

Coaches Reveal the Most Important Factors Determining Performance

Surprise: Physical training doesn't even make the top three when it comes to what coaches think is crucial.

When you're considering the variables that can get you to your next PR or ready for a major race-or maybe both-most likely you'd put training first on that list. But a recent survey of coaches published in *Sports Medicine* found that for most respondents, physical training didn't even make the top three in terms of factors for better performance.

The survey involved 106 coaches with a wide range of experience, with two thirds of them having coached individuals, and from a number of countries. When researchers asked them to rank the most crucial factors for modifying an athlete's ability to physically adapt to a training plan, only 28 percent indicated that the training itself was key.

The top variable? A solid coach-athlete relationship. Following that were factors like life stress, an athlete's belief in the plan, and psycho-emotional stress, with physical training coming after all of those.

"A good takeaway message is not to place too much emphasis on creating the perfect training plan, as such a thing does not exist," says lead researcher Kechi Anyadike-Danes, PhD(c), researcher in the department of intervention research in exercise training at the University of Cologne in Germany.

He tells *Runner's World*, "Instead, more time could be allocated to other factors which are just as important, such as improving coaching interactions and monitoring mental health and wellbeing. These factors are often viewed as afterthoughts, when in fact, they're the basis on which performance is built."

Building the Coach-Athlete Relationship

Another significant takeaway from the recent survey is how a coaching bond can make or break a training effort, says Anyadike-Danes.

An aspect not covered in the survey but that may inform the selection of a running coach is the way coaching has changed in the past couple decades, says Rocky Snyder, C.S.C.S., a strength training coach in California.

"Coaches lift you up to perform at a higher level," he says. "They do not break you down and tear you apart. There are still some old-school coaches out there who believe yelling, berating, and ridiculing, are effective means to breeding champions.

More coaches these days take a more positive, supportive tack. Great coaches are masters at creating buy-in with their athletes and other coaches. Great coaches are able to be leaders, mentors, and counselors, and even more importantly, they know when they must take on the role of one or more of these."