



Mindwalk: Mental Skills
for High Performance

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PERFORMANCE PSYCHOLOGY

Purpose

The purpose of performance psychology is to counsel coaches and performers toward a positive experience, and to apply mental training techniques to enhance performance.

Performance psychology includes five major areas:

1. Understanding the participant
2. Understanding the performance environment
3. Understanding group dynamics
4. Enhancing performance
5. Fostering personal development

UNDERSTANDING THE PARTICIPANT

Personality

Psychologists distinguish *personality trait* – a typical style of behaving – from *personality state* – a situational style of behaving.

An individual may possess a predisposition to being highly anxious (trait anxiety) but one may not actually display anxiety in a specific circumstance (state anxiety).

Inventories enable psychologists to identify personality traits and states which allows coaches to understand performers and develop appropriate expectations.

UNDERSTANDING THE PARTICIPANT

Personality Traits of High Performers

The highest-scoring personality traits of high performers

1. Risk-taking – low safety; high excitement and challenge
2. Stimulus-seeking – chronic activation rewarded by risks
3. Competitive – focus on achieving, succeeding
4. Confident – belief in ability to be successful in activity
5. Attentional – attend to cues in an effective manner
6. Expectant – environment is not threatening
7. Mentally tough – sustain high performance under pressure
8. Self-controlled – calm in tense and stressful situations

UNDERSTANDING THE PARTICIPANT

Motivation

Motivation is the direction and intensity of effort.

1. Direction is whether an individual seeks out, approaches, or is attracted to certain situations.
2. Intensity refers to how much effort the individual puts forth in a given situation.

In performance, termed achievement motivation, it is defined as a person's effort to master a task, achieve excellence, overcome obstacles, perform better than others, or take pride in displaying a given talent.

UNDERSTANDING THE PARTICIPANT

Achievement Motivation

Achievement motivation is dependent on

1. Personality – traits for achieving success and avoiding failure (confidence, pride, emotional stability)
2. Situation – probability for success in the given context and the incentive value of that success
3. Orientation – comparing self with and defeating others (outcome orientation) or improving self relative to past performance (task orientation)
4. Efficacy – feeling of being worthy or competent and possessing sense of control over ability to learn and perform

UNDERSTANDING THE PARTICIPANT Motivational Profile

Factor	High Achiever	Low Achiever
Orientation	Achieve success	Avoid failure
Goals	Process & Performance	Outcome
Perceptions	Hi competence/control	Low competence/control
Tasks	Challenging	Easy or impossible
Scrutiny	Good under evaluation	Poor under evaluation
Focus	Perseverance and pride	Immediacy and shame

UNDERSTANDING THE PARTICIPANT

Feedback

Feedback is the strategy of presenting information regarding the correctness (or incorrectness) of a performer's actions and, when given contingent on a specific behavior as opposed to general or vague remarks, enhances motivation.



UNDERSTANDING THE PARTICIPANT

Reinforcement

Reinforcement is the use of rewards and punishments that increase or decrease the likelihood of a similar response to a given situation.

Reinforcements should include mental, intrapersonal, and training behaviors, and should be repeated and positive during initial stages of training; intermittent positive and negative during later stages of training.

UNDERSTANDING THE PARTICIPANT

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation

Rewards performers receive from others are *extrinsic*.
Rewards arising from the inside self are *intrinsic*.

Effective extrinsic rewards occur in four categories

1. Social – praise, publicity
2. Tangible – trophies, medals,
3. Competitive – travel with team, day of rest
4. Special – party, meet celebrity

Intrinsic rewards arise through

1. Knowledge (pleasure/satisfaction of exploring/learning)
2. Improvement (pleasure/satisfaction of mastery)
3. Stimulation (pleasure/satisfaction of the experience itself)

UNDERSTANDING THE PARTICIPANT

Correlates of Intrinsic Motivation

Increased or prolonged extrinsic rewards tend to reduce intrinsic motivation.

Success tends to increase intrinsic motivation while failure tends to decrease intrinsic motivation.

Positive feedback tends to increase intrinsic motivation while negative feedback tends to decrease intrinsic motivation.

UNDERSTANDING THE PARTICIPANT

Increasing Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation increases through the following actions

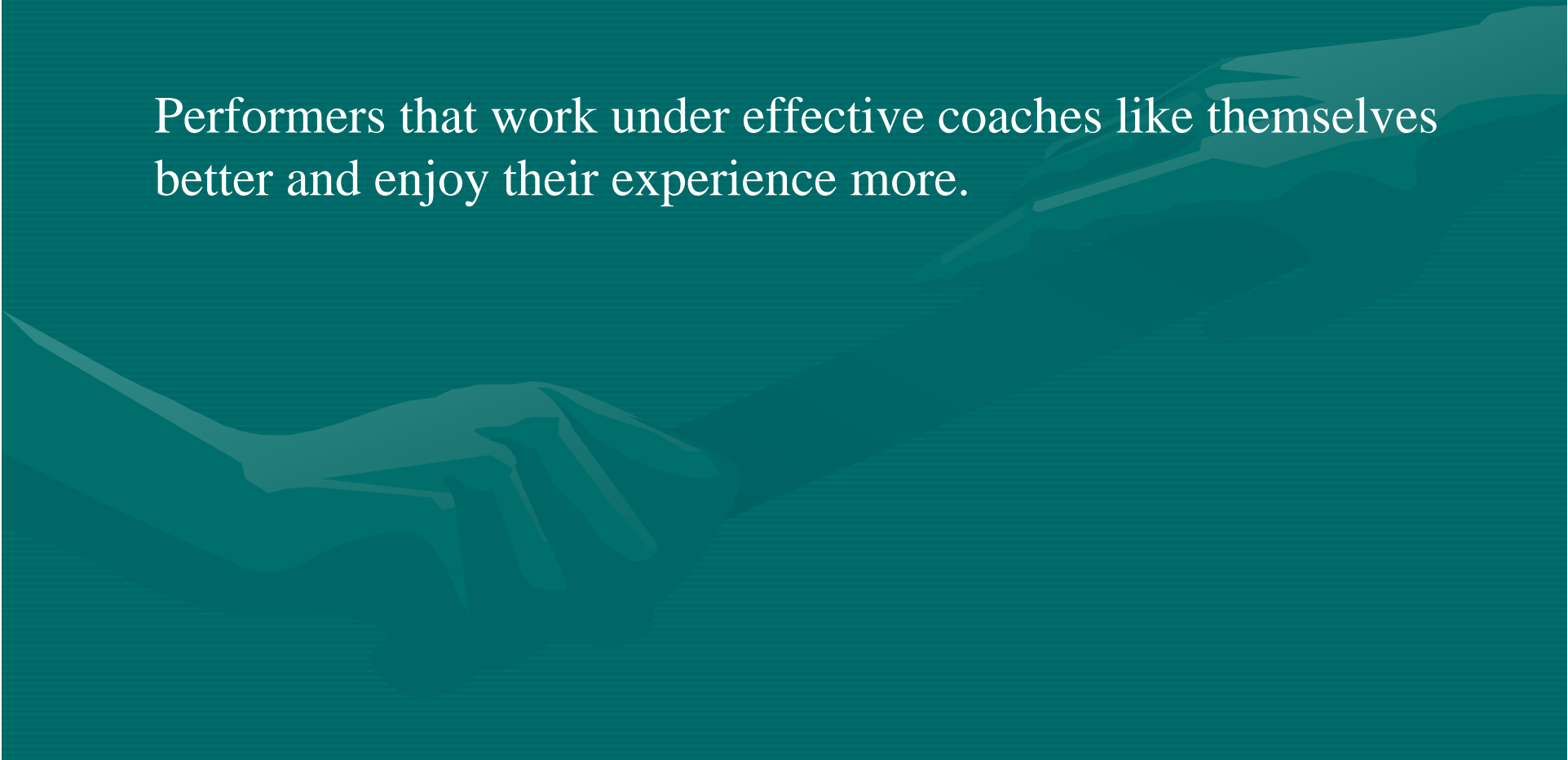
1. Successful experiences
2. Realistic performance goals
3. Rewards issued contingent on performance
4. Varied training content and sequence
5. Participant decision-making
6. Positive reinforcement

UNDERSTANDING THE PARTICIPANT

Coaching Correctly

Effective coaching focuses on rewarding desirable behavior rather than focusing on punishing undesirable behavior.

Performers that work under effective coaches like themselves better and enjoy their experience more.



UNDERSTANDING THE SPORT ENVIRONMENT

Competition

Competition is a process that occurs when rewards are given to people based on how their performances compare with performances of those doing the same task.

Competitiveness is an enjoyment of competition and desire to strive for success in competitive settings.

UNDERSTANDING THE SPORT ENVIRONMENT

Competitive Orientation

Outcome orientation – a focus on interpersonal comparison and winning in competition such that it is more important to beat opponents than to improve on personal excellence

Task orientation – a focus on personal performance standards such that it is more important to improve one's own performance than to win a competition

Elite performers are highly competitive and tend to be goal oriented rather than win oriented.

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Setting Goals

A goal articulates what one wishes to obtain.

Goals serve as a cognitive dimension of motivation by

1. Focusing attention on the task
2. Mobilizing effort
3. Increasing long-term persistence
4. Promoting new learning strategies

Characteristics of a good goal include

1. Specificity – specific goals better than general ones
2. Measurability – recorded, monitored, measurable terms
3. Attainability – difficult goals better than easy or vague
4. Adoption – goals must be accepted by performer

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Types of Goals

There are three types of goals

1. Outcome – focus on a result
2. Performance – focus on a standard needed for outcome
3. Process – focus on prerequisites of standard

Process goals are particularly effective in positively influencing cognitive anxiety, confidence and efficacy.

Using a combination of all three goals facilitates high performance.

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Attentionality

Attentionality is the ability to ignore irrelevant information and pay selective attention to relevant information.

Attentionality functions in four ways

1. narrowing – select relevant cues from among many
2. broadening – expand number of relevant cues
3. internal – use proprioceptive information
4. external – use exteroceptive information

Attentionality is also used to combat negative thoughts and doubt through process called centering.

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Using Mental Pictures

The brain cannot distinguish real from imaginary so images can be used to provide practice, elaboration, intensification of skills.

Imagery benefits elite performers more than beginners and is most effective for activities with cognitive component.

Imagery is classified as

1. Internal (within own body, feel performances)
2. External (outside own body, watch performance)

Internal is superior to external because it creates greater muscle electrical stimulation but is more difficult to engage.

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Arousal and Anxiety

Arousal is a blend of physiological and psychological activity and refers to the intensity dimension of motivation at a particular moment varying from no arousal (comatose) to entirely aroused (frenzied).

Anxiety is a form of arousal in the form of a negative emotional state characterized by nervousness, worry, and apprehension (cognitive anxiety) associated with physiological activation of the body (somatic anxiety).

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Sources of Anxiety

The main competitive sources of anxiety are

1. Worry about performing up to capability or making team
2. Doubt about talent, low confidence or self-esteem
3. Importance of event or event situation
4. Uncertainty of outcome
5. Fear of injury or recovery from injury
6. Discomfort with coaching communication
7. Time and social demands of training

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Trait and State Anxiety

Trait anxiety is part of personality, an acquired behavioral tendency that predisposes an individual to perceive as threatening a circumstance that is not actually dangerous physically or psychologically.

State anxiety refers to the ever changing mood component during the course of a particular competition or during different competitive environments.

A direct relationship exists between a person's level of trait anxiety and state anxiety but the relationship can be altered by learning coping skills to reduce the state anxiety

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Relationship of Arousal and Performance

Drive model – As an individual's arousal or state anxiety increases so does level of performance.

Inverted-U model – At low arousal levels, performance will be below par but as arousal increases, so does performance up to an optimal point where best performance results and further increase in arousal cause performance to decline.

Facilitative/Debilitative model – The stress a performer experiences depends on trait anxiety and confidence whereby the resulting state anxiety is perceived as facilitative (confidence in ability plus heightened moment direct athlete toward achievement) or debilitative (lack of confidence and heightened moment derail athlete from achievement).

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Managing Arousal

Inappropriate level of state anxiety reduces performance

1. Increased muscle tension that interferes with coordination
2. Decreased frequency of environmental scanning and focus on inappropriate cues

To address these problems, athletes must

1. Recognize some level of arousal and anxiety is needed for peak performance
2. Find the optimal level of somatic and cognitive state anxiety for sport and ability
3. Manage shifts in state anxiety through confidence, perception of control, self-talk, and visualization

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Reducing Arousal

Techniques to lower arousal level include four components

1. Mental device such as deep breathing
2. Passive attitude
3. Decreased muscle tonus
4. Quiet environment

Positive self talk to mitigate doubt occurs in three forms

1. Task – “enter smooth”
2. Mood – “push, you can do it”
3. Affirmation – “I feel strong today”

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Increasing Arousal

Psyching-up to increase arousal level is essential for gross motor activities involving strength, endurance, and speed.

Psyching-up occurs most readily through

1. Pep talks
2. Personal support
3. Signs and messages
4. Music

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Confidence and Efficacy

Confidence is a realistic expectation about success as result of previous experience. *Efficacy* the knowledge one has the power to produce the intended results.

The degree of efficacy determines whether one approaches or avoids an achievement situation.

Performers who possess high degree of efficacy enter competitive situations with confidence and lower state anxiety and thus achieve high performance.

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The Role of the Coach in Developing Confidence

Building efficacy and confidence as a coach requires

1. Articulating high, positive expectations
2. Ensuring early athlete success
3. Offering positive feedback
4. Maintaining positive pre-competitive environment
5. Teaching skills and strategies
6. Behaving as a good role model
7. Making accurate causal attributions

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The Role of the Performer in Developing Confidence

Building efficacy and confidence as the athlete requires

1. Emulating positive role models
2. Using cognitive strategies (self-talk, imagery, etc.)
3. Reflecting on previous successes
4. Interpreting anxiety as invested readiness not fear
5. Being competitively ready at the right moment
6. Having fun
7. Knowing an opponent's strengths and weaknesses

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Ego and Arrogance

Ego is the desire to be seen in the process of doing something important and/or remarkable, the desire to call attention to one's self and one's accomplishment.

There are two levels of ego

1. Public ego is nourished by acclaim and allows individuals to perceive themselves as superior to others and derive pleasure in the praise and in the perceived distinction.
2. Private ego is nourished by personal victory and pushes individuals to constantly better themselves and overcome the obstacles in their path toward achievement.

FOSTERING PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Balance

High performers are busy achieving because they are not happy with life the way it is, they are not content. Pursuing their passions defines what it means to be alive.

The self-centered nature of achievement can make one completely obsessed with self and the achievement.

Part of achievement is learning how to understand what is really important which requires perspective, placing the achiever and the achievement in context.