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Social Work and Coaching Styles

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Literature Review

Although there are many factors that affect organizational performance in today's society, the role of an effective leader is crucial. Holstein (2010) noted that the majority of leadership research in athletics focuses on the coaches. The most accurate measurement of organizational success can be found on athletic teams, where coaches are responsible for their athletes' performance. Coaches combine the power of their position with a particular coaching style to maximize organizational performance (Pratt, Eitzen, 2005).

Grasmuck (2005) reported that coaching involves key dimensions that cluster in different ways to produce a wide range of distinct styles. One key dimension includes coaches' expertise of their sport. Coaches range from those who have played their sport their entire life to those who only attain a passive understanding of it. The more years of expertise, the more likely coaches are to place importance on developing a wide range of essential skills (Grasmuck, 2005). Another dimension includes coaches' emphasis on individualization versus winning. What helps a particular athlete advance their skills might be detrimental to the chances of a team winning a game (Grasmuck, 2005). Therefore, coaches must weigh the importance of helping their athletes achieve individual goals versus the team as a whole. The last dimension includes the type of reinforcement coaches' use, which can be positive or negative. It is not always about coaches' level of expertise that determines their coaching style, but rather the way in which they teach their athletes, either with criticism or affirmation (Grasmuck, 2005). A significant preference for positive feedback emerged from track and field athletes and athletes with low performance expectations (Turman, 2003).

There are three types of coaching styles that can be used to help athletes perform to the best of their ability. These styles consist of the command style, the submissive style, and the cooperative style (Martens, 2012).

Command style coaching consists of the coach making all the decisions. The coach takes full control by explaining exactly what needs to be done and the role of the athlete is to listen to, absorb, and comply with the coach's commands (Martens, 2012). Athletes are considered instruments with little opportunity to initiate change. This style encourages strong discipline, rigidity of rules, and hierarchical authority (Pratt, Eitzen, 1989). The underlying philosophy of this style states that because the coach has the most knowledge and experience, they hold the most powerful position, which gives them authority over the athletes (Martens, 2012). Turman (2001) reported that coaches' use of a command style was affected by team success. Athletes who competed at higher levels and were involved in traditional sports preferred coaches to utilize command behaviors (Turman, 2003).

Along with the command style, the submissive style is another approach to coaching. In contrast to the command style, submissive coaching is when coaches make as few decisions as possible. Coaches who adopt this style provide little instruction and minimal guidance in organizing activities. Also, they only resolve discipline problems when absolutely necessary (Martens, 2012). Some coaches choose to adopt this method for various reasons. Reasons could consist of lacking the competence or confidence to provide instruction or not being able to devote the time and effort to properly prepare. On the other hand, some coaches truly believe that this style is best for their athletes (Martens, 2012).

Another method of coaching consists of the cooperative style. This style of coaching emphasizes the relationship between the coach and the athlete (Martens, 2012). The goal of this

method is to develop an alliance between the coach and the athlete for the purpose of meeting the athlete's needs (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, Sandahl, 1998). The coach believes it is their job to guide the athlete in the decision-making process to achieve their goals. The coach realizes that they are the knowledgeable leaders, but also understand that the knowledge and thought processes of the athletes are just as important. Cooperative coaches "cooperate" with their athletes by sharing the decision-making (Martens, 2012). Athletes from modern sports had the strongest desire for their coaches to include them in the decision-making processes for the team (Turman, 2003). Coaches articulate the athlete's dreams, desires, and aspirations, and help them clarify their mission, purpose and goals in order to achieve an outcome (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, Sandahl, 1998).

Social Work Code of Ethics: Comparing and Contrasting with Coaching Styles

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics serves as a guide to the everyday professional conduct of social workers. It offers a set of values, principles, and standards to guide social worker's decision making when ethical issues arise (National Association of Social Workers, 2008).

The Code of Ethics addresses the value, "Importance of Human Relationships." This ethical principle emphasizes that "social workers seek to strengthen relationships among people in a purposeful effort to promote, restore, maintain, and enhance the well-being of individuals." Social workers are required to engage people as partners in the helping process (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). This value is linked to the cooperative style of coaching. Social workers must involve their client's thoughts and ideas in the helping process, just as coaches involve their athlete's thoughts about decision-making on a team (Martens, 2012).

Cooperative coaches articulate their athlete's dreams, desires, and aspirations, and help them clarify their mission, purpose and goals, just as social workers do in the helping process (Hepworth, 2013).

Although social workers are required to abide by ethical values, they must stand for certain ethical responsibilities as well. One of social workers' responsibilities to their clients is self-determination. "Social workers respect and promote the right of clients to self-determination and assist clients in their efforts to identify and clarify their goals" (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). The social worker's job is to help the client help themselves. This can be done by determining the client's strengths and how they can be used to promote a sense of self-worth (Hepworth, 2013). D. Fielder claims that during one-on-one sessions with clients, power is given to the client (personal communication, 2013). Therefore, sessions should revolve the client's needs and desires, rather than the social worker.

The social work ethical responsibility of self-determination contrasts with the command style of coaching. In command style coaching, the coach takes full control and athletes are considered inferior. Therefore, power is given to the coach. The responsibility of self-determination teaches that social workers do not make decisions for clients, but rather assist them in their efforts to identify and clarify their goals (Hepworth, 2013). Thus, power is given to the client. The role of the command coach opposes the role of the client in social work because they signify contrasting functions. Command style coaching recognizes the coach as the authority, whereas the value of self-determination emphasizes the client as the authority. Clients are seen as a source of expertise regarding their situations and behaviors (Starlin, 2006). Athletes are not viewed as a source of expertise to the command coach because they have less knowledge and experience in relation to them.

Although the value of self-determination contrasts with the commands style of coaching, it relates to the submissive style. “The primary responsibility of social workers is to promote the well-being of clients. In general, client’s interests are primary” (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). D. Fielder stated that it is up to the client to make as many decisions as possible during one-on-one sessions (personal communication, 2013). Because the role of a social worker is to guide, rather than provide for their clients, they must make as few decisions for them as possible. Therefore, in this case, the social worker can be viewed as submissive to the client. Submissive coaches make as few decisions as possible, just as social workers are liable to let clients make their own decisions.

In addition to the value of self-determination, the social work responsibility of “Integrity of the Profession” is connected to the cooperative coaching style. This ethical responsibility states that “social workers should share their professional knowledge and skills with colleagues” (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). Cooperative coaches focus on teaching, so they are willing to share their knowledge about the sport with their athletes (Martens, 2012). Social workers are expected to share their professionalism, just as cooperative coaches are expected to share their familiarity with the sport to their athletes.

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