

Coaching the Generation Z-athlete

This article is an extract from an article by **Dr. Celesti Jansen van Rensburg** which was written for the **Free State Academy of Sport**. Comments are added by **Rudolph Cloete**.

Coaches must know the athletes who they work with! The problem is that there is usually a big generation gap between coaches and the athletes. Therefore, the coach must take into consideration what makes his athletes tick!!

Different generation has different characteristics! Working with school athletes means that the coach is working with the so called Generation Z (born after 1996) – while he/she falls into the category of Generation X or Millennial!

Characteristics of Generation Z:

More practical – less theoretical

Show, don't tell

Open-minded, but impatient

Creative and Innovative

Up for a challenge

Happiness is very important

Friends are very important

More face to face communication

More global in their thinking

Less structured education preferences – use alternative methods

More individualistic

More technology dependant

More parented – they have “helicopter parents”

More early starts – in work, sport, education

More disruptive – they are multitaskers

Very short attention span

More entrepreneurial

Personal responsibility is high in some

Outcomes focused

Mentor seeking – don’t care for academics

Difference makers – 60% of them wants to make a difference

Some comments for coaches on these characteristics:

1. Make use of technology: cellphone video clips and YouTube etc. Take video clips of their technique and show it to them when explaining something.
2. Work individually with each athlete when explaining something important. Don’t explain important things to the whole group of athletes. They prefer that the coach pull them to the side when he/she wants to explain their mistakes.
3. Keep explanations short. Get to the point.
4. Don’t give 3 or 4 orders simultaneously.
5. Set realistic goals – they strive on positive outcomes.
6. Be creative in your training schedule – change and mix up the exercises on a regular basis. Don’t let them become bored.
7. Don’t yell! The Generation Z-athlete will take this as a sigh that the coach is angry at him/her! They want the coach too consistently remain calm and in control of

himself!

8. Be aware of your gestures – the athlete may interpret it as a negative attitude towards them/him/her. They prefer a coach who shows positive interaction and feedback.

Coaches must change the way they think about and deliver the information he/she wants the athletes to hear.

Challenges coaches are facing:

1. Athletes and parents who think they have a free pass to act disrespectfully because they are paying the coach.
2. Athletes and parents who think they have a complete monopoly on coaches' time (even personal time).
3. Athletes and parents who want to blame a lack of progress on the coach, instead of looking at themselves or their potential.
4. Parents who interfere with the coaches' methods and/or program.

A negative experience with a coach is likely to have a greater impact on the coach-athlete relationship; hindering the positive youth sport experience