

The Modern Head Coach

Using his experience heading-up the elite coach development programme at the RFU in England, Kevin Bowring tells us how you can be a more effective head coach.

Working with other coaches can be as challenging as being the only coach at a club or school. There is always the danger that too many coaching “voices” will send mixed messages to the teams. As head coach you need to clearly define your role and the role of your coaching team. Are you going to be on-field solving problems, or managing the resources off-field?

Clive Woodward managed a very large coaching team to mastermind England’s 2003 RWC success. More recently a coaching team of three seems to provide the bulk of England’s team coaching, with the Head Coach managing the use of specialist coaches when required.

Bring in Specialists – But Keep Control

At the elite level, coaches have access to specialist coaching on every minute aspect of the game. You may have access to a medical support team, fitness advisors and other sports science support. In which case, you need to ensure you don’t become a slave to their regimes, which may conflict with your systems. To help you overcome this become a “T” shaped coach.

“T” Shaped Coaches

The head coach needs to have both a breadth and a depth of knowledge. Those with a breadth of knowledge, as indicated by the horizontal part of the “T” in the diagram, have a good understanding of all the specialist areas, but may not be specialists themselves. The vertical part of the “T” indicates the depth of knowledge of an area of specialism.

The head coach needs to know a little about ALL areas of performance and development. The specialist coach knows a

great deal about one specialist area of performance. The head coach needs to be able to understand what specialists have to offer, manage them and balance this against all the other areas.

Use Business Management Skills

A lot of a head coach’s work involves generic management and interpersonal skills. In rugby, however, there are few “management” experts. Lessons from commerce and business schools can help us improve our management skills.

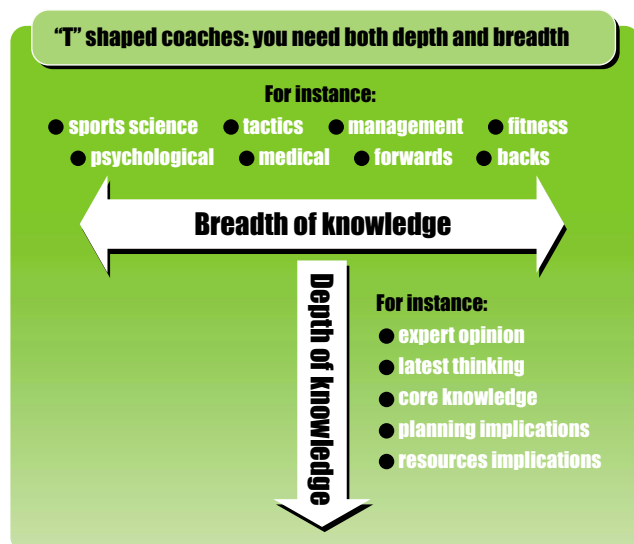
With the England set up, non-rugby management experts work with our elite coaches to help them manage their players and coaching teams. They ask questions of the coaches and encourage them to discover the solutions themselves. The focus is on “how” coaches coach and “how” coaches manage people.

80:20 Rule (Off-Field to On-Field)

As a head coach, you probably find yourself spending more time preparing off the field than on. Video analysis, team programmes, individual schedules, giving feedback, meetings with the other coaches, plus planning each training session all mean that your time on the field is reduced. In addition, head coaches need to have excellent communication, analytical and “multi-tasking” skills. Head coaches also have to “sell” their ideas to players, senior management and perhaps even the media.

Being an Inter-Disciplinary Coach

A head coach will approach problems by considering all the coaching disciplines. This means thinking about the psychological, medical and physical, as well as the normal rugby skills, tactics and strategic solutions. The role of the head coach is to review all these areas with the specialists. The key is to support and challenge. Do you have enough knowledge to support your specialist coaches, and yet challenge and manage them to deliver what you require? 🎯



Summary

- 1 Be in control of your specialists, not led by them.
- 2 Gain a solid understanding of all areas.
- 3 Develop your management skills.
- 4 Work hard off the field.
- 5 Coach “through the eyes” of all the disciplines.
- 6 Support and challenge your specialist coaches.

Kevin Bowring is the RFU Head of Elite Coach Development and a former Wales National Coach.