



## **Transformational leadership in basketball coaching**

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## Abstract

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<p>This thesis is a written diary-based method where it describes my daily work and coaching at Tapiolan Honka U16 boys' team. It's followed up by a weekly reflective analysis.</p> <p>The entries in this thesis covers 7 weeks (18.9-5.11.2023) and describes my daily activities and experiences within the club and the team. Mainly describing pros and cons while working with this age group and my personal thoughts that arose during the working period.</p> <p>In this diary Transformational leadership style and theory is heavily in usage. The theory behind Bass &amp; Avolio (1994) holds 4 main dimensions which are: Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. How to use these dimensions and methods in the daily coaching and with the intension of improving leadership skills.</p> <p>This thesis offers a general reflection on leadership skills and what to expect when coaching as full-time basketball coach. It gives an idea on how to implement leadership skills in a sports world.</p> <p>As a result, this thesis is a look on my personal development as a basketball coach and how my skills have progressed.</p>
<b>Keywords</b> Basketball coaching, Sports coaching, transformational leadership, leadership

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# 1 Introduction

I will write this diary thesis starting from 18.9.2023 and continue for 7 weeks. In this diary I will discuss my daily duties as a Basketball Coach at Tapiolan Honka (Espoo). I will analyze my daily coaching and development within the U16 boys' team throughout the weeks. How to lead a group of young players to the designated goals while using transformational leadership. In my near future how to develop from an assistant coach to a head coach. How necessarily I need to develop my leadership skills to reach my personal goals.

## 1.1 Background

It's my 7<sup>th</sup> season as full-time basketball coach as of now. And it will be my fourth season in Tapiolan Honka, Finland. Tapiolan Honka is one of the biggest and most known basketball youth clubs in the country. Being known for developing many Finnish basketball talents and winning championship in youth and adult leagues. We have 11 full-time basketball coaches in the club and that's the highest amount of full-time working basketball coaches in any other club.

I've had the pleasure of coaching in many different age groups from toddlers all the way to the men's 1<sup>st</sup> league. While being in Tapiolan Honka mainly my responsibility has been in coaching high school age groups. And this season is no different. While working as head coach for U16 boys' team, I will also be part of U19 boys' team as an assistant coach. So, I'll get to see both sides this year and it will help tremendously with my goals.

My daily work consists of basketball coaching, planning practices and schedules, player development, video feedback and analyses for the team, communication to the players and their parents, having 1-1 meetings with everyone involved in the team. Also, communication with the club and other coaches. We co-operate with other coaches for example like sending players to the older age groups when some of the players are mature enough to gain valuable experience playing against older age groups.

## 1.2 Skills needed

Describing skills needed for a basketball coach is a little complex. I have to possess good understanding of basketball knowledge. Understanding how sport dynamics work helps a lot. Some

required skills are communication, problem solving, work ethic, creativity, and flexibility. While leading a team it's important to have quite good understanding of interpersonal skills. I'm supposed to have the readiness patiently to be effective while making decisions. I need to value teamwork in my behavior, how I listen to players and how responsible I am.

Throughout my experience I have to be organized in terms to help my team in a season. What are the areas for improvement? What are the priorities and emphasis points for playing the game. It's vital to build relationships with my players and my coaching staff in terms of gaining their trust.

### **1.3 Working environment**

I work in a basketball gym in Espoo. The facilities are top notch. 3 basketball courts, Strength and conditioning gym and office rooms and meeting rooms for coaches and office members. Practices are held 2-3 times a week in the morning before school starts and the U16 team practices 4 evenings a week. The season starts mainly around end of September and ends in approximately April.

I have 17 players in the U16 boys' team. My staff is me and 2 other assistant coaches who are part-time coaches, younger in the age compared to me. Which is instructive in terms of leadership. I have to guide my assistant coaches because they are eager to learn and help me and the players.

Ninth graders who I'm coaching are heading into a big year in their lives. They are planning in which high school they are going to apply to. And most likely the ones who are going to play for later stages are looking at Sports emphasized high school. My co-operation with high school coaches and U19 coach will be important.

### **1.4 My goals**

After doing my 360 analysis prior to this thesis report I found that my development areas were in the leadership department. Despite my young age, I've had the luxury of coaching for a long time now. But despite my experiences I still believe that I need to improve my leadership skills.

This thesis will be done for my own personal development. I need to fully understand transformational leadership and how to implement it in my daily work. I am about to discuss the usage of transformational leadership in team sports.

My goal is to have good overall view of my basketball coaching and leadership skills towards the age group that I am coaching and increasing my professional growth.

## 2 Initial situation

### 2.1 Analysis of my current work

I started beginning of June coaching the U16 age group. My job as a head coach is to teach basketball and enhance their living through sports. It comes with enhancing values and good habits. Habits are divided into three different categories. Basketballers habits, athletes' habits, and learners' habits. As a head coach I'm responsible for the environment and the culture of the team. How we behave daily and how we show our values through our practices on a daily basis.

My job is to also plan teaching points for the whole season. This year we emphasis our playing on off ball movement and playing positionless defensively. The reason for this is that I want to teach the players to play actively. To work harder than the opponent for ball possession and learn to win spaces on the floor. We are great at our club with static dribbling the ball and our passing skills are adequate at the best. And I want to make sure that these athletes won't have the same habits as the previous age groups.

While I try to help our players the best I can I try to analyze what is needed for the players to prepare for the next phase of play. Obviously U18 differs from U16 in terms of athleticism-wise. Groundwork should be done properly earlier than U16 level. Motor skills and emphasizing strength & conditioning for the athletes should be done properly. And by the latest to create understanding of athletes' habits is to teach nutrition and recovery habits (sleep).

Our U16 boys are in a tricky situation competition-wise. Last year in their respective U15 league unfortunately they failed to qualify for the first league U16 level. Which is not end of the world in my opinion. I strongly believe that you have to have setbacks for better comebacks. It has obviously at first decreased the motivation levels for the athletes. But with weeks past that I entered the team as the new head coach and talked about the challenges and the possibilities there are for this and every season when you are playing competitive sports.

What makes it little awkward for the boys is that it's the first time since 2005-2006 season that our U16 boys play in the 2<sup>nd</sup> league. So, there was also a competitive goal for the team to get promoted back for 1<sup>st</sup> league. The goal was set automatically by the players. They have understanding and autonomy of setting goals collectively for the upcoming season. Best 2 teams out of 11 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> league earn the promotion after the season for upcoming season U17 1<sup>st</sup> league.



My specific tasks are in the daily work. I assess every practice with my staff, with a short reflection. What were the specific targets for the practice and did we achieve those. When planning practices, it's important to be reasonable when doing so. You cannot practice everything all at once. The better periodization the better practices you'll have. I use plenty video feedback during practice as in live play. We have monitored an iPad with video delay app that can possibly be viewed from the TV mid-practice. My main job is to create good practice environment where players learn, compete and at the same time learn to enjoy the sport with all its sides. Player development and team development comes through experiences of working with players and teams.

This is my 7<sup>th</sup> season as a full-time basketball coach, so I have gained some experiences from my previous coaching stations. I've had the pleasure of working abroad as an assistant coach in Germany with Men's 2<sup>nd</sup> league team that got promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> team. That 2 years of experience abroad coaching professional athletes has helped develop my own coaching philosophy. What does it take for a team to succeed, how you apply winning ingredients. Values and leadership becomes more valuable when leading human beings in coaching world. Players are willing to play the game they love, but a coach is the one who provides all the tools for players to succeed.

While writing this, I'm increasing my know-how by attending the highest basketball coaching course in Finland. It's a yearlong education (HKVT), in which the Finnish Basketball Federation give tools and teach coaches to become Head Coaches. From that education I will learn plenty about leadership skills and that will help my personal development.

I would describe myself between skilled performer and an experienced expert for my current job. I have plenty education and working experience to work at the U16 level. But also, my plenty experiences from my past stations give me an advantage to help these young athletes to pursuit their dreams when I as a coach know the level needed to be taken to reach those top stages.

My dream in the near future is to lead a professional basketball team as a head coach. For that to happen I feel that I need to succeed this year in terms of leadership skills. It is also refreshing for me to coach younger athletes to actually get back to teach "grass root" things that develop my coaching knowledge like basics of the game or for example mental skills.

I would definitely need to learn how to lead a huge group of athletes to buy-in on a collective goal. Understand different personalities, traits, and habits. I need to show example myself first to the athletes, so they have a role model to emulate. My wish is that through transformational leadership model I will get some answers to my previous questions and that leadership skills would not bother me in the near-future and my professional goals.

## 2.2 Stakeholders

I'd like to call everyone in our team or club stakeholders. But on a club level obviously my coaching mentors from U19 and U15 coaches are working closely and monitoring my work and our team on a weekly basis. Office people, who are often inquiring about our team and players.

My coaching staff who are me and 2 other coaches. We form our coaching staff for this U16 team that consists of 17 players in our "competitive" group. On top of that we have our U16 2<sup>nd</sup> team that consists of 20 players.

Then there are players parents who are big part of the athlete's season. They are the core for providing for their kids the chance to play this sport. By paying the annual fees and trying to be supportive. But also helping our club on a weekly duty. Could be from working as a team manager or taking care of scorer's table during the weekend games.

## 2.3 Interaction situations

My interaction with colleagues is on a daily basis. Our facilities provide the chance to spend the days in the meeting rooms watching video together and planning practices together. Implementing new ideas and educate each other about basketball and the coaching world in general. The work environment is extra ordinary, and you would not find many youth clubs that has the opportunities that we have at our club.

With the players I have this rule or standard that they have to inform and be in-contact with me regarding anything. It could be basketball, injury, or school problems. I try to be as available to every athlete in my daily work. What I try to implement is that the athletes are in control of their own actions and learn to become responsible. How can we increase their understanding and provide the correct information about becoming responsible. What responsibility in an early stage of an athlete's career can influence the future and their behavior.

Interaction situations that will provide some challenges will be during the longest phases of the season. For example, November is a testing month in Finland and in school system. It tends to be the darkest time of the year and also athletes are nervous when they are starting to think about applying for high-school and which schools are the right one. How can I engage with athletes after a personal bad game. How my leadership skills will provide light and clearance for a young athlete that is all about results and stats. Will the process matter? Can I explain to the frustrated parents after a game where their child did not play enough that was because of a bad week of practicing. All these questions come to hand while going through this process.

### 3 Transformational leadership

#### 3.1 Theory

Transformational leadership refers to leaders who seek to create ideas and new perspectives to create new path of growth and prosperity in front of the organization. The idea is to make fundamental changes to the organization. By moving in new directions and reaching higher ideal performance peaks. Leaders act as mentors and advisors and pay attention to personal development, learning and feeding the needs of the athletes. Values that are displayed in their daily behaviors are commitment, passion, and loyalty. (Mirkamali 2014.)

Transformational leadership is conscious, moral, and spiritual process that provides development patterns for organization through a reliable equal power leadership. Aiming is to draw athletes' attention to the teams needs and conversion of athletes' individual interests into team collective interests. (Bass and Avolio 1994.)

Cronin (2015) and Callow (2009) reported in their respective studies that transformational leadership results into players sacrificing more for each other meanwhile increasing team cohesion. When improving team cohesion that is automatically improving teams' communication which is valuable throughout the long season (Cron 2015, Callow 2009).

Increased organizational citizenship (Lee 2013) behavior among the players resulted into more effective practices and coaching instruction. When focused on TFL styles there was huge positive influence on athletes' perception of a coach's competency, leading to increased athlete satisfaction (Kao and Tsai 2016).

The aim is to create positive outcomes with youth athletes and their youth development. Positive psychosocial outcomes as athlete satisfaction, effort, motivation, and previously group cohesion are the goals for this leadership (Arthur, Woodman, Ong, Hardy & Ntoumanis 2011).

### 3.2 Characteristics in coaches/leaders

The main characteristics in coaches while using transformational leadership (Moradi & Shahbazi 2016):

1. This type of leadership creates an environment where coaches and players are valued the same. Coaches can affect their players behaviors but understanding that they are there to help the players.
2. Coaches are involved in the process of the team for the long haul. Values and personal beliefs are behind their philosophy. Coaches are not coaching because of their ego or reaching their personal goals like winning regardless of the cost and outcomes.
3. Leaders are inspired by their deepest personal values like for example honesty, fairness, honor, justice, discipline, humility, loyalty, passion, respect, and trust. These values are called ultimate values (Burns). Ultimate values are non-negotiables. Not one situation can undermine the importance of ultimate values. They guide athletes and coaches in their daily lives.
4. Delivering ultimate values as personal standards, transformational leaders create unity and understanding between their followers. When personal standards are set in a team environment, they accelerate changes in personal beliefs and team goals.
5. Coaches are authentic and care about their athletes. They are inspired by either their influence or motivation. You cannot make up authenticity and play a role in front of the athletes, because they will notice if there is difference in behavior and appearance.
6. Coaches have perspective and vision in terms of playing style and habits. They are linked with passion and purpose. Coaches purposefully coach certain aspects that are attributed to their playing style. For example, like psychological attributes, not giving up on plays or fighting for loose balls (rebounds) throughout every event.
7. Transformational leaders are inspired to communicate and lead by example. They can create an environment with their actions and "speeches" where the athletes will be engaged and encouraged to try to reach beyond their limits.
8. Leaders also pay attention to staff's personal attentions and will try to use them to create trust and commitment. It cumulates about caring for the people in the staff. How you can reach the goals collectively. What the staff wants and how you can help them as a leader.
9. Coaches become more curious to new ideas through transformational leadership. Will have growth mindset from the beginning and are constantly trying to evolve and improve themselves.

(Moradi & Shahbazi 2016.)

### 3.3 Implementation of basic components

According to Bass and Avolio (1994) transformational leadership consists of 4 different main dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

*Idealized influence* is based on leaders serving as role models for athletes while demonstrating high values and positive behaviors. Their behavior is friendly, and they admire, respect, and trust their athletes. Coaches are unselfish and they pay more attention to the needs of their athletes than their own personal interests. Coaches do not use power to gain advantage for their own needs. Typical indicators are 1) instilling a sense of pride and honor to athletes to connect with teammates 2) showing a sense of power and competence while leading. Could be leading by example or proving your basketball IQ to create trust between the team. 3) Acting in a way to rise others' respect and 4) as previously mentioned sacrificing your personal interest for others' interests. (Bass & Avolio 1994, Moradi & Shahbazi 2016.)

*Inspirational motivation* is where leaders will inspire followers through the development and communication of a vision. Coach can motivate by providing motivation and stimulus to perform well. Coaches use a vision of the future to motivate the athletes. By avoiding the usage of punishment and rewarding. Athletes are constantly challenged to improve their abilities. Creating clear routes to reaching their goals and increasing their efficiency while doing so. Indicators for inspirational motivation are 1) talking seriously about things that should be done 2) giving hope to athletes about achievable goals 3) talking optimistically about the future 4) emphasizing on the importance of foresight. All these indicators are valued high when speaking about inspirational motivation. When coaching athletes how you communicate in your daily action can affect the athletes in a unique way. (Bass & Avolio 1994, Moradi & Shahbazi 2016, Vella & Oades & Crowe 2013.)

With *intellectual stimulation* the coach is challenging existing assumptions and accelerating the thought process about how certain goals are about to be achieved. Coaches can encourage their athletes to create motivation and creativity by modifying their own approaches and opportunities. The main purpose is to offer free flow of ideas and imaginations. That would explore athletes mind and courage to try to reach new approaches and techniques. Could be implemented perfectly in skills coaching. Or the coach is able to challenge the athletes to come up with new ways of learning. A new team strategy implemented to the team by the athletes, but the coach is responsible for thought provoking questions during practice. Main indicators that can be seen are 1) suggesting new ways of how to do a certain activity 2) considering different perspectives while solving a problem 3) requesting for examination of problems from different perspectives 4) careful examination of characteristics to ensure their suitability for the team. For example, in a team atmosphere it's

important to fit in and not to excel as an individual apart from the core of the group. How you affect as an individual the cohesion of the team moving forward and are you aware of your actions to ensure your role in the team. (Bass & Avolio 1994, Moradi & Shahbazi 2016, Vella & Oades & Crowe 2013.)

*Individualized consideration* main goals are directed at following by meeting the personal needs and concerns of the athlete. The idea is that coaches are willing to meet the athletes' needs for development and growth. It could involve an in-depth knowledge of certain skill level. Coaches could set practice drills according to athletes' skill level that are challenging enough for each athlete. By paying attention to athletes individually could spark a healthier relationship by providing new learning opportunities to their interest and skills. Indicators for individualized consideration are 1) helping others to develop their capabilities 2) allocating time for guidance and practicing 3) treating with athletes as a human being not as an athlete 4) considering people with different needs, abilities, and creativities. (Bass & Avolio 1994, Moradi & Shahbazi 2016, Vella & Oades & Crowe 2013.)

### **3.4 Values in our U16 boys' team**

When starting a new season with a new team it's important to underline and create understanding about teams' rules, values, and standards. As mentioned earlier as ultimate values, those that are non-negotiables. The importance of having rules and standards can create a cohesion with the team when every athlete is on the same page. When working as head coach your job is to lead the athletes by example. The younger the athletes are the more you have to understand how to teach and create learning through life lessons. My daily life guides strongly around my values and standards. Without them I would feel meaningless in my daily work. It's important to have the whole coaching staff understand your values and how to implement them to the whole team.

We started the preseason in the summer by examining the team through practice. Which I will discuss further in my diary analysis. It was clear to the coaching staff because of our co-operation with U19 and U17 teams that we had to have a leadership group. One captain is not enough, I truly believe in collective decision-making. Leadership is about listening the group and having their trust is far more important than me just singlehandedly making the decisions as a head coach.

After our first meeting with the team, the players had to vote for a team captain and two co-captains. These three would form the leadership group for the whole season. Two of three players have been captains in their previous seasons, so it was easy for the team to vote for those two athletes. They are not the most skilled players on the team. But complete backbones regarding practicing and representing themselves like we want our athletes to be represented. Well behaving

athletes, who rarely practice badly and are eager to learn about the sport. On the other hand, our team captain selection was a complete shock to our coaching staff. This athlete has played with the team for a long while. But never been the most vocal to lead the team. He is talented enough skill-wise and his approach to the daily practice have been nothing short of amazing. I can't admire enough how a 15-year-old can represent himself with the joy that this athlete shows up to the gym and try to perfect his craft on daily-basis. Status is also important for athletes around the high-school age. This kid's selection helps a little that he was nominated last summer to be part of the U15 national team. All in all, the team was satisfied with the selection of leadership group. And the selection was made between the athletes themselves, so I also gained the trust of the athletes by giving them the freedom to select and vote for the players on their own.

In order for these players to buy into values it comes down to the coach that is leading the group. Our clubs' values have been since 2018, so that we value perseverance, responsibility, and respect. Along these values it's important to remind our athletes that they represent these values all the time. In our U19 team where I work as an assistant coach, we emphasis similar values besides they added diligence and trust as the biggest values. However, my biggest inspiration in the basketball world comes from my favorite team and organization. Boston Celtics' (they play in the NBA) head coach Joe Mazzulla (basketball Immersion podcast) describes his values rightfully so as having awareness in every situation, as an athlete and a head coach to be an active listener. But on the other hand, to also be an effective with your questions that create curiousness with the eager to improve. Mazzulla also points out the importance of accountability and ownership with athletes in any level. Obviously, it differs coaching professionals to ninth graders. But same implementation in values could be used to maximize the impact a coach can have on the athletes.

After going through these values and examples from other environments with our team in the summer, I asked the team to represent our teams' values and standards in a meeting led by the leadership group before our first regular season game in September.

## **4 Diary entries**

This diary was written for 7 weeks during the season. I will go through my daily work and also how I'm integrating transformational leadership to my knowledge and using it with my team on a daily basis. During my weekly work I coach 3 mornings in the week our U19 team and 4 evenings a week for our U16 team. On top of that I try to help our U19 team 2-3 times a week during the evening in their team practices as an assistant coach.

### **4.1 Observation week 1**

We just finished our 8-week preseason with the team. After a long off-season and 1,5-month preseason the team has completed its mandatory practices and preparations for the upcoming season. As our team plays this year in 2<sup>nd</sup> league, it's important for the club to be competitive and still develop the athletes in the right way while ensuring productive practices.

#### **4.1.1 Monday 18.9.**

Usually in my weekly schedule my Mondays are free of practice. We practice usually from Tuesday till Friday and during the weekend we play our regular games. During my Mondays I do preliminary work for the week ahead. We play our first game of the season on Saturday, and I planned that we would have a sit down with the team about our team's values and standards. Just to revisit our meaning as a team for this season. Besides that, I cut video footage from our last weekend's preseason game and the emphasis was on the defensive end.

#### **4.1.2 Tuesday 19.9**

I start my day by running a morning practice at 7:30 for our U19 players. Morning practice consists of strength and conditioning part and a 45min minute basketball practice. Basketball practices in the morning are heavily divided into individual skill workouts and small-sided games. Position specific workouts and attacking the empty space was the main theme in this morning.

During the evening we started our practice with a team meeting to discuss about our team's values and standards. The leadership group was given this task previously to present the rules and standards for me and the rest of the team. I will go through the meeting in-depth during this week's analysis.

After the meeting I had two practices in a row. First was our U19 team practicing and later was mine U16 team practicing. We worked on our off-ball movement and offensively finding the rhythm in a half-court set up. Our main goal was to create advantages while using off-ball screens and we had a successful and focused practice.



#### **4.1.3 Wednesday 20.9**

I started the day with morning practice for our U19 team. My responsibilities are on Wednesdays to work with our point guards, to work on ball handling skills and using the ball screen. Different reads and different actions they will face during the beginning of the season.

During the day I did prepare and planned our U16 team practice. The emphasis of the practice was on transition defense, how can we affect the other teams playing while picking up defensively from full court. It is all about desire and growth mindset to understand the hard work behind it. Defensively to create trust but also being able to do something uncomfortable. And it was uncomfortable for our athletes. The practice was okay, focus and paying attention to detail was at a low level, compared to our normal practices.

#### **4.1.4 Thursday 21.9**

My Thursdays start with a morning practice with our U19 team. Practice load-wise our Thursdays are the lightest practices. We follow up on our athletes weekly to follow their mental well-being and also physical load, so we decided along with other coaches that Thursday mornings are for strength and conditioning. Basketball practices in the morning are mainly competition, to keep the mood light and to not to “overcoach” these athletes.

Thursday evenings are the shortest for me personally. I only coach our U16 team, and the practice starts at 15:30. Some of the athletes show up late because of school and that only gives us usually an hour practice time on the basketball floor. Thursday evening is mainly themed around individually specific skills and small sided games. Our small-sided games were around down screen actions. After the practice I broke down the playing roster for our Saturday’s game.

#### **4.1.5 Friday 22.9**

My Fridays consists of two practices. During our both U16 and U19 practices they a game preparatory for our weekend games. U16 practice was intense, and our theme consisted of transition offense. We want to implement our passing game so that we can move quicker into our primary offenses after transition.

#### **4.1.6 Saturday 23.9**

I was excited for our athletes because we had our first game of the season. The boys have had practiced so extra-ordinarily well the past months and it’s always to gratifying to go and finally play

the first game. The game was a blow-out win for us. But what made me happy was that the thing we had practiced the whole summer (off-ball movement) did work really well in this age group. And regardless of the result I was satisfied with our intention and energy of competing against the opponent. We are supposed to be 1<sup>st</sup> ranked team in 2<sup>nd</sup> league so I'm expecting us to go as the favorites for every game.

#### **4.1.7 Week analysis**

The week was successful in my opinion. While writing this we just had played an exceptional first game and beat a good team by large margin. Now next week on I will use transformational leadership in our U16 team and in their practices and that makes me little nervous to see how I can implement and explain the whole process to the team.

The highlight of the week besides the game was our Tuesday meeting with the team. The leadership group presented our teams values as maturely as possible. I was caught completely off guard but proud at the same time. Our values were 1) *ownership*, taking more responsibility in our practices and also doing more generally. 2) *trust*, trust yourself and trust one each other. 3) *Diligence*, being as good as you can be. With these values we all agreed on that these are non-negotiables in our team. At the same time the leadership group set standards for the team from that day forward on. First one was dress code in practice and on our road trips. We represent the same uniforms with our team logo on just to show how united and proud we are to represent Tapiolan Honka on daily basis. Team cohesion that no one is left behind and respect is shown towards everyone around us. Leadership group also created a totem animal for us and labeled as a hyena group. Just because they are pesky, won't hunt by themselves and they represent some kind of underdog mentality, just exactly what this team need this season. Team captains also represented groups weak points and things to improve. Two biggest improvements where that need to be better mentally aware (focus) and have better discipline towards practices and themselves.

## **4.2 Observation week 2**

After having set our values and standards, it was the right time to take first steps towards transformational leadership. My idea for this week was to base it around idealized influence.

### **4.2.1 Monday 25.9**

No practices during this day. Video cutting the previous weekends game and preparing and planning next week's plans and schedules.

#### **4.2.2 Tuesday 26.9**

Started the week with morning practice. Continued with small-sided games, and for U19 team it's a huge week ahead because of their 1<sup>st</sup> league qualifications that will be played during the weekend. In the evening we started our practice with a meeting that consisted of positive themes. We revised our values; how does a good athlete behave and what/how we want to represent ourselves this season. I explained to the team what ownership, trust and diligence means to me, and that created some laughs with the players. I led that meeting with a positive attitude, made the athletes feel safe and created a laid-back atmosphere. Which carried on to the practice, we emphasized on being diligent offensively. We want to help each other to create better openings offensively, either by passing the ball or freeing up teammates while setting up off-ball screens. We had one of the better practices all season long.

#### **4.2.3 Wednesday 27.9**

As the saying goes, you cannot have two great practices in a row. Morning practice was solid and okay overall. During the day I spent it planning the practice and having mentor conversations with my peers. But the evening practice was something else. We had one of our worse practices. Like a complete turnaround from yesterday's evening. Lack of concentration and lack of trust defensively while practicing.

#### **4.2.4 Thursday 28.9**

Thursday was my intention to repay athletes with trust and confidence after yesterday's events. I red the situation from yesterday and my job was first to listen to our athlete's needs. Some were complaining about being tired and schools first exam weeks were weighing on heavily. The players had asked earlier for Thursday evening to be an individual/skills workout instead of it being a short team practice due to our gym time that day. After revising it with my staff, we decided to listen to the players and gave them some freedom designing position specific regarding our playing style to practice with the help of the coaches.

#### **4.2.5 Friday 29.9**

During the day I studied about individualized influence and realized that my role as a coach for these athletes is huge. The way I can impact these athletes with my positive influence and as a leader to not dwell on small bumps on the road and just focusing on practicing because that is where we can get better as individuals and as a team. Our practice was a game prep for Saturday's game. We were better focused and had a good practice.

#### **4.2.6 Saturday 30.9**

We played our 2<sup>nd</sup> game of the season. Unfortunately, the opponent was no match to us, but we kept our composure and confidence throughout the game. We repeated positive behaviors with my coaching staff. How to act in good sport mannerism and respect the opponent no matter the result.

#### **4.2.7 Week analysis**

This week was fun from a coaching and leadership standpoint. I learnt that everything cannot be planned. There will be bad days and bad practices. Normally I would react completely differently if I hadn't had the opportunity to revise the TFL model and throughout idealized influence I had the patience to understand the whole picture better. By implementing our values during our daily work, it becomes more and more effective while coaching. While making sure the same things are repeated and emphasized the athletes will start to buy-in. As a head coach I need to be stricter with applying our values with our playing style and keeping things in control with my positive influence.

#### **4.3 Observation week 3**

This week we will be playing our first away game. The emphasis will be on inspirational motivation for myself and how can I help these athletes become better.

##### **4.3.1 Monday 2.10**

I started my week with planning practices and schedule for the whole week. Our U19 had a big weekend past which saw them qualify for 1<sup>st</sup> league after a hectic 3 games played behind them. U16 started 1<sup>st</sup> national team camp and we have two of our players there with the national team so they will be absent the whole week.

##### **4.3.2 Tuesday 3.10**

We started the Tuesday meeting by discussing about our vision for this season. How with our playing style we can affect changes in mindset. From not trusting in this team after a rough spring last year from how the players can affect possibly the next season by playing in 1<sup>st</sup> league. I discussed about intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy with the players. These are 2 most important things that will value our behavior and growth this year. I asked the players to set goals for the rest of the season collectively and individually. Later on, we had a better practice where we reminded our players by the fundamentals of our playing. We went back to the basic things we did at the beginning of the preseason. We played some music in the background while practicing and went through our play-book by sorting schemes into our end-game situations.

### **4.3.3 Wednesday 4.10**

During our morning practice we went with couple of the players about their individual skill plans for the rest of period of morning practices. Later on, I did some video clips and helped the U19 coaches with playbook-related stuff. I had a surprise for our U16 team during the practice. I brought out an active 1<sup>st</sup> league player to coach our practice and they were buzzing about it. I thought I had to spark extrinsic motivation by creating an environment where the athletes could see an actual professional player up-close showing individual techniques that they would emulate later in their playing careers. Defensively during the practice, we were active and vocal. More vocal than I thought, I was pleased with the practice.

### **4.3.4 Thursday 5.10**

Thursday, we went back to working out in individual groups and position specific groups. The players were competing hard and had the right mindset to the practice. Trying to build self-efficacy throughout the athletes because these Thursdays are the most challenging to myself as a coach. I like to coach players individually, but when you work as the head coach you have to be aware of the whole picture. And during Thursday we barely do anything team related. We could be working on small-sided stuff or just individual workouts and focus on strength and conditioning training.

### **4.3.5 Friday 6.10**

During Friday I sent the playing rosters for Saturdays game and left couple of players out of the roster which raised some questions. Had couple of phone calls with national team coaches about the camp and how our athletes survived that period. I couldn't attend the practice because of a family matter.

### **4.3.6 Saturday 7.10**

We had our first game on the road against a solid team. My assistant coaches took care of the game while I was absent. The result favored us, but it wasn't our best game at all. Also, our national team players were absent. We gave them the rest of the weekend off to recover from national team camp.

### **4.3.7 Week analysis**

Big theme for this week was inspirational motivation, and it paid dividends. I'm actually still surprised at how I could deliberately deliver the message about intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy, without the players being bored about it. It was a heartfelt message to the needs of the players. That sparked a good practice week and at the end of the week even I was absent we were able to

practice well with intention. Huge thank you goes to my staff for covering for my absence with huge representation and coaching effort. These are the experiences that can mold a coaching staff into a better one.

Self-efficacy is an enormous attribute while coaching youth players. The more you can teach it the earlier the better. Self-confidence can breed better athletes but also understanding that with positive mindset and that first thought is positive can change an athlete's career enormously. It's possible that athletes will go through tough patches in their season which is understandable. But how can you manage that, can matter for the outcome of the performance. That's when coaches have to step in. Understanding that with positive approach can neglect all the negativity and insecurities.

By motivating our athletes, we make sure we have hopefully basketball fanatics in one way or the other. It's so important for us coaches to leave good mark on our sport and that every athlete has a positive experience from their playing days. Because they could be valuable in the near future helping the club in some way or bringing their children to the same sport and club.

#### **4.4 Observation week 4**

Week 4 will be consisting of intellectual stimulation. The idea will be to give the players more freedom in morning coaching and also give them tools to plan some parts of the individual workouts.

##### **4.4.1 Monday 9.10**

Started the week with preparing the whole week. We play on Saturday an away game and also the older age groups league U19 and U17 starts. So, I'll be monitoring our players and their loads for the week regarding practices and games. Came up with a plan for this week that the players will introduce oneself for the whole team to explain how certain individuals can help the team to reach their goals.

##### **4.4.2 Tuesday 10.10**

We started Tuesday by introducing to the players that this week they will be in control of the individual practices. They have to coach each other on certain position specific drill like point guards how to use ball screen and what we are looking for as a team when trying to create an advantage. Practice was divided into 2 phases. 1<sup>st</sup> phase was individual workouts for like 20 minutes which was player-led. They had the help of 3 different coaches to design workouts after the warm-ups. This experiment was successful, but it was done carefully. It could've gone completely the wrong way, but we have well-aware athletes that are self-motivated to get better. Today I felt that this experiment with TFL was something worth it and improved my leadership skills.

#### **4.4.3 Wednesday 11.10**

Wednesday's morning practice was light load-wise. Players had to come up with ways to teach jump shot off the movement. Players worked in small groups and there was video delay as feedback. While practicing shooting efficiency, players started to correct certain techniques like foot-work while uninstructed. They were creating new ways of giving peer feedback.

Evening practice was all about practicing our offense. With the tools they had practiced earlier in the day, we came prepared to execute offensively. Compared to other Wednesdays today the energy was high, maybe one of the reasons is that I was not as vocal as the past days, so the players have had an emotional break from being vocally coached all the time. I think that mental effect on the players can take a toll in a long season.

#### **4.4.4 Thursday 12.10**

My Thursday was filled with plenty of meetings. Meeting with coaches about the upcoming weeks, because I'll be with the U14 national team camps and also head of charge in our basketball camp from Monday to Wednesday for U12-U7 aged boys and girls.

Later on, we practiced together with our U19 team. The practice was full of competition, and we had a little inter-squad scrimmage. We got into a game type of intensity and competition which was healthy and needed. After couple of variable games, we thought as a coaching staff that we need to spice it up in terms of competitions. Players responded well even though the U19 team was way better than our team. As the days pass by I'm seeing developments in my daily leadership and coaching skills.

#### **4.4.5 Friday 13.10**

On Friday we had to call up couple of our U15 players to the practice because of injuries and illness in our team which were occurring in the last days. I've had planned that we will continue to implement intellectual stimulation. The plan was that we would start the practice earlier than usual, just to the players would have enough time to introduce oneself and talk about how they can help the team and reach their individual goals.

This worked out better than I thought! I was shell shocked with what positive affirmations it had created for team cohesion and how relaxed the locker room was after the meeting. It wasn't serious at all but when each player presented the other player everyone was focused to listen and were paying attention.

Practice was short and effective, because tomorrow we will travel to Tampere to play. I can see the changes in emotions and group collectiveness with now being together from June. It's been a delight as a coach to see this evolving.

#### **4.4.6 Saturday 14.10**

We started our day by traveling to Tampere to play our 4<sup>th</sup> game of the season. The game was solid for us even with the roster we had to play with. I was happy but the players were satisfied after the game by understanding that we had missed a lot of players from the team with that particular game. It takes growth and maturation to also be satisfied with something that you have worked hard for. My job is getting "easier" with these athletes as the days pass by quickly.

#### **4.4.7 Week analysis**

This week was completely uncomfortable for me. I had done something I've never tried in my coaching career. I jumped completely out of my comfort zone to help the team and the athletes with the best I can. Giving players somewhat freedom and trusting their instincts was for a perfectionist like me difficult to grasp at first. I have created such an environment that I wished that I would've been part of while I was playing. It's so welcoming right now to any player who is seriously interested in perfecting his craft and becoming a better basketball player. While implementing TFL implementations on the team it takes a toll on top of all the extra daily work. From planning the practices to being available to your work, you have to be well prepared and having the right plans as a basketball coach.

### **4.5 Observation week 5**

Individualized consideration is the main theme for this week emphasis. The schools are on a holiday so we will be having players missing due to family holidays. This week we don't have a game, so we'll have also more time to focus on only us. I'm also in charge of our club's holiday camp from Monday to Wednesday so I'll be busy with camp arrangements.

#### **4.5.1 Monday 16.10**

Beginning of the week was planning our practice week and scheduling one on one meetings with the available players. Idea is to get in touch with the players after the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of fall season. Meeting the individuals as humans first then athletes second, it's important to give them some freedom and time to also foster their studies. Camp was a long first day, but we had around 100 kids on 3 courts from 10:00-16:00. A lot of smiles and joyful kids, I used some similar tools while



coaching that I've been using with my U16 teams. For example, like video feedback and practicing the same individual tools that the players created in their environment.

#### **4.5.2 Tuesday 17.10**

This week because of the holidays we didn't hold morning practices. It was discussed that this week's it's okay to listen to the available athletes needs and try to help them regenerate as much as possible to be ready for evening practices. The 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the camp was even more entertaining than the 1<sup>st</sup> one. I enjoy being around the youth and helping them with basketball trainings. It is so sincere and innocent with the kids and that puts me into a good mood.

I sat down with 5 players in the evening and had individual conversation. About how the season has been so far, about practice implementations and how they had seen the season so far. Mostly were positive conversations, 1 out of 5 was concerned with his playing time because it was less than last year's playing time. Our conversation was healthy so that I could refer to our team values and standards to talk about not being diligent enough to find to practices like the other players.

#### **4.5.3 Wednesday 18.10**

Today was the last day of the camp. Got it done and received plenty of positive feedback about the way I coached and helped the kids around the camp.

With my U16 team we continued our individual meetings and continued to write down developmental plans for the players.

#### **4.5.4 Thursday 19.10**

Today we decided with the coaching staff to have an open gym, because most of the players were absent from the practice. I earlier on challenged the players about the holiday times. If you want to play competitive sports, you cannot just take holidays whenever you feel like it. But in Finland on holiday (parents specially) in our area are pretty precise with having holiday which I totally get. It sets the coaches into a difficult period, and it is unwanted to have your athletes to not be present. But I remember that they are only ninth graders.

#### **4.5.5 Friday 20.10**

We practiced together with the U19 team. They were preparing for their game on Saturday, and we challenged them with our U16 lineup and were working to help them but also to get some repetition with our U16 lineup.

#### **4.5.6 Saturday 21.10**

The players were given free from Saturday until Tuesday practice. Prior to the holidays.

#### **4.5.7 Week analysis**

This week was known beforehand that it is going to be difficult. From a holiday standpoint but also that we don't have a game on the weekend as well. From the individualized consideration standpoint, I think we achieved it with certain athletes. From going through the development plans to having sit-downs with the players. It was based on the players needs for their development and growth. As a coach it's reasonable to understand that these types of weeks are a part of the long season. How much you can affect the availability of the players is a different thing but in how and which manner you conduct yourself when you might be frustrated. Also, to underline another cliché; you work with what you have.

#### **4.6 Observation week 6**

After 5 weeks of implementing transformational leadership skills and traits to our environment. This week will be about practicing well and me personally a huge opportunity to go coach in U14 National team camp which is part of the degree (HKVT) I'm doing.

##### **4.6.1 Monday 23.10**

Started the week by video clipping individual clips for the players that are playing with the older and are at this point more invested and skilled to play/practice. Theme for this week will be our transition offense and breaking down our primary options in transition. We have a bad habit of dribbling so try to speed the game by passing and cutting without the ball.

##### **4.6.2 Tuesday 24.10**

Morning practice was good and energized after a holiday week. The players were fresh and focused to work on their developmental plans that supported their vision and growth for the future. During evening practice, we had short discussion again about our standards and just reminding everyone that competition is high in this team. I went away from punishments because it is not the right way to lead and specially in TF-leadership where I'm trying to improve the trust and team cohesion.

##### **4.6.3 Wednesday 25.10**

Today morning practice was divided into position specific skills, and I mainly had guards and wings to work out with. We worked on baseline exit screens and different routes for the offensive player.

Can't fault the players for trying their best. It was a difficult topic for the players, and we will for sure continue to work on it in the future.

During the evening practice I realized little difference in our behavior patterns. Our team was much more vocal towards the younger U15 players that came to practice with our U16 team. Maybe it was the changes in the group or the culture that was much more welcoming. Before I arrived, these players moved only in smaller groups according to their previous coach. Perhaps my leadership style has gained some respect from the players, and they believe also in team cohesion and being a better human being towards each other.

#### **4.6.4 Thursday 26.10**

I was for the rest of the week absent from my clubs' practices because of my duties regarding HKVT degree. We had our near-term until the weekend with the U14 national team as assistant coaches. Our job there is to learn from the national team coaches and help the players as the best to our abilities. Maybe I could pick up some traits of leadership skills while being in a different environment.

#### **4.6.5 Friday 27.10**

We had two practices with our team which was mainly players from Tampere region. The practices were different from what I've had experienced with my youth teams. Practices were pretty intense on both times, there was really no implementation of loading or individualized needs for the athletes. It was a national team camp; the players were nervous enough just to be there.

#### **4.6.6 Saturday 28.10**

Long days with the U14 national team was wrapped up with two practices again. The days were long but productive and I learned tremendously. The huge pinpoint that I made was the teaching was done concept-first not players-first. I understand that it is a short time to integrate the athletes to understand how to play like the national team wants the athletes to play. But I would've hoped for more individual attention towards the players.

#### **4.6.7 Week analysis**

This week was more of less a hybrid-week. It was fun that our U16 players had returned to practice, and we have made some huge strides in our playing but that is due to effective and deliberate practice. To help my leadership skills I've noticed the first benefits of TF-leadership if done correctly and precisely.

The U14 NT experience was amazing despite the long days. We were tried and tested as coaches doing the degree throughout the basketball federation. Demands and standards in the national team level is something that I should take notes and try to implement some of the stuff in my daily work. Now I have the understanding what the groups best and finest practice methods look like.

#### **4.7 Observation week 7**

This is the last week of observing the diary throughout our U16 team and this is going to be a heavy week ahead. We have two games against the better teams in our league. The latter game will be away in like 5 hours bus trip so that's a challenge in itself. The goal is to practice productively and later on have a chat with the players about the methods what was used the past weeks.

##### **4.7.1 Tuesday 31.10**

Morning practice was heavily based around on strength and conditioning. The reasoning behind this was that during the evening we would only do activation and basketball practice. We practice on Tuesdays until 21:30, so if there is a slight chance, we can send the players home earlier to sleep and get some kind of sleeping patterns before the next school morning we would be doing a huge favor for recovering.

During the evening practice we challenged our players to have a high-quality practice. We had the trust among our coaching staff, that the players would deliver. We resorted to competition and also having two games on the weekend which the playing roster was undetermined. I wanted as a head coach for the players to be as sharp as possible. The less we waste time on breaking down our values to ensure concentration or diligence that would be better for the whole group. Here my leadership skills were crisp, that I knew exactly what I wanted from the practice and later on we met the practice goals.

##### **4.7.2 Wednesday 1.11**

Wednesday our practices were around introducing a tweak to our inside automatics offensively. The idea was generated by my assistant coach in which we discussed, and he had made some notes in our games that it's has not been run "correctly". Which I gladly gave him the space to run the practice and I had the chance to observe the practice and help the players individually. As I've mentioned before; a transformational leader is able to be flexible when needed the most for the better of the group. It is never about me personally as a coach.

### **4.7.3 Thursday 2.11**

Last practice day before our doubleheader on the weekend. The practice was light but joyful. Players were enthusiastic about the chance to play two games on the weekend and spend some together time on the bus.

During the practice we went through our defensive schemes and how we can affect opponents build up play by being active and having high pick-up point.

### **4.7.4 Friday 3.11**

Our first game of the weekend at home against a top 4 team in our league. The game was fantastic on our behalf, we were energized and focused from the start. The game was in our control, and it looked like we had excelled on the things we've been practiced on lately.

### **4.7.5 Saturday 4.11**

This day was given free to the players of team activities. Main goal for everyone to regenerate and do schoolwork.

### **4.7.6 Sunday 5.11**

Our 2<sup>nd</sup> game of the weekend after a long trip was lob-sided. Best part of the trip was that we could spend some time together on the bus which was a very valuable experience for this group. The game showed both sides of our team. When we decide to play according to our values and standards, we are a team that is a tough to beat in this league. Whenever we decide to do things individually and exploit personal opportunities like stat-padding or whatever else then we look a completely different team out on the floor.

### **4.7.7 Week analysis**

This week wraps up my seven weeks of writing this diary. It has been an eventful seven weeks being a part of this team and specially trying to implement transformational leadership. Our practicing habits has been better and better as the day's passed by. I will write more about the whole experience in my discussion and conclusion.

## 5 Analysis

### 5.1 Discussion

Since writing this thesis from week 1 to week 7 it feels that time has passed in a glimpse. The number of ideas and thoughts just by writing down my daily activities and team events that has passed during these days. I'm satisfied with choosing transformational leadership as a leadership method to try to implement into my daily basis. 4 main dimensions of leadership qualities were exactly the little tie knots that I needed to add to my leadership skills. To see in such of short time the development in team cohesion and personal development throughout my athletes was such a joy to see.

I have developed better as a leader, by giving space to my athletes and assistant coaches better than before. My actions speak louder than words and that I've been involved with our team more than I've ever imagined. My basketball know-how has increased by trying and implementing new ideas through TF-leadership. I've realized that the stronger the values and standards are in the team the easier it will be in the long run. Basketball season is such long time specially in youth adolescent league. It lasts from 10-11 months depending on the situation and the club.

I was worried earlier when writing my plans for this thesis is how can I improve from becoming an assistant coach to a head coach. The answer is simple; It comes with time. When the time is right, I'll have that opportunity. But meanwhile it is important to understand your role as a leader and then as a follower. How can you define at the end who is the leader and who is the follower. In sports world it is easy described that coaches lead, and players follow. But it's not a opposite layout, when there are clear goals and how to approach those goals, you can have both work together to accomplish something bigger than themselves. And that is all about transformational leadership, it is about coaches not making a big deal of themselves, putting themselves behind the team because the team and its goals comes first.

With positive outcome and strong self-efficacy, it can be transferred to your athletes. You can set an example as a coach how to behave and what values and habits are valued in the daily basis. I learned that transformational leadership behaviors created improvements at 3 different levels. First there was clear changes in task- and self-perceptions. At our team the athletes were eager to complete tasks, either at the practice or in the video room creating our values and standards. Players throughout the weeks became more social and showed more emotions than any youth team I've been part of so far. Second was on an interpersonal level regarding big changes in leader-follower relationship quality. I sensed that throughout the weeks I gained my players respect and hopefully

that will continue until the end of the season and the upcoming seasons. Last but not least I saw changes on an environmental level. Our culture had changed in a midst of 3 months from a team that was losing games and practicing badly to the complete opposite. And here I can't thank my assistant coaches well enough for challenging me and my thoughts about the way we should play and practice. By having a clear vision as head coach you have a great chance to impact many human beings' psychosocial outcomes.

I have been able to use this analysis and thesis to my own personal development. I think it has been beneficial to our team as well. I've noticed that during my time writing this thesis and coaching this group of players the team has benefited from it greatly. Examples that come to my mind include effective practices, inspired and intrinsically motivated players. We didn't have a problem with players accepting their roles, because they wanted to help the team with the best of their abilities. In the bigger picture, the higher team commitment we had the reduced selfishness was seen in practices and in the games specially. The way our U16 play sometimes is fascinating, just because of the previous reasons. My job as a transformational leader is to make my players motivated. My personality helps with gaining the trust of the players, but it comes down to players involvement and that creates greater effort to succeed in the team.

I feel that I have succeeded in my topic selection and creating clear vision to myself what I need to further develop in the future. As a coach but also as a human being. How I want to approach my daily life as a coach but also as person, with so little that I can affect the people around me.

But to be completely sure about this, further researches needs to be made in terms of transformational leadership and sports coaching combined. If we would have a larger sample on how to implement transformational leadership on athletes in a team environment, then this is a really effective and exiting tool to use to develop your team as sports coach in the future.

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