



# Developing a successful Culture

For any senior coach, developing or perpetuating a strong club culture is the key to success. In the second part of the AFL Record's coaching series, Carlton's Brett Ratten outlines his philosophy on creating a winning environment.

**H**onesty is the catalyst behind a great culture, a great team.

From myself, right through to the last guy on the list, you need to be able to tell the bloke beside you if he's letting you down. I'm always honest enough to say, "Boys, I made a blue here, but this is how we're going to fix it." The honesty factor makes or breaks a culture because, if you're dishonest or hide from issues, that's when you start to have problems.

I'll never forget a speech Greg Williams made after winning our best and fairest in 1994.

We'd been beaten by Essendon in the '93 Grand Final and knocked out of the '94 finals series in straight sets, and he got up and said, "All of us older blokes are playing at a high level, but the middle tier of players need to take the next step. You need to come and join us and bridge that gap."

I was definitely in that category, and having one of the champions of the game asking for help really put it on to the players to lift their game.

We were driven anyway, but that gave us the extra two or three per cent motivation to do the little things behind the scenes when no one else was watching. It was instrumental in our flag in '95.

As a coach, it's not just me in control of our culture. It's our development coach, our line coaches, our welfare and footy managers and our leadership group – we all set the standard at the club. How can we preach



**COMMUNICATION:** Brett Ratten makes sure his message gets through to all players, including youngster Jeff Garlett.

### FACT FILE

**Brett Ratten**

**Born:** July 11, 1971

**Coaching career:** Carlton (round 17, 2007-)

**Games:** 43

**Record:** 18 wins, 25 losses

**Winning percentage:** 42

something if we don't actually do it ourselves?

It takes every person at the football club to be on board, but it all starts with the management.

For example, Chris Judd has had an enormous impact because of the traits he brings with his professionalism – he spends about 15 hours a week outside our football program working on himself, and our younger players have grown up with that.

When Chris first came to the club, he saw Marc Murphy getting a bowl of chips at lunch – he was going to share it with some of the other players – but Chris just said, “Why don't you grab an apple instead?”

Little things like that make him and the people around him better players, and when they sit down to evaluate their performance, they can say they did everything they could in their preparation.

When you are creating your behaviours or trademarks, you can only achieve outcomes if you actually measure them.

If you say, “These are our values,” and put 10 things up on the wall, everyone walks past them every day and, then when you ask them in six months' time what they are, players will go, ‘Oh, I think one was respect, one might have been commitment ...’ It's very sloppy and you get no result.

Behaviours and trademarks need to be attached to something measurable, whether it is skinfolds, running ability or specific goals a player has set – otherwise it just becomes flippant.

Club culture definitely has a big impact on performance and, as a coach, you can actually see it in the communication, cohesion and unity out on the field. I might spot something from the coach's box, send a message down and hope the runner gets out there in time and explains it the right way.

There's a chance the communication chain can be broken somewhere along the line, so you are just hoping the player gets the



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information, absorbs it and adheres to those instructions.

But if you can get the player to identify the issue first time himself or be able to say to a teammate, “Come on, pick him up, you're being too slack,” and people respond positively instead of saying, “Nick off, I'm not doing that,” then you know you've got a good culture and you're heading in the right direction.

There might be the odd debate out on the field, but everyone switches back on pretty quickly.

If you haven't got a great culture, that togetherness can fracture – a guy goes away from the game-plan or structures that have been put in place for the team because of self-preservation, own glory, wanting to pat themselves on the back or to be the star of the team.

Tardiness is another danger sign of poor culture. If attitudes become sloppy, that actually affects your playing group, because one shortcut can lead to the next.

A player might say, “It's only punctuality, and I only missed a weights session,” but the real question is, was he really committed?

If a younger player sees an older player cutting corners, he might think, “I'll get away with it once,” and then he gets away with it once, twice, three times, and that becomes the way he prepares himself, which is unacceptable.

And, at the end of the day, you can set your core values, but you do have to coach each individual based on what they bring to the team.

We do a lot of emotional intelligence at our club – all of the players have been profiled – so we know their attributes and learning capabilities and can coach them more specifically.

We've got Brendan Fevola, who's an extrovert in a football club with a lot of introverted people, so it's a balancing act – do we want to take away his flair, his pizzazz, his showmanship?

We actually want that part, because it brings energy to the team, but we still want to instill the core values of our club.

I think a coach also needs to be very mindful of the history of the club he comes to.

With culture, it's a bit like coming up with a game-plan – if you went to every team in the competition and tried to implement the same strategy, you'd have a fair few failures, because you actually have to look at the list and tinker with your plan according to your stocks.

But on the behaviour side of things, you always hear Collingwood president Eddie McGuire talk about the

## KEYS TO COACHING

- 1 Creating an honest and open environment will have a huge impact on any team.
- 2 Slogans and mottos are pointless unless they can be measured in some way.
- 3 The responsibility for a successful culture falls on every person at the club, from the coach down.
- 4 Tardiness is the warning sign of a poor culture.
- 5 Player empowerment will eliminate the necessity to constantly reinforce key themes.
- 6 Drawing upon a club's former culture can be useful, but players essentially want to create their own history.

grandma theory – if your grandma would like it, do it; if she wouldn't like it, don't do it.

If you think about it, in most premiership teams, or sides that have won big stretches of games, there have rarely been any off-field incidents; everyone has been focused and committed to the cause, and that's when you get the greatest reward as a group.

Coaches can generate motivational spikes by creating themes or blasting the group, but when all the extras are washed away, what's the underlying base like?

You can bring in a guest speaker, rant and rave, or have a theme of physicality for a month, but if all the coaching staff walked away, would blokes turn up to do weights, would they come to training?

The best indicator of culture is to see just how driven people are by themselves.