

# THE BEST OF THE BEST

*Signature Sport Psychology Techniques  
That Link*

*Theory & Practice*

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## FIRST ANNUAL BEST OF THE BEST

Sponsored by the Performance Enhancement/Intervention Committee

Association for Applied Sport Psychology Conference, Louisville, KY

Thursday - October 25, 2007

Featuring the *Signature Sport Psychology Techniques* of the following invited speakers:

***Jack Bowman***

***Dan Gould***

***Greg Dale***

***Gloria Solomon***

***Kristen Dieffenbach***

***Barbara Walker***

# MIND DING POSITIVE ENERGY THE REFRAMING OF PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

*Presented by Dr. Jack Bowman*

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<b>PURPOSE</b>	To enable athletes to cope with and interpret pre-event anxiety feelings as a positive and empowering response to being challenged
<b>THEORY</b>	<p>This brief technique draws its effectiveness from the synergistic application of four major theoretical approaches to enhancing performance: <i>MINDFULNESS</i>, <i>EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE</i>, <i>CHALLENGE RESPONSE</i>, and <i>FLOW</i>.</p> <p><b>MINDFULNESS</b></p> <p>Turning off the the autopilot and treating our thoughts and emotions as passing messages to read and let go.</p> <p><b>EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE</b></p> <p>Engaging the inhibitory capacity of objective appraisal (Pre-frontal cortex) to rein in the high alert signals of the Amygdala.</p> <p><b>CHALLENGE RESPONSE</b></p> <p>The perception of challenge to stressful situations leads to a complex chain of biochemical events that lead to positive arousal.</p> <p><b>FLOW</b></p> <p>Flow is achieved when the perceived level of skill is in balance with the p erceived level of challenge (C-S Balance).</p>
<b>TECHNIQUE</b>	<p>How would you like to switch from feeling uncomfortable and worried to feeling positive and confident before your event? Your body has four built-in systems that when engaged can make this happen. All you have to do is use your <i>MIND</i> to activate the switch for each system one at a time and your <i>BODY</i> will do the rest.</p> <p><b>MIND</b></p> <p><i>MINDFULLY</i> observe the feelings in a detached way: "I am not my body and my body is not me"</p> <p><b>CALM</b></p> <p>Calm your mind: "This is my body getting ready to compete and meet the <i>CHALLENGE</i> of this event"</p> <p><b>CONFIDENT</b></p> <p>Connect arousal to positive thoughts: "I can go to the WELL and draw up experiences that give me confidence and energy"</p> <p><b>IN CONTROL</b></p> <p>Once the Challenge Response Alert has been triggered: "I can <i>CONTROL</i> what I focus on. Focusing on my <i>MENTAL PLAN</i> puts me in control"</p>

# MIND DING POSITIVE ENERGY THE REFRAMING OF PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

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# LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TRAINING FOR COACHES

*Presented by Dr. Greg Dale*

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## **PURPOSE**

To provide coaching education programs where coaches have an opportunity to examine their coaching styles and philosophies with an emphasis on earning and maintaining credibility.

## **THEORY**

Coaches at the middle school, high school and college levels often attend professional development workshops to further their knowledge of the sports they coach. This training is often focused on x's and o's and the technical strategies of coaching. While extremely important, this facet of coaching isn't the only determinant of a coach's success. When asked, many coaches admit that other aspects of their development (leadership, team dynamics, psychology of coaching) are equally important. As a result, I offer training programs for coaches that address leadership development based upon theories and strategies from sport psychology (Dale, 2005; Janssen & Dale, 2006; Lynch, 2001; Martens, 2004) and corporate leadership (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; George, 2003; Greenleaf, 2002). In addition, interviews with over 500 athletes and numerous highly credible coaches at various skill levels regarding characteristics of credible coaches were used to develop these programs.

## **TECHNIQUE**

I conduct an initial half-day to full day workshop with coaches at individual schools, school districts or organizations. These workshops consist of large and small group interactions, case studies and experiential activities. Ideally, follow-ups consist of three additional shorter sessions throughout the year. Those sessions are either conducted by me or an athletic administrator responsible for the development of the coaches.

Sample Topics Included in the Workshops:

- Definition of Success
- Credible vs. Coercive Coaching Styles
- Stages of a Coach's Career
- Legacy of the Coach
- Characteristics of Highly Credible Coaches
  - Character
  - Competent
  - Committed
  - Caring
  - Confidence Builders
  - Communicators
  - Consistent

# LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TRAINING FOR COACHES

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# ERASING STINKING THINKIN' WITH THE POWER OF THE POSITIVE USING POSITIVE THINKING TO ENHANCE PERFORMANCE

*Presented by Dr. Kristen Dieffenbach*

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## PURPOSE

To provide athletes with the opportunity to become more aware of the impact of their self talk and develop the skills to direct their self talk for positive constructive development.

## THEORY

This technique is grounded in Albert Ellis's cognitive behavioral theory (CBT) and cognitive restructuring technique. It focuses on using self awareness, self challenge, and reframing or replacement to improve confidence, effort, and performance.

Individuals who are self critical have a negative internal response to situations which diminishes both confidence and performance. CBT puts forth that regardless of the situation, an individual needs to understand the role that his or her personal thoughts and responses play as mediators between an activity or event and the consequences or outcome. This is also known as the ABC model where A is the event, C is the outcome and B represents the thoughts or ideas the person has about A which influence the end result or C. Learning to understand the role that these thoughts play in the subsequent consequences or results to the event or activity is a useful tool for an athlete to gain. The awareness of the direct personal influence that can be asserted in difficult or stressful situations is a powerful confidence enhancing tool. Great confidence has been associated with more determined effort, better resiliency, and improved enjoyment in participation.

The effective use of positive self talk requires first the awareness of the types of negative internal dialogue, or stinkin' thinkin' and the impact that it has on performance and effort. This awareness can then be followed up the use of thought stopping techniques and replacement with more task specific, constructive positive self statements. Depending on the nature of the situation, the self talk may take the form of being instructional, motivational, or self-affirmation. All types of self talk should be considered and developed as appropriate.

## TECHNIQUE

**A. Create awareness of self talk.** Everyone talks to themselves. Sometimes it is an intentional internal dialogue and sometimes it is just the silent backdrop of our thoughts. Often athletes don't give a second thought to their self talk. It is just the background elevator music that they don't really hear, yet later in the day they hum the song that was playing without knowing where it came from. Regardless of whether it is in the foreground or background, self talk can be positive and helpful for decision making and to reinforce our efforts or unfortunately, it can be negative and harmful, damaging confidence, reducing effort and ultimately diminishing performance.

**KEY QUESTION:** Think about training and/or competitive situations where you struggle. Identify and write down the statements you say to yourself when you are having a poor performance or when you are having trouble. (*I.e., I'm going to pop, I don't belong with this group, I'm not good enough*)

# ERASING STINKING THINKIN' WITH THE POWER OF THE POSITIVE USING POSITIVE THINKING TO ENHANCE PERFORMANCE

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**TECHNIQUE**    **B. Consider the impact of the internal dialogue.** Once aware of what types of things athletes are saying, it is important to guide them to consider the tone of the internal chatter and the impact that it can have. Frequently the negative self talk is seen as earned or deserved without consideration for the negative impact it has on future performance.

KEY QUESTION: *For each of the statements consider the following questions.*

- Is this something I would say out loud about myself in front of other people?
- Is this something I would say to a friend or teammate?
- Is this something that is helpful or positive?

If you answer 'no' to any one of these questions then you have identified a statement that can potentially harm your enjoyment and your performance.

**C. Making a change.** It is important to do more than just make athletes aware of negative statements and the detrimental effect this type of thinking can have. Typically this type of dialogue is a long set way of doing things and happens without much effort. In order to change the habit of saying such things, athletes need to work being tuned in to their dialogue and to halting the negative self statements as quickly as they occur.

KEY ACTIVITY: Identify a word or phrase you can use when you catch yourself saying something negative or counterproductive. (*ie: Enough! Drop it! Or some athletes will use a visual or auditory cue like a stop sign or a blast of noise they create*). Make a conscious effort to use your stop phrase or visual whenever a non-productive thought speaks up or gets loud enough to hear.

**D. Developing Positive Thinking.** Just halting the practice of stinkin' thinkin' is only half the equation to improving confidence, enjoyment and performance. It is important to empower the athlete with the ability to use positive constructive self talk to guide, direct and reinforce their efforts. Help athletes integrate their practice these skills into their daily routine, in training and in competitive type situations so the skill can become a natural part of their routine before expecting it to be useful in competition.

KEY ACTIVITY: It is important to recognize that changing from a negative self talk style to a positive style takes time and practice. It is very difficult to replace negatives with positives off the top of your head when in the middle of a stressful situation. Let's start by creating some ready to use positive and constructive statements that you can practice using. List positive, beneficial statements you can use to replace the negative, nonproductive thoughts. These statements should reflect what you need to do to stay focused and should include skill reminders or effort reminders that are important for task at hand. It is important that these statements feel truthful and meaningful to you. Avoid using words like 'don't' and avoid any negative statements. (*ie: Strong and steady, eyes up, relaxed arms, 5 minutes of effort, steady on for a count of 10, I am ready for this*).

# ERASING STINKING THINKIN' WITH THE POWER OF THE POSITIVE USING POSITIVE THINKING TO ENHANCE PERFORMANCE

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# HELPING ATHLETES MOVE FROM GOOD TO GREAT

*Presented by Dr. Dan Gould*

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- PURPOSE** To help successful athletes understand the skills and actions needed to move from being a good to a great performer as well as to become motivated to do so.
- THEORY** In recent years there has been a move to use what is learned in sport psychology and apply those principles to other performance contexts such as business (Gould, 2002; Jones, 2002). While this transfer of knowledge and skills has proven successful for a number of sport psychology specialists what has not been discussed is how the research and best practice literature in business can be used in the athletic context. An excellent example of this cross fertilization of knowledge comes from the highly acclaimed business book, *Good to great* (Collins, 2002). The book discusses what author Jim Collins' research team discovered in their 5 year study of 28 top corporations. In particular, companies that made the leap from good to great earnings were compared and contrasted similar companies who did not. Analyzing extensive data and interview results key factors associated with greatness were uncovered. Results shed light on a variety of management and strategy areas including such things as the need for a culture of discipline, the type of leadership required and pitfalls of radical restructuring.
- TECHNIQUE** I have adapted key elements of the *Good to great* findings for use with individual athletes and teams to help increase their awareness and motivation to move from good to great performers. This usually takes the form of a guided discussion using the attached handout. I begin the session by asking the athlete or team the question of "Why being a good athlete or team can be the enemy of becoming a great athlete or team?" This is followed up by the question "How does one go about moving from good to great?" Finally, the athletes or teams are asked "What being a disciplined person/team, having disciplined thoughts and taking disciplined actions means on a day-to-day basis?" I typically have the athletes or team complete a handout sheet with just the questions written on it. Attached is second handout (for the instructor) with key points to make as one discusses the athletes or teams responses.

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# HELPING ATHLETES MOVE FROM GOOD TO GREAT

## *Athlete Handout*

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### High Performance Sport Psychology *Moving from Good to Great!\**



1. Why is good the enemy of great?

☐☐☐

Keys:

2. What specifically will you do to move from “good to great”?

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\* Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great*. New York: Harper Business.

# HELPING ATHLETES MOVE FROM GOOD TO GREAT

## Instructor Notes

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### High Performance Sport Psychology *Moving from Good to Great!\**



#### 1. Why is good the enemy of great?

- ☐ *Because being good is comfortable—being great means consistently pushing yourself outside of your comfort zone! e.g., Tiger Woods reshaping swing*
- ☐ *To move from good to great you must become “comfortable being uncomfortable”*

#### Keys:

- *“Great is largely a matter of conscious choice.”*
- *Moving from Good to Great is a transformation process that involves:*
  - ☐ *Disciplined people*
  - ☐ *Disciplined thought*
  - ☐ *Disciplined action*

#### 2. What specifically will you do to move from “good to great”?

- ☐ *Be a Disciplined Person (Athlete):*
- ☐ *Have Disciplined Thought:*
- ☐ *Demonstrate Disciplined Action:*

**Note Teams:** Moving from good to great requires what is called “Level 5 Leadership” – Individuals (Athletes) who are incredibly ambitious, but their ambition is first and foremost for the team. Ego or self-interest comes second. These individuals also demonstrate tremendous will power and stoic determination. They will do almost anything (within the rules) to make their organization (team) great.

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\* Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great*. New York: Harper Business.

# CHANGING DESTRUCTIVE TO PRODUCTIVE THINKING VIA POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

*Presented by Dr. Gloria B. Solomon*

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## **PURPOSE**

To direct athletes attention from unproductive to constructive thinking

## **THEORY**

Positive psychology, or the psychology of positive affect, is a growing sub-discipline within the field of psychology. As sport psychology practitioners, we by definition, use principles of positive psychology when providing mental training services for athletes. The tenets of positive psychology suggest that each person has the capacity to mentally emphasize the quality life experiences. While many people are inclined to focus on what is not working, positive psychologists offer a technique whereby thought processes are redirected toward the positive experiential and situational dynamics in one's life. In brief, positive psychology assumes that dimensions of positive affect (happiness, excitement, joy) are just as authentic as negative affect (anxiety, depression, distress). Positive psychology allows for the self exploration of one's signature strengths (24 qualities grouped into 6 categories) and subsequent control over one's thought process. Using the signature strengths as a foundation, this technique allows athletes to identify common unproductive thoughts and learn a system of replacing those thoughts with a positive affective response, which is under their control and based on their signature strengths. Cognitive behaviorists posit that the majority of human thoughts are within one's control. Therefore, one can change negative thought processes. Combined, these two theories allow for the creation of a theory-to-practice technique for facilitating productive thinking in competitive athletics.

## **TECHNIQUE**

"What would you rather be thinking?"

1. Athlete completes the VIA Signature Strengths questionnaire available online at [www.authentic happiness.com](http://www.authentic happiness.com)
2. Athlete taught to identify patterns of disruptive self-talk which typically occur during pressure situations or after performance errors
3. Athlete asks self "What would you rather be thinking?"
4. Athlete is taught to create a constructive response to the pressure or error
5. Athlete categorizes common thoughts into two categories: within my control (C) and outside of my control (UC)
6. Ultimately, the athlete will become able to identify unproductive thoughts and quickly counter with a constructive and controllable thought

# CHANGING DESTRUCTIVE TO PRODUCTIVE THINKING VIA POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

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## REFERENCES

Ben-Shahar, T. (2007). *Happier: Learn the secrets to daily joy and lasting fulfillment*. New York: McGraw Hill.

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# AROUSAL REGULATION THROUGH BIOFEEDBACK

*Presented by Dr. Barbara J. Walker*

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## PURPOSE

Regulating Arousal, particularly with states of over-arousal and performance anxiety. Through biofeedback, the technique allows clients to gain awareness of the connection between the mind, emotions, and their body, and how their thoughts influence performance. The technique is practiced in a sedentary position and then replicated via practice by the athlete during performance.

## THEORY

Hanin's Zone of Optimal Functioning, Herbert Benson's Relaxation Response, Children's HeartLock technique from the HeartMath Institute, as well as research on the Autonomic Nervous System.

Research has demonstrated that different patterns of heart activity (which accompany different emotional states) have distinct effects on cognitive and emotional function. During stress and negative emotions, when the heart rhythm pattern is erratic and disordered, the corresponding pattern of neural signals traveling from the heart to the brain *inhibits* higher cognitive functions. This limits our ability to think clearly, remember, learn, reason, and make effective decisions. (This helps explain why we may often act impulsively and unwisely when we're under stress.) The heart's input to the brain during stressful or negative emotions also has a profound effect on the brain's emotional processes—actually serving to *reinforce* the emotional experience of stress. The more ordered and stable pattern of the heart's input to the brain during positive emotional states has the opposite effect—it *facilitates* cognitive function and reinforces positive feelings and emotional stability. This means that learning to generate increased heart rhythm coherence, by sustaining positive emotions, not only benefits the entire body, but also profoundly affects how we perceive, think, feel, and perform. (HMI, 2007).

Heart rate variability is a measure of the beat-to-beat changes in heart rate. The normal variability in heart rate is due to the synergistic action of the two branches of the autonomic nervous system (ANS)—the part of the nervous system that regulates most of the body's internal functions. The sympathetic nerves act to accelerate heart rate, while the parasympathetic (vagus) nerves slow it down. The sympathetic and parasympathetic branches of the ANS are continually interacting to maintain cardiovascular activity in its optimal range and to permit appropriate reactions to changing external and internal conditions. The analysis of HRV therefore serves as a dynamic window into the function and balance of the autonomic nervous system. (HMI, 2007).

In general, emotional stress, including overarousal both physically and emotionally—including emotions such as anger, frustration, and anxiety—gives rise to heart rhythm patterns that appear irregular and erratic: the HRV waveform looks like a series of uneven, jagged peaks (an example is shown in the figure below). Scientists call this an *incoherent* heart rhythm pattern. Physiologically, this pattern indicates that the signals produced by the two branches of the ANS are out of sync with each other. (HMI, 2007).

# AROUSAL REGULATION THROUGH BIOFEEDBACK

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**TECHNIQUE** A baseline is established for the athlete via the biofeedback software, which reads the quality of one's heart rhythm in a sedentary position. I usually have them recall an exceptional performance from the past and measure their results. I then teach the athlete diaphragmatic and/or circular breathing, including a particular counting technique, while measuring their heart rhythms. We utilize many different scenarios, including having them re-experience a negative performance and then use mental rehearsal to visualize a new, positive experience. After establishing success, the athlete then takes this newly learned skill out the field to replicate the same feeling state experienced in the office.

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[www.emwavepc.com](http://www.emwavepc.com) or [www.heartmath.org](http://www.heartmath.org)