where the learners want to go in the given conditions. Some will be challenging pistes and some easier - the learner can decide. On route though I am always looking for 'off-piste' options, this is where I need to leave the 'piste' [plan] and respond to either learner or environmental needs. We have to look for the 'off-piste' opportunities, but we also need to check they are 'safe and not likely to avalanche' – checking against the learners' needs and abilities does this. With my 'piste map' available though I always have a plan to come back to if required.

Written Plans – These have their place if the session/topic you are delivering is new to you. The process of writing it down can help your understanding, you then have it as a guide in the delivery and of course it can then go into your ‘recipe book’. The written plan is also useful if team teaching, it allows the plan to be easily shared. How it is written is up to you, maybe try a pictorial ‘piste map’ approach!

Shopping List Approach – This is a great way of capturing your mental planning so as not to forget it in the heat of the coaching moment. It is just a matter of noting down a simple word/sentence in a waterproof notebook that reminds you of the ‘recipes’ that could work for the session. It can also help with the progression of these. The shopping list acts as a ‘memory jogger’, if using the ‘piste map’ approach it can also help get you back ‘on-piste’ if some time has been spent enjoying ‘off-piste’ with a learner.

A coach’s life: worry, anxiety and the unknown? You decide, but either way planning is a key skill for us as coaches, and if you are a bit of a worrier then perhaps it can become your security blanket!

By Doug Cooper, Glenmore Lodge
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