

Commitments - The keys to perfection



The team benefits from the strengths of each individual.

The keys to perfection

A team is top when it benefits from the strengths of each individual. But what does that mean in practice? Bertrand Théraulaz, volleyball coach and coordinator of the French-language coach education of Swiss Olympic, knows the way. He leads through commitments.

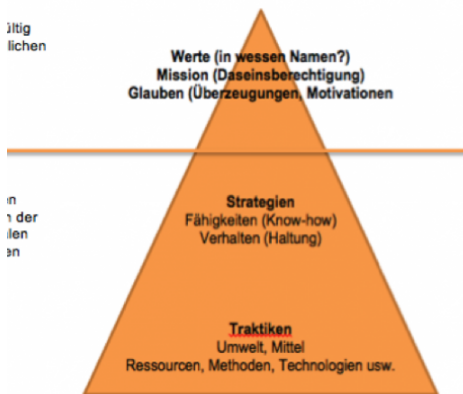
"To find out who can do what and how for the team, you need a team project." As a former top volleyball coach - alongside Georges-André Carrel - Bertrand Théraulaz knows what he's talking about. The level of the team does not play a role: the players, the coaches, the board and other people involved must have a common vision. "For a team to function successfully, you have to take time to discover shared values. Too often you worry about the environment and the resources available first. Then when a problem arises, such as insufficient results, the reasons can't be explained and everyone looks for fault in each other."

A compass for the team

The training conditions - training sessions, coaches available, material, etc. - vary depending on the team. So there is no magic formula. But if the players' behaviour and their different personalities can be brought into the service of common values, important steps towards success have already been taken.

According to Bertrand Théraulaz, seeking and finding shared values is a top priority. Values that players - and their entire environment - want to fight for. As abstract as it sounds, the "virtual" must first be constructed (see Fig. 1). As is well known, however, terms are interpreted differently. They must therefore be collected, discussed and sorted in order to become an internal compass for the team or club. Everyone must be able to refer to it at any time to determine whether or not their attitude or performance supports the shared values.

Fig1: Searching and finding common values



Sport as a mission

Once the team has found common values, it has to be clear about its mission, its *raison d'être*, the results it wants to achieve and its goals. "As a concrete example, I mention the task that the Swiss men's national volleyball team - which has been actively getting back into the action this year - has set itself. For them, on the one hand, it's a matter of showing the public that they're back in full force, and on the other hand, they want to inspire young talent in particular."

But the coach, teacher or leader must also set themselves a clear task. First and foremost, the players and their own resources must be put at the center before personal goals of the coach are pursued.

Autonomy instead of hierarchy

A team project - and thus the definition of common values - is one of the means to get the team excited about one and the same thing. It is then no longer a question of how a problem should be tackled. The team project is the framework and guiding railing for it. "The project promotes the freedom of each individual within the general limits. Each player should be allowed to perform to the best of his ability." For Bertrand Théraulaz, it is important that each player takes responsibility. For him, this is one of three keys to perfection. "The first is transparency in the team, the second is the development of freedom and responsibility, and finally the third is making the most of the players' opposites. This is only possible if you replace hierarchies with autonomous teams." This has one pleasing effect: the release of unimagined powers in each player.

Calling a Spade a Spade

A team project is divided into several phases. In reality, the first phase is often not fully realized. After the initial euphoria at the beginning of the season, it is often assumed that everyone has the same motivation. In reality, however, this is not the case. It is then enough to lose two games in a row to realize that the togetherness is purely superficial. The players do not base their decision on the same fundamentals and the compass that guides them and brings them back together is missing. The model of the "best possible conditions" by the Alain Mounir (MCP©, used in French-speaking coach education) illustrates the different phases as they ideally proceed (Fig. 2).

Fig2: Detailed representation of the phases of the best possible conditions (MCP©)

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When you consider all that should take place in the first phase, it becomes clear that time needs to be invested there. It is very important that clear and unambiguous communication takes place.

"The coach must guarantee that things are called by their name, because the unsaid often holds the greatest dangers."

Bertrand Théraulaz is an instructor, lecturer and sports teacher at the FOSPO. The J+S head of volleyball specializes in individual differences in motor development.

Alain Mounir is a consultant, trainer and coach. He works both as an entrepreneur and in the coach education of Swiss Olympic.

No sooner said than done!

How to approach a team project? Alain Mounir practices a simple method, tested by Bertrand Théraulaz, that involves everyone involved.

1. Players write down the values they want to fight for during the season. One value per sheet, in capital letters.
2. Collect the papers and spread them on the floor.
3. The team is given the following tasks (time: 20 minutes):
 - Order the values into four groups
 - Place the most important value of the group on top, followed by discussion, everyone should participate

4. The behaviors and attitudes necessary for each value are put into words. The three most important ones are selected by the team. Examples of key attitudes:

- Flow: focus, have fun, infect others
- Exchange: communicate, listen, open up
- Teamwork: respecting others, taking responsibility, being supportive
- Pursuing a goal: Have self-confidence, criticize yourself, work

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