

What is coaching?

Coaching is a process that is used to help learners to develop over an extended period.

There are many definitions of coaching. Tim Gallwey (author of The “Inner Game” series of books) explained coaching as: “Unlocking a person’s potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.” Though the concept originated in sport, coaching has subsequently found its way into many other walks of life including personal self-development and business.

From a distance ski coaches and ski instructors may look similar; however there are significant differences between the two processes which are helpful to understand.

Ski schools train instructors to deliver products that often have defined entry and exit standards. Instruction is an important part of introducing the sport to the masses. In contrast, a coach usually works locally with individuals to help them reach their personal goals. As a consequence, there are as many potential outcomes as there are skiers.

So “coaching” and “instructing” are different. Some of the distinctions are highlighted below:

Aspect	Coaching	Instructing
Contact time with skier	Often over an extended period from weeks to years	Often short-term whilst on holiday skiing (from one hour to a week)
Relationship	Develops over time with coach/skier rapport	Often brief as the allocation of instructors to classes varies
Goal setting	Coaches need a good understanding of skill development, so they can help the skier set realistic process and outcome goals over short, medium and long-term periods.	Goals are often short-term and outcome (product) led; requiring the instructor to set specific goals for their skiers.
Observation and feedback	Feedback is structured to help the skier develop in a variety of areas including: Perceptual, technical, tactical, physiological and psychological.	Feedback is largely structured to help the skier develop technique to achieve the lesson outcome.
Specialist support	Coaches enlist the support of experts in other fields to support the skier (e.g. fitness coaches)	Instructors tend to work with the skier in isolation and rarely enlist specialist assistance.

Of course we all know coaches who instruct, and instructors who coach. Good coaches are often amongst the best instructors, because of their deep insight into what skilful skiing is and how to help the learner to learn for themselves.

What we do as coaches should be helpful for the lifetime of the skier, enabling them to pursue the sport however they desire, irrespective of whether we are still coaching them.

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Originally published in The Piste, the magazine of Snowsport England, November 2011