

The third of a series of articles taken from the BCU's Level 2 Coach Support Book.

Supporting Coaches develop and improve their coaching practices.

ESTABLISHING A SAFE COACHING ENVIRONMENT

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by Ed Christian

Introduction

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This section is designed to help you consider how to establish and maintain a safe environment for your coaching, some of the concepts you may be familiar with from level 1 but are worth revisiting. The crux of establishing a safe environment is the issue of risk assessment and management. Although this may not be new to you it is important to remember that risk management is a skill that becomes more automatic the more you do it. Before we look more closely at risk assessment we should remember who we are responsible for when involved in coaching.

4.1 Duty of Care

The plain truth is that we have a duty of care to everyone we come into contact with or have an effect on. The level of this responsibility increases as we take on more responsible roles, such as being a coach. It also increases in specialist environments if we have a greater level of knowledge or ability, than those around us. Duty of Care is a legal commitment to being responsible. It is not something that we can choose, to avoid by writing disclaimers, or something we can duck by being an amateur coach.

A good definition of Duty of Care is:

"The duty which rest upon an individual or organisation to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure the safety of any person involved in any activity for which that individual or organisation is responsible"

(Phil Hadley, BCU Coaching Handbook)

An important part of the definition is "to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken".

We should also consider the notion of 'foreseeability'. Simply put, if it would be obvious to other level 2 coaches that something could go wrong then it is reasonable that you should consider it too and do something about it. Diving into dark coloured water has sadly, resulted in numerous injuries where people have hit the bottom because it was difficult to tell how deep it was. So, if someone did something similar without checking the water depth first then maybe they should have known better. A coach encouraging novices to do this could be thought to be negligent in their duty of care because it was an accident waiting to happen (Foreseeable).

4.2 Risk Assessment

Risk assessment encourages the identification of items and situations that may cause accidental injuries or health problems, and the development of a measured and appropriate response.

Production of a risk assessment is a legal requirement and is part of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. Every location that is used for coaching should have a risk assessment analysis and we should hold a copy of each. In addition to this we should also conduct dynamic risk assessment on the day taking into account the environmental conditions at the time. We will talk more about dynamic risk assessments later.

The most commonly used format for risk assessment is the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) 5 step to risk assessment.

- Step 1 Identify the hazards
- Step 2 Decide who might be harmed and how
- Step 3 Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions
- Step 4 Record your findings and implement them
- Step 5 Review your assessment and update if necessary

You will probably have seen and used this model in the BCU risk assessment form. The 5 steps offer a simple, user friendly way to identify and manage risks.

