

How becoming a Daddy has made me a better therapist

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I don't think much can prepare you for parenthood. The nights of broken, poor quality sleep, monotonous routine of changing, feeding, sterilising..... over and over and over. On the flip side it's also the best thing ever. Spending time with my wife and 11 month old son is the thing I look forward to the most. Making time to do this brings its challenges. Working full time in professional sport alongside running my own clinic takes a big chunk of my time. Continuing to have a social life alongside spending time with other friends and family is difficult. Rocking into work having had three hours sleep the day prior isn't the ideal preparation but needs must! Despite this, I actually think becoming a parent has also had overriding positive effects on my working life and actually improved me as a therapist.



Time Management

Despite the time bounds of work discussed above I want and need to free myself as much as possible. In order to do this I need to primarily be time efficient. This need and want to be more effective and time efficient and the strategies I have put in place to do so have actually led to me having more time on my hands, not less, as you might expect. Below are three things I have learnt since becoming a parent that have aided my work as a sports physiotherapist.

#1 Prioritise

I've stole this idea from Tim Ferris' book 'The 4 Hour Work Week' in which he discusses prioritising and also staged and progressive tasking. Rather than having a single to-do list, I break down tasks into;

Today

Tomorrow

The Next Day

I've found this process breaks down tasks into smaller more manageable chunks and as such has led to me getting much more done. Additionally, it ensures I stay on track and get things done I need to get done i.e. today, those tasks that are priority, leaving those less important tasks to other days i.e. tomorrow and the next day.

#2 Routine & Comforts

Professional athletes and babies don't differ too much in many ways. One of the main similarities probably relates to routine. Both love routine. Athletes get told where to be, at what time, what to wear, and what to do and how to do it. They are led by medical, strength and conditioning and coaching staff in the same way a baby is led by their parents. Take my 11 month out of his routine and there is hell to pay. Be it his sleep, feeding, changing or playing routine, any deviation from what he perceives as normal i.e. his routine, things generally don't bode well. Any athlete is no different. All have their own individual routines and comforts. The way they prepare for each training day and/or game will likely follow similar steps; be it their warm up habits, timing of eating around sessions and recovery methods just to name a few. We as therapists can mould and guide these processes but we need to be respectful of what athletes are already accustomed to. Some of these processes can progress to habits. These habits may be in our eyes advantageous or disadvantageous. In the case of disadvantageous habits, we would endeavour to try changing these where possible. However, changing long established habits can be tricky and might be something an athlete is unwilling to change. In the same way trying to change my son's feeding times would be something that would need to be planned and staged over a period of time. Given his reliance to his current routine, changing this might prove problematic. As such I'd probably leave it to the wife!!!

#3 Give me what I want!

Try giving my 11 month old son something he doesn't want and he'll be sure to let you know. Any deviation at the moment away from his favourite foods; mushy peas, rice pudding or his milk is usually met by a chorus of wines and whinging. Having observed this it got me thinking about my own work and the importance of giving those we work with what they want. Athletes have a perception of what they want, what they perceive the service they should receive and also the perception of what the outcome should be. Tapping into this is key if we are to achieve fast and effective treatment and rehabilitation outcomes.

If an athlete indicates that a particular treatment for a particular pathology he has had previously was very effective, then use it. They're giving you half the puzzle right there to help fix them up. Stop short of course of something that is going to be detrimental, coax them away and towards your intervention of choice. On most occasions I aim to give both what the athlete thinks they want in addition to what I think they need. But wherever possible, in some degree I will always give them what they want. Just like my 11 month old, if he's happy, I'm happy, if athletes are happy and getting what they want, your job as a therapist can be so much easier.

Thanks for reading

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