

Boris Becker's Three steps to Success

The last week in June/first week in July has a special place in the British sporting calendar. The time when we enjoy fresh strawberries and cream, desperately hope that the sun will continue to shine and wonder whether, once again, Federer be champion. Yes, it's Wimbledon time!

This past week I've been dividing my spare time between catching up on the day's action from Wimbledon and doing some research for my MA in Coaching and Mentoring. For the latter I've been interviewing people who have undergone coaching in the past and asking them, 'Did it really work?' and 'How much of the learning have you managed to sustain?' Time and time again I've been surprised by the similarities in their responses. 'Yes, coaching does work and the learning from it is sustained', they all said, 'but only if as an individual you are really signed up for it and motivated to make it work'. Furthermore, all of those interviewed, commented that part of this commitment involved being open to feedback, some of which might be unpalatable and, crucially, be prepared to accept this and persevere in making change happen.

Whilst mulling over this feedback, (and watching a bit of tennis), I happened upon an account of an interview with Boris Becker. The following extract is taken from Nick Owen's excellent book 'The Magic of Metaphor'.

Had he always been a champion? The interviewer asked

No, he hadn't, he said. Although when he'd been young he'd been picked as a potential future prospect. However, other boys had been better than him, more naturally gifted.

"So where are they now these boys?" said the interviewer. "What happened to them?"

"Well," said the former champion, "they just didn't make it. For all their talent they didn't have what it takes".

"So what does it take?" asked the interviewer.

"You've got to want it enough"

"Is that the secret?"

"There's another. It takes discipline. No matter how much talent you have, you've got to have the discipline to nurture and develop it. You've got to prioritise and give up a lot of things that can seem attractive."

"Is that the secret?"

"There's another," said the former tennis ace, "and it's harder and more demanding than the first two put together. You need humility, no matter how good you are. You need humility to listen to your coaches, to take advice, to test new possibilities, and to admit that you don't know everything. Feedback is the breakfast of champions. These three things are the secrets of my success."

It struck me that, whilst I've been focussing on coaching as a personal development tool, Boris Becker's 3 steps to success are applicable to any form of personal development. Yes, some kind of latent potential is important but, for me, that personal hunger and drive, combined with the humility to accept and embrace feedback is the difference that makes the difference.

"Feedback is the breakfast of champions". Food for thought as you enjoy your strawberries and cream?