

Long-Distance Coach-Athlete Relationship

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Coaches and athletes usually develop **typical** coach-athlete relationships. A typical relationship is defined as one where coaches and athletes interact face-to-face on a daily or regular basis. In **atypical** coach-athlete relationships, a coach and an athlete choose to work long-distance. Due to the current situation created by COVID-19, coaches and athletes need to adjust to long-distance working modes with one another. Moving to a long-distance coach-athlete relationship can pose certain challenges.

Difficulties with training apart or long-distance with your athletes

While *training together* may provide more opportunities for growth in performance capacity and relationship quality for obvious reasons, long-distance may potentially impact negatively on the quality of the coach-athlete relationship in terms *closeness* (trust, respect), *commitment* (loyalty, reliability), *complementarity* (co-operation, roles) and *co-orientation* (being on the same wavelength, striving for the same things) as well as performance (including technical, tactical, physical and its derivatives psychology, nutrition, and so on). Therefore, to make a long-distance coach-athlete relationship effective and successful, coaches and athletes will need to ensure that there is continuous *trust* and *loyalty*.

HOW to work long-distance?

- Communication is key.
 - The principles of good quality relationships apply: Be close, committed, complementary and co-orientated (4Cs of quality coach-athlete relationships) with one another
 - Show your trust, respect, appreciation
 - Express and affirm your continuous commitment
 - Work in a collaborative manner
 - Ensure you are on the same page (strive for the same things)
 - Share information (both personal and sport related) on a daily or regular basis – frequency of interactions needs to be agreeable by both parties
 - Technology is your best friend as it allows you to mutually share information: provide context and content in exchanges so that each witnesses what/how has happened; provide feedback and instructions, ask questions, invite opinions/questions; avoid generalisations and offer specific information. Make conversations purposeful and cheerful
 - Stay honest and talk openly about your feelings of fear, insecurity, uncertainty; provide each other support, assurance and comfort
 - Have a clear, single plan in place for what happens and together work towards that goal for the duration that you work remotely from one another and until you resume working together as you used to
 - Set ground rules for your new ways of working together so that expectations are managed well during this time (of socially distancing)
 - Include your athlete in decisions as much as possible
 - Experience these atypical working conditions as an opportunity to grow and develop
 - Last but not least, stay positive and inject the necessary energy into the relationship to get you through this challenging time

Relevant Literature

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