

The Coaching Puzzle: Developing Transformational Coaches and a Learning Network.

I'd like to share with you some thoughts on a potential new Cycling New Zealand philosophy and approach to developing coaches and coaching expertise. There are some very exciting, cool and well researched developments in the coach education field internationally; we need to make sure we align ourselves with this world best practice or we will be left behind in the future.

We've been consulting widely over the last 6 months and held discussions and workshops with several very experienced coaches, cycling groups, riders and clubs across New Zealand. We have also conducted surveys and have been researching the current best practice from other sports and from around the globe.

Engaging the Coaching Community

As coaches we are in the business of transforming people to be the best they can be. Getting a 'buzz' from seeing people smiling when they 'get it' for the first time or become more skilful in handling a bike or riding more effectively, is why we do it. If you are a coach; you want your athletes/riders to become more skilful, more aware or to perform well. If you are a Coach Mentor then you want the Coaches you are developing to be more rounded and able to cope with the puzzles they are presented with. A brilliant phrase to highlight this would have to be: *"Knowing what to do, when you don't know what to do"*; this was a key principle emerging from a recent Coach Development Workshop delivered by Andrew Gillott (a top UK Coach Developer who works for the UCI) and hosted by Cycling New Zealand.

Cycling New Zealand recognises that there are many cycle coaches from all codes delivering great skills or training programmes across New Zealand. Some of whom we have had excellent engagement with and some we have not yet engaged with. Recent changes to legislation have made endorsement or accreditation more relevant and necessary than ever before so engaging with coaches at all levels is incredibly important.

My view is that all coaches are valuable and they are a key contact point with riders of all ages and/or stages. Research tells us that a positive experience with a good coach keeps people in sport longer. Attracting new people to cycling or getting them to change their lifestyle can also happen through the initial interaction with a great Skills Coach. I see Skills Coaches as the foundation of our industry. An awesome Skills Coach will either teach someone to ride safely on the road or develop great bike handling skills throughout any cycling code. Skill acquisition is obviously fundamental to the whole cycling education pathway for beginners through to elite.

I do not believe that we should separate out recreation or utility skills training from cycle sport skills training; we should meld them together more effectively. This is an approach I have recently been employing through the delivery of NZTA Cycle Safety Instructor (Skills Coach) courses and L1 Road Coach Courses; 'cherry picking' and melding the content to suit the needs and wants of course participants.

'Box Ticking' or Making Learning Happen?

I believe we do not need a tiered system that suggests a hierarchy such as coaching Levels 1, 2 & 3. You either wish to coach skills, develop groups to ride more effectively or to coach individuals to become better riders or athletes. It's all coaching. 'Box ticking' and collecting levels does not make better coaches, and in some cases can even create a barrier to learning.

All new and emerging coaches naturally need to connect through a Foundation course to get them rolling, while 'developing coaches' may need to connect with and learn from other more experienced coaches. Coaches who have years of experience may be missing some of the generic material or may not be up to speed with new guidelines or legislation. All of us, as coaches, should be learning all of the time and none of us know everything.

This works both ways; all experienced coaches should put themselves out there to work with and learn from the 'less experienced'. I have been developing instructors, trainers and coaches for 25 years in a number of industries including sports and emergency services and I still learn from new attendees at courses. You have to be open to learn.

The idea of a pathway for riders or Coaches is a good one however I see this more akin to a network rather than a linear path. A learning environment with coaches who have a growth mind-set and want to mentor each other would be my idea of a coaching utopia.

Our New Approach - Individualisation

So the Cycling New Zealand approach will be to continue to develop a number of regional Coach Mentors and transition the existing L1 courses for all codes through 2015 to a new Foundation Coaching Course being developed and offered in 2016; changing from a 'teaching environment' to a 'learning environment'.

Alongside this we will be working with existing experienced coaches to fill any gaps they may have in their personal coaching puzzle and endorsing them accordingly. There will be some pre-requisites such as First Aid certification, Police Vetting and agreeing to sign a Code of Ethics, however the endorsement will be based on recognising prior learning or experience, and developing an individual process for each experienced coach. We will also be re-designing and developing our suite of coaching resources to have more resilience and suit the ever evolving learning network we are creating.

If you have any feedback about this approach I'd like to hear from you. Please provide your thoughts or comments to me by 31st May.

If you are an experienced coach and would like to be recognised and endorsed by Cycling New Zealand, or are considering becoming a coach, or are a novice or inexperienced coach and would like to find out more about the Foundation training, then please contact me:

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FAQs:

Q: Will my existing Level 1, 2 or 3 Cycle Coaching Qualification still be valid or recognised?

A: Yes of course. The new approach will not be de-valuing what has gone before; only enhancing it. It becomes part of your portfolio of experience.

Q: Why do I need a qualification or endorsement?

A: On a number of levels it is becoming increasingly more important to gain formal endorsement/recognition for your skills. This is due to changes in legislation both Health & Safety and Child Safety Acts for starters. Endorsement can:

- Give you access to Cycling New Zealand insurance cover for coaching activities.
- Open up doors to the ever increasing number of organisations and individuals searching for quality cycle training/coaching and who expect to see formal qualifications.
- Can give you the credibility you deserve.
- Enhance your learning network of cycle coaches.

Q: Do qualifications expire?

A: The onus is on the individual coach to show ongoing professional development (PD) ie attending seminars, up-skilling courses or workshops. Even online PD is useful evidence that you are staying on top of good practice. This should be kept in the form of a written coaching log or diary. A coach should be able to access PD at least once per year. If this is done and there is regular contact with the network of Coaches and Coach Mentors then a qualification can be valid for up to 5 years without review.

Q: Who and where are the Coach Mentors?

A: There are currently 17 endorsed Coach Mentors across New Zealand, based in the following regions: Manawatu (1), Hawkes Bay (1), Waikato (7), Auckland (3), BoP (1), Southland (1), Otago (1), Canterbury (1) and Tasman (1). For details please contact Chris Foggin.

Q: Have I been doing stuff wrong all these years?

A: In most cases probably not; and in the eyes of Cycling New Zealand you are valued for your knowledge, drive, passion and expertise that you give to the sport of cycling. Let's formalise and recognise this.