

Tips to make coaching go swimmingly

By Adrian Moorhouse

People Management

At the age of 42, I can look back and see that I have been shaped by my interactions with many coaches over the years. Some of those coaches were the most inspiring people I have met, and I would not have achieved half my success without them. But I've also met bullies whose approach to coaching bordered in the illegal.

I came across both types of coaches during my time as a competitive swimmer. I have also dealt with many coaches in my current career as a business leader, and can say that I have met many more of the inspiring kind than those who resort to bullying.

Great coaches show belief in those they are coaching. I remember sharing some of my loftier swimming aspirations with one of my earliest coaches. Rather than dismiss what I had told him as the ravings of a naïve 14-year-old, he said that winning the Olympics seemed like a good goal, but asked if I knew how I was going to achieve it. He passed responsibility for determining how I would reach my goal back to me. This view, that the coach's own fears should not limit any dream, has been a feature of most of the good coaching I have had.

I also think there has been a certain edge to the coaching I have received. Coaching won't be effective unless it nudges you out of your comfort zone. Bad coaches tend to retain control, and any challenge they set tends to feel more like a personal vendetta than anything that is likely to aid your development.

A coach should act as a mirror for the client and help that person to grow by providing feedback. As a coach you can't control how that feedback will be received, but you can work at your ability to deliver it.

My experiences of being coached have tended to shape the way I now coach others – mainly my direct reports in the business. I know the process isn't about me: it is about them, and their performance aspirations.