

Being a Developer Coach Has Never Been More Important

Article by: Nate Baker



In a society where signaling significance trumps pursuing potential, the Developer Coach is a generation's only hope.

We don't coach in the same world we grew up in.

I can feel your nodding approval. But have we ever taken the time to explore those differences any further? Or have we kept that phrase in our back pocket—ready to use when things don't go the way we want?

The tension we feel is today's development paradox:

This is the hardest moment to develop a special player or team, yet it's also the most advantageous time to create distance between your contemporaries.

There's more interest in the game, more access, and more infrastructure than ever before, but...

As coaches, we feel the tension—regardless of the level we coach. For Developer Coaches, it can feel like we're dragging players toward their potential, almost against their own will.

And that's because we are.

Today's player was:

- Born with a smartphone in their pocket.
- Raised by helicopter parents.
- Over-diagnosed and over-medicated.
- Grew up on participation trophies.
- Placated by poor leaders.
- Reinforced with lowered standards.
- Engulfed in apathy.
- And inundated with an excess of inputs on a level that doesn't protect their well-being.

We most definitely do not coach in the same world we grew up in.

You're dragging your players because society has implicitly trained them to avoid the very things that help them move toward their potential.

Because they're scared out of their minds with no tools for how to manage it. They fear challenge, embarrassment, and failure to such an extent that they'll do anything to protect themselves.

Including never shifting out of second gear. To move into third gear exposes them too much, even when they're just playing a game.

Reinforced by a soccer culture that uses winning as its navigation, it becomes plain to see...

Today's players need Developer Coaches more than ever.

In a society where signaling significance trumps pursuing potential, the Developer Coach is a generation's only hope. *This is not hyperbole.* Our players need us more than ever.

And they need us to give more than we ever thought we'd have to give.

Here are 10 principles to hold close to help today's player believe in (and fully pursue) their potential.

1. Make Sure They Are Seen (And Safe)

They need to know they're in a space where they can be themselves.

Create environments that help people feel safe to be who they are while pursuing their better version.

2. Build Trust Every Day

Today's player needs three things more than anything: **belief, guidance, and care.**

They also need more of it than yesterday's player so give them all you have and more.

3. Create Compelling Visions

Development requires aspirational visions where every player can see themselves as the lead.

Compelling visions transform lives.

4. Make Parents Partners in the Mission

Educate your parents on the vision so they can help make it real on the home front.

Let's increase the odds of long-term development by seeing parents as partners—not problems to overcome.

5. Always Believe in Their Potential

Because each of your players has one, even if it's impossible to predict at any given moment.

Make them believe in it by keeping them on their path and showing them all the small wins along the way.

6. Provide Endless Support

Every one of your players is going through something.

Do your best to help them understand that you're there to help—always.

7. Keep the Game a Game

Today's player doesn't smile as much.

The game is a vehicle for greater things, but it must always remain a game that, at its core, brings us joy.

8. Be Willing to Have the Hard Conversation

They've been placated enough and are starving for true guidance.

Be honest and have the hard conversations so players have the best chance of becoming their best selves.

9. Serve with Humility, Empathy, and Courage

Great leaders are a dying breed in a self-obsessed world.

Serve your people with the Developer Coach's core three traits.

10. Help Them See Their Power

Each of your players will reach a moment when you're no longer their coach.

Help them become autonomous people who understand their true self-worth and power—and the responsibility to stay on their path well after you're gone.

Final Words

I get so frustrated sometimes.

I see how great my players can be...

But their actions make me feel like they don't see the same thing.

But I know it's so much more complex.

Part of it is that they just haven't been taught how to pursue it.

Part of it is that they're inundated with detrimental inputs and poor leadership.

And a big part they wrestle with is that they deeply fear the ramifications of its pursuit.

Or even feel worthy enough to pursue it in the first place.

But this is what I do know:

- Nearly 1 in 5 high school students seriously considered suicide in the past year, and almost 1 in 10 attempted. ([CDC, 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#))
- Over 40% of teens report feeling persistently sad or hopeless—the highest level ever recorded. (CDC, 2023)
- Young adults (18–25) now report the highest rates of depression and suicidal thoughts of any age group in America. ([NIMH, 2024](#))

We indeed don't coach in the same world we grew up in.

And because of that...

Being a Developer Coach has never been more important.

There's so much more at stake than winning the match on the weekend.

Today's player needs us to help them see their potential

And to know they're worthy of its pursuit.

Even if it takes far more than we ever thought we'd need to give.

Because in the end, that's what they'll remember most—

Not the results we achieved.

But the courage we showed.

To keep believing in them...

Until they were ready to believe in themselves.