

## Snakeoil Salesperson: Who Should You Trust to be a Part of Your Team?

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J: Welcome to the compete like a champion podcast where we explore the psychology of performance, advanced coaching and sports science through the lens of professional tennis. You're here with Dr. Larry Lauer, mental skill specialist, and coach Johnny Parkes with USTA player development. All right, this is Johnny Parkes here with the USTA player development. And I'm here with Dr. Larry Lauer, our mental skills specialist for the USTA player development team USA. And we're here going to be talking about the top of the game and what sets them apart, the snake oil salesperson and know what is quality support. Now, first of all, what is the snake oil salesperson coming from the UK I don't think I've heard that terminology before, so, or that phrase before.

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L: Probably everyone in the UK is honest and ethical, so that's probably why, but...

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J: Pretty sure that's not true.

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L: Yeah, I guess probably not. But you probably heard the story of the snakeoil salesman. They come around town and and they, they try to sell you the snake oil as the medicine to solve everything in your life. And of course it doesn't work, but they, they're already gone. And they've left with your money. And I think that's the point about the snakeoil salesman, is that there's a lot of people out there who do good, very work, a very good work, excuse me. But there's a lot of people out there also who don't do good work or don't, aren't trained to do what they're doing in sport and, and they make it difficult for the athletes to know whom to go for, go to for help. So

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J: Yeah, and I guess that can be tough. I mean, how do you separate that out? You know, it's, it's the same with, if you're reading a book, how'd you know that that book is quality or not? There's tons of 'em out there, but you know, how do you know which one to go for, which person to best teach your kid, you know, where do you separate that quality? So.

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L: We kind of joked about the snake oil salesman at the, at the top of the podcast, but this idea that I, I believe that that players at the top of the game are actually pretty, um, critical about whom they let into their team. And they're, they're pretty critical of the messages that they hear. And I don't want anybody to take this the wrong way because it's about being open minded and having a growth mindset to learn and find new ways to get better. But at the same time with a pretty healthy cynicism that there are a lot of people out there who all they want to do is sell you on their product. Whether that product is, is the latest line of gadgets or, uh, whatever mental training, for example, uh, things that they're doing. And, and I think you as a, as a top player, you really need to have someone in your camp who is able to filter that stuff, right? And, and help you to, to not fall prey to those things. Um, but I, you know, we just take mental training for example. I want to kick it back to you, Johnny, maybe from a coaching standpoint. I think if you asked, for example, just take the

women's tour. I think if you asked the players, they would all know about mental toughness. I mean, Dr. Jim Lehrer has popularized that term. He's really a pioneer in this area. They know what that is, but they wouldn't necessarily know who should be providing that mental training. Right? So they, they know what essentially they're looking for, but they don't know who should be providing that. And who do we want our players going to? I think he, I think he is as a, as a parent, as a coach, as a player, you need to know who's qualified to help you. So if, again, we wrap it back to the theme of this podcast, what the, what do they do at the top of the game? They know what they need and they don't, I don't think really get involved with things that waste their money or involved with the charlatans that are purveying things that, uh, are not useful. You know, and it's tough because there may be people listening who I guess if you take it personally then you need to take a look at what you're doing. But if you don't have the training to do something, you shouldn't be doing it. You know? And again, we have enough of that going on that we have to protect our young players from, from these things and make sure that they're getting the quality training that they need. And this would include from a coaching standpoint, right Johnny? I mean, what do you see in the coaching side in terms of this, I mean, do you see issues with this as well?

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J: Yeah. Oh well absolutely. I think, you know, I'll touch on your point about seeking out that kind of mental skills expert or that you know, somebody that can help them on that side of the game. I mean essentially the tennis coach is part of driving that player's development. And I think a coach is able, you know, should, should have that open mind to expose themselves to the different areas of the athletes development. And obviously that mental skills, the character development piece and all that, that's a huge part of their development. And so that coach should take an interest in meeting people. Oh Hey, there's Larry Lauer, I know his name through, you know, the team USA tennis camps. And essentially that player has that relationship with their tennis coach already, that trust and relationship building. But if you're going to bring somebody in, you've got to have a credible, somebody has got to have that credible source in recommending that person. I think the tennis coach needs to, yes, open their mind up to that mental skills side, but keep always making sure that they're able to help their players in the areas that they need. And that doesn't mean that they're the person delivering everything all the time and sometimes they will need to bring in certain people to their team, a mental skills expert or character development expert.

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L: Well. And just to touch on that, Johnny, I mean I think one of the mistakes that we make some times as coaches is we rely on the people that we know versus going to the people who have the training, the credentials and with the caveat of, I worked in ice rinks for a couple of years and after I got my masters and I worked in an ice rink and I had a masters in exercise and sports science, one of these smartest, sharpest people that I know did not have a graduate degree, but she made that ice rink run and tick and make money and people happy. So I'm not saying that you have to have a degree to be successful, a graduate degree. What I'm saying is it's gotta be in the strike zone of what we're

looking for here. So if you're a coach and Oh, I've got a buddy who's got a buddy that does this, that should send off, shouldn't that send a warning signals already that, all right, we're going on a rogue. We're not even sure of the competency of... And what I know working with professional athletes, top players, it's not like you can just throw stuff at them and spitball like, well, let's bring this person in and try it out. With mental training, they're going to, if they have a bad experience, they're getting, they're not just going to say, well, that was a bad mental coach. They're going to say mental training's not for me. Right? That's been my experience. And so we've got to protect not only the field, and that could be the field of coaching or of mental training, we have to protect the players. Okay? We have to protect the players here, make sure that we're putting them in a position to be open mind and to be accepting of the quality support that they need. And to do that, we have to do our best to try to avoid those charlatans, a snake oil salesman in those bad experiences.

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J: Um, I was fortunate enough last week to go to a, a seminar on athletic development and a, an strength and conditioning, but one, uh, this was a great, great little equation. And I liked a fella from the Indianapolis Colts in the NFL. He, he gave me this equation experience plus knowledge equals wisdom. And yeah, that needs to be, you know, especially in some fields because if, if you don't have that experience or knowledge, you can do a high amount of damage. Right. So, so that's what we want to avoid. Um, so when we're seeking out people to be part of our team, we need to ensure that they have a pretty, pretty good experience of what they're doing. And again, but also there's that knowledge base and combining these elements together equals that wisdom that can really help the athlete. But for me it all comes back to are we player centric. Is everything we do in the best interest of that player. So when we talk about the, the snake oil salesman, now that you've helped me understand that a bit better, um, you know, it comes back to get a feel for that person. Are they just trying to sell you something or they just trying to tell you what you do wrong? You know, cause that's what you hear a lot is this, you're not doing this, you're not doing that and this is what I'm going to do for you. Rather than actually sitting down with them and help them understand what they can do, you know, and what they can help them with. And I'm really understanding that person, getting to know them as a person and not just an athlete. And I think that's where the thing that's where it ultimately comes down to is with that snake oil salesperson is, but how do you filter that out and yeah.

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L: Well I think one, one thing, and that's a great point, Johnny, the snake oil salesman is not that in the individual their, their agenda is to sell their product and you've got to think about their business model is to sell as many as they can as quickly as they can. They want to be able to do this while they're sleeping. Right. That's the idea, right? I mean, can we sell things while we're asleep? And there are certain products like, like books, if it's quality based on science, et cetera, that makes sense to me. But in terms of working with human beings, or with individuals, especially ones who are high-performance players, that doesn't work, right? So if you're a parent listening, a coach, a player, if someone's trying to sell you a cookie cutter program, if they're trying to sell you something out of

the box, I'd stay away from it. If they're, they want to get to know you as a person first and say, look, I'm not going to charge you anything. I want to come, I'm going to come watch your daughter play. I'm going to talk to you and talk to their coach. Then you're like, okay, that's a first impression that I like to see. Secondly, don't ever feel bad about asking for a second opinion or just a little doubt. So if your player looking for a, um, a mental coach, instead of signing on for the year, get some second opinions, talk to somebody else. There's nothing wrong with that. I'm happy in my role here at USTA player development for players to come and say, Hey Larry, I'm looking to do mental training with someone. What do you think? I can give them names of people that I know in that area or at least tell them what qualifications you're looking for and what do those letters behind their name mean? Right. You know what, what does that Master of Arts, M.A., Master's of Science, M.S., PhD, philosophy. Doctor of Philosophy, right? [Inaudible] Doctor of Psychology. And what are those? What do those things mean? Right. From a coaching standpoint, it's a bit more challenging because they typically don't have letters behind their names. You don't know what their training is, but have they gone through the routes that we have in American tennis to go to the PTR, to the PTA to get certified and train. You know, we have our coach, youth tennis and NET generation. So there are things that parents can and coaches can do to make sure that the quality training is occurring for their, for their player. Yeah.

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J: Well this is great. This has been awesome, Larry. Uh, you know, I know we could probably sit here and go on for hours and hours like we usually do in the office just this time, we've got these nice little, uh, microphones in front of our faces, but I think we'll wrap it up there. Um, if there's a couple little tips you want to give to our viewers here or, uh, coaches, players, parents, give them a few tips for the day or tips for the week.

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Well, I think we'll go back to the theme. The theme was what do top players do in trying to mimic some of the things you can't maybe as a junior player. I think number one, it's, it's really surrounding yourself with people who know what they're doing and their positive influences. Who care about you, that put your interests first, uh, but will also tell you when you're screwing up, right? We don't want, yes-people. We want people who want you to be a better person first, and they're going to tell you when you're being a jerk and set you straight. Look for those people. Hang with those people. Climb the mountain step by step. Johnny. There's no other way.

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J: Well, that's great. Larry, thank you so much. This has been Dr. Larry Lauer and coach Johnny Parkes. Tune in next time where we'll be diving into more characteristics of competing like a champion.

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L: This concludes this episode of the compete, like a champion podcast.

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J: We thank you for joining in. And for more information, go to [playerdevelopment.usta.com](http://playerdevelopment.usta.com). To contact Dr. Lauer or myself, coach parks goto [teamusa@usta.com](mailto:teamusa@usta.com). And that's it for today's episode of compete like a

champion. For more information, visit our website [playerdevelopment.usta.com](http://playerdevelopment.usta.com) and you can email us a [teamusa@usta.com](mailto:teamusa@usta.com). This is Dr. Larry Lauer, coach Johnny Parkes signing off until next time.