

How to Coach Generation Z

POSTED JULY 10, 2017_GLEN MULCAHY

Youth sport coaches needs to be aware we have now evolved from the Millenials, known for their sense of entitlement, to Generation Z, known for their screen addictions (7.5 hours a day) who are also known as The Digital Natives, iGen, Homelanders, Selfie Generation.

These are kids that were born after 1996, 100% in the digital era per below timeline;

Not including various Video Game Consoles (Playstation, Xbox, Nitintendo) and other social media, and as the cliché goes, “There is an ap for that”..

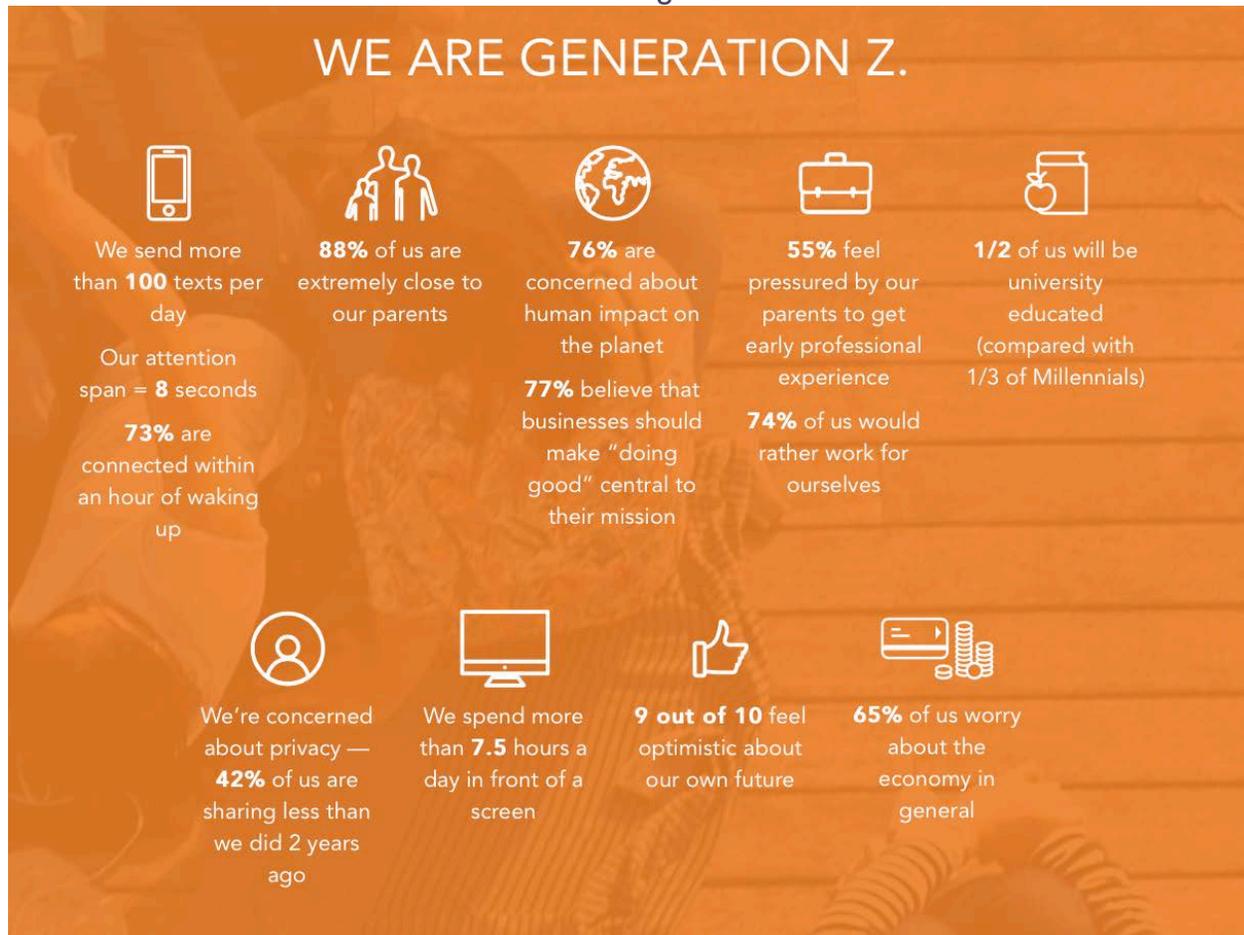
I can speak with the perspective of coaching Gen Z kids as they entered organized sports at the age of 5 but also as parent of two that were part of the youth sports system since 2000.

As each year evolved and technology became more of our day to day lives, **I also had to adapt my parenting and coaching styles to relate to this generation.** I saw the digital era evolve pre internet, then IBM clones with 5 ¼” floppies with approx. 0.5Mb storage capability (when a micro SD card now hold 128 GB), amber screens taking up ½ a desk, dial-up evolving to cable and DSL high speed, Computer monitors and TV’s changing from tubes to LCD, then LED, now OLED and the list goes on. There was no digital era when my generation played sport, now it is commonplace with parents on the sidelines filming with smartphones, tablets and checking latest aps for schedules, scores, streaming of siblings games etc.

Gen Zedders are exposed to more information in ONE day, than two generations back would see in an entire lifetime.

Below is a summary of Gen Z characteristics;

Source: Ologie.com



Top ones that jumped out at me ...

Coaches – **you have 8 seconds to get your message across when explaining a drill so best to involve technology Gen Zedders use daily (video, youtube, facebook live etc) so cut to the chase so to speak to overcome their 8 second attention span.**

Texting – on average 100/day = +3000/mth (hopefully you have unlimited texting plans). Use platforms that work like texting to relay reminders, scheduling and so forth like Facebook Messenger group room I created for my High School Senior Rugby Team

88% of Gen Z are VERY close to their parents, so engage, don't deal with, parents. There has been a lot of media coverage on parental behavior on the sidelines or the ride home in recent years, but the reality is the vocal majority only represents a small % of all parents, most are great and unfortunately a few bad apples are spoiling the broth. **Treat parents on your teams as your allies, not your enemies and remember the enemy of your enemy is your friend.** The more education we do, more the silent

majority start speaking, the sooner we wean the vocal minority out of the game to bring it back to the kids.

One of the most important things you will do all season is running your initial parent meeting, here is link to prior article I contributed to [One Million Skates](#) with summary of agenda items that coaches should cover in their parent meetings.

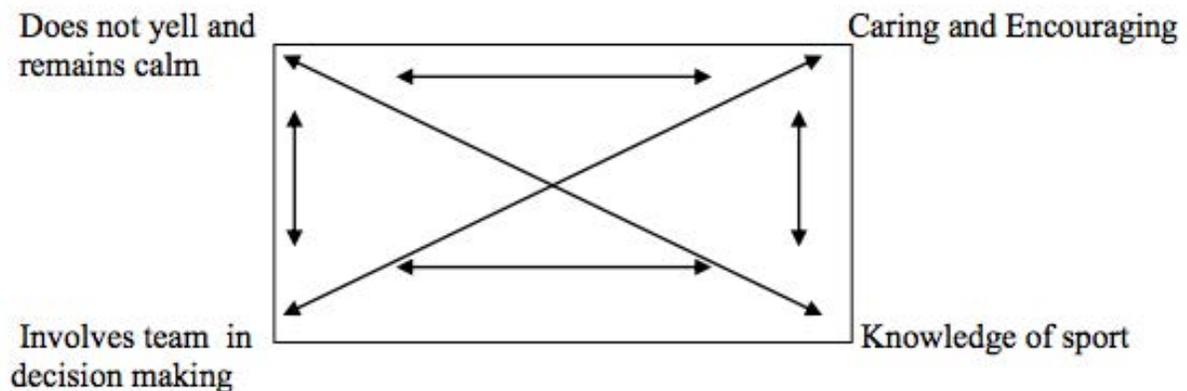
Screen time that is replacing their former active play time now is 7.5 hours PER DAY. We never will get back to the good old days where kids will play organized and free play sports and activities for hours on end, but we must find a happy medium where they get their minimum 60 minutes of required physical activity daily.

In my role as Hockey Canada NCCP instructor, I was one of first to introduce the new Hockey Canada Network Ap this past hockey season. I was thrilled that we now had access to HC's full database with an ap to create practice plans in minutes vs. hour or more used to take me when I first started coaching minor hocky. The fact that I no longer have to haul binders to every clinic alone is HUGE and I look forward to how coaches start incorporating for their practice planning.

The biggest benefit is that coaches can now pull up demo videos and show to players in advance (email PDF with video links) or bring a tablet to the rink to show before they run a drill.

Gen Z are highly visual, and having only an 8 second attention span is important that coaches tap into their grey matter as quickly as possible.

Krishna Parker the University of Georgia surveyed female and male gen Z soccer players and asked them what characteristics they would like to see from their coaches today and below is a table that summarizes the top 4 characteristics;



Source: Journal of Coaching Education: The Preferred coaching styles of Generation Z Athletes July 2012

In order, players desired;

1. That coaches does not yell (at them, officials, other teams) and remain calm.

Hmmm .. how often have you been in the stands or sidelines and saw a coach screaming at the top of their lungs at a player because they made a mistake? Screaming at a young official as they missed a call or made one coach did not agree with? These are top reasons why 70% of Gen Z athletes are quitting all youth sports before they enter high school (by age 13).

2. Caring and Encouraging

In literally every talk I do with youth sport coaches I ask them the question “What is the top characteristic of the greatest coach or teacher you ever had?”

The number 1 characteristic EVERY time pertains to how much the coach cared, demonstrated empathy and provided positive encouragement.

As the great Teddy Roosevelt stated “No one cares how much you know, until the know how much you care”

3. Knowledge of the sport

Coaches must develop their knowledge of the respective sport and for EVERY drill they run in practice, have the answer to WHY. If you try to use the answer “because I said it, or this is the way we have always done it” you have lost them. Coaches must know the reason behind every drill, why it will help the players improve their skills and how it will help them in game play. If not, they will lose players trust and they will google it at the earliest opportunity to find out the answer if don't believe coaches reply.

Don't run a drill to fill up time in a practice plan, plan your drills and progressions to ensure optimal development with key teaching points to share with players and **assistant coaches.**

4. Involve team in decision making

John Tortorella recently received the Jack Adams award as coach of the year for how he transformed the Columbus Blue Jackets and took them to the playoffs, had a record winning streak in league play.

I will be the first to admit that I did not see this EVER happening after the USA World Cup team under Tort's guidance did not even medal in Sept 2016, nor seeing highlights of many of his tirades from the bench over the years.

Torts was asked by Columbus management to calm down and refrain from those types of outbursts Torts was infamous for, as well have a lot more patience to allow the

younger players to make mistakes. Like Ken Hitchcock before him who also was awarded the Jack Adams trophy who did the same and changed his coaching style to accommodate the young players he had with St. Louis Blues

Both acknowledged instead of using former coach to player only feedback, they incorporated democratic 360 degree coaching styles and asked players for input when came to decision making for practice planning, systems, strategies that would work best for their core group of players.

For John Tortorella, this was a complete role reversal from the time where he coached the Canucks, missing the playoffs and many of the players having their worst years EVER (Edler was -37, Sedins suffered many injuries and lowest points totals in years).

As Gen Z has grown up only knowing the digital era and many of their coaches have not to same extent, the last tip I want to share is you incorporate technology on your teams.

1. **Communicate with Social Media** – For my High School Rugby Team this past spring, I setup a group chat room on Facebook Messenger and sent all team postings, even schedules and attachments to communicate with the Gen Zedders. I laughed every time I hit Send and within seconds after I posted would see images of each players face pop up as they read the messages.

Note: Ensure that all applicable team members are included in groups and have codes of conduct for appropriate posts, language, images posted and ZERO tolerance for any form of cyberbullying.

2. **Use Video to demonstrate drills, review strategies in games.** Pre Hockey Canada Network Ap I would use Hockey Canada skills of gold on DVD's and showed players videos of drills we would be doing on an old laptop (AKA boat anchor), then tablets. When I attended a coaches conference a couple of years ago and Corey McNabb (manager of player development for Hockey Canada) talked about the new Ap, he envisioned it would evolve to the a point where coaches would have access to big screens in dressing rooms as TV pricing had eroded so much.

When he did so, Don Hay (Major Junior Coach) who was standing beside me, "Cory I still write my practice plans on paper towel/napkins". Translation – old school coaches write drills down on whatever they have on hand at the moment so must adapt to new school technologies.

3. **Connect with each of your players face to face** (old school not Skype), and get to know each of your players to develop trust. The hardest thing for you as a coach will be to trust your players FIRST before they extend trust of you and your coaching practices but it was the greatest tip I ever received from one of my mentors.

This is exactly what John Tortorella did this past season with Columbus, he let his players play vs. over coaching them in games, much like Ken Hitchcock did before him in 2011 when coaching the St. Louis Blues. That is probably the hardest thing that we all have to do as coaches is extending trust to our players before they have earned it.

Follow these key tips and you will not only connect better with your players, but should see improvement in your overall team play as a result.

Let's work together to bring the game back to the kids.



Don't Be A Kid's Last Coach