



*“There is a huge difference between ‘knowing’ a tactic, system or play and actually ‘doing’ it consistently on the ice. Even the best players need regular reinforcement on what they need to do, and why, so that under pressure they execute believing what they are doing is best for the team.”*

## **COACHING LEADERSHIP – “KNOWING” IS NOT “DOING”**

How many times have you seen professional and amateur players make fundamental mistakes in games under pressure that they would never make normally. Everyone is different but a big reason for this happening is that people usually revert back to their basic instincts and ways of doing things (habits) as opposed to new ways, even if the new ways are better, when they are under pressure or are overly excited or intense.

Another reason is that some players don’t really believe the play or tactic is the best one for them or the team.

Some players are selfish and will take unnecessary risks to try to score or make a play.

In hockey, with the right fundamental split second decisions needed consistently, the idea that good habits will be the norm must come from constant reinforcement both on and off the ice as to what the fundamentals are and why they are best for the team’s success. These habits should become so second nature in certain situations that they automatically follow the other team’s pattern of behavior, that is, some of our player’s actions are in automatic reaction to the other team’s movements.

A good example of this would be automatic reaction of our defenceman who are at the other team’s blue line when the other team just gets clear possession of the puck at their hash marks and our three forwards are caught no higher than at the face off circle in their end. Our defencemen should immediately back off the blue line and not pinch trying to challenge their player with the puck and risk an odd man rush. This safe reaction of our defencemen should become second nature.

The coach’s leadership role in making this and other fundamentals second nature in certain situations is key, without stifling creativity in other situations. Other players on the team who are the leaders like the captain and the alternates need to support the club’s systems and tactics openly. The fundamentals need to become a topic of conversation in the dressing room, at off ice sessions, when the guys hang around, and on the bench.

Also, players should be asked to review the club’s systems or Play Book regularly. Participative off ice sessions should be held to see if players remember these tactics and



systems. Videos should be used to point out the good and the bad and to make the reinforcement fun.

### **THE FUNDAMENTALS NEED TO BECOME SECOND NATURE**

When clubs are winning and things are going pretty well, it is a very good time for a coach to expect a variance from basic fundamentals from players and the emergence of unreasonable risk taking. Coaches should anticipate this. In practice and in the “easy” games when we are winning by 3 or 4 goals, coaches need to continue to emphasize and point out mistakes in fundamentals that lead to defensive errors, in particular, even when the mistake did not result in a goal against us.

By not dealing with the unwanted variance from the system all the time, you will be reinforcing a potentially bad habit that may reappear at the most inopportune time like in overtime in an important game. And you can be sure the variance will result in a goal against then! Right!