

S2 E4: Coaching Philosophy with Darren Joy

Ricky Snodgrass 0:00

Hello, and welcome to this episode of the coaching podcast from British canoeing.

Lee Pooley 0:08

Okay, welcome, everyone. Welcome to the coaching podcast. It's myself Lee Pooley, Head of coaching at British canoeing. And what I'm going to be doing over a series of probably around seven to eight sort of interviews, is almost aimed at exploring how experienced coaches go and decide exactly what they're going to coach. So their thoughts and their approaches to what they actually are going to focus on within their coaching intervention. And I'm really pleased to be able to introduce our first guest onto this miniseries, which is Darren Joy. I've had the pleasure of coaching alongside Darren Joy for many years, paddling in the Alps and further afield. And Darren has got a wealth of background within paddlesports. And yeah, welcome, Darren. And Darren, if you wouldn't mind, could you introduce yourself and introduce yourself to the listeners and also a little bit of background on paddlesport career, who you coach, and then what we'll do with delve into a few more questions as we go along.

Darren Joy 1:22

Great. So as Lee said, I'm Darren Joy, I run a little company called fluid skills. That's kind of where I'm going for the moment. My kind of pathway journey for all this coaching instruction kind of started all the way back at PGL, like the age of 19. So started as an instructor for about five or six seasons with PGL, taking kids and very much an instructor in kind of different kind of places in Scotland and all over the UK. And then kind of progressed into a an instructor at a college, taking kind of 16 to 18 year olds out to learn outdoor pursuits from climbing, walking to paddling, and then progressed from there into a lecturer of that kind of industry in the college as well. And then finally decided to kind of do this for myself full time. So kind of based on the southwest out, teach everything from canoeing to white-water kayaking, take people around Europe, doing white-water holidays. Over the last 20 years kind of this has been my main career of just taking people out boating, that's kind of where I'm at.

Lee Pooley 2:32

And just so people can sort of, people can relate to what you're talking about a little bit later on is: What age groups do you work with?

Darren Joy 2:43

A great question. So it depends on the clientele so massively, my clientele at the moment seems to be kind of 40s upwards, people coming back into paddling. At the moment, a lot of people that started their paddling for university or clubs as a youngster, I've gone away and got life and now come back to kind of re-engage with paddling. So that's kind of my main clientele, especially when you're abroad. People are kind of, you know, their holidays, now their kids have left home and they kind of found kind of paddling again, which is really nice. So kind of waking up in a paddler again. But then on the flip side of it, when I go to an outdoor centre and help with their staff training, it could be back to the 18 year olds, you know, first time ever in the industry, you know, coaching or instructing. So it's a massive various age group. And every now and again, I get the pleasure to drop back down to working with children, you know, from eight years old, that was to kind of keep my hand in with the engagement with kids having their first taste of you know, getting on a boat for the first time. So it totally depends. So but more recently, the older generation getting back into paddling.

Lee Pooley 3:52

Okay, that's great. So you refer to you know, you're the last, you know, this, this has just been your life for the last 20 years, I think would be really nice is for you to probably share some what has been the significant episodes of your of your coach development. So you know, as you've developed as a coach, could you could you just sort of amplify to the listeners, what's your been your significant episodes of your coach development for 20 years?

Darren Joy 4:25

I think some of the big highlights, I think, was mainly having, you know, when we first got a pass in our level three coach award many years ago, in my kind of my early 20s, finding white-water for the first time and taking people out. You know, the first episode of actually, you know, shaped a lot of my coaching from a chap called Stuart Woodward many years ago from canoe control. He's retired now,

but he was he was a massive influence in my in my coaching episode of kind of how to coach many years ago. You know, from that one of my biggest changes was going through the level five coach process many years ago. And really looking deeply at my coaching, what coaching were meant to me who I am as a coach of where that kind of took things. I think the next so from there really was having, having my own business, you know, working by myself, and actually really kind of looking at, you know, when someone looks at me and says, is the coach over there? You know, what, what does that mean? To me? That was a huge influence to me of actually going well, you know, who am I as a coach, you know, and that's really shaped me recently of what I do as a coach.

Lee Pooley 5:41

Okay, all right. So sounds like there's, there's loads of episodes within it that has shaped your schedule occasion, from very early stages of, you know, PGL through to working in the French Alps with Stuart and I imagine some of the listeners will remember Stewart in his campsite, next to the Giron, and then obviously went on and you know, did your you did your qualifications with British canoeing or British canoe union at that time and then did you level five? So what would be really interesting to hear is: what is your, you know, after all those years, what is your coaching philosophy? What could you describe to us what your coaching philosophy is now?

Darren Joy 6:28

Okay, so I struggle with this. So, as part of my work with the performance coach for British canoeing, I felt it was a good idea for me to actually write out my coaching philosophy and actually explore this. I struggled for quite a while of kind of like, well, what is my philosophy mean to me? So I kind of, I kind of started with finding out kind of what I valued most as a coach, that's kind of what I kind of started off with, with my philosophy. And the biggest things I kept on coming back to that I that I valued, just kept on coming back to this reflectiveness of what a coach. I've never really had anybody stand over me and go, well, why have you done that? Until, you know, my level five coach process and having yourself tested as a mentor towards that kind of challenge, my kind of critical thinking quite a lot of the time was, why am I doing this? And how am I doing it? Is it right? Or am I just modelling what I've seen before it just trying to imitate someone? So I think my philosophy has kind of been quite fluid and

developed over kind of, especially the last kind of eight years, I think, it's really, really changed with rather than just kind of coaching scripts and things, I think my philosophies become very more self-aware. And actually, it's made me more confident. So, you know, some of the things I think, I put into my philosophy now is actually really empowering the learner, being the centre of all, whereas I think when I first started out PGL, many, many years ago, and my philosophy was very much instructed, it was about, I've got stuff that people want. So I'm just going to tell him, you know, good stuff, and make them good, you know, that that was, you know, that was my upbringing, but it's shaped my, my kind of original philosophy of, you know, we're out there, we've got to be good at a boat, we've got to teach people how to be good in a boat, and they've got to learn this, this certain stroke, if they want to be good. And that's evolved, it's hugely evolved, when actually, a lot of my clients now are coming to me and asking, you know, for like, confidence building, there's no strokes. But that confidence building, so you know, you can't go Okay, well, here's a draw stroke, and this will make you confident. So actually deep dive in into the person and, you know, really, really kind of get involved with their journey, rather than linking people on to my journey. So I think that's been my biggest philosophy changes is taking people on their journey now, you know, you know, I've done my bit, and now I'm kind of, you know, very quiet, quiet mindedness now, to actually go in, you know, this about their journey. Now, that's where my philosophy has really changed in the last eight years. That's, that's really, you know, really encouraging to hear, you know, that, you know, it's very clear that, you know, you allude to your philosophy changing, you know, from the early days to, to, to where you are now, from a very much I am the provider, and I will provide you what you need to almost to a place that you are now which you describe about empowering the learner.

Lee Pooley 9:31

I think what would be nice to nice to explore now, is, rather than looking back and, you know, please still refer to looking back, but what I'd be really keen to explore is, you know, What on earth gets you, gets you to a point to know what you are actually going to coach. So what approaches considerations or processes, if you, you don't have to use those particular words, and it might feel quite, almost a granulator way of doing it. But how on earth do you decide what to focus on? What do you just how do you decide what you are going to COACH?

Darren Joy 10:03

I guess, great question. It's a great question. I've given it some thought. And I think I have three kind of coaching, I don't know approaches or focuses that, you know, really depend on what's in front of me what I'm actually getting to that conclusion. So with my providership roles, you know, it's very much contact, content focused coaching. So there is a product, there's a syllabus, this is what they get. And actually, you know, that drops very much into kind of scripts and patterns that I've seen before, and it just becomes not really coaching to me not actually becomes just delivery, you know, that that's, that's what it is. And I find from that kind of content, focused coaching, or delivery, you know, I can I can deliver all day, and then my clients from that really just take away what it is they want from that delivery from that, from that subject from that, that syllabus. I think really, now, what if I think about through coaching, I think it's now kind of solution based stuff, that's where I'm kind of going at the moment. Where I really get to know people. So I think the first thing would be, you know, original client comes to me, I've got to get as much information out of as possible, you know, I can't just suddenly go magic up here is the answer from, you know, two minutes on it on a telephone call with them, you know, that's just not possible. You know, some of them some of the biggest things I do is: someone rings up and says I want to be in to do this, you know, that I want to go paddling on a great free white-water River. Well, the first thing is, is having that kind of profiling conversation with them. You know, that's one of the biggest things, but, you know, I really struggle just with the phone call, I need to see it, that's where I get my triggers from, I need to, I need to see stuff. So very much, you know, there's still not much talk talking in the car park, it's literally get, changes get on the water. You know, I'm you know, I'm very, very technical as an observer or coach, so I need to see people, I need to see people on there. So very much a test piece. So, an example would be, let's get on the river. And, you know, I won't even coach probably for the first 30 minutes, which I think for some people probably are nerves in that, you know, you know, I've paid for this coach to come along, and I'm getting nothing from them. But I'm really need to kind of tune into them, and I need to paddle with them. That's, that's one of the things when I first get my direction. So once I paddle with them for a bit, tried a few things out, you know, we'll call it test piecing, to kind of go or try this, try that I've kind of kind of settled into it, then I started getting my picture. You know, that's where I that's my progressively, you know, that's, that's where I've started getting my first triggers of what I'm going to coach is finding out kind of bit more about who, you know, that's about them.

Lee Pooley 12:50

Okay. That's really good and we're going to dig into a little bit more. But you know why, if you were talking there, you know, you talked about, you know, gathering information, getting a fuller picture. And it just reminds me of a book by Malcolm Gladwell where he talks, he talks about thin and thick slicing, about making quite judgmental, judgmental decisions very early on with very little evidence, and the importance of actually thick slices. So that just sort of resonated with me there. If possible, if possible for the listeners, could dig into a bit on test piecing. So, you know, you coach and coach lots of different on lots of different clients in lots of different environments. And sorry, in lots of different environments. How do you how do you decide the test piece? What is the test piece? And what are you looking for?

Darren Joy 13:49

I mean, that's a great question. So, you know, very environmental specific, I think, is the first thing really, you know, even on flat water a test piece for me would be to find a kind of a level, you know, where are they at? So someone could turn around to me and say, you know what, I've been paddling grade four for years, you know, well, I've been skiing for 25 years, well, that just means I've been 25 times, I'm still not very good. So, you know, the test piece for me when I go skiing is when I first put the skis on and I kind of shuffled towards the left and still feel like it's still my first day skiing. So a test piece for me would be kind of like finding, you know, their, their kind of their comfort points. And that's a big thing. For me, it's finding a comfort point because, you know, when they're comfortable, they they're not stretched, you know, I'm not going to see kind of breaking points, I'm not going to see weaknesses, you know, if people are comfortable, you know, and, you know, as an example of a test space for me, and I've used it recently would be that, you know, we can get onto a river, I could paddle down, you know, like the river dart Southwest for probably for half an hour and that's the majority of the river done, you know, so and I've not seen much, you know, I've seen them do moves that they already do because they don't know the river inside out. So a test piece for me would be, you know, trying to gather as much information about, you know, their entire performance. Now, if they're just going to perform and do what they normally can do, I can't get any more information from that. So it's got to be a challenging test piece. So something I've done more recently is, you know, I'm sure the listeners have

come across this before, but just getting someone to paddle back up a rapid. So it's so simple like that can give me huge amounts of information, and then I would follow them back up that rapid as well. So I can actually then almost mimic and go, well, why did they make that choice? Is that what I would have done? You know, is there a better way of doing this from, from behind as well, I can see stroke patterns, fitness levels, changes speed, everything from confidence, you know, attack angles, you know, all the technical stuff, you can see all the tactical things coming up and actually looking at the water are they are they just looking at the eddy and just flapping their arms? You know, you can see the psychological stuff coming out, you can see, you know, you can't make it up there, you know, if they're starting to get fatigued, you know, have they got determination to keep themselves going, you know, this, there's so much I can see from those sort of test pieces, as opposed to just let's get on and go for a paddle. That's, that's where I think at the moment Lee.

Lee Pooley 16:16

Yeah, no, I think, you know, that's just, I think that's really, really helpful. And I imagine there's, you know, you know, people listening in and thought of that, or, okay, some, you know, a bit of background, because lots of people talk about test pieces, don't they, but actually, what you've done is given some great examples of, you know, paddle up the river, and then all of a sudden, just by that exercise of paddling up the river, you're gaining a phenomenal amount of information. So we're at the point that you've probably gathered a phenomenal amount of, of information. How do you decipher that, then? So what? So you go, crumbs I've got loads of information, you talked about angle you talked about, you know, speed fitness levels, confidence, decision making? You went on? And you did you talked about lots? What, how you narrow that down, man to go, that's what I'm going. So the so what I'm going to ask for next? Is this, because of x, y, and z, how do you narrow it down?

Darren Joy 17:19

I think it's really easy to say, based on lots of experience, but that doesn't really help our new coaches, I think I can break this down really quickly that you kind of go right, this starts starting to join up some themes, you know, this is where I start looking for it. So you know, anybody's been out with me, though, they're always see that I've got, you know, a notepad, I'll be jot down a few things down

of like common things that I'm seeing, the biggest thing for me, it might just been a mistake. So I'm not very quick to jump on someone and get all I mean, he didn't rotate the body on that, that that kind of movement. And so, so often, that's too easy to do, you could just jump straight down the obvious one, the big flag that's flying away and go actually, that there's probably a root problem here. And it's doing that kind of triage or analysis of actually getting to the root of the problem, that's, that's the biggest, that's the biggest thing you've got to be able to do. So what I do is, you know, you know, if you look at technical templates, you can, you know, you're looking at the body of the blade, you know, you can narrow into that. But the question is, what happens if it's not the body warms, if it's, you know, the psychological side of things, and that's when, you know, this can kind of constraints based coaching comes in, where you can kind of kind of push people a little bit more and go, Well, they've made that look quite easy, and they just show me what they normally do, or can I just make them a little bit, you know, you know, unseat them slightly, by just changing the challenge, you know, can come at, you know, are they doing that on their left hand side? Because that's what they're comfortable? You know, by just having that simple question going, Well, that's how we're going to write sure in that that could be the one trigger you go, okay, that that also then links into that, actually, all of that side of their body is weak, you know, but they were just, you know, putting it to one side, because actually, they're not, you know, not very happy to show that, you know, that's one of the biggest things. So, you know, finding out where they've got to go for me. You know, if you're looking at technical, you know, I always start looking at that triage side of things, look at the head and work downwards, you know, if you're looking at observation stuff, you know, you can get really deep into kind of observations. And I think, right, you can have too much information and it could throw the wrong door open. So I think the biggest thing for me is, I've got to pick one, that's the thing I've got to make a choice. And I think one of my biases is that, you know, I will look at kind of the fundamentals that they're doing, you know, the posture, the connectivity, the power transfer that that stuff. I think that's one of the biggest things I'll go down straightaway.

Lee Pooley 19:48

Okay, well that I mean, that's just you know, users opened up a huge amount of areas and started to explain you know, your rationale of your approaches to coaching and also, you know, alluded to some of, you know, maybe a bias that you have, which is really, really, really interesting. So I think it's really important that all coaches understand what maybe their biases are, because it will have an

influence on the way that we coach and the way that we approach stuff. And I, you know, I think it's a, it's a great start to this to these coaching conversations that I get to have with lots of lots of different lots of different coaches over the next over the next 12 months. Darren, really appreciate all your time, and being really open and honest on this, you know, getting coaches to open up and, and, and share some of their vast coaching experiences is absolutely phenomenal. And I hope some of the listeners have already benefited from it and think about their coaching from what they've just heard. So, Darren, thanks very much for your time, very much appreciated, and what does the next you know, what does the next what's this year look like for you in terms of your coaching?

Darren Joy 21:06

So I think this year is looking complex. You know, with the COVID side of things, I think there's going to be a lot more UK based people emerging with skill fade. So I think you know, that the opportunity to get people out and water is going to be huge. I think that's going to be my biggest next step people kind of get a hold of me insane It's been a while I want to get back in my boat. So I think that's going to be my 2021 and start I think getting people back out paddling. I'm really looking forward to it. All right, well, thanks very much again down and make sure you take care on the water and hopefully we'll be able to get out for a paddle soon together.

Lee Pooley 21:46

Thanks very much for everyone for listening and keep an eye on the coaching podcast for all the instalments over the next 12 months. Okay, take care everyone. Bye