



The Talent Code

GREATNESS ISN'T BORN.
IT'S GROWN. HERE'S HOW.



Daniel Coyle



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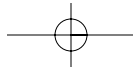
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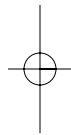


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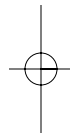
The Teaching Circuit: A Blueprint

*A teacher affects eternity; he can never
tell where his influence stops.*

—Henry Brooks Adams

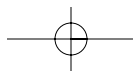


THE FOUR VIRTUES OF MASTER COACHES



Great teaching is a skill like any other. It only looks like magic; in fact, it is a combination of skills—a set of myelinated circuits built through deep practice. Ron Gallimore, who is now a distinguished professor emeritus at UCLA, has a good way of describing the skill. “Great teachers focus on what the student is saying or doing,” he says, “and are able, by being so focused and by their deep knowledge of the subject matter, to see and recognize the inarticulate stumbling, fumbling effort of the student who’s reaching toward mastery, and then connect to them with a targeted message.”

The key words of this sentence are *knowledge*, *recognize*, and *connect*. What Gallimore is saying, and what Jensen, Wooden, and Miss Mary are showing, links back to our thesis: *Skill is insulation that wraps neural circuits and grows according*



to certain signals. In the most literal sense, master coaches are the human delivery system for the signals that fuel and direct the growth of a given skill circuit, telling it with great clarity to fire *here* and *not here*. Coaching is a long, intimate conversation, a series of signals and responses that move toward a shared goal. A coach's true skill consists not in some universally applicable wisdom that he can communicate to all, but rather in the supple ability to locate the sweet spot on the edge of each individual student's ability, and to send the right signals to help the student reach toward the right goal, over and over. As with any complex skill, it's really a combination of several different qualities—what I have called “the four virtues.”

THE MATRIX: THE FIRST VIRTUE

The coaches and teachers I met at the talent hotbeds were mostly older. More than half were in their sixties or seventies. All had spent decades, usually several, intensively learning how to coach. This is not a coincidence; in fact, it's a prerequisite, because it builds the neural superstructure that is the most essential part of their skills—their matrix.

Matrix is Gallimore's word for the vast grid of task-specific knowledge that distinguishes the best teachers and allows them to creatively and effectively respond to a student's efforts. Gallimore explains it this way: “A great teacher has the capacity to always take it deeper, to see the learning the student is capable of and to go there. It keeps going deeper and deeper because the teacher can think about the material in so many different ways, and because there's an endless number of connections they can make.” Or as I would put it: years of work go into myelinating a master coach's circuitry, which

is a mysterious amalgam of technical knowledge, strategy, experience, and practiced instinct ready to be put to instant use to locate and understand where the students are and where they need to go. In short, the matrix is a master coach's killer application.

We'll see how the matrix functions in a moment; for now the point is that people are not born with this depth of knowledge. It's something they grow, over time, through the same combination of ignition and deep practice as any other skill.* One does not become a master coach by accident. Many of the coaches I met shared a similar biographical arc: they had once been promising talents in their respective fields but failed and tried to figure out why. A good example is Louisiana-born Linda Septien, who eventually founded the Septien Vocal Studio in Dallas, Texas.

Septien is a tanned, youthful fifty-four-year-old who tends toward skin-tight tracksuits and metallic sneakers, and who possesses a natural exuberance that allows her to move past obstacles that would discourage most people. This exuberance shows itself in the way she talks (quickly, candidly, italicizing key words) and drives her BMW (only seventeen speeding tickets last year, she informs me) but also in her approach to the ups and downs of life. During our first conversation at her studio, she mentioned that her house had caught fire last year. How big a fire? I asked.

* As Anders Ericsson would remind us, reaching world-class status requires ten thousand hours of deep practice. So why did the master coaches tend to be older? Perhaps it was just chance, or perhaps it reflected social forces (after all, most children don't grow up wanting to become a coach in the same way they grow up wanting to become Tiger Woods). Or perhaps it illustrates a unique double requirement that coaches not only grow proficient in their chosen field but also learn how to teach it effectively.

“I wasn’t there, but my neighbors said there were some *pret-ty* big explosions when the boat blew up,” she said. “It took six fire engines to put it out. I lost *everything*—my piano, passport, clothing, photos, toothbrush, all burned up. My cockatoo Cleo got singed, but she made it. I didn’t mind losing my stuff, but I minded losing the time—*that’s* what’s precious to me. I’ve had to move like six times in the last year while we built a new place, so that isn’t any fun. But you know what?” Septien gave me a frank, dazzling smile. “I like the new house better. I really do.”

Septien has had some practice rebuilding. In her early twenties she had a successful opera-singing career (performing with the New Orleans Symphony Orchestra) and a marriage to a famous football player, Dallas Cowboys placekicker Rafael Septien. But when she was in her late twenties, her opera career stalled out, and her marriage did likewise. In 1984, pregnant with her first child, on the verge of separating from her husband, she went to Nashville with the idea of making a transition to popular music and recording a Christian album. She auditioned with a team of record producers, singing “I’m a Miracle, Lord.” The audition went well, or so she thought.

“I sang *beautifully*; I hit every note,” she remembered. “And when it was finished, the producers sat there silently. I thought, ‘I’ve stunned them. They know I’m great.’”

Septien smiled ruefully. “Then they told me the truth: I was *terrible*. Awful. They didn’t care about notes, they cared about feeling, and I sang with no feeling, no passion, no story. I was a classical singer. I had *no* idea how to sell a song.

“I can’t tell you how much this bothered me. I thought I was really, really good, really talented, and here were some

guys who said flat out that I sucked—and they were right, I did suck. It made me really mad, and it also made me really curious. I wanted to figure out how to do this.”

Septien spent the next few months taking care of her new baby and studying big pop and rock acts: Tom Jones, the Rolling Stones, U2. She studied the way they sang, moved, and spoke. She took notes, scribbling on napkins and programs, tucking her findings into large three-ring binders. Septien approached pop music like a medical student, systematically dissecting its various systems. How did Tom Jones manage his breathing in “Delilah”? How did Bono use movement to convey emotion in his songs? What made Willie Nelson’s minimalist vocals so compelling? She watched audiences as much as artists, “to see what really turned them on.”

Despite all this work Septien’s singing career failed to lift off over the next few years. She made ends meet by selling real estate, working as a spokesperson, modeling, and on occasion teaching classical voice lessons out of her home. “It wasn’t like I was a good teacher,” she said. “I was the only ad for voice in the Dallas Yellow Pages.” When youthful acts like Debbie Gibson and Tiffany succeeded in the early 1990s, Septien saw a growing trickle of kids who wanted to be pop stars. “I said, why not? I knew pop music. I just had to figure out how to teach it.”

At first Septien taught pop the same way she’d learned classical, by teaching students to follow universal principles of technique. But that didn’t work. “Really quickly I switched and became more artist-focused,” she said. “I realized my job was to find out what worked for somebody and connect it to what worked in pop music. There was no system for doing that, so I had to invent my own.”

Septien dug into her binders and, over the next few years, created a curriculum that applied the rigor and structure of classical training to the world of pop. She mined Whitney Houston vocals for scale exercises. She developed programs for diaphragm exercises, ear training, and scat singing. Like Feinberg and Levin at KIPP, she was constantly experimenting with new approaches, discarding, trying again. She made performing a central element, arranging gigs for her students at malls, schools, and rodeos. She required students to write their own songs, importing professional songwriters to teach them how. Over the years the matrix of her knowledge expanded. That expansion accelerated in 1991, when an eleven-year-old named Jessica Simpson showed up at Septien's studio for a lesson.

"She sang 'Amazing Grace,'" Septien recalled. "Jessica had an infectious personality—real sweet, but she was painfully shy on stage. Plus, her voice needed a *lot* of work. It was beautiful, but it was churchy, which made sense because her dad was a minister. She had a big vibrato." Septien demonstrates, filling her office with pulsating sound. "You can't sing pop music with a vibrato. You ever seen a pair of vocal cords? They're pink and shaped like a V—they're muscles, basically. The vibrato meant that Jessica wasn't controlling her cords properly, so we had to work at tightening them up, like you would a guitar string.

"The other thing with Jessica was that she had no feel, no expression, no connection to the emotion of the music, the same as I was when I started out. So we had to work a lot on that, on gestures, movement, connection to the audience, which is a whole skill in itself. The audience is like a big animal out there; you've got to learn to control it, connect to it,

and make it breathe hard for more. Your voice can be incredible, but if you can't connect, it doesn't matter. But Jessica was a hard, hard worker. She really dove in."

It took two years to fix the vibrato, and a few more to learn stagecraft. By the time she was sixteen, after five years of working with Septien, Simpson had a record deal; three years later she had a 3.5 million-selling album and a platinum single, "I Wanna Love You Forever." Simpson was hailed as an overnight success, a term that continues to entertain Septien.

"Everybody said Jessica was a Texas girl who'd been singing in her church choir. That's ridiculous—that girl *worked* to become the singer she was. They said [*American Idol* winner] Kelly Clarkson was a waitress, like she never sang before. Waitress? Excuse me? Kelly Clarkson was a *singer*—we all knew Kelly Clarkson. She had training, and she worked her tail off like anybody else does. She didn't come from nowhere any more than Jessica came from nowhere. It's not magic, you know."

After Simpson, one thing led to another. Septien briefly worked with a rising Houston-area singer named Beyoncé Knowles, then used her ever-growing skills to develop and launch Ryan Cabrera, Demi Lovato, and several future *American Idol* finalists; her small studio became known as a star factory. On the day I was there, I heard singers from *High School Musical* and *Barney and Friends*, and a half-dozen pint-size Christina Aguileras. Septien was embarking on a roadshow for investors, seeking \$100 million to expand the school to what her financial adviser called "the Gap of music schools." More important, her matrix is now complete. As Septien puts it, "Someone can walk in that door, and I know I can figure them out in twenty seconds."

"There's nothing she hasn't considered, nothing you can

stump her with,” says Sarah Alexander, an ex-lawyer-turned-recording-artist who’s worked with Septien. “She has the cognitive understanding of what my vocal cords are doing at any moment and exactly how they could be better. She always had an explanation that made the problem surmountable. Linda takes good care of the small steps.”

“People see all the glitter and stage stuff, and they forget that vocal cords are just muscles,” Septien said. “*They . . . are . . . just . . . muscles.* What I do for myself as a teacher is no different from what I ask my students to do. I know what I’m doing because I put a lot of work into it. I’m no different from them. If you spend years and years trying hard to do something, you’d *better* get better at it. How dumb would I have to be if I didn’t?”

PERCEPTIVENESS: THE SECOND VIRTUE

The eyes are the giveaway. They are usually sharp and warm and are deployed in long, unblinking gazes. Several master coaches told me that they trained their eyes to be like cameras, and they share that same Panavision quality. Though the gaze can be friendly, it’s not chiefly about friendship. It’s about information. It’s about figuring you out.

When Gallimore and Tharp studied John Wooden in 1974, they were surprised to find that he distributed praise and criticism unevenly. Which is to say, certain players got a lot of praise; others got a lot of criticism. What’s more, he was open about this. During the team’s preseason meeting each year, Wooden would say, “I am not going to treat you players all the same. Giving you the same treatment doesn’t make sense, because you’re all different. The good Lord, in his infinite wisdom, did not make us all the same. Goodness gracious, if he had, this would be a boring world, don’t you think? You

are different from each other in height, weight, background, intelligence, talent, and many other ways. For that reason, each one of you deserves individual treatment that is best for you. I will decide what that treatment will be.”

Almost all the master coaches I met followed Wooden’s rule. They wanted to know about each student so they could customize their communications to fit the larger patterns in a student’s life. Football coach Tom Martinez, whom we’ll meet later, has a vivid metaphor for this process. “The way I look at it, everybody’s life is a bowl of whipped cream and shit, and my job is to even things out,” he said. “If a kid’s got a lot of shit in his life, I’m going to stir in some whipped cream. If a kid’s life is pure whipped cream, then I’m going to stir in some shit.”

On the macro level, the coaches I met approached new students with the curiosity of an investigative reporter. They sought out details of their personal lives, finding out about family, income, relationships, motivation. And on the micro level, they constantly monitored the student’s reaction to their coaching, checking whether their message was being absorbed. This led to a telltale rhythm of speech. The coach would deliver a chunk of information, then pause, hawkeyeing the listener as if watching the needle of a Geiger counter. As Septien put it, “I’m always checking, because I need to know when they don’t know.”

“They are listening on many levels,” Gallimore said. “They are able to use their words and behaviors as an instrument to move the student forward.”

THE GPS REFLEX: THE THIRD VIRTUE

“You gotta give them a lot of information,” said Robert Lansdorp, the tennis coach. “You gotta shock ’em, then shock ’em some more.”

Shock is an appropriate word. Most master coaches delivered their information to their students in a series of short, vivid, high-definition bursts. They never began sentences with “Please, would you” or “Do you think” or “What about”; instead they spoke in short imperatives. “Now do X” was the most common construction; the “you will” was implied. The directions weren’t dictatorial in tone (usually) but were delivered in a way that sounded clinical and urgent, as if they were being emitted by a particularly compelling GPS unit navigating through a maze of city streets: *turn left, turn right, go straight, arrival complete*.

For example, here is a transcript of three minutes of Linda Septien working with eleven-year-old singer Kacie Lynch on a song called “Mirror, Mirror.” On the page it reads as a monologue, but like any coaching it was actually a conversation: Kacie’s part was sung, Septien’s was spoken.

Kacie: (sings)

Linda: Okay, it’s a dance song, it’s not pretty, it’s not a power ballad. It moves quick, so be quick. Sing it like a trumpet.

K: (sings)

L: Add a scat on each of the ends—sing it like this: “You know how much he caa-aaares.”

K: (sings)

L: Fade the ending—it should be like a balloon running out of air.

K: (sings)

L: Use your diaphragm, not your face. Hold your tongue tighter there for a clearer sound.

K: (sings)

L: Get your cheeks back on the scats . . . almost . . . almost . . . *there* it is.

K: (sings)

L: Use your yawn muscles—you're using wimpy muscles there. *There* it is.

K: (finishes song)

L: That was okay, but I think you've got a better one in you.

K (nodding): Uh-huh.

L: Now you gotta go practice that a bunch bunch bunch bunch bunch.

K: Okay.

This is Septien's GPS reflex in action, producing a linked series of vivid, just-in-time directives that zap the student's skill circuit, guiding it in the right direction. In the space of a three-minute song, Septien sent signals on:

1. The goal/feeling of the whole song ("it's a dance song . . . like a trumpet").
2. The goal/feeling of certain sections (" . . . like a balloon; caa-aaares").
3. Highly specific physical moves required to hit certain notes ("cheeks back, tongue tighter, yawn muscles").

4. Motivation/goals (“you’ve got a better one in you . . . gotta go practice a bunch”).

Septien was concise, locating mistakes and their solutions in the same vivid stroke. She highlighted the crucial moments when Kacie hit the desired mark. (“*There* it is.”) Septien’s skill is not only her matrix of knowledge but also the lightning-fast connections she makes between that matrix and Kacie’s efforts, linking where Kacie is now with actions that will take her where she ought to go.*

Patience is a word we use a lot to describe great teachers at work. But what I saw was not patience, exactly. It was more like probing, strategic impatience. The master coaches I met were constantly changing their input. If A didn’t work, they tried B and C; if they failed, the rest of the alphabet was holstered and ready. What seemed like patient repetition from the outside was actually, on closer examination, a series of subtle variations, each one a distinct firing, each one creating a worthwhile combination of errors and fixes that grew myelin.

Of the many phrases I heard echoing around the talent hotbeds, one stood out as common to all of them. It was: “Good. Okay, now do ____.” A coach would employ it when a student got the hang of some new move or technique. As soon as the student could accomplish the feat (play that chord, hit that volley), the coach would quickly layer in an added difficulty. *Good. Okay, now do it faster. Now do it with the harmony.* Small successes were not stopping points but stepping-stones.

“One of the big things I’ve learned over the years is to

* It must have worked: a few months after this rehearsal, Kacie signed a recording contract with Universal Records.

push,” Septien said. “The second they get to a new spot, even if they’re still groping a little bit, I push them to the next level.”

“Push the buttons, push the buttons, push the buttons, and see what you can do,” Lansdorp said. “A mind is such a hands-on kind of thing. It’s fantastic!”

THEATRICAL HONESTY: THE FOURTH VIRTUE

Many of the coaches I met radiated a subtle theatrical air. Robert Lansdorp wore a snow-white pompadour and a black leather jacket and spoke in a booming Sinatra baritone. Septien’s sheeny outfits and flawless hair evoked a Hollywood star. Larisa Preobrazhenskaya (who trained in her youth as an actress) favored Gloria Swanson turban-style head wraps and spotless white track suits, and could go from a Brezhnev glower to a Betty White smile in a heartbeat. Lansdorp took positive glee in the characterizations he would play. “I’m a total put-on,” he said. “I raise my voice, lower my voice, ask questions, figure out how they react. I have all kinds of things I do; sometimes I’m mean and tough, sometimes I’m easygoing. It depends what works for that kid.”

It would be easy to conclude, from this pattern, that master coaches traffic in hokum. But the longer I saw them work, the more I saw that drama and character are the tools master coaches use to reach the student with the truth about their performance. As Ron Gallimore said, moral honesty is at the core of the job description—character in the deeper sense of the word. “Truly great teachers connect with students because of who they are as moral standards,” he said. “There’s an empathy, a selflessness, because you’re not trying to tell the student something they know, but are finding, in their effort, a place to make a real connection.”

Theatrical honesty works best when teachers are performing their most essential myelinating role: pointing out errors. For example, consider a KIPP math class taught by Lolita Jackson, whom we met earlier. For an hour and forty-five minutes, Jackson worked the room like a master heavy-equipment operator, flicking levers, controlling every move with the instrument of her voice, her body, her eyes. She was warm and encouraging one second, surprised the next, terrifying the next. At one point she found that a student named Geraldo had been figuring the circumference of a circle using the wrong formula.

“So why did you multiply by *four*?” she said, disbelief rising in her voice. Her finger jabbed the paper, a witness identifying a criminal in a lineup. “You had two right there. Right here! That’s where you made your error—*right there*. Right there!”

She turned to the class, and her face suddenly became friendly and open. The crime witness was gone, replaced by your kindest aunt. “Who else was confused about that? Don’t be shy. I’ll make sure you’re not confused by the time you leave here.”

Midway through class she mentioned that another student, José, who’d been struggling, recently scored well on a test. She walked over and stood close.

“You tell your parents [about the test]?”

José nodded.

“Did they like it? Did they like it? You gonna be like this until the end of the year?”

José said, “Yes, Ms. Jackson.”

She looked at him sternly. “You know what, José, I *don’t* like it. I don’t like it,” she said.

The class held its breath, and Ms. Jackson held the mo-

ment. Then she released a sunburst of a smile. “I don’t like it—I love it! I love it! I LOVE it!”

The class then did the circumference problem again, and again, and once again. First 80 percent of the class got it right, then 90, then 95 percent, then 100 percent, which they celebrated with a group stomp-clap.

“Do we have a better understanding? A better understanding?” Ms. Jackson said, summing up. “You don’t have a complete understanding of this, no way, we haven’t done it enough. But do we have a better understanding? YES!”

“I can connect with them because I know what I’m talking about,” Jackson told me afterward. “I didn’t go to college until my kids were in high school, and so I’ve been on both sides of that. I know the world they live in. This isn’t about *math*. I’m not teaching math. It’s about *life*. It’s about every single day being a new day, and each time you wake up, you look at the sky you’ve got as a gift. The day is here. What are you going to do with it?”

CIRCUIT-GROWING: WHY TEACHING SOCCER IS DIFFERENT FROM TEACHING VIOLIN

Given the coaches we’ve met so far, it’s tempting to conceptualize a master coach as a busy electrician, always zapping the student with helpful signals, soldering the myelin connections. That is often the case. But many other times the most masterful coaches are completely silent. Consider this conundrum: both Brazilian soccer academies and Suzuki violin instruction programs are remarkably good at developing world-class talent. Yet Brazilian soccer coaches talk very little, while Suzuki violin teachers talk a lot. To see why, let’s first look at them one by one.

Brazilian futsal practices are the essence of simplicity. The coach begins with a few cursory drills, then divides the team into two sides and lets them play an intense, full-throttle game, during which the coach rarely says a word. The coach is attentive. He occasionally smiles or laughs or says *oooooooo* for a close play as a fan would. But he doesn't coach in the regular sense of the term, which is to say he doesn't stop the game, teach, praise, critique, or otherwise exert any control whatsoever. On the surface, this laid-back approach would seem to violate the basic precepts of master coaching. How can you build skill if you don't stop the action, give information, praise, and correct?

At the other end of the spectrum is a Suzuki violin lesson. Here the teacher monitors beginners with microscopic precision. Some programs do not permit the student to play a note until she has spent several weeks learning how to hold the bow and violin. (In Japan many Suzuki students aren't allowed even to touch the violin for the first few weeks but are given shoeboxes with strings to practice the holds.) Suzuki training is the photographic negative of Brazilian futsal: it's 100 percent structure and zero free play. Yet judging by impressive results, both coaching techniques (or seeming lack thereof) seem to work extremely well. Why?

The answer lies in at the nature of the skill circuits that each technique is trying to develop. From the myelin point of view, the two coaches only look as if they are doing the opposite thing. In fact, they are both doing precisely what good coaches should do: they are helping the right circuit to fire as often as possible. The difference is the shape of the circuits each is trying to grow.

In skill circuits, as in any electrical circuit, form follows function. Different skills require different patterns of action,

thus differently structured circuits. For instance, visualize what's happening inside the nervous system of a soccer player as she moves downfield on a breakaway. The ideal soccer circuitry is varied and fast, changing fluidly in response to each obstacle, capable of producing a myriad of possible options that can fire in liquid succession: now *this, this, this*, and *that*. Speed and flexibility are everything; the faster and more flexible the circuit, the more obstacles can be overcome, and the greater that player's skill. If ideal soccer circuitry were rendered as an electrician's blueprint, it would look like a gargantuan hedge of ivy vines: a vast, interconnected network of equally accessible possibilities (a.k.a. fakes and moves) leading to the same end: Pelé dribbling downfield alone.

Now visualize the circuitry that fires when a violinist plays a Mozart sonata. This circuit is not a vinelike tangle of improvisation but rather a tightly defined series of pathways designed to create—or more accurately, re-create—a single set of ideal movements. Consistency rules; when the violinist plays an A-minor chord, it must always be an A-minor chord, and not a smidgen off. This circuit of precision and stability serves as the foundation on which other, increasingly complex patterns can be constructed to form that Mozart sonata. If ideal violin-playing circuitry were also rendered as an electrician's blueprint, it would look like an oak tree: a solid trunk of technique growing straight upward, branching off into realms of pure fluency—Itzhak Perlman flying through high canopies of sixteenth notes.

During that “uncoached” futsal practice in São Paolo, the players' flexible-skill circuits are firing with great speed and intensity. The game serves as a factory of precisely the sort of encounters that coaches want to teach, along with the benefit of instant feedback: when a move doesn't work, the ball is

taken away, and *humiliado* results; when it does work, the result is the ecstasy of a goal. To stop the game in order to highlight some technical detail or give praise would be to interrupt the flow of attentive firing, failing, and learning that is the heart of flexible-circuit deep practice. The lessons the players teach themselves are more powerful than anything the coach might say.*

The beginner violinist represents the opposite case. Here the circuit needs not just to be fired but to be fired correctly. The high level of coaching input is a reflection of a crucial physiological fact: this circuit will form the core of the oak's trunk. The coach's actions form a kind of trellis, to direct the seedling's growth precisely where it needs to go. (Which doesn't mean the process needs to be unnecessarily solemn, by the way. The Suzuki teachers I've met are charming and charismatic, able to turn holding a shoebox into an enjoyable game.)

Skills like soccer, writing, and comedy are flexible-circuit skills, meaning that they require us to grow vast ivy-vine circuits that we can flick through to navigate an ever-changing set of obstacles. Playing violin, golf, gymnastics, and figure skating, on the other hand, are consistent-circuit skills, depending utterly on a solid foundation of technique that enables us to reliably re-create the fundamentals of an ideal performance. (This is why self-taught violinists, skaters, and gymnasts rarely reach world-class level and why self-taught

* It's also a lot more fun—a point not lost on Fernando, the twenty-something son of Emilio Miranda, the professor of soccer at the University of São Paulo. Fernando went to college in Virginia and came back mystified by the coach's role in the game. "In America, everyone is yelling all the time. Telling the kids, 'Shoot the ball, pass the ball!' I once saw a kid wearing a shirt that said 'THERE ARE NO EASY DAYS.'" Fernando made a confused face. "No easy days, when you're ten? The play should be easy, fun, nice. To be so serious is not good."

novelists, comedians, and soccer players do all the time.) The universal rule remains the same: good coaching supports the desired circuit. The passive Brazilian coach and the highly involved Suzuki teacher only seem to use different methods; when we look closer, we see that their goal is the same as that of John Wooden or Mary Epperson or any other master coach: to get inside the deep-practice zone, to maximize the firings that grow the right myelin for the task, and ultimately to move closer toward the day that every coach desires, when the students become their own teachers.

“If it’s a choice between me telling them to do it, or them figuring it out, I’ll take the second option every time,” Lansdorp said. “You’ve got to make the kid an independent thinker, a problem-solver. I don’t need to see them every day, for chrissake. You can’t keep breast-feeding them all the time. The point is, they’ve got to figure things out for themselves.”