



### **The successful Athlete/Coach relationship**

Just like their athletes, coaches strive to improve on their skills (or at least, they should). For me this includes reading a lot and attending courses when the opportunity arises. However, one of the most effective tools I have found to aid positive growth is listening, observing, reflecting and learning from what I experience. Today, I asked myself: “what makes an athlete/coach relationship effective?”. I drew from my experiences with my most successful athletes.

More on that in a while but first we need to understand what makes an athlete successful. The simple answer is that no matter what the athlete’s level when first starting to work with a coach, the trend has shown steady gains for them in one way or another throughout the relationship.

Common relationship traits between my successful athletes and myself.

1. There is trust. My athletes may not always understand the process, but they are willing to stick with it because they trust that I have their best interests at heart. Of course, this works both ways. I trust their feedback I trust that they have done what is reflected on their files.
2. Honesty. Need I elaborate? It ties in with no 1.
3. There is respect for each other. We may not always agree or like the feedback that we get from each other, but we can actively listen to one another with the single purpose of working towards improvement.
4. There is respect for self. A successful athlete will not mess around with their training sessions or races. They value their own investment too much to look for excuses to fail. In the same way, a self- respecting coach will give only their very best to ensure that all doors are opened for their athlete.
5. There is focus and patience. We are on the same page as to what phase of training we are currently in, what the focus of that phase is and what the expected outcome should be.
6. Communication happens often and it is timeous and appropriate. I very seldom chase my successful athletes for communication. If I do, its more for elaboration than information.
7. There is commitment and discipline. Sessions are done when and how they are prescribed and when this doesn’t happen, I get updated at the first opportunity.

8. There is a shared vision and collaboration to make this happen. With my more long-term clients the relationship balance shifts from being more coach directed to be more athlete directed. This does not mean that I stop coaching, it just means that through experience, the athlete has a very good understanding of themselves in terms of strengths and areas of development and is capable of finding the best path to improvement. My job then becomes to lay the stepping-stones along the path whilst they forge the direction that the path will take them. I will however make minor alterations to the course as needed.
9. We have stood the test of time. In my experience, working with a coach can yield gains in a very short period however, like any growth curve, it flattens out over time and gains become marginalised. The successful athletes appreciate this and celebrate those marginal gains as they continue to grow.



This is still my favourite medal ever – given to me by a very special athlete after she completed a 70.3 distance race. 6 months before, she could barely swim, bike or run.