

## The Skill of Coaching

Less of a lecture, more of a discussion

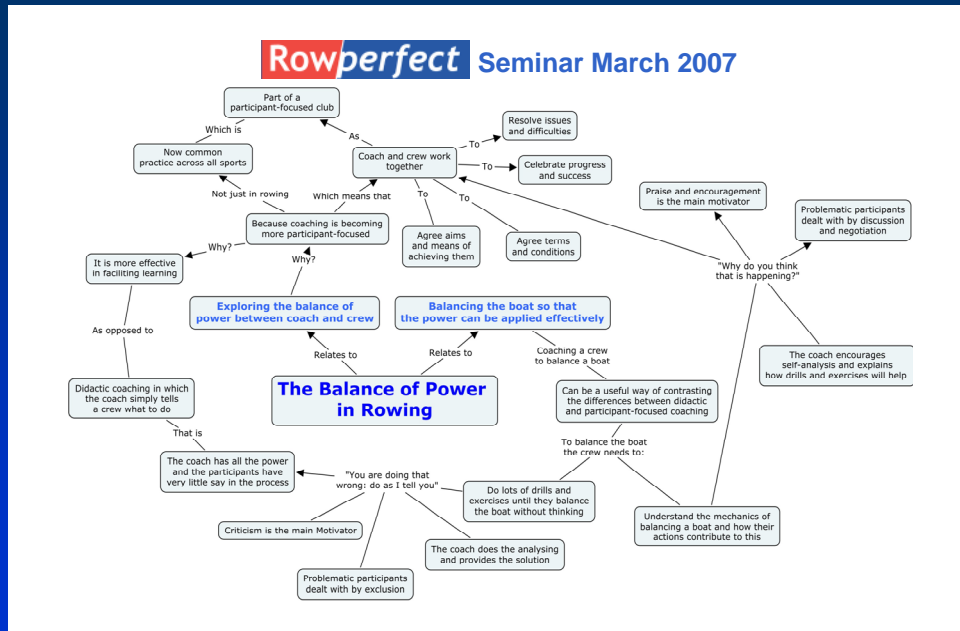
Led by Jim Flood

10 April 2007

By the end of this session, we should have:

- Analysed how coaches communicate with crews and have generated some new techniques to try
- Improved our understanding of the way our choice words affect the way in which crews feel
- Some ideas to try out to enable beginners and improvers to make quicker progress
- Discussed the possibilities and limitations of athletes and crews participating in the coaching process
- Considered ways in which we manage individuals who pose a particular challenge

Rowperfect Seminar March 2007

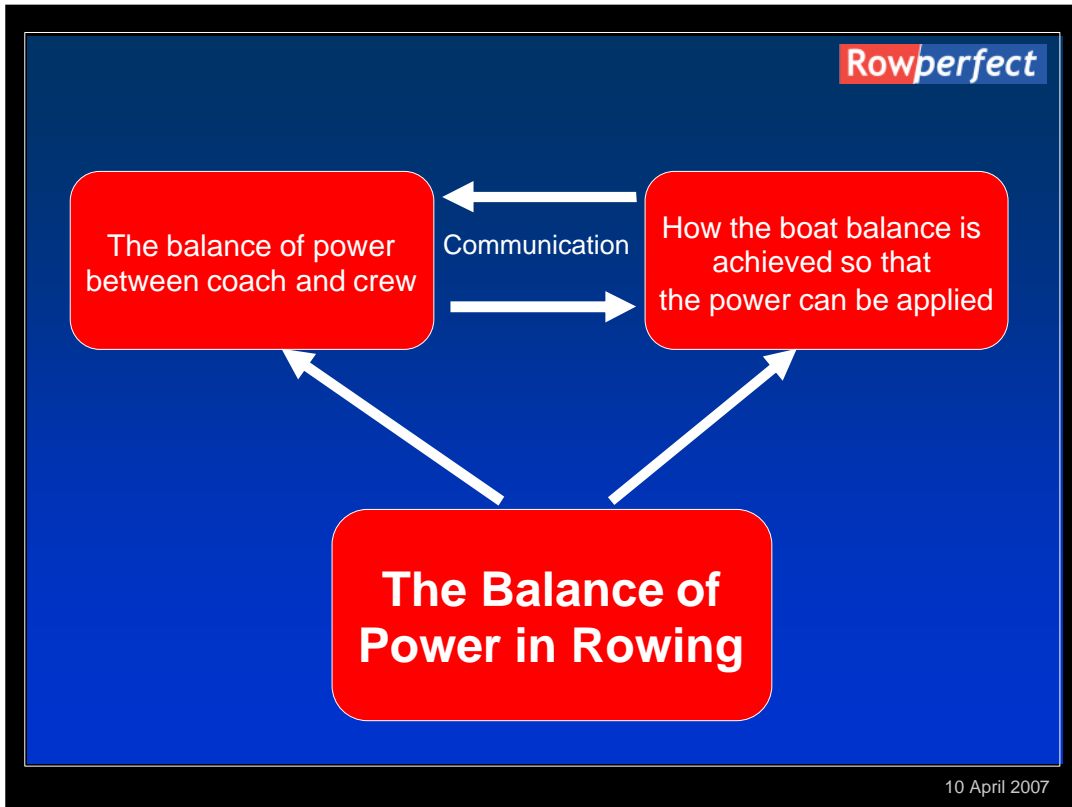


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This mind map is the main handout and aims to show how the themes and sub-topics are related.

This was drawn using free software available from:

<http://cmap.ihmc.us/download/>

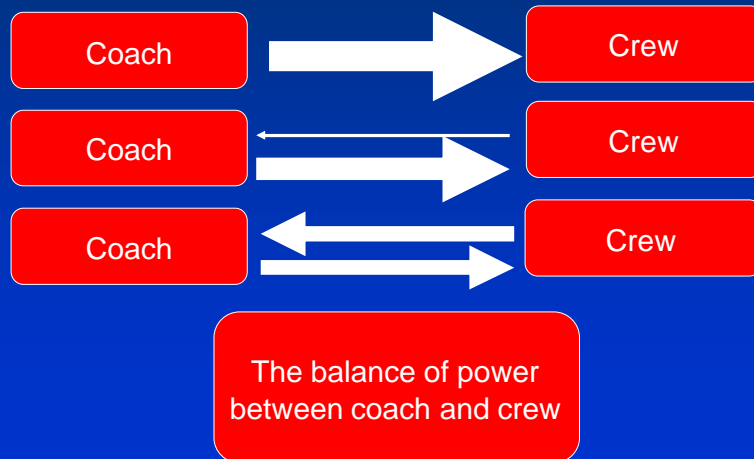


I've taken the theme of 'The Balance of Power' because, in my view, it relates to two key areas in coaching beginners and improvers. One is the balance of power in the communication between coach and crew, and secondly how coaches approach coaching a crew to balance the boat so that good technique can be used to power the boat effectively.

What was the balance of communication when you were coached?

What is the balance of communication in your club at present?

What difference does it make?



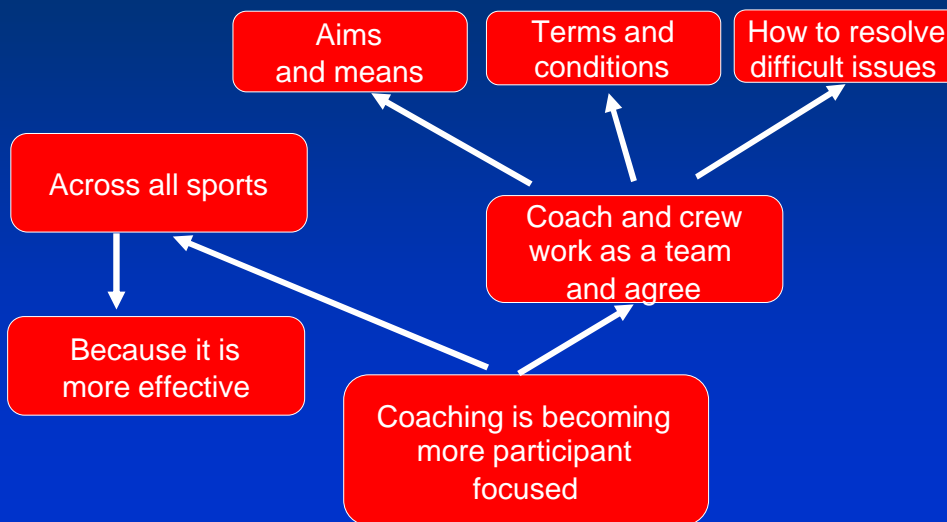
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The questions above will have been discussed by the participants and some key points related to this slide will have been posted on the website.

The aim is to get coaches to think about own experience of coaching and being coached and the extent to which the flow of communication between coach and crew should be a two-way process.

What are the potential benefits and problems?

The times they are a changing .....



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Participant focused coaching is not just a new fad. It's been around for some time – and the new Level 2 ARA coaching course is based on this model of practice. The new ARA coaching philosophy and structure is in line with Government Agenda for Sport - [http://www.sportengland.org/news/press\\_releases/activity\\_agenda.htm](http://www.sportengland.org/news/press_releases/activity_agenda.htm)

It is based on the belief that coaching has much in common with teaching – and teaching, as an activity now focuses much more on how learners learn, and how the teacher can best facilitate this process: i.e. teaching is now much more learner centred.

Learner centred teaching is about:

- Understanding about how people learn in different contexts
- Seeking feedback from the learner about that works best for them
- Viewing teaching and learning as partnership

The increased effectiveness for the learner are:

- ability to self-analyse and correct
- improved self-esteem
- Improved retention

The implications are significant – it is a change in the psychological contract (the set of expectations) that coaches have of crews, and crews have of coaches.

When you coach this, what is the balance between instruction and explanation?

Instruction = telling the crew what to do  
Explanation = explaining why the action will be effective

How the boat balance is achieved so that the power can be applied

“Do as I tell you” demonstrably works as a technique for the able and confident athlete.

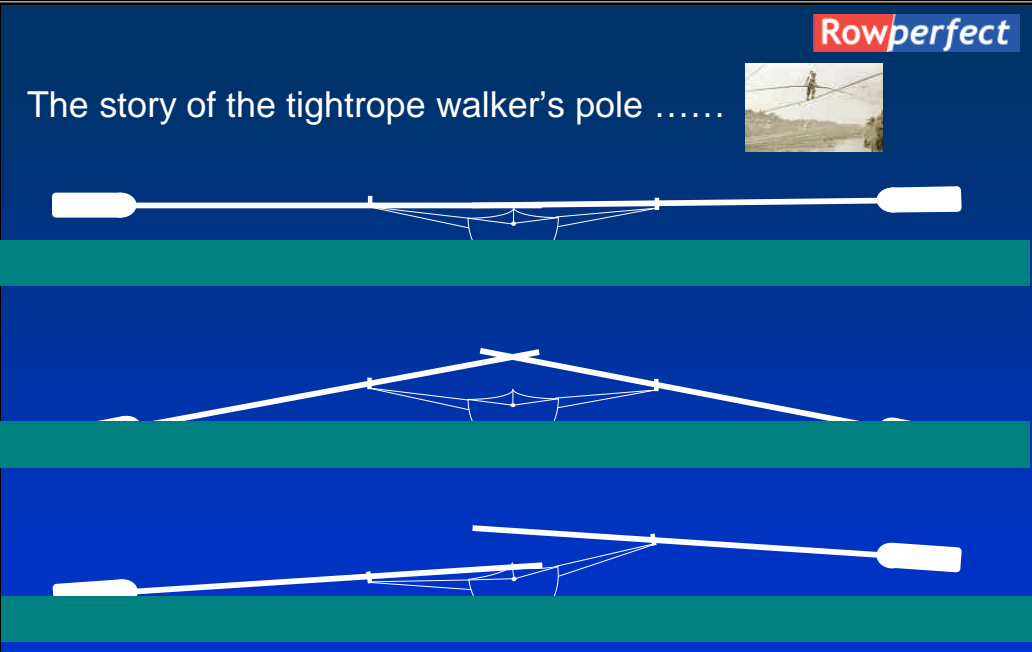
However, beginners and improvers are learning – and learners have very fragile egos. When told to do something and it does not work, they tend to feel failures and they locate the blame in themselves.

The belief has been in coaching that ‘Practice makes perfect’. The research evidence suggests that ‘Practice makes permanent, but not necessarily perfect’

“Understand – and then you will be able to better adapt yourself to what I’ve explained is more efficient”.

**Rowperfect**

The story of the tightrope walker's pole .....



When hands are raised or lowered, the blades do not move – the boat does  
Although hands have moved up or down, the angle of the blades has not changed

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This is how I explain the mechanics of balancing the boat.

The blades are analogous to the tightrope walker's pole. The pole can be straight, or sagging equally as when it bends. The key to keeping the blades as effective as a tightrope walker's pole, is to keep the hands at the same height.

As soon as hand heights differ, the pole is effectively broken.

The reaction to a boat rolling to one side is often to raise or lower the hands in order to get a stroke in. All this does is to roll the boat further over. What the lower diagram shows is that when the hands move up or down, the angle of the blade does not change - because it takes less force to move the blade in the vertical plane than it does to roll the boat on its axis.

When rowers raise or lower their hands they think that they are changing the angle of the blade relative to the water- they are not – they are tilting the boat.

The aim is to get the crew to balance the boat, not by moving their hands in the vertical plane but by connecting to the boat through weight on the toes and subtle weight shifts on the seat.



Explaining the reason why .....

Helps learners to 'construct' their own understanding

For more information about

*Constructivist Learning Theory*, go to

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructivism\\_\(learning\\_theory\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructivism_(learning_theory))

The coach encourages  
self-analysis and explains  
how drills and exercises  
help

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The theory that underpins this aspect of participant focused approaches to coaching is Constructivist Learning.

The role of the teacher is to assist the learner in constructing models that help them to understand the cause and effect relationships in what they are learning.

“Control the slide, slow down as you approach frontstops”

“Why?”

“Because hitting frontstops stops the boat”

“How?”

The ball represents the rower. What will happen when it rolls forward and hits the end of the slide?



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Teachers have long used visual aids as powerful means to aid understanding. This is one example.

In this case it is food tray representing the boat, a track for the slide and a squash ball for the rower. With the 'boat' stationary, the ball is released to run down the slide and to 'crash' into the frontstops position. How will the 'boat' behave?


Guessing what is going to happen before it happens is part of what is known as 'guessing and testing' or, at a higher level, developing a hypothesis to test. Thinking about what happens next ..... is a powerful part of a learning experience.

Coaching the  generation of rowers

**Rowing Technique by Flip Luisi**

**The Leg Drive**

**HUGELY IMPORTANT:**  
Your shoulder muscles cannot engage. Keep shoulders extended forward as if hanging from a pull-up bar.



Shoulders move horizontally back.

Notice the body angle remains the same throughout the leg drive.

00:24 / 03:04

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXnKyJdA01w>

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How do we communicate effectively with young people?

Increasingly young people obtain their information (and their learning) from the Internet. This is one example of what can already be found.

Do we need to be thinking about providing more?



Praise and encouragement  
is the main motivator

What fuels learning?

Always begin with the  
positives

Phrase the negatives in terms  
of areas to improve

Never under estimate the  
power of this approach. The  
ability to learn effectively  
correlates closely with good  
self-esteem

*I feel good therefore I learn*

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Research at The Open University with mature learners showed that, even when they 'knew the rule' that tutors always had to begin feedback with the positive comments – they still wanted to have them.

Begin with something positive and learners will listen. Begin with something negative and they switch off.

To get a crew member to make a change, try:

I want you to ..... for me ..... that's it there, well done.

## Self-analysis

Rocking over at the first stage of the recovery with a straight back and ensuring that the shoulders are well over the hips before allowing the knees to lift

1 2 3 4 5  
■ ■ ■ ■ ■

- 1 Haven't a clue, will some one please explain this again from the beginning!
- 2 I think I understand but would benefit from a further explanation
- 3 I'm getting there and I know when things are going well
- 4 I can feel how I'm improving and I now know what I need to do to improve
- 5 I'm feeling confident on this aspect and I know what I have to work on

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There are a number of ways in which coaches can encourage rowers to analyse their own performance. For example watching video clips of themselves rowing and picking out strengths and weaknesses.

With beginners I often use tick type progress check list.

Two members of a crew you coach ask to see you to tell you that:

*“Chris is a disruptive social influence in the crew, can’t row very well and is obviously not responding to coaching. What are you going to do about it?”*

So, what are you going to do about it?

What reference can we make to how we have agreed to operate?

Can we establish what Chris feels about the situation?

Can we agree a support package, some goals, a review point and a time limit?

All too often such situations are dealt with by not dealing with them

Coach and crew work together

To resolve issues and difficulties

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Having a set of principles by which the group observe and operate provides a reference point for action.

It's important to establish how many sides there are to the 'story'.

If we can identify and discuss problems early enough, it might be possible to get agreement on a 'support package of measures'.

However this needs to be within a framework of available resources, there should be an agreed time limit with a review point. This might establish that Chris is a disruptive influence and is impossible to coach – but at least there has been a positive attempt to deal with the problem.

What does it feel like to be a participant in a participant-focused learning situation?

*“Err .... Coach, you are now operating on a different psychological contract from the one we are used to, what’s going on here?”*

How practicable is it to change the dynamic between coach and participants?

If you are seeking to make changes, do so gradually and look for the evidence that it is making a difference

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It is important not to underestimate the discomfort that a change of coaching style can cause. Coach centred coaching tends to make 'lazy learners' in the sense that they have little responsibility. Demanding that they take some responsibility for their own learning can cause a negative reaction.



## Fair selection

“Chris has not such a good ergo score as me and leans out at the finish, yet has been selected ahead of me. It's SO UNFAIR!”

Selection criteria: is it possible to be objective and open?

Ergo score            /10 X weighting factor (50) =

Rowing skill        /10 X weighting factor (30) =

Crew match         /10 X weighting factor (20) =

Total =

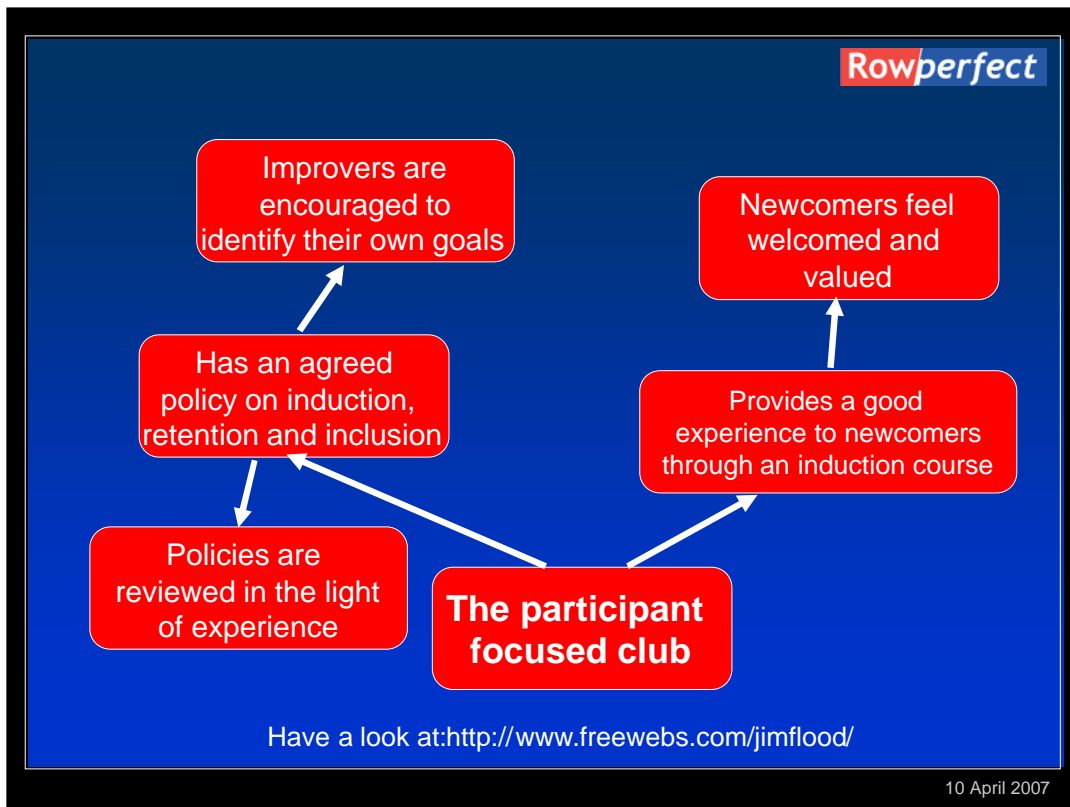
For more information about making decisions using KT analysis, go to:<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kepner-Tregoe>

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Crew selection is, traditionally, a cause of discomfort in clubs.

I was asked to provide a fair and open means of crew selection for a Swedish rowing club – so I drew on my engineering experience of decision making that made use of Kepner-Tregoe (KT) analysis.

This is based on giving each criterion a score and a weighting. The weighting factors must add up to 100% and it's usual to give a score of out of ten for each criteria. In this case a decision would be made about how 2K ergo times relate to a mark out of ten.



Club funding is in most cases a result of attracting and retaining fee paying members.

How does your club communicate with prospective members?

What kind of experience do newcomers to your club have?

What kind of learning journey do they experience? And who checks?

As club funding becomes more dependent on involvement with the local community, such factors become much more important.

Are you totally happy with this aspect of your club? If not what could be done to improve it?

[http://www.sportengland.org/index/about\\_sport\\_england/equality\\_standard\\_for\\_sport.htm](http://www.sportengland.org/index/about_sport_england/equality_standard_for_sport.htm)

## Summary

Participant focused coaching is:

- Is not a solution but a challenge
- A basis for improving communication
- About improving how participants learn
- More about managing the learning and continuously finding out what works best
- Becoming more deeply involved in the social process of coaching
- About having more fun

**The participant focused coach**

**The authoritarian coach**

Establishes and agrees aims for the group	.....	Makes the decisions and sets targets
Understands how different people learn and responds accordingly	.....	Instructs in a didactic manner
Asks for feedback on progress	.....	Relies on own judgement
Encourages the development of a dialogue through questions	.....	Talks at, rather than with, the participants
Makes considerable use of praise and encouragement as a motivator	.....	Motivates through the fear of criticism
Explains the purpose of exercises	.....	Sets exercises without explanation
Sets clear learning targets for each session and reviews these positively at the end of each session	.....	Sets performance targets and reviews on the basis of criticism
Inclusive in terms of keeping everyone involved regardless of natural ability	.....	Aims to filter out those who are not going to 'make the grade'
Highly professional in behaviour and the observation of rules and good practice guidelines	.....	Idiosyncratic in behaviour and rather cavalier about rules and regulations
Always seeking to learn and improve		Has fixed and proven ways of operating

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Further reading

Communication

<http://www.brianmac.demon.co.uk/commun.htm>

Correcting inbuilt patterns of action

<http://www.coachingwins.com/coachingdemo.html>

Coaching self-belief

<http://www.pponline.co.uk/encyc/sports-coaching.html>

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Contact Jim Flood at [jimflood@btinternet.com](mailto:jimflood@btinternet.com)