

Lee Pooley 00:00:14

Hi and welcome to British Canoeing Awarding Body Coaching Podcast. My name's Lee Pooley and I'm the Director of Coaching and Qualifications. And today what we're doing is this is part two, part two of focusing on coach burnout. And I'm absolutely delighted that Ben Woodruff is enabled to be able to get some time out of his new work. I mean, Ben used to work for British Canoeing as a digital learning developer and it's great to have you on the podcast again Ben

Ben Woodruff 00:00:46

Thank you, Lee. It's really strange being on the other side. Normally it was sort of myself in your shoes and then editing it, putting it together and disseminating it. So yeah, so it's nice to be back. Thank you for having me back. And it's been nice having a bit of a catch up about British Canoeing and seeing how that's developed since I left last year.

Lee Pooley 00:01:07

Yeah. So it was last year. How long ago was it? Is 12 months?

Ben Woodruff 00:01:11

Oh wow. Actually, it's probably longer now, isn't it? It's about a year and a half. It was November 21, so just below a year and a half now.

Lee Pooley 00:01:20

Okay. So, so 18 months down the line, what's new for you Ben? What are you doing and what's new in your life?

Ben Woodruff 00:01:30

What's new? So I'm currently working at the University of East Anglia, sort of split roles, so I'm an associate tutor on the PE, Sport, Health and Education course, and that is sort of lecturing in academic and professional practice, the psychology of education and sport. I've done a little bit of outdoor adventure activities, so we went canoeing last year, which was amazing dragging that sort of experience across.

And I also work with UEA Sport, so the university sporting organisation where there's 56 sports clubs, we look after. I look after 19. Unfortunately, kayaking isn't one of my clubs, my colleague's club, but they get up to all sorts, all over the place, actually quite, quite entertainingly they lost a boat in Scotland recently and we received a call last week saying that someone found it in their back garden. It looks we've got the boat, but that's sort of a bit about me at the minute.

Lee Pooley 00:02:27

Yeah, and you know, sounds like a busy time. You know, you moved from British Canoeing to the university, started tutoring there and looking after clubs, 19 of the clubs and at the same time continued your research and completed an MSC. Because you know when we had we talk about part one and part two, part one was your degree, your paper around coach burnout.

And if listeners haven't listened to that yet. I would I would recommend that they have a look at that particular one because one of the things that I thought was really, really sort of impactful on our conversations around your previous paper Ben was how, how open you were about its your personal experiences, your personal wrestles that you had with coach burnout, etc..

So obviously it's a very close thing that you have in terms of, you know, you're very passionate about it. So this is this a continuation, was the MSC was a continuation of your of your study? And could you give some background and methodology around what the MSC was about?

Ben Woodruff 00:03:47

Yeah, of course. So with the, the research, the study I was offered an opportunity while I was still at British Canoeing, as you know Lee, to come and study Master research at the University of East Anglia, sort of on a half funded scholarship. And it wasn't, it wasn't one I could turn down because it was an opportunity for me to expand on my research.

The reason I wanted to complete this course at the university was because it gave me a lot of scope to create a research project of my own. It wasn't one that was pinholed into certain ways. And as you've alluded to, I'm really passionate about coach burnout researching that further. I want to know more about it and to then be able to effect policy and practice on later in my potential academic career.

So that was sort of the course I chose in terms of taking that study because it allowed me to create a research project of my own that led on really well from undergrad. So my undergrad was looking at burnout, as you said there's already a podcast on it, so I won't go into it. It was looking at different factors that might affect burnout.

For this study what I did was I looked at that paper and I worked out what the most prominent factor that affected burnout was and chose to explore in further detail in this paper. So in terms of this this research, we focused on entrapment and its relationship with burnout. So entrapment is essentially how trapped the coach feels in the situation.

For whatever reason, it might be financial and it might be they feel they owe a debt of gratitude to the participants or the people they work for it might be that they think that that's the only thing they can do and they can't do anything else, among other things. And they feel trapped in that situation because of that.

So I wanted to explore that more in relation to burnout. And so as you as you also mentioned for me it's a personal passion. When I was 18, I burnt out as a coach. I was doing quite a lot, sort of 70 hour weeks between college and voluntary coaching and paid coaching, which at 18 probably wasn't ideal. I burnt out because of it and sort of have seen the repercussions and potentially still see the repercussions today.

And it's something I'm really cautious about now. And as you said, very open about. I'm happy to have conversations about in terms of coach burnout, hence why I wanted to complete this research now and I want to further it even still to help people not experience what I did. In terms of the background behind it, we had 238 participants, a mix of coaches from different sports, different levels, some were recreational, some were professional.

We had a male female split. It was a really big range of coaches almost to understand the coaching community as a whole before looking into the different subgroups potentially later on in my academic career. The study was quantitative so it was all data based. I collected data from five different pre tested questionnaires that had been used in previous studies, so I knew that they were valid and reliable.

We collected I collected the data and then analysed it on a programme called SPSS using different analysis methods and used that to almost infer conclusions from it. So that's sort of a background of the study, if you like.

Lee Pooley 00:07:02

So, a significant sample size there and, and new research, new findings. So what are the new findings from, from this particular research that you undertook?

Ben Woodruff 00:07:17

Amazing. Yeah. So in order to sort of understand that, I'll just explain how burnout is conceptualized in, in the paper and almost throughout research. So burnout as a phenomenon is split into three different dimensions. You have depersonalisation where you start to feel less of the person you are and potentially less personable to the people around you. You almost feel like you're floating in your own space and you have reduced personal accomplishment where you feel that you're not good enough, you're not doing enough, which is an element of burnout and emotional exhaustion where we have anxiety and depression and just emotionally exhausted the whole time have no headspace to think and you get home, you slump on the sofa and that's it.

That's sort of the three different dimensions. So in terms of what was found, potential new findings, the whole premise of the study was to examine entrapment in relation to each of these three dynamics to see which it might affect more and see what symptoms coaches may have to look for more if they were to burnout.

So the first one we explored or I explored was emotional exhaustion. It was found to account for 36% of the variance, meaning that entrapment was a likely effect of emotional exhaustion. Because of this, coaches might have felt like they had no fight left to give, and that was sort of the main precursor for this. So if coaches felt like they had no fight left to give, were starting to have depressive thoughts, start to have random flutters of anxiety for no reason, it was likely being caused 36% by entrapment, leading to that level of burnout.

The next thing we or I, keep saying we. That I focused on was reduced personal accomplishment. Now, this accounted for essentially 20% of the variance in the link between entrapment and burnout through this strand this dimension. And again, when attempting to understand it, when coaches start having a lack of self-belief, feeling like they're not good enough, like they're not good enough

for their family, for the organisation, for the participants that sort of linked to the 20% spread of this link to burnout.

So already we've got about 56% between these two dimensions linking entrapment to burnout across these dimensions. And then the last one I focused on was depersonalization, that feeling of almost out of body not being the person that used to not or being personable among other people. And that account for 26 and a half percent of variance. So overall, we've got about 70 80% variance in burnout that is found by entrapment. #

Now, that's not exclusive to 100%. Obviously, there's different percentages with different factors that may affect. But interestingly, we can see that each of the different dimensions are impacted by entrapment on a quite significant level. All of them are over 20% and meaning that all of them are massively impacted by entrapment in some way.

So feeling trapped in a situation will very likely lead to a coach being burnt out, and that is the main takeaway that we've had or that I've had and the different elements around that is what will now help us as practitioners, as providers, as coaches ourselves recognise burnout in ourselves or others, those that we deploy, those that we look after and are responsible for that helps us work out potentially what element of entrapment is causing that burnout and allows us to pinpoint that and isolate it and then mitigate against that to potentially reduce their risk of burnout.

And that's sort of the overall aim of this, is to is to pinpoint the different elements of which is most likely a coach is burning out based on their situation, with the idea being that with further development a coach will be able to take an entrapment questionnaire, will be able to split that answers into the different three burn out categories and work out why they're burning out and work out what the cause is, because essentially they might not know, obviously, as deployers we might see, for example, depersonalization.

Someone become robotic in terms of their persona, maybe different behaviour in terms of constructive criticism, not being able to take it anymore. But they might not be able to see that and helping them recognise that is the important challenge of them being able to then mitigate against burnout themselves. It's easy for someone else to say it, but they need to actually understand it themselves.

And the whole point of this research is to allow them to understand what element of their coaching life, career or potentially personal life is impacting their burnout. And this specific research is entrapment based.

Lee Pooley 00:12:18

And in terms of the new findings, and before we start to move into the practicalities in your own experiences, you know, when you were 18 are you able to relate to this entrapment.

Ben Woodruff 00:12:33

Yeah, absolutely. And that was really interesting for me when I was writing it up, because there were there were times where I was sat there and things just clicked into place in my head about what I was experiencing. So depersonalization categorised quite predominantly by a robotic persona not

being able to take constructive criticism that that sort element of burnout was something that I had never considered myself.

But actually reflecting back on it, several people commented on my personality being different over the course of a few months and actually speaking to them after the fact they said it was almost robotic in terms of you couldn't get much out of me and if you were to give constructive criticism, I wouldn't be able to take it in. And that's something I used to pride myself on, was being able to take on board any development points and implement them.

I wasn't having any of it at that stage and that really clicked into place and then I went back down the chain further and realised that actually I did feel entrapped in that situation. I felt entrapped because I was 18, earning £15 an hour coaching and I thought I couldn't give that up. At 18. I thought that that was almost the be all and end all in terms of earning financially.

And I felt that I then couldn't let down my employers, the people who deployed me to different places. I felt like I couldn't say no to sessions and would keep saying yes. And I also then grew an affinity to the participants in my sessions, and I didn't wanna let them down by stopping and having someone else come in.

But again, looking back from this, then looking at the fact that I had a robotic persona that I potentially wasn't as personable with them as I could have done, and I essentially changed as a person from when I first started coaching them. I realized that actually me staying would have then potentially impacted them and hurt them and myself getting help for the burnout and giving myself time to rest and essentially recuperate was the best thing for them.

I didn't realize until after the fact until I did this, which was sort of really interesting. I say a lot of coaches don't understand the signs of burnout while they're happening. They think it's just part of life or something that's going on and obviously it builds in from personal life for a lot of coaches as well. Yeah, but yeah, really important to sort of recognize those signs that I've potentially mentioned so far.

Lee Pooley 00:14:49

Can we dig into that a little bit more Ben? Because I think just to properly give clarity and precision on it too, is what do you see as the significance? What's significant for coaches to be aware of what the telltale signs of burnout for the coach, not other people looking in, but as coaches, as we all coaches, what would you say the telltale signs, that burnout is either approaching or here?

Ben Woodruff 00:15:19

Yeah. Yeah. Amazing. Yeah, really good question. So in terms of understanding the telltale signs, I won't split this into the the three categories because if you're a coach, you don't need to understand the three categories necessarily. That's more for deploys, employers and policy makers to understand the people who are HR departments or wellbeing departments to understand in terms of how they intervene most effectively, because obviously different types of burnout and different focuses for a HR department need different types of intervention.

But as a coach, you just need a fundamental understanding of what might be wrong. So you can then go to your GP or HR or wellbeing practitioner at work or occupational therapist as such and have

those discussions. So the first symptoms and then signs that people will start to realize as a coach is just constant exhaustion, being exhausted all the time above a state you've ever been able to deal with.

Not sleeping as well is a really big one popping up and then a change in appetite. So when I burnt out over two months, I've put on 2 stone, hadn't realized myself obviously people around me were like flippin eck that's a big change. But I hadn't realised because I was seeing myself every day and I was so head in the clouds that you don't realize that so that weight changes it's a really big one to do.

Having sort of depressive thoughts or moments of anxiety where your heart rate starts to go fast for no reason, or you start to sweat profusely for no reason. It's another sign of burnout. That was something that sort of hit me and eventually led me to the GP when I was 18.

Before understanding all of this that was the predominant factor for me was the the heart rate and sweats that that came with anxiety, that I didn't know what caused that anxiety and predominately with burn out. We found that people don't know what causes the anxiety, it is coaching related, but they don't know the exact pinpoint. It just seemed like something that's happening.

And then that robotic persona we talked about, if people are constantly asking you if you're alright, you don't seem yourself, if you can't take criticism, if you're not the same with people as how you used to be, if you're potentially not enjoying time out with your mates as much as you used to be. That's one of the big telltale signs and that's a really broad spectrum because it also then includes feeling like you're not good enough anymore, feeling like you can't achieve what you want to achieve with the potential group your coaching or in that line of work anymore.

It's a really wide range of symptoms and telltale signs to look out for, but it's a really wide subject. Hence it's split into three normally. But my message to coaches I implore them if they are experiencing any of those things, to either go to their GP or talk to an occupational therapist at work HR department or line manager, because I think the taboo around these things is starting to disappear really well.

People are a lot more open to these conversations than they used to be. There are a lot more of these conversations than when I was 18, just five years ago, and I've definitely found that. So I absolutely implore people, especially looking at the target demographic of sort of 35 to 55 year old male coaches to to really if they're experiencing those things, have a discussion.

It's not necessarily to reach out for help. But it's have a discussion as to how you can then mitigate against these factors and have longevity in your coaching.

Lee Pooley 00:18:43

Yeah, really good advice there about, you know, if people are struggling or or seeing that they've got particular telltale signs of burnout or heading towards burnout is to seek to seek help. Isn't it rather than trying to, you know, sweep it under the carpet and hopefully it will go away because these things have got a habit of not ever going away. In the in your research and your experience, how could we as coaches look beforehand to mitigate coach burnout?

What could we do to to not go down that particular route? Have you got any suggestions or advice for coaches? New coaches. Coaches who are in the system already. What could they do to to mitigate burnout?

Ben Woodruff 00:19:34

Yeah, there's definitely, definitely some things that I've learned and sort of have to take forward. I think are really effective. So the first one is not being afraid to say no. There's a big culture in terms of if you want to progress and get up the ladder or become a better coach, you have to say yes to everything. Now, that is not an exclusive, yes to everything.

That should be a say yes to every opportunity that is relevant and adds value to you. If an opportunity doesn't add value to you as a coach, as a person, then feel free to say no to it because that will help your mental wellbeing and your burn out. At the end of the day, if you are to burn out as a coach, you lose that longevity of coaching and it potentially sets you back more than saying no to an opportunity.

I'm not saying say no to every opportunity, not at all, because you can't progress at that stage, but it's more looking at being strategic around the opportunities that you do take in terms of the ones that are better for your wellbeing. That's often more of a personal experience in terms of the research the research showed. So another element of the research when looking at social support and how that could potentially moderate a relationship between burnout and entrapment, we didn't find a moderating relationship or I didn't find a moderating relationship, and I did find that it correlated quite positively in terms of it had a positive effect on burnout being reduced, by having a stronger social support network.

So as a coach making time to see your family, your mates, potentially if you've drifted away from your mates getting back in contact with them and having that social support network, because that mitigates against burnout really well, having those people there that you don't even have to talk to about it, but that are there to support you and just the actual process of feeling supported helps.

You don't have to be supported every minute, but feeling supported helps you feel like you're not alone in that situation. And the research really quite significantly indicated towards having a good social support network obviously it's quite tricky because if you've got a stressful home life and a stressful coaching job that almost fast tracks your burnout, you need something where you have a social outlet.

Be that seeing your mates, be that taking part in the sport yourself, but not as a lead, actually as just enjoying it and participating and going on trips to actually enjoy the sport and remember why you fell in love with it. I think a lot of coaches do get lost and lose their way and get so blinded by becoming the best coach possible. That they almost forget why they took up that in the end and having a social network will massively help mitigate against burnout because it's also people that can potentially realize the early stages of and point out to you.

Lee Pooley 00:22:31

Yeah, over the years, as you know, I've talked to a lot of coaches and it's interesting that, you know, there's quite a lot of people that have taken time out and actually stopped coaching and gone and actually said, I'm going back to the sport to just to enjoy it and and to really reignite their enthusiasm with that particular sport throughout throughout our conversation, you have you have alluded to employers and, you know, these are my words, and having a responsibility.

So, you know, head coaches, performance directors, you know, employers, club committees are all deployers in themselves. And as I said, they feel like they have a responsibility. What should employers or deployers be doing? And what are the pitfalls?

Ben Woodruff 00:23:27

Really, really good question. Obviously the the ultimate aim of any piece of research is to add value to the field in which it's it's done in. And the value I feel I want to be adding through further research, through this and through potentially making more contacts within industry is to have organizations, NGBs, deployers, employers, club committees. As you've all alluded to realise that burnout is part of that responsibility to the people they are deploying.

As as you've said, Lee and I know that's something that you feel very strongly on as well from the times that we worked together, in terms of what employers, deployers and NGBs, committees can do to facilitate these things. And these are also recommendations that were at the end of the research was to ensure that there is a social support network for employees to the stage where potentially they're encouraged to to socialise during a lunch break. Taking a standard coaching group say if there is a lunch while coaching, a lot of the time you're not actually having a break.

You're still thinking about the session you're thinking about and the participants. You're dealing with bits that need to be dealt with. Actually having the ability to encourage those people. So if you've got group leaders to take in turns to go off together and get some lunch, have a chat and actually build those personal relationships with each other, that that massively helps having that social support network, within that work within that work environment, that coach environment, even at the grassroots club level, going to the pub after a session together can really help build that support network, but not making people feel they have to go to the pub after, making people want to go.

Because if they feel they have to do that, it adds to the burnout as it becomes another coaching task, whereas if they want to go and have a drink and a chat and not chat about the session at all, and that's then a really good way of building a social network that they have that potentially is unproblematic to them. And as I said, not talking about coaching at all, actually talking about what they've been doing, the football that's been on the telly, the rugby that's been on the telly, the cricket that's been on the telly and taken themselves out of that sort of paddle sport chat for a brief time.

Another way is to adjust coach workload and you know, that's not always possible. And if there is a coach that seems to be burning out then potentially need to adjust that coach's workload and it's then a really tricky balance because you don't want to overload another coach and burn them out. And so it's about putting that consideration into policy in terms of a minimum amount of coaches whereby burnout can be covered if someone is about to burn out because you're a lot better to cover someone who's preburn out than someone who has burned out.

You're looking at a few weeks instead of a few months from a deployer's sort of almost operational point of view and mitigating it before it becomes a big issue is is technically the best way of dealing with it and also monitoring coach behaviour, actually looking out for them. That robotic persona I discussed earlier, just always considering their behaviour.

And I'm not saying watch them like Big Brother and always put an arm around them and then always trying to talk because that is also counterproductive. But monitor their behaviour and just see if you can tell any changes and almost foster that culture of openness within your organisation, within your

club. No, no. As I've said, like that is growing massively now, but trying to reach everyone within your club or organisation or centre, that there is that open culture and lastly is to write that into policy and practice, into your club constitution. Is to have coaching organisations and clubs write a consideration of entrapment and burnout into their training policy to safeguard coaches working for them.

And that that for me is sort of the best way deployers can do it. For me personally. I'm going to look at doing a longitudinal study to see how burnout can change in its multi-dimensional nature across the season to give deployers a better understanding of the crunch points throughout the year they might need to be careful of and mitigate against and put extra support because that that is something that could be a really key consideration.

And I'm also going to look at a further study into the possibility of generating a model for predicting burnout based on entrapment, when it might occur. In terms of a timescale based on that longitudinal study. As part of the study I've just done, we had I had a 79% success rate of predicting burn out based on their entrapment rate.

So if we can if I can get up to 95% based on different models and sort of using a longitudinal study, then we potentially have a tool where developers sorry deployers actually have a way of inputting the current entrapments score for a coach and using that to predict when they're going to burn out and how to mitigate against that, which would be immensely powerful in terms of in terms of the setting.

So that's sort of where I want to be in terms of deployers and helping them sort of on top of what they can be doing already.

Lee Pooley 00:28:45

Yeah. And I think in listening to you Ben is it's quite common, isn't it, that if you are good you get more, you get more placed on you and you can you see it happen in every organisation not just coaching that if you are good at your job you tend to get given more. And this is the bit that we all need to be really conscious of when we are responsible for others.

That is easy to overload and that's where you need to actually strike while the iron's hot and not actually get to that point of actually giving people more than they should be doing.

Ben Woodruff 00:29:24

Actually an interesting one for you Lee, potentially spinning it back round on you. Doesn't normally happen in the podcast but the question to you as as the host obviously loads of years experience of coaching and if you were to still sort of be coaching at that frequent level, what would you do to mitigate your own burnout as a person? Having sort of listened to this and other experiences?

Lee Pooley 00:29:50

It's a really good question. I wasn't expecting it at all Ben. I cycle a lot and one of the things that, I really enjoy my cycling to the extent I do, bore people with it, and I always said I would never make it my job, cycling is for me. So I always try to make room for at least three cycles a week that I get the

space of at least 2 to 3 hours on the bike each time to give me headspace, to enjoy something different, to exercise.

I tend to like hills. There's probably something wrong with me. So that that's that's the escape that I have. But I still have that escape now. And although I'm not coaching, I'm on the coalface as much as I used to be. I still think that helps me within this role as well, because it just gives me that separation rather than actually doing that or thinking about work all the time.

So yeah, that's. Yeah, I wasn't expecting that. Ben Thank you. But as I said at the beginning, I know you're busy. I really appreciate your time and I do hope that the listeners have really enjoyed the part two, of actually looking at this such a significant and important area such as coach burnout. A lot of times we do neglect coaches.

A lot of our focus is around the athletes or the participants, and the coaches', welfare wellbeing seems to be neglected. Not purposely, it just gets neglected. So I think this is really prominent and it sort of hits a few areas that I'm involved with and I think, you know, a lot of other directors of coaching, etc. are already aware of as well.

So yeah, really appreciate your time, Ben. For everyone that's listening the research, you know, Ben's extremely kind and allowed us to put his research on to the digital library so the British Canoeing Awarding Body Digital library that can be found. Yeah. Thanks again, Ben and really appreciate your time. You take care.

Ben Woodruff 00:32:06

Thank you very much for having me.