

What makes a good coach?

I am sure that everyone will have their own views, and as in any sport, this view maybe influenced by what the player or judoka wants from the sport and from the training session.

In my opinion, the fundamental attributes of a good coach are to know their own strengths and weaknesses and to know the limitations of their own coaching ability. I am friends with a 4th Dan who has trained with Team GB, and has over 20 years of competitive experience, however, by his own admission he finds teaching a technique very difficult, especially to children and novices.

Every training session that I coach, I usually learn something new, an alternative way of conveying the key points to a given technique. I have also found that sometimes a method of teaching a technique to one group of students works very well, and then the next day I use the same method to a different group and I fail to convey the components of the technique entirely. So, as a coach, I think that you need to be able to acknowledge when something is not working quite quickly, adapt and change the teaching method to suit your group.

Planning is essential for me, as I do not have the years of experience behind me to think up a whole training session on the spot. I think that the coach needs to show confidence and a clear direction of where they are heading throughout the session, bringing it all together at the end, in order to keep the judoka interested and for them to enjoy the session. So for me, that means I will plan the session so that I know the objectives of the forthcoming hour and can prepare any additional equipment required and fully inform any assistants, so as to maintain a seamless session.

Safety and awareness is always going to be a key attribute, limiting the risk of injury in what is a contact sport. This is not only relevant for the equipment used, such as mats and keeping players aware of walls and windows, but also in the techniques themselves, and by instilling a sense of looking after your partner and breaking down every technique so that the key components are clearly understood we can keep injuries to an absolute minimum and encourage the judoka to enjoy and fully participate in the training session.

Communication is another key attribute. No-one wants to do the same warm up every session, and sometimes by asking an assistant or a capable judoka to take the warm up they can do the same usual warm up as this is within their comfort zone, and the chances are that everyone switches off. So a good coach will either have a variation of warm-up activities to keep the session interesting and fresh, or if you are going to ask someone else to take the warm-up, it may be better to tell them 'say' 15 minutes beforehand and ask them to think of something that we haven't done for a while.

Delegation, or utilising assistants will keep them involved and alert. It also gives the coach time to observe from a good position on the mat, which is helpful not only to assess the ability of the judoka that you are about to teach, but also to help the assistant develop their own coaching skills and gain confidence.

Equally as important is to 'know your judoka', to understand where they are having problems, to be aware of issues that may affect their training (e.g. hard of hearing, behavioural issues) and to ensure that you remain approachable, and that you can cater for their needs, such as someone who works better learning a technique by watching, i.e. a visual method, as opposed to someone who prefers to have a go and learn by 'doing'. Not everyone will benefit if you can only teach one way.

Image, politeness, confidence, timeliness, preparation, hygiene, patience, motivation, smiling are all visual factors that the judoka will pick up on. We all want a coach who knows what they are doing (or at least looks like it!!)

Lastly, but not at all least, is the technical competence. The knowledge to teach a technique is very important and the coach, by knowing their limitations as mentioned right at the start, should allow other members of the group to demonstrate the technique if they can provide a technically correct presentation, such as left – handed Morote-gari. Never knowingly teaching a technique wrongly. This may mean attending courses regularly and maintain your own knowledge and willingness to learn.

Only your judoka can say whether you are a good coach

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