

The 4 Best Kept Secrets For Elite Soccer Coaches



A Director of Coaching (DOC) is inevitable measured on their ability to deliver strong results and develop high-quality players. In order to achieve these objectives, every DOC wants to have the most elite, soccer-savvy coaches by their side.

Elite soccer coaches have the experience to produce high-performing teams, develop the skills of individual players and develop their appreciation of the game. Generally former players themselves, coaches boast in-depth game knowledge, happy to pass this information down through the ranks and power soccer teams to the right results.

Of course, there is no doubt that the role of an elite soccer coach is wide-ranging. Some may concentrate on a specific age group or team - or even on coaching a certain skill, such as defence or goalkeeping - while others have broader areas of focus. However, when you want your players to keep clean sheets and take chances when they come, elite soccer coaches are the talented tacticians to help you win games.

If you're ready to get the most out of your coaching staff, improve coaching performance, develop your coaches careers and take your club to the next level, read our **4 best kept secrets to elite soccer coaches.**

Questions this eBook will answer:

How to hire the perfect soccer coach?
How to motivate your soccer coaches?
How to evaluate your soccer coaches?
The do's and don'ts of coaching development?
How The Coaching Manual can help retain coaching talent?



Part I: How to Hire the Perfect Soccer Coach

Hiring the perfect coach is far easier said than done; especially when you're searching for the most elite performing coaches to join your club. Overwhelmingly, coaches tend to be hired on haphazard searches which include:

- A coach's reputation
- Their past success
- Recommendations from other coaches

Recruiting the best coaches requires you to understand what a 'good coach' actually looks like. Hiring a coach on their reputation vs hiring a coach based on data, facts and actionable information can be a deciding in factor in strengthening your coaching staff or weakening it.

In the search for elite soccer coaches, you'll need to carry out a rigorous vetting process to ensure that any potential recruit has the best chance of succeeding within your club or organisation. Consider the following when hiring the perfect coach:

Are they a good cultural fit?


The last thing you need is to appoint a coach who doesn't naturally fit within your club culture (or worst of all, a coach who disagrees with the culture you've worked so hard to define). Consider the impact of recruiting a strict disciplinarian at a club with a culture of promoting creative freedom. It's highly unlikely they'll get the best out of their players in a manner that fits with your overall coaching philosophy.

Are their vision, goals and objectives aligned with your needs?

Any ambitious coach should start a new job with a clear view of their own career plans. They may want to progress to coaching different age groups, focusing on a specific skill (such as defence or fitness), or climbing the ranks to become a DOC. These ambitions should be welcomed - they're often an indicator of a talented coach - but it's important that they align with the immediate practicalities of the job.

Do they share your coaching philosophy?

Your coaches are the people responsible for translating your coaching philosophy into practical training sessions. This job becomes much harder - if not impossible - if they don't completely buy into a given philosophy. To give a simple example, a naturally defensive-minded coach is unlikely to thrive within a club that believes in an expansive, possession-based gameplan.

 **The Coaching Manual Tip:** "Building a strong network of close DOC contacts. There's no better recommendation of a coach's abilities than a reference from a DOC whose judgement you trust."

Do they possess the necessary qualifications?

Paper credentials aren't the be-all-and-end-all of a talented coach, but at a basic level, a coach needs to have the necessary qualifications for the job at hand. Relevant qualifications will vary depending on the nature of your club or organisation. For instance, in the US, several official bodies offer training courses for coaching high school soccer:

- The National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA) recommends that high school coaches complete either the NSCAA High School Coaches Diploma or NSCAA Premier Diploma.
- For coaches working with players aged from 16 to college level, US Soccer offers a National B Licence Course. Before applying, coaches are required to progress from the entry-level E licence up to C level.
- Coaches who complete the National Federation of State High School Associations' National Coach Certification Programme become qualified interscholastic soccer coaches specialising in high school soccer. The specifics of the programme vary significantly from one state or school district to another.





Part 2: How to Motivate Your Soccer Coaches

Motivation is the internal desire of your coaches to win games, improve players, and succeed. But when teams suffer a run of bad form or that unexpected loss, keeping your coaches motivated can be hard; especially if you want to keep their head in the game.

Without a bought-in, driven coaching team, even the most experienced Director of Coaching (DOC) will fail to translate their sporting philosophy to the soccer field.

Read on for a run-down of five common conflicts that can emerge between coach and DOC, plus solutions for how each can be resolved.

1. Problem: Feeling pressured to deliver results, rather than develop players

As we all know, sport is a results-driven business. Failure to achieve success on the field reflects badly on the DOC and by extension their coaching team. But focusing too heavily on results can have a major impact on a coach's ability to support and improve their players.

Solution: Praise effort, not outcome

Counterintuitive as it may seem, the outcome of individual fixtures - whether positive or negative - shouldn't play a major part in your evaluation of a coach. As a DOC, you will have played a major hand in establishing your club's philosophy, values and tactics, which makes you accountable for results. In contrast, your coaches should be judged on their ability to get the most out of their players, in line with your overarching sporting vision. Praise their efforts toward achieving this (delivering constructive criticism where relevant), rather than focusing on results.

2. Problem: Not buying into the club's coaching philosophy

A club's sporting philosophy should be the ultimate guiding principle behind all on and off-field decisions. If a coach doesn't believe in - or fully understand - this philosophy, it's highly unlikely they will feel motivated to get the most from their playing squad.

For some coaches, this lack of buy-in will stem from a lack of understanding. If they can't see the purpose of your sporting philosophy (or, indeed, of any sporting philosophy), they simply won't get behind it.

Solution: Communicate clearly and provide incentives

This problem has a double-pronged solution. First off, it's vital to clearly communicate the logic behind your sporting vision. Take the time to listen to any grievances, but reiterate that your job is about creating a generation of quality players, rather than one successful age-group team. Next, provide clear incentives that give the coach additional encouragement to buy into the system. These incentives should be tied to developing players in line with your coaching philosophy.

3. Problem: Lack of coaching resources

Every coach wants more resources, whether that be dedicated skills coaches to lead specific sessions, or an assistant to support them by taking on simple day-to-day tasks. As DOC, it's not always possible to grant these requests; you're operating within a set budget that has to be spread across multiple age levels, after all. But over time, a mild grievance about lack of resources can turn into a major demotivating factor for a coach, giving them the impression that their suggestions aren't being listened to or taken seriously.

Solution: Use beneficial technology

You may not be able to guarantee additional coaching personnel, but that doesn't mean you can't seek out alternatives. At The Coaching Manual, we've developed a suite of tools designed to free up your coaches' time, while providing them with hundreds of ideas for full sessions and practice drills. Our coaching content is filmed in broadcast quality with Southampton F.C., giving your coaches access to unparalleled levels of professional advice, support and techniques. That means no more late nights grappling with how to deliver the next month's worth of training sessions, and more time spent getting the most out of players.



4. Problem: A coach's approach works with some age groups, but not others

Some coaches are the ultimate all-rounders, with skill sets that allow them to work with any group of players. Others specialise in motivating and training a specific age level or type of player. Neither type of coach is 'better' than the other; ideally, your team should incorporate a mix of both. But this can inevitably lead to headaches in ensuring that your 'specialist' coaches are being used in the most effective way.

Solution: Foster strong working relationships to understand the strengths and weaknesses

This is a people management challenge that exists across all areas of business, not just sport. Overcoming it is an investment in relationship-building. Until you understand the key strengths and weaknesses of everyone in your coaching team, you won't be in an informed position to decide how to use each coach effectively.



5. Problem: Lack of clarity around what success looks like

Coaches naturally want to feel like they're doing a good job. After all, the knowledge that you're excelling in a challenging role can be a major motivator. But it's difficult - if not impossible - for them to measure their own performance if they lack a clear understanding of what 'success' even looks like. Are they being assessed on results? Player development? Easing player progression from one age group to the next? A combination of all three? Or something else entirely?

Solution: Set clear objectives and KPIs

As DOC, your job revolves around evaluating the performance of your coaching team. It's important that each coach understands and appreciates the metrics against which they're being measured; without this knowledge, it's hard for them to feel bought into the evaluation process. Ensure each coach has a clearly defined development plan, comprising a set of mutually agreed objectives with specific key performance indicators (KPIs) in place to assess performance. At any time, a coach should be able to look at their development plan and immediately understand whether they're performing above or below expectations.



A photograph of a soccer coach, seen from the back, wearing a light blue shirt, addressing a group of young male players. The players are wearing dark blue or black soccer jerseys and are standing in a line, looking towards the coach. The background is a blurred outdoor soccer field with a goalpost visible.

Part 3: How to Evaluate Your Soccer Coaches

A vital aspect of the Director of Coaching (DOC) job role is to assess and evaluate the competency of soccer coaches. Understanding their strengths and weaknesses can help to:

- Align their knowledge and strengths to the correct age group
- Ensure they are given relevant training and support
- Create tailored development plans

Effectively evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your coaching staff shouldn't be seen as a headache or an overwhelming challenge. It simply requires a consistent approach and sufficient preparation.

Here are some methods to consider when planning your next round of evaluations.


Conduct dedicated performance reviews

As with any people management role, a DOC needs formalised one-on-one time with their team members to discuss new approaches, overcome grievances, and generally to maintain a positive working relationship. However, a performance evaluation shouldn't be treated as part of a regular recurring meeting. Instead, it should be planned separately, with nothing else on the agenda beyond the evaluation. How can you expect your coaches to take the process seriously - and prepare accordingly - if you don't schedule a dedicated review?

When booking a performance review, be sure to give the coach enough time to get ready for it, taking into account other demands on their time. Again, this will demonstrate the importance that you place on their evaluation and helping them to develop. You may also wish to follow up on your evaluation with a second session to agree on updated performance objectives, if necessary.

Provide coaches with a self-evaluation form

Asking for a coach's honest assessment of their own performance provides a useful basis for evaluation. Give them a set list of criteria against which to self-evaluate, and be sure to remind them of their SMART objectives. Above all, urge them to support their assessments - whether positive or negative - with measurable evidence rather than opinions.

 **The Coaching Manual Tip:** Use self-evaluation as a conversational framework around which you can base your own appraisal. Don't be afraid to disagree with any of their assessments, as long as you offer constructive feedback while doing so.

Gain feedback from players and other coaches

Given the many constraints on your time, it can be challenging to acquire sufficient hands-on knowledge of an individual coach's strengths and weaknesses. Peer reviews can help to overcome this. Ask other coaches who work closely with them to provide their own feedback; you may also wish to reach out to the players they coach. It's fine for you to know the identities of those conducting the reviews - indeed, you should know them, as this gives you an opportunity to challenge or ask for further details on specific feedback - but they should be kept anonymous from the coach you're evaluating.

💡 **The Coaching Manual Tip:** Don't overdo it - six to eight reviews should be sufficient to support your evaluation without becoming overwhelming. Give them structured review forms and urge them to supplement their statements with real-world examples.



Assess player development and performances on the pitch

The ultimate measure of a coach's performance lies in the development of their players. How are they progressing against the measures outlined in your season plan? Are they developing in the right areas, and at the right pace? Do they show clear signs of playing within the overarching sporting philosophy of your club or association?

The only way to answer these questions is by taking the time to watch them in action over a prolonged period. Importantly, you should focus on sustained development rather than one-off results, whether positive or negative. The objective is player development, not success or failure in a specific game, so avoid jumping to conclusions off the back of two or three matches.

Maintain a log of 'critical incidents'

One surefire way to ensure that your evaluation remains rooted in the real world, rather than becoming an unfocused series of unsupported opinions, is to keep a log of so-called 'critical incidents' throughout the review period. These incidents should be examples of positive or negative behaviours and actions, which can then be used as a basis for discussion during the evaluation.

It's vital that you provide clear and constructive feedback as part of this process. Overly criticising a coach for an isolated incident doesn't make for effective evaluation, and is likely to damage your working relationship. Likewise, avoid simply patting a coach on the back for a job well done. Ensure that every incident you discuss is accompanied by learning - something that the coach can work on when they're back on the training field.



Part 4: Coaching Development: The Do's & Don'ts

Just as coaches play an important role in the support and development of players, there should be an ongoing commitment, as a Director of Coaching, to the development of your coaching staff.

Coaching development is essential. It allows even the most effective coaches to evolve his or her knowledge of soccer, assist in producing winning teams and facilitate a player's enjoyment of the game.

With that in mind, here is our list of the five biggest coaching development do's and don'ts!

Do: Provide the resources they need to succeed

Even the most talented and experienced coach is unlikely to succeed in their role without the appropriate resources. Those resources can take many forms - from smaller requirements like new training equipment to larger matters like a higher-quality playing surface.

One of the most important is time. Coaches need time to develop training sessions, build a rapport with their players, and implement new tactics. Sadly, it's a resource that's often missing from a coach's life. They can easily fall into a routine of constantly preparing for the next fixture without ever looking at the bigger picture.

Do: Offer emotional support and mentorship (if it's wanted)

As a DOC, your experience is one of your most valuable assets. Whatever challenges your coaches encounter, there's a good chance you've seen and dealt with them before. A key part of person management involves intuitively understanding when to offer the benefit of your years of accrued wisdom in the form of emotional support and mentorship.

Mentoring your coaches can give them the confidence to overcome problems, without specifically telling them how to do it (or doing it for them). This allows them to build their personal skill set rather than encouraging them to blindly follow your lead.



Do: Give a clear pathway for career progression

If your coaches are ambitious, they'll want to progress - both in terms of developing their skill set and taking on greater responsibility. But "progress" itself is a vague term - how does a coach know what they should be working toward, or understand when they've achieved it?

The answer lies in agreeing on goals and objectives as part of the coaching assessment process. These goals should be clear and actionable; it should be immediately obvious what they mean and whether or not they have been completed.

Do: Define roles and responsibilities

Just as your coaches need to know what they're working toward, it's important that they understand the full extent of their role. Every coach within your club or organisation should have a job description that specifically details their areas of responsibility. This helps to focus their progression in the right areas while helping to create a culture of accountability and minimising the risk of coaches stepping on each others' toes.

Do: Create a framework for effective training

While your coaches are ultimately responsible for delivering effective training sessions, it's up to you as the DOC to ensure that those training sessions are focusing on the right areas. Your club's culture and overarching sporting philosophy should act as a framework around which individual sessions can be based. This, in turn, will help your coaches to achieve their goals around player development.

Don't: Focus solely on results

Focusing too heavily on results can be a major demotivating factor for your coaches. It can also seriously hinder their progression, forcing them to constantly worry about the next match rather than developing their coaching methods.

Sport is often described as a results-based business, but at age level, win/loss ratios and league positions often aren't the best metrics to judge a coach's performance. Keep goals and objectives geared toward player development and reassure your coaches that they won't be under pressure after a couple of disappointing results.

Don't: Be overly prescriptive

It's important that your coaches are pulling in the same direction when it comes to game tactics and player development. As such, it can be easy for a DOC to give overly prescriptive instruction around how teams - or individual players - should be coached.

A hands-on approach may reassure you that things are being done "properly", but it can also be a major barrier to coaching development. Your coaches need to understand that you trust their methods and are prepared to give them the freedom to coach in their own way, provided the results are in line with your club culture and playing philosophy.

Don't: Shy away from tough conversations

In order to maintain a positive working relationship with your coaches, it can sometimes seem like the best option to avoid - or tone down - difficult conversations around performance and areas of weakness. But these very conversations are often the most beneficial from a coaching development standpoint. It's your job as a DOC to handle them professionally and sensitively, ensuring they remain constructive and non-confrontational.

Don't: Treat performance evaluations as a low priority

DOCs are notoriously time-poor. Coaches may not be used to formal performance evaluations and assessments. These two factors combined can easily result in your evaluations being treated as a low priority, rather than a critical element in helping your coaches to develop. The key lies in setting out expectations and acceptable behaviours in advance:

A schedule of regular one-to-one meetings should be established
Coaches should come prepared to these meetings (as should you)
A recurring itinerary should be agreed upon
Meetings should be kept on track, in line with the agenda, rather than meandering into general complaints about work etc.

Don't: Leave your coaches out of the decision-making process

And finally, as your coaches progress within their roles, they will naturally take on greater responsibility. Prepare them for this inevitability by consulting them on key decisions related to soccer-specific matters. Depending on the size of your club or organisation, this may involve holding one-on-one talks with each coach, or forming a leadership group of senior coaches - ideally with different backgrounds and skillsets - to speak on behalf of their colleagues.



Part 5: How The Coaching Manual Can Help you Retain Coaching Talent

With hundreds of soccer coaching ideas at your fingertips, The Coaching Manual offers the tools to develop your coaches and give them

can help you get better; no matter what level you coach at. Our content ranges from full coaching sessions and practices to expert interviews, guides and articles through cutting-edge software tools.

It's our aim to provide coaches with professional standard coaching content to improve the level of coaching standard globally. The Coaching Manual solves this problem by taking coaches at any level inside the walls of top academies.

With plans to suit everyone, The Coaching Manual is the perfect resource for soccer coaches who want to improve their understanding of coaching and create a first-class soccer learning environment for their players.

www.thecoachingmanual.com



The world's best digital coaching tools

- ✓ Plan Sessions
- ✓ Find Sessions
- ✓ See LMA Coaches in Action



Proud sponsors of the League Managers Association

