



life performance solutions

744 blue ridge avenue  
bedford, virginia 24523

540.425.4123

todd@lps-toddroberts.com  
www.lps-toddroberts.com

## Are You Coachable?

Todd A. Roberts, USAC & USAT Certified Coach

Engaging a professional coach to train you is a commitment to a significant personal/professional relationship. Like all important relationships, the more time and energy each of you invest, the more each is willing to see the other's point of view and work toward shared goals, the better it's likely to be. The coach/athlete relationship also works like most others in that progress is less likely to be in a straight, uninterrupted line than an undulating series of advances and retreats in which the gains must outweigh the losses for those involved to be satisfied.

While the coach and athlete are in partnership, and they have equal responsibility for communicating, they play different roles. The coach is in charge of designing the training, monitoring performance, responding with appropriate adjustments, and supporting the athlete. The athlete is responsible for making time to train, following the protocol, and exerting his or her best effort.

In the first year of training, the coach may have to build a new record of the individual athlete's performance. This makes it difficult to predict outcomes. There are some likely trends, but each athlete is physiologically unique and responds to training in his or her own way. Ideally—and in most cases—the overall trend line moves upward. If, however, the trend line fails to improve, the coach will want to make a comprehensive examination of factors outside the training that may influence progress, such as other activities that compete for the body's ability to recover, nutrition, rest, and the priority of training among the athlete's commitments.

Training programs are developed sequentially based on fitness testing and on data. During certain times of the training year, such as the aerobic base development phase, the athlete's performance is linear due to the slow progressive nature of the work. However linear growth and performance may diverge soon after anaerobic activity starts as the nature of the athlete's unique physiology responds to the increase in training intensity. That's when undulations in performance show up.

Most people want to see a straight line toward their performance goals, but undulations are the norm; they reflect the way the body improves. Training programs consist of several "build" periods with increased intensity or duration—or both—and scheduled rest periods that may range from "active recovery" to full rest. (Full rest periods are beneficial only a few times during the training year.) The surprise for many athletes is that during "build" periods, when greatest stress is placed on the body, performance *temporarily* goes down. After "active recovery" or rest, however, performance usually exceeds prior levels, making for an overall upward trend line.

The most effective training incorporates a series of working sessions that alternate with scheduled rest. As the athlete improves, training intensity and duration can grow, which leads to greater strength and endurance. Depending on the time of the training year and the athlete's goals, workout intensity may be high or low. Those variations, balanced by rest, are essential. The keys to monitoring success are following the program and interpreting the data carefully over time.

## Ask Yourself These Questions

Here are some issues to contemplate when you consider engaging a professional coach.

### Motivation

- What are my personal fitness goals?
- Am I invested in improving my fitness enough to explore new ways of training?

### Commitment

- Am I prepared to enter into a relationship with a partner dedicated to supporting my fitness goals?
- Am I ready to commit to a training program that requires consistent, reasonable, challenging amounts of effort?
- Is my personal schedule one that can accommodate a regular training program?

### Trust

- How likely am I to learn to trust someone whose means of achieving fitness goals may differ from those I'm accustomed to?
- Am I willing to let the data I provide my coach be the baseline for modifications to my training program?

### Understanding

- How does my athletic performance fit into my other life activities?
- Am I prepared for the reality that my athletic growth is likely to be non-linear in its progression?

### Expectations

- Do I set reasonable expectations for myself—about fitness and in general?
- Am I prepared to set reasonable expectations of my relationship with a coach, understanding that I'm part of the success equation?

Successful relationships are based on shared interest and clear expectations. Give yourself straight answers to the toughest questions you come up with about what you're looking for in a coaching partnership. Interview more than one coach; tell them what they need to know about you, and ask them everything you want to know about them. Check references. Make sure you feel good about the personality fit.

Once you start working with a coach, pay attention to the quality of your relationship as well as to accomplishing your training goals. You're there to learn, which means you need to keep an open mind. The coach is there to support you, which means that he or she should be attentive, thoughtful, encouraging, and firm enough to get you past the barriers you can't hurdle on your own.

Nothing makes a coach happier than hearing, "I did it! I succeeded!" Behind the scenes, that means "we succeeded," but a wise coach will tell you that in the end only you could do it.