

# What is Good Coaching?

George Fell takes over Coaching Corner and begins by asking what makes 'good coaching'...

I'm privileged to be taking over 'coaching corner' from Doug Cooper. I've got lots of topics where I'm keen to spark some conversations. Before I start though, there are some things we need to be clear about. All I can offer you are my own thoughts about coaching, from my perspective, based on my own experience. If any of my musings chime with your own experiences, or spark creative thoughts in your head, that's brilliant. If it all reads like wishy-washy coaching mumbo-jumbo, then rip this page out and make a paper aeroplane! You might get more satisfaction out of it that way.

I'm going to try really hard not to use the academic coaching buzzwords. Sorry if that's frustrating – if you want to release your inner geek, I'll try to provide some relevant links at the end of each article. In this edition I'm keen to look at some of the big coaching questions. I'm going to ask more questions than provide answers.

Can you think of an occasion when someone has really helped you improve something in your boating? What did they do? Why did it help? If you're willing to share your thoughts, I've put a Facebook page up at [fb.me/coachingcornerscotland](https://fb.me/coachingcornerscotland) and shared some of my best experiences. It'll be interesting to see if there are any common threads, but I'm willing to bet that some of the things which worked for you are totally different to those that worked for me. Everybody who posts will have had different experiences and attributed different reasons as to why those experiences helped them get better. That's just fine. There is no absolute right and wrong in learning or in coaching.

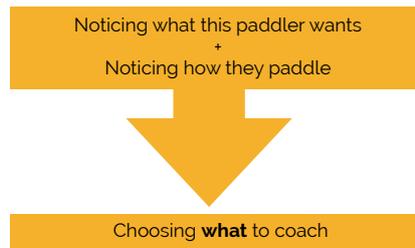
That gives us a big challenge as coaches.

I'd argue that the best coach is the one who does the right thing at the right time. But if everyone is different and two different paddlers might perceive what a coach does in two completely different ways, then how the heck do we know what the right thing to do is?

The honest answer is 'we never know', but we can guess. Improving as a coach is all about getting better at that informed guesswork.



There's a load of rational stuff that underpins that guesswork. Here's one way of looking at it:



But there's also a load of messy, subconscious 'gut feeling' which doesn't fit into a nice flow diagram. For me it is that which often decides what I'm going to do next in a coaching session.

If we all wrote down our technical beliefs, and compared them, we could have some great arguments about what to coach (and I'm really keen to do that in a future article). At least you can settle some of those arguments by trying paddling in different ways and seeing what works. The more I learn about boating, the more my technical beliefs have changed from black and white 'everyone should always do this', to context-driven "this will probably work best for this person in this environment".

It's often impossible to settle differences of opinion about how to coach. What works for one paddler developing in one environment will be totally different to what works for another. A style of delivery that one coach carries off will fail abysmally for another. Plus what 'good coaching' means is hard to pin down. Is it what helps people get better? If so, does that mean better at the end of the session or better in a month's time?

If people go boating, they'll improve on their own. If we're coaching them are they getting better because of us or in spite of us? What if they got better but didn't enjoy themselves? Or what if they enjoyed themselves but didn't get better? If you watch a good slalom coach and a good recreational WW coach you'll see different ways of working in the same environment. Is one better than the other or are they just doing different jobs?

It's almost impossible to complete the sentence, 'a good coach always...' because you can always find a situation in which it'd be better to do something different! But if you managed to answer my question about 'when did someone really help you



improve?', then you've got some opinions about what good coaching is like.

I'd argue that a good coach has options and makes good informed guesses. They have more than one way of doing things, and enough spare brainpower available during a session to choose which option to take. What that good option actually looks like will vary wildly from situation to situation.

In the next article I'm keen to look at different ways to build up our repertoire of coaching options and also how we might improve our guesswork by examining why we make our choices.

If you want to read the academic background to this, here are some useful names to google. I've put some more links up at [fb.me/coachingcornerscotland](https://fb.me/coachingcornerscotland). Smith & Smoll's Mediation Model of Coach Athlete Relationships puts forward the (common sense?) idea that it's not just what you do; it's how the person you're working with perceives what you do that's important. It one of the ideas that underpins the British Canoeing leadership model [www.britishcanoeingawarding.org.uk/download/284/](https://www.britishcanoeingawarding.org.uk/download/284/)

The idea that it's all about context is key to a theory called situated learning [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Situated\\_learning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Situated_learning) What I've called informed guesswork, is a close relative of what the academic literature calls Professional Judgement and Decision Making (PJDM). Andy Abrahams, Dave Collins and Loel Collins are good names to search for. Doug's Coaching Corner article from July 2016 goes into much more detail about this.

The idea that to be good at something, you need to notice what's going on around you, have a range of options and enough spare brain to choose, is stolen from John Mason's book *The Discipline of Noticing*.

# Performance Coach **Qualification**

Lara Cooper introduces the Performance Coach qualification and hopes to inspire many more paddlers to undertake this award...

The British Canoeing UKCC Level 3 Qualification was rebranded to Performance Coach at the start of this year. A title that these outstanding coaches well deserve! The qualification is designed to support discipline specialist coaches who are able to plan, implement and analyse long-term development programmes.

We hope this article will inspire some more coaches to use the process of working towards this qualification to further develop their coaching practice and join this exceptional community of forward thinking, progressive and inspirational coaches.

So far, 35 SCA Coaches have achieved the Performance Coach Award in both competitive and non-competitive disciplines.

## Why do it?

To help me with this article I asked all of our Performance Coaches for some quotes that would help bring to life the qualification. I was overwhelmed by the response and by how much the process has impacted on their personal development, their ability to better support the people they are coaching, and the increased satisfaction they now get from their coaching.

I was also impressed by their desire to help us encourage more people to experience the powerful learning opportunity it presents.

■ "I loved developing a progressive, motivating, long-term learning plan and seeing my students grow. I particularly enjoyed exploring the psychological side of their performance, which I could fully explore over the one year time frame." Jonny, White Water Kayak Performance Coach.

■ "The journey through the process was the best bit. Various training courses interspersed by working with real people helped all the theory come to life and made me realise why I was actually wanting to do the award – helping others learn something new and enjoy paddling!" Pete, Canoe Performance Coach

■ "The journey through the Level 3 gave me a huge amount of new tools to play with in my coaching which has allowed

me to make my coaching better tailored to the individual giving them a fully individualised experience." Lyle, White Water Kayak Performance Coach.

These positive outcomes are also seen by the people that the Coaches are working with, and for:

■ "Steve managed the learning environment, and learners, expertly; by providing appropriate and consistent challenge. Throughout the experience, it was evident that all of his decisions were influenced by a desire to ensure the well-being, and the development of the athletes in his care." Deployer in reference to Steve, Slalom Performance Coach.

■ "Zoe started working on the sea kayaking programme last year for us. She has shown that she has the qualities of a coach looking to inspire and work with paddlers over a longer term basis. This is crucial for us and Zoe has the personal skills and coaching ability to achieve this." Deployer in reference to Zoe, Sea Kayak Performance Coach.

## Funding

The Performance Coach is a UKCC level 3 accredited award and attracts funding from [sportsotland](http://sportsotland.org). You may be eligible for a scholarship of up to 60% of the course fees. Coaches already part-way through the process may also be eligible; contact [coaching@canoescotland.org](mailto:coaching@canoescotland.org) for advice. [sportsotland.org.uk/funding/ukcc-subsidy-for-coaches](http://sportsotland.org.uk/funding/ukcc-subsidy-for-coaches)

## Are you Eligible?

YES, most probably IF you have completed any of the following:

- Level 2 (UKCC) Training or Assessment
- Coach Award Training or Assessment
- MWE or AWE Training or Assessment
- Level 3 Coach (Pre-UKCC)

## The Journey

What some of our coaches have said about their journey through the qualification;

■ "The Core Training gave me the tools to keep more than one coaching process plate spinning, allowing me to concentrate on Individualisation and psychological factors alongside the

overall aim/goal of the paddler." Sam, Performance Canoe Coach.

■ "The Discipline Specific Training was a chance to put all those words from Core training into practice, a great way of testing the bits you aren't confident with in a controlled environment with both participant and Assessor feedback." Sam, Performance Canoe Coach.

■ "The Level 3 pushed me to really think about how I coach. The long-term nature of the award means you get the chance to put all your ideas to the test, and find out what works for you and for your students." Laura, Sea Kayak Performance Coach.

■ "I think the most positive thing that came out of my whole Level 3 journey was my assessor. The feedback that my assessor gave me on the day is quite simply the best I have ever had...and the result was good too." Steve, Canoe Assessment Candidate

■ "The assessment day wasn't scary at all because all the hard work had already been completed. I was coaching my long-term students; I knew how they learned and what we had to work on, so it was just another day paddling with my mates. Most of the unknowns were sorted and all I had to do was coach!" Lizzy, Sea Assessment Candidate

## Need Support – Stuck on the Way?

If you would like some help or support in your journey working towards the qualification please get in touch. In the past we have arranged pre-assessment opportunities, additional training, portfolio support, mentoring etc. to help coaches work through some of the barriers stopping them from progressing. Book your training or assessment NOW! Visit [www.glenmorelodge.org.uk](http://www.glenmorelodge.org.uk) for scheduled course dates or bespoke courses. [coaching@canoescotland.org.uk](mailto:coaching@canoescotland.org.uk) for bespoke courses.

## More Information

Contact [coaching@canoescotland.org](mailto:coaching@canoescotland.org) for further information or with your questions. Or see further qualifications details here; [www.britishcanoeingawarding.org.uk/level-3-performance-coach](http://www.britishcanoeingawarding.org.uk/level-3-performance-coach)