



The Big Blue Box Ltd

Bending The Rules

One of my interests is motorcycling and I work as a volunteer within a Road Safety Charity to training motorcyclist and trainers to an advanced level. We train riders 'on the road'.

Coaching styles have to be flexible to achieve an outcome, in this situation, coaching two people simultaneously; each coachee is at different skill level and has different needs. The challenge is to find methods and styles that will work for each coachee.

Background

S is a 'Born Again' motorcyclist, returning to motorcycling after several years. He has recently been out for training rides with other 'Observers' (as the trainers are called). Today S has arrived at the training group's monthly meeting for another training session.

B is a trainee Observer –and joins us on the session to practice his analysis and coaching skills.

The Process

We complete the formalities, S will lead off and B will follow to observe S, and I will direct the ride using radios.

At our first stop we gather together to discuss the ride so far.

I encourage B to begin the de-briefing. We agree on the analysis of the key issues - which centre upon S's gathering of information from the scene around him and his consequent positioning on the road.

S's key problem is that he is not looking far enough ahead of his position to make a safe riding plan; potentially identifiable and foreseeable hazards are coming at him unexpectedly.

There is also another safety issue which lends a degree of urgency to the lesson.

It is vital that the safety message is delivered clearly, but a simple demonstration ride is unlikely to get the combined messages across.

I decide to set up S to ride ahead of me whilst I give a commentary on the road scene that I can see ahead of him.

Whilst the riders are familiar with the use of radios for giving directions and commentary, it is not normal practice within the group for the commentary to be given by the trainer whilst following the trainee – although I have used it several times and know that this is a highly effective technique. It is however outside the current skill level for B - the 'trainee' trainer.

We ride for perhaps 10 minutes or around 5 miles and then pull over for a debrief.

S – the 'Born Again' rider lifts his safety helmet and sunglasses and is smiling broadly to exclaim his astonishment –

'That was incredible! ...You were talking about things I hadn't seen.

I couldn't understand where you were seeing those things...

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You told me about events before they happened ... you told me I was about to meet a line of cars as we rounded a corner....you told me about a narrow bridge and I couldn't see it – then I saw the second road sign, but you had already anticipated vehicles in the middle of the road....

I was only seeing perhaps 30% of what you were seeing – and you were (2 seconds) behind me!!'

I can now understand how far ahead I need to be looking!'

As a trainee Observer B remarked:

'I can see how powerful a commentary can be, I would have had to be very lucky and the rider would have had to be very observant if I were to make any Demo ride as useful without using' radio commentary', that was really good. It was a good call to use the commentary – and to do it from a following position'.

I then handed the observing role back to B, the Trainee Observer. We continued the ride with S leading and B observing from a 'following' position - the normal formation. This was S's chance to practice what he had seen and for B to cement the learning.

At our next stop B remarked that it was very clear that S had seen how he could improve his observation – taking in Information – the evidence was there in his riding – his head movements showed he was looking further ahead and he was beginning to alter his positioning in the road as a result.

In his briefing for the next stage of the ride B correctly decided that the key point to establish was that the trainee should now begin to use the new information gained to inform his positioning. This time another demonstration was given and S had a chance to practice before we pulled into a tea shop for a final debrief and review.

The Outcomes

In a very short period of time S had been able to see a new skill and to put it into action. As a part of my debriefing at the first stop I had warned S that he could be killed or seriously injured if he did not change his riding style to respond to a key safety issue – our lesson directly addressed the issue. S reported that this comment was a bit of a shock to him and had caused him to take the lesson even more seriously.

The lesson required several coaching techniques that are not 'standard practice' but the lesson was short and emphatic. S learned about information and positioning and B practiced extensions of his current skills and had a demonstration of some higher level skills.

In the debrief S noted that the lesson had made an immediate impact on his riding, he felt more relaxed, was '*seeing far more*', was now planning his ride and was aware of his changed approach to what were significant hazards in his riding style.

Safe motorcycling is based upon good techniques and one of those techniques is taking in information and using it to make a flexible plan.

In this case there were numerous other coaching issues to address but prioritising and focusing on the key issues, utilising a clear 'gut feel' to decide upon what the right approach and then taking the courage to 'bend the rules' proved decisive.