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Women Coaches as Coach Education Program Facilitators

The importance of Bettina Callary's article lies in the fact that it shows an additional path women coaches can consider as a means to enhancing and improving their coaching, leadership, and organizational skills, developing that all-important network, mentoring the next generation of women coaches, and continuing their own personal growth. As Callary demonstrates, facilitating coach education programs also builds confidence and competence, two all-important characteristics of the successful coach. This article makes a significant contribution to the growing body of literature that supports the case for the integration of educated, experienced women coaches into every echelon of coaching in Canada. — Sheila Robertson, Journal Editor

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Women Coaches as Coach Education Program Facilitators

By Bettina Callary

Women coaches who have pursued a number of certification courses might start thinking about becoming coach education program facilitators. Such a leadership position can be a way to develop skills and help other women coaches at the same time. In this article, I give examples of women coaches learning and developing as coaches and role models by becoming facilitators. In my experience interviewing several women coaches who have had the opportunity to facilitate courses, and in my own experience as both coach and facilitator, I have seen how such facilitating can help women coaches learn more about their own coaching approach, gain confidence in their coaching, take an active role in developing sport education initiatives, and act as role models and mentors by being visible and available for other women coaches. With these stories in mind, I encourage other women coaches to get involved in facilitating coach education.

Learn more about your coaching approach

Becoming a coach education program facilitator can help coaches develop and refine their coaching skills. Nadine* is a ski coach who felt she was beginning to define her abilities and her knowledge of the athlete development process, but was lacking the organizational skills that would tie her coaching practice together. When the opportunity arose, Nadine started working as a facilitator for the Canadian Ski Coaches Federation (CSCF) to help develop these skills. She said: "When I was working for [the CSCF], I learned such valuable information about coaching. When you teach you learn. That experience opened up more avenues to my learning." More specifically, Nadine learned what she wanted: organizational skills.

"In order to lock down all the components of a coaching career, deliver a product that was professional and polished, and ensure that I understood the sport, I decided to work

* name has been changed

for the professional development side of the sport. I ended up working full-time for the CSCF for five years. During that time, I definitely developed my own professional skills. I was mentored by many excellent role models. It was really good insight into the pros and cons of the coaching profession in Canada. It definitely made me more aware of the integral spot that coaches hold and how that relates to the product of the athlete.”

Nadine was able to learn so much because the CSCF’s top management supported her ongoing development.

“I was working with all these guys who had been presenting for years. They were in the back of the room evaluating my every presentation. I received a huge amount of direction on what I was doing well and what I could do better. With their help, my professional skills improved drastically. We also had many people show us how to present, organize, and prioritize.”

Through these mentoring relationships with the top management and through seminars on pedagogy, organization, and communication, she was able to learn a great deal about how to present herself and her coaching practice.

Nadine moved on to work as the CSCF’s program coordinator and met many sport science experts because she was involved in writing manuals and handbooks.

“I was meeting with international experts in the field of pedagogy and physiology. So, when I was in that environment, I was learning huge amounts of information. I didn’t even recognize it until suddenly one day I had a grip on much more than I realized.”

Nadine’s experience working as a coach education program facilitator helped her learn organizational and teaching skills and sport science information that became an integral part of her coaching approach as she continued her career in coaching.

Gain confidence in your coaching

Apart from learning skills of organization and pedagogy as well as sport-specific skills, it has been my personal experience that through facilitating coach education courses, I have gained confidence in my abilities as a coach. I started coaching 14 years ago, took Levels 1 to 3, and then began facilitating courses with the CSCF. I proceeded to take tasks at a National Coaching Institute while coaching and facilitating courses.

In the entry-level coaching course, we teach the stages of skill development, including the initiation of understanding a skill, followed by its acquisition, then consolidation, then refinement, and finally the ability to creatively vary the skill. These stages explain how a skill can become engrained into our understanding. One could also use this skill development framework to explain the stages of development of learning facilitators in coach education courses. As I facilitated more courses, I noticed that I mastered the material in the courses and could start to reflect on personal experiences to contextualize the information. This helped me to fully understand how I may use this information when coaching.

Gradually, I learned more about how to teach and more about the material of learning. This translated into confidence in my abilities as a coach. I have noticed that this confidence is now incorporated into my attitude while coaching. This is a felt reaction that cannot be discounted in working with athletes and other coaches and helps provide credibility to my coaching.

You may have heard of or experienced the subtleties of discrimination against women coaches, which include the tendency for some to assume they are less competent than men coaches. Therefore, it is important for women coaches to display confidence so that they are not questioning their own competence – and neither is anyone else. Of course, this comes with experience, but facilitating coach education programs is a sure-fire way to build confidence.

Develop your sport's coach education programs

Another way to develop as a coach and feel valued is to become involved in developing your sport's education programs. Coach Lisa* volunteered on the board of directors of CanoeKayak Canada. She said: "Volunteering on the board, I felt I was valued."

Lisa learned she could make a difference by sitting on boards and volunteering her time and energy to voice her knowledge of coach education and development. She liked sharing information and wanted coaches to share more often, but felt that the competitiveness of sport stopped them from doing so. Therefore, as volunteer domestic development director, she helped re-vamp the coaching courses and was also a facilitator for coach education courses.

"The national team coaches used to work on their own, and if you were lucky enough to meet them and get information from them, that was great. But in the past 10 years, we started bringing in the national team coaches to teach clinics, sessions, and workshops through the coach education programs ... I feel that if a course is able to mirror that mentorship piece from national team coaches, that's great ... We've made our courses a lot more real life and the experience I had with my mentors while coaching, a lot of our coaches now can have that same mentorship experience in a weekend session with any of the facilitators. We share information, and so the courses are more of a mini-mentorship weekend."

Lisa explained that as a high school teacher, she also understood how important mentoring is.

"I've always known the power and influence of other people and the strength of mentorship. I see that every day in teaching co-op courses. I've always been a hands-on, kinesthetic learner. When I was taking my courses, the process for coach education courses did not meet my learning style at all. Now, it has changed so much from our efforts in re-developing the program. I think it meets everyone's learning styles."

Lisa noted that she learned by reflecting on her own learning style and on how coaching courses did not cater to that style. Therefore, she strove to make courses more applicable to everyone, regardless of their learning styles. Furthermore, as a facilitator and as a coach, she was open to sharing information and coaching responsibilities so that athletes would have the best possible learning opportunities from a number of different coaches. Through the process of developing the education program, she learned "how much I'm willing to share and to give back of myself to my sport and my community so they could also develop ... I'm a learning facilitator because I really believe we have to be mentors and share information to make it better for the next group of coaches coming through."

Acting as a volunteer and helping develop your sport's coach education programs can be a rewarding and valuable learning tool in developing as a coach and in helping athletes by helping other coaches progress.

* name has been changed

Be a role model and mentor for other women coaches

I was at a coach education update session and presented a module on sport psychology for alpine ski racers. One young female coach approached me after the session to tell me what an inspiration I was to her as a novice coach. She said it was great to see other women coaches share stories and knowledge. It was wonderful to get that feedback because it made me realize the impact we can have on other women coaches when we act as leaders.

Research has shown that there is a devaluation of women in sport, which often begins with a lack of opportunities for learning about women coaches. The gender-related bias will persist as long as individuals base their learning on their past experiences of not having had female coaches. Marshall and Sharp (2010) have suggested that women coaches develop their coaching practice by observing and interacting with coach mentors. They further contend that the rewards for the protégé include getting advice on setting realistic career goals and strategies, avoiding errors, and getting opportunities to coach. Furthermore, Mercier and Marshall (2010) proposed that women could be advocates in their coaching profession by encouraging one another, by identifying and promoting their strengths, and by refusing to participate in women-debilitative dialogue. When women see other women in leadership roles such as learning facilitators in coaching courses, they learn that women coaches are leaders and have a wealth of knowledge to share and they may reach out for help.

Lisa found that having the leadership position of facilitator allowed her to create a network of women coaches that helped younger women coaches communicate their worries and gain knowledge. She organized an annual women coaches seminar and dinner during the national championships a few years ago.

“I think that dinner was so important because it formed a network ... There are still many issues out there for us and we can help each other get through that. Now that we are connected as a group, it gives us safety in numbers. The women coaches know they have someone listen to them who has been in that situation.”

Lisa noted that through this experience, she learned she was a role model for other women coaches. She believes the social connections created in networks such as this will help future generations of women coaches.

In short, women coaches who decide to become learning facilitators in coach education programs enhance understanding of their sport and of coaching, and also increase their confidence levels. At the same time, such leadership positions may give women coaches the opportunity to take part in developing their sport's coach education programs, and be role models and mentors for the next generation of women coaches.

References available upon request.

About the author

Bettina Callary recently completed her PhD at the University of Ottawa in the school of Human Kinetics. Her PhD research, under the supervision of Drs. Penny Werthner and Pierre Trudel, focused on the lives of Canadian women coaches and how they have learned to coach. Bettina is also a part-time professor and mother. She has been an alpine ski coach for 14 years, working at all levels including entry and development levels through to the Canadian University ski team, the Argentina World Cup team, and guest coaching stints with the Canadian Alpine Ski Team. Bettina works for the Canadian Ski Coaches Federation, facilitating entry and development level

coaching courses as well as taking part in a task force to redesign the coaching courses. She has won several coaching awards, including Development level female coach of the year in Ontario in 2006. She has completed her National Coaching Institute diploma.