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How do we know whether coaching actually works? Furthering our evidence base.

Abstract

We introduce the first issue of *Coaching, An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice* for 2014, highlighting the role of evidence in sports coaching and other fields, as well as the importance of sound methods in coaching research.

Editorial

Since the last issue of *Coaching, An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, much has happened in the world of coaching, in executive and work contexts, in health, in sports and indeed other fields. A world class tennis player, Novak Djokovic, recruited another former world class tennis player, Boris Becker, as his new head coach only to then be beaten at the Australian Open Championships in the quarter finals (Newbery, 2014). As this particular defeat ended a near 30-match winning streak, there are of course some interesting questions raised. Would Djokovic have done better at the Australian Open had he not changed his coach? Or was this simply a chance event, as every winning streak is likely to end sometime? The effects of sports coaching are certainly an interesting topic, as coaching for performance is of such relevance across many fields.

We debated the question of whether coaching actually works, and also the current status quo of the evidence base, in an interactive ‘hothouse’ debate at the 4th European Coaching Psychology Congress in Edinburgh in December 2013 (McDowall et al., 2013). We brought together practicing coaches, psychologists, coaching researchers and also academics from other fields who have a very keen interest in coaching. One of our panellists, Professor Rob Briner, is a ‘resident critic’ in the academic field, and passionate about the use of evidence particularly in management in organisations. He raised the valid question of why there is not

more controlled evidence in sports coaching and indeed other areas of coaching regarding whether, and if so how, coaching actually works. This is a question which to some extent is tricky to answer for top level tennis players. There is only one Novak Djokovic, and one Rafael Nadal, who each play tennis at top levels of competence, but with different approaches and strategies. Still, a win is a win as an outcome. So surely matched and indeed randomised comparisons could be done in other context for instance to understand the effects of specific coaching techniques on performance. Whilst some very good quality evidence exists in sports context, elicited through searches using terms such as “randomised controlled trial sports coaching”, this appears largely concerned with the effects on training techniques rather than coaching per se on health related outcomes, such as the prevention of injury (e.g. Olsen, Myklebust, Engebretsen, Holme & Bahr, 2005; Soligard et al., 2008). So do get in touch if you are working on coaching research in sports contexts. We are mindful that we have not published a paper from a sports context for some time, and would be very interested and keen to solicit your ideas and contributions.

Of course, randomised controlled trials are only one type of evidence; there are research questions require a different approach. Good methods are absolutely critical to bringing coaching into the mainstream of research. Hence we are pleased to offer our readers Rojon and Saunders’ aptly titled “*There is There’s no madness in my method: Explaining how your coaching research findings are built on firm foundations*” in this current issue. We have been getting very positive feedback on our methods pieces in previous journal editions (e.g. Saunders & Rojon, 2011), which we understand are being used in coaching training around the globe, and would like to highlight these to our readers as a valuable resource. More often than not, in our role as editors we reject submissions to this journal because the research had not been audit trailed in a way that our readers could follow, even if the topic is interesting and worthwhile. So we hope to make a contribution to furthering the quality of coaching

research through the publications in our journal, as a solid evidence base is crucial for practitioners and researchers alike.

Indeed, the other contributions in this issue also contribute to the growing evidence base. Grant considers autonomy support, relationship satisfaction, and goal-focus in the coach-coachee relationship to ask which of these best predicts coaching success. Lawrence is focused on how to measure return on investment in executive coaching, a critical question which many organisations will ask when they consider whether to invest into coaching, or not. There is another contribution from Lawrence in this very same issue, but this time on coaching supervision. Gabriel is focused on humanistic coaching and its effects on employee wellbeing and performance.

We sincerely hope that this current edition offers a wide opportunity to further our reader's professional development, by offering guidance on how to further your own coaching research, by offering insight into the processes and mechanisms of coaching, but also the professional context and standards. As always, we welcome your feedback on what you would value to see in our journal, and what contributions speak to you. More international research is certainly what we would like to see. So what are you waiting for?

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