

# Challenging the Beliefs Driving A Controlling Style in Coaching and Education: What the Research Reveals

*Leen Haerens*

Sports coaches and teachers are entrusted with the vital task of helping youngsters learn and grow in safe and nurturing environments. Yet, sometimes, they may resort to a controlling (i.e., pressuring and autonomy-thwarting) style of coaching and teaching. This keynote will present the latest SDT-based research on the detrimental effects of a controlling coaching and teaching style for young people's motivation and well-being, their growth and development, and even their performance. In doing so, it will challenge three pervasive laymen's beliefs.

The first belief is that certain controlling practices are needed for instilling discipline and promoting respect. SDT's distinction between a controlling and a structuring style is essential in this regard. Although both a controlling and structuring style entail a directive socialization approach, the extent to which these styles thwart versus nurture people's needs differs. Our most recent work on the circumplex approach to teaching and coaching reveals that respect and discipline typically follow need-supportive rather than controlling communication. Evidence will be presented that directiveness is perceived as more legitimate and has a more positive impact when it is provided in a structuring rather than controlling way, and when it is combined with autonomy-support.

The second belief is that a controlling style is beneficial in some situations or that specific people benefit from a controlling style: "Is a controlling approach justified or warranted when students display disruptive behavior?" and "Are some youngsters more resilient or even immune for a controlling style?". Findings from experimental vignette-based studies as well as longitudinal repeated measures field studies will be presented to answer these questions.

The third belief is that the periodic use of a controlling style is no longer detrimental if it is combined with a generally need-supportive style,

or when it is embedded in a broader empowering climate. To address this belief, we rely on profile analyses to gain more refined insights into the impact of different combinations of styles. Multilevel analyses allow to explore the dynamic interaction between coaches' and educators' generic styles and situational or periodic instances of control.

The keynote will conclude with a summary of the factors that lead to a controlling style as such insights are essential to develop effective interventions to help coaches and educators in adopting a more need-supportive style to create safer and more motivating learning environments that foster growth and development.