

SEVEN KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESSFUL LEARNING

If I were to ask the question: “what do you coach” I am sure I would get a range of answers, perhaps sea kayaking, slalom, surf or canoeing may be a few. I’d be prepared to argue (well maybe discuss!) that all these answers are wrong, and there should only be one answer. What we all coach is ‘people’. People are at the heart of the coaching process surely, and this cannot be overlooked. If this is accepted then perhaps we should not focus so much on ‘coaching people’ but on ‘people learning’?

For us to be successful in our coaching we need to support and develop people in their learning. This is a belief held by Phil Race (2014) and through his research he has come up with seven key factors which promote successful learning. Much of what he identifies is fairly obvious. However as always it is the obvious and simple things that make the biggest difference; these often being overlooked in the heat of the coaching moment.



1. Wanting to learn.

The learners need to 'want' to be there and in that 'want' to learn. We are lucky in paddlesport coaching as this is often the case when working with adults, is this always the case with children though?

2. Needing to learn.

This is the whole 'wants versus needs' challenge. Our learners often know what they 'want' to learn, but as coaches we often have to help the learner realise what they 'need' to learn. Race (2014) suggests that it is not until these wants and needs are aligned that learning will be as successful as it could be.

3. Learning by doing.

We all know that 'doing' is essential for our learners to learn. The question is whether the doing is as productive as it could be. Try to create learning activities that promote learners making their own decisions and that this happens in as realistic environment as possible. From a paddlesport point of view this environment and the associated activities should be as variable as possible; this increases the need for decision making and develops adaptive skill development.

4. Learning through feedback.

We all crave feedback; it is the 'wonder' ingredient in the learning process that allows us to develop. As coaches we need to monitor our feedback to ensure it is maximised. It is well established that feedback the learners are able to gain for themselves is very powerful, ensure the balance of this 'self-gained' feedback and the alternative 'coach-given' feedback is appropriate. What are we giving feedback about, knowledge of results (outcome based) or knowledge of performance (process based), performance based feedback often being cited as the more powerful yet again the appropriate balance being key.





5. Making sense of things.

It is no good learners learning because you the coach tells them, the learner needs to make sense of things and understand what it is and why they are learning it. Learning by doing and appropriate feedback will support this but coach facilitated questioning and learner based reflection will be key to making sense of things. After all any fool can know, the trick is to understand!



6. Verbalising orally.

If a learner is able to actually verbalise what it is they are doing and learning, then this really starts to cement the learning process. It moves learners from the 'doing' phase into the 'making sense' and 'reflection' phase. This is often done through the coach asking questions, but perhaps we should explore ways to develop this further. Get learners to discuss with each other what they are learning, perhaps ask learners to present to the group their learning or maybe instead of asking 'closed' or 'leading' style questions just ask the learner to 'describe' what they did and why.

7. Assessing their own abilities - making informed judgments.

Learners need to be able to assess their own abilities and then make informed judgments from this. We need to change our learners' language from: "Can I paddle this rapid successfully?" to "I know I can paddle this rapid successfully"; and then they need to do just that. As coaches we support this by getting our learners to self evaluate their performance against agreed goals. The key in this is that it needs to be done before (in anticipation of) the action as well as after (in reflection of) the action.



So there we have the seven key factors needed for successful learning, the question is do we have them in place every time we go out coaching or are there certain areas we could do better at? Go and play with them, it may seem simple but I promise you it will have a big effect!