

The Bedrock of my Coaching Philosophy

In the many years of coaching experience gained I more than ever have total belief in creating an environment to allow athletes to drive themselves and continually encourage good decision making with sound advice to help them reach these decisions.

I was sent this thought provoking article which sums up my ethos in a practical story. Please take the time to read it and reflect upon the really well made message.

*“Do you want to keep riding down the path or shall we turn around and ride back to Mum?”
“I want ride down this way, Dad.”*

It was an option that I hadn't even considered. My 3-year-old daughter was pointing down a grass slope that stretched down and away from the concrete path on which we stood.

I hesitated for a moment. This would be by far the most difficult thing she had attempted on the balance bike. After receiving the bike for her third birthday some months before, progress had been intermittent, as was her interest. She had always tired quickly of any “practice” even sometimes protesting at the mere suggestion of getting the bike out. Her improvement had taken a bit of an upturn lately – she was now able to generate a little bit of speed on a flat surface – but the prospect of racing down a hill was entirely different to riding around in front of our garage.

I expected a tentative attempt from her, but once she was in position at the lip of the slope, she kicked off and rolled over the edge. I jogged after her, watching anxiously. She built up speed as she ran her feet along the ground on either side of the bike, she a wobbled a little but maintained control. She was going faster than ever before when she lifted both feet off the ground and coasted . . . and coasted . . . and kicked again . . . and coasted some more. She rode faster and further than she ever had before. It was a huge improvement. A monumental leap forward. I was proud, relieved and frankly amazed.

When she finally came to a stop she looked up at me triumphantly and shouted: “Again!” She immediately wheeled her bike around and rode it back up the hill. This scene was repeated about a dozen times with only fatigue preventing her from continuing.

Her energy, enthusiasm, and perseverance for the activity was in such contrast to previous efforts, it made me wonder what had happened. The dad in me was proud and amazed, and the coach in me was curious.

Athlete-Driven Action

What I had witnessed that day with my daughter was similar to what we should be striving to facilitate as parents and coaches: an enthusiasm and persistence that is completely child-driven. This is not always possible, but there are times where we can allow this to happen.

It got me thinking.

If we can stumble upon situations that motivate kids to attack what was previously difficult or uninteresting for them, can we subsequently learn to *intentionally* craft an environment around young children that generates such buy-in and engagement in a sporting domain?

If so, we firstly need to be alert to what factors lead to such self-driven engagement. So, what worked for my daughter? In hindsight, I suspect that a number of things aligned on the day to provide such a positive experience for her.

Autonomy

My daughter chose to ride down that hill and completely drove the activity herself. There was no instruction or cajoling from any outside source.

Autonomy is critical to intrinsic (internal) motivation. Intrinsic motivation is a [higher quality form of motivation](#) than being motivated extrinsically (from an outside source).

A child is most likely to try something with vigor if it is their idea and driven from within.