

Why Coaches Should Prioritize their Own Mental Wellness Too

As a busy coach, you likely haven't spent a lot of time thinking about your own mental health and wellness. Sure, you've told your athletes to seek professional help if they need it, or maybe even spent time doing group activities with your team to promote [mental wellness](#). But how are you doing?

[TrueSport Expert Kevin Chapman](#), PhD, clinical psychologist and founder of [The Kentucky Center for Anxiety and Related Disorders](#), believes that a coach who isn't taking time for his or her own mental health is at a serious disadvantage. Here's what you need to know.

You're not invincible—and don't have to be

"At the end of the day, it's important for you and your athletes to understand that as a coach, you are not invincible," says Chapman. "It's so important to normalize having a range of emotions."

Checking in with a professional—even before something is 'wrong' in your life—is a great idea for anyone. "In our sporting culture, especially for men, it can be hard to show emotion or admit that you need help," says Chapman. If you know you should talk to someone but are struggling to feel okay with seeking help, he suggests you think about it in a new way: "I reframe treatment as coaching, or mental conditioning, or mental toughness training. That tends to feel better for many coaches."

Chapman adds, "Coaches generally understand that their [athletes need to have a growth mindset](#) and believe that they're capable of changing and growing. But as adults, we tend to fall into the fixed mindset even if we don't realize it. And because of that, we actually convince ourselves that we can't change or be flexible, or that we shouldn't 'need to' grow."

Your mental health impacts your work

"In my experience with coaches, I've found that there's even more of a stigma with coaches seeking mental health treatment compared to athletes," says Chapman. "I've also seen how incredibly impactful this is, because depending on the sport, a coach's mental health might be critical to overall success, wellness, and safety on the team." For instance, if you're going through a tough time, you might struggle to stay on top of tactics in a fast-paced basketball or football game, or potentially even miss warning signs of injury for your athletes.

"Your functioning is impaired when your mental health is not in order," Chapman explains. "And if your judgment is impaired, then you need to do something about it. You need to enhance your mental health and wellness. You can't be good at your craft in any capacity if your mental health is not taken care of. You can't competently do your job."

Athletes emulate you—for better or worse

"As a coach goes, so does the team," says Chapman. Regardless of how many [mental health and wellness activities](#) you do with your athletes, if they sense that you're struggling or you're not taking your own advice, they won't take it either. [Athletes will emulate you](#), rather than doing what you suggest. There's a reason for the cliché of 'do as I say, not as I do,' but unfortunately, that cliché doesn't work.

“Your athletes are learning more from your example, not from what you're saying,” he adds. “No matter how many mental health exercises you lead them through, your athletes are going to follow that example. Ultimately, some coaches have this unrealistic expectation for themselves that they can't show emotion, which trickles down to the team and what we teach our athletes.”

Transparency is powerful

“If you can tell your athletes that you are not okay, and that you’re struggling with something, that's going to [enhance your rapport with your players](#),” says Chapman. You don’t need to overshare and dig into the details, but telling athletes that something is going on will make you more relatable. “Your athletes are going to relate to you better, because everyone goes through something at some point,” he adds. “And you’ll be surprised, too: Athletes are going to rally around you. They’ll appreciate your honesty and find you more relatable as a human, which will make you more effective as a coach and a leader.”

TAKEAWAY: As a coach, you may not think about your own mental health as often as you think about your athlete’s emotional well-being, but you can’t be an effective coach when you’re struggling internally. Protecting your own mental health will make you a better coach and stronger person.



About TrueSport

TrueSport®, a movement powered by the experience and values of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, champions the positive values and life lessons learned through youth sport. [TrueSport](#) inspires athletes, coaches, parents, and administrators to change the culture of youth sport through active engagement and thoughtful curriculum based on cornerstone lessons of sportsmanship, character-building, and clean and healthy performance, while also creating leaders across communities through sport.

For more expert-driven articles and materials, visit TrueSport’s comprehensive [LEARN](#) resource. This content was reproduced in partnership with TrueSport. Any content copied or reproduced without TrueSport and the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency’s express written permission would be in violation of our copyright, and subject to legal recourse. To learn more or request permission to reproduce content, click [here](#).

You can link back to the TrueSport article beginning 2/1/22 at:
<https://truesport.org/mental-wellness/coaches-mental-wellness/>