



Equine Sports Coaching

Alison Lincoln

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Alison Lincoln, BSc Equine Sports Coaching

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Introduction

The Coaching Task Force set up by the government in 2002 highlighted the need to develop coaching across all sports. The main concerns identified were that too many unqualified individuals were involved with coaching and there was no national coaching structure. In fact, a study carried out by Sports Coach UK in 2004 identified that approximately 40,000 coaches were active in the U.K. but only 4,990 (1.3%) of them had formal coaching qualifications.

As a result the Task Force recommended the introduction of a UK Coaching Certificate (UKCC), which came into being on 1 January 2007. Thirty-one sports, including equestrian sport and leisure, are involved in this initiative, the objective of which is to advance coach education programmes and support the development of coaching as a career.

In the future any coaching of horses and riders will need to be carried out by qualified individuals. All current BHS registered instructors will need to undergo additional training in order to gain the UKCC qualification, of which there are three levels. Any individual involved in teaching at riding schools, riding club, or Pony Club level, and those involved in the BEF disciplines (British Dressage, British Eventing, British Show Jumping Association, British Equestrian Vaulting, British Reining, British Horse Driving Trials Association, Endurance GB, and Riding for the Disabled) will also need to hold a UKCC endorsed coaching qualification.

This book aims to provide an overview of the many aspects involved in the process of coaching horses and riders and to take techniques that have been researched and used successfully in other sports and make them available to equine coaches. It also hopes to provide a useful reference book for those competitors (amateur or professional) who prefer to coach themselves and are looking to update their knowledge on how they can best prepare themselves and their horses for competition success.

Contents

	Acknowledgements	ix
	Introduction	xi
Chapter 1	The Coaching Process	3
	1.1 Approaches to Coaching	3
	1.2 Coaching Philosophy	9
	1.3 Coaching Styles	14
	1.4 Communication and Feedback	19
Chapter 2	Understanding the Individual	33
	2.1 Motivation	33
	2.2 Goal Achievement	42
	2.3 Psychological Skills	47
	2.4 Cognitive Control Strategies	59
Chapter 3	Preparing Effective Coaching Sessions	67
	3.1 Learning Styles	67
	3.2 Equine Learning	75
	3.3 Skill Acquisition	76
	3.4 Principles of Training	80
Chapter 4	Planning and Delivering Effective Coaching Sessions	99
	4.1 The Coaching Environment	99
	4.2 Planning Sessions	110
	4.3 Monitoring and Evaluating Progress	121

Chapter 5	Developing a Coaching Programme	127
5.1	Long-Term Rider Development	127
5.2	Periodisation	133
5.3	Performance Analysis	140
Chapter 6	Managing and Developing Personal Coaching Practice	157
6.1	Analysing Personal Practice	157
6.2	Personal Action Planning	163
Chapter 7	Specialist Coaching	173
7.1	The Disabled Rider	173
7.2	The Elite Rider	177
7.3	Team Sports	186
Appendices		189
Appendix 1	Goal-Setting Template	189
Appendix 2	Performance Profiling Template	191
Appendix 3	Scorecard for Fitness Tests	193
Appendix 4	Fitness Demands Profile	195
Appendix 5	Circuit Training Template	197
Appendix 6	Training Programme Template	199
Appendix 7	Risk Assessment Template	201
Appendix 8	Accident Report Form	203
Appendix 9	Session Plan	205
Appendix 10	Scheme of Work	207
Appendix 11	Competition Plan	209
Appendix 12	Team Selection Plan	211
Appendix 13	Team Plan	213
Appendix 14	Individual Learning Plan	215
Appendix 15	Show Jumping Analysis Template	217
Appendix 16	Dressage Warm-Up Analysis	219
Appendix 17	Analysis of a Fence on a Cross Country Course	221
Appendix 18	Reflective Journal Template	223
Appendix 19	Skills Audit Template	225
Appendix 20	Career Profiling Template	227
Appendix 21	Action Plan Template	229

Appendix 22	Travelogue Template	231
Appendix 23	Progress Log Template	233
Appendix 24	Planning and Delivering Effective Coaching Sessions Competency Review	235
Appendix 25	Understanding the Coaching Process Competency Review	237
Appendix 26	Understanding the Individual Competency Review	239
Appendix 27	Preparing Effective Coaching Sessions Competency Review	241
Appendix 28	Developing a Coaching Programme Competency Review	243
Appendix 29	Managing and Developing Coaching Practice Competency Review	245
Index		247

Equine Sports Coaching

The Coaching Process



1.1 Approaches to Coaching	3
1.2 Coaching Philosophy	9
1.3 Coaching Styles	14
1.4 Communication and Feedback	19

Chapter Objective

To provide an overview of the different approaches to coaching; the purpose, philosophy and role of the coach; and a guide to effective communication and feedback.

1.1 APPROACHES TO COACHING

In the equine industry, there are individuals employed as trainers, instructors, and coaches. But what is the difference between a trainer, an instructor, and a coach, if indeed there is any? Does what you call yourself affect the types of clients you are likely to get? Do potential clients perceive differences between the role of an instructor, a trainer and a coach?

A straw poll of those involved in the industry would probably differentiate the terms as follows.

Instructors:

- tell the rider what to do
- provide lessons that incorporate tried and tested exercises
- focus predominantly on the rider
- are found mainly in riding schools, colleges, and the Pony Club

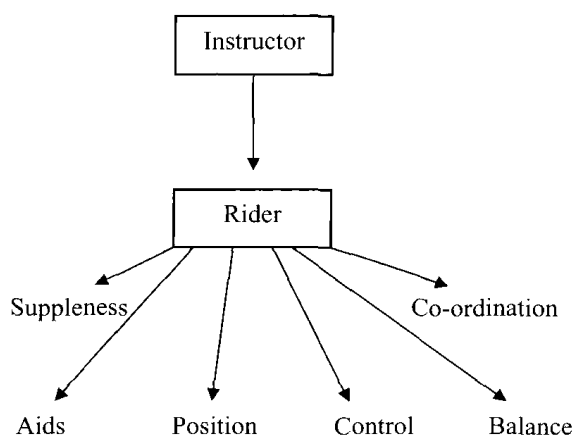


Figure 1.1 Focus of an instructor.

- pass on facts and knowledge
- are viewed as concentrating on improving basic riding skills
- will have instructor qualifications from either the British Horse Society (BHS) or the Association of British Riding Schools (ABRS)
- adopt an authoritarian approach, for example, "Do as I say"

Figure 1.1 illustrates the areas an instructor is likely to focus on in their lessons. They are expected to be experienced and knowledgeable about the steps needed to develop a beginner into a competent rider on the flat and over fences. Instructors are generally associated with the leisure industry, that is, riders who participate for enjoyment and exercise.

Trainers:

- pass on their skills and knowledge by guiding practice
- focus predominantly on the horse
- are viewed as producing horses for competition
- are often freelance
- are perceived as having "hands on" experience
- work in partnership with the rider

Figure 1.2 illustrates the areas a trainer is likely to focus on in their training sessions. Trainers are expected to be able to demonstrate experience and knowledge in producing horses from novice level to established both on the flat and over fences. Trainers are generally associated with the serious amateur, those who may work outside of the horse industry, riding and competing in the evenings and at weekends.

Coaches:

- encourage self-awareness
- work with teams or elite riders in preparation for major competitions
- have often competed at the highest levels themselves
- act as "eyes on the ground"

Figure 1.3 illustrates the areas in which a coach is likely to be interested in when working with horses and riders. Coaches are expected to have a thorough knowledge and experience of developing riders, producing horses, managing teams, and competing. Coaches are generally associated with professional and elite riders, that is, those who make a living from competing or are in contention for national team places.

Interestingly, in other sports (football, hockey, cricket, athletics, swimming, etc.), anybody involved with helping athletes to improve in their chosen sport, whether

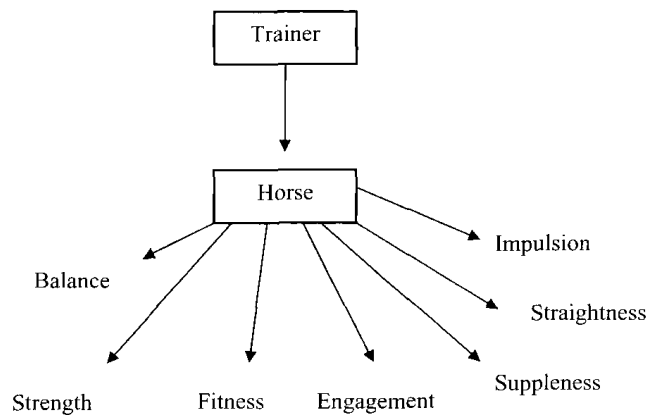


Figure 1.2 Focus of a trainer.

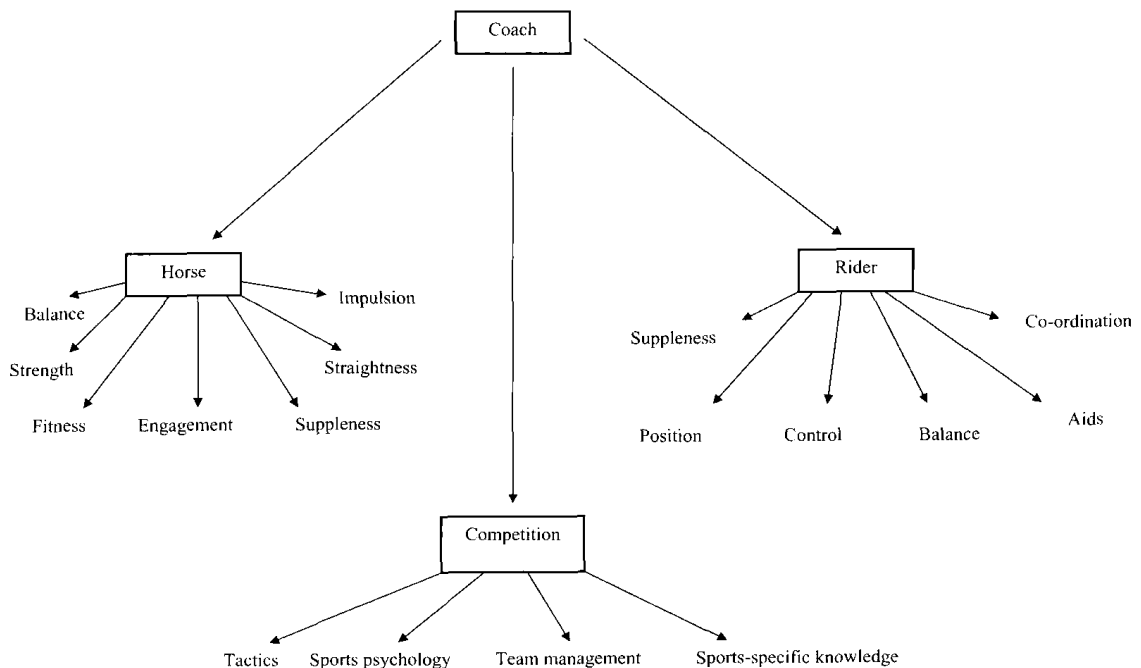


Figure 1.3 Focus of a coach.

for competition or leisure, is referred to as a coach. It is recognised, however, that there are many different approaches to coaching, and these have parallels with the terms commonly used in the equine industry.

Models of Coaching

Lombardo (1999) identified four coaching models:

- Standard (or traditional) model of coaching
- General educational model
- Humanistic model
- Invitational model

Standard Model of Coaching

The standard model of coaching centres on winning. It is a coach-centred approach that does not aspire to educational outcomes such as the growth and development of the individual. It simply aims to improve those areas that will enhance the chance of winning. All decisions are made by the coach, and the individual or team is viewed as belonging to the coach. This approach is more appropriate at the professional or elite level of sport, where team selection, lottery funding, and sponsorship are generally influenced by the success of the rider.

Case Study 1.1

Sally is a former member of the young rider event team and has completed Badminton, Burghley, and Blenheim several times. She now makes her living coaching and runs a training yard in Oxford. Currently, she is coaching an event rider who is aiming to compete at CCI**** (international four-star three-day event) level this year with a view to being selected for the European Championships in two years.

They meet monthly for a two hour coaching session, which comprises dressage and jumping. The sessions focus predominantly on the challenges that the horse and rider will meet in competition and working on issues that the rider has identified in their training or competitions to date. Sally also attends some of the bigger events to help support and assess their performance at competitions.

The riders who will benefit most from this type of coaching are those who require only slight “tweaks” to their technique. They are highly likely to be accomplished producers of horses in their own right. The coach will generally decide which horse is to be selected, what team training must be attended, what the qualifying standard is, and which competitions are compulsory for qualification purposes.

The downside of this approach is that it is not personalised. A rider just breaking into the professional or elite ranks, such as those moving up from Young Riders, are likely to require a higher level of individual support, encouragement, and direction.

General Educational Model

The general educational model, in contrast, focuses on the growth and development of the individual and will typically consist of regular, intense instruction to develop both fitness and skill. The coach remains the primary decision maker. This approach is appropriate in pony clubs, riding schools, and colleges where riders are either being prepared for work within the equine industry or are aiming to improve their general riding skills and where health and safety considerations are paramount.

Case Study 1.2

Tom works at a riding school and has the Assistant Instructor qualification from the BHS. The majority of his clients are children and adults who are learning to ride and attend weekly for a one-hour lesson. The focus of these lessons is for the clients to do as much actual riding as possible in the hour and usually involves Tom setting a number of exercises for them to have a go at. Tom's main objective is that everyone enjoys themselves and stays safe.

The benefit of this model is that the health and well-being of the rider is put first. It is an ideal approach to take with novice riders and children and should emphasise fun, enjoyment, and the acquiring and development of skill. The disadvantage of this approach is that it is unlikely to be as effective for competitive riders who measure their ability and progress against what they have achieved rather than whether they've had a good time.

Humanistic Model of Coaching

The humanistic model is an educational model devoted to the all-round development of the individual. It is rider-centred and focuses on improving the self-awareness of the participant in all areas. Riders are encouraged to reflect on their subjective experiences, and these insights are used to enhance their personal development. The goals of the rider take precedence over those of the coach, whose role is to encourage and support the rider.

The riders are expected to analyse, think, and make important decisions about their learning and aspirations. This approach generally results in the long-term participation of the rider in the sport. The rider-coach relationship is viewed as a co-operative one, although the coach cannot fully relinquish the responsibilities inherent in their position. This is an appropriate approach for coaching in riding clubs and freelance coaching of non-professional competition riders.

Case Study 1.3

Ian is a dressage rider who uses his freelance coaching to support his competing. He has a number of clients who are enthusiastic, non-professional dressage riders. Typically, they attend a one-hour session every couple of weeks. The focus for these sessions is on the progressive development of the horse. The riders are encouraged to reflect on their competition results and identify areas they would like to work on in each session. Ian spends time at the start discussing the focus for the next hour and agrees upon a plan of action with the rider. The exercises are attempted, and Ian provides feedback to help improve the rider's awareness of the effect of the exercise.

The advantage of this approach is that the rider is required to be fully involved and engaged in the whole process. The coach helps them take responsibility for their own development and provides them with the skills to coach themselves when they are not with the coach. This approach is appropriate for most situations, although it may need to be adapted for younger children who have not yet fully developed the ability to analyse and evaluate themselves.

Invitational Model of Coaching

The invitational model focuses on the positive encouragement of all participants. It is characterised by sincere optimism for the riders, trust in their ability, and respect for all individuals connected with the sporting experience, such as parents or other family members. This approach aims to ensure all aspects of the riding experience are inviting, including the people running the coaching sessions, the policies, processes and procedures, the environment, and the facilities. It is designed to increase participation in the sport and is rider-centred, being predominantly concerned with learning and development rather than winning. This approach is appropriate for all organisations involved in the leisure riding industry such as riding schools, riding clubs, pony clubs, and equestrian centres.

Case Study 1.4

Elaine runs an equestrian centre that has close links with the local riding club. She runs weekly dressage and jumping sessions that are open to everyone. The centre has a small café, and those attending the sessions often arrive early to share a cup of coffee and chat with Elaine. The focus of the session is on enjoyment and the positive encouragement of all who attend, most of whom are adults riding for pleasure. The majority do compete in the shows held at the centre and local riding club competitions. Each person knows the others by name, and friends and family members are encouraged to attend as spectators. The atmosphere is relaxed and informal.

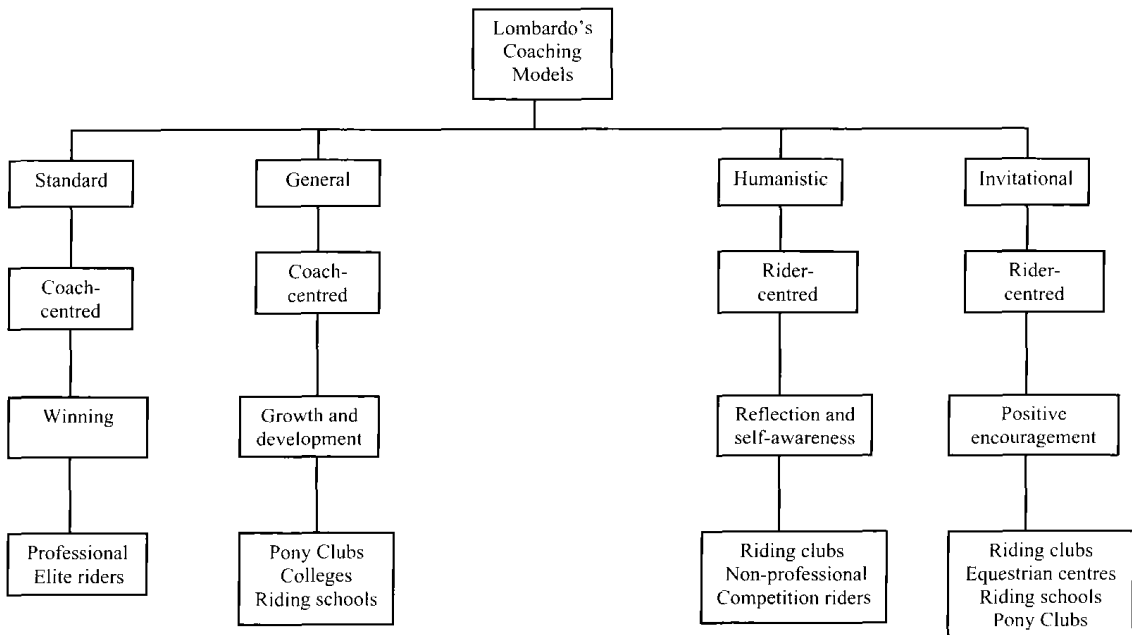


Figure 1.4 Models of coaching.

In reality neither one of these approaches is better or more successful than another, and the experienced coach will be able to recognise which is the most appropriate to adopt given the situation and the individuals they are coaching. Figure 1.4 provides a summary of the four coaching models.

Regardless of their approach, a coach will inevitably find themselves fulfilling a wide range of roles throughout their career (Table 1.1). Whatever role, the purpose of coaching remains the same – the development of the physical and psychological skills required to ride, as well as the wider personal development of the rider. In order to achieve this and remain true to their own values, beliefs, and goals, the coach will need a clearly defined personal coaching philosophy.

1.2 COACHING PHILOSOPHY

The reasons for entering into a career coaching riders are numerous:

- Making a living
- Supporting one's own competing
- Loving the sport
- Wanting to teach
- Working with children
- Traveling
- Gaining reputation and recognition
- Working with horses