

## The Coach as Teacher & Motivator

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After a few years of coaching at my university, I noticed that some of my athletes performed much better in practice than in competition. (I was both a strength and conditioning coach and a shot put discus, hammer, javelin coach). I noticed this manifestation both in the event preparation and the conditioning phases as well. I studied this at length, trying different methods to make the competition the 'real' event and not the prep. What I concluded was that a combination of two major factors; Lack of Confidence and Pleasure/Excitement had combined to displace and redirect the purpose of the training.

What was practice and training had become pleasurable and confident. The 'real' event had become unsure and reluctant. It was if a schizoid atmosphere had embraced the athlete. I watched more closely at their body/eye cues and compared the two disparate venues. Given my limited observations I began to prepare a new way to train for them, using the following devices.

When they did their supportive training they would, at specific times, as the conditioning exercise came closest to their 'real' event, image the event as they did the training. An Example; A shot putter who 'puts' a heavy metal ball, would image this while pushing a barbell or a medicine ball in the exercise. I would often ask them to exhibit similar sounds ( a yell, loud groan) similar to when they did the real event. In the event training, as in throwing the shot put, I would cue them, at specific lowered arousal times, how what they were doing , in specific terms, matched what they did in there prep work.

This is a form of parallel chunking( a way of comparing a similar event under a different general category) and reframing but the emphasis , cued by my own posture and voice would emphasize that the goal was to 'throw' far which would occur at anytime soon. My verbal and body cues always matched what I would use in the actual event practice. I would raise my arms and shout FAR!

2. They would not be allowed to throw their limit in practice and must stay within proscribed ranges low to high until a specific time period before

a championship. ( this created a paradoxical effect that, a long throws might accidentally 'pop out' without effort to do so) It often built up a developing anxiety which would be released in the 'real' competition. I would adjust the range upward as the throws approached the higher range indicator in greater numbers. That release would bring as wave of excitement and pleasure at being successful, which would reinforce the competition environment in practice learning.

This high level competition and performance is a skill with a particular mind and skill set. Practice also has its own mind set and skill. The 'range' of performance allowed, widened their expectant focus and allowed them to accept lesser throws with the higher, lowering their arousal. Once an achieved number of performances within the current range had been performed, the range was moved upward.

My rationale was that if I could get them to raise their actual performance at lower arousal levels then a natural rise in arousal in competition would result in increased result with only the awareness of a slightly improved effort. Using numbers to categorize effort as an example, 10 would be a maximum effort and 1 the lowest effort. The training regime should result in a self reported long competition effort as feeling like a '6' when in performance it looked like a '8' to me the observer/coach. The athlete had successfully brought their arousal mechanisms under control and let the natural CNS reaction take place. As a coincidence to this competition goal I found that the athlete's well being both mental and physical affected in real ways their self report. They would report an '8' effort when I observed a '5'. This would alert me that something important was happening to the level of fitness at that critical point in time. It could be long hours of study, the onset of a cold, an emotional conflict, lack of sleep etc.

3. I rarely if ever measured a practice throw, emphasizing the work done and the goals of the practice. I would constantly link an improvement as noted, with a presupposition of a further effort in 'real' competition. The links were always to a future competition, which was then linked with another. Here is a verbal presupposition for an athlete that whose longest throw is 180' in the hammer (about 54 meters)

“Good you're getting more in that range. That shows the jump will come anytime now so you must be prepared for it! We'll probably move your range up a meter on Thursday (pacing forward).

“When you are at 200 feet you will begin to notice that you’re now 'hanging' on the hammer in the back  
(he's never done this prior. It is a result and cannot 'be' willed!)

“this will keep you in contact with the ball better. You will love the feeling (expectation of result and I demonstrate the position)( future pacing ) as the hammer throws itself.”

“Your range will probably move up 10 feet in practice so ( beware, you are about to improve!), save your energy for then" ( throw what you have been doing with an easier effort and arousal level)

4. Do NOT explain what is happening to the student/athlete, let it happen. The student/athlete does not need to intellectualize the event...just do it. A former world record holder in the Javelin Al Cantello, once said to me " Analysis leads to paralysis! " Explanation takes away from the excitement of learning. it becomes a "it's just ....." IT'S NOT, ' it' for the doer is SPECIAL and you can link that feeling to future results.

I used these 'devices' first as a coach then in the classroom with my behavioral handicapped students. They had similar results which I will write about later.

All my NLP (Neuro Linguistic Psychology) training came after these events. The training's confirmed what I observed. It works because we both expected it to and we LET it happen!

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