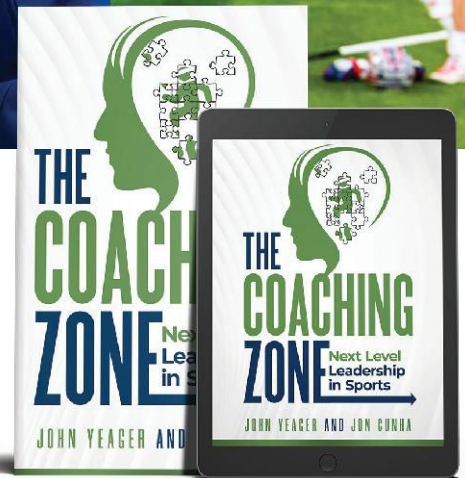




COACHES AS STORYTELLERS



How to uncover your athletes' beliefs and motives

BY JOHN YEAGER AND JON CUNHA

Self-awareness helps coaches draw on their stories, experiences, strengths and shortcomings to work with their athletes and teams effectively. In all four ways, they model self-awareness skills for their athletes. Self-awareness helps us manage our thoughts, emotions and behaviors.

Stories help us sharpen our sense of "who, when, where, how and why" we coach. They can help us identify what motivates us. When we reflect on our own stories, we understand ourselves better. When we share them with our teams, stories create stronger connections.

Our athletes are drawn to stories that convey meaning and purpose. Stories can ignite them to take action. Stories help coaches and their athletes shape their perspectives of their sport, as well as pass down knowledge, values and traditions that shape team culture.

"I started off as a young, inexperienced assistant coach still in player mode," says Sean Quirk, head coach of the Cannons LC of the Premier Lacrosse League.

"When I became a head coach, I learned from mentors and then established my own philosophy. I always thought I was a positive person and had the best interests of my athletes, but it was enhanced tenfold once I had my own children. Then I really became aware of the impact I can have on my athletes and teams."

Quirk is very humble and doesn't like to get up in front of a team and say, "I did this," but he loves talking about the coaches that have been mentors to him and helped him appreciate the game.

"I love being a storyteller," he says, "and how the stories relate in terms of the type of culture that we want to build within our team today, and not being afraid to tell your teams about failures you've had."

Teams can learn so much about failures the coaches experienced either individually or with past teams. By being able to share these stories, the coach

portrays both confidence and humility. This humility can create trust by showing the coach's authentic self.

Stories tell us much about our values, the things that really matter to us. Values are personal beliefs that guide behaviors, decisions and actions. From Quirk's narrative, you can see the importance of family and how that translates into care for the athletes and teams he coaches.

While some stories come from aspects of ourselves that we know well, other great stories come from feedback that shows us things that surprise us about ourselves. We become better storytellers when we know the motivations behind our stories. Many rich stories come from experiences that inspired belief and a sense of purpose. As we listen to stories, both our own and those of our athletes, it helps to listen for the cues that uncover beliefs and motives.

EXCERPTED FROM "THE COACHING ZONE," A NEW BOOK ON COACH SELF-MANAGEMENT, LEADING AND EMPOWERING ATHLETES AND CULTIVATING THE TEAM DANCE. VISIT THECOACHINGZONEBOOK.COM.