

COACHING SERIES

*"Great coaching is not simply measured by what a coach knows or can demonstrate themselves. It is measured by what they are able to build in others."*

Ady Gray

# High Level Coaching in KARATE

A coaching perspective

Great coaching goes  
beyond the dojo



Ady Gray  
Former England Head Kata Coach

## High-level coaching goes far beyond technical knowledge or personal ability.

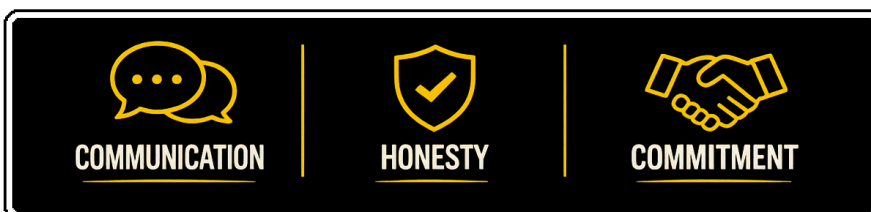
The best coaches do more than demonstrate skill. They build trust, understanding, confidence, and long-term development in others. High level coaching is built on trust, communication and the personalisation of learning



## TRUE COACHING IS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS.

It is about understanding what makes each athlete tick. How they think, how they learn, what motivates them, what pressures they carry, and who they are away from the dojo.

Athletes must feel valued, as people, not just performers. When athletes know their coach genuinely cares about them, everything changes and that relationship becomes the platform that allows a coach to truly get the very best out of an athlete.



## High-level coaching is about far more than technical instruction.

It is about building genuine relationships with athletes, their coaches, and even parents.

- The conversations after training.
- Checking in after a difficult day.
- Supporting athletes through challenges in life as well as sport.



To truly understand an athlete, you must understand the person behind the performance. Their schooling, work, family background, pressures, motivations, and challenges outside of sport.

*SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT COACHING MOMENTS HAPPEN AWAY FROM THE ACTUAL TRAINING SESSION.*



**TRUST IS OFTEN BUILT AWAY FROM THE TRAINING VENUE**

When athletes know you are genuinely invested in them as people, not just performers, they are far more likely to fully commit, fully believe, and fully grow.

## HIGH-LEVEL COACHING

— IS NOT JUST ABOUT DEVELOPING ATHLETES —  
**IT'S ABOUT CREATING GOOD PEOPLE.** 

## No high-performance environment is built by one coach alone

A high-level head coach must also invest in their coaches, build relationships with them, value their opinions, and create an environment where everybody feels trusted, respected, and able to contribute.

**STRONG HEAD COACHES UNDERSTAND THEIR OWN STRENGTHS, BUT THEY ALSO UNDERSTAND WHERE OTHERS MAY BRING GREATER KNOWLEDGE, DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES, OR SPECIALIST EXPERTISE.**



Bringing coaches on board who complement your own skillset is **NOT** weakness. It is high-level leadership. High performance environments are often built through servant leadership - leadership that supports, develops and empowers others rather than controlling them.

The best programmes are rarely built around one person. They are built around a well-constructed coaching team that works together, challenges each other positively, shares ideas openly, and collectively drives athlete development forward.

**— A STRONG COACHING TEAM IS —**  
**PARAMOUNT**  
**— TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF —**  
**BOTH ATHLETES AND PROGRAMMES**

Alongside knowledge, performance, and communication, there **MUST** also be discipline and respect

**OUR VALUES. OUR CULTURE. OUR COMMITMENT.**



NOT FEAR



NOT CONTROL



RESPECT  
FOR COACHES



RESPECT FOR  
TEAM MATES



RESPECT FOR  
TIME



RESPECT FOR  
PREPARATION



RESPECT FOR  
EFFORT



RESPECT FOR  
THE ENVIRONMENT

“

**THE BEST ATHLETES ARE NOT ALWAYS THE MOST TALENTED. OFTEN, THEY ARE THE ONES WITH THE STRONGEST VALUES, CULTURE, AND STANDARDS EVERY SINGLE DAY.**

”

“

**ENVIRONMENTS LIKE THIS DO NOT HAPPEN BY ACCIDENT. THEY ARE LED BY DISCIPLINED, HIGH-LEVEL COACHES WHO SET STANDARDS, MAINTAIN THEM, AND HOLD PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE.**

”

***Without discipline, standards drop and without respect, culture slowly breaks down.***

High-level coaching is not about control. It is about creating an environment where standards, respect, and accountability become part of the culture every single day.

## High-level coaches do not chase short-term success at the expense of long-term growth.

They understand when to push, when to hold back, when to develop, and when to compete.



**SOME COACHES  
BUILD QUICK WINNERS.**

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**GREAT COACHES  
BUILD ATHLETES.**  
WHO CAN SUSTAIN HIGH PERFORMANCE  
**FOR YEARS.**



True development is not about shortcuts, It is about building strong foundations, consistent habits, resilience, understanding, and the ability to continue progressing over time.

### *High-level coaching requires patience.*

High Level coaches develop athletes with a growth mindset. Athletes willing to learn, adapt, reflect and continue improving under pressure.

### *High-level coaching should not create athletes who are completely dependent on a coach.*

Great coaching develops athletes who can think independently, analyse performance, solve problems under pressure, and adapt in real time.

The goal is not to create athletes who constantly need instruction, but athletes who understand performance deeply enough to think, adapt, and perform independently.

In karate, this is essential. Without understanding, athletes simply repeat movement. With understanding, they perform with intent, awareness, timing, purpose, and belief.

## High-level coaches understand that athlete development does not begin and end inside the dojo.

To consistently perform at a high level, athletes often require support beyond technical training alone. Strength and conditioning, mobility, recovery, nutrition, psychology, lifestyle management, and performance analysis can all play an important role in long-term development.

A high-level coach does not need to be the expert in every area. Part of high-level leadership is recognising when specialist knowledge is needed and bringing the right people into the environment to support athlete development.

This may include strength and conditioning coaches, physiotherapists, psychologists, nutritionists, recovery specialists, or experienced coaches with different technical expertise and perspectives.



*High performance is rarely built through one element alone. It is built through a complete environment that consistently supports athlete growth, performance, and wellbeing.*



## Talent alone rarely thrives in poor environments.

High-level coaching is often about creating an environment where athletes feel safe to improve, standards remain high, communication is open, and people enjoy the process while still being challenged.

Calm coaches often create calm athletes.

Chaotic environments often create inconsistent performances.

At elite level, emotional control can influence performance just as much as physical or technical ability. High-level coaches must understand pressure, confidence, fear, anxiety, momentum, and the emotional energy within a team, because the emotional environment often shapes how athletes perform under pressure.

**A COACH'S BEHAVIOUR OFTEN BECOMES THE EMOTIONAL TEMPERATURE OF THE ENVIRONMENT.**

 Calm coaches often create calm athletes.

 Chaotic environments often create inconsistent performances.

**ICE COLD**

CALM MIND. CLEAR FOCUS. CONSISTENT PERFORMANCE.

## At elite level, small details matter.

High-level coaching is often about consistently getting small things right. Performance is rarely decided by one big thing, It is usually built through hundreds of small things done consistently well over time.



## CONSISTENCY OVER MOTIVATION

Elite athletes cannot rely purely on motivation. High-level coaches help athletes develop habits, standards, routines, discipline, and accountability.

Because standards remain long after motivation fades.



## Great coaches adapt.

High-level coaching requires flexibility without lowering standards.

*Not every athlete learns the same way*

*Not every athlete responds to the same communication.*

*Not every athlete develops at the same speed.*

*Some athletes need pressure.*

*Some need reassurance.*

*Some need structure.*

*Some need freedom.*

The best coaches understand when to change their approach to get the best from the individual standing in front of them.

## COACH EGO VS ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT

Some coaches coach for their own image. High-level coaches coach for athlete development.



The best coaches are secure enough to collaborate, share credit, bring in specialists, continue learning themselves, and sometimes step back when somebody else can better help the athlete.

## Importance of leadership above the coach

Although Sir Clive Woodward rightly receives many of the plaudits, I always look deeper than the head coach alone. What often gets overlooked is the role played by the leadership at board level above him.

England winning the World Cup was not achieved by one person. It was built through alignment, trust, structure, shared vision, and an organisation that fully backed the head coach.

The board **MUST** fully support the head coach and the programme with trust, alignment, and a shared vision. Leadership should create clarity, alignment, trust and support. **NOT** fear, politics or interference because the reality is simple:

Even the best coach in the world will struggle when they are constantly forced to fight internal battles instead of focusing on athlete development and performance.

**High-performance environments cannot be built through politics, control, interference, or a lack of alignment from above.**

**They are built when leadership, coaches and athletes all move in the same direction with clarity, trust, and purpose.**

**STRONG ORGANISATIONS  
EMPOWER  
GOOD COACHES.**

**INSECURE ONES  
UNDERMINE THEM.**



## Final thoughts

Modern teaching and high-performance coaching follow remarkably similar principles when developing people.

In both education and elite sport, the focus is no longer simply on what practitioners know themselves, but on how effectively they can develop understanding, habits, performance, and long-term growth in others.

At the centre of this sit three key principles:

### **INTENT • IMPLEMENTATION • IMPACT**

Intent shapes implementation, and implementation ultimately determines impact.

The same applies in karate. Practitioners must first develop strong content knowledge, but knowledge alone does not create a high-level coach.

What often separates great performers from great coaches is pedagogical content knowledge: the ability to teach, communicate, adapt, and develop understanding effectively in others.

Some athletes can perform at world-class level yet struggle to explain what they are doing or why it works. They have mastered performance through repetition, feel, and experience, but high-level coaching requires deeper understanding.

True coaching goes beyond copying. It requires understanding how athletes learn, how environments shape behaviour, how communication influences confidence, and how habits, standards, emotional control, and long-term development are built.

This is why high-level coaching is far more than technical instruction alone. The best coaches constantly learn, reflect, analyse, adapt, collaborate, and search for better ways to develop people and performance.

Ultimately, coaching is not about creating copies. It is about developing independent thinkers, adaptable performers, and better people.

When intent, implementation, environment, leadership, and understanding align together, meaningful development can happen remarkably quickly.

## **THAT IS THE POWER OF HIGH-LEVEL COACHING.**