

Education Support Cell (ESC)/TLDE Tips & Strategies

The Coaching Mindset

Much of what we have traditionally discussed in our *Tips* publications has been steeped in educational methodologies. We've discussed educational strategies, assessments, and even assessing education. What we haven't devoted any "press time" to is the idea of coaching. This concept gets a lot of air time in discussions around the schoolhouse, but we haven't stopped to capture it, so here we go now.

"But wait! What about Mentoring?" you ask.

*Coaching and Mentoring.....*We've heard these terms tossed around. We've used them ourselves a time or two--maybe even synonymously--but is there a difference? Let's go to the dictionary. *The American Heritage Dictionary* (YES, I WENT OLD SCHOOL AND LOOKED AT AN ACTUAL DICTIONARY) gives us **coach** in the verb form as "1. To train..." and as a noun, "8. ...to prepare a student for an examination" while **mentor** is "a wise and trusted counselor or teacher". If this isn't clear, take a look in FM 6-22 (2015, June). The FM defines a coach as someone who "gets the person or team to understand their current level of performance and [who guides] their performance to the next level" (3-105) while mentoring is defined as "...the voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of great experience and a person of lesser experience that is characterized by mutual trust and respect" (3-60). Aren't both of these roles important to those of us who work with those who have been selected to be the future of our regiments?

America's Favorite Pastime



Since spring has sprung and baseball is upon us, let's use the model provided by this great American sport to look at these two terms. In professional baseball, players are signed that have better than average athletic talent and who know how to play the game. Each individual player is then **coached** by people who work to improve upon the athlete's individual skills and abilities, to meld him into the team's philosophy and to assist him in becoming a successful player for the chosen team. These professional teams have coaches who specialize in critical elements of the sport--- strength coaches, pitching coaches, batting coaches, infield coaches----you get the idea. Players are coached by those who have already proven themselves to be successful, **and** who can translate that success into lessons and drills to assist in the development of the athlete. These coaches are role models for their subordinates. They are actively and directly engaged in developing these athletes, are visible, and have a genuine concern for the athlete's growth. Good coaches have set up a positive learning environment for their teams. [FM 6-22 addresses this for us, and we will explore the learning environment in an upcoming *Tips*.]

The ESC provides support for the uniform application of USAJFKSWCS educational processes across the Institution to include:

-Support to Curriculum & Instruction [Courses and Instructors];

-Support to Leadership & Professional Development Initiatives;

-Support to the development and implementation of program evaluation and assessment systems; and

-Support to the design and implementation of SOF Career Pathways.

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Additionally and of equal importance, these athletes are **mentored** by players already on the team and immersed in the team's philosophy and culture. Mentors are not typically assigned, but coaches are in clearly defined and established positions. Overall, coaches and mentors have a vested interest in ensuring that these young players develop; they provide individual and group interventions, are creative in applying tools and techniques for success, and remediate skills when necessary.

What does this have to do with us?

Well, connecting the dots here, isn't really difficult. We have a recruitment and selection process that focuses on a candidate with higher than average talents. Our recruits don't always know how to play "the game" in the way we'd like them to, but otherwise, our reality pretty much mirrors the baseball analogy. Once a Soldier is selected, it follows that we would take that raw product and work to refine it---to improve upon his individual skills and abilities, to allow him to work with our specialized instructors, and to meld him/her into the Team philosophy.

The Coaching Mindset

Think about the most successful coach you've ever had, or watched. This coach probably had some success in the sport in which he/she is working. There is a layer of experience that allows for the impartation of wisdom and guidance. There may be some interpersonal draw to this person; maybe the coach has some charisma, but not necessarily. But what this person **does** possess is the ability to listen actively, to ask powerful, probing questions that cause you to think, and the ability to assist you in raising your own awareness of your strengths and weaknesses. This coach may not have been a former league MVP or had never batted a day over .400, but that isn't what makes him/her a good coach. **Genuinely, this coach wants you to succeed.** After all, if you are successful, your game will improve, your talents will be maximized, and you will contribute to the big wins. If this isn't the coach's mindset, the team (and you) will ultimately suffer.

The Bottom Line

As professional baseball invests in its newly recruited athletes, so should we invest in our newly selected Soldiers—the future of the SOF community. Each phase of our qualification courses has the subject matter experts in place who can impart skills and knowledge through teaching, and who can assist with melding young "recruits" into our game. These specialized instructors are in place to convey the wisdom of "the game" and the encouragement to succeed. Our cadre are there to help the Soldier discover the answers for self-improvement, allow for mistakes, and grow the candidate into a successful member of the team. With an intentional coaching mindset, our success rates for qualification will soar and our team will consistently come out on top.

Over the years, the Army has given us the Army Learning Model (ALM) and the arena of education has provided us the Experiential Learning Model (ELM). With these two instructional models, our instructional techniques and processes have evolved, and we have become more intentional with our practices. Now it is time for us to work towards setting up an organizational culture that values the coaching mindset. Follow-up with us this spring/summer for a discussion on how the coaching mindset can enhance the environment and conditions we set for learning.