



Hi!

Thanks for downloading this. I wrote this for our Community Trainers off the back of our recent Level 1 course where we spend time exploring the different roles of coaches during a session.

I hope it's helpful. I've left my email at the end, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Enjoy,
Andrew



Andrew Telfer is Head Coach at WildStrong.

Different Modes of Coaching; When to Step Back and When to Lead.

Member-centered Coaching

One of the things that surprises new WildStrong members is that not only are they 'allowed' to talk during classes, they're actively encouraged. People are conditioned to clam up when a teacher walks up to them in school or a coach catches them chatting during a bootcamp session. We always try to explain that we're not a bootcamp. We want you to talk to other members, we're not going to punish you with 10 burpees for telling a joke or asking questions. Peer coaching and co-teaching is a big part of the WildStrong methodology. We want our members to collaborate and learn from each other.

I joke that good coaching is easy coaching or even lazy coaching, but that's not exactly true. Coaches need to work hard and thoroughly prepare in order for their sessions to run smoothly. There is however a kernel of truth in the joke that lazy coaching is good coaching. What I mean is that you should get your members to do the hard work for you. Don't tell them what to think; try to pull or elicit the 'why' of each session and movement selection. Don't just tell clients what a clean is, or why crawling is useful; ask them how developing a heavy clean can translate into real world capabilities, or how they might use crawling in their own lives. Have clients demonstrate the movements and provide points of performance or common faults.

Physicist Richard Feynman is famous for many reasons, but I like to reference his technique for learning. Eponymously known as the [Feynman Technique](#), it involves teaching a concept, as simply as possible, to someone else. If you can't clearly teach a concept to a new member, there's a good chance you haven't mastered the content yet. A big part of the success of Wildstrong is based on the concept of reciprocity, people are happy when they feel useful and can help others. Facilitate learning and physical activity, but don't do all the work. This feeds into our adherence to the PERMA model of flourishing. Ensure that members have multiple opportunities to build relationships, increase their sense of mastery and build a sense of autonomy or agency. If a coach only employs top down teaching, then their members will never develop a sense of ownership over their movements. Members need to share and teach and co-create in every WildStrong session. An effective class, in a mature community, relies on building multiple, bi-directional cross-connections of everyone helping everyone. This could be as simple as helping to set up or clean up spaces, carrying each other's kettlebells or going out of your way to welcome new members and help them with new movements.

That being said, coaching is dynamic and involves multiple roles, even during the same session. We try not to make our sessions too coach-focused. Good sessions maximise member talk time and interaction. However, there are times during the class when a coach needs to lead and not just facilitate. Since coaches will have more knowledge of the 'whys' behind a session and will have prepared their PACTS, it's the coach's role to direct and organise members in order to ensure a smoother, more educational class. (PACTS stands for: Points of Performance, Anticipated Problems, Cues, Tips/Tactics, and Scaling/Substitutions.)

As mentioned above, a WildStrong coach wears many hats. Loosely, I'd say that over the course of one session you might act as a teacher, an event planner, a cheerleader and a manager. These roles aren't set in stone and they'll overlap a bit. Building up your coaching persona/personas is a large part of maturing as a coach. In no order here are the roles laid out:

Teacher. Ask questions, use the socratic method, elicit, check understanding. Think about pedagogical techniques like "tell, show, do", "think, pair, share", "targeted questions".

Event planner or flow master. Ensure everyone is having a good time and everything is in its place. Pay attention to who is in the class. Who needs more help, who's a complementary peer coaching or conditioning partner. Identify your in class helpers. Identify who works well together, or even who doesn't work well together. (Too chatty? Not chatty enough.) Ensure that the pace is good and nothing is too rushed, nor too behind schedule.

Cheerleader. This one is straightforward. Encourage members during a tough workout. Find that positive balance between correcting and inspiring. Tell people they can do it. Bring attention to hardwork and a job well done. Make good vibes.

Manager. This could easily be called drill sergeant or school master or whatever resonates with you. We'll go with 'manager' because it might be a more neutral term. Sometimes you have to tell people what to do for their own safety or to ensure other members are robbed of a good session due to disruptions or dilly-dallying. It can be challenging for some coaches to switch roles and actively tell people what to do. Use the structure of the class to make it clear when it's time to listen. Find your manager voice when you call the group back to the whiteboard to establish that the session is progressing to a new stage.

Normal you. Often during classes you'll need to be in coach mode. This means you might have to act a bit more confident or authoritative than you normally would. Allow yourself to be yourself when you're not managing 12 people swinging heavy objects around. Before or after class, take the time to have genuine conversations with people outside the role of being a coach. Admit that you drink beer and eat biscuits. Don't feel the need to pretend you're somebody else.

Components of a Session and Coach's Role

It's good to review the components of a standard session so we can think about the **why** of each session and the coach's role during each phase. Sometimes your role might shift over the course of a component stage. For example while introducing the peer coaching, you start off as a teacher, then shift to more of an event manager. When you call the members back to prepare for the conditioning, you might switch over to pure manager mode until things calm down and the group is ready for conditioning.

Pre-class and start of session:

Welcome members and informal chat. Ask early members to help with set up and any last minute arrangements. (Cones, lights, bringing out weights etc.)

Use this time to bring attention to the Question of the Day and start prepping members to think about the movements and skills required for today's session.

Use this informal time to check in with members, see how they're doing, ask about family, enquire about previous injuries etc.

Remember that some members need a bit of transition time, moving from work or family mode. The early class period can serve as a liminal zone for people to prepare for class. Don't rush it.

Start of session and Question of the Day:

Use the question of the day to refresh names or introduce new members.

Judge the mood of the class by seeing how enthusiastic/energetic everyone is. Does anyone seem down or tired? Take that into consideration.

One purpose of question of the day is to give a bit more time to later members. This is the time of class that can be interrupted, no no crucial information is being disseminated.

Use this time for housekeeping, talks about plans, changes, administration points or events that might need a boost.

Why:

Use this time to explain the justification, desired stimulus and goals of the session. Let members know what you expect in terms of effort, quality of movement or focus. (Sprinty, heavy, high quality, high enthusiasm team conditioning etc.)

This is also the time to share the overall format of the session, major movements, considerations or anticipated problems that can be addressed by communicating ahead of time. (We don't have much time today so let's focus, this is a jumping workout so be extra careful, it's raining today so the grass is slippery. etc)

Hopefully everyone is present now so we can use the warm up and peer coaching for skill development, movement assessment and a time to decide on scaling or substitutions.

Warm Up:

Surprisingly, the warm up is one of the more coach intensive phases of the class.

There's a lot to think about while running warm ups, you must juggle several tasks at the same time.

Direct members where to stand, where to move and how to use space.

Generally we want members lining up shoulder to shoulder with plenty of space in between. Everyone should be facing the same direction and clear about where they are moving.

Coaches must demonstrate new movements and explain the why of the movements while sharing cues and ensuring everyone understands the movement.

During warm up you will need to demonstrate and troubleshoot more movements than at any other part of the session.

Remember that the warm up is your time to assess movement quality, load cues, and start thinking about how you will scale and choose substitutions for the rest of the session.

Your main focus should be on what the members are doing and whether or not they're displaying the capabilities to participate in the planned movements for the session.

Peer Coaching:

Peer coaching really has at least two subsections.

There is the introduction which involves elicitation and demonstration. This is the Tell component of a Tell, Show, Do methodology.

Secondly, there is the Think, Pair, Share element. We want members to have space and time to explore and collaborate. Let them practise the movements and think about developing new cues or troubleshooting unfamiliar movements.

During the introduction, the spotlight is often on you as the coach. This will be some of the most coach-centred time of the class. This is your time to show movements, communicate PACTS, and generally prepare members to succeed in the peer coaching and conditioning components.

During the paired work, give your members space and step back. You can walk around and facilitate and help those who are struggling, but let the partners do most of the problem solving. If members don't appear to be using the peer coaching time actively, it's probably because a clear goal was not communicated. Always ensure each peer coaching session includes a clear, actionable goal that can be shared with the group upon completion.

It's best to clarify when Peer Coaching is finished by calling the group back to the white board and signifying that the class is transitioning to the conditioning prep phase.

Pre-conditioning preparation:

Though it often doesn't have its own write up in the preparation materials, the post peer coaching/ preconditioning phase of the session can be one of the busiest for both coaches and clients.

It's very important that you take the lead during this section as this can be a period of spiked anxiety and confusion as members prepare for the main conditioning. There are a lot of moving parts and space/equipment management are high priorities. If the coach can maintain control and ensure clear communication during this phase, the final conditioning is often the smoothest, lowest input phase of the class. Clearly assign substitutions, partners, and required space. Clarify and check understanding of format with targeted questions. Demonstrate and refine any additional movements in the conditioning. Give clients a chance to practise any additional movements and substitutions. Concept checking and targeted questions are key during this period. Lead clients on the best space and equipment use.

Main Conditioning:

Ensure your timing app is set to the correct format before class begins.

Check over equipment and space.

Is non relevant equipment cleared away?

Do clients appear to be in the correct space and ready to begin?

Use a final round of targeted questions to review format and order.

Give a 1 minute or 30s warning before the conditioning is about to start.

Announce the beginning of the 10 second countdown.

If it's helpful, the coach may demonstrate the movements and order of the first round of conditioning as members are starting. Sometimes it's helpful to present visual cues. For members to mimic.

Now it's time to be active with verbal, visual and tactile cues.

Think about the cues you loaded and demonstrated during warm up and peer coaching.

Remember coaching triage. Address potentially dangerous movement first. Then cue when appropriate, try not to over cue individual members.

Sometimes it's helpful to present visual cues. For members to mimic.

If required, make time and space to slow members down or provide substitutions when appropriate.

Use client names when necessary.

Make mental or board notes on common trends, faults or improvements or especially good form. Use these for the debrief.

Post Conditioning Debrief:

After the final countdown and members have had a few seconds to rest or begging to clean up, be sure to call the group back to board.

Think about trends, notes, observations from the session.

Praise good form or improvements either generally or specifically.

Generally, demo and correct any common faults.

Praise effort.

Be sure to complete notes for future programming or share feedback. with your programmer.

Incorporate observations into future programming.

Be present to chat with members as they leave. They may have additional questions.

Conclusions

This is a lot of information to take in. If you're an audio-visual learner, check out some of our explainers on our YouTube channel.

As a new coach, you'll want to develop different skills concurrently.

A big part of your success won't be due to knowing the most about biomechanics or memorising all your antagonist muscle pairings.

Your success and enjoyment of coaching will be dependent on your ability to communicate clearly, deliver a fun, safe class and develop relationships with your members.

Next time you coach a class, think about the different roles you'll play and how your responsibilities will change with the needs of the group.

Thank you!

I hope you enjoyed this article. The skill to know when and why to switch between different coaching modes is a big focus of our Level 1 Certification. We want to equip you with all the skills to know when to step in and when to stand back as a coach.

You can find out more about our [Level 1 Certification Course](#) here.

If you have any questions about anything you've read here, please just drop me an email and I'll get back to you.

All the best,

Andrew

Andrew.telfer@wildstrong.co

Andrew Telfer is Head Coach at WildStrong.

Andrew holds a Master in Public Health and has over 15 year's experience of coaching, personal training and course development. Andrew holds a lot of sports science certificates, here are some of his favourites: NSCA Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist; Crossfit Level 2; ACE Certified Personal Training qualifications; USAW Olympic Weightlifting; Columbus Weightlifting.