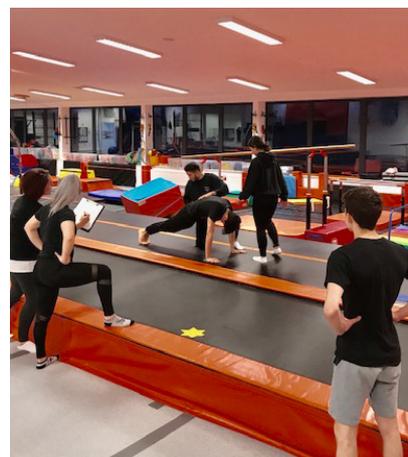


Developing Coaches – Success Story

Club: Prime Acrobatics

Club contact: Chris Bowler, Coaching Director

Prime Acrobatics is a gymnastics club in Surrey that offers classes to participants from four months-old to adult. The club has been open for the past three years and currently boasts a membership of 1,700 along with a workforce of 60 staff. There are ambitions to create a second larger facility to offer an even wider range of acrobatic gymnastics activities.



What do you believe makes a great coach?

“We ultimately want coaches who believe in our core objectives and the importance of the service we provide to the community. Our aim is to create an unmatched cool atmosphere and learning experience where children and adults alike want to be.

“We believe that great coaches are fun, bubbly and outgoing people who provide great energy and deliver sessions with a high work-rate. If the coach has fun, the children will have fun as they thrive off the positive energy the coach provides. We want all our children to leave each session with rosy red cheeks from being challenged, and a smile on their face from having had fun and having gained a sense of achievement.

“It’s important that our coaches are able to coach and work across all aspects of our centre. Working with preschool children and talking to parents is very different to how you would manage teenagers and competitive groups. Having knowledge across these different areas not only benefits our coaches but it also benefits our team cohesion.”

Why do you mentor and develop your coaches?

“Our business is all about people and we believe that our employees are our greatest assets.

“We believe that if you look after your staff, they’ll look after your customers and the key to a great company culture is to treat your staff how you would like to be treated. By doing this then hopefully they will be loyal, and they won’t want to leave.

“We want to continuously show a willingness to invest and better our staff because as a result this will make us more efficient and lift the overall standard of our classes. It should also help to motivate our staff, so they keep the energy high and environment positive, enabling us to start empowering them and entrust them with added responsibilities. Overall, it will help engage our staff in a process where we create a performance management culture. They will be more likely to pay greater attention to detail and save us from having to deal with customer complaints. Our staff will also be more likely to go above and beyond for the club when needed.”



On top of this we also have:

1. Annual appraisal meetings with all staff.
2. A routine staff training day three times a year and after a holiday break i.e. Easter, Summer and Christmas.
3. Staff training every Wednesday afternoon.
4. A formal staff meeting/think tank once a week.
5. A library of coaching videos and books for reference.

“We also intend to introduce a weekly open training session for all staff to train, collaborate and bounce new ideas off each other.”

How do you mentor and develop your coaches?

“We encourage our coaches to be creative, try new things and learn by their mistakes. We want to help our coaches broaden their experiences and encourage them to reflect on their practices. We also want to help them become well-rounded individuals and to be open and respectful to other people’s methods and philosophies on coaching.”

Our basic structure for mentoring our coaches is:

1. **General induction:** We walk and talk the coaches around the centre, telling them about our history and underlining our centre’s ethos and mission.
2. **Office induction:** We sit down and underline our standards of practice and set out our expectations.
3. **Baseline:** We give our new coaches practical time on the majority of apparatus, to establish and recap on foundation skills
4. **Shadowing:** Our new coaches are given time to work and settle into our environment by working with a more experienced coach, learning the structure of our classes before taking any direct responsibility.
5. **Set mentors:** We establish senior members of the team to be the mentors to our coaches, to provide general guidance and support for courses and exams they wish to undertake.
6. **Class assistants:** We always have a floating coach in our general classes to help manage the safety and welfare of all staff and participants and they provide additional feedback to all of our coaches.
7. **Open-door policy:** There is never a silly question. If any of our coaches have a concern or a question, we will meet and discuss anything they wish to address.



What are the barriers to developing coaches?

“We have a high turnover of younger coaches which consequently makes gaining stability with a coaching team to help move the club forward and raise standards quite difficult. Not many youngsters see coaching in gymnastics as a possible career and something they could do long term. As a result, staffing is a daily job and as a club we end up investing a lot of time, effort and money into recruiting, training and developing young coaches for them to only stay for a short period of time.

“We have brought in a lot of older coaches who were previously gymnasts and many of them tend to be more settled with their families and less likely to move. However, it is often unlikely that they can give us a significant amount of time.

“As a private centre we also find it difficult to compete with private schools and leisure centres because they have larger budgets to spend and their sole focus is on providing a service as opposed to making sure they’re financially self-sufficient. Because they can offer higher rates of pay, this makes it challenging for us to attract coaches through the door.

What would you do differently in the future?

“We have learnt through experience that recruiting, integrating and coach education is a challenge and although we have done well, we want to ensure that we continue to grow, that our standards are maintained and that we are not left short staffed. We are now considering hiring someone to specifically oversee the management of this in the club.”

How much money have you spent on developing your coaches?

“Over the past three years we have spent around £10,000 on training for our staff. This includes:

1. In-house training and inviting guests to our club to run sessions i.e. visits from technical experts, first aid and safeguarding courses.
2. Sending coaches away to other clubs to gain experience from other settings and knowledge from other high-profile coaches.
3. Other external clinics and or workshops i.e. club management.

“We have applied for a number of coaching bursaries from the region to support our staff.”