

S2 E23 – Coach Philosophy with Julie Perren (Miniseries)

Ricky Snodgrass 0:00

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

Lee Pooley 0:07

Hello and welcome to the British canoeing awarding body coaching podcast. My name is Lee Pooley. I'm the head of coaching for British canoeing and all as some of you listeners may already know that I'm looking at a miniseries, investigating and exploring with experienced and highly regarded coaches, their thoughts approaches to how they decide on what to coach or focus on during a coaching intervention. I'm really pleased and delighted today to welcome Julie. Julie. I've known for many years, from tautness to canoe club, from doing some coach development and really delighted just to see how much Julia has grown over the years in terms of varying paddling, experience and coaching. So welcome, Julie.

Julie Perren 0:57

Hi, Lee. Nice to be here.

Lee Pooley 0:59

Cool. Well, thanks very much for giving up your time. And let's get straight into it. Let's get straight into the podcast. If you don't mind, could you introduce yourself to the listeners, your bit of background from your Paddlesport background, and then where you are with your coaching?

Julie Perren 1:19

Okay, so I started kayaking about 15 years ago, and I was nearly 40 at that time. And I got totally thrown into it by meeting experience, seek hiking, chat and getting involved and learning the hard way I think my just doing is out on the sea. And then I got involved with topless Canoe Club. And because my eight year old daughter was interested in learning kayaking, I've not really been into this was the area I joined for her benefit. But as happens with clubs, I soon got

dragged in to help to help coaching sessions started doing busy awards. And I could see at that time that they had quite a lot of coaches in Atlanta, they had about 22, I think at the time, but only two of them were women. And although coaching wasn't something that I'd ever thought I would do, there was definitely a bit of a gap there. And I thought, well, I'll help redress the balance. I'd like to repay the help that I've had from people. And I'll know I'll give it a go. So I did the level one and level two. And alongside that I was also progressing with my own paddling in White-water and canoeing and sea kayaking, going through the BC award system. And I've been or I've gone blank lay sorry. What did I What happened then? I guess Okay, right. So, I think at this point, I started traveling more with the sea kayaking, started going to events, getting coaching from people all over the country, getting far more interesting input, and being much more aware of the broader coaching environment that's out there. This really helped I think, in many ways for me to understand what coaching was when you're the person that's on the receiving end of it. So I kept going with the leadership awards, and eventually I did Fausto and I kept going kept going. And eventually this last year did advanced Leader Award. In amongst that, I was still coaching quite a lot as well. And I thought that perhaps at some point, I would do the level three coach, although I understood that it was going to change. So I left it for a little while and then eventually got to do the performance coach last year. I think a really key moment in all of this development was when I went to an event up in Scotland, which was the Scottish women's see hiking festival, in Butte, which I ended up almost by chance attending this and it was such a great event. And they had said that they were going to take a restaurant running it. I thought it was a real shame that it wasn't going to continue. So myself and a couple of buddies decided that we would try and run something similar down in Devon. And so we started doing the women's seek hike festival. We had 65 participants and we ran that for the first time in 2015. And then we've run it again every other year. We really did it just as a let's see how this goes and it just as escalated. The feedbacks been so great. So that's another area where I've really seen coaching happen and work really well. So I think that's probably about me where I am now.

Lee Pooley 5:02

It's a you know, such a, you know, such a condensed experience, isn't it? You know, over, you know from you starting paddling, going on to the sea joining a canoe club, great shout out for tautness Canoe Club, they're really thrive in a canoe club and, you know, deliver a lot of opportunities for people in the local

area, including the youngsters. So it's fantastic to see you involved in there. And then, you know, traveling, you know, traveling has been quite a big part for you has made in terms of traveling to different locations gaining Absolutely,

Julie Perren 5:39

Absolutely. And I think the you just can't replicate the different. The I've gone blank again, we've run out of words on art. So that's again. Yeah, traveling has been really key for me, I've always loved to travel anyway, and traveling when you're sick. Like you've got a totally different set of totally different environment, a set of tidal systems, it's just so different everywhere. Yeah. And everywhere you go, you would like to explore as well. So the more places I go to and seek I think the more places I want to go, because there's just so much to see out there isn't that and it broadens your experience so much. And this is one of the things that I find a little bit frustrating sometimes with the club culture is that some people get into a bit of a rut where they'll only panel certain areas, and it really limits the possibilities of what they could be doing.

Lee Pooley 6:40

Yeah, yeah. So today, I'm going to sort of, you know, we're probably quite hard question, but top three, top three, you top three locations that you see paddled?

Julie Perren 6:53

Oh, well, I have to right up the top, there's got to be Greenland. We went out there, to the east side near Disko Bay from Ilulissat. And we were lucky enough to get hold of six boats that we could use and we took for other people went up the coast of Greenland, and that was totally amazing. I'd love to go back there again. But of course not at the moment. Norway's got to be right up there love Norway, Lofoten islands, all along that coast is so much exploring to do there got to go back there as well. And then I think UK has so many possibilities. I've really not explored Scotland enough. There's so much more on our doorstep. And perhaps that's the way we're going to be going in the next year or so with the circumstances we're in.

Lee Pooley 7:44

Well, it's not a bad playground is it the I think the UK for sea paddling is probably one of the prime places that you can get. So it's not a bad place to be stuck on this island that gives so much different variety in terms of surf swell tidal streams and fantastic scenery. So yeah, thanks for sharing that, Julie. I think what I'm in probably listeners again, oh, he hasn't even gotten to the subject yet. Which is quite normal for everyone listening. And so if possible, could can could you you're going through your the new performance coach now and you had great delight being on a on a course with you recently. Where would you say your coaching philosophy is at present? What is your coaching philosophy?

Julie Perren 8:33

Okay, so I really had to give this quite a lot of thought when this word this word philosophy came up because it's something that we live by anyway, isn't it, it's something that we live our whole lives by philosophy, and I coach in the same way that I live. So it really led me to set down some quite deep cards to come up with something, a few words that said all those things. So the first thing I wrote down, and I've written notes before, were far too long, far too many words far too repetitive. And I've got it down to a few less words now. But it's still quite a lot of words, and I'm sure it's going to become less. And each time I've read, read it back and go Oh, but I haven't put this in. And I haven't put that in. And I think it's really hard to include all the elements that you would like to. But I'll read to you what I've got at the moment. And no doubt it will change again next week. But at the moment I'm thinking that I would like to help other paddlers build confidence to achieve their own goals with honesty and integrity and in in an environment of mutual respect and safety. My aim is to create the opportunity for progression and development in a collaborative way. And I believe that I can achieve this by being motivated, hardworking and empathetic whilst not forgetting to have fun on the water too. So that's where I am with it now, but it's something that I've missed in there. His humour. And I think that's a really important part of my philosophy. And, okay, I've said, have fun on the water. But to have a little bit of humour in the day, I think that's quite important as well. So yeah, I would probably put that in there. And the other word that I changed recently, it was adding the word create, creating, because my, my background in my other line of work that I've been doing for the 30 years, which I've pretty much stopped doing that now. But I thought that it was in no way relevant to my coaching. And because it's so different, but actually, now I've come to analyse it and really think about what I did at work. So many of those same qualities are the qualities that you might include in in good coaching as well. So I used to run

a team and keep everybody motivated, and they were learning as well. So I'm teaching them on the way. And we're all working towards a common goal, which was, it was within the theatre industry working on quite high level shows. And it was a definite teamwork, effort, collaborative. So that's very important to me. And I think that a lot of those qualities that I had from that business just apply to all of this, too. So I've always felt like coming into this later, I was at a bit of a disadvantage, because I haven't been through the, you know, haven't done a degree in sports philosophy or, or anything that we're I've been reading, I haven't been reading the primary research and the academic papers that go behind a lot of what we read in here now. But I have been actually doing it. And I think that has been one of the biggest discoveries in doing the performance coach and having some time to listen to podcasts. And what did we do before podcasts and read stuff? Is that a lot of what I do I has a name. It's called something I didn't know. I didn't know about self-determination theory. All there is behind motivation. But in fact, I've probably been doing some of this without even realizing it, I've come to some of the same answers that I've been reading about. So it's been a real eye opener to me to find that someone's done research on this. And it's backing up what I've discovered, and I set myself along the way by experimenting. And so yeah, I've really been I've been enjoying that. I know I've gone totally

Lee Pooley 12:35

although you haven't got I think the listeners I think you you've you clearly I articulated your coaching philosophy, Julie, I think, you know, from what from lie no of you is, you know, really lovely to see the stuff like mutual respect come out. Collaborative approach is actually their goals, not your goals. Apps. Yeah. And I think that was really well articulated, I think that's really important for people to sort of, you know, to listen to, especially when we start to maybe investigate or how do you apply that, it's quite interesting that you say, you know, you've, you've got a career, I was going to say you had a career, you've got a career, you've, you've, you've been working in that particular then you're going actually I'm doing a lot of this already. So you've gone from an application stage, in your previous life, let's discover your previous life, then you've done your research, and you said, a lot of it is backed up. So it's backing up what you're already doing, has anything actually questioned what you've done? So rather than it just as any quick, anything?

Julie Perren 13:46

Absolutely. And it's got to be the biases and heuristics. Because reading though, is it I don't think anyone can read those and think that you don't apply some of those without even meaning to. So that that's been a quite an eye opener, and quite some something that made me question what I do and how I do it. So, yeah, that that's been a real good line of research.

Lee Pooley 14:13

Okay. And biases, you know, biases within reason are absolutely fine, aren't they? Yes, these things. Yes. So, you know, a bit of a delving question. Then when you're coaching, what biases do you need to be conscious of your own biases,

Julie Perren 14:32

My own biases, I definitely stereotypes. Somebody turns up in front of me and I'm trying really hard to make not make a judgment about how they look whilst trying to take on board the things about how they look that could be important to me, like, what kit they're carrying, or what state their kits in or whether it's all brand spanking new never been used or whether it's a little bit tatty and could do with replacing. And whether it's that or whether it's No, I hate to say it, but I don't know whether it's some sort of cultural or social bias, which I'm trying really, really hard not to. But its some stuffs must be there in the back of your brain, you're unconsciously making a bias to some somebody turning up in front of you. So it's a difficult balance, isn't it, but I think being aware of it is, is the way to go. And by just asking the question, and letting that person talk, and then listening to what they say, and making the question very open as well, so that they can actually answer it. Without you're not you haven't led them down a path of what you want to hear from them, or you've, you've given them an open question. So they can speak. And then you can really work out what it is that they need from you or what you can offer them in the day. So definitely, I'm stereotypes, and then the familiarity of where I operate. Sometimes, that's who hasn't been called out by the beach, they thought it was going to be there to land because you know, it's there. And you know, you've used it before and you know, it's not been surfing and it's, there's been plenty of room and then you turn that on one day, because you've not really thought it through. Don't know that sort of beach is always good. And you go around, and it's not quite as good as it's been in the past that that kind of familiarity. And I think that's its very easy

to fall into that trap when you've when you're under a lot of pressure. Maybe it's with a big group or time pressure, or it's just a lot going on. So that that's definitely one to me. And I'm sure there are more I'm sure the remainder

Lee Pooley 16:49

Oh, well, I think yeah, Julia, I think what's really nice, and I'm sure everyone listening is your honesty and you know, of, you know, there is I mean, I'm sure, you may have read it, but there is a good book by Malcolm Gladwell on it's called Blink, and where we make we make quite quick judgments about things, things and people. And absolutely is, it's fine to have biases, but as long as you're aware of them, and you are you're putting in appropriate mechanisms, like you said, spending time with them understand what they want. So really nice for to, for you to have that, that honesty, in terms of biases, when you talk about familiarity of venues is the when you're when you're thinking of a coaching session, are you because you work on the sea? You have people in front of you, you and so what makes you decide to go to a location? Is it because you like the location? It provides everything? Or is it learned learner driven?

Julie Perren 18:04

Okay, well, I think the answer that I ought to give you is that it's learned refer, I think that's what we're looking for all because not necessarily driven, aren't we really. But it's sometimes there are practicalities involved in that aren't there in terms of parking access, where people are coming from, as well as what their needs are for, for the day. We're fortunate down here in South Devon, and having quite a lot of venues that gives us the opportunity to go in different directions, and will offer different things all going leading out of one place. And that's something that I like to use those why no, there's a lot of variation. So if I'm not sure about what we're going to do, but I've got a reasonable forecast, there are a couple of places that I would resort to or one or two more I know where there's always going to be a good landing, regardless of what the winds doing or what the SERPs doing. So one of the things I particularly like to have my groups, particularly the ones that are I've got a bit more time with where it's a six week session is that I will always ask the group to turn up with their, what they've discovered about the conditions for the day and ask them to come up with an option for a trip that we might do that day. So then we can talk through all those possibilities. And I might have some vague idea in my head, but I will be

led by what I hear as well. I mean, I know what the options are out there. But I think that is a really good idea to have a group discussion about that and involve everybody's ideas about would that have worked? Would that not work this this good? And then come back to that during the day. And perhaps at the end of the day when we have found out what it's really like and then we can discuss would that have been a good trip that might have been a better idea? No, we wouldn't have come across this and that. I think one area that I've found really seems to give people confidence on the sea is the knowledge ledger, what it will look like linking to what they've written down on a piece of paper the night before. I think that's quite a big leap for people. And I think that's one of the reasons why they feel when they lack confidence about going out, because they just can't make that link between what what's it going to look like when I get there is that can be really scary or not scary. So being able to experiment and discover those things for themselves, I think is really key. And before you even really do any paddling, that's a key issue.

Lee Pooley 20:31

Yeah. And I think, you know, go just going back to the venue, it is a balancing exercise isn't he can't always the reality is it can't always be learner driven when you are working in an environment that is quite hostile, and volatile. So there has to be a balance of, you know, what is? What is practical? I'm quite interested in in your in your you talked about a six week session, if you were doing a six week session, and you get them involved with the planning stage. Now. You talk about confidence, are you are you suggesting that your outcome, your outcome for that six week session is to build independence? Or?

Julie Perren 21:17

Definitely, absolutely, definitely. And certainly within that day, if we've got someone that said, Okay, well, I think his trips going to work? And I'll say, Okay, well, let's, if everyone's happy to do that, then shall we do that, then, and let that person have a chance at leading it as well. Because ultimately, you want those people to be going off by themselves. So there's no point in keeping it as a secret. They know, they need as much information as they can to be safe, and be out there. And in that's always been my philosophy, really, it's only now I've started reading about it and discovering that this is not a bad idea and giving people independence.

Lee Pooley 22:00

So what else would be on your checklist? And so if we, if you don't want to say that you've got a tick list, because you probably haven't got a tick list. But working towards independence is really important for you. Probably really helps with people within the club as well, I'd imagine flourish and start leaving their interests, which is a real healthy, club community environment. What else would be on your Tickler? So one is planning. Yeah, what else? What else would be on your ticket tickets for independence?

Julie Perren 22:33

I think we've got to get some safety schools in there. Got to know that they're safe out on the water. And by giving people the opportunity to try rescues out, try their kids out. Make sure they know what they're doing with a tow line. I've had people that turn up that have borrowed one that have never used one of anything. Well, that's what you're carrying all the time, then we need to make sure we use it today. So it's confidence in the kit competence a little stuff the boat bear in the paddle I've got I so much confidence comes from paddle skill. I think that's a that's definitely on my not really take most but things that I would like to make sure we've covered perhaps that. And yeah, I think that's probably I'm sure there are more themes in there.

Lee Pooley 23:30

I do. And would you think, and as a coach, you're you are an experienced? Coach? What? Where does technical expertise come in that? Would you say that's lower down the lower down the scale? Or is it higher up the scale? So technical expertise? So, you know, where would you Where would you gauge that within your, within your, your coaching in your delivery? So you're working towards a six week session, you talk about independence, you talk about safety and rescues, where there's technical expertise coming?

Julie Perren 24:04

Okay, well, I think we've got to have that some of that going on in the middle there as well. But I try not to the only thing I remember doing level one and level

two where we used to have the ideas structure and go okay, we're going to do turning strokes today. So here's your bow, rudder and here's just an order I try and include all these things but in a much more organic way. So we by creating a situation where we're going to need to use these things but not necessarily giving them tools to do it. So we will do some rock copying and let people do some rock hopping and then then we might gather together and go okay, what works for you going around there. What did you find out? She wants to try? Maybe try this or that. So I let it happen to some degree much more now than I ever used to. I feel like used to just give hand this this information out. This is what you need to do. But I now don't do that. I'm really aware that that's changed over the years.

Lee Pooley 25:09

So rather than rather than you doing quite a formed, established skill acquisition session, you're almost working in an ecological dynamic setting on you in where you're still using the environment for people to ask for what works for them. Totally,

Julie Perren 25:25

Totally, I just think that that gives a better outcome. And I think people enjoy that more as well. And you see it happening in front of you, you see people discovering something, and it may be that you can nudge it slightly or direct it somewhere in some way. But with still without giving them the final answer that they might be looking for.

Lee Pooley 25:48

As soon as you leave, just like come up, come with us that that approach ever come with any resistance that you've seen?

Julie Perren 25:57

And yes, there are people that that quite like to have something laid out in front of them. But if they come up to me and go, Okay, well, I've tried this and this doesn't work, then I'm quite happy to share with them what might work better, or it's just a way of trying to draw that out of them rather than giving it to them.

But if they really insist that they've that's the only way they can they can learn it, then certainly I'll give them something or something to set them off down that path, I suppose rather than the whole thing. And then set them off with that. And that that sort of answers the need. I think

Lee Pooley 26:38

That's lovely to hear. And as the as the chairperson for tautness Canoe Club, you know, this, this approach to eco ecological dynamics. Has that, do you see that working in the club as well? So maybe your sessions you're running? Is that now sort of? Is that how the club operates?

Julie Perren 27:01

Well, we've got quite a mixed bunch of coaches who all come from different backgrounds, some who've had more recent learning than others. So you know, that's part of the club environments, isn't it? You get that eclectic mix. So I would not necessarily say that it's happening everywhere. But that's not also not a bad thing. As well, I think as long as I can try and introduce it, where I, where I can, I'm, I mean, the other issue that you have with clubs is that you can't do new people. And now you know, can't, can you but they got six people, you get given six people, you've got an hour and a half do something with them. That restricts quite how organic you can be about a session, you can still you can still introduce it in there.

Lee Pooley 27:54

Yeah. Because it adds just another level of complexity, doesn't it? No, not knowing who's going to turn up on the evening? Yeah. And it will it? Will it be the same group as I had last week? Or will I have someone less or someone more? And, you know, that's, that's one of the things that I've always been really quite impressed with, with club coaches, being able to have that agility. I don't think everyone would be able to have that agility. I think that is something that club coaches really are good at. And, you know, is quite difficult, isn't it? So to actually plan too far in advance,

Julie Perren 28:33

It says, and I think it's much harder work. Using this more environmental approach, I think, because you are often juggling a number of people at a number of different stages and to keep people engaged and challenged and motivated. There are easier ways to do that. But they don't necessarily give such a good outcome.

Lee Pooley 28:57

Yeah, yeah. That's, that's, you know, it's really nice, because, actually, just through our conversation is we're just talking about your coaching philosophy, how you coach, how you approach it, you focus around the independence, which is really lovely to hear buildings, people's confidence. And actually, and actually, you're not, you're not specifically doing a skill session, you're actually allowing the environment to do a lot of the coaching. So going back to the going back to the bit that we talked about venue, venue selection is really important and isn't it?

Julie Perren 29:32

Oh, totally, totally. I think it's not only that, I knew it was the venue selection, and it's the conditions within that. That venue. Because if you choose something that's just a little bit too feisty too soon, then you're probably not going to get the outcome that you would like to get.

Lee Pooley 29:50

Yeah, because, you know, a lot of coaches that you know, I've worked with in the past is actually if the if the venues, the venues considered really carefully, then the coaching sort of takes care of itself?

Julie Perren 30:05

Yes, yeah, definitely. Definitely. I have one of those sessions recently where I've been waiting to take a group. And they happened to be a group of women to our local tide race, which is at start points. And they were a little bit apprehensive about this, because it has a bit of a reputation for being a bit scary. And I've been waiting on waiting, and I put it off and use different venues. Because every time I looked at the forecast of dominoes, it's just a bit too exciting, or there's nothing

there. That when we finally went there, it was just bang on perfect. And the day coached itself. It really did because it was he could easily make it progressive. It was within the it started off being well within their capabilities, and then we were able to move out into something a little bit more exciting. Yeah, and it was just the right venue on the right day with the right people. And it got the right results, I think as well. It was a really good day.

Lee Pooley 31:08

Yeah, no, that's, that's, that's really, really nice, isn't it when everything just falls in the right place? Yes, yes. Yes, absolutely. Lovely. And I think, you know, I know, on all honesty, you know, is, you know, not every session is like that is it's you know, not every session that we get right. Not every decision that we make is the right decision, but we have to go through a reflection process. So yeah, I think that's really nice to hear. And truly one we nearly come to the end of the end of the podcast and really appreciate your open openness and honesty around the questions that we've asked and we've explored. But I have got I have got a quite a selfish question to end on. So 2021 is looking very different for everyone, isn't it? Yeah, absolutely. You alluded to earlier that you know, more likely going to be doing trips within the UK. Where would you say your top your top three locations for paddling on the sea. And where would you encourage people to go and explore?

Julie Perren 32:31

Okay, well anyone that hasn't come to South Devon, I've got to I've got to start with that haven't I because on my doorstep here which is I would call my doorstep but somewhere between Exeter and Plymouth if you like the lot the coastline along here is surprisingly varied and it still has many little coves and beaches where there are no people and you can only land by kayak definitely worth exploring. Then if you go further west then you've got Cornwall which well I mean what doesn't go and will have to offer I think the Cornwall you have to you just have to be a little bit careful about the forecast because it can get pretty rough especially down the end around the headlands but the beautiful places in Cornwall. I was able this last year to do a mini expedition down along the north coast which I haven't done before. And that is just stunning. It is just breath-taking. And I suppose I'm just going to have to mention Anglesey on site because for somebody that likes a few waves and some conditions in a tide race then

really Anglesey has just got the tidal flow and again, stunning location. Totally different, totally different sets of tidal circumstances and then great place to go.

Lee Pooley 33:57

Okay, well, good, good recommendations there. Certainly a fan for South Devon and Cornwall and also Anglesey. So thanks for those recommendations. And last thing before we wrap it up. You talked about doing your performance coach and you're into listening to podcasts and research, what you what you investigating at the moment, what would you like to share with the listeners what you're investigating at the moment.

Julie Perren 34:30

I've been particularly taken with podcasts on languages, the language of coaching. I've been listening to Nick Winckelmann. And that makes so much sense to me. And that's definitely an area that I feel that I have something that I use anyway. But the more I read about it, the more I think well now I know why I use it and Now I know a lot more about it as well, and why it's such a good thing to know about. So your language, I think the moment

Lee Pooley 35:10

Well, Julie, thanks very much for your time today, very much appreciated. Thanks, everyone for listening and for more podcasts, please visit the British goon awarding body website and click onto the podcasts function and then you'll be able to find all of the podcasts recorded to date. So thanks very much and take care.