

Resilience Lesson

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SPEAKERS

Neil Craig, Mercedes Taaffe-Cooper, Jan Stirling, Paul Barnett, Tim Walsh, Jackie Carson Smith, Jim Woolfrey, James Wade, Dean Vickerman, Tom Ryan, Cori Close, Norma Plummer, Brenda Frese

Paul Barnett 00:00

Welcome to the lessons from the great coaches podcast.

00:04

I've learned that you don't do it alone,

Neil Craig 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

00:20

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

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've interviewed have shared so much insight and wisdom that we decided to create episodes dedicated entirely to the ideas that have resonated with us the most. Today's episode is on the topic of resilience. And it features audio quotes from a wide selection of coaches that we have interviewed from around the world.

01:06

The lessons from the great coaches podcast

Paul Barnett 01:09

as the father of two, and the leader of an organization. One of the topics that fascinates me the most in these interviews is resilience. The American Psychology Association describes resilience as the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences. And in my humble opinion, it is as critical to your success as a leader, as your emotional intelligence, and your ethical standards. To begin the exploration of what the great coaches think about resilience, I will start with Neil Craig, who offers an alternative definition to the one I just shared, and uses an analogy of driving an f1 car to illustrate why being uncomfortable is a necessary precursor to developing resilience, I sort

Neil Craig 01:55

of go back to the definition of what's the resilience, immediately, most people think it's about how you handle some form of adversity or crisis. And that can be a loss, it can be a poor form, it can be an error on the pitch in front of 100,000 people. It can be criticism in in the media, and it is that it is part of that. But it's also being able to handle success. So you need to be resilient, to better handle success. Because if you're not resilient, you'll be you'll become very inconsistent. Because success seduces people. I think as human beings, we've evolved to distinct the comfortable environment. Our body is, from a physiological point of view is good to bring it back to equilibrium doesn't like to be stressed. So it's got all these internal mechanisms that if if you start to overheat, get rid of the heat. And I think as humans, we tend to be like that anyway, like we'd like to be comfortable. Whereas your best high performance environment. Eddie, Eddie Jones, Ric Charlesworth, Charlie Walsh, they are very, very uncomfortable about being comfortable. In actual fact, they seek they seek ways to keep things uncomfortable. Because when that's when you really learn that you learn you when you first learn to drive a car. Like it's uncomfortable, isn't it? Like if everything's highlighted, and yeah, you got to push the accelerator down, you got to brakes and the indicators and whatever, eventually, you get to a stage where quite comfortable. And if you want to get better, if you want to get better at that you need to actually extend yourself. So you might be able to drive a car around Prague all day. But if you want to be really uncomfortable, we'll put you in a Formula One. And so your skill set will have to increase enormously for you because you'll be totally uncomfortable again. And so this capacity to to embrace the adversity which, which is a form of training for you.

Paul Barnett 04:06

Cory, close coaches, the UCLA women's basketball team in America. And she builds on Neil's thoughts by saying that uncomfortable places is where growth starts. And in order to get there, your response must be greater than the event that you are experiencing.

Cori Close 04:25

Okay, at the end of this time that you've not had to sit out, so to speak, what do you want to be able to say about your response? What do you want to be able to look back and go man, I chose to strengthen my arm, I chose to respond a certain way. And as a result of those choices, this is what transpired. This was the work I did in the dark that got revealed in the light, so to speak later on, but sometimes when we all tend to look at like our circumstances and go, Oh, this is what we can't do. This is what we can do. But when you are committed to your response or discipline over default, you choose to say, Okay, where is it that I can grow maybe an unpredictable way as this event is hard this event is not what I

would have chosen, but maybe it will force us to the uncomfortable places where the real growth and change happens when you have to make those hard choices that develop deep character and life changing habits.

Paul Barnett 05:20

When it comes to building resilience, the great coaches talk about starting in training, and setting up pressure situations that simulate what you will experience during the game. In fact, Muhammad Ali once said, I hated every minute of training. But I said, Don't quit suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion. Here is iconic nipple coach, Norma Plummer?

Norma Plummer 05:45

Well, the performing under pressure, we, we would have to do all of that at training, of course, you have to have you your players under pressure and building it up. And the thing is, when you do it in training, I used to say to them, it doesn't matter if you make the mistake. That's why we're doing it a training. So we learn how to handle that under the pressure. And of course, you don't make a mistake. But once you really started to handle the pressure, you got better than decision making on what you're going to do.

Paul Barnett 06:15

Brenda Frese is an American basketball coach. And she echoes enormous views on the importance of simulating pressure in training, so that people are uncomfortable. But she adds an interesting twist, but also referencing her twin sons, and how she thinks you can help build resilience in children.

Brenda Frese 06:34

I just say this as a mother of twins, as I think we've taken away as parents, just the resiliency factor of it's okay for your kid to fail, it's okay for them to experience hard things, I think sometimes we've gotten to a point that we just don't want to see our kids hurt or be in pain. And I think those are some of the toughest moments where you're able to establish that resiliency within your child. I think when you think of a team, sometimes I can point to a moment and a season each and every year where there's a defining moment that moves your team along a path more times is for the good. Sometimes it changes the path. But those moments are crucial. Sometimes after a really tough loss, you'll learn about your team to be able to fix it and change it, the growth that comes out of it really allows your team to become a lot more resilient. So in practices, we're trying to kind of build those moments all the time, we want those practices to be hard and as uncomfortable as possible, we want them to understand that games are going to be you know, different and uncomfortable, and we want to embrace it, because that fight is what makes it so worth it.

Paul Barnett 07:45

When it comes to creating pressure situations, though, you have to find the right amount of intensity to apply. And finding this balance is the art of leadership that is so difficult to develop. And yet so important to your eventual success. Here is WNBA championship Coach James Wade, talking about how he finds this balance.

James Wade 08:06

But you still want to put that you want to apply the right amount of pressure, but it's delicate. So it's like, okay, when and where and how and how much. So this is the constant battle that you're fighting as a coach because you care about the players and you care about their well being. But you also know that they have to be pushed to a certain point to be their better selves. So you're actually trying to balance that offseason to go along with the tactical stuff, and pick and roll those games or getting the player to post up more or shoot more threes when they're open or all this stuff or just work on their jump shots. And, and so all you're dealing with all this stuff. And so that's where we had to get better as a staff. That's what I had to get better as a coach is, where's that limits mentally, physically, you know where it is. But whereas there are limits mentally, and how do I motivate them to be on the same page, even when it's not their day, and now was the tough part.

Paul Barnett 09:05

One way of balancing the amount you push your players in training is to include a focus on selflessness. A good example of how this works, comes from the Australian basketball coach, Dean Vickerman.

Dean Vickerman 09:17

To finish a practice, the selfless side of it, is how did you make someone better? And so we'll ask that question after practice. How was your physicality which was the heart of what we did? Did you make others better with screening? Did you compete on every rebound? Did you dive on the floor? Did you do all the little extra things that helped teams win? And then how did you execute what was prescribed or taught before practice in you know, did you achieve it in the day? Did you execute offensively defensively, what we wanted to get done over the day and so we asked our players to either rate themselves or to rate their teammate and give yourself a ticker across in all those three areas and try and build a consistency in our behaviors in practice every day,

Paul Barnett 10:03

another way of helping to build resilience is through the expression of gratitude. And psychology research is now able to show the link between gratitude and your inner strength to combat stress, and therefore build resilience. It is such a powerful force. And in this example, Jen Sterling, who coached Australia to the World Championship in basketball, talks about how she uses gratitude as a coach.

Jan Stirling 10:31

I remember writing are even the number 78 handwritten cards and I write a legacy card by the way, Paul, all right, you know, a lot a lot. And it was to the pieces. It was the parents of every athlete, it was to the partner of every athlete, and then it was to arrange of our corporate sponsors, we then go to essence, then have the group together. And I had Trish family and Christie Hera wonderful, Rachel Scott had some fence, Sandy Vaughn Bella was in that team. You know, I had some fantastic athletes. And I just challenged them. And I said, Hey, you know, now that we're all here together, have any of you given thought to actually, when you get home, loading a car to someone who actually will be home watching you with great interest that might have impacted on you really early in the start of your journey? So it might have been you? And straightaway the girl said, Oh, ye, my under 10. Coach was really fantastic. Do you know that every one of them did that? And fast track it now to now. And I know for a fact that there's some of those athletes that I've engaged with over time that say, oh, Jim, one of

the best things, you know, I do I actually send that now it's email, of course. But I actually write to people now and thanked them. And I, you know, when I achieved something, or when I won my MVP, I wrote back to them and said, thanks for sharing, you know. And so, I'd like to think my legacy is that I've helped people embrace a little bit more of thinking and being having gratitude for the journey that you've had an understanding that even if someone's only had you for one season, that when you're an open and you're getting that metal round, you it may they own, you might but let them know, they mattered to you. And that they've contributed to your journey, because they kept your interest or, you know, you're ready to quit, and they talked about whatever it is, and it could be your grandma around, it could be your struggle system, that just make sure that let them know that you appreciate and you're grateful for how they've impacted on your journey.

Paul Barnett 12:42

Resilience, like most things, is built through a daily ongoing focus on small improvements. In this example, from quarry close, she talks about focusing on the small daily habits that can be overcome through the application of a little discipline.

Cori Close 13:00

I think maybe asking yourself the question of what are three areas that if I do nothing, I will default to but if I make some small habitual discipline choices I can overcome. The reality is if someone were to strengthen there are tomorrow, it's just to make a decision that what's going to govern your feelings in your circumstance, I always say not to decide is to decide if you don't decide in advance. Look, I may have some hard things that happened today. But I'm going to choose to look in and strengthen my response no matter what

Paul Barnett 13:35

the wrestling coach Tom Ryan, builds on what Cory says, by talking about the importance of mindset, and developing that through achieving small ongoing improvements in tasks. This idea of bringing your focus onto the next action, and not looking too far ahead, is a common theme with many of our interview guests.

Tom Ryan 13:56

So the first thing I think, is just developing a mindset, right, getting the mind ready for what is about to move toward. And then I would set up right a series of challenging scenarios that they succeeded at. Right. So it's the whole theory of right 1% Better, they would be challenging, but they would prevail is because prevailing is important.

Paul Barnett 14:22

Mental application, when under pressure also helps build resilience for critical moments when it will be tested. In training, there is the opportunity to normalize the situations by introducing small games or tasks. A good example of this comes from gold medal winning Rugby Sevens coach, Tim Walsh.

Tim Walsh 14:44

So they're really important to be able to perform under pressure and that's where that sort of processes come in is a process driven, performance based and then giving the players tools to be able to do it and

that they got to be that's got to become part of your your culture and your training. So Add a comfort zone chaos. And I just find a lot of a lot of games that aren't related to rugby. It's more mental application that really put you in those positions. So I think there's a double dartboard in the background here. So this look, we'll have tournaments in here that get one shot close to the ball or whatever it is that and how do you immensely review it is like, how did you feel? What did you do about it? How did you handle that? That moment? Did you visualize Did you breathe? Did you think about the outcome did you not focus on the process, so whether it be their sole goal for anything, but you're constantly putting the players under under pressure, at the end of training instead of market kickers just to come over and get the whole team just to circle them, and just absolutely berate them in the best way they can, to see how a if they can kick it under pressure. I've even got an indoor training area here, I recorded the crowd on the iPhone and then hooked it up to the, to the speaker system and just played that while they was training in the field, but just how you can block it out. So just continually trying to create scenarios that put you in that position, the there's nothing better than alive, and how do you create it, but it's just trying to understand it. And then giving him giving them the tools to be able to do it.

Paul Barnett 16:17

Supporting your resilience is your mental toughness. And the material on this topic is so rich, that we'll have a separate lessons episode on that alone. But here, basketball coach Jackie Carson Smith explains why mental toughness is so important when it comes to resilience, especially in a social media world, and the role that she plays in trying to help her team develop it.

Jackie Carson Smith 16:41

So the resiliency, it's also taught because it's so tied to mental toughness. And that is the one aspect that is becoming harder and harder to coach because, again, going back to what we talked about, there's this negative self talk. And there's all these influencers. If you think about the generation of players that are coming through the playing race right now, they have so much more access to people who can influence them in so many ways through social media, through internet through, there's so many people and get a hold of them. And they allow their opinions to matter more than the people whose opinions truly matter. So the resiliency is they gotta find a way to block out the noise. Focus on the goal, focus on the process. And just the available mental toughness. The mental toughness part is the most challenging thing that you can do to maintain resiliency, because, again, there's so many factors that can come into it that are damaging and can quickly you build all this mental toughness and in one second one game, one instance, it can all be snapped.

Paul Barnett 17:50

To close this episode on resilience, I have a short but powerful piece of advice from boxing coach, Mercedes TAFE Cooper. Mercedes is also a registered psychologist, and has a degree in sports and exercise science. And in this grab, sums up over 35 years of coaching experience.

Mercedes Taaffe-Cooper 18:12

What in terms of resilience, I think the single best piece of advice I would give is to add as much as possible. Allow your athletes to experience the consequences of their own behaviors.

Jim Woolfrey 18:24

We hope you enjoyed our episode on resilience and found one or two things that you can bring to your own dinner table, locker room, or boardroom table for discussion. The key lessons I've taken away on the topic of resilience from our great coaches are uncomfortable places is where your real growth and change will come from. So when they present themselves step into them. Knowing that something good will come from the situation creates situations in training that will replicate the pressures that people experience in the game. An example of this is small competitions that normalize performance, stress, or anxiety. Balance the pressure you place on the team, by a focus on selflessness and gratitude so that people look beyond their own experience and feelings. Don't wait for adversity. Talk to your team about embracing suffering for theirs and the group's development. Do it before the pressure comes here at the great coaches podcast. We're always trying to learn so please let us know if you have any feedback. Just like Robert Wagner, who said inspiring stuff. So many lessons for business and life. Thanks, Robert. It's the interaction with people around the world who listen give us great energy. And so if you have any feedback or comments, please let us know. And all the details on how you can connect with us are in the show notes or on our website. The great coaches podcast.com