Climbing The Coaching LADDER

The complete guide on how to get the job of your dreams.
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INTRODUCTION

When most people hear the phrase “climbing the coaching ladder” they think of the process of advancing their coaching career. When I hear “climbing the coaching ladder,” I think of literally climbing a ladder and cutting down the nets after winning a championship! But I guess the more I think about it, the more I realize that you really can’t climb the one ladder without climbing the other one first.

I am assuming that if you are reading this report then you are already somehow involved in the coaching profession. You might be a college or high school assistant or you might be coaching your own middle school, youth, or summer club team. Maybe you are still in college yourself and are volunteering your time to help the local freshmen or J.V. team. Regardless of your official title, I want to congratulate you for coaching the greatest sport on earth and on your decision to take your skills and talents to the “next level.”

For the most part, this report is being written for those who want to coach in some type of school setting where the hiring procedures and practices are a little more stringent and where the competition to secure the position is a little fiercer than those in club situations.

Just a strong, but very realistic, word of warning as we get started: Many young coaches find it extremely difficult to get that first real job. Not just a good job but any job. Because several NBA and college coaches have reached celebrity status and are paid extremely well, more and more and more aspiring coaches are determined to some day roam the sidelines in front of a national TV audience, and so competition for jobs is at an all time high. Whatever you do, don’t become discouraged. Learn from the process. Continue to improve and sharpen your skills both on and off the court. Abraham Lincoln once said “I will get ready and then perhaps, my chance will come.” Don’t wait for the job to open before you start preparing. Prepare first – and then start climbing!
The first thing you need to do, if you haven’t done so already, is to give some serious thought and consideration concerning your long and short term coaching goals because they could have a huge impact on your choice of career path. In other words, if your ultimate goal is to coach at a major college or university you might want to pursue that opportunity differently than you would if you want to coach high school varsity.

What I mean by that is this: it is my own personal opinion based on my own observations and experience that if you want to coach at the middle school, high school, and possibly even junior college levels then you want to position yourself where you can climb UP the coaching ladder. If you want to coach basketball at a major college or university then it may be easier and more beneficial to work your way DOWN or ACROSS the coaching ladder.

Let’s look at the possible middle school/high school/junior college scenario first. The normal career path is to possibly start at the middle school as let’s say the seventh grade coach. You do a good job and then move up to coach the eighth grade team. Do another good job and move up to coach the high school’s freshmen team and then eventually the JV team and ultimately the Varsity squad. You are moving UP the ladder - pretty straightforward stuff.

But here’s where it gets tricky:

I don’t have the exact numbers and I’m not even sure they even keep official stats on something like this - but how many high school coaches are hired to coach at the university level? Very, very, very, few!

Why? Because coaching in college requires some additional skill sets than the ones needed to coach in high school. The ability to recruit a diverse population after correctly evaluating talent, use video editing equipment, oversee large staffs and budgets, make travel arrangements, fulfill extensive public speaking and public relations commitments, and work more closely with the media are just some of the extra skills that a college coach needs in addition to being an X’s & O’s expert. Obviously, all of these skills can be learned and eventually mastered but most college athletic directors are not willing to pay relatively large sums of money to someone who needs extensive “on the job” training.
Because of this, if your goal is to eventually coach at the college or university level then you may be better off starting at that level and working your way DOWN or ACROSS. Now I fully realize that is much easier said than done, but so are most accomplishments of great value. However, at least considering this option may save you from being eventually shocked and disappointed when you discover that moving up is much more difficult than moving across or down.

If you were to do a little informal research you would discover that overwhelmingly the vast majority of college coaches somehow got their foot in the door at a relatively young age and continued working with college programs, completely bypassing the opportunity to work at lower levels. Then when they acquired the skill sets necessary to qualify for other college coaching positions they either moved across, from one Division 1 job to another Division 1 job for example, or they moved down, from Division 1 to Division 2 or Division 3. Even getting a high school coaching job can be made easier by moving down. If you are the athletic director at Fairfax High School are you more likely to hire the eighth grade coach from Fremont Middle School or the third assistant coach from Kentucky?

Of course, the same holds true at lower levels as well. If you have coaching high school varsity basketball on your resume, you are going to be at least considered for every middle school or youth coaching position you eventually apply for.

**GETTING YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR**

Let’s take a quick look at the various positions and responsibilities that make up a major college coaching staff.

**Head Coach**

The head coach is obviously responsible for overseeing the entire basketball program and everything that entails. Where all college basketball teams used to be considered by everyone as part of the college, some basketball programs are now seemingly separate organizations and many are perceived to be bigger than the college itself. As coaching staffs continue to grow, many head coaches today are more CEO than coach. In many cases leadership and organizational skills are more important than understanding X’s and O’s and how to teach the game.

At the highest levels of college coaching, individuals are being hired as head coaches on the basis of their ability to be the “face of the program.” With public relations and fundraising in
the forefront, head coaches need to have strong, almost charismatic personalities and exceptional communication skills. John Calipari (Kentucky), Brad Stevens (Butler), Geno Auriemma (UCONN) and Pat Summitt (Tennessee) are all examples of coaches who are the “face” of their programs and possibly even their university’s “face” as well.

**Assistant Coach**

Most major college staffs now have three assistant coaches and in many cases, the bigger the program the more actual coaching responsibilities these assistants have because of the extraordinary time demands placed on the head coach. On some staffs the assistants are equal in terms of title, responsibility, and salary while in other programs there is a clear distinction between the first, second, and third assistant.

Typically, one of the assistants is designated as the recruiting coordinator and oversees all potential player evaluations, correspondence, and home and campus visits. All staff members, including the head coach, have various recruiting responsibilities, but the organization and delegation of those responsibilities falls on the shoulders of the coordinator. A separate assistant may be assigned as the scouting director and is responsible to oversee all pregame preparation. Again, all coaches may alternate opponents when it comes preparing the scouting report and relaying the information to the team, but one assistant is in charge of making sure everything is done correctly and in a timely manner. In addition to these main responsibilities, one of these coaches will primarily focus on developing the team’s post players while the other will work mainly with the perimeter players.

The third assistant’s responsibilities are a little more diverse. The following job description was taken from a recent posting on [www.ncaa.org](http://www.ncaa.org) by a college basketball program looking to hire a third assistant.

“Responsibilities include assisting the head coach in all areas including, but not limited to: coaching, individual workouts, weight training, administrative duties, recruiting qualified student-athletes, supervising academic progress, game scouting and preparations and film breakdown. Must have knowledge of computer systems.”

Colleges and universities with smaller budgets often fill this spot on their staff with a **Graduate Assistant**, who receives a stipend and/or tuition waiver for graduate school in exchange for coaching. *This graduate assistant position can be an enormous stepping stone for a coach looking to get his foot in the door and break into college coaching!* Graduate assistants are typically on staff for only two years, the length of graduate school, and so there is often a much higher turnover rate than there is in other assistant positions. Even though the responsibilities may be more “behind the scenes,” the fact is that for the rest of his life that graduate assistant will be able to honestly list “Assistant Coach” on his resume as he attempts
to climb the coaching ladder. On top of that he will have earned a graduate degree at the same time, making himself even more marketable.

**Director of Basketball Operations**

This staff position is almost entirely administrative and in fact used to be referred to “Administrative Assistant” in a lot of programs. While this individual is prohibited by the NCAA from doing any on the floor coaching, it does provide a great entry level opportunity to develop skill sets that relate to nearly all aspects of a college program, and it is a natural progression for the DOBO to eventually move into an assistant coaching position.

The following was submitted by the University of Hawaii to www.ncaa.org when looking for a Director of Basketball Operations:

“Responsible for managing the budget of the program, promoting the program and day-to-day administrative operations, including communication with both internal & external constituencies, facility scheduling, film exchange and summer camps.

Responsible for planning and coordinating all aspects of team travel for away contests, including but not limited to developing travel itineraries, transportation and hotel arrangements, meals, coordinating practice sites and times that meet NCAA rules and regulations. Ensures per diems are allocated to the appropriate players, coaches and others in the traveling party prior to travel. Reconciles all travel expenses. Serves as liaison to the Athletics Compliance Office on all travel related issues and other issues that arise around NCAA rules and regulations.

Responsible for securing facility needs on a day-to-day basis for all home and away practice times.

Responsible for collaborating with visiting teams to coordinate scheduling of practice time and assisting the visiting teams with game day needs such as pre-game meals.

Responsible for hiring, supervising and evaluating team managers and game day ball boys.

Responsible for organizing all aspects of prospect official recruiting visits and on-campus contacts (e.g. facility scheduling, schedule activities while visiting, host coordination, hotel accommodation, meal schedule and flight arrangements, transportation, campus meetings with personnel such as the faculty and athletic staff, etc.)”

**Video Coordinator**

The position of video coordinator is another one that has evolved over the years in response to skyrocketing advances in technology. Coaches have watched game tapes for decades but now with a lap top and some video editing software, tape can be a much more effective teaching tool than ever before. In a matter of minutes, coaches and players can be watching a tape made up entirely of an opponent running their most widely used plays and sets. Players can watch individual highlight tapes to either build their confidence or to correct possible flaws. Because video coordinators spend so much time reviewing tape and discussing what’s
important to the coaching staff, they are able to gain some insights they couldn’t get anywhere else.

Here are the posted responsibilities and skill sets involved in being a video coordinator:

Responsibilities will include, but are not limited to: coordinating all video filming including practices, games, and putting the videos into the editing systems to provide another resource to the men’s basketball staff and student-athletes in preparation of competing against other teams; coordinating all film exchange; coordinating and overseeing the use of XOS software, provide the coaching staff with the resources to assist in game preparation; complete understanding of NCAA and CAA film exchange policy and procedures; organization of all game films, practice films, edits, etc.; overseeing all travel with XOS software, with utilization of the software on the road. The successful candidate must have full understanding of implementation of XOS system including server functionality, downloading of games, splicing of edits; and must be able to communicate effectively with other NCAA institutions in areas of film exchange.

**Director of Social Media**

Adolph Rupp, John Wooden, Dean Smith, and Bobby Knight would never in a million years have guessed that someday coaching staffs would employ a Director of Social Media but that day is here and now. It used to be that athletic departments would have a Sports Information Director who would write and distribute a weekly press release highlighting that week’s results and previewing upcoming games. Today we live in an age of instant communication and fans, boosters, and recruits want to feel like an insider and insist on being more connected than ever before. To meets those demands, social media directors are constantly updating the program’s web site, posting on Facebook, sending out Tweets, and maintaining a team blog.

Whoever is fulfilling these responsibilities has their foot firmly planted on the coaching ladder.

**Student Manager**

Hall of Fame coach Don Meyer often warns aspiring assistant coaches that they must be prepared to “suck scum” when they first start out. Well nobody sucks more scum than do student managers. Handing out towels and water, cleaning locker rooms, hauling equipment & supplies and running seemingly meaningless errands for the coaching staff are only part of a manager’s duties. Fortunately, the other part includes assuming many different roles and participating in various ways during practices and games, attending to the needs of visiting coaches, and being in constant contact with influential coaching movers and shakers. Managers who take their responsibilities and opportunities seriously can establish a nationwide reputation that is capable of launching a college coaching career if they so wish.
Will being involved in any of these entry level positions really make you a better coach? It’s possible but it’s certainly not guaranteed. What is guaranteed, however, is that being involved in any of these roles will make you a college coaching insider and will increase your credibility among college head coaches and Athletic Directors. In other words, it’s going to make you more marketable to those who do the actually hiring!

It is this combination of credibility, experience, and marketability that often makes it easier and more practical to move down or across when climbing the college coaching ladder than moving up.

CREATE A PERSONAL BRAND

Let’s be honest – we live in a world dominated by effective marketing and branding. Countless corporations, politicians, movie stars, athletes, singers, and other professionals all rely on marketing strategies and techniques to start, build, improve, and prolong their careers. Basketball coaches should be no different!

There are numerous resources readily available that are designed to help someone create a personal brand, but for simplicity sake there are essentially four steps in establishing a coaching identity.

1. **Fake it until you make it.** No one is going to buy into your own personal brand unless you do. From this point on you need to ooze extreme confidence when it comes to anything and everything dealing with coaching. I’m not saying you should be a conceited jerk but you have to believe that you have what it takes to be extremely successful. All people, including school administrators and Athletic Directors, are impressed and drawn to strong, confident personalities.

   One way to do this is to “act if.” Act as if you have already accomplished your goals and you’ll be shocked at how things change for the better. How do D1 coaches act and carry themselves? What about championship caliber Varsity coaches? Whatever you want to be in the future should dictate how you act now. Make your life a self-fulfilling prophecy!

2. **Become an Expert.** What do you do already or what can you do that can make you famous? Start with one area and make a commitment to completely dominate everything that pertains to it. Become an expert recruiter, fundraiser, motivator, or developer of individual talent. Learn everything you can about how to take complex concepts and make them simple to understand. Master all the technology that you can and create new and improved ways to relate it to coaching. There are a lot of people who can do several things fairly well but since coaching is a results oriented
profession you are better off becoming great in one single area and then find your niche. And then only after you’ve done that then pick another area and become an expert in that one too! Keep asking yourself, “what can I master that will add the greatest value to the players and coaches I work with?”

3. **Visibility, Visibility, Visibility.** There’s a good reason why Super Bowl commercials are the most expensive 30 seconds in the advertising industry and you already know what it is. But you don’t have to saturate the TV and radio airwaves, magazine covers, or billboards to increase your professional visibility. Use Facebook, Twitter, and Linkedin to connect with as many people as possible.

Most importantly, go where other coaches go. Attend every camp, clinic, all star game, Final Four, etc. etc. that you possibly can and introduce yourself to everyone in the building and leave them with your contact information. (Remember that it doesn’t matter how many people that you know but how many people know you!) Let everyone see and feel the passion you have about your area of expertise and make them glad they talked to you!

4. **Everything Counts!** When creating a personal brand and a professional identity you must NEVER forget that everything counts! How you speak; your body language; how you act when you think no one is watching; your work ethic; your integrity. You are ALWAYS auditioning for your next job. If you goal is to move up the coaching ladder and be a head coach somewhere you have to be qualified to be the “face of the program.” More so than ever in this day of instant communication, it may takes years to build a solid, iron clad reputation and only a couple minutes to destroy one!

**COMMIT TO CONSTANT PERSONAL & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Establishing your goals, getting your foot in the door and creating a personal brand are steps in the right direction and will give the opportunity to be noticed but it is also up to you to provide employers with a reason to hire you.

As coaches we are always stressing to our players the importance of individual skill development work if they want to take their game to the next level. Well, what is good advice for our players is good advice for us as well. Preparation is crucial here. Coaches who put off developing and improving their skill sets until they get their next job may never get their next job! (And may eventually lose the one that they have!)
There are six main areas that should be the focus of your individual skill development:

1. **X’s & O’s.** You can’t coach basketball if you don’t know basketball. Even though you may only use a fraction of the total basketball knowledge you have each season, it’s imperative that you know our great game inside and out. You need to know that you are prepared for anything and everything. Your future employers need to know that and your players absolutely need to know it! That’s why BasketballClassroom.com is such a wise choice because you can get a lifetime of information for less money than it would cost to travel and attend one weekend clinic – and not just any information but things have been used and proven to win championships!

2. **Communication Skills.** Coaching and communicating are nearly synonymous. To be an effective coach you have to be able to communicate with people of all ages, races, economic backgrounds, and education levels. Not only do you have to possess the necessary skills and confidence to talk to anyone about anything but you also need to have outstanding writing and listening skills. The only way to sharpen your communication skills is to practice them. Make a deliberate effort to talk to several different types of people every day. Join Toastmaster’s where you can polish your public speaking and listening skills. Keep a daily journal where you can not only keep a record of your climb but also have an outlet to improve your writing.

3. **Sports Psychology.** The game is much more mental now than ever before. Parents have gone to such great lengths to protect their children from disappointment and adversity, that kids just aren’t as mentally tough as those in previous generations. Fewer athletes are playing solely because they love the sport and so much of their motivation is extrinsic not intrinsic. Being able to motivate athletes and getting them mentally tougher without breaking their fragile spirits has become a necessity in the coaching profession and are skills that you need to possess and develop.

4. **Teaching.** While this is closely related to communication skills, there is more to it than that. Kids play so many games over the summer that some of their individual skills are lacking and that means coaches have to teach more effectively so they can accomplish more in less time. Coaches now need to be able to explain the “why” as well as the “how” and the best teachers can take complex concepts and make them remarkably simple.
5. **Recruiting.** I can’t possibly emphasize this strongly enough - If you have any aspirations to coach in college then becoming an outstanding recruiter is the number one perquisite. However, even if you are not looking to join a college staff, recruiting skills are useful to all coaches at all levels. For example, every middle school and high school coach will at some point have the need to “recruit” an in school athlete from another team in order to fill out or to improve his roster. Assistant coaches, managers, booster club members, scorekeepers, and even concession stand volunteers also usually need to be “recruited” at one time or another.

One of the easiest ways to learn some valuable recruiting techniques and skills is to study several of the myriad of books and audio program that have been produced primarily for salesman. All of these resources offer suggestions on how to handle objections so you don’t always have to take “No” for an answer. There is also a website at [www.sellingforcoaches.com](http://www.sellingforcoaches.com) that is designed to help college coaches expand their recruiting knowledge.

6. **Technology.** The use of technology in coaching is rapidly increasing each and every year and provides a great opportunity for younger coaches to make their mark on the profession. Most older, more experienced head coaches are not as technologically savvy as many younger coaches yet they need a certain level of expertise on their staffs. For example, an advanced working knowledge of video editing software would make you much more marketable and the ability to use such programs as Excel and PowerPoint are now minimum qualifications for many coaching jobs.

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**NETWORK CONSTANTLY**

Given the choice, and with everything else being equal, most people would rather hire someone that they already know and have a relationship with than a complete stranger. This being true, the more people that you know, and more importantly, the more people that know you, the better off you are in terms of professional advancement.

Now again, there are countless books and self help programs designed to give you hundreds of ideas and suggestions, but networking can be quickly boiled down into two basic steps.

1. Meet the right people
2. Develop a personal and/or professional relationship with them

Exactly how to do that is the subject of another BasketballClassroom special report but for now let it suffice to say that you must be relentless in expanding your circle of professional relationships if you are serious about climbing the coaching ladder.
THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Network, network, network
- Attend every camp, clinic, and all star game possible. You can network, be visible, and hear about job opportunities through the “rumor mill.”
- Don’t limit yourself geographically. If you are going to coach for a living you are going to relocate at some point. Guaranteed.
- Log on to www.ncaamarket.ncaa.org and sign up for the Job Agent service and receive an email notification every time a job is posted
- If you’re not currently coaching then volunteer with the “biggest” program you can. It’s easier to get a coaching job when you already have a coaching job.
- Make sure your resume is always up to date. Sometimes the window of opportunity is only open for a short time.
- Be honest on all applications and on your resume. Nearly everything can be verified or discredited using the internet and you have to assume that employers are going to check you out thoroughly.
- Line up personal references before hand and let them know they may be getting a phone call. Being caught off guard will probably not work in your favor.
- You are always auditioning for your next job! “Make the big time where you are.”
- Don’t get ahead of yourself. The task at hand is to get an interview and then go from there.
- Practice answering the interview questions here in this Special Report. Get a small tape recorder (a web cam would be even better) and record yourself answering the questions. Would you hire you based on your answers?

WRITING AN IMPRESSIVE COVER LETTER

An impressive cover letter will undoubtedly not land you a coaching job by itself, but it can help you make the first “cut” and get your name and resume in front of the hiring committee. However, a poorly written cover letter can fast track the rest of your application materials straight to the shredder. Here are some things to consider:

Send your cover letter to the right person. Before you start writing, do some research and find out who is actually doing the hiring. Is it the school’s Head Coach, the Athletic Director, the Vice President of Student Services, the Principal, the President, etc. etc.? A cover letter that opens with “Dear Dr. Kraby” makes a stronger first impression than one that says “To Whom it May Concern.”
If the job opening is part time (no teaching contract included) at a high school or middle school then the Athletic Director is probably the one who will make the final decision. The same is true if you are applying for a head coaching job at a major four year college or university. If there is a teaching position involved, then there is usually a hiring committee made up of both athletic and academic representatives but there will a designated “Committee Chairman.” That is the name that should be on your cover letter.

**What if you’re emailing the cover letter?** Make sure you are emailing it to the right person and send a copy to anyone else who would benefit from seeing it. Some applications require that the email’s subject line contains your name and the position that is open. If this isn’t a requirement, then feel free to be creative as long as you don’t sound obnoxious or too over the top. Something like “Championship Coach Ready to Get Started” is catchy but not overbearing.

**Introduction.** Use the first paragraph to introduce yourself and to mention the coaching job that you are applying for. If appropriate you can mention the name of the person who told you about the opening, especially if that person is on staff or somehow associated with the school or athletic department. “I ran into Assistant Principal Hoffman while on vacation recently and he suggested that I should apply for the job.” A subtle endorsement like this should help you make the first cut.

This is also a good place to mention something very specific about the school, athletic department, or even current basketball program. Let the reader know that this isn’t a form letter, that you are aware of what is going on and that you just don’t want any coaching job, you want *this* particular coaching job.

**Education and Coaching Experience.** This next paragraph should be a four or five sentence highlight tape. Be concise and don’t exaggerate. “In my three years at Acme High School we won two league championships and one region championship, even though the program had never had a winning season before.” The more successful experience you’ve had the less you need to emphasize your education and training and vice versa.

**Why You?** Here’s where you take several sentences and explain why you’re the right coach for the job. Go into detail about why you love coaching and how the team, athletic department, and school can benefit from having you on staff. Let the reader feel your passion for teaching the game and explain in concise detail how your players will benefit from your knowledge and experience.

**Final Wrap Up.** Use the last paragraph to tie everything together and to exude confidence that you will be hearing from them soon to set up an interview. Encourage them to contact you at any time if they have further questions. If you are emailing your cover letter you
should also remind the readers that your resume is attached or provide a link so they can access it online.

**Closing.** End your letter by including your full name and all of your contact information – all of your phone numbers, email address, personal web site, etc. When finished, proof read the letter very carefully and pay attention to every detail. Immediately correct any spelling or grammar mistakes that your word processing program may have detected. Don’t give your future employers even the slightest excuse to “cut” you from the pool of applicants. It might even help if you read the letter out loud to someone else to see if it sounds forced and awkward or if it flows smoothly.

**RESUME**

No one is ever closer to perfection than they are when they write their own resume! School Administrators and Athletic Directors all realize this so you need to be very careful when putting together your resume.

In September 2008, Helen Wheelock offered some valuable insight on her blog “Unintentional Journalist,” when she posted these statements:

“The only thing résumés do for me is give me a reason to eliminate candidates,” said Eric Schoh, Athletic Director at Division II Wayne State College (NE). “In college coaching, there are an overwhelming number of applications for every position. So to get 100+ applications down to a manageable pool, you have to have ways to eliminate people. We always ask for excellent communication skills – both written and oral. If you can’t submit a résumé without typos, or one that is concise and easily readable, then they obviously don’t have excellent written communication skills.

“I think you need to list where you are at now, and a lot of people don’t do that. They list what they think was their best accomplishment first. If they had better luck at a different school, they list that first. I’m looking for a résumé in chronological order so that I can clearly follow their progress. The initial application is not the time for coaches to submit booklets on how they run a program or their coaching philosophy or team rules,” Schoh added. “I want the basics, and I want it well written.”

Don’t risk being eliminated from consideration because of your resume. Use a professional resume service or at least an up to date software program that can guide you through the process to ensure that the resume you submit is impressive, informative, and professional.
PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Everything that you have done up to this point is to put yourself in a position to be granted an interview so you can sit face to face in front of an individual or group of individuals and convince them to give you the opportunity to coach the game you love.

If you are even a half way decent coach you have undoubtedly never gone into a game without being as well prepared as possible. You know that it’s nearly impossible to be completely prepared for every potential scenario that might arise during the course of a game but that doesn’t stop you from trying. You also know that when the ball is tossed up, the time for preparation is over.

The exact same approach must be taken when it comes to interviewing. It’s nearly impossible to be completely prepared for every potential situation that might arise during the course of an interview but that shouldn’t; it mustn’t keep you from trying. When that first question is tossed your way the time for preparation is over.

Here are 7 ways you can prepare for the interview

1. **Review and answer potential interview questions.** While we don’t know the exact questions that you’ll be asked in your interview, we do have a pretty good idea. We’ve collected samplings of those questions from several different sources and have included them in the next section of this Special Report. We’ve even listed them under three separate categories: General, Middle School or High School, and College & University. Read through the questions and practice answering them. Have someone “interview” you by asking you the questions in random order and then answer those questions out loud. (Encourage your interviewer to occasionally throw in a random curve ball by asking you a question about something not on the list.) Write the questions on 3x5 note cards and review them like you would flashcards when studying for a big test.

2. **Decide beforehand what you want to tell the committee about yourself** and then steer the interview in that direction. I’m not saying that you shouldn’t answer the questions but instead am suggesting that you answer them in such a way that gets your intended message across. For example, most of the coaching success I’ve enjoyed has been built around three main concepts: relentless work ethic, preparing players for the next level, and rock solid relationships. Now I have thought about these concepts so much that when anyone asks me a question about my team or overall program, whether it be a recruit, a parent, a newspaper reporter, or interviewer, my answer is woven around at least one of the three themes. Too many coaching candidates approach interview situations from a defensive standpoint when they might see better results if they were on offense once in a while.
3. **Arrive early.** Not just to the interview location but to the city if you are interviewing out of town. Get a feel for the campus, the facilities, and the city. Get a copy of the local newspaper. Can you see yourself living and working there? If not, it’s better to find out before you ace the interview and accept the job.

4. **Dress for success.** We all like to say “Don’t judge a book by its cover,” even though we know it’s not true. Earlier in this report we talked about how head coaches are often hired in part due to their ability to be the “face” of the program. Dressing professionally demonstrates respect for yourself, for the job, and for the hiring committee. No one has ever been passed over for a coaching job because they were dressed well, but who knows how many have been passed over because they weren’t!

5. **Smile, Eye Contact, Handshake.** Whether its 30 second speed dating or hour long interviews, people are impressed and even attracted to individuals who ooze confidence. As you are introduced to everyone who will be involved in the hiring process, look them straight in the eye, smile, and shake their hand firmly. Then when answering interview questions, keep your head up and make eye contact with every person during every answer. Not only will this scream confidence and self assurance but it will also give you the opportunity to quickly judge everyone’s reaction to your response.

6. **Prepare and distribute professional handouts.** This can be as simple as a one page explanation of your overall coaching philosophy or as complex as a 50 page portfolio outlining your entire program. It might even be a team handbook that would normally be distributed to team members and assistant coaches. Basically, the sky’s the limit here and so don’t hesitate to be creative. Places such as Staples and Kinko’s can be a great help in putting something together. Those conducting the interview may not have time to look at your work right there in the conference room, but I guarantee they will look at it after you leave. The more (and longer) they think about you, the greater your chances of securing the job.

Food for thought: Portfolios such as these are becoming more and more common. Would you rather possibly be the only candidate who brings a copy for everyone on the committee or the only one who doesn’t?
7. Do your homework and present a plan for success.
This still isn’t as common as it should be and can give you a tremendous advantage of done correctly. Gather as much information as you can, from as many sources as you can, and prepare an in depth scouting report on the team that you want to coach. What is the history and tradition of the program? What are their strengths and weaknesses both from a team standpoint and as far as individual players are concerned? How did they finish in their league and what do they have to do to improve? Are they young? Small? Slow? Unskilled? (If they are young, small, slow, and unskilled – are you sure you want the job?)

Once your scouting report is complete, then devise a written plan for improvement. What are you going to do specifically to make each player better? (For example, John needs to work on going to his left and needs to increase his shooting range so defenses won’t continue to drop off of him and clog the middle. To help him get better, I’m going to have him do a series of two-ball dribbling drills and make 50 three pointers every single day.)

As a team, what are you going to do to beat your top two competitors in the league? Just be careful that as you are outlining and presenting this plan that you don’t say or even imply anything negative about the previous coach or players! It’s not about them any more – it’s about you and the future. Not only tell the committee that you’re the right coach for the job but show them why as well!

POTENTIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Listed below are 33 potential interview questions. While no one can guarantee exactly what you will be asked during the course of an interview, chances are that they will be at least somewhat similar to these.

GENERAL

- Describe your basketball playing and coaching experience.
- What 3 things have you learned from your basketball experience?
- Why are you interested in this job?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses as a coach?
• What are your coaching goals? Where do you want to be in 5, 10, 20 years?
• What do you know about our basketball program?
• Describe some discipline matters that you have had to address as a coach?
• Why are you the best candidate for this position?
• How would your best friends describe your personality?
• How do you go about making an important decision?
• What are your best and worst memories in coaching?

HIGH SCHOOL OR MIDDLE SCHOOL

• What is your overall basketball philosophy and how does it fit into an educational setting?
• What would you try to teach your players besides basketball? How would you do that?
• How would you deal with a player who openly complains about the head coach or the program?
• Describe experiences you have had supervising other coaches? What criteria do you use to judge the merits and contributions of an assistant coach?
• What do you think of basketball players that want to play multiple sports and how would you address this situation?
• Describe your coaching experience with High School (Middle School) aged athletes.
• Will your practices be open to parents and others who wish to observe? Why or why not?
• What team rules will you have in addition to the ones established by the school district? How will you communicate these rules to your players and their parents?
• Describe how you will fund raise to help support your program.
• How will your coaching style be accepted by the community?
• How will you deal with unhappy parents?
COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY

- Describe your priorities as a coach and a person.
- What role does academics play in your program and how do you ensure that your players get the most out of the student-athlete experience?
- Discuss your professional conduct requirements for those sitting on the bench.
- Please take us through the recruiting process from start to finish.
- Discuss your philosophy on winning.
- What type of team rules and guidelines do you feel are important? How are those rules and guidelines communicated and then enforced?
- What two values do you think every student-athlete should learn before they graduate from college? How do you plan on teaching those values to your players?
- What do you want your legacy to be?
- How many games do you expect to win next year and how are you going to do it?
- Please explain your expectations of a typical day in the life of a college basketball coach.
- What do you feel you need in terms of staffing, budget, and other resources to be successful?

Now that you have looked at these questions go back and re-read the first two suggestions on how to prepare for an interview and decide on a practical way to apply them. Another piece of helpful advice is this – each time you are interviewed for any coaching job, return home after the interview and immediately write down as many specific interview questions that you can remember. Then briefly jot down which of your answers were “home runs,” and which you would like to answer again. If there was anything else that happened, good or bad, that could help you prepare for the next interview make sure you also write it down in as much detail as possible,

FOR COLLEGE COACHES ONLY

VILLA 7 CONSORTIUM

The Villa 7 Consortium, which is sponsored by the VCU Center for Sports Leadership and Nike, is an invitation only seminar/networking event held each year for some of the country’s elite assistant coaches. The event was originated in 2005 and has since become the “Top Gun” of assistant coach training because it is clearly “the best of the best.”
Steve Megargee, a national writer for Rivals.com explains it this way:

“The consortium works as a gathering place that allows promising assistants to introduce themselves to athletic directors across the nation and participate in mock interview sessions. The event also includes panel discussions in which assistants learn how to prepare for the obstacles they might face after they get hired as head coaches.

In short, the process allows the nation’s most promising assistants to introduce themselves to potential employers and it helps school officials to get an early look at the candidates they might end up considering for their next coaching search.”

One of the most unique features of Villa 7 is their own version of “speed dating,” where each coach spends no more than five minutes with up to nine different athletic directors and administrators in rapid succession.

Since its inception, over 50 head coaches can attribute their hiring directly to the training they received and relationships they developed at Villa 7, including VCU’s Shaka Smart, who led his team to the 2011 NCAA Final Four.

**CONTRACT CONSIDERATIONS**

Once you have been offered the job, there are several contract details that need to be worked out before you officially decide to accept it or not. The number of these details may vary greatly depending on the size and status of the college or university and on your exact job title. In other words, the future head coach at a major BCS university is going to have more to discuss and settle than a future graduate assistant at a smaller Division II college.

First of all, you need to meet with every one of your supervisors including the Board of Trustees, the President, any relevant Vice Presidents and the Athletic Director. By asking as many questions as necessary, it’s important that you determine exactly what they are expecting of you. Do they want and expect a championship caliber program or are they content with being average as long as it doesn’t cost too much money and your players graduate?

At some point you should meet with the current coaching staff individually and all together. If you are being hired as the Head Coach you will have to determine whether or not you will be retaining any of the current coaches and support staff.

Some of the contract details that need to be hammered out:

- Length of contract – push for 5 years guaranteed, don’t accept less than 3 (Assistant coaches are usually on a year to year contract)
- Incentives – Conference Championship, Conference Coach of the Year, Qualify for Post Season, team grade point average, etc. (BCS football programs are extremely creative at this. For example, Oregon’s defensive coaches have 70 possible incentives that could raise their compensation if met!)
• Severance pay – What happens if you resign? What if you’re fired?
• Relocation expenses – Will school pay moving expenses?
• Medical & Dental coverage – for self and dependants
• Retirement package = 401K? Annuity?
• Expense Accounts & Allowances – Courtesy car, cell phone, meals, family travel with team
• School Perks – Tuition for family, football tickets, basketball tickets for family and friends
• Fund Raising – expectations and obligations, travel requirements, public speaking requirements

ALWAYS FOLLOW UP WITH A THANK YOU

A follow up thank you letter is as important to the whole hiring and interview process as is the cover letter. First of all, hiring a coach takes a lot of time and effort and requires several people, all of who deserve thanks for being involved. Secondly, if you don’t get the job the follow up thank you letter may be the first step in applying for your next. All levels of the coaching profession are fairly tight knit communities. Even if you weren’t the right fit for this job, someone on the committee may be impressed enough that they will look after you and recommend you for a coaching position that will be an even better opportunity.

But most importantly, sending off a quick, sincere, and handwritten thank you letter is going to plant you firmly in the minds of the person or committee responsible for making the final decision. And if they are on the fence for whatever reason, thinking about you in a positive light when it comes down to crunch time might just turn out to be the deal maker.

FINAL THOUGHTS

I hope you found some helpful ideas in this BasketballClassroom Special Report and I hope they help you get the coaching job of your dreams!

Here’s to climbing the ladder. . . . . And cutting down the nets!!