Interview for the SheCOACH project

"Coaching starts at -1 for women": Turkish Human Behavior Consultant, Trainer, and Certified Coach Aysim Altay on breaking barriers in sports

Aysim Altay

Aysim Altay is a Human Behavioral Consultant, Trainer, and certified Coach specializing in Executive, Performance, Life, and Mental coaching.

With a foundation in Computer Engineering and a master's degree in Neuroscience, she brings a unique interdisciplinary perspective to her work. Aysim has been extensively trained in various therapeutic and coaching modalities, including NLP, CBT, Time Line Therapy, Hypnosis, Remote Viewing, Expressive Art Therapy, and Sophrology, among others.

Over her career, she has worked with more than 150 companies and institutions, and for 15 years has served as a lecturer and mental coach for FIBA Europe. Her client portfolio includes CEOs, directors, artists, athletes, and professionals across diverse industries.

She has coached teams and individuals to achieve notable successes, including World Championship titles and European podium finishes. Her current role is as the Mental Coach for Anadolu Turk Telekom Basketball Men's Team. A prolific author, she has written several books on human behavior and life, including Yaşam Kaçtı Gözüme, Yüreğin Sacayağı, Madem Öyle Polyanna!, 40 Santim, and Mental (also available in English), alongside numerous articles.

How have you seen gender equality evolve in sports over the years?

Kathrine Switzer made a significant change in the world of sports by becoming the first woman to officially enter and run the Boston Marathon in 1967. Although women's place in the world of sports has improved significantly since then, unfortunately the difficult situations experienced in the business world also find their place in the world of sports: women receiving lower wages and having more limited opportunities.

Have you noticed a difference in how male and female coaches are perceived by players and fans?

Based on my practical observations, since the world of coaches is easily perceived as a male-dominated world and this is how it is lived in most countries, the process of women coaches accepting their existence in that world requires great effort and experiences to prove themselves. Sometimes, even in the acceptance of knowledge, they need to provide more evidence to prove themselves.

Another point of discrimination that I have observed is that the label "emotional" is very easily attached to women. Even if the reactions they give stem from an objective point, they can easily be labeled as "emotional reactions".

What challenges do women coaches face compared to their male counterparts?

The problems women face in the world of coaching start with the process of finding a team to work with. It would not be wrong to say that they start with -1. After they start working with a team, their decisions become candidates for being observed, monitored and discussed more. In addition, depending on the culture in which they are coaching, their clothing, behaviors and communication styles are also under the microscope more. Some gestures and expressions that are considered normal in the male world are judged much more when made by female coaches.

Apart from the very few countries where women are evaluated equally, as I mentioned in previous questions, there is unfortunately a different approach that is reflected in the wages that female coaches receive.

At this point, I would like to underline the danger of being referred to as "positive discrimination". Because the need to apply "positive discrimination" is actually an admission of how differently one gender is approached and that special protection is needed. All that is needed is for both genders to be treated equally.

What steps can be taken to encourage more women to pursue coaching careers?

In order to encourage more women to pursue a coaching career, I would first recommend that our women go through a healthy preparation process so that they can know themselves better, manage the difficult situations they may encounter correctly, and get out of these situations without experiencing emotional wear.

Although we avoid making comments like "All women" or "All men" in Behavioral Sciences, a generally accepted reality is that women tend to understand people more deeply and take stronger steps in terms of EQ. This is actually one of the strengths of women coaches in terms of forming a team, establishing a true team spirit, and taking healthy steps in difficult situations. It is important for our women coaches to experience this reality in experiential environments.

In order for them to exist within the system, the first steps can be taken, starting with the Basketball Federations (even though this approach is "Positive discrimination"), by allocating quotas for women coaches and giving them the opportunity to both learn and take the stage as instructors in coaching trainings.