

Club support for the Coach Developer Program

The coach developer (CD) is a different approach to supporting coaches. It will be new to most if not all coaches, as well as participants, parents, volunteers and club administrators.

Any new approach will bring out a range of reactions:

- > **Coaches:** Coaches may feel threatened or offended – they may feel that a new and different kind of support implies that they aren't doing a good job. Or they may embrace it as a way of helping improve their coaching.
- > **Participants:** The presence of a CD at a training session might be viewed as the club believing that the coach needs help, therefore diminishing the credibility of the coach in their eyes. Or they may see it as someone there to help out and view it positively.
- > **Parents:** As with participants, the presence of a CD might reduce the credibility of the coach. Or they might view it positively as the club trying to raise coaching standards.
- > **Volunteers and club administrators:** Most clubs have a mix of new and longer-term people involved in running the club, many of whom would be former (or current) participants and/or coaches and know a great deal about the sport. Some of these people may believe that a new approach is not needed. Others may recognise that times have changed and new things need to be tried.

With such a range of likely reactions from across the club, there is potential for confusion and disagreement. The solution is to fully understand the concepts and practice of the CD program and promote this widely through the club.

Why do we need a coach developer?

If your club is like many others in Australia, you probably have at least some of the following issues:

- > trouble finding enough coaches each season
- > coaches don't last long enough, turnover is high
- > there are too few new coaches coming through to higher levels
- > it's hard to get people to do coaching courses

- > at the junior level, a lot of coaches are well meaning parents who try to do their best but may not have the knowledge or experience
- > coaches tend to use techniques from when they were playing, and today's children don't necessarily respond well to that approach.

These issues are not new, but changes in society mean that they are becoming more and more of a challenge. To meet that challenge requires new approaches. We also know more about how adults learn than we ever have – and therefore how they become better coaches.

A mix of approaches is important. 'Traditional' training for coaches, like accreditation, along with newer methods like online courses are valuable. But research tells us that the best results are likely to come from 'experiential' learning, i.e. on the job. Coaches will generally get better at their jobs as time goes by as they learn for themselves by trial and error what works and what doesn't. But they will improve more and improve faster with some support. This is where the CD can help.

The CD will work to improve the quality of coaches in your club and improve coach retention. Coaches who are more confident of their abilities, receive more support and feel a part of something larger will generally be happier in their role, get more satisfaction out of it and are more likely to come back again the following season.

What is a coach developer and what do they do?

The role of the CD is a combination of 'training the trainer' and mentoring, with a focus on supporting the coach on the job.

The role is to provide ongoing support, advice and encouragement to the coach. There will be some simple reporting, but the key focus is hands on helping the coach with the art of coaching.

It does require a person with a certain set of skills. Supporting coaches will naturally look different for coaches of varying experience and knowledge, so the CD has to be flexible. Appendix 1 is a general guide to what makes a good CD.

Getting the message to the club community

The CD will need the support of the club community. To get that support, they will need to understand why the CD program is being introduced and what the CD does. Appendix 2 has a suggested set of 'key messages' you might use.

Leaders of the club will need to have a solid understanding, as they will drive the program and answer questions. 'Leaders' in this context means the board or committee, as well as staff, key volunteers, and particularly those people leading coaching, including senior coaches. This is probably best done in an information/discussion session. Ideally this would be facilitated by a representative from the state or regional body promoting the program.

When this achieved, the rest of the club community has to get on board. Use existing communication tools such as newsletters, social media, email etc. Club functions are also a great opportunity to promote the program – social functions, coach meetings and so on. Appendix 2 has some suggested content that you might use and adapt to your situation. This role should be allocated to someone. This might be the CD coordinator (see below) or some other dedicated person.

A personal touch is also important. When the CD starts, have someone with some coaching credibility within the club available to talk to parents and volunteers, answer questions and generally support and promote the role. It would be a good idea to do this periodically through the season; it sends a message to parents and volunteers that the club is backing the CD and the full and visible support of a respected figure helps motivate the CD and the coach.

Direct support: the coach developer coordinator

The CD program will require oversight from a person in the club leadership group. This might be a board/committee member or the person responsible for coaching (if not on the committee).

Their role will be to:

- > organise or help to organise CD induction and review sessions
- > facilitate program evaluation
- > provide periodic updates to the board/committee and the relevant state/regional representative
- > be the contact for 'go-to' support as the CD requires
- > maintain standards – ensuring that the CD wears any gear provided, attends sessions as required, etc.

This person, perhaps called the CD Coordinator, might also have responsibility for promotion of the program both inside and outside of the club community (see below) and managing reward / recognition (see below).

Getting support from the wider community

Some external publicity helps generate support inside the club. There may be local media interest in a new program, linked to the state and national association and backed by the state department of sport and recreation and the Australian Sports Commission.

If there is a recognisable personality available – an Olympian, a celebrity who plays etc – then they might agree to be the public face of the program for media purposes if they are well briefed.



Reward and recognition

Everyone who contributes to your club deserves some kind of reward or recognition and the CD is no exception. This will take different forms depending on resources available, ranging from simple and no cost recognition in newsletters, at presentation nights and so on, to memberships, clothing, fee reductions etc. Some suggestions are at Appendix 3.

Building a legacy

If the program is a success, you will want to keep it going. The first step is to complete evaluations of the program and discuss with your state organisation contact. There may be some changes to be made that will improve the program.

Once you make any necessary changes, you should publish a new coaching pathway/structure document showing the place of the CD within the club and communicate it widely.

You should also promote the positives as widely as possible, to encourage more people to get involved. Use all your existing communications channels - website, newsletters, social media, email etc.

Appendix 1: What makes a good coach developer?

The coach developer (CD) has a vital, threefold role in any sport. A good CD will:

- > help coaches deliver sport in such a way that participants enjoy their sport more and get more out of their experience, leading to increased retention and recruitment
- > help coaches feel more comfortable and confident in their jobs, so that they too enjoy the experience more and are more likely to stay in the sport
- > have a positive effect on the 'culture' of the club, making the sporting environment more welcoming and enjoyable.

An effective CD will have appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes. Knowledge may include their command of technical coaching matters and the coaching process and understanding people and their motivations. Skills might include honesty, empathy, planning, goal setting, people and process management, and the ability to communicate to groups as well as one-on-one. Attitudes relate to their philosophy on coaching and their attitudes about the club or association they work in.

Critical qualities of a good CD are the 'soft skills':

- > cares about people's growth and development
- > able to create a positive culture and environment for learning
- > good communication and feedback skills
- > ability to build rapport and work with others including those who are hard to engage

- > trustworthy and able to maintain confidence
- > patience
- > can provide honest feedback – both positive and constructive
- > able to challenge, as well as guide coaches
- > respected and respectful
- > provides support and encouragement
- > can focus on the coaching process, not just on participant performance or winning
- > able to prevent or defuse conflict.

Some sports have established criteria for selecting CDs, while others are more flexible. In general, the following factors should be considered:

- > good communication and people skills
- > a willingness to be involved
- > experience and technical knowledge of the sport
- > an understanding of their role and the roles of coaches in helping participants move through the sport's pathways
- > integrity and willingness to model the values of the organisation
- > credibility within the club, based on coaching experience and qualifications
- > the ability to commit sufficient time
- > are readily accessible to the coaches they work with.

Appendix 2: Key messages

Why are we doing this?

- > The club places high value on all its coaches; they do a fabulous job.
- > We recognise that people give up their time to coach and we want to help them in any way we can.
- > We are always looking at new ways to support our coaches.

Where has the coach developer program come from?

- > The Australian Sport Commission (ASC) has developed and tested the coach developer (CD) program.
- > It is being rolled out across the country in a range of sports.
- > We are lucky to be one of the first sports to be involved.

How did our club get involved?

- > The ASC has worked with *<insert national sport organisation>* and *<insert state sporting organisation>* to develop a CD pilot specific to *<insert sport name>*
- > Our club has been identified as having the capacity and structure required to support a successful program.
- > Joining the program is a big tick for our club.

What is a coach developer and what do they do?

- > The CD is an experienced coach who will provide 'hands on' support, advice and encouragement to the coach on the job.
- > The CD is not there to coach the participants direct, rather to support the coaches.
- > The CD is not there to assess the coach in any way.
- > Coaches will benefit from the tips and knowledge the CD will be able to provide and therefore so will our participants.
- > The CD will observe sessions at different times during the season, not necessarily all sessions.
- > The CD and coach will likely discuss before and after a session and may also speak briefly at times during a session
- > The CD may also be available to speak to parents about the program
- > You probably won't see it, but outside of sessions, the CD will also be available to the coach for support and advice.

Appendix 3: Reward/recognition for the coach developer

There are many reasons why people become a coach developer (CD). Since one of the key criteria is knowledge and experience in the sport, it is most likely that CDs feel they can contribute something to coaches and therefore the participants. They probably want to 'give something back' to the sport that has been a significant part of their life. No doubt they enjoy the engagement with coaches and players, seeing people improve and love the sport and seeing it grow. Enjoyment also means that they just like being around the club, helping and being seen to help, and have a sense of pride in what they do.

Regardless of their motivations and whether they are paid or volunteer, all CDs deserve some form of reward or recognition.

There is a huge range of things that can be done. What your club does will depend on the culture of the club, the extent of the roles of the CDs and what resources are available. Below are some ideas.

Low or no-cost recognition

Letters

- › People like to be formally welcomed and thanked.
- › Send an initial note to your CDs welcoming them and thanking them for being involved. This letter should reiterate the importance of the job and how much their contribution will be valued. This might be in the form of a cover letter for other information you are providing, such as schedules and job descriptions.
- › It is also a good idea to send a note at the end of the program, thanking them for their contribution. Briefly outline some of the positive things that have come out of the program. You might flag some improvements or innovations in the program next season and encourage them to be involved again.
- › There is extra impact if the letters come from or are countersigned by your state sporting organisation (SSO) or national sporting organisation (NSO) contact. Include those logos if appropriate and you may also use the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) logo in accordance with the guidelines. All these things add status.
- › Letters can be via email or hard copy. A formal letter, something tangible with a handwritten signature carries a certain prestige.

Involvement in decision making

- › People tend to be more enthusiastic about their jobs if they have some input into what it is and can therefore feel some ownership.
- › Ask for their views and feedback -they will have useful knowledge and experience.

Getting coach developers together

- › Belonging to something is motivating to most people. So is being social, making new friends and sharing experiences.
- › Introduce your CDs to each other and encourage communication.
- › Facilitate this by having a coach night or barbecue or some other social activity.
- › Help establish contact between your CDs by sharing (with their permission) contact details.

Ongoing contact

- › It is really important to keep in contact with your CDs on an ongoing basis. People generally value this even if it is just a 'how's it going?' chat. People are motivated when someone shows an interest in what they are doing. They also value the opportunity to seek advice or problem solve.
- › A secondary benefit of ongoing contact is that it helps the club keep tabs on how the program and the CDs are going. Its good practice to ask the CD if they need something before an issue gets out of hand and they feel they have to raise it.

In-club promotion

- › It is important for the wider club to know about and understand the role of the CD. The CDs themselves will also feel more comfortable knowing the whole club is behind them.
- › Promote your CDs and their role in your usual communications: newsletters, emails, social media etc.
- › When you have club gatherings such as fundraisers and end-of-season functions, publicly recognise CDs and coaches.

External promotion

- › Some publicity outside of the club through media helps boost the club's profile and helps motivate your CDs.

Official positions

- > The CD should be an official part of your club structure. Any organisation charts should include them.

Accreditation

- > Depending on the sport, being a CD may count towards a level of accreditation. This might be a powerful motivator for CDs who want to coach at a higher level. Check with your SSO or NSO.

Ongoing learning

- > Your CDs are, by their nature, interested in the sport. They will likely be motivated by learning new things.
- > They will value talking to other CDs about their experiences, so facilitate that where possible.
- > Invite and encourage them to attend any courses being held.

More expensive options

Clothing

- > CDs will value some clothing that has recognisable logos on it. Wearing these items will put them in 'operational mode'. They will be readily recognised and in the public eye. Branded clothing gives credibility and status. It also tends to make the wearer conscious of their responsibilities and perform their roles with greater professionalism.
- > You can use the ASC logo (in accordance with the guidelines) as well as your NSO and SSO logos. Check with your contact for guidelines.
- > The clothing you provide will depend on your resources and arrangements with the NSO/SSO.

Freebies, discounts

- > Particularly if the position is voluntary or not well paid, freebies or discounts can ease the burden and are a good reward. Possible examples:
 - discount on their own participation
 - discount on their children's participation
 - discount on membership fees
 - discount on club merchandise.
- > Your SSO or NSO may be able to offer tickets to an event or other incentives.