

Mentors Lesson

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SPEAKERS

Paul Barnett, Dean Vickerman, David Parkin, Helene Wilson, Thomas Frank, Neil Craig, Alan Smith, Steve Jenkin, Rohan Taylor, Tricia Cullop, Tanya Oxtoby, Justin Langer, Jim Woolfrey

Paul Barnett 00:00

Welcome to the lessons from the great coaches podcast. I've learned that you don't do it alone,

00:06

you learn so many different things from so many different coaches. That's an elite learning environment.

00:13

How you deal with how to be resilient, how important it is to infuse joy in the process of learning. To be

Alan Smith 00:20

a good candidate, you've got to do more than you take. What an interesting way it is to be a mentors.

Paul Barnett 00:29

My name is Paul Barnett, and you are listening to the great coach's podcast, where we explore leadership through the lens of high performance sport, by interviewing great coaches from around the world, to try and find ideas to help all of us be better leaders. As the podcast has grown. The great coaches we have interviewed have shared so much insight and wisdom that we decided to create episodes dedicated entirely to the lessons that have resonated with us the most. Today's episode is on the topic of mentors. Here at the great coaches podcast, we're working to create one of the world's best leadership libraries. From the lessons our interview guests share with us. You can help support our project get exclusive content, an early access to the great coaches collection by joining our Patreon community. All the details on how you can be a part of this journey are in the show notes. And now on to the topic of mentors. The lessons from the great coaches podcast. I started my first professional job in 1993. I was 21 years old fresh from University and was fortunate enough to have secured a graduate trainee ship with Nestle. As a trainee, my job was to learn how the business worked. And to do that I spent time working across all the different functions from warehousing to accounting through to sales wrapping my workday finished at 4pm. And one day in that first year, I asked one of the key account managers if he would like help after I finished work. That gentleman was named Eugene for Rikkyo.

And he became my first mentor. He's still in my life now that over the years has helped me with my work challenges like difficult managers, through the ups and downs of raising children, and finding balance in a life where you are trying to juggle so many roles. I have been very fortunate to find other mentors like Eugene in my life. And each of them has been just that little further along life's curve, and open to sharing their experiences in the hope that it might help. They are an invaluable resource, especially when you are faced with new or unfamiliar challenges. One of the things we have heard many times from our interview guest is the importance of surrounding yourself with mentors. In the words of the Australian swim team coach Roland Taylor, they are your most important resource as a leader.

Rohan Taylor 02:54

For me, the resources I find helpful are my sphere of influence. The people I surround myself with. As as what I would say is the people I go to to tell me what I need to hear and not what I want to hear. So they're the people that I know I can call and they'll give me feedback that is helpful to they understand what I'm trying to achieve. So that's probably my most important resource.

Paul Barnett 03:22

The legendary Australian rules football coach David Park, and builds on this idea of mentors being your most important resource by calling them his critical friends who are not afraid to be blunt with you.

David Parkin 03:35

The greatest asset for me was to have what I would call mentors for one of a better word, my better still critical friends, who knew you loved you knew your business, and could tell it to you exactly. So if you don't have someone in your life, who knows you extremely well, who knows your business. That is your specific role in that business. At the moment well, who is available can watch you at work and hear you but having that I call them critical friends who can give it to in a way that you need to hear and who do have the experience and background and understanding required to have them in your life is critical.

Paul Barnett 04:21

Here is an example of a mentor acting as a critical friend that ultimately led to personal improvement from Helene Wilson. Helene is a netball coach and now works for high performance New Zealand, helping and mentoring other coaches.

Helene Wilson 04:37

And I definitely hands down would thank my mentor Len Ganson. I consider her to be a master coach. She's coached us over boons here in New Zealand. She's coached England netball and she works as our coaching consultant for high performance sport New Zealand. I was lucky to meet her about 15 years ago and I remember my first interaction With her I had applied for a New Zealand's Secondary School coaching role and the applications they let me know that applications had they decided to reopen them up and, and put applications out. And obviously, when that happens to you kind of thing, I'm obviously not good enough kind of thing. And I said it to were very naively at the time. And I remember her turning around and saying to me, you're not good enough. But why is that? And that's a really direct, what is it? And it made me go away and think I want to wait, oh, my gosh, you know, I'm not good enough. Because you kind of ego, the ego gets a bit bruised. When you miss out on a role.

You think you should get it and you don't. And I think the fact that she asked me that question made me curious at the time, and I can remember multiple times as a mentor, she's supported me when I've needed her to support me when I've been really challenged and vulnerable as a coach. But when I've needed to be challenged, because I'm making excuses, or not really saying the word between the charities, she's really challenged me to look at myself first. And think Did I do the best job to prepare the athletes because at the end of the day, the way that athletes perform, I remember affliction of the orchestration of everything that you're doing as a head coach. So you can't change everybody and won everything all the time. But you can leave a growing learning success and shift and performance at all times. As a coach, if you're aware and noticing what you're doing. So I'm very grateful for her for the robust conversations she's had with me. And there's been many of them over the years to help me be a better coach.

Paul Barnett 06:34

Mentors are not just for young people, either. In my experience as a managing director, they provided a strong counterpoint to balance your thinking. This was also something that Neil Craig spoke to us about. Neil has been both a head coach, and is now a mentor to other elite level coaches.

Neil Craig 06:54

The role of the mentor now, I think, in High Performance Coaching is, is crucial, because of it's such a complicated and complex role to play. So we all need help. And, and the older coaches have been around for a while and who are happy to be vulnerable, and have had the humility, say, yet coming here. As I said, they still control the situation that's still in charge, and they accept that responsibility. But they just want a bit of balance in their thinking.

Paul Barnett 07:25

Ellen Smith was a great coach in his own right in the English Premier League. And these days, mentors, the English soccer coach, Gareth Southgate. Alan was terrific to interview full of the kind of deep wisdom, that many years of success and failure helps cultivate. Here, he talks about how the use of mentors has changed over the arc of his career journey.

Alan Smith 07:48

Well, I do really, if I'm on his path, anybody have any graduate statue. People were much more ruthless in that period, there wasn't. People saw that as a weakness, if you're invited said, when I was being brought on as a coach. I want you know, I want a mentor. I think people will have thought that was quite strange, you know, we were being matched out. We were very much out there. And I realized, you know, Gallup talks about it in his book of people says that we are now you know, they see you there. They see me they see Jim, they see the self confidence we seem to have, but actually, there's a lot of self doubt in all others. And I must say, I didn't really have anybody that mentored.

Paul Barnett 08:40

Mentors are able to help you achieve a more balanced view. By giving you a perspective, you may not have considered, or by challenging your thinking. There has been several times when our guests have talked about their mentors, and mentioned how they come from industries or environments that are

very different from theirs. Here is an example from Tanya Oxtoby, who coaches in the women's Super League in the UK.

Tanya Oxtoby 09:05

My mentor is not in football, she has been in the army. She has played elite sport for her country and been to Olympic Games. And so she she gets performance sport, but she's not from football at all. And she is probably one of the main reasons I guess, for me that I got through that first period of the season, because she's the person that you can be vulnerable to she's the person that you can say, I don't know what I'm, I don't know where to go next year. And she's able to bring me back and sort of say, well hang on a second. You one of the most clearly defined people that I know. This is what you know, we've spoken about previously. Talk to me about why you're thinking that.

Paul Barnett 09:47

Another interesting example of a coach working with them mentor comes from Thomas Frank who leads Brentford in the English Premier League. I liked his idea of using constructive cynicism and how Are you methodical in using it with his mentor?

Thomas Frank 10:03

I have that mentor I speak to him once a week. And the good thing about having him constantly speaking or adjusting my leadership every week, is that he's so good in terms of keeping me on track with, for example, energy with work When an element is called constructive cynicism, in terms of all the time suckers all that conduct, but also in terms of every other aspect in the daily work. We're working very hard on those four main pillars. I spoke to you about hardwork, togetherness, attitude, and performance, tried to really reinforce it every single day every week in the team so they know it.

Paul Barnett 10:46

Another critical area of focus for coaches with their mentors, is dealing with self doubt when it arises. Here. The basketball coach Dean Vickerman describes how his mentor helped reinforce to him that he was doing the right things with the culture, a question that you often ask yourself as a leader, when performance is slipping.

Dean Vickerman 11:07

I normally deal with a lot of things myself, but through those times of self doubt, you know, having those mentors above you that could reinforce you know, that you were living the culture, you were doing the right things. But you just needed to make some changes to your to the personnel and to your own accountability to play relationships as well.

Paul Barnett 11:31

Mentors do not have to come from outside the team or organization though. World Cup winning cricket Coach Steve Jenkin explains how the senior players on his team took on a mentoring role.

Steve Jenkin 11:45

And I approached the senior players who I thought are either gonna give it away in the next two or three years. Or they might go to the next World Cup. And I just asked them what they mentor is a hard

thing because I believe a mentor is someone who you build a relationship with and that I asked them, would they help the younger players and bring them through? And when I first asked him this, I had a couple of replies. Well, when I first come into Australian teen, no one helped me But to their credit, people like Katherine Fitzpatrick and Lisa quietly. Avril, fey worked with the younger kids, and brought them through, right on time in the 2005 World Cup, where our likes of Alex Blackwell was there, Lisa Kitley was there, Kate Blackall was there, they did a great job in bringing those players through. And that's what makes a great team and a great coach, I guess. Well, that helps been if people want to call you a great coach, that the players, they're driving all the time, they're driving your program, they're driving that the new players understand that they can't cut corners.

Paul Barnett 12:53

If you were thinking of finding a mentor for yourself, and want to know where to start, good advice comes from the University of Toledo women's basketball coach, Tricia Cullop.

Tricia Cullop 13:04

Number one, it's a huge compliment to the person you're asking. And many people that they have the time are going to say yes. And so not being afraid to, I think there's a book out called Never Eat Alone. And it talks about inviting people to lunch. And and asking them during lunchtime because everybody's got to eat. And during lunchtime, having some questions prepared to ask those people. One of them could be would you be willing to be a mentor, but it might even just be? Can I get some information from you to make myself better to understand why you're so successful what you do, just those simple little things, you may take one thing from that person, but even that one thing could be life changing. And so I think not being afraid to ask people and and then if you get a no, don't be disheartened, because there's plenty of people in our field that are very, very good at what they do for various reasons. There's a lot of different ways to carve it up. And I think that if you if you ask for that help, you'd be surprised what you get returned. The WBC has a mentoring program. And I've been a part of it as a mentor. And I wish that when I was a younger coach, I would have been a mentee in that because I think that even those conversations as a mentor helped me sometimes the mentees were doing things that I was like, Wow, that's incredible. You know, I this I've never thought about that. And so that conversation sparks a lot of different items that can help everyone. And don't be afraid. People will be so excited that you thought enough of them to ask that most of them will say yes.

Paul Barnett 14:34

The final word on mentors, comes from the Australian cricket coach Justin Langer, who builds on the idea of how critical good mentors can be by highlighting it as the main piece of advice he wanted to offer the audience in our interview.

Justin Langer 14:50

One thing I'll say I would not be here talking to you today without incredible mentors in my life. And if I could give people one bit of advice at any age Ah, have a curious mind and search for mentors and a lot of people. The mistake they make is I think they already know it all. And they don't ask questions and I've said this for many, many years, I hope in the last day of my coaching career, I still consider myself as a novice coach. In other words, I hope I'm still learning.

Jim Woolfrey 15:21

Everyone, it's Jim here. We hope you enjoyed our episode on mentors and found one or two things that you can bring to your own dinner table, locker room, or even your boardroom table for discussion. The key lessons I've taken away on the topic of mentors from our great coaches, our mentors can be one of your most important resources as a leader. They act as your critical friends and are not afraid to give you direct, unabashed feedback. Mentors also help you build self belief and bring balance Do you think you encourage others who are leading to either take on a mentor role or find mentors to help them and don't see mentors as a sign of weakness? Instead, view them as an extension of your curiosity. Here at the great coaches podcast, we're always trying to learn so please let us know if you have any feedback, just like Dunkin. See, who said love the wisdom and sincerity of the guests. So enlightening brush. Thanks, Duncan. See, the interaction with people around the world who listen gives us great energy. And so if you have any feedback or comments, please let us know. And also if you're interested in helping us create one of the world's best leadership libraries, from the lessons our interview guests share with us, then you can join us in our journey by joining our growing Patreon community. All the details on how you can do this or just connect with us or in the show notes or on our website that great coaches podcast.com