

Coaching for the RIGHT Reason
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Over the last several years, I have interacted with coaches from “Learn to Play” to the NHL, trying to hone my “coaching/teaching skills” and develop a philosophy that hopefully will not compromise my ability to be able to sleep at night, knowing that I did my best to develop not just hockey players/athletes, but future citizens.

Through the years, I have queried many coaches of all levels about what the goal/mission of a coach should be. I do not recall one encounter where a coach told me the mission was to coach championships. Not once did a coach tell me that the mission is to coach/teach “win at all cost.” I have been told both as a young athlete and then again as a coach, that we are teaching athletes to become part of a team, preparing them for life.

The one common thread I did hear is that we are teachers. As teachers we have the responsibility to do the best we can. We will make mistakes, just as the students/players will make mistakes. This is part of the LEARNING process. In my quest to become a better teacher/coach, I found the following two paragraphs in the book “ The Art of POWER” by Thich Nhat Hanh. These two short paragraphs, if contemplated, send a very powerful message.

“When I see one of my students not practicing mindfully, I am not happy, because I always want my students to practice well. But if this student doesn't practice well, what should I do in terms of power? I might be tempted to shout at him, to punish---to use my power and authority as a teacher aggressively. And of course a teacher always makes mistakes, especially in the first part of his career as a teacher. But to help my student, I must learn to be patient. I first need to offer him my love and insight. Using this kind of power, you are safe from misusing or overstepping your authority. You can help your student; you can help your son, your daughter, and your employees without creating suffering for yourself or others.

There are many ways to share our guidance, our advice. If we share out of compassion, we will be effective and helpful. We may be unskillful in our guidance, but in the process we will learn how to share in a way that doesn't create suffering, that doesn't turn others away from us. We need to constantly check if we are guiding or teaching for the sake of fame, wealth, or a superficial kind of power”

The goal of this paper is not to tell you what your philosophy of teaching/coaching should be. Just like the meaning of life, our individual philosophy of teaching/coaching is something we have to establish ourselves. We will take bits and pieces of what we learn through clinics, books and other coaches and mold those pieces into our individual philosophies, possibly changing and molding our philosophies as we grow.