

the good **COXSWAIN**

COACHING THE COXSWAIN



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12



12.1 Introduction	p 5
12.2 Select the Right Person	p 7
Your Coxing Potential	p 8
Examples of Coxswain's Applications	p 12
12.3 Clearly Define the Role	p 15
12.4 Empower The Coxswain	p 19
Examples	p 20
12.5 Implement Progressive and Achievable Goals	p 24
12.6 Provide Feedback	p 28
Self Assessment Table	p 30
12.7 Reward Success	p 31
12.8 Conclusion	p 32
 Quick Glossary	 p 33
The Good Coach knows...	p 34

"The coxswain without a coach is rudderless."



the good COXSWAIN 12

12.1 INTRODUCTION

The coxswain forms that vital link between coach and rowers. It is a unique position: both assistant coach and crewmember. The coxswain is the coach's voice in the boat, the interpreter of the coach's words, the spruiker of the coach's message. He senses the boat's movement and the crew's mood, becoming a sensitive instrument that is finely tuned and calibrated by the coach to provide real-time, accurate feedback.

This is the relationship between coach and coxswain at its most successful and the subject of this booklet; invigorating and guiding coaches in a sequential development of a coxswain's skills.

Unfortunately, there are too many coaches that believe the development of a good coxswain is an organic process - take one small person and just add water. To this very day there are many coaches who believe that their best course of action is no action at all. 'Let nature take its course' appears to be the dictum.

There are plainly only four pre-requisites that these coaches have for coxswains: (a) remain inconspicuous, (b) tolerate neglect, (c) have a high boredom threshold, and (d) fall within the prescribed weight limits. Each of these pre-requisites inevitably justify the ignorance or re-affirm the poor regard that some coaches have for the coxswain's role.

Thankfully, there are enough responsible coaches prepared to recognise that good coaches beget good coxswains. There are very few exceptions to this aphorism and its chain of responsibility. If a coach assumes credit for a crew's success he should only be able to do so by acknowledging the contribution made by the coxswain. For ultimately, the coxswain and the coach are inexorably linked in the process of assisting the crew to achieve success.

COACH'S GUIDELINES - HOW TO DEVELOP A GOOD COXSWAIN



Each of the points listed on the left are to be addressed in this booklet and assumes that the coach is working with a coxswain that is new to the crew or the role of coxing. This does not negate the relevance of the information to coaches with experienced coxswains – the very same principles apply.

All coxswains can benefit substantially from a coach that methodically and systematically gives attention to their development. Never assume that devotion of a coach's time should wane proportionally to the coxswain's experience. Each experienced coxswain that may come to a new crew can benefit greatly from the processes applied in this booklet.

12.2 SELECT THE RIGHT PERSON

The task of creating a good coxswain can be made at least half as demanding if the coach is able to begin with the best natural ingredients – a person with proven abilities or talents. It is the coach's task to realize the latent potential that comes with positive personal characteristics for anyone wishing to be a coxswain. Any honest coach that has enjoyed their own measure of success will readily admit that their best crews began with their best selection.

In *booklet #1* of this series *The Cox and the Boat* the following chart was introduced (see next page). This chart may help the discerning coach to seek qualities that are valued in an inexperienced individual interested in coxing. Each coach will have their own means of assessing competence but it is appropriate to have a keen sense of the criteria by which to measure potential. If the coach is unclear from the outset as to the qualities he or she most desires in their coxswain then the door is left open for confusion rather than clarity.

YOUR COXING POTENTIAL



DESIRABLE



POTENTIAL



UNDESIRABLE

Size

Male (weight)	<input type="radio"/> Under 55kg	<input type="radio"/> 55-58kg	<input type="radio"/> 60kg or more
Female (weight)	<input type="radio"/> Under 50kg	<input type="radio"/> 50-55kg	<input type="radio"/> 55kg or more
Height	<input type="radio"/> Short	<input type="radio"/> Medium	<input type="radio"/> Tall

Experience

Sporting Involvement	<input type="radio"/> Much	<input type="radio"/> Some	<input type="radio"/> None
Learning New Skills	<input type="radio"/> As I am taught	<input type="radio"/> With more practice	<input type="radio"/> With much help
Working under pressure	<input type="radio"/> Calm	<input type="radio"/> Coping	<input type="radio"/> Distressed

Application

Attitude to Challenge	<input type="radio"/> Persistent	<input type="radio"/> Inconsistent	<input type="radio"/> Negative
Approach to Competition	<input type="radio"/> Enthusiastic	<input type="radio"/> Interested	<input type="radio"/> Disinterested
Attitude to Work	<input type="radio"/> Positive	<input type="radio"/> Indifferent	<input type="radio"/> Negative

Relating

Team Membership	<input type="radio"/> Insider	<input type="radio"/> Neutral	<input type="radio"/> Outsider
Response to Feedback	<input type="radio"/> "Give me more"	<input type="radio"/> "Some is OK"	<input type="radio"/> "Leave me alone"
When-in-charge	<input type="radio"/> Firm & encouraging	<input type="radio"/> Loud & pushy	<input type="radio"/> Quiet & timid

Personal

Confidence	<input type="radio"/> Much	<input type="radio"/> Some	<input type="radio"/> None
Responsibility	<input type="radio"/> Readily Accept	<input type="radio"/> Reluctantly accept	<input type="radio"/> Reject
Punctuality	<input type="radio"/> Always	<input type="radio"/> Most	<input type="radio"/> Never
Organisation	<input type="radio"/> Very organised	<input type="radio"/> Organised	<input type="radio"/> Disorganised
Care of Equipment	<input type="radio"/> Very careful	<input type="radio"/> Careful	<input type="radio"/> Careless

Coxswains (or coxing applicants) are often in short supply and every effort should be made to make the road to coxing competence a well defined and smooth one, if interest is to be encouraged or retained. The coach should be clear from the start as to what is required.

COXSWAIN WANTED

We are seeking applications from highly motivated individuals to work cooperatively with a similarly motivated rowing coach. The successful applicant must be able to follow coaching instruction, work in a team-oriented environment and be willing to assist in the preparation of a competitive rowing crew.

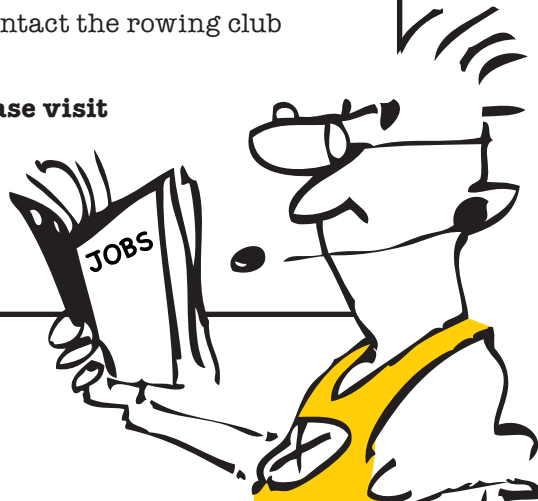
You must have:

- **A preparedness to learn**
- **A quick and decisive mind**
- **A competitive desire to succeed**
- **A capacity to take charge**
- **A weight not exceeding 50kg**

The successful candidate will be energetic, intelligent and required to work flexible hours. No previous rowing experience is required.

For more information please contact the rowing club nearest you.

**To apply for this position, please visit
The Good Coxswain website
www.goodcox.com
and apply on line.**



Whether it is in the work place or on the sporting field, **potentially successful individuals share many desirable characteristics**. Coxswains are by no means the exception to these general standards of excellence. But for the singular exception of weight, coaches should apply the same criteria to their potential coxswains as they would a prospective employee from which they expect excellence.

It is certainly not unreasonable to expect a prospective coxswain to make a formal application. This achieves three major outcomes:

1 A formal application is “value adding”. If the position is important enough, significant enough and valued enough it will require the application of high standards for selection. If the position is insignificant or valueless then little time will be spent in the selection process – “who cares?”

How often does the poor quality of coxing reflect the poor esteem in which coxswains are held among the general rowing fraternity? It is the ‘chicken and the egg’ argument i.e. bad coxing = coxswains held in low-esteem, low esteem = bad coxing.

2 The completion of a formal application leads the potential coxswain to define the qualities and expectations needed to be successful. An individual that need not measure up to a standard will not seek high standards nor deliberately work toward achieving improvement.

How much more motivated would a coxswain be if they were keenly aware of their own progress toward (or maintenance of) stated expectations agreed to from the inception?

3 A formal application begins a dialogue between coxswain and coach. The coxswain feels that he or she has something valuable to say to which the coach is prepared to listen. This empowers the potential coxswain and creates the foundations for future interaction i.e. a crew briefing or debriefing depends greatly upon the honesty and openness of this exchange.

Ultimately, the coach is seeking someone to be his or her assistant in the development and management of the crew – a cooperative and easy communication can make this achievable.

The process of filling a coxing position in a way similar to common work place practices is important enough to warrant the extra effort: it raises standards, raises the coxswains profile and raises the quality of coaching – this can only mean retaining empowered coxswains and attracting more potential coxswains.

Coxswain's application 1

Dear Coach

I am very keen to be the coxswain of your crew. I enjoy the camaraderie that comes with being closely involved with a sporting team – especially working as a team member toward a common goal. I feel that my competitiveness and desire to succeed in everything that I do matches well with the criteria in your advertisement.

Although I have no previous rowing experience, I am prepared to work hard at understanding and mastering the necessary skills to be a good coxswain. My personal experiences demonstrate that I can learn quickly and follow instruction i.e. guitar lessons over three years leading to a band, part-time supermarket shelf-packing leading to promotion as assistant manager in my section.

I have also been asked to assist in the coaching of a junior league football team and enjoy the management of the players and working with their regular coach to encourage the players' efforts and to work out appropriate strategies.

If coxing requires me to develop skills in a competitive environment to manage, organise and motivate others then I am sure that I will enjoy it tremendously. I look forward to working with you and learning more about the sport of rowing with your ongoing help.

I am more than happy to provide you with a resume upon request. I look forward to having the opportunity to speak with you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Novie Cox

Coxswain's application 2

Dear Coach

I am writing this application in response to your recent advertisement "Coxswain Wanted". I know that I am well suited for the role of coxswain as I am too light to be a rower. My experience as a failed rower has given me considerable insight into the coxing position as I was often made to cox. Consequently, I feel comfortable that I have the necessary skills to steer the boat.

I enjoy the company of rowers as many of my friends continue to row. As rowing has been the only sport I have been involved with I am keen to retain these connections. I feel sure that I will be able to tell crewmembers what to do and have the coach provide me with instruction. Unlike many, I am prepared to sit in the boat and leave the rowing to the rowers.

I look forward to the opportunity to travel each weekend to a variety of venues for regattas – fortunately, I can share transport with my friends.

In keeping with the role of coxswain I have patience and a high boredom threshold, which allows me to sit for long periods of time without doing anything.

From the limited number of applicants you are likely to have I feel sure that you will be desperate enough to choose me as your coxswain – please feel free to contact me at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Yule Dhoo

A cursory comparison of the two applications included on the previous page will give immediate context for what is most desirable in a coxswain. The second of the two applications is amusing for its familiarity. It approximates the selection criteria of many clubs. They settle for less than what their crews deserve, hence apply a standard that communicates desperation rather than discernment.

A clear and decisive selection criterion reflects well upon the coach and draws the applicant toward higher expectations for their role as coxswain. The best standards should always apply. It simply means the coach (or club) has to work harder to implement these standards not discard them all together because it appears all too hard!

There will always be a need for coaching a coxswain (some more than others) and the coxswain will be best assisted on the path to establishing and honing coxing skills by a coach that states their best expectations from the beginning. It is worth noting: the coxswain, whether good or bad, will miss 100% of the goals that were never set. Without goals or clear criteria dissatisfaction is guaranteed.



12.3 CLEARLY DEFINE THE ROLE

The coxswain must know what a coxswain does before they can begin to achieve competency. Already, the coach has begun this process by communicating a selection criterion to potential coxswains. The coach has made it clear: there are specific personal characteristics that are valued more than others when it comes to coxing. Now the coach must begin to make the crewmembers and the boat a conduit for the expression of these qualities.

However, the coxswain's practical aptitude should not be tested before laying down some basic guidelines. A coxswain that is "thrown in the deep-end and told to swim" will either "drown, swim or suffer a life-long fear of water" - only one of these outcomes is desirable.

Understandably, the retention rate of coxswains that are thrown straight into a boat without **adequate instruction, previous exposure or supervision** is low. An attrition rate of 4 out of 5 may be acceptable to a coach with "spare coxswains" but for most it is a waste of a very rare and valuable resource.

Create a context for the new coxswain - an inexperienced coxswain does not have a **starting point of reference**, a poor coxswain does not have **an example of best practice**. It is the coach's job to create an environment where the coxswain is receptive to coxing's new challenges and skills. There are two basic questions that are being asked of the coach by the coxswain:

- 1 *What do you expect me to do?*
- 2 *How do I go about doing it?*

The coach should never assume that the answers to these two questions are self-evident. Also, the response that goes something like: "Just get into the boat and find out," should not be proffered as the most obvious answer. The coach must give the coxswain the opportunity to observe, consult, enquire, listen, experience and experiment to broaden the knowledge base while creating a context for learning.

C

COMMUNICATION

The coach facilitates a meaningful and developing interaction by being approachable, friendly and open to the concerns and questions of the cox.

EXAMPLE

Know the coxswain's fears, interests and aspirations. Ask for his or her opinion.

O

OBSERVATION

The coach allows the fledgling cox to observe 'best practice' examples of coxing in a real context before attempting the same.

Accompany the cox on the riverbank or in the coaching launch during training sessions - observe what experienced coxswain's do and how boats operate on the waterway - talk about the observations.

The coach sits in the stroke seat and makes all coxing calls while the new cox sits in the coxswain's seat to observe the crew's responses and ask questions.

X

EXPERIMENTATION (AND EXPERIENCE)

The coach organises a safe and 'forgiving' environment for trialing skills and making mistakes under the watchful eye of the coach.

The new cox to row in a boat under the watchful eye of an experienced coxswain or the new cox takes out a single-scutt under the watchful eye of the coach.

The coach may also allow the new cox to rotate through the coxswain's seat with an experienced coxswain during a session, alternating observation and enquiry with practical hands-on coxing opportunity.

E

ENQUIRY

The coach provides the cox, or directs them toward, readily available references or resources to answer questions or obtain information.

The coach introduces a new coxswain to experienced coxswains or appoints a mentor for the new cox to use as a personal resource for ongoing consultation.

The coach provides the coxswain with copies of The Good Coxswain booklets.

N

NURTURE

The coach devotes time to the ongoing education of the cox by providing feedback, encouragement, positive reinforcement and opportunities for learning.

The coach introduces the cox to the crew and nurtures the establishment of a working relationship that is friendly and respectful - social functions, land based competitive activities for the inclusion of cox and rowers.

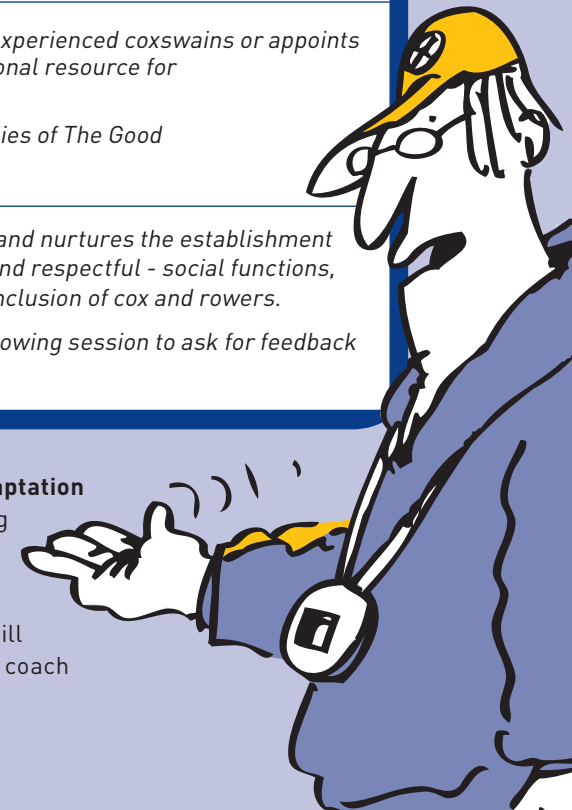
The coach meets with the cox after each rowing session to ask for feedback and any concerns (and listens).

The acronym above, COXEN, may be useful to the coach in the preparation of a new (or old) cox.

The implementation of each of the strategies used in the examples above, foster a meaningful dialogue between coxswain and coach. Even before setting foot in the boat the coxswain will be aware of the coach's expectations and feel comfortable in discussing these expectations in an environment that is both respectful and encouraging. If the coach spends the time to use many of these strategies over the first three of four sessions, he or she will be allowing the

coxswain a **slow acclimatisation or adaptation** to what can be a sometimes threatening and alien environment.

A helpful, engaging coach that takes the time to define the coxswain's role will always reap far greater rewards than a coach that is either dismissive or dictatorial.



"If you fill an empty vessel with words, you will only hear in return, an ever diminishing echo of yourself."



12.4 EMPOWER THE COXSWAIN

Coxswains, like rowers, must be allowed to exercise their 'muscles' if they are to build their strengths. In the case of the coxswain, it is the building of a 'muscular intelligence' very different from the required physical musculature of a rower.

The wizened old coach who once said "You cannot give a rower a heart, just the means to use it," could have quite easily have added, "Coaches cannot give coxswains a brain, just the means to use it". Physical prowess is the domain of the rower; intelligence is that of the coxswain.

But how can the good coach 'exercise' the coxswain's intelligence and make that cox 'stronger'?

Firstly, the coach must acknowledge the maxim: *If you don't use it, you will lose it!* An interfering, untrusting, overbearing or overly protective coach denies their coxswain opportunity to exercise these four key strengths: **initiative, leadership, responsibility and good judgement**. This coach fosters a relationship of dependence where all decisions are deferred to him – all knowing, all seeing. Consequently, the coxswain loses the opportunity to grow, the authority to speak and the much prized, respect of the crew.

How ineffectual is the coxswain that awaits permission to act or speak? How demoralising is it for a coxswain to have his calls countermanded by the coach? How debilitating is it for a coxswain to have a crew doubt the accuracy of his call? All of these can be a direct result of the coach not allowing, or not entrusting, the coxswain to fulfil all necessary responsibilities.

If the coach cannot trust the coxswain there are four very good reasons for this, and each reason has more to do with the coach than the coxswain:

- ➔ **The coach hasn't allowed the coxswain the opportunity to demonstrate their competence.**
- ➔ **The coach hasn't allowed the coxswain the opportunity to hone their skills.**
- ➔ **The coach has not coached the coxswain in the key competencies.**
- ➔ **The coach has selected an inappropriate candidate to be the coxswain.**

A coach that selects poorly, instructs poorly and provides poorly is not often in a position to criticize the coxswain.

The table that follows outlines just some of the opportunities that are available to coaches to make the coxswain a more powerful contributor to the crew's success.



EMPOWERING THE COXSWAIN

SOME EXAMPLES

PRE-TRAINING	Provide the coxswain with a copy of the weekly training program and timetable as a fail-safe backup.	Provide the coxswain with a copy of the warm-up routine for implementation at each session.	Invite the coxswain to make changes to the warm-up routine through consultation with the crew (and coach).	Require the coxswain to actively participate in land-based crew activities.	Provide the coxswain with, and the responsibility for, a coxbox and/or tools.	Defer to the coxswain when asked questions by the crew.
TRAINING PRE-WATER	Meet with the coxswain, prior to meeting with the crew, to explain the session and provide opportunity for questions.	Allow the coxswain to guide the crew safely from the racking to the water.	Consign some time to the coxswain in the briefing for him to explain to the crew e.g. what calls he may be making, drills to use.	Make the coxswain responsible for the crew's punctuality to the water.	Hold the coxswain responsible for the care of rudder, fin and coxbox.	Ask the rowers if they have any suggestions or requests re the coxswain's calls.
TRAINING ON THE WATER	After a piece, ask the coxswain specifically for feedback before requesting feedback from the rowers.	Establish and reinforce the rule that it is only the coxswain's voice that should be heard in the boat.	Allow the coxswain to speak without unnecessary interruption, contradiction or correction when coxing.	Ask the coxswain to provide the crew with information e.g. ratings, puddle clearances, timing calls, stroke counts.	Ask the coxswain to convey coxbox information to the coach.	Allow the coxswain to interpret / implement general instructions given by the coach e.g. "turn the boat" or "control rating".
TRAINING POST-WATER	Recognise and praise the contribution made by the coxswain in the presence of the crew.	Ask for an "in-boat assessment" of the session from the coxswain prior to a debriefing.	When debriefing begin a sentence with "I agree with the coxswain's assessment that..."	Assist the coxswain in completing his Good Coxswain Logbook.	Allow the cox to download info from the on board computer.	Confer with the coxswain re the content/context of the next water session.
REGATTA RACING	Enable the coxswain to collaborate with the coach and rowers to formalise the race plan.	Allow the coxswain to access/purchase the regatta program and inform the crew of necessary race details.	Ask the cox to check that all rowers are present and focused for racing at the required time.	Entrust the coxswain to apply the agreed to race plan.	Allow flexibility to change race plan relative to the race unfolding.	Ask the question of the cox "Where do you think we won/lost it?".

12.4 EMPOWER THE COXSWAIN cont'd...

Ultimately, if it is good enough for the coach to trust the abilities of the coxswain, it is good enough for the rowers to do the same. If the crew is irresponsive to a coxswain's commands, or respect for that individual is absent, it may just possibly be that a coach has not given sufficient endorsement of the coxswain and their efforts. **Good, supportive coaches that encourage input from the cox will, more often than not, have good, supportive rowers** that are prepared to listen to that coxswain's input.

All the same, this is not an invitation for coaches to renege on their coaching responsibilities. The coxswain is simply the messenger, working on behalf of the coach - one coach, one message through one coxswain. The coach must continue to provide the coxswain with the message.

I have had coxswains that believe that the boat is their own personal fiefdom - the rowers are all lowly serfs and the coach is some competing feudal lord. I would laugh off suggestions of a Napoleon complex; suggesting coxswains were overcompensating for their lack of stature. But power, war and conquest seem to be high on some coxswains' agenda - heaven forgive the coach that hands responsibility for the crew over to a cox and then walks away.

Anita Keyes - coach

There is always an exception to any rule. Sometimes you can be too encouraging, too supportive and create yourself a monster!

My crew was getting worse rather than better - not because I wasn't supporting the coxswain but because she wasn't supporting me! She was undermining my efforts from within the boat. I would tell the crew to lift the rating; she would tell them to keep it the same. I would tell them that they needed to change their technique; she would tell them they needed to change their coach!

She had been a technically fantastic cox with just three years experience. But she 'knew people' and she knew better. She had decided that our early losses were due to coaching incompetence. She was wrong but when I lost her support, I lost my crew and we lost more races. That realisation, for me, came far too late.

Lawrence Tripp, Coach

The crew is not a blank cheque that the coach offers to the coxswain to fill in as he sees fit - for there can be no doubt that the irresponsible coach will soon be 'bankrupt' and the cheque will no doubt 'bounce'.

Emphasise the role of "assistant" when conferring with the cox and make plain that the exercising of initiative is not to be confused with the exercising of "power". This may be a partnership between coach and coxswain but the coach should be leading the way for the junior partner. Power is a by-product of respect.

12.5 IMPLEMENT PROGRESSIVE AND ACHIEVABLE GOALS

The beginning of any successful journey requires the travellers to know, as a bare minimum, their point of departure and the expected destination. How can progress be tracked for a coach, rower or coxswain if there is not, from the beginning, a mapped route and a definitive destination over the course of a rowing season? Understandably, disappointment and frustration become the most likely outcome if there is not a mapped route for the coxswain.

A coach must make clear his expectations as he and the coxswain traverse the valleys and mountains, obstacles and detours, of a typical rowing season. It will avoid confusion and conflict between he and his crew, and make sure that there is the required motivation and energy still present to complete the journey.

Far too often crewmembers become dysfunctional, dispirited and disinterested if all their efforts appear to keep them in a boring and unstimulating holding pattern. Technical critiques become personal slights, motivational speeches become the substance of cliché and the coach's dedication becomes an unreasonable demand upon the time of the crew. The coach must engage his crew with short-term achievable goals.

Do not neglect the coxswain for he should not only have his own short-term goals to achieve but be the chief gauge to ensure that the efforts of the crew advance the shared goals.

It would be a mistake to look only at the long-term goal, the ultimate destination – whether that is being selected to cox the first eight, winning the regional championship or achieving Olympic selection. There is very little immediacy with long-term goals – they are distant and can appear ultimately unattainable. They are important but only in that they can give reason and focus to the short-term. **Short-term goals become the small steps taken on a long journey** – one step after another moving further away from the point of departure and closer to the point of arrival.

The coxswain, in consultation with the coach, will set these goals to benefit not only himself but also the crew. They must be measurable and attainable otherwise they can only become a source of further frustration and a measure of perceived failure, not success – three steps forward, should not be followed by two steps back.



12.5 IMPLEMENT PROGRESSIVE AND ACHIEVABLE GOALS cont'd...

Realistically, the coach can direct the coxswain to consider many of the following as short-term measurable goals:

Crew completes the entire set warm up silently and within 15 minutes of being on the water.

Implement all coaching instruction for the turning of the boat within 30 seconds of the instruction being given.

Achieve an average score during the season of not less than 70 out of 75 in the Good Coxswain Log self-assessment chart.

Devote at least 5 minutes to the completion of the coxswain logbook within 24 hours of the training session.

Inform the crew of their current rating at least twice every 300 metres.

Speak directly to the coach about the content of the training program before each session.

By mid-season read the instructions and be able to utilise the software that comes with the onboard computer.

Offer at least three positive statements to the crew for every 2000m rowed.

Abandon then start again any spinning of the boat that has oars moving out of time or not fully buried.

Complete each landing without need of assistance from the bank.

Make time each Friday prior to a regatta to meet with the crew to reconsider or make changes to the calls in the race plan.

Have an agreed to race plan in place by the second last regatta.

Learn to row a single scull before next rowing season.

Make all calls with a countdown of three strokes.

Help crewmembers to concentrate by making immediate calls to not allow them to look out of the boat.

Encourage crew interaction by organising a pasta night at home for the crew during the season.

Learn two new drills for the improvement of balance.

Make contact with last year's first crew cox and exchange emails once a week through out the season.

Arrive 10 minutes before the scheduled assembly time at each regatta.

Maintain current weight.

Ask the coach for feedback after each session.

Know the splits required for success at the final regatta, use them in training.

Speak to all new coxswains during the start of season rowing camp.

Know each crewmembers P.B. over 2000m on ergo (including average split) when testing is being done.

500 metre ergo for each buoy hit during a regatta.

Have all rowers assembled 40 minutes before race time.

Make one recommendation for each fault identified to the crew.

Find out and write down what motivates each crewmember when competing.

There is nothing more disconcerting than a coxswain without a rudder!

A coxswain without short-term goals, or even a long-term goal, is a 'rudderless' coxswain. The cox needs to be given direction and must be encouraged to set their own goals if the crew is to be successful. The good coxswain is not one (as the earlier letter of application suggests) that has a high tolerance for boredom. The coach should keep it real and interesting by staying involved and by making the good coxswain accountable to high standards set by the rowers, the coach and the cox.



12.6 PROVIDE FEEDBACK

Much of this booklet has established the importance of providing the coxswain with useful information for future development. The establishment of an open, honest and clear line of communication between coxswain and coach is essential to progress.

Obviously, feedback is a two way street and it should have a constant flow of traffic. It is not enough to have all major feedback fed into the system when regatta day approaches. Everyone knows how congested traffic becomes when there is a major event! Nor should feedback be reserved for the end of the season when the coach looks back and identifies what is missing or what should now be done better – it is often too much, too late.

Experience suggests that if a coach delivers feedback to the coxswain (or other crewmembers) all at once it will either be resisted or pushed aside. This is especially true if it is negative. Not surprisingly, anger is often a typical response.

Coaches should understand the need to give feedback all through the rowing season so that any appraisal becomes less contentious and is delivered by a person that is known to be caring and involved. A good coach that cares about long-term outcomes, cares about their coxswain and learns to appraise session by session. **Effective feedback is given at the time that the coxswain is coxing** and not as some small component of a larger 'complaint' weeks later.

The **feedback given should be on both good and poor performance**. The good coach will be in a position to 'catch the coxswain doing something right' and praise them for it (refer to Reward Success below). Don't make the mistake of providing a constant flow of criticism as feedback.

The **feedback also needs to be specific** ("I am disappointed that you didn't allow for the wind when you steered that crooked course.") and not personal ("You're a bad cox."). The feedback should give the coxswain specific guidance on how to improve.

Also, as was said earlier, if the cox is penalised by their coach when they make mistakes they will be reluctant to try anything new. The best way to learn is by doing. **Coaches need to make allowances when the cox lacks experience**. The skills are not going to be perfect the first few times they are undertaken.

Unfortunately, (and this was said earlier) there are still some coaches that believe that they may as well give all the commands themselves rather than spend the time to instruct their coxswain. This may make sense if the job being done by the coxswain is only going to be done once and never again – but it is not. Perfection will come through repetition and it is worth the investment of time to provide the coxswain with the feedback to do it.

One of the **most effective tools for providing the coxswain with feedback is the digital voice recorder**. Far too often coaches are ignorant as to the real contribution being made by the coxswain in the boat. The coach cannot hear the commands being given and is unable to gauge their effectiveness. A voice recorder allows the coach to review the input of a coxswain after a training session or a race. It also allows the coxswain to hear the race calls of others as an example of best or worst practice.

Recordings are most effective when used along with the Good Coxswain Logbook (and/or a race plan) for providing structured, specific and constructive feedback. The self-assessment page, which appears in the logbook, is reproduced here. Each coach and coxswain can use the chart to facilitate a productive dialogue upon completion of a race or training session. A recording is certainly not necessary to facilitate such a dialogue



LOGBOOK - TO BE COMPLETED AFTER EACH ROWING SESSION

CLUB / SCHOOL

LOCATION

DATE

CREW

BOAT NAME

NAME OF COACH

☐ TRAINING
OR
☐ REGATTA

BOAT CLASS: ☐ 2+ ☐ 4+ ☐ 4X+ ☐ 8+

☐ RACING BOAT
OR
☐ TRAINING BOAT

TIME ON WATER:
Start
End
Total Minutes

COMMENT / RECORD

Your thoughts after the session?

What feedback did your coach give?

What will you do better next time?

SELF ASSESSMENT - tick the response that best defines your coxing session

VOICE	5 points	2 points	0 points	ASK YOURSELF...	SCORE
Volume	<input type="radio"/> Easily heard	<input type="radio"/> Inconsistent	<input type="radio"/> Not heard	Did the crew hear what I was saying?	out of 15
Clarity	<input type="radio"/> Understood	<input type="radio"/> Inconsistent	<input type="radio"/> Misunderstood	Did the crew understand what I said?	
Authority	<input type="radio"/> Immediate Response	<input type="radio"/> Delayed Response	<input type="radio"/> No response	Did the crew 'jump' when I asked them to 'jump'?	
CONTRIBUTION	5 points	2 points	0 points	ASK YOURSELF...	
Fault Identification	<input type="radio"/> Much	<input type="radio"/> Some	<input type="radio"/> None	Did I identify faults for the crew?	out of 15
Drill Recommendation	<input type="radio"/> Much	<input type="radio"/> Some	<input type="radio"/> None	Did I recommend a drill to help my crew?	
Fault Correction	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> Some	<input type="radio"/> None	Did I help fix the problem?	
APPLICATION	5 points	2 points	0 points	ASK YOURSELF...	
Attitude	<input type="radio"/> Positive	<input type="radio"/> Swinging	<input type="radio"/> Negative	Did I add enjoyment to rowing?	out of 15
Approach	<input type="radio"/> Enthusiastic	<input type="radio"/> Interested	<input type="radio"/> Disinterested	Did I remain alert?	
Motivation	<input type="radio"/> Inspiring	<input type="radio"/> Encouraging	<input type="radio"/> Discouraging	Did I motivate my crew to succeed?	
STEERING	5 points	2 points	0 points	ASK YOURSELF...	
Water Rules	<input type="radio"/> Obeyed	<input type="radio"/> Overlooked	<input type="radio"/> Disobeyed	Did I follow the rules for traffic?	out of 15
Water Conditions	<input type="radio"/> Adapted	<input type="radio"/> Unaware	<input type="radio"/> Ignored	Did I alter my coxing to suit wind, tide, traffic etc?	
Rudder use	<input type="radio"/> Gently / Firmly	<input type="radio"/> Jerky / Strong	<input type="radio"/> Soft / Hesitant	Did I steer confidently and not cause problems?	
COACH COMMUNICATION	5 points	2 points	0 points	ASK YOURSELF...	
Session Aims	<input type="radio"/> Known	<input type="radio"/> Hazy	<input type="radio"/> Unknown	Did I find out what the crew was to be doing?	out of 15
Followed Instruction	<input type="radio"/> Completely	<input type="radio"/> Partly	<input type="radio"/> No	Did I do as I was asked to do by the coach?	
Session Feedback	<input type="radio"/> Contributed	<input type="radio"/> Listened	<input type="radio"/> Avoided	Did I offer the coach the coxswain's perspective?	

12.7 REWARD SUCCESS

When the coxswain is successful, i.e. achieves his short-term goals, applies the standards of excellence that the coach has established and is fundamental in the crew’s goal realisation, recognize it! **Recognition, not surprisingly, is a very powerful motivational tool for coaches.**

Too many have the mistaken belief that recognition and rewarding success is the presentation of a large trophy or a significant medal at the end of the rowing season. If coaches wait for the end of the season or for a winning race to offer praise to the coxswain then they slowly starve the coxswain of the very nutrition that feeds their energy and enjoyment. **The cox should feel good about himself and feel good about the contribution he is making.**

Alternatively, effusive back slapping praise is not necessary for every small achievement; the recognition needs to be proportionate to the accomplishment otherwise it becomes hollow and insincere. There must certainly be a hierarchy of recognition that is proportionate to the magnitude of the coxswain’s accomplishment; this will vary from person to person, circumstance to circumstance.

“Thanks,” may be enough for everyday, common garden - variety achievements. It takes a few seconds of the coach’s time and is only one word out of the thousands of words spoken in a day. But it may be the only ‘thank you’ the coxswain/person has received in an entire month – it offers the **promise of urging him on to better and greater things.**

If the achievement is something more than the everyday, then the coach can single the coxswain out for recognition in the presence of his crew. This not only acknowledges a particular deed but also has the added benefit of commending the coxswain to his peers. Subsequently, the crew will be more prepared to commend the efforts of their coxswain, creating a **supportive crew environment** that all good coaches desire.

Further to this, the coach may commend a coxswain to another coach or coxswain. It need not be “Isn’t he great,” but an invitation to engage in a dialogue as an equal or respected practitioner of the coxing art. This is a great spur forward and offers other coaches and coxswains an example of coxing best practice for their consideration. The club (like the coach) must be prepared to build upon its successes, even if these successes are relatively small.



For the coxswain that meets all expectations, there is probably no greater commendation than the use of his name in dispatches between club members. Newsletters, emails, blogs, reports, letters, photos, minutes of meetings, assemblies etc. are all valued – share the good news; not only use the name but commend the specific skills. This provides, during the rowing season, an active model and a level of expectation for coxswains among all club members.

Usually, at the end of a rowing season, there is opportunity to recognise the accomplishments of club members at special functions. Certificates, plaques and trophies are the currency of these formal evenings attended by the wider rowing and non-rowing community. The occasion celebrates not only achievement but also endeavour. **A few select individuals will receive awards – a good coxswain should be one of those.**

The delivery of a few well-chosen words that commend and acknowledge **all good coxswains** should be high on the agenda; not just on this special occasion but throughout the entire rowing season. It is what all good coaches do.

12.8 CONCLUSION

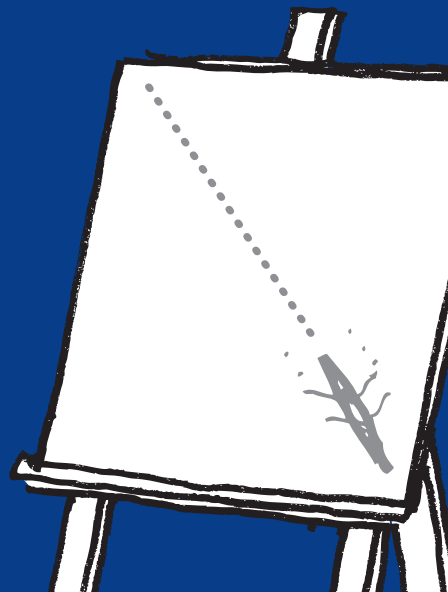
This booklet, *Coaching the Cox* is the twelfth in the *Good Coxswain* series of booklets. Although it is the only booklet addressing the coach directly, it is certainly not the only one recommended for the coach to read. Each booklet addresses specific skills in coxing for the coxswain. However, what is read is only theoretical unless the coach becomes an active participant in the development of the coxswain's skills. The coach and the coxswain must be sure that they are "on the same page".

Read the *Good Coxswain* booklets and provide a real world context for what has been read by the cox – breathe life into it. Be open to discussion and have a fuller appreciation and understanding of what the good cox is trying to achieve. It is, after all, for the improvement of the crew.

And finally, remember: The coach is the greatest resource a good coxswain can have.

quick glossary

DECISIVE	The voice a coxswain can use that is immediate, clear and firm.
EMPOWER	The authority, confidence and trust given to the coxswain by the coach.
EXPERIENCE	The reward a coach or coxswain gets for persistence.
FEEDBACK	Useful information given by the coach to improve a coxswain's future efforts.
INITIATIVE	The ability of a coxswain to make decisions and solve problems on his own.
LEADERSHIP	The ability of a coxswain to guide, direct and influence a crew.
LONG-TERM GOALS	The destination a crew has for which they make plans together.
POWER	The influence a coxswain can have when his crew respects him.
RECOGNITION	The endorsement of a coach for the successful effort made by a cox.
RESPONSIBILITY	A coxswain that understands that no one else is to blame.
SHORT-TERM GOALS	The small steps taken during each training session toward a long-term goal.
SELECTION	The establishment of a successful crew.
SUCCESS	The achievement of short-term and long-term rowing goals in the course of training.



the good coach

THE GOOD COACH WILL KNOW:

- ✓ The coxswain is a vital link between coach and crew.
- ✓ The coxswain functions as an assistant to the coach.
- ✓ The coxswain's role must be clearly defined.
- ✓ Selection of the most appropriate person to cox is the first step toward success.
- ✓ Communication between coxswain and coach is vital.
- ✓ A practical model of good coxing must be offered to the coxswain.
- ✓ That feedback from the coach to the cox is important.
- ✓ The coach must help the coxswain set short-term goals.



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