

Good Coach, Bad Coach

Mark Eaton

Much has been said and written about good coaching. This primer is therefore intended not as new information but rather as a collection of some elementary wisdom from that body of knowledge in a nutshell, to serve as a reminder and an opportunity for personal reflection on how we think about coaching and behave as coaches and trainers.

This document was originally designed as primer on behavior patterns for coaches of adolescents, where the import of the coach's role as custodian of the athlete's whole person is particularly significant, but it applies just as well to coaches and trainers of all levels of athletes and teams.

Athletes will give, and grow, beyond imagination under the influence of someone who dares to be a Good Coach.



Mark Eaton has a broad leadership history in both nonprofit and business venues. These include management at a major corporation, several successful nonprofit and business start-ups, and being president of a regional social agency that assists agencies nationwide with improving their leadership effectiveness. Over the years, he has been involved in baseball, wrestling, judo, mixed alpine climbing, skiing, triathlons, and mountain rescue and has coached a number of kids' and teens' sporting teams. He has been CrossFitting in a garage gym for almost a year now and gets more into it, and more out of it, every day. He can be reached at mark60180@comcast.net.

Good Coaching Behavior

Loves the game
Cares about athletes
Calls athletes to nobility
Focuses on excellence in fundamentals
Uses intensity to build and encourage
Speaks well of athletes to others
Shakes hands with the athletes
Encourages progress
Uses the coach position constructively
Is good at support
Talks to athletes directly
Says "We'll work on that"
Honors athletes' past coaches
Supports the team
With wins, boldly esteems the athletes
With losses, brutally examines self
Expects 100 percent from athletes
Gives 100 percent of self
Gives consistent message to athletes
Shows loyalty to athletes
Is strong in character
Invites feedback from athletes
Respects parents/family
Earns respect
Seeks to understand the athletes
"Owns" the results of his/her coaching
Apologies and forgives
Cultivates confidence
Embraces humility
Is teachable and open-minded
Seeks help and input
Shares information
Single faced and forthright
Emotionally and intellectually honest
Protects athletes' weaknesses
Admits personal weaknesses
Inspires hope
Brings joy to the game
Releases athletes
Channels passions
Finds the best in every athlete
Teaches and instructs
Works for athletes
Seeks acclaim for athletes

Bad Coaching Behavior

Loves to win
Cares about wins and losses
Calls athletes stupid
Develops the showy before the solid
Uses intensity to degrade and shame
Speaks poorly of athletes to others
Shakes head at the athletes
Encourages favorites
Uses the coach position to tear down
Is good at sarcasm
Talks about athletes behind their backs
Says "What was that?!"
Mocks athletes past coaches
Supports own ego
With wins, boldly esteems self
With losses, brutally examines athletes
Expects applause from athletes
Talks about how much he/she gives
Gives erratic message to athletes
Shows disgust with athletes
Boasts of his/her strength of character
Instills fear in athletes
Disregards parents/family
Expects or demands respect
Seeks to undermine the athletes
Blames results on athletes/staff/circumstances
Holds personal grudges, seeks vindication
Crushes confidence
Parades arrogance
Knows it all
Seeks to block and isolate
Withholds information
Two or three faced and oblique
Emotionally and intellectually dishonest
Exposes athletes' weakness to others
Denies personal weaknesses
Inspires hopelessness
Robs the game of joy
Stifles athletes
Chokes passions
Seeks only the best athletes
Yells and shames
Expects athletes to work for him/her
Seeks acclaim for self

Final note: A Good Coach reads this and reflects on his or her style and motivations. A Bad Coach reads this and responds with contempt and cynicism. Gut check time.