

To stay motivated, individuals need to have personal goals!

Interview with Coach G ¹

Coach, Mentor, Personal Trainer
Former Rugby player & World Cup Champion
South Africa and Canada



Interviewed by Aina Aliieva

International Correspondent, PM World Journal
Ontario, Canada

Introduction

As Project Managers and enterprise leaders, we closely work with teams and organizational cultures. We motivate and inspire our employees to keep performing in order to get great results. However, not many of us associate managing people with sports skills. Coach Gurthrö Steenkamp agreed to help me cover this gap and connect sports coaching skills with the enterprise environment.

Gurthrö Garth Steenkamp (Coach G) is a former South African [Rugby union](#) player and World Cup winner (in 2007). Gurthrö is a professional rugby coach. He also started a business focusing on helping front-row rugby players and coaches improve their performance in Scrum. Passion: help purpose-driven people develop mental resilience,

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give them tools to overcome obstacles and roadblocks, and give them the tools to achieve their goals and turn their vision into reality. Gurthrö does it through ZUU, which is high-intensity training that helps improving Physical, Social and Mental Health. Learn more or connect with Coach G at <https://www.instagram.com/ggsteenkamp/>

Interview

Q1. What does Scrum mean in sports, and have you ever heard about Agile and Scrum in the corporate world?

Coach Gurthrö Steenkamp (Coach G): I'm not going to pretend that I know what Agile is, and that's what I'm looking forward to learning from this conversation. In sports, Scrum is the engine. It is about fighting for position and for the team to fighting up. For me, Scrum is a collective effort which means eight players are pushing in the same direction, generating power and engaging at the same time. It comes down to synchronization, reaction speed and mental resilience. If one team player doesn't do his job, the whole team is weak. So, Scrum requires a lot of training. If players are not working in the right direction, if they are not reacting simultaneously, they are not synchronized, the game could be catastrophic.

Q2. What do you think the most critical skills the coach needs to have?

Coach G: In sports, we always differentiate talent vs skill. There are always talented athletes who are unwilling to do hard work and less gifted players but focused on developing skills. From a coaching perspective, it is crucial to develop skills that you can integrate into a team's strategy. In a team environment, we have different players. Similar to the corporate world, where there are people who develop the strategy and others who are implementers, people who are researching specific projects and people who actually execute them. In sports, the primary responsibility of a coach is to build your team. You can use all strategies in the world, all facilities, but if you didn't build a core, all training tools and facilities mean nothing. So, when we start with the team, any coach will lay down the team culture, i.e. getting players to work towards a common goal. Athletes need to understand that we are sharing a common vision. We need to know what we're working towards, and each person needs to understand their role in the team.

And this is not very different from the corporate space. In enterprises, you need to create an inclusive culture to bring up the best of everyone. It's not just about having classic workshops. It's about actually communicating and learning to respect each other. And the coach's job is to see who actually wants to be part of this journey. When you have

players that are going against the grain, it's counterproductive if you have athletes who do not believe in the team's vision or culture. So you have two ways of going about it. Either you need to get them on board, or you need to get rid of them. Unlike sports, that's not always the case in organizations. In the corporate world, you can repurpose them. But coaching skills, which are essential for us in the world of sport, are managing people and making the right choices.

And as a coach, it's not just the players on the field you need to take care about. You need to manage your medical staff and other parties as well as focus on team strategy. So the skills that coaches need are management skills, the ability to correct the problems, strategic skills, the ability to analyze opposition or the competition, see what is required, and how we can actually take the seat or be the principals in the game.

Q3. How do you motivate your team?

Coach G: You need to inspire through actions and leading by example. That means you encourage them by acknowledging them and being empathetic, which doesn't mean you have to be positive, happy, and screamy all the time. You can be positive, and you can be firm. You want to have it come down to human connection. But to stay motivated, individuals in the team need to have their personal goals. People need to know that they are part of the team's vision, that that vision includes them because if they feel excluded, they will lack motivation. That's why the foundation of the proper team culture is so important.

You need to do what we call "work the room," analyze your teammates, your colleagues, and look at the program. You need to be able to identify with the so-called soft moments in people's lives.

Q4. What are soft moments?

Coach G: Soft moments are when you lose focus; you lose concentration; when we are no longer productive. We want to avoid these moments because these moments can cost you a game or a contract. These moments can cost you a client. You always need to be ready.

So keeping people motivated, it's about getting to know them and keeping a team motivated is making sure that they know they are part of the team and that they are included in the global vision. In summary, they need to have a purpose and having a sense of belonging.

Q5. Could you tell us a bit more about the role of soft moments in the corporate world? How to avoid them?

Coach G: In a corporate team, you need to take a week as a measurement point. When do your teammates feel the most underproductive? Is it a Monday morning? Is it Friday afternoon? Is it midweek? A good coach is able to anticipate that. To avoid the soft moments, we need to regroup.

For example, If we know Friday afternoon will be a slow day or unproductive day, at two o'clock, you tell everyone: "Guys, let's finish strong! Let's go! We've got two hours left in this week, but let's finish strong!"

So you need to identify those soft moments so that you can reduce them and actually manage them.

Q6. I absolutely agree with what you've said that no individual is bigger than the team, and to succeed, people need a shared vision. And I see in the corporate world many organizations try to implement these practices. They might even paint mission and vision on their walls, but they don't truly believe in it. Why do you think a lot of corporations struggle with that? Why do you think they become so profit-driven versus purpose-driven?

Coach G: The answer is they have a poor team culture. That means those words on the wall, those values that this shield, just comments on the wall. When new team members come into a corporate space to the existing team, they need to buy in. And that's what you need to manage. Especially when you have experienced people in the group, and you've got new people coming in. It's a two-way street. Both people, both parties. We need to make an effort; they need to meet each other, so the experienced people need to integrate the new people and make them feel part of the team; it is not just up to the new guys to give it their all. Yes, the new guys need to earn the respect of the others, but it still goes both ways. The two-way street always uses this analogy in sports. We have a pre-season. The pre-season for a company is the start of the new year when the new strategy and new structures or new systems are put into place. So pre-season is the time we start conditioning the body and conditioning the mind.

And that's where everybody needs to switch off because you're preparing for those obstacles in pre-season. You are putting new strategies into place, new things. But you always need to revisit the team culture. You need to constantly make sure that everybody's in check. You can be an athlete and play for the club for years, but you still need to believe in that team's culture and core values. And if players do not believe in culture and values, you need to understand why. Sometimes you feel that this is too hard,

but this lays the foundation for the rest of the year. And this is what I advise teams to do in the corporate world. When I work with directors and managers, I say do the groundwork at the beginning of the year and push your team to success.

Q7, What is the secret of a high-performing team?

Coach G: There are many essential things. You definitely need to do the homework. You need to do the preparation. Preparation and routine are the key factors. But the secret of a high-performance team is a locker room. A locker room determines the success of any sporting team because that's where you connect with your teammates, talk about your family, the nights out, sometimes about nonsense, pulling pranks on each other, having a drink or a cup of coffee.

That's why in the corporate world, you need a space, a lounge, whatever we call it, where people can take a break five to ten or even twenty minutes and just have a chat. If we don't have the dedicated space in the corporate world, you'll have no soul in that team. That's your DNA. That's where people can talk. But if you don't have space which belongs only to the team, to the employees, there will be just work, work, work and no soul. You need to maintain balance, not just in life, but it needs to be balanced in the structure of a company which leads to a balance in the team's structure. You want people to stay SWITCHED-ON in the workplace. But in order to have that, you need to provide them with space where they can switch off.

Q8. As coaches, how can we keep our level of energy up?

Coach G: The most important thing is that you need to take care of yourself if you want to be an authentic leader. So I maintain balance. Sometimes, leadership can be a lonely path because you need to make tough decisions, unpopular decisions. But it's for the greater good of the team. And that's where you need to trust yourself, and you need to have confidence in yourself, your energy. What inspires me is people. I have that sense of responsibility to give them my best because I know that I can change their lives, help them with their careers if I'm at my best.

So, these are some tools I use to level myself up.

I'm not a big fan of journaling because I don't have time for writing, but I do write things down sometimes if I want to process certain thoughts or frustrations. But what I do is I have something which is just for me. There could be other methods such as breathing exercise or yoga, meditation. But this should be something just for me, and there is nothing wrong with being selfish sometimes.

The best method to refresh myself is to have power naps. They are unbelievable. Sometimes I'm at my desk for five minutes. Usually, I set up the timer on my phone. Sometimes I can just close my eyes and focus on breathing.

If I need to energize myself, I could do squats. Thirty seconds for squats could be enough. But talking about recommendations, nothing can help if people don't feel passionate about what they are doing.

Q9. Alright! It is clear about personal energy level. In a working environment, we have numerous endless meetings during the day. As facilitators, what is the best approach to quickly increase energy in the room?

Coach G: I do something very simple when I'm working with leaders to reduce tension. It's about bringing everybody to the same level, balancing things out. You need to disrupt a little bit so you can get everybody on the same level. I just get people to high five with each other. Obviously, this was before covid when you could get people to high five. Well, now it might just be a fist bump, but it raises the level of energy immediately. I did this with the leadership group in Germany three years ago. Those people were serious, and they weren't expressing and talking that much. I said: "Everybody, stand up! I want you to give the high five to three different people. Get attached!". Some people felt awkward; some people were laughing. But all of a sudden, what we heard was a buzz. There was energy. What we've done is that we gave them experience; we created an experience, a moment that they could share.

Q10. What about the celebration? Not everywhere in the business environment, the culture encourages celebrating success. Unfortunately, it is still more into criticizing and less celebrating. So what would you recommend in a team culture? What are your tips for celebrating achievements?

Coach G: I'm a firm believer you need to celebrate the small victories. How can you celebrate that? It's not just about throwing parties and going crazy. It even could be in the meeting. You can say: "You know what? - this was an awesome presentation!". That simple! It doesn't always have to be an event. It's more about encouraging people in front of other people as well, especially if you want to really make them feel valued. It is vital that you need to enjoy the small victories, not only those big ones because they motivate and inspire you to move forward.

About the Interviewer



Aina Aliieva

Toronto, ON, Canada



Aina Alive (Aliieva) has 10+ years working in Project Management and an Agile environment.

She has managed and consulted on Technical, Construction, Telecom, Retail and Engineering projects. Aina is a Transformation Leader, Coach & Mentor. She helps individuals, teams and organizations in their transformation journey. Aina is passionate about productivity, creating a positive work environment and building Dream teams.

Aina has a Masters's degree in electrical engineering and an MBA in technology. She holds PMP and PMI-ACP certificates. Aina is a proud member of PMI CWCC (Canadian West Coast Chapter), PMIT (Toronto Chapter), PMI Ukraine Chapter and UAE PMI. She is also a Program Manager, Disciplined Agile in PMI CWCC and DA Ambassador in PMIT.

Aina is an experienced public speaker and coach. In her free time, Aina participates in different mentorship programs, speaks at webinars and interviews people for her blog.

She can be contacted at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/aina-aliieva/>