

Promising Practices of Dairy, Horse, and Livestock Evaluation Career Development Event Coaches: A Mixed-Methods Study

Abstract

The present study describes promising practices of successful dairy, horse, and livestock judging coaches. Expert coaches were interviewed regarding previous experience, coaching philosophy, coaching objectives, coaching style, and advice. Twenty-seven promising practices and eight themes were identified from the interviews. A questionnaire was sent to the accessible population of coaches to determine practice usage and relationship to youth performance. Influential and motivating practices were found to be most used by coaches. Youth performance was related to use of competitive and expectancy related promising practices. Findings suggest use of promising practices would facilitate greater coaching success in competition and youth development.

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Introduction/Theoretical Framework

Career Development Events (CDEs) are competitive educational experiences established to enhance present and future practical application of youths' knowledge and skills in specific career-related domains (Croom, Moore, & Armbruster, 2005; Nash & Sant, 2005; Radhakrishna, Everhart, & Sinasky, 2006; Russell, Robinson, & Kelsey, 2009). Often CDEs are facilitated by 4-H and/or FFA programs for senior (grades 9-12) and junior (grades 3-8) youth. The objective of dairy, horse, and livestock CDEs is to provide youth with practical experiences studying and evaluating animals while developing skills that prepare them for industry professions. Additionally, these evaluation events provide youth with opportunities to develop skills in cooperative learning, observation, analysis, decision-making, and communication (National FFA Organization, 2006).

Coaches take on the role of preparing youth for a specific CDE (Barbour, 2011; Bowling, 2010). The

role of coaching individuals includes conveying information, motivating youth, praising youth, helping youth learn from errors, and providing performance feedback (Becker & Wrisberg, 2008). In terms of coaching the team, the role of the coach includes structuring and organizing the team, identifying learning resources, and using individuals as resources for the benefit of the entire team (Hackman & Wageman, 2005).

One measure for coaches' effectiveness in regard to CDEs is through youth and team performance scores (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Research suggests an effective coach is one who has an adequate combination of coaching competence, content competence, time dedication, personal motivation, and ability to motivate students (Abraham, Collins, & Martindale, 2006; Becker & Wrisberg, 2008). Coaching competency is defined by Stone and Bieber (1997) as being adequately skilled in the application of best coaching practices, where best coaching practices are standards of coaching efficacy that are tested and generally held to be true (Leseure, Bauer, Birdi, Neely, & Denyer, 2005). However, Leseure et al. (2005) explained that promising coaching practices must be identified before the acceptance of best coaching practices. Promising practices, therefore, are standards supported by professionals and evidence such as observations that have not been rigorously tested. Within the context of CDE dairy, horse, and livestock coaches, no set of promising practices has been established.

The framework for the study reported here was an applied version of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977; 2001), which focuses on learning within a social context and assumes learning is influenced by continuous reciprocal interactions. To apply this theory, influencing factors of the student and coach must be considered. Specifically, the study focused on the influencing factor of coaching practices.

Purpose(s)/Objective(s)

The following research questions were developed to identify and describe the promising practices.

1. What promising practices do expert coaches of selected Indiana CDEs use and perceive to be most important?
2. What promising practices do non-expert coaches of selected Indiana CDEs utilize?
3. Is there a relationship between coach utilization of promising practices and student performance across selected CDEs?

Methods/Procedures

The study was conducted in three phases, with each phase being informed by the prior phase.

Phases One and Two: Qualitative Study

Participants

Participants consisted of expert coaches for the selected CDEs in Indiana. Coaches were identified as

experts based on their teams' performances in state level CDEs from 2005 to 2010. The six top-ranking coaches based on the frequency of top three team placements in the selected Indiana State CDEs were selected for individual phone interviews (Phase One). The remaining expert coaches in the population were selected to participate in the focus group portion of the study (Phase Two).

Phase One: Individual Phone Interviews

Six coaches were contacted through email communications for participation in the study. Five of the six expert coaches chose to participate in the individual phone interviews, and one did not respond. Individual phone interviews were conducted using combined methods. A standardized open-ended approach was used to provide structure and consistency among interviews, while the general interview guide approach allowed for flexibility and probing during questioning (Patton, 2002). The research team developed 18 questions from relevant coaching literature (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2004; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2006a; Martens, 2004; McCallister, Blinde, & Weiss, 2000). Questions were asked by a single researcher in the same predetermined order for all individual phone interviews.

Phase Two: Focus Groups

Sixteen coaches were contacted by email and a follow-up phone call, requesting their participation in the focus groups. Eight coaches agreed to participate. Focus groups were guided by established focus group protocol and facilitated by the lead researcher with the aid of the unfolding matrix (Padilla, Treviño, Gonzales, & Treviño, 1996). Focus group data were collected with audio-recordings, through completion of the unfolding matrix, and lead researcher journaling during and reflectively after each focus group.

Analysis

Individual phone interview data were inductively analyzed to discover categories, themes, and/or patterns that would aid in the development of promising practices (Patton, 2002). Following phone interview data analysis, focus group data were deductively analyzed according to categories, themes, and/or patterns that emerged from the inductive analysis of individual phone interviews. The coding procedures established by Corbin and Strauss (1990) were used to analyze the data.

Phase Three: Quantitative Study

Participants

The participants were coaches from the 2011 program year who had teams participating in an Area contest of the selected CDEs in Indiana. From the census of accessible coaches contacted (N = 178), 52.81% (n = 94) completed the questionnaire.

Data Sources

Area contest results were collected and included: coach's name; team name; individual class, reasons,

and total scores; and team class, reasons, and total scores. A Web-based questionnaire was developed from results of prior phases and relevant literature. The questionnaire included: participant identification; general demographics; prior experience; and importance and utilization of promising practices.

Post-hoc Cronbach's Alpha reliability was conducted on the importance and utilization of the promising practices section of the questionnaire. The 27-item importance scale was determined to have a Cronbach's Alpha of .87, and the 27-item utilization scale was determined to have a Cronbach's Alpha of .88.

The instrument was entered into Qualtrics, a Web-based survey tool, which made the questionnaire available through a unique URL link. Methods for contacting participants and collecting data were based on the tailored-design method (Dillman, 2007).

Results/Findings

Identification, Use, and Perceived Importance of Promising Practices

Phases One and Two of this study identified 27 promising practices that were described by expert CDE coaches in the selected events. The eight themes were developed based on examination of consistency and association among promising practices identified and discussed throughout individual phone interviews and focus group interviews (Table 1). The theme youth development was found to be the core or central tendency of the other themes. In addition to the identification of eight themes, 13 promising practices were identified as being extremely important.

Table 1.
Themes and Corresponding Promising Practices

Themes	Promising Practices
Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having expectations as the coach^{EI; I&M; CR} • having expectations of the youth • having expectations of success • having a reputable program
Effective Coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being a dedicated and committed coach^{EI; I&M; CR} • having interest and passion for coaching and/or judging^{EI; I&M; CR}

	<p>receiving benefits in terms of student success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintaining motivation to coach^{EI}; I&M; CR
Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having prior experience judging, coaching, and in industry • seeking out mentoring relationships with other coaches or industry professionals^{EI} • addressing coaching challenges through mentoring relationships^{EI}
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting team and individual goals^{EI}; I&M; YR • motivating youth^{EI}; YR • challenging youth^{YR}
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowing youth • support from parents and family^{EI}
Foundational knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teaching the basics of evaluation^{EI}; I&M; CR • utilizing mentoring relationships between youth
Positive environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • foster positive learning environments^{I&M; YR} • utilize positive reinforcement and praise^{YR} • promote flexibility in learning • efficient utilization of time in practices^{I&M}
Youth development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • youth receiving benefits^{YR} • development of youth^{EI}; I&M; YR • development of life skills^{EI}; I&M; YR

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • competitiveness of youth^{EI; I&M}
<p><i>Note:</i> EI = Extremely Important Promising Practice I&M = Influential and Motivating Promising Practices CR = Coach-related Influential and Motivating Promising Practices YR = Youth-related Influential and Motivating Promising Practices</p>	

Phase Three assessed the importance placed on each of these promising practices by coaches involved in these events. The 27 promising practices were analyzed and sorted based on exploratory Factor Analysis of respondents' degree of perceived importance of each promising practice. This analysis resulted in six importance factors encompassing 26 promising practices. One of the 27 promising practices did not load. The resulting factors were ranked using the Wilcox signed rank test according to importance as follows in Table 2.

Table 2.
Rank of Importance Factors

Rank	Importance Factor
1	<i>Influential and motivating promising practice^a</i>
2	<i>Youth-focused promising practices^b</i>
3	<i>Relationship-focused promising practices^c</i>
3	<i>Expectancy-related promising Practices^c</i>
5	<i>Competitive promising practices^d</i>
6	<i>Coach-focused promising practices^e</i>
<p><i>Note.</i> Different letters in superscript indicate statistical significance ($p < .05$).</p>	

When comparing the promising practices identified as extremely important in Phases One and Two with the influencing and motivating promising practices of the top-ranking importance factors from Phase Three, both groups of promising practices include nine common practices (refer to Table 1).

Utilization of Promising Practices

In Phase Three, the 27 promising practices were analyzed and sorted based on exploratory Factor Analysis of respondents' degree of perceived utilization of each promising practice. This analysis resulted in six utilization factors encompassing 26 promising practices. One of the 27 promising

practices did not load. The resulting factors were ranked using the Wilcox signed rank test according to importance as follows in Table 3:

Table 3.
Rank of Utilization Factors

Rank	Utilization Factor
1	<i>Coach-related influential and motivating promising practices^a</i>
1	<i>Youth-related influential and motivating promising practices^a</i>
3	<i>Competitive promising practices^b</i>
3	<i>Relationship-focused promising practices^b</i>
3	<i>Expectancy-related promising practices^b</i>
6	<i>Coach-focused promising practices^c</i>
<i>Note. Different letters in superscript indicate statistical significance (p < 0.05).</i>	

Coach-related and youth-related influential and motivating promising practices are noted in Table 1.

Relationship Between Utilization of Promising Practices and Student Performance

A senior performance score was calculated for each coach based on the average of the overall performance score of all senior youth (9th grade and above) coached by each individual coach. This score was used as a measure of success for each coach (Table 4).

Table 4.
Percentage of Respondent Senior
Performance Score (n = 89)

Performance Score Category	Percent
70% & below	4.5%
70 - 79.99%	56.2%
80 - 89.99%	33.70%
90 - 100%	5.6%
Total	100.0%

Table 5 shows the comparisons of senior performance scores in regard to the utilization of promising

practices by factor. Coaches with a score of 90-100% had greater average reported utilization of promising practices than coaches with a score of 70-79%. Additionally, between these two categories of coaches, those with scores of 90-100% had greater utilization of Competitive Promising Practices. As coaches' senior performance scores increase, there is a greater utilization of Expectancy-Related Promising Practices.

Table 5.

Comparison of Senior Performance Scores in Regard to Coach Utilization of Promising Practices (PP)

Senior Performance Categories							
		↓70% vs. 70- 79.9%	↓70% vs. 80- 89.9%	↓70% vs. 90- 100%	70- 79.9% vs. 80- 89.9%	70- 79.9% vs. 90- 100%	80- 89.9% vs. 90- 100%
Average PP utilization	M-W U	25.500	81.000	1.500	444.500	4.500	27.000
	Z	-1.654	-.487	-1.837	-1.783	-2.568	-1.871
	p-value	.098	.626	.066	.075	.010	.061
Utilization factors							
Coach-related influential & motivating PP	M-W U	38.000	79.500	2.500	417.500	12.500	29.500
	Z	-.761	-.386	-1.249	-1.782	-1.861	-1.629
	p-value	.447	.700	.212	.075	.063	.103
Youth-related influential & motivating PP	M-W U	15.000	46.500	3.500	394.500	11.500	33.500
	Z	-1.508	-.645	-.443	-.670	-1.801	-1.266
	p-value	.131	.519	.658	.503	.072	.205
Competitive PP	M-W U	31.500	74.500	2.500	365.000	2.500	21.000
	Z	-1.086	-.300	-1.249	-1.729	-2.592	-1.890
	p-value	.278	.764	.212	.084	.010	.059
Relationship-focused PP	M-W U	44.500	75.000	4.000	391.500	21.000	46.500
	Z	-.104	-.281	-.714	-1.127	-1.108	-.705
	p-value	.917	.779	.476	.260	.268	.481
Coach-focused PP	M-W U	47.500	73.500	5.000	428.000	32.500	48.500
	Z	-.033	-.410	-.354	-1.015	-.271	-.661
	p-value	.974	.682	.724	.310	.787	.509

Expectancy-related PP	M-W U	36.500	78.000	.000	374.000	3.500	14.500
	Z	-.861	-.440	-2.141	-2.318	-2.549	-2.266
	p-value	.389	.660	.032	.020	.011	.023

Note: M-W U = Mann-Whitney U
Significant comparisons are bolded ($p < 0.05$).

Discussion

Coach-Focused Promising Practices

The nine promising practices viewed to be most important by expert and non-expert evaluation CDE coaches are discussed below.

These promising practices focus on the coach and were found to be most essential. The actions a coach should take to incorporate each practice are described.

Coach Has Expectations of Self

This means having set standards or guiding principles to follow as the coach. These standards or guiding principles are often developed through the establishment and utilization of a personal coaching philosophy (Cassidy et al., 2004; Martens, 2004). The standards and guiding principles should clearly align with the personal beliefs of the coach and be realistic, such as attaining adequate knowledge and being assertive in the acquisition of that knowledge. One way to acquire said knowledge is to seek out and establish a mentoring relationship with a coach known to be successful.

Coach Is Dedicated to Team

This means a coach faithfully devotes his or her time and ability to coaching the team and youth. Being committed to the team is a key attribute of a successful coach (Vallee & Bloom, 2005). This practice includes the coach dedicating adequate time to ensure youth are provided a quality experience, which also serves as a model for youth to follow. To facilitate this practice, a coach could create and follow a schedule that sets aside time for practice preparation and coaching the team.

Coach Has an Interest in and Passion for Coaching

This refers to a coach having desire from within to share with youth knowledge and experiences related to dairy, horse, and/or livestock evaluation. Often this interest and passion are inspired by a coach's desire and enjoyment of seeing youth grow and develop into young adults (Barbour, 2011).

Coach Has Positive Motivation for Coaching

This refers to a coach having intrinsic and/or extrinsic motives that cause him/her to want to coach youth. For some coaches, it is motivating to have the opportunity of making a difference in youths'

lives (Barbour, 2011). Other coaches may be motivated to coach for the networking opportunities it provides. A coach should critically examine his or her motives for coaching to ensure they align with his or her beliefs and personal coaching philosophy.

Coach Is Focused on Teaching the Basics of Judging

This addresses a coach maintaining focus on the fundamental knowledge of evaluating dairy, horse, or livestock when teaching youth. This includes keeping concepts simple and focusing on the big picture, not getting lost in details. Additionally, this practice includes the notion of not assuming youth automatically understand simple or complex concepts.

Youth-Focused Promising Practices

The following youth-focused promising practices were found to be most essential. The actions a coach should take to incorporate each practice are described.

Coach Assists Youth in Setting Realistic Individual and Team Goals

This is the practice of a coach guiding youth through the process of setting realistic team and individual goals. These goals should be attainable and mold the strategies and approaches a coach utilizes during coaching sessions. Goals can be measured through personal or competitive achievements.

Coach Motivates Youth Through Positive Means

This is the practice of a coach facilitating intrinsic and/or extrinsic motivation in youth that causes them to want to participate in dairy, horse, and/or livestock evaluation. Some youth are motivated by the opportunities afforded them through participation, others are motivated by the development of new friendships, self-improvement, recognition, and competitive success. The practice of setting and striving for the attainment of realistic goals is often a successful motivating strategy (Burton, 2001).

Coach Is Focused on the Personal Development of Youth

This is the practice of a coach placing emphasis on the personal growth and learning experienced by youth through participation in dairy, horse, and/or livestock evaluation. A coach should recognize when a concept needs to be taught again in an effort to enhance youths' learning. It is the coach's responsibility to foster development in youth as it is the central objective of CDEs. This personal development is a matchless, intangible benefit youth receive by participating in these CDEs (Barbour, 2011; Cosgrove, 1986; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2006b). A coach should help youth recognize the attainment of these intangible benefits and maintain a high priority on youth development. One way to help facilitate this is for a coach to evaluate his or her personal philosophy for coaching, remembering the importance of focusing on youth development. Additionally, when implementing strategies to help youth develop judging skills, a coach should evaluate the strategy and determine how it will affect the personal development of youth.

Coach Is Focused on the Life Skills Development of Youth

This is the practice of a coach placing emphasis on and facilitating youths' attainment of life skills. The development of life skills often is derived from the process of learning to evaluate a set of animals, working collaboratively with a team, and demonstrating knowledge through competition. These life skills include such things as decision-making, public speaking, teamwork, note taking, criterion placing, prioritizing, communication, and confidence. Additionally, the attainment of these skills is transferred and utilized throughout youths' lives (Martens, 2004). A coach should help youth recognize the life skills they have and are developing through participation in evaluation CDEs. Moreover, a coach should facilitate the development of life skills and utilize a variety of opportunities and experiences to further develop life skills in youth.

Student Performance

In an effort to increase student performance, a coach should utilize to the best of his or her ability practices correlated with high youth performance, which includes Competitive Promising Practices and Expectancy-Related Promising Practices. Practices that are not found innately, such as program reputation or prior judging and/or industry experience, should be addressed in alternative ways.

Conclusions/Recommendations/Implications

Even though the study reported here was situated within the context of youth coaches, the findings can provide a basis for understanding and developing mentoring relationships with youth. Adult volunteers working directly with youth can apply such practices as setting realistic goals, motivating through positive means, focusing on life skill and personal development, and so on. Fostering or enhancing the learning process in youth is not contingent on competitive settings.

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1977; 2001) explains learning as a process of reciprocal influencing interactions. In the context of the study, these interactions occur among coaches, youth, and the youths' resulting performance. Learning is reinforced intrinsically through pride, satisfaction, or a sense of accomplishment, as well as externally through environmental rewards. Coaches from the study confirmed this process of social cognitive learning by sharing their personal experiences and examples of coaching. Through analysis of interviews, focus groups, and the questionnaire, the emergent theme was that of coaches emphasizing practices to enhance the development of life skills in youth. It is evident from the study that the practices a coach chooses to utilize are influential over the personal and/or competitive achievements of youth as surmised by Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory.

Three recommendations emerged from the study. First, coaches of dairy, horse, and/or livestock evaluation CDEs should implement and utilize the promising practices discussed in the study. They should place greatest emphasis on Coach and Youth-Related Influential and Motivating Promising Practices. Additionally, coaches should implement and utilize Competitive and Expectancy-Related Promising Practices to improve performance. These practices should be strategically incorporated into judging programs and utilized throughout the judging season.

Second, structured opportunities for coach training and development should be implemented. The need for coach training and development is emphasized throughout literature (McCallister et al., 2000; Vallee & Bloom, 2005). Moreover, expert dairy, horse, and livestock evaluation CDE coaches who participated in the study greatly emphasized this need because they had first-hand experiences with many coaches who would benefit from structured development and training.

Third, resources should be developed for new and inexperienced coaches. Expert dairy, horse, and livestock evaluation CDE coaches emphasized their desire for comprehensive resources that would guide new and inexperienced coaches through the processes of coaching, judging, and competing.

National 4-H identifies eight Essential Elements for Positive Youth Development (4-H National Headquarters, 2012). These elements include positive relationship with a caring adult, an inclusive environment, a safe environment, engagement in learning, and opportunity for mastery. CDE coaches are uniquely situated to provide these elements due to the time they spend with the youth. This time spent affords coaches the opportunity to affect youths' lifelong development of perceptions, values, skills, and knowledge. When coaches recognize this influence over youth, they should take on the responsibility to facilitate positive experiences for the youth.

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