

S2 E11 – Coaching Philosophy (Chris Evans) - Miniseries

Ricky Snodgrass 0:00

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

Lee Pooley 0:07

Welcome everybody to the coaching podcast at British Canoeing Awarding Body. My name is Lee Pooley, Head of Coaching and Qualifications. And as some of you may already know that I'm running a miniseries aimed at exploring, with highly experienced coaches, their thoughts and approaches to how they decide on what to coach or focus on during any coaching intervention. And I'm absolutely delighted today to have Chris Evans from Plas y Brenin, who is the Head of Paddlesports there. And I've had the pleasure of working on several projects with Chris over the years. And also, as part of the coaching diploma that we've run at British Canoeing. So welcome, Chris. Thank you very much.

Chris Evans 0:59

And yeah, thank you for the invite to this podcast.

Lee Pooley 1:01

No, no problems at all. I really appreciate your time. Chris, what we'll do is, before we actually get into the topic of actually, you know, looking at, you know, why you decide on what you do during your coaching interventions. I wondered if you could possibly give the listeners a bit of a background to yourself in terms of who you are, your career within paddlesports.

Chris Evans 1:27

Yeah, no problem. So grew up outskirts of London, paddlesports and me started on the Thames with a bit of competition paddling. So bit of slalom to start off with then found freestyle, originally, I won't call it coaching yet originally instructing was a way of me staying in boats and carrying on with that. And it wasn't really about the people that I met and interacted with, it was about me staying in boats. It was only when the interest for how people learn started,

which was probably early 20s, that I sort of see that as the start of the coaching career, the coaching pathway. And I've been lucky that, you know, coaching and paddle sports has taken me all over the place. You know, as with any career, I guess there has been sort of ups and downs with it. But for the most part, it's been incredibly enjoyable. I've started with sort of white-water coaching and instructing and as I've carried on with it, I've sort of diversified a bit and now ended up coaching a lot of home canoeing, sea kayaking, paddleboarding, white-water, and more recently, been involved a lot with Coach development and sort of facilitating leadership pathways as well, which is incredibly exciting.

Lee Pooley 2:55

Well, Chris, you've clearly got a diverse experience, you know, coming from, you know, coming from the Thames and starting new or sort of your, your, your freestyle, rodeo or play boating, whatever we call it those days. And, you know, you're now obviously, you know, you allude to that, you know, you're delivering a lot of coach, Coach development courses, you know, you're doing a lot of coach developing and helping people in edge on their journey. And also now head of paddlesports at Plas y Brenin. And typically, what would your, you know, typically, what would your client base be, you know, who are they in terms of who you coach these days?

Chris Evans 3:41

So that, the centre at Plas y Brenin, it seems quite a variety of people, I guess the sort of the biggest group of people that we see are you it's kind of adult coaching, most from the southeast, if I was to put the sort of put a finger on where people are from, and a lot of it is skills based courses. So people come to us for a week or a weekend, and they're sort of solo thing they're looking at is improving over those over the days that they're with us. Having said that, we do still get, you know, school groups in youth groups in stag dues, corporate days. So it's quite a nice variety of stuff. Which is, which is fantastic actually keeps things yeah, keep things entertaining. Yeah, keeps you on your toes.

Lee Pooley 4:33

Chris so, I mean, that's really good. And I think it's really important that, you know, listeners, you know, do are able to engage where you are coming from

because when we explore certain avenues within your coaching and the coaching interventions that you're involved with, is you know, it will be relatable. So, thanks very much for sort of giving us a bit of a background there. But before we move into the nitty gritty of Have you know what, how you decide what you coach? We could you possibly give us what your what your coaching philosophy is now? And maybe how it is how it may have changed over the years?

Chris Evans 5:16

Yeah, no problem. That was part of the coaching diploma that we went through was building that coaching philosophy. And it's quite funny because it's one of the things I talk about a lot with people now is that coaching philosophy and the power of it. I remember at the time, not enjoying the task of writing that coaching philosophy, because it was, I had to be quite open about it and really think about it. Having said that, once it's done, it's almost here it is, this is me, and it's, you know, it's quite hard to, it's quite hard to dent that, which hopefully, I'll get to talk about in a bit. But my coaching philosophy now is about the people that I see about the learners and about their development, and it should stem from them, you know, these people that we see at that centre, or you know, what I have coached and worked for other people, and they've paid good money to come and get that coaching. And there's obviously a few things that will draw them there that will bring them there. And that's the to me, that's the interesting thing is, you know, what's brought someone to a coaching interaction. And there's a few things that do that, you know, it could be a hurdle to get over a confidence knock a social thing. And it's drawing out of all of that, and working with that, to their chosen end goals. Often those interactions are policed by the learners. So if I bring it back to what my philosophy looks like, it's all centred on the learner. So where do they want to be? Where are their goals? What's their sort of action plan to get there? And to, for me to achieve that, it's about being up to date, and current with coaching practices, with technical skills as well, because that's going to be part of the input. So you know, it really stems from the learner.

Lee Pooley 7:24

Yeah. And do you think over the years from, you know, from your early days you refer to, I'm not going to use? I'm not going to call it coaching? I'll call it instructed? Do you? Do you think, you know, has there been any changes from

your philosophy, you know, from you might not even have news or philosophy in the early days? But you know, has there been any, as it hasn't been any changes in the, in your coaching philosophy over the years? And also, what about any significant episodes that that have created change? Or I know, you'd refer to that to the British Canoeing diploma? But is there anything else that's, you know, is, and is quite significant in changing your philosophy?

Chris Evans 8:09

Yeah, I mean, I've been, I've been incredibly lucky with the people that I've not just coached and worked with, but also the people that I've called colleagues, and mentors and peers. And these people that you have interactions with, that's obviously going to change some of the things that you do on the ground, as you're coaching, I wouldn't necessarily call that little bit philosophy that is kind of picking and choosing the bits that you put into your everyday application. I was thinking about this the other day, and an early approach, if I was ever challenged, would have been what I'm the one with the ticket. You know, and I'll put my hand up, well, I will quite happily say, No, I'm the level three Coach, what do you know, sort of thing? You know, and I'd heard that from other people. And at the time, when I heard that from other people, it was, well, that's where I want to be because they're the font of all knowledge. And the shift actually, a little bit of it was helped with the coaching diploma, a bit of it is from turning up at Plas y Brenin and, you know, being quite full of ego about where I was, and then appearing at that centre and realizing where I was actually seeing that. Okay, I might have these tickets. And I might have a lot of knowledge about technical input. But the people being coached those learners, they're the ones who really know themselves. They're the ones you've really got the information about, how they learn, how they like their information, how they want the interactions to go. Anything that's been a hurdle previously, you know, so maybe they've been on the river and had an exciting experience that's all owned by them by those learners. And I, as coach need to learn that, to help with that pathway. That's been the really big change. Real big change.

Lee Pooley 10:15

Yeah, that's really interesting to hear Chris, you know, though those significant points of view, you know, that reality of going, Oh, my God, almost not an embarrassed because that's, that's who you are. And that's where you were at

that time. But you know, you have? Well, I've got the ticket. So I know, I know exactly. I know exactly what you need. And I think it's as you the more you actually delve into coaching, I don't know if you would agree with this, Chris. But the more I've dealt delved into coaching over the years, it's actually a confirmation of how little I do know, the more I delve into coaching, I don't know if you've, if you've experienced that at all?

Chris Evans 10:56

Oh, yeah, it was, I think it was one of the first conversations that we had, actually, that's one of the residential, it was just that lovely little sentence from you, which was, I thought I knew lots until I started this. And that, that really stuck with me really struck with another thing that was that was said there that sort of lines up with it was like a 10 year cycle. So you sort of work on your skills. And as a coach, you find all these things that are fantastic. And you sort of think, right, I'm here with it, I'm there, I'm really good. There's that 10 year pathway. And at that 10 year pathway, you go, alright, actually, there's a whole load that I had thought of that I hadn't tweaked. And maybe that was ego and arrogance. And we're right back now and starting again. So it's that sort of 10 year process came out of again, one of those residential, one side of his that goes out every 10 years, I've got a, I'm going back to the start again. But the other side of it thinks, actually, you know, there's a process now, every, every so often I'm going to find something that really challenges it, and makes me makes me think I can be really good. If I sort of include this into my practice, and, and, you know, everything that you're doing out in the water with, with people. And that's, that's quite exciting to me.

Lee Pooley 12:22

It's just, you know, as I said, before, you know, I've had the pleasure of working with you, and you know, and seeing you on the on the coaching diploma, and you can do just hearing your voice as well, you know, the excitement of actually the development, the learning that you're going through, which might be quite difficult for some people listening and thinking, Well, what, you know that, you know, Chris Evans, he's had a paddlesports, you know, playground, surely he doesn't need to learn much more. But actually, there is so much more than that. And what I'm keen to do is to dig into now is the essence really of what this miniseries is about. And you might have started alluding to it but let's dig into it

in a little bit more depth is. So Chris, what is it? And how do you decide what to coach? What are your approaches? What are your considerations? Do you have processes? Let's, let's explore that.

Chris Evans 13:23

Okay. And I really liked this question when I got it, as part of the email is this invite. I thought that's it? That's a fantastic question. And it's one of those questions that coaching me could go round and round and round for hours. What I didn't want to do is sit here with the answer of it depends, because you hear that as a reply a lot. So I was thinking about this, and you know, how could I? How can I word it without saying it depends. However, it does depend. And that what to what to coach depends massively on the people that you've got, what you're coaching, whether it's a skills course, or whether it's a coaching or leadership course, whether there are other factors that might sort of steer where you go in? Is it there's a whole load of levels and layers to it? And I guess a syllabus course would be easier to talk about to start off with the knowing what to coach there will ultimately come from the syllabus. You know, there's a number of things I've got to get into this course. What's the logical process for these things to be in? What timeframe am I going to put to them? And the change there for me is rather than having times to stick to there, a there a time is a guideline. So if people have turned up and they've got loads of knowledge of one thing, I can make it so that I've just covered it, and expand on other things. If the knowledge isn't there, maybe or the practical skills aren't there and If we go back to a skills course, the, the what to coach, again, previously, it would have been well, I've got an intermediate white-water course, for example, I know that one of the first things I need to look at is posture that would have been previous approach, because it was all kind of from coach. Now, I don't know until I've had the conversation with the people on the course, I've maybe seen them on the water. And, most importantly, I think I've built some sort of rapport with them. So that whatever is looked at is agreed, so that what to coach for me needs to come from that relationship with the learner. You know, if, if they've come along for confidence, for example, and they want confidence building, if you were to go straight in with a technical skill, it might not address the competence bit to start off with. So there might be some things here with confidence that need addressing, cleaning away a few ways of know, coping with it and dealing with it, not going to be able to focus on the technical until that confidence thing has been resolved. And put away if you like.

Lee Pooley 16:20

Chris, can I just dig into that a little bit? Because listeners might be going well, okay. So how do you? Yeah, because you said, well see them seeing them on the water? So you have a conversation? We then you see them on the water? And then you can you sort of our discussion? Is, let's, let's concentrate on that confidence bit? Or sort of things? How would you set that up on the water? How would you be able to see about confidence? Is there any test pieces? Or what would you ask them to do is just, it's just good to sort of explore that.

Chris Evans 16:57

And again, I guess for me, a starting test piece is sort of on the fringes of how I would previously have done it. You know, here's, here's a few routine things that I'm going to do so that I can see, in my mind what that bias would be if they performance on moving water. I actually quite liked just opening the doors to start off with, you know, here's a simple stretch, it's a nice big pool, warm up. Off you go. And what you get to see there is not just what people are doing, but how they're behaving. So somebody who's completely confident in that environment, they'll go, off they go, they'll start playing, and they'll almost immediately come back with either this works, this is comfortable, or they'll come back with questions. And somebody who's maybe not as confident, maybe won't venture into the moving water, they'll stay where they are comfortable. Or it might be that nice opportunity to start that conversation. You know, you know, rather than wading in with are you, I can see that you're not that comfortable here. It might be. There's that nice little jet over there. When you're ready to go and have a play Are you just need to adjust the boat? This isn't quite right. I've been in a rolling pool and I had shoes on and now all these things might be that factor. It's almost buying time to have those conversations. So it's almost unstructured that start. Yeah, that dive in. I have a play completely unstructured. So you can start to pick all that out without those biases.

Lee Pooley 18:43

Yeah. No. Yeah. And it's quite interesting. You gave some really nice examples of maybe some indications to the listeners of why, you know, what, what actions or behaviours people might be displaying, to, to, you know, because of a confidence issue, isn't it? So it's really, really interesting to explore that. Within

your within your Yeah, yeah, very, very clear to me that its learner centred, you know, you're thinking about the individual, etc. But typically Plas y Brenin, you've got two days or five day courses. That's right, isn't it around two week, a weekend course, or five days? So if we can just construct on a on a on a on a two day course. That's a very short period to build a rapport and develop people, isn't it? So what sort of top tips or what could you know, give away to us as you know, as listeners to actually give some sort of top tips Golden Nugget, so actually, you engage in and build up a repertoire quite quickly with someone for a short period of time.

Chris Evans 20:01

The best tip I can give would be, just listen. Just listen, you know, if, if people have come to you for coaching, they've got their reasons for coming along. And those reasons are owned by that learner, there is. And for you to be part of it, you need to understand it. So just listening, and that is listening to understand. So listening to understand, I'm not going to put my previous experiences on it. Well, I agree with that bit of confidence thing, I also took this horrible swim, and that was how I got over it, for example, I'm just listening. And while I'm listening there, without putting my stories into it, without trying to sort of almost sympathize with them, and interact, while they're, while I'm listening. What I'm trying to do is I'm trying to get as much information out of them. That listening, that first bit of trying to get as much information and trying to understand as much as you can, the next steps, once that has happened will feel like it becomes much tailored, very individualized and personalized to that learner. And that's, that's, that's the thing, to me, that's quite powerful. You know, if I'm a learner, and someone has taken the time to do that, they're interested in me. And that's powerful.

Lee Pooley 21:36

Yeah. So you're not really jumping to conclusions, and you're not trying to come up with solutions for the first thing you hear is that you're, what you're trying to do is build up a much bigger individualized picture of what they're saying or how they're interacting or behaving.

Chris Evans 21:55

Exactly. Exactly. You know, and the interesting thing we get is we get everything from my confidence has been completely stripped. And we've mentioned the behaviours behind that the behaviours, things quite interesting, that can be everything from trying to hide behind it and being quite withdrawn to almost being quite aggressive. Yeah. You know, and that can be quite a hard thing to get through you. Should we get that on one hand? And at the other end of it, we get I just wanted a weekend away. You know, it's, and it can be quite a balancing act, actually.

Lee Pooley 22:31

Yeah. And that's what I want to just sort of, you know, sort of delve into a little bit, Chris is because you know, you, you know, that anyone listening you, yeah, you'll absolutely agree with gathering, gathering as much information as you possibly can for that particular individual. But you're, you know, I'm just, I'm just going to put some constraints in that I've seen, yeah, I've been at Plas y Brenin, you know, for many years. I'm just going to put some constraints in and then just, you know, how to pose a question to you. So, individualization, learner centred, that's what you're about. So, you know, clients arrive there the they have a briefing in the morning, if I remember rightly, meet your meet your instructors for the day, or for the course. You got to think about where you going to go minibus traveling equipment loan at the trailer, driving to the venue, Get, and you've may have five, five people on your course. How do you absolutely link it to what you've just talked about? How does that happen with all of those constraints you have to deal with? And many other coaches across the whole of paddlesport? How do you have you approach that? That dilemma?

Chris Evans 24:02

Um, see the really interesting thing is it's almost like you've got a 10 minute window to make an impression on someone. And in that 10 minutes, if it really feels like you're doing everything that you can for that personalized and individualized, it becomes a two way relationship. So yes, we've got many buses and trailers and kit and the morning meeting, and sometimes that can steal time from the day. Obviously, if there isn't water, we are constricted to one area that we can use to areas that we can use that can eat into the day as well. By going out of your way to not get people on site, but understand build those relationships build that rapport with people, it almost sees people becoming

accepting of everything, that's part of your work and part of your organization. The flip side to that is, there is no other stress. You know, if you come to that centre, we put your boat in a trailer, you get into one of our vehicles, and you have expressed everything that's brought you there, everything that you want out of those interactions, and now you've got time, where everything's taken care of. And you focus in on just that. You know, you so it's it, you know, it's a two way relationship, I guess.

Lee Pooley 25:44

Yeah, yeah, absolutely Chris, you know, for me, you know, you know, just observing when I've been when I've been, you know, and most centres are very much the same, it was just, you know, typically, because you work there, and it was just a, but your engagements that, you know, you will have those individual chats whilst walking down to the minibus handing out kits, you will have those interactions, right, throughout almost that continual process of probably over several hours to get the, you know, they will be they will be split up throughout the day, won't they? So from introductions to walking down to the minibus, walking back up to the members to get a bit of equipment with a with a with a learner or someone on the course. So there's all those interventions all the time that you're, you're asking questions and, and getting lots of information back for you to be able to make appropriate engagements with that with that individual. That's right. Yeah. Yeah. And, Chris, before we go, and before we sort of round it up, and you did, you did talk a little bit about biases and biases that you've probably you've had in the past that that you may have, you know, brought into brought into your coaching questions. Question for you. Do you have any biases now?

Chris Evans 27:14

Do I have any biases now? Yeah. Yeah, I do. We are. We all have biases, that I think this is the I think this is the really interesting thing. These biases aren't necessary. Well, they changed previously, it was this is a bias of how coaching should look, and it comes from me. And now that's changed to well, you know, you've turned up on this course now, what do you want from it? How do the interactions go, and so on? The biases now, I think are more along the lines of technical skills. So we've all got a bias about what a perfect performance should look like, what should be part of it, what should be in it. And the interesting thing

there is, again, if you've got a roomful of coaches, that's another conversation that could go on and on and on. What does perfect look like? Now those to me, if you just leave it there, that changing coaching philosophy, to that statement, don't sit together at all. Now, if you use that bias as a shortcut, okay, so I've seen this person on the water, let's try this a little bit, because I know it gets to the net result quite quickly. What it's done is it's created a shortcut. So if it works for that person, then they go, Oh, my God, this is this is brilliant, this is changed it completely. This is the next steps. The interesting thing there for me, is, if they've come with their own ideas of what they need, what they want, what they want coaching for, they've got their own biases, as well. So with these biases that we all have, you need to be aware of them. And you need to try and find out the biases of the learner. And that's where that nice link comes in, if you get that link, and maybe tweak yours a little bit, because we're all different builds and body shapes and different boats and different wants and needs and you know, different outcomes. Getting that link to happen means that you have created a shortcut as opposed to a bias that gets in the way. Yeah,

Lee Pooley 29:31

That's a really great way of putting it Chris and I'm sure everyone listening to this podcast really appreciates your open openness and honesty about your development as a coach and now as a coach developer as well. And yeah, really appreciate you, allowing us to explore together about you know, it's only ever a short term, but actually you open it up to how you approach coaching so yeah, thanks very much Chris. Really appreciate all your all your comments there and, and, you know, I do hope that very soon you'll be back on the water and Plas y Brenin will be back up open and you're having you'll be welcoming, welcoming clients into your door. So, Chris, thanks very much again very much appreciated. So thanks very much for listening everyone and making sure that you keep keeping contact with us at British Canoeing Awarding Body and have a lookout for the next coaching podcast. Take care everyone. Bye.