

Performance Coach Program Level 4
Written Assignment
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“Reality Experienced: Transitioning into Head Coach of Club & 1st Grade”

I’ve been toying with the fact of what topic resonates with me, my journey, and a message I want to convey to the rugby public and more importantly, those who’ll undertake the process that is coaching and coaching at a premier level. Often the end product, being Saturday, is what defines a “good coach, good team or good club”; however, it is the time between where a coach earns their crust.

“We live for Saturday, but we earn our keep, 7 days of the week”.

I’ve opted to detail something raw, as opposed to a specific game element which may hold relevance at this point in time through other people’s findings, purely based on personal preference and connection.

This subjective piece, portrays my transition into Head Coach of Club & First Grade, navigating the **Reality** of the role, and adaptability required to learn, fail, improve, and drive to continue. I’ll shed light onto the past 18-months and key experiences and learnings that will continue to shape and guide by coaching journey into 2024 and beyond.

The words listed below form both what I believe to be of great importance to formulating a year in the life of a club rugby coach and elements that align closely to the challenge that life presents. Together, they provide a brief insight into a year in review.

People – Failure – Balance – Supportive Environment

People are the lifeblood of a rugby club, encapsulating the players, coaches, managers, committee, supporters, family members, sponsors and general onlookers, but it’s the challenge of unearthing those “good and great people” who can transform into the catalyst for improvement, change, success and a willingness to leave things in a better place than when they arrived.

Often, we’re tasked with identifying the “right coach, right team, for the right environment”, which in theory is the recipe we all seek for our final product, but how do we know if we’ve got it right?

The staffing nucleus that forms the basis of a club & premier team holds complexity and above all, requires everyone to have a “team first” mentality, but how we reach that unity is unique to each group within the club as the people are the beneficiaries or the collateral.

A year in review, saw the people within our club provided multiple avenues to detail feedback on prior learnings, areas of success & where improvements lie, analysis on self, team and the club to add context for my year 2 planning.

Our club is the largest within the Canberra Competition, with 240 registered players and 30 coaching & management staff, it’s vital for those contributing to the club to have a voice and understand the importance of speaking for self, others, and the club more broadly. The information below, portrays the engagement levels of our feedback survey at two points in the season that provided all members an opportunity to give voice and add to our clubs direction in a collective manner.

- Mid-season survey completion:
 - 64 Players (26% of 2023 registered players)

- 18 Staff (60% of 2023 registered coaches, managers & medical staff)
- End of-season survey completion:
 - 84 Players (35% of 2023 registered players)
 - 16 Staff (53% of 2023 registered coaches, managers & medical staff)

Our **people** are our most valuable asset, to the club, team, committee and broader rugby community with these channels for feedback designed to provoke conversation, constructive feedback and derive an understanding of our environment from a holistic club experience.

Often, our clubs foundation are the volunteers and those who've chosen rugby to be their hobby, and in some cases, the lucky few who're involved in a paid capacity, however it's vital to understand that each person is vital to the rugby clubs ecosystem, and navigating how, why and where they fit and what drives them becomes is of great importance and as such, becomes the most time consuming aspect of the role.

Failure is a term often feared by individuals in most contexts, and when referred to in that of a rugby club, it's a reality often met for those involved, but what your relationship is with it, how you approach it, verbalise it and embrace it, has the ability to transcend failure from a burden to fuel. We are a young club (24 YO), the culmination of two foundation clubs with rich history of success and we're yet to ascertain the same feats at the premier level. Success has been achieved in Premier Women, 3rd Grade, 5th Grade and near misses in several others. **Failure** is a term we've known but are learning to embrace.

12 months ago, during the 1st PCP Camp, a task was to write why we coach and what drives us in this space, during that time, mine was centred around a fear of failure and a want to prove others wrong.

I had remained stuck in my playing mindset of wanting to avoid failure, only to impact myself during this process which had been ingrained in my previous experience and within the club.

This mindset wasn't conducive to creating the environment, nor relationship with failure I had desired for our team in particular and as a result, **mindset**, **resilience** and **care** became the overarching theme for 2023.

Several distinct moments stand out as to being pockets of, acceptance & comfortability, old habits die hard, and a new era.

- Acceptance & Comfortability (Coach): I shared a thought & feeling during RD 1 with my Coaching group that from what we'd experienced, were currently watching and could see, that we could lose every fixture in 2023, knowing what we had begun building with our mindset and in particular, fear of failure. The players might not have felt the same, but it began to come to light as the season progressed.
- Old Habits Die Hard (Senior Player): I stood in front of the group after close consecutive losses, and accepted responsibility for not providing the appropriate preparation to warrant a result in an effort to absorb the groups mounting pressure. A senior player, who I'd previously played with made a private comment to me several days later "You're our coach, you're leading us, what message does it send if you're accepting responsibility for not providing us what we needed". – LC, "If I can't stand in front of our group and accept responsibility as an individual, how can we expect to become comfortable with failure?".
- A New Era (Emerging Player): Effort is something we've never lacked and this player epitomizes effort. A question was asked and the playing group gave the answer they thought I wanted, all but one. He stood as an individual and addressed his beliefs on our current mindset of "winning expectations", his mindset and accepting failure in order to improve, be

better and add to the team. This was a catalyst for 6 other individuals to address the group post-game.

Our understanding of our individual relationships with **failure** is a work in progress and will always be, however, to witness a group with an average age of 21.5 years become comfortable addressing one another in an open manner gives confidence, we're moving in the direction we need as a collective.

Balance is easy to want, difficult to find and a consistent work on at the conclusion of the week, month & year. How do we make continual improvements in this space to service the club, team, staff, and oneself?

Similarly, a personal target aligned to balancing priorities of "Touch Points" was put from pen to paper in the form of having a weekly, meaningful touchpoint with our top squad, staff and club coaches. In theory, how difficult can it be engaging with 70 people in a productive manner on a weekly basis? My challenge was and will continue to be navigating time on task for others, the team and self which organically saw the podium start in that order and finish with team, others, and self. Often, I found myself dedicating time to whole of club challenges, other team issues, coaching staff needs, player management, general well-being of people, which detracted from time on task for our team where I personally felt I could've been more targeted with them as a collective, individually and myself.

The nature of being both a Club Coach & 1st Grade Coach will consistently provide challenges when aiming to find **balance** for myself and our community, which will be more closely supported through the inclusion of good **people** in key roles, seeing greater investment from the club for our vision and more stringent planning when dedicating time to self, the team and others.

A Supportive Environment encapsulates what every rugby club needs, wants & often has, but to what level are we adding value and is our approach aligned for the greater good or is it a perception?

We often speak of culture and having a "good culture" is conducive to our team and club, with many seeing it as a buzz word for a key ingredient to success, where some may not see that the environment is what drives the culture.

It's our goal to ensure that training, game day & social activities become a place to decompress and exhale from the reality that is life when you enter the gates or experience the first handshake from a teammate or club member. Noting there is an intense level of commitment to this hobby and varying levels of what an individual deems "commitment" looks like, it's imperative that it doesn't be seen as or develop into a chore.

Our feedback survey regarding Club experience in 2023, reflects an increase in player & staff satisfaction from mid-year to end of-season, leaving a resounding positive thought and feeling in what was a successful year from a club standpoint.

We are only as strong as the people who walk alongside us and as a result, saw the club's most successful year from a results perspective in our brief history, largely due to the creation and continual development of a **Supportive Environment**, driven by all who are embedded within the club.

We have instilled a place where all those in our club will contribute to all roles from Monday to Sunday and back again. 1st & 5th Grade, Women & Colts, Coaches and Supporters dressing the field, stocking the canteen, working the BBQ, engaging with sponsors, packing up training venues, developing our buddy system and above all, addressing behaviour that's not conducive of what it means to be a Uni Norths Owls member.

- Mid-season survey completion:
 - 64 Players
 - Satisfaction:
 - Excellent: 48%
 - Good: 40%
 - Fair: 12%
 - 18 Staff
 - Satisfaction:
 - Excellent: 40%
 - Good: 50%
 - Fair: 10%

- End of-season survey completion:
 - 84 Players
 - Satisfaction:
 - Excellent: 62%
 - Good: 30%
 - Fair: 6%
 - Poor: 2%
 - 16 Staff
 - Satisfaction:
 - Excellent: 50%
 - Good: 42%
 - Fair: 8%

When stepping back from the rugby field and looking through the lens of what I've highlighted to being key binding agents of a rugby club and the team in: the **People**, relationship with **Failure**, **Balance**, and the need for a **Supportive Environment**, personify 2023 from a personal perspective. Providing avenues for our people to be heard, valued, and consistently reminded of their importance to our ecosystem is vital to building a sustainability.

Acknowledgement, acceptance, vulnerability, and growth pertaining to **Failure** has shown we're moving in a forward & progressive direction and will embrace the need to continually work on this aspect of club life as we shift behaviour.

Balance continues to be the most important aspect from a personal perspective. Time is invaluable and it is a gift to be shared to all, but oneself must be considered and valued.

Our pursuit of continual improvement for a **Supportive Environment** is the overarching aspect that will permit growth, development and success in all facets of our rugby club environment and will continue to be valued as such.

As I commence my 2nd year in the role of Head Coach of Club & 1st Grade, and 7th in overall coaching experience, I feel strongly that for the first time during this period, we've got the right **people** for our coaching & management team with their connecting agents are, their connection to the club & themselves, their ability to value add, self-improve, exceptional levels of commitment and a thirst to create history.