



**THE  
CAMOGIE  
ASSOCIATION**  
An Cumann Camógaíochta

**Camogie  
Coaching Corner**  
By Peter Casey

[www.camogie.ie](http://www.camogie.ie)

## **The power of habits**

I am your constant companion.

I am your greatest helper or heaviest burden.

I will push you onward or drag you down to failure.  
I am completely at your command.

Half of the things you do you might as well  
turn over to me and I will do them - quickly and  
correctly.

I am easily managed - you must be firm with me.

Show me exactly how you want something done  
and after a few lessons, I will do it automatically.

I am the servant of great people, and alas, of all  
failures as well.

Those who are great, I have made great.

Those who are failures, I have made failures.

I am not a machine though I work with the  
precision of a machine plus the intelligence of a  
person.

You may run me for profit or run me for ruin - it  
makes no difference to me.

Take me, train me, be firm with me, and I will place  
the world at your feet.

Be easy with me and I will destroy you.

**Who am I? I am Habit".**

This poem teaches us the power of habits. Everything we do is learned. From the way we stand and sit to the way we walk and talk, to how we run, jump, kick, strike, look, listen. The way we react to success and failure. Most people are distinguishable by their habits. We can recognise most singers on the radio by their voice, even when they sing a brand new song. We can recognise individual hurlers and camogie players by the way they carry themselves on a field. Even if they get a new hairstyle or wear a different helmet they are distinguishable by their own unique style and while some people can copy them, they can never be them.



One of the biggest coaching tasks is to help players form good habits. We get our best chance to do this when players are young. In order to help players form good habits we need to have good knowledge of technical, physical and the mental habits that players require to perform well. We help players identify what their habits are and why they may need to break old habits or form new ones. Our bad habits are generally what let us down when we come under pressure. As coaches we should be aware of our own habits and how we can change them when the need arises.

William Wordsworth said that "habits rule the unreflecting herd". We often hear that we are creatures of habit and that when we come under pressure we revert to type. That means we do the thing we have done previously. Great coaches can help players to replace harmful and wasteful habits with effective habits. So what are the harmful habits and what can we do to replace them? The most harmful habit in the world today is the idea that we are helpless. Martin Seligman the great American psychologist has coined the phrase "learned helplessness". Learned helplessness is when we get put off by early failures in our lives and we believe that there is nothing we can do when faced with challenges in the future.

The ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu said that our thoughts become our words, our words become our actions and then our actions become our habits. What we think and how we think is vital to the formation of habits. Henry Ford said "Whether you think you can, or you think you can't - you're right," If a child thinks



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that they will never be able to master a skill of hurling, then they won't be able to master it. If they think they can they will. If a coach thinks a child will never be any good, it is likely that message will transmit to the child and the coach will be proven right. If a community believes that their area will never be good at camogie or hurling, it will be impossible for the games to thrive. However if a few people could think that their club could produce good hurlers, start saying it and then put it into action by organising training sessions, communicating with others in the parish and beyond, attending coaching courses and teaching good habits to children then hurling and camogie should succeed.

I recently had the pleasure of sitting down with a successful rugby coach in the hope of developing my own coaching. The thing that struck me very early in the conversation was that he was the complete opposite of helpless. He didn't utter a negative word. He only spoke about instilling belief in players and fellow coaches, making training an enjoyable and hardworking place and avoiding outdated practices that are not relevant to the game the players play.

In the GAA family we can easily be in a state of learned helplessness. We can believe that we are powerless and unable to fend for ourselves. We can live in the illusion that other people are to blame for our failures. Everyone can get it from the administrators in Croke Park, to the county boards, the media, referees and umpires. Many of us devote a huge amount of time to blaming things that are way beyond our control. We often hear people complaining that "the coach doesn't like me, he never picks me", "the referee is biased" and "everyone hates us". Very often children receive feedback in their homes and communities that they are hard done by. This leads to learned helplessness. The child grows up with an excuse for everything.

The opposite of learned helplessness is resilience. Resilience is a great habit. Resilience means that when bad stuff happens I can cope. A referee can make a mistake and we can still win. A coach may decide not to pick me and I can use it as a learning opportunity. Resilient people do not need to be served. Coaches should do their utmost to help players learn resilience. This might start by always getting them to put out and pick up cones, count balls before and after training and provide opportunities for them to deal with success and small failures.

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Coaches can have a huge impact on the lives of people in a community. The interaction between coaches and players can help these people to develop lifelong skills that they can use in all walks of life. The biggest skill we can teach our players is resilience. We teach them resilience by empowering them. We empower them by giving away some of our power. We teach them that we trust them to make decisions, to cope under pressure and not alone to survive but to flourish.

The final word to the coach I met recently - "sport doesn't build character, it tests it".

