



Alistair Smith is the Chairman of Alite Ltd, a UK based company specialising in human motivation and learning. Alite Ltd are the designated learning consultants to FA Learning. Alistair has helped the FA develop their unique approach to learning and coaching. To find out more about Alistair and Alite visit the website at [www.alite.co.uk](http://www.alite.co.uk)

## LEARNING

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### FAKING IT

What does a chess playing computer geek called Maximillion Devereaux have to tell you about becoming a soccer coach? Max featured in a Channel Four Television Programme called 'Faking It' broadcast here in the UK last week. The premise of the programme is that anyone can be trained to become convincing enough in three weeks to persuade a panel of experts that they are the 'real thing.' Max, coached along the way by Wally Downes, Manager of Brentford FC to become a soccer coach, blew it! What was interesting, given the limitations of the programme, was that he failed because he didn't know what to do with his hands when he was watching the game and when asked about tactics he was too open and gave too much detail. Nothing about tactics, coaching methods and deep knowledge of the game. He didn't fold his arms enough! They saw through him straight away!

Great coaches model the behaviours and patterns of response they espouse. Be consistent in your philosophy because it will emerge in your unguarded moments and be there for all to see. Own to mistakes if necessary. Here's what Gordon Strachan says about modelling behaviours:

"Most managers have always recognised that players have different personalities and temperaments and that it is asking for trouble to try and motivate them all in the same way, but this is particularly true now. It can take time for a manager to really get to know his players and mistakes are inevitable. I have certainly made mistakes in this department - there have been a couple of occasions when my approach to a player has been too abrasive for him to handle and, minded, I have apologised to him for this a day or two later."

We talked last week about modelling values. What is obvious is that this modelling is expressed in the little things as well. In learning, the most natural mode of learning is mimicry. It's seen throughout the animal kingdom and, in fact, our brain is set up with mirror neurons whose function is to help us replicate gestures and movements which we see around us. Humans are configured to observe, mimic - and through repetition, learn. Some research suggests that it takes as few as forty replications of a behaviour for that behaviour to become a habit. When you are with your team they are watching your every move and making up their minds if your behaviours are worth mimicking! So great care needs to be taken in the sort of behaviours you choose. If you want your players to be problem solvers then model problem solving behaviours. If you want them to be leaders model leadership behaviours. If you want them to blow hot and cold, be unpredictable, moody and inconsistent then model those.

For a coach think about learning as a process which goes beyond the confines of drills and routines and continues throughout every aspect of your relationship with your players. Ask yourself the question, how does what I do demonstrate

what I value and believe in? Of course if your not sure what you value and believe in, then you might not know what to do with your hands...