

Coaching With Perspective: How Trish & Corey Kennedy Model Athlete-Centered, Bias-Aware Coaching

By The Coaching HER® Team

One of the most powerful lessons in the Challenging Gender Stereotypes and Coaching Girls modules within Coaching HER® is that great coaching begins with perspective: *the willingness to see each athlete as an individual rather than through assumptions, stereotypes, or long-held beliefs about girls and boys*. Coaches who create positive, equitable environments do so by building trust, examining their own biases, and centering the whole person.

Trish and Corey Kennedy embody this mindset. Together, they've raised five children (two from Trish, two from Corey, and one they welcomed together) while impacting the lives of hundreds of student-athletes at Lakeville South High School in Minnesota. Over the years, Trish and Corey have coached a remarkable array of sports including cross country running, track & field, baseball, nordic skiing, football, and wrestling. With more than 30 years of coaching experience across multiple sports, their approach demonstrates what research consistently shows: *relationships, individualized expectations, and intentional communication help athletes thrive*. Their words offer a real-world example of what athlete-centered, stereotype-aware coaching looks like in practice and complements our January 2026 theme, "Great coaches see potential, not stereotypes."

What first sparked your interest in coaching, and how did each of you find your way into the profession?

Trish: "It was the love of athletics for me. I was a college athlete and after that I always wanted to be a part of a team."

Corey: "I never planned on teaching or coaching. I always loved sports, but this wasn't something I planned. I really believe I was called to do this work. I love to build up kids and help them be better. Our motto is to move daily."

→ **Insight:** Their entry into coaching reflects a core principle emphasized across modules: purpose and connection—not gender-based assumptions—shape effective coaching behaviors.

What has inspired you to stay committed to coaching for so many years?

Trish: "The athletes! You get to know these girls in 9th grade and see them all the way through senior year. Each new group, I can't ever imagine leaving."

Corey: "For me it's the kids and those former athletes that become your friends. When they call you up years later to play golf; that's when you know you did something right."

→ **Insight:** Long-term engagement grows out of meaningful relationships—something the research identifies as a major contributor to girls' confidence, motivation, and retention

How would each of you describe your core coaching philosophy?

Trish: "Coach the whole person. It's not about faster times. I want girls to become more confident, meet friends, learn integrity, and grow as a human."

Corey: "Coach the athlete first before the sport. You have to build trust and those relationships before you can push athletes. (Then Corey adds): I just love watching Trish coach, the athletes love her. I learn so much from watching her."

➡ **Insight:** Their philosophies mirror core messages:

- Coach the individual, not the stereotype
- Trust precedes challenge
- Girls want to learn, grow, and be pushed—just like boys
- Same identity role models matter

When challenges arise, how do your coaching perspectives guide your approach?

Trish: “Before talking about times or finishing at big meets, I always let the girls know I love them and they are my girls no matter what their times are, what place they finish in, or whether they are on JV or varsity.”

Corey: “It's hard to put into words; student-athletes today don't come in automatically respecting their coaches, just because it's their coach. It's similar to my EBD students. I would never expect them to show me respect without showing them respect and care first. I always let my athletes know I'm not here to judge. I usually start those tough conversations with something like, 'I'm sorry that happened....' I just want kids to feel good when they leave every day.”

➡ **Insight:** This aligns closely with the idea that coaches set the climate, and that psychological safety and belonging matter as much as skill instruction.

Has there been a time when seeing a situation through your spouse's perspective changed how you handled something in your coaching role?

Corey: “Let me lead this one. I love hearing kids say, ‘Love you Kennedy.’ I just love watching how much Trish's athletes respect and love her. I was really able to coach the younger girls watching Trish's lead.”

Trish: “I loved watching Corey. I loved watching Corey with the freshmen (who he had coached in middle school). They really look up to Corey. They are in his room in between classes. He's great at building relationships. It was really fun to see Corey through the athlete's eyes.”

Corey: “If you do it right, they (the athletes) lift your day’

➡ **Insight:** Perspective-taking is a key strategy for reducing bias and strengthening athlete relationships.

How has coaching together shaped the way you view competition, teamwork, or leadership?

Corey: “Trish is too competitive at home!” (teases)

Trish: “We are both so competitive. Doesn't matter what it is—Wii bowling, scrabble, you name it—we compete! I love watching the girls come together though, to get a workout in or support each other during a race. I love the support and the boost they give one another, and it doesn't matter if they are friends at school or not, they come together. That's what competition and teamwork are all about.”

Corey: “In CC if you do well, you are going to be in pain. They way Trish coaches these girls though, they are okay with this pain and learn to push themselves. She always just leads with, ‘You are loved wherever you are at.’ This really allows the girls to get to that place on their own.”

➡ **Insight:** Their lens focuses on learning, connection, and internal motivation—all of which counter stereotypes about girls being “less competitive” or “less tough.”

How has your coaching perspective evolved from when you first started?

Trish: “I'm definitely more confident. I've learned it's okay for me to make mistakes. I used to pretend like I knew things I didn't, for fear that parents and athletes wouldn't think I wasn't capable. Honesty is huge. Admitting that I don't know everything has put a lot less pressure on me. I tell the girls I read this, or learned this from this coach or video, and I let them know that I'll find an answer if I don't have one. I'm okay with not knowing everything.”

Corey: “It's gotten easier for me too. I think it's important to be vulnerable, it's okay if they are getting outside coaching in the summer. I don't need to be the expert in everything and can learn from the athletes too.”

➡ **Insight:** Growth mindset + vulnerability = reduced bias, stronger relationships, and greater athlete trust.

What perspective would you share with parents—especially?

Trish: “It was important for me to model for my girls that I can be a mom AND do what I love.”

Corey: “Kids need to be coached by them... It's a gift.”

➡ **Insight:** Their message disrupts a common societal assumption that coaching is not a space for women—especially mothers—and invites more adults to see coaching as a shared role.

What have you learned about why girls leave sport, and what can we do to change it?

Trish: “It can really be a struggle for girls... especially when their bodies start to change.”

Corey: “It is really different from boys... I try to remind girls: you deserve to feel confident.”

➡ **Insight:** Their insight combats the harmful stereotype that girls are “less committed” or “less tough,” and they model how coaches can validate girls’ lived experiences instead of minimizing them—a key strategy in reducing stereotype-driven coaching errors.

What strategies have helped you build a team culture where girls feel seen, valued, and capable?

Trish: “I give girls time... I'm vulnerable... I make sure girls know my door is always open.”

Corey: “We can pick up those pieces for kids... It's just how we are with kids.”

➡ **Insight:** This is the heart of bias-aware coaching:

- vulnerability
- consistent support
- building trust
- giving athletes voice
- designing connection intentionally

These practices directly counter harmful stereotypes and allow girls to develop confidence and leadership.

What perspective could you offer someone who thinks they don't know enough to coach?

Corey: “You can learn anything... If you have the ability to build relationships and you care about kids, it's an opportunity that shouldn't be wasted”

➡ **Insight:** This reinforces a key Coaching HER® message: Coaching is about relationships, not gender or expertise myths.

What gives you hope about the future of girls' sports?

Trish: “Girls of today are more confident... they can do whatever they want.”

Corey: “There are beautiful platforms today for girls to see themselves as professional athletes and leaders.”

➡ **Insight:** Their optimism reflects the growing visibility, opportunity, and leadership pathways available to girls today.

Trish and Corey Kennedy demonstrate what research consistently affirms: coaches have immeasurable impact when they lead with awareness, empathy, and high expectations free from stereotype. Their athlete-centered approach aligns naturally with the principles found throughout the Coaching HER® curriculum challenging assumptions, seeing each girl as an individual, fostering belonging, and creating environments where girls feel emotionally safe and capable of pushing themselves.

Their story is a reminder that when coaches shift the way they see, they transform the way athletes grow.

“Great coaches see potential, not stereotypes.”