

GOLD DUST

How To Become A More Effective Coach, Quickly



DAVID AND KEITH MAYER

Thank You

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We would also like to thank all of coaches mentioned below who contributed to the book with their stories, experiences and ideas. There are hundreds of years combined experience in coaching and dealing with people across different sports featured in the book. Their help has been greatly appreciated in this process. In first name alphabetical order:

Alex Inglethorpe – Current Liverpool FC Academy Director. Ex professional soccer player. Previously coached at Leyton Orient FC, Exeter City FC and Tottenham Hotspur FC.

Chris Millington – Assistant Manager at FC Halifax Town.

Darren Moore – Current Doncaster Rovers FC Manager. Ex-Premier League footballer and ex West Brom Manager in the Premier League.

Gareth Holmes – Professional Phase Lead Coach at Nottingham Forest.

Justin Holbrook – Gold Coast Titans Rugby League Head Coach. One of the most successful Super League coaches of all time as Head Coach at St Helens RLFC.

Kevin Harper – Former 2x Thai Boxing World Champion. Owns a combat a gym with boxing, MMA and Thai Boxing with over 50 Champions, including several World Champions.

Mick Beale – Current Rangers FC First Team Coach. Ex professional footballer. Previously coached at Chelsea FC, Liverpool FC and Sao Paolo as Assistant Manager.

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Richard Dobson – Current Assistant Manager at Wycombe Wanderers.

Ryan Maye – Current Head of Coaching at Aston Villa. Coached at Chelsea, Rangers, West Brom and the FA before taking up a role at Aston Villa.

Steve Heighway – Liverpool FC Legend. Ex Liverpool Player and Ex Academy Director.

Vicky Jepson – Current Manager at Liverpool FC Ladies.

Chapter 1 - The Lone Wolf: The Story of a Boy – An experience from Keith Mayer

For the purpose of the story we will call this athlete John to make it easier to follow.

Wolves are known as pack animals that live, hunt, and defend together to ensure maximum opportunity of flourishing in their environment. Similar to humans, the wolf spends the majority of their time in a group where they are stronger than by themselves. In your coaching environment you are likely to find packs within your group, but have you ever come across the lone player?

A lone wolf is an animal or person that acts independently, spending time alone instead of with a group. In the animal kingdom, the lone wolf may be stronger, and far more resourceful than the average wolf that is a member of a pack. They go under the radar because they tend to travel alone and are often looked at differently than the rest.

After 35 years of coaching, Keith came across a lone wolf like never before. It was only during this experience he started to realise what coaching really was. This experience gave him a greater empathy, understanding, and overall ability to work with athletes across many spectrums. Keith had an athlete within a group that he metaphorically called the lone wolf. The one that didn't speak to anybody, including coaches and teammates. The one who didn't look you in the eye. The one who intrigued and inspired Keith more than most.

For Keith, this was an athlete he had to work with. He had amounted all of this experience throughout his coaching and professional career and he wanted to help this athlete. John would go under the radar but would give everything he had when playing football. There was something about this athlete that was different.

Keith set off on my journey to develop this athlete in what proved to be the most fruitful experience he had ever had.

John came in as a trialist. He was a big tall athletic boy but technically required a lot work. There was something about this boy that appealed to Keith. When you asked him a question, you'd get a really simple answer, if any answer at all. You wouldn't get any real interaction with the boy, but Keith couldn't delve too deep at first because he had over 20 players that all required looking after.

At the end of the first week of his trial we signed John on. Keith understood that through to around December it was a settling in period for John. It's important as coaches that we allow athletes the opportunity to integrate with their peer groups. That in itself is a process, and even though we, as coaches, allow them time to settle in, it's important to observe how the interactions are within the group. John was still extremely quiet around his peers and the coaches. You had to really dig deep to get any interaction with this player, but it was something Keith was willing to do.

In December of that year, Keith decided to find out more about John through his Mum. Keith wanted to connect with John and his family to get some depth and understanding around what was going on in his life outside of football that may help him when he comes to practice. Over a couple of conversations with John's Mum, Keith found out there were five children in the family, all living just with their Mum, with John being the youngest. To Keith's surprise, he was also a twin. When Keith started to talk to the Mum about John and how he was very quiet, she told him John's twin sister did most of the talking for John, both in and out of school. At

that point a lightbulb switched on. Keith needed to work with this boy differently. How did he connect with John now knowing what he knew?

During the conversation with his Mum, Keith asked if he could speak to John to see how his Christmas had been. The Mum shouted upstairs to get John down. When he got on the phone, Keith asked how his Christmas had been, expecting a quick and basic answer.

"It was fine, thank you. How was your Christmas?" That set Keith back. He had a moment because that was the first time John had shown any real interaction outside of people asking him questions. Face to face he was very quiet, and people got very little from him, but Keith had one phone call with the boy and the conversation seemed different. Maybe Keith could use this platform to get more from this boy where you aren't physically in his presence.

Even with 35 years of coaching experience up to that point, that conversation was the most impactful one Keith had ever had with an athlete. Keith has worked with players that have represented their countries, and World Champion athletes, yet he was on the phone with nine-year-old boy thinking he was helping the boy when in reality, it was far from it. John taught Keith something on that phone call. After speaking with John, Keith asked John to put his Mum back on the phone so he could share what he and John had spoken about. It's important to let parents know what has been discussed on the phone so that everybody involved is aware of what has taken place.

That was the start of a project Keith called the 'Lone Wolf'. How could Keith help John further, or did he even need the help? **You will come across athletes that don't say a great deal on or off the pitch. Do they have to be noisy, or are they the type of people that may be registering much more information in silence? I guess the magic may lie in the silence between the notes.**

This boy had a lot to learn, but he wasn't signed on because of his technical proficiency. That was something Keith could work with. John was signed on because of his attitude. He wanted to learn. His actions spoke more than his words. Was it Keith's place to get in his world and change him from being a quiet boy into somebody who had to speak because he was too quiet? That was a big lesson for Keith. His job was to make the environment as comfortable as possible for John without changing his World, which is what he then aimed to do.

Where Keith coaches, they organise team events a couple of times a year. The age group below John's had a trip to a place called Airborne, a place where there are trampolines and climbing frames. Keith knew John had built a good relationship with another young boy in the age group below, so it was set up where John would go with his friend in the year below and see how it worked. After the event, Keith briefly spoke to John to find out how his experience was, but instead of forcing him to talk, Keith asked John if he could write what he enjoyed about Airborne and share it with Keith at their next training session. John agreed.

As promised, John brought the paper in the next time Keith saw him at training. To this day, Keith still has the handwritten paper. John wrote the following, "I enjoyed jumping and climbing on the obstacles. It was really fun when we were bouncing on the trampoline. We did some tricks and we were running around for the warmup. I enjoyed the trampoline the most because we were doing flips and we were bouncing around."

In that note, the thing Keith picked up was John used the word 'we' a lot. Keith didn't know whether that was John's understanding of the English language, or whether his interest

was in more than just himself. Instead of saying what he enjoyed, was it about more than just him?

Not too long after Airborne, John and his age group had a tournament. The room lists were already sorted before the players arrive. Keith selected the rooms carefully for all of the players. It was important for him that John wasn't in a room with somebody that was going to overpower him and force themselves on him. Keith also asked John if he could write down the room list and who was staying in what room. Within five minutes John slipped under Keith's door a piece of paper with every single person's room in our party. Keith was giving John responsibility, which he took seriously.

At certain periods of the season, away trips where a regular occurrence and Keith wanted to occupy time by providing different experiences for this group of boys. On one of the trips, Keith decided they would have interviews where the boys sat down and got interviewed by their peers so they could get to know each other even more. There were some confident young boys in the group, which is a quality Keith also admires. Even though the whole experience was very informal, Keith had to ensure the questions were worded correctly and there wasn't any silly behaviour within the group. If Keith was to ask who wants to go first, he would pretty much know who it would be, but it was interesting as he went down the list. Keith believed John would want to be the last one to go, being the Lone Wolf. He was the fifth out of fourteen who stepped up.

Keith's specific question to each player that got up was "if you were not to become a professional soccer player, what job would you like to do next?" Keith wrote the answers down on flip chart paper. When John got up and asked this question, he said "I'd like to become a lawyer." As he said it, there was a moment of surprise for Keith, but he wanted to know more, so he asked why John wanted to become a lawyer. John's reply was "I want to help people." Keith asked why John wanted to help people and his response was "I want to help people who don't have a lot of money." Wow. Keith had to hold back some tears when John said that because it was an unexpected reply. This boy came from a very humble background. He lived with his Mum and four other siblings and wanted to become a lawyer so he could help people who don't come from money. The meaning behind his words were so powerful. He doesn't speak much, but he chooses his words very carefully when he does speak. **For a lot of people, the power of silence can be a challenge. For John, the World he lives in is the World that works best for him.**

This is the type of boy John is. If there were balls, bibs and cones on the other side of the pitch, he wouldn't just get one. He would get everything so the pitch looked nice and tidy, and he would do it as quickly as possible. There was an experience during training when Keith purposefully left a few cones out about 50 yards away from the group when they were finished. Keith asked for a volunteer to go and collect the cones. As soon as Keith asked, John started running. Keith started to count down from 10. John was sprinting at full pace to get these cones in. As the countdown continued, the group of boys started counting too. John made it back within the countdown, and as he did the group of boys went absolutely ballistic. They were jumping and celebrating as if John had scored a goal. Up to that point it was one of the only moments where Keith had seen this boy smile. It was touching to see his peers embrace him so strongly that it created a smile on his face. His peer group that he plays with absolutely adore him. He doesn't say much to them, but they care for him.

To this day, John has no idea how much influence he has had on Keith's life and the way he now delivers and coaches. All Keith wanted to do was help John become a strong pillar of society. John doesn't have to be loud and boisterous, but could Keith help him become confident in different situations?

Keith learned so much from this experience. He needed to develop a greater understanding of the person as opposed to the athlete. The experience got Keith to reflect and ask questions about himself, which has in turn helped him become more aware of the sensitivity surrounding athletes. You may have had people ask the question, what animal would you be? If you were to ask Keith what animal he would be, he is a lone wolf. He is away from the pack, and so was John. The lone wolf, the one that acts independently, spending time alone instead of with a group. Just because somebody may be silent does not mean they don't possess big action. **Just because somebody may be silent does not mean we have to invade their world and tell them they need to speak and be louder. By no means am I saying we don't want to develop them, but we need to be more sensitive as coaches to this. Do we have to force athletes to do something they aren't comfortable with? What can we do to help the athlete, rather than force issues?**

As a more sensitive coach, Keith now works with athletes in a different way. There are many moments where he is consciously trying to help, but what he has learned is how important it is to be aware of people and their situation. If you don't know what's happening in their World, be careful about jumping to conclusions around what they need. How somebody acts currently is based around what happened in past experiences. Keith is not a social worker, but he is here to help develop athletes to become even better. He is curious around what he does, and how he can take his athletes on a journey before he passes them on to someone else.

It's important to remember that no one athlete is exactly the same. Steve Heighway, Liverpool FC legend is a strong believer of this. "When I'm working with athletes it isn't about me making them do something exactly how I want it to be," said Steve. "What I want is for my athletes to do something the way that works best for them. No one athlete is the same as the next. **When you look at music, you could have twenty people all playing the guitar with the same teacher and they'll all end up being different types of guitar players. They won't sound the same because they'll bring their own personality and character. We need to treat athletes in a similar manner.**"

As long as you have the intent to influence with integrity and with a positive manner, it will brush off on other people. We want to create strong people. We're creating memories for our athletes that they can take on their journey. It is a never-ending search in the pursuit of excellence, which has and continues to keep us going.

Listen Purely, Explore Deeply

Buckminster Fuller - "What is my job on the planet? What is it that needs doing, that I know something about, that probably won't happen unless I take responsibility for it?"

Consider the notion that you cannot not communicate. What signals do you transmit in your verbal and non-verbal language that ultimately influence what type of communication you receive in return? If your intent is to deliver more effective information to your athletes, you

must be aware of what's happening outside of your own World. If you pay close attention to the messages people provide, both verbally and non-verbally, you are more likely to understand the World around you, because that's where the answers lie. Opening up your eyes and ears and truly listening and watching more intently to what's happening around you. The purpose of this book is to give you more insight and greater possibility to influence with integrity and effectiveness.

John led Keith to develop an even deeper curiosity around what it is we as coaches do, and how we can develop better relationships with our athletes quicker and more efficiently. What can we do to become even more highly effective coaches? What steps do exemplars take to connect with athletes and how can we model those exemplars?

What is the first thing you can do to build rapport with your athlete? How can you build a stronger connection with your athlete? How can you get the most out of your athletes? How can you become a more highly effective coach, quicker?

Dedication to Dick Bate – by Keith Mayer

Thank You

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Dedication to Dick Bate – by Keith Mayer

This book is dedicated to my close friend, Dick Bate. The footballing circle lost a pioneer, a maverick and one of the finest coach educators the World has seen when Dick passed away in April 2018. The thousands of coaches that had the pleasure to observe his captivating sessions were in the presence of greatness. His sessions were constantly filled with unparalleled technical detail that always ignited the imagination of those present.

Whenever Dick and I spoke, he always inspired me with this ability to make me feel special. He was a mentor, and a friend. Dick has played a huge part in my life, and for that, I will be forever grateful. I miss our conversations my friend.

In dedication to Dick, 10% of profits from this book will be donated to The Giles' Trust, the brain tumour fund within the University Hospital Birmingham Charity.

