

THE JOURNAL OF EXCELLENCE



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Mission of the Journal of Excellence

Terry Orlick, PhD – Founder and Editor in Chief, the Journal of Excellence.

My mission in beginning the Journal of Excellence was to fill some important gaps in our knowledge, and in our lives, that are essential to the successful pursuit of excellence. The Journal of Excellence is devoted to nurturing excellence in all human endeavors and all worthy pursuits. It is centered on the pursuit of excellence in the working or performing parts of our lives, as well as the non-working parts of our lives. Our goal is to inspire excellence, to present a forum to discuss the positive pursuit of excellence and to provide practical strategies and perspectives for pursuing high-level goals.

The Journal of Excellence is committed to a positive vision of education and training for better people, better performers and a better world.

There is much value in the pursuit of excellence, for example in education, sport, health, the performing arts, parenting, teaching, coaching, leadership, health care, business and every workplace. There is also much value in the pursuit of quality living, quality relationships and the development of a higher level of humanity. This is the first and only journal, which has **EXCELLENCE** in multiple domains as its sole focus. Providing insights and strategies for being successful in the pursuit of performance excellence and excellence in living is the ultimate mission of the Journal of Excellence.

My vision is a journal that is applied in orientation, relevant in content and wide ranging in application. We are committed to:

- 1) Learning from and sharing the experiences of great performers and great people.
- 2) Developing a more thorough understanding of the mental links to excellence.
- 3) Promoting excellence in performance and excellence in living.
- 4) Initiating positive real world change.

If you have experiences, applied research or meaningful insights that are relevant to the pursuit of excellence in any worthy human endeavor, for any age group, we encourage you to submit your material to the Journal of Excellence to be considered for publication.

Introduction to Journal 8

Executive Coaching and Performance: An Overview of the Path Ahead

James **Kendrick** and Terry **Orlick**, Canada

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Almost 500 years ago, Ferdinand Magellan left Spain with 5 ships and 250 men on a journey around the world. Three years later, after enormous hardship, Magellan returned to Spain with only one ship and 18 men, having just completed the first circumnavigation of the globe. About 420 years later, the reclusive American billionaire, Howard Hughes, embarked on his own voyage around the world, this time by plane. His trip lasted just under four days. And, today, astronauts can orbit the globe in 90 minutes. That is more than 64 times faster than Hughes and more than 17,000 times faster than Magellan's original journey.

There are a couple of points to this little history lesson. First, while it is probably obvious to most people that the rate of technological change is increasing, what might not be so apparent for many is that change, in general, is now a constant part of personal and professional life. The implication is that we can no longer simply rely on "what worked in the past" to achieve and maintain excellence today and tomorrow. We need to continually learn, to adapt and to improve, just to maintain our relevance let alone achieve excellence.

Second, not one of these people who excelled or pushed the limits, could have

achieved their level of excellence without input from “trusted advisors”, whether in the days of the early explorers or in today’s fast-paced environment. It is perfectly normal and acceptable to seek advice from those who can provide competent guidance, motivation and inspiration in virtually all disciplines.

As a field, “executive coaching” has exploded in popularity in recent years and there are a large number of individuals from various backgrounds who call themselves “executive coaches”. Whether it is helping a business line manager plan for an important talk, assisting a VP in the diagnosis of a strategic issue, or guiding a CEO through a change management process or lifestyle change, these “trusted advisors” can play a critical role in several ways by : serving as a sounding board, helping to identify personal and leadership strengths and weaknesses, assisting in the development of an action plan, and getting others to see the opportunities and possibilities. Bottom line: executive coaches or trusted advisors help executives make specific positive behavioral changes while increasing their effectiveness as leaders and as people.

Issue #8 of the Journal of Excellence deals with coaching and performance. The first three articles deal directly with coaching executives while the last two articles offer potential coaches of executives some practical insights on how to be effective advisors. In the first article, Witherspoon and White describe four roles that coaches play in the corporate environment, depending on context and function and need. Coaching for skills helps people learn specific skills, behaviors and attitudes over several weeks or months. Coaching for development helps people prepare for advancement and it can take place over a year or more. Coaching for an executive’s agenda is a personalized ap-

proach that provides ongoing support on broader themes such as personal lifestyle issues, stress management, transitions, productivity improvement or shifts in strategy. Coaching for performance helps executives function more effectively in their present jobs. In sum, the authors present an overview of the basic uses of executive coaching in today’s business context.

In the second article, Marshall Goldsmith describes a unique concept called “feedforward”. Arguing that traditional feedback focuses too much on the past and on what has already occurred, Goldsmith often gets leaders and executives to focus their thinking on future possibilities and the behavioral changes that may help them perform more successfully, more consistently. We believe that Goldsmith’s approach is based on a solid foundation of communication and is an excellent way to help individuals and groups of people to maximize their performance and the performance of others.

The third article presents a unique experiential approach to executive coaching that blends elements of practical performance psychology with theatrical improvisation. Written in manuscript style for a theatrical play, Cathy Salit describes a workshop that she runs with groups of executives called “Directing a Performance” in which a parallel is drawn between the “theatre director” and the skills and abilities required of executives to be effective coaches and/or mentors in their organizations. The practice of traditional executive coaching is most often done privately on a one-on-one basis. The type of intervention described in this article has the added benefit of bringing together groups of 20-30 executives to observe each other’s behaviors and expressions and to learn in a shared environment.

In the fourth article, entitled “Mental strategies of elite Mount Everest climbers”, Shaunna Burke and Terry Orlick address the mental skills and perspectives required to be successful when facing an extremely demanding, life-threatening challenge. We all probably feel like we are facing a Mount Everest challenge at some point in our life. How well we get through those challenges has a lot to do with our mind-set and focus. Successfully climbing to the summit of Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world, has many relevant analogies for excelling and persisting through obstacles or set-backs in the business world. It really drives home the importance of having a vision of where you want to go, detailed planning, preparing for obstacles, focusing on the step in front of you, and developing a real sense of team support.

The fifth article entitled “Lessons learned from graduate students’ early consulting experiences” was written by a group of graduate students who were training to become coaches/consultants in the performance enhancement field. These newly graduated consultants, Jessica Fraser-Thomas, Kelly Doell, Louise Friend, James Galipeau, Alex Lamontagne, Kristin Marvin, and Paul Sealy share their views on what they learned from their applied internship experiences as graduate students in the sport and performance enhancement field. They also speak about the importance of being given the opportunity to gain hands-on experience, where they get quality coaching, mentoring and supervision in the applied consulting field. They have some important insights related to helping young or developing performance enhancement coaches / consultants become highly competent and confident in what they have to offer performers and leaders in a variety of contexts.

There are common elements across each of these articles. First, no matter the context, effective coaching and consulting require honesty and openness, both from a giving and a receiving perspective. Second, coaching in a business environment is similar to coaching in an athletic world where the desired outcome is quality performance and ongoing excellence, however defined. Third, regardless of the type, executive coaching is really about continuous learning. We would argue that the ability to learn, and the commitment to continue to improve, are perhaps the cornerstones of consistent high-level performance. Lastly, executive coaching in this context happens at three levels – directly for the individual who is being supported, indirectly for those around the individual who will be affected by the changes occurring in the individual being coached, and at the organizational level where effectiveness and productivity gains accrue as a result.

The path ahead for executives is filled with both challenges and opportunities. The role that executive coaches/trusted advisors can play becomes increasingly important as the rate of change and the complexities of work and life increase. When pursuing personal or professional excellence, there is value in looking at lessons from other high performance domains. Trusted advisors and executive coaches who can meaningfully address performance issues and help executives see possibilities along the path can add real value to any leader, team or organization.

Every day is an opportunity to become better in some way – better at listening, relaxing, focusing, eliminating distractions, coaching, leading, creating new visions and finding opportunities in tough times. We wish you the best in this quest along your own path.

Essential Ways That Coaching Can Help Executives

Robert Witherspoon and Randall P. White, USA

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Abstract

This article briefly describes four of the most popular types of executive coaching in today's marketplace. The four types are defined in practical terms and suggestions are made with respect to when it might be appropriate to employ each one. The authors present coaching as an important way of getting executives to learn continuously. They place the four coaching types on a continuum based on an assessment of the learning that each executive requires.

This article was adapted for the Journal of Excellence by James Kendrick from the work of Robert Witherspoon and Randall P. White. 1997, "Four Essential Ways That Coaching Can Help Executives", Greensboro, N.C.: Center for Creative Leadership. The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) is an international, nonprofit educational institution founded in 1970 to advance the understanding, practice, and development of leadership for the benefit of society worldwide. To obtain a copy of the full publication, please contact the CCL online bookstore at www.ccl.org/publications.

The Roles Coaches Play with Executives

Imagine a professional football team that recruits the best players, puts them through a training camp to hone their technical skills and learn the plays and strategies to win, and then plays the entire season without a prac-

tice or a coach. There is not a team owner in the world that would ever expose such a major investment to that kind of risk. Yet most traditional practices in organizations seem to do just that. People are expected to perform key roles – to lead a new project team, to present financial results to outside

investors, to manage conflicts across departments – all in an exemplary fashion, without training, practice, or coaching. Consequently, many investments in people – the human side of enterprise – have had mixed results. As a result many organizations have turned to coaching. Coaching is recognized in business, in teaching, and in sports as a positive and empowering strategy for performance and leadership development.

For decades, athletes, public speakers, and performing artists have turned to coaches to help them perform better. For individuals already atop their fields, the next level of performance cannot be taught, but it can be learned. To coach in these situations is less to instruct than to facilitate (to make easy). Now this approach has taken hold in business, where top executives are turning to coaches to reach their business and personal best.

Coaching entails individually helping executives to learn and to make the most of that learning. Because these encounters involve executives in different stages of their careers and in varied settings, coaching represents a continuum of roles. *Sans* role, coaching is a process that helps executives learn, grow, and change. Since coaching is situational, what the coaching involves specifically depends on the executive and the situation. For example, Peters and Austin (1985) have discovered that talented leaders and coaches:

Make dozens of intuitive judgments daily about how to work with their people. Sometimes they focus on removing barriers to performance. Other times they immerse themselves in a situation and exert a great deal of influence on the way it turns out. There are times when they help people work through personal or performance problems, and there are

times when the only requirement is to provide straightforward information. In some situations, the coach is the dominant figure while in others the team practically forgets he or she is there (pp. 398-399).

Typically, external (those brought in from outside the organization) coaches have little or no direct influence – much less control – over the outcome. To have direct control is to manage, not to coach. It is the coach's lack of direct control or authority that makes the coaching difficult and challenging. A coach, however, can have considerable power depending on reputation, track record, access to other parts of the organization, and so forth. Absence of authority also makes possible major change, because the person being coached must be motivated internally. True, a coach can be instrumental in encouraging or motivating the executive to learn and to change, but ultimately the changes must be embraced by the executive if they are to be effective.

Coaching is more than an event; it is a continuous process. Good coaching requires a skill, a depth of understanding, and plenty of practice if it is to deliver its remarkable potential. Although some coaches reside inside the organization, this paper addresses the role of external one-on-one coaches in a business context. It does not address other settings, like personal growth seminars or “cyber coaching” over the Internet. Nor does it address group coaching functions like boardroom facilitation and team development. The focus here is on formal coaching – rather than on the many informal opportunities for coaching that arise on a daily basis.

One way to think of executive coaching roles is in terms of client need. Does the executive need to learn a new skill, to perform

better in the present job, or to prepare for a future leadership role? Does the executive understand and acknowledge these needs? Is he or she willing to seek and accept coaching? Or is the executive looking for a confidant to talk through issues and receive constructive feedback before taking action? These questions suggest client need – or primary coaching function – as one key dimension for distinguishing among different coaching roles.

Coaching role refers to the coach's primary function in helping an executive learn, grow, and change. These coaching functions may focus on imparting specific skills, addressing performance issues on the job, or supporting broader changes in the executive's behavior. There are often several coaching functions in any situation, but unless one is defined specifically as primary, there tends to be considerable confusion about expectations and resulting loss of time and effort.

Executive coaching entails several distinctly different roles, based on the primary function:

- Coaching for skills (learning sharply focused on a person's current task);
- Coaching for performance (learning focused more broadly on a person's present job);
- Coaching for development (learning focused on a person's future job); and,
- Coaching for the executive's agenda (learning focused in the broadest sense).

Early in the process, these different executive coaching roles should be clarified and discussed for several reasons:

1. It is important for both executive and coach to recognize the distinctions between the various roles, if only to foster informed choice by everyone taking part in the process – the executive (and possibly family members), the executive's boss, the human resources representative, and the coach providing the service.
2. These role distinctions provide a common language about coaching for both executives and practitioners and a useful way to orient all parties to the process of assessment, feedback, and action planning.
3. These critical distinctions represent a continuing choice through the life of the coaching relationship, but particularly during the early stages. The choices define behaviorally how executives and coaches can work together and can make the difference between meeting or not meeting the executive's expectations.
4. An open discussion of these matters is helpful in creating some ground rules and a feedback system to be used in the coaching process.

Each of the coaching roles has a different contribution to make when it comes to enabling the executive to act. Role clarity is also key in sizing up the situation: how to approach an opening for coaching; what to emphasize; what to leave alone for the time being; where to start. In practice, of course, these coaching roles may overlap over time. A coach contracted to help in skill building may end up working on performance issues. In the process, a longer-term relationship may be forged that contributes to the executive's overall development. Changes in role, however, should be acknowledged specifi-

cally by all parties so that the coaching contract can be changed accordingly.

Executive coaching might be defined as a confidential, highly personal learning process. Typically, the coaching is designed to bring about effective action, performance improvement, and/or personal growth for the individual executive, as well as better business results for the executive's organization. More than other forms of organized learning (for example, workshops or traditional classrooms), coaching is personal in several senses. First, it is individualized. In working one-on-one, there is the recognition that no two people are alike. Each person has a unique knowledge base, learning pace, and learning style. Consequently, executives progress at their own pace, although holding people personally accountable for their progress is often a key element of executive coaching. Second, coaching is personal when uncovering blind spots and changing one's personal style.

Coaching for Skills

Coaching for skills is learning focused on a person's current task or project, typically in the context of the present job. "Skill" is used broadly to include basic ideas, strategies, methods, behaviors, attitudes, and perspectives associated with success in business. Sometimes the executive needs conceptual clarity – "I am not familiar with the basic principles" or "I do not understand why these skills are needed or when to apply them." Other times executives need to build or sharpen a skill associated with success in business or professional life – "I have never learned how to do it" or "I know how, but do not always do it well." Usually this coaching is needed for the short-term (this week, this month) and is clearly identified and agreed on by the executive and others in the organization. Further, coaching for skills represents little or no threat to most learners.

Coaching for skills helps people learn specific skills, behaviors, and attitudes – often over several weeks or months. Situations well-suited to this coaching role include:

- to support learning on the job (for example, before or after a "first" such as a first customer visit or a first board meeting);
- to support traditional classroom training (for example, by reinforcing learning and practical applications back on the job); or
- to support job redesign (for example, when reengineering introduces new or different roles and responsibilities).

Coaching for Development

Coaching for development is learning focused on a person's future job. Typically, the executive needs to prepare for a career move, often as part of succession planning discussions. For some, the challenge may be to strengthen leadership skills for higher levels in the organization. Others may need to "unlearn" a behavior that's become a liability – a strength overdone that has become a weakness. Usually this coaching is viewed as a long-term investment. However, the extent of that investment may vary depending on client need and on the degree to which an organization maintains succession planning systems and success profiles of its executives. Finally, coaching for development can be intense, analytical, and may represent more threat to some learners than coaching for skills or performance. Of all the coaching roles, coaching for development tends to involve a deeper focus on executive development and personal growth. As one coach has said, "This is easy for

people who are introspective and enjoy root canals.”

Coaching for development helps people prepare for advancement – often over an extended period of a year or more. Business examples include providing support for possible promotions or lateral transfers. This coaching role can help:

- to learn more skills and capabilities for a future job, after coaching for performance;
- to clarify shared goals about success when executives and their organizations are at odds about the skills and perspectives needed for success in a future position; or
- to encourage the long-term development of promising people by facilitating learning from challenging career experiences.

Coaching for the Executive’s Agenda

Coaching for the executive’s agenda helps that person realize broader purposes, the results and well-being the executive wants in life – often on an ongoing basis. The scope for this coaching can range considerably and usually goes beyond a single person or situation. Business examples include: mergers and acquisitions, productivity and quality improvement, executive leadership transitions, turnarounds, and coping with explosive growth. Among the situations well suited to this coaching role are:

- to support better decisions when insight and perspective are needed on an executive’s ideas;
- to open up more options when creative suggestions could improve the chances for sound decisions;

- to support change management by preparing an executive to successfully implement specific change initiatives; or
- to guide the executive through unknown or unexplored areas or when the executive feels overwhelmed.

Coaching for Performance

Coaching for performance is learning focused on a person’s present job. Typically, the executive feels the need to function more effectively at work (“I need to do a better job at ...” or to address performance issues – “I am not aware of how my actions have affected others” or “I have not made a commitment to doing it well”). For executives at risk in the workplace, the challenge may be to correct problem behaviors before they jeopardize productivity or derail a career. Although this coaching is usually seen as needed for the short or intermediate term (this quarter, this year), and it is critical for the long term, it is often seen as less urgently needed than coaching for skills. Also, there may be less shared agreement about the need for performance coaching, particularly with regard to the executive at risk. Finally, coaching for performance can represent more threat to some learners than coaching for skills. For others, the experience is challenging, something like private swimming lessons for Olympic-class swimmers.

In coaching-for-performance situations, clarity is mixed as perceived by those considering the coaching (the executive, the boss, and relevant others). Coaching goals are often fuzzy. For example, there may be a presenting problem (“He is not doing it the way he is supposed to ...”) but little clear definition of actual behavior or root causes. Or people may be expected to improve their effectiveness on their own but do not know

how. Likewise, the business reasons for coaching may be less clear than when coaching for skills. Consequently, coaching for performance tends to involve more time, if only to reach clarity and consensus about the need for coaching and desired outcomes.

Coaching for performance helps people improve their effectiveness on the job – often over several quarters or a year or more. This coaching role can be applied to improve performance in a present position:

- to practice and apply effective performance on the job;
- to clarify performance goals when expectations about behavior are unclear or when business goals, roles, or conditions change; or
- to orient and support a newly appointed executive, or someone with significant new responsibilities, in making a smooth transition.

Coaching for performance also can help to change individual behaviors and correct problems:

- to confront ineffective attitudes or other motivational issues;
- to alleviate performance problems when deficiencies jeopardize a person's productivity, job, or career;
- to increase confidence and commitment when seasoned players have experienced career setbacks and disappointments; or
- to deal with blind spots that detract from otherwise outstanding performance.

In these cases, the coach acts as a performance coach by helping executives assess their performance, obtain feedback on individual strengths and weaknesses, and enhance their effectiveness. The coaching sessions typically focus on performance in the present job, although continued improvement may well lead to advancement.

Example Situation

The CEO of a diversified service firm discovered that as the company grew, there was no performance feedback system to accurately assess his performance or that of other key players in the company. The short-term goal was to set viable measures for executive success and apply them to himself and top managers. Longer term, the CEO hoped to establish a leadership development program that would ensure the next generation of executives for the organization.

Process

A coach was hired to help the CEO achieve these goals. They began by defining a success profile of specific skills and behaviors that related to effectiveness in that organization. Based on this competency model, a multi-rater (360-degree) instrument which best measured these competencies was chosen to gather feedback. An assessment was then conducted in which the executive was reviewed by a full circle of board directors, peers, subordinates, and outside customers whose observations of the CEO could be valuable.

Following the assessment, this feedback was presented, along with the coach's observations of the executive, in a series of confidential sessions. The coach and the executive focused on how to learn from the data by (1) interpreting and accepting the data, (2) identifying performance trends and areas for improvement, (3) analyzing reasons for

major performance problems, and (4) establishing action steps for performance improvement.

Results

The CEO described the performance feedback as revealing, accurate, honest, and useful. The feedback was trusted and accepted because it came from the combined judgment of many people with firsthand knowledge of the CEO's performance. With coaching skills after the assessment, the executive saw progress in managing execution, the skill set he selected to develop. Specifically, he was better able to delegate and coordinate work and was more effective in

empowering employees. As a result, both the CEO and others acknowledged that he had become a more effective executive.

Conclusion

In this paper, we focused on some significant distinctions among coaching roles. We want to close by pointing out that all coaching roles have something in common. First, all executive coaching involves action research – or action learning, the user-friendly term. Second, successful coaching involves working in partnership with executives. By combining a coach's observations and capabilities with an executive's expertise, the executive achieves better and faster results.

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Leadership Development : Try Feedforward Instead of Feedback

Marshall Goldsmith, USA

Marshall Goldsmith is widely recognized as one of the world's foremost authorities in helping leaders achieve positive, measurable change in behavior: for themselves, their people and their teams. In 2000, Forbes Magazine listed Marshall as one of five top executive coaches and Human Resources magazine rated Marshall as one of the world's leading HR consultants. He has also been ranked by the Wall Street Journal as one of the "Top 10" consultants in the field of executive education. His work has received national recognition from the Institute for Management Studies, the American Management Association, the American Society for Training and Development and the Human Resource Planning Society. His coaching process has been positively described in both the New York Times and the Financial Times

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Abstract

Quality communication—between and among people at all levels and every department and division—is the glue that holds organizations together. Feedforward is basically giving someone else positive suggestions for the future, rather than focusing on negatives of the past. By using feedforward—and by encouraging others to use it—leaders can dramatically improve the quality of communication in their organizations, ensuring that the right message is conveyed, and that those who receive it are receptive to its content. The result is a much more dynamic, much more open organization—one whose employees focus on the promise of the future rather than the mistakes of the past. This article presents simple steps for making feedforward work with your group or organization.

Adapted for the Journal of Excellence by James Kendrick from an article by Marshall Goldsmith in *Leader to Leader*, summer 2002, published by Jossey-Bass and The Drucker Foundation.

The Positive Impact of Feedforward Communication

Giving and receiving feedback has long been considered to be an essential skill for leaders. As they strive to achieve the goals of the organization, employees need to know how they are doing. They need to know if their performance is what their leaders expect from them and if not, they need suggestions on how to improve. Traditionally,

this information has been communicated in the form of feedback from leaders to their employees. And, leaders themselves need feedback from their employees, in the form of suggestions for how to improve procedures and processes, innovative ideas for new products and services, and input on their own leadership styles. This has become increasingly common with the advent of 360° feedback.

But there is a fundamental problem with feedback: it focuses on the *past*, on what has already occurred—not on the infinite variety of opportunities that can occur in the future. As such, feedback can be limited and static, as opposed to expansive and dynamic.

Over the past several years, I have observed more than five thousand leaders as they participated in a fascinating experiential exercise. In the exercise, participants are each asked to play two roles. In one role, they are asked to *provide feedforward*—that is, to give someone else suggestions for the future and *help as much as they can*. The term “feedforward” has been used previously by engineers, but not in the domain of human communication until it was coined in a discussion that I had with Jon Katzenbach, author of *The Wisdom of Teams, Real Change Leaders and Peak Performance*.

In the second role, they are asked to *accept feedforward*—that is, to listen to the suggestions for the future and learn as much as they can. The exercise typically lasts for 10-15 minutes, and the average participant has 6-7 dialogue sessions. In the exercise participants are asked to:

- Pick one behavior that they would like to change. Change in this behavior should make a significant, positive difference in their lives.
- Describe this behavior to randomly selected fellow participants. This is done in one-on-one dialogues. It can be done quite simply with comments like, “I want to be a better listener.”
- Ask for feedforward—for two suggestions for the future that might help them achieve a positive change in their selected behavior. *If participants have worked together in the*

past, they are not allowed to give ANY feedback about the past. They are only allowed to give ideas for the future.

- Listen attentively to the suggestions and take notes. *Participants are not allowed to comment on the suggestions in any way. They are not allowed to critique the suggestions or even to make positive judgmental statements, such as, “That’s a good idea.”*
- Thank the other participants for their suggestions.
- Ask the other persons what they would like to change.
- Provide feedforward - two suggestions aimed at helping them change.
- Say, “You are welcome.” when thanked for the suggestions. The entire process of both giving and receiving feedforward usually takes about two minutes.
- Find another participant and keep repeating the process until the exercise is stopped.

When the exercise is finished, I ask participants to provide one word that best describes their reaction to this experience. I ask them to complete the sentence, “This exercise was ...”. The words provided are almost always extremely positive, such as “great”, “energizing”, “useful” or “helpful.” The most common word mentioned is “fun!”

What is the *last* word that most of us think about when we receive coaching and developmental ideas? Fun!

Ten Reasons to Try Feedforward

Participants are then asked why this exercise is seen as fun and helpful as opposed to painful, embarrassing or uncomfortable. Their answers provide a great explanation of why feedforward can often be more useful than feedback.

1. *We can change the future. We can't change the past.* Feedforward helps people envision and focus on a positive future, not a failed past. Athletes are often trained using feedforward. Racecar drivers are taught to, “look at the road, not the wall.” Basketball players are taught to envision the ball going in the hoop and to imagine the perfect shot. By giving people ideas on how they can be even more successful, we can increase their chances of achieving this success in the future.
2. *It can be more productive to help people be “right” in the future than prove they were “wrong” in the past.* Negative feedback often becomes an exercise in “let me prove you were wrong.” This tends to produce defensiveness on the part of the receiver and discomfort on the part of the sender. Even constructively delivered feedback is often seen as negative as it necessarily involves a discussion of mistakes, shortfalls, and problems. Feedforward, on the other hand, is almost always seen as positive because it focuses on solutions.
3. *Feedforward is especially suited to successful people.* Successful people like getting ideas that are aimed at helping them achieve their goals. They tend to resist negative judgment. We all tend to accept feedback

that is consistent with the way we see ourselves. We also tend to reject or deny feedback that is inconsistent with the way we see ourselves. Successful people tend to have a very positive self-image. I have observed many successful executives respond to (and even enjoy) feedforward. I am not sure that these same people would have had such a positive reaction to feedback.

4. *Feedforward can come from anyone who knows about the task. It does not require personal experience with the individual.* One very common positive reaction to the previously described exercise is that participants are amazed by how much they can learn from people that they don't know! For example, if you want to be a better listener, almost any fellow leader can give you ideas on how you can improve. They don't have to know you. Feedback requires knowing about the person. Feedforward just requires having good ideas for achieving the task.
5. *People do not take feedforward as personally as feedback.* In theory, constructive feedback is supposed to “focus on the performance, not the person”. In practice, almost all feedback is taken personally (no matter how it is delivered). Successful people's sense of identity is highly connected with their work. The more successful people are, the more this tends to be true. It is hard to give a dedicated professional feedback that is not taken personally. Feedforward cannot involve a personal critique, since it is discussing something that has not yet happened!

6. *Feedback can reinforce personal stereotyping and negative self-fulfilling prophecies.* Feedforward can reinforce the possibility of change. Feedback can reinforce the feeling of failure. How many of us have been “helped” by a spouse, significant other or friend, who seems to have a near-photographic memory of our previous “sins” that they share with us in order to point out the history of our shortcomings. Negative feedback can be used to reinforce the message, “this is just the way you are”. Feedforward is based on the assumption that people can make positive changes in the future.
7. *Face it! Most of us hate getting negative feedback, and we don't like to give it.* I have reviewed summary 360° feedback reports for over 50 companies. The items, “provides developmental feedback in a timely manner” and “encourages and accepts constructive criticism” almost always score near the bottom on co-worker satisfaction with leaders. Traditional training does not seem to make a great deal of difference. If leaders got better at providing feedback every time the performance appraisal forms were “improved”, most should be perfect by now! Leaders are not very good at giving or receiving negative feedback. It is unlikely that this will change in the near future.
8. *Feedforward can cover almost all of the same “material” as feedback.* Imagine that you have just made a terrible presentation in front of the executive committee. Your manager is in the room. Rather than make you “relive” this humiliating experience, your manager might help you prepare for future presentations by giving you suggestions for the future. These suggestions can be very specific and still delivered in a positive way. In this way your manager can “cover the same points” without feeling as embarrassed and without making you feel even more humiliated.
9. *Feedforward tends to be much faster and more efficient than feedback.* An excellent technique for giving ideas to successful people is to say, “Here are four ideas for the future. Please accept these in the positive spirit that they are given. If you can only use two of the ideas, you are still two ahead. Just ignore what doesn't make sense for you.” With this approach almost no time gets wasted on judging the quality of the ideas or “proving that the ideas are wrong”. This “debate” time is usually negative; it can take up a lot of time, and it is seldom productive. By eliminating judgment of the ideas, the process becomes much more positive for the sender, as well as the receiver. Successful people tend to have a high need for self-determination and will tend to accept ideas that they can “buy” while rejecting ideas that feel “forced” upon them.
10. *Feedforward can be a useful tool to apply with managers, peers and team members.* Rightly or wrongly, feedback is associated with judgment. This can lead to very negative unintended consequences when applied to managers or peers. Feedforward does not imply superiority of judgment. It is more focused on being a helpful “fellow traveler” than an

“expert”. As such it can be easier to hear from a person who is not in a position of power or authority. An excellent team building exercise is to have each team member ask, “How can I better help our team in the future?” and listen to feedforward from fellow team members (in one-on-one dialogues.)

In summary, the intent of this article is not to imply that leaders should never give feedback or that performance appraisals should be abandoned. The intent is to show how feedforward can often be preferable to feedback in day-to-day interactions. Aside from its effectiveness and efficiency, feedforward can make life a lot more enjoyable. When managers are asked, “How did you feel the last time you received feedback?”

their most common responses are very negative. When managers are asked how they felt after receiving feedforward, they reply that feedforward was not only useful, it was also fun!

Quality communication — between and among people at all levels and every department and division—is the glue that holds organizations together. By using feedforward—and by encouraging others to use it—leaders can dramatically improve the quality of communication in their organizations, ensuring that the right message is conveyed, and that those who receive it are receptive to its content. The result is a much more dynamic, much more open organization—one whose employees focus on the promise of the future rather than the mistakes of the past.

The Coach As Theatre Director

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Abstract

This article presents an innovative approach to executive coaching. Based on improvisational performance, the approach is the hallmark of the consulting firm **Performance of a Lifetime** (POAL) in New York City. It grows out of several decades of psychological and educational discovery and practice in synthesizing elements of theatrical performance with elements of developmental psychology and psychotherapy.

In this approach, the art of improvising is connected to the art of coaching in order to help executives see and explore new opportunities.

Introduction

As CEO and lead trainer for Performance of a Lifetime (POAL), I knew I wanted to present a concrete illustration of our approach in action. But rather than describe it or talk about it in the abstract, I wanted to capture and convey the life and the process of the work we do — and to do that in writing is a chal-

lenge! So I revisited one of our recent half-day executive trainings and fashioned it into a theatrical play (Part One — The Practice). You'll find some "theory" in the play, mostly spoken by the character Cathy (based on me). I'll then make some more formal comments on the most salient theoretical background in Part Two — The Theory.

PART ONE
THE PRACTICE
 (in the form of a two-act play)

Cast of Characters

POAL Trainers:
 Cathy, David, Adam and Margo

25 Workshop Participants, including:
 Andrew, Barry, Jim, Nick, Teri, Walt

Act One
The Performance Challenge

Scene One
Creating the Stage

It's 8 o'clock on a Thursday morning in a large meeting room at a corporate conference center in Chicago. Swivel chairs are arranged in a large semicircle facing a small stage. One by one, 25 senior executives from a Fortune 500 company enter the room with coffee in cardboard cups and large loose-leaf notebooks. They're men, and a few women, from 40-65 years of age, dressed in sweats or shorts or jeans. They are obviously nervous — and skeptical — about the “acting class” they've been drafted into.

The four actor-trainers from the consulting firm Performance of a Lifetime stand waiting to begin. Cathy, the leader of the group, steps forward to address the executives.

CATHY

Good morning and welcome to “Directing a Performance.” This will be an experiential workshop in which we'll explore the relationship between the skills and talents of a theatre director and the skills and talents required for leaders in the organization to be

effective coaches and mentors. We're going to begin with a theatrical demonstration.

Cathy motions to the stage, where Adam and Margo now sit.

CATHY

In this scene, Rose and Christopher — portrayed by Margo and Adam — play a husband and wife who have been experiencing difficulties in their marriage. The setting is their summer home where they've just arrived for the weekend. Our director for the morning will be David.

Cathy gestures to David, who stands near the back of the semicircle with a clipboard and pen and a copy of the script. He nods. Actors begin. The characters face each other tensely, sharing resentments and regrets. As the scene is performed, most of the executives are immediately engaged. A few are self-conscious of this fact, and look around to see if others are. Half-smiles emerge on their faces. After about four minutes, David stops the scene.

DAVID

(To Actors.) Good. (He approaches the stage.) How'd that feel to you?

Actors express a lukewarm response to their performances. David compliments them on their clarity and the intensity of their listening. His questions elicit their intentions at specific points in the scene — how is “Rose” viewing the interaction, what does “Christopher” expect, want, etc. David makes suggestions to build on these intentions.

DAVID

When we do it again, go ahead and stand up when you want. Feel free to move wherever the impulse takes you. And it'll be your partner's challenge to accept and deal with

whatever you come up with. Okay? Let's try it again.

Actors perform the scene again. The improvement is remarkable, the room is bathed in a palpable tension. Eyes widen in the audience, and several partners lean forward in their chairs. Silence follows the last moment of the scene. Then Cathy steps forward.

CATHY

(Applauding; executives follow suit.) Thank you! See the difference that a little direction, a little coaching makes? Think for a moment about the director-actor interaction we just saw. This was a conversation — in which together they came up with the “next steps.”

Being a good theatre director, and being a good coach, means that you are concerned with creating an environment for learning, for development, and for discovery — an environment for exploration. We're going to work to create that kind of an environment with you today.

Talented directors (and by the way there are many untalented ones!) create a rehearsal and performance environment that is a great place to work. They bring a strong vision to the table... *and* that vision is synthesized with their ability to create an environment in which people feel that what they have to give matters, will be respected, will be used. And that's the kind of setting where people do their best work.

Let's take a look at the Good Coach Chart, hanging up over there next to the podium. It identifies some of the key attributes of a good director, or a good coach. We're going to go on a creative journey with you this morning that will explore these attributes:

A GOOD COACH

- Sees the real person, not who you think they should be
- Asks “what can I give to this person to take their performance further?”
- Sees more than the obvious
- Builds on people's strengths
- Asks, “What *is* this scene?” and “what *could* this scene be?”
- Pays thoughtful attention to her or his own performance style in giving coaching
- Becomes skillful in asking for help and direction from others

This workshop is deliberately designed as a creative, experiential journey, *not* a cognitive one. We're not going to give you a lot of information today, because this session is about the *art* of directing or coaching.

Now I don't know what you've heard about this program from some of your colleagues. I know that this is an unusual setting for you to be in — you chose financial services, not theatre, for your professional life. *(Laughter and murmurs including “damn right.”)* Well let me tell you right now — we're aiming for this to be the weirdest workshop that you've ever taken! *(Laughter is now loud and acknowledging — a few groans can be heard as well.)* Yes. In here, weird is good because we want to tap into some abilities and viewpoints that you don't get to work with a lot of the time.

We're going to relate to you as performers: as improvisers, directors and creative people. Because in addition to being senior executives, you are also performers. We all (we human beings, that is) have a natural

ability to perform — to pretend, to play, to create; to do what professional actors do; to be who we're not. We play different roles, different characters; we speak different lines, depending on our environment.

So today we're going to borrow from the activity of the acting profession. And we're also going to actively "reminisce" — we're going to borrow from the activity of children as well. Both actors and babies perform, you see. They both go through a process (either consciously or unconsciously, depending on which you are), a process in which they become somebody else. In the case of the actors, they become another character by reading a script, researching the character's history, by improvising, etc., etc.

In the case of the baby, you can see this in your own life, those of you who have kids or are around young children: when they learn to speak, they go from baby talk and making strange sounds to speaking the language. How does that happen? It happens because the big people around (you, me – aunts, uncles, older siblings, etc.) talk back to them — improvise with them — when they babble.

Cathy starts to make gurgling sounds and then imitates how we adults respond by saying, "You want a cookie, don't you!" Then she responds with another gurgle, and another adult response. The audience laughs as they recognize the very familiar discourse.

And it's these thousands and thousands of conversations — improvisational performances — that the child and the adult have together that enable the child to speak.

So what's happening here? The adult — the "coach" if you will — is relating to the child as a somebody who is "becoming." The

adult "coach" trusts and knows that the child is going to become a speaker — and relates to the child as such. And you know what? That learning environment makes it possible for the kid to talk. That social environment develops the child. Unconditional support: "Kid, I know you're going to make it from here to there."

Now, we're not children anymore — but we can still grow. And today, the world of acting and directing is going to help us tap into our ability to grow, and to help others to grow.

Now to be able to see what it takes to do that, to look through a director's lens — or in your case, a coaching lens — you have to go through some of that exploration yourself. If you want to help someone grow and develop and learn — to do what actors do, to be "who they are" and "who they're not" at the same time — you have to do some of that yourself. You have to tap into the performer in you.

That's hard. It's a different kind of work. It's actually a little bit more like play than work. We're going to do some playing and performing because we want to help you to act differently!

Why is that hard? Learning new things can be uncomfortable. Trying something a new way can be embarrassing, or scary. When you're really learning something new, you might not look good. Just like you might not look good when you're trying a whole different character than you've ever played on-stage. You make mistakes, you sound like an idiot...and that's how you discover what you can do! That's how you find out what you want to do. That's how a director or a coach can see new possibilities and help you to explore them. When you're coaching

someone you're guiding him or her to do things in a different and new way.

So we're going to play this morning. We're going to perform... act... improvise... make strange sounds, do weird things, bizarre physical movements and more. And you're going to play all the parts — you'll be a performer, you'll be a director, you'll be directed and you'll be the audience. We're packing two years of study at the Actors Studio into a half-day program, so we've got a lot to do. Let's get to work!

Scene Two. The Warm Up

MARGO

Thank you, Cathy. Let's all stand and make a big circle. You might want to push your chairs back to give us a little more room.

Participants stand, some reluctantly, and push back their chairs. Their big circle includes a noticeable gap on either side of Margo.

MARGO

You can also stand near me. Nothing any weirder happens over here.

A few isolated laughs. Participants fill the gap. Several have crossed arms, hands in pockets. Two run to put their cell phones on their chairs, and return to circle.

MARGO

We're going to dive right into the activity of changing our behavior. We like to use the term *performance* instead of *behavior*, since it's more flexible, creative — and positive. So we're going to change our performance right now, with an unusual warm-up that actors will sometimes do.

We're going to do that by doing everything very, very slowly over the next fifteen minutes or so. We tend to do things in our everyday lives at breakneck speed. Sometimes speed can be fine... and sometimes it can be problematic as well. When you're moving too fast, you can miss a lot. This is important if you want to be a good coach. We want to help you to slow down, and be more aware of setting your own pace.

Let's all take a neutral stance, feet a bit apart, weight evenly distributed, hands at your sides. And if you have to adjust your glasses or your hair, I'm going to ask you to do that very slowly as well. Now to start off, we're going to take a deep breath and let it out with a sigh, Okay? Everybody inhale...and exhale.

A wispy sound fills the room.

MARGO

Okay...that was...not very convincing. Let's try it again. Inhale...and exhale.

This time, there's a long heavy drone.

MARGO

Much better.

Participants go through a series of everyday movements, all done in extreme slow motion. Each lifts an arm as if a puppeteer was pulling a string wrapped around a wrist, then brings the arm back down twice as slowly. They walk towards the center of the circle, breaking down the movement — first sliding a foot across the floor, then putting weight on it, then sliding the other leg forward, finally adding the arms in counterpoint. Most avoid eye contact.

MARGO

Good. Now as you get close enough to another person, I want you to greet that person,

silently. Imagine if you will that we're all at a cocktail party, and you're "working the room" silently.

Greeting begins, with vigor. Margo reminds participants a few times to greet silently. They overcompensate with exaggerated gestures and handshakes. Margo instructs them to add funny faces to their greeting rituals and then gibberish. The volume and entertainment levels in the room rise in tandem. Margo has to shout the final instruction, which sends partners — slowly, very slowly — back to the perimeter of the circle.

MARGO

That was great; give yourselves a hand. *(All applaud.)* Let me hand things off to Adam.

Scene Three. The Non-Verbal Communication Game

ADAM

Thanks, Margo. The next exercise we're going to do is called "Passing the Imaginary Object." Here's how it works. Imagine that I'm holding a lump of invisible modeling clay. I'm going to take this clay and mold it into an ordinary everyday object. *(He does.)* Then I'm going to demonstrate using the object. *(He does.)* At this point it should be obvious to everyone what I have in my hands. *(Apparently it's a hammer.)* Okay?

Now I'm going to give the object to the person on my right. *(He passes it to Margo.)* She will take it from me and demonstrate using it also. *(She does.)* Then, she will transform the object into another one, pulling it, pushing it, reshaping it, whatever it takes. And she'll also demonstrate using it before passing it on to the next person in the circle, and so on.

A couple of guidelines: If you can't figure out what the object you're receiving is, you must give it back until the giver makes the object clear to you. Make your object something simple and easy to recognize, and something you're familiar with. This is not the time to unveil the underwater submarine launcher you've been working on in your basement for the past 15 years. Finally, try not to think in advance what your object will be. Let the object you receive inspire your choice of an object to make. As we say in the theatre, "be in the moment." Okay, let's start.

The game proceeds smoothly. The participants pantomime with surprising precision, and a lot of humor. One player passes a football; the next does an elaborate end zone dance after an imagined touchdown. At one point, an executive named Walt makes a waffle iron, but the next person in the circle, Andrew, doesn't get it and passes it back. A ripple of laughter goes through the circle, mostly at the moment when Andrew stares at the invisible clay and does...nothing. Walt tries again, more methodically going through the process of shaping the object. Andrew doesn't get it, again. The group laughs again, louder.

ADAM

Okay Walt, that's fine... Now try conveying it differently than you have before. Use the object in a different way, and think about the weight and the specific size and shape of the object. See if you can show that to Andrew.

Walt tries again, and Andrew gets it. There are various sounds of relief and isolated applause. The clay goes through a half dozen more transformations before making its way back to Adam.

Scene Four. The First Debrief

ADAM

Good. Coaching requires thinking and acting in different and creative ways — sometimes without knowing exactly where it will lead you. Let's talk a little bit about what happened with Andrew and Walt. Often, in business — and in life too — when we communicate, we deliver our message and think that's the end of it. If the other person doesn't get it, it's because they're stupid or they're not listening. Maybe we don't even notice whether they understand or not. Walt, what was that like when you had to do it over?

WALT

Oh, man. At first I didn't know what to do. I couldn't imagine why he didn't get it.

ADAM

Right.

WALT

A lot of the other people in the circle knew what it was.

ANDREW

That was embarrassing.

ADAM

You felt the pressure? (*Andrew nods.*)

WALT

I did too.

ADAM

When we're trying to communicate, it's important to remember that we have a creative responsibility to get our message across and help the other to hear and understand what we're trying to say — to be clear. An important aspect of the act of communicating is exploring and trying out different ways to be understood. We make choices — in act-

ing we call them performance choices — about how to be, how we communicate, and what we do and don't say and do. Certainly the listener has a role as well — an important one — but too often we blame people for not connecting. (“The reason they didn't understand me was because there's ‘something wrong with them.’”) Maybe we can work harder and more creatively to be understood, to make the connection, to get closer to where they are. This is key to good coaching and directing. Push yourself to find new ways to “perform” your conversation. Good job, everybody.

Scene Five. The Performance of Your Life

CATHY

Thank you, Adam. Let's reconstruct our semicircle.

Participants bring chairs closer, joking about some of the objects they made in the previous exercise and the way they were used.

CATHY

To be a successful coach you need to increase your ability to reinvent yourself and thereby support others in doing that. To help others change and grow, you have to be good at that, too.

You also have to be willing to get to know them — not just on the level of what department they're in, or their history with the company — but to know some more about them as a human being. And that requires your ability to show yourself as a human being as well.

Trust — one of the key values of this organization — crosses into a lot of different territories. We want to push further the bor-

ders of creating trust, to go further than perhaps you think is possible — or even necessary.

This is all a big part of what the coaching (and directing) activity is: helping others to reinvent themselves, to grow and to change. That means helping your colleagues, your peers, your team, to be open about themselves, and that means that you, the coach, need to be more open about who you are. That's the hard part!

This next exercise is about doing something before you know how, and it's about you pushing beyond your current limits in a personal, creative way.

Here's what we're going to do. (*Indicates the training team.*) We're all from an organization called Performance of a Lifetime, and we get our name from this exercise. We're going to ask each of you to come up on stage, one a time, and perform your life in sixty seconds. What do we mean by that? Whatever you want to do. It can be your entire life in sixty seconds, it can be an important moment from your life, it can be a mundane moment from your life. It can be something that happened this morning; it can be something that happened five, ten, twenty years ago. It can be something that never happened at all. You can speak or not speak, you can sing, you can dance, you can play as many characters from your life as you want.

Do whatever you want! The only requirement is that we ask you to *perform* your life...not *tell us about* it! After you've done your one-minute Performance of a Lifetime, either David or I will be your director and set up another thirty seconds of performance with you and one of the four of us — maybe more — as your fellow performer(s). The aim of this direction is not to make a “bet-

ter” performance. It's to make a *different* performance, using what you create and building on it. In line with our “attributes of a good coach” chart, we're going to try to see more than the obvious, and to ask, “What could this scene be?”

Now we're going to show you two demonstrations. These are not to say, “this is how you should do it,” but to show you the structure, and show that it can be done! One last thing. The audience is very important. Every time a new person is introduced, they should be welcomed with tremendous applause and support. Okay? Here's how it goes: “Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome to the stage for the very first demonstration of a Performance of a Lifetime, Margo Chapman!!!!”

The group applauds wildly, encouraged by Cathy and David and Adam. Margo jumps on stage and does an abstract sort of piece, moving around with her arms above her head as if she is carrying something very heavy, talking to an unknown group of people whom she assures that it is fine for her to take on more work. She gets loaded down further and further, handling it with physical finesse.

CATHY

(*Applauding; participants join in.*) Thank you, Margo. Adam, would you join us on stage, please? (*He does.*) Okay, let's see thirty more seconds. Margo, you have decided to open your own moving company — One Woman Mover — and you pride yourself on being able to do it all, in as few loads as possible. You've been hired by Adam to move his belongings to a new apartment. Okay, thirty more seconds.

In the redirected scene, Adam is a bit of a sadist and takes pleasure in overloading Margo with articles to carry — couch, tele-

vision, piano, et al. — all in one load. There's a lot of laughter in the audience.

CATHY

Thank you. *(All applaud.)*

Cathy calls up Adam in a similar manner for his demonstration of a Performance of a Lifetime. He acts out trying to carry out his morning routine while dealing with his very large and very affectionate dog. In Cathy's direction, Margo and David play dinner guests who get treated the same way as the dog: baby talk, scolding and embarrassing rewards. Lots of laughter and vigorous applause follow the scene.

CATHY

Okay, that's what it looks like. David, take it away.

David calls the partners up to the stage in random order one by one. Every introduction is as enthusiastic as the one before, and most participants trot up to the stage, grabbing furniture or props they've decided to use on the way. Cathy and David alternate as directors.

Some themes begin to emerge, with a handful of participants performing variations on them: the awkwardness of being transferred to a faraway business post, whether it's breaking the news to a spouse or acclimating to a new situation or culture; scenes about balancing work and home lives. A few relive moments of glory, sports or academic, from their teens.

Then there's Jim. He jumps onto the stage and begins a conversation with an imaginary doctor, in which he incredulously asks why his wife is going to have to stay in the hospital — three months before the baby is even due.

JIM

Well, when will she actually give birth? You don't know? What do you mean be strong for her and the baby? How can you "be strong" during something like this? I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do.

The scene lasts for another fifteen seconds, with this inexperienced improviser and self-described (and Myers-Briggs analyzed) "left brain introvert" performing his heart out on stage in front of his colleagues about something very personal and most likely never shared with them.

Cathy ends the scene at what feels like a natural ending, and the group applauds. They seem somewhat taken aback, a bit exhilarated, slightly embarrassed, perhaps moved and now nervous, especially those who have yet to take their turns.

CATHY

Thank you, Jim. Let's see another 30 seconds. Margo, would you join Jim on stage, please? (She does. They shake hands.) Margo, you'll be playing Jim's daughter. Jim, what's your daughter's name?

JIM

Sarah.

CATHY

Sarah. Okay, Margo you'll be Sarah. And the scene takes place several years from now. You'll be asking your Dad about what it was like when she was born early. Okay, thirty more seconds.

Margo swings into improvisational action and becomes Sarah, Jim's daughter. In a childlike voice she asks Dad to tell her one more time what happened when Mom went to the hospital and gave birth to her three months earlier than expected. Jim tells her how special she was and how nervous he

was. Sarah asks him to repeat the story several times, and the performance is now filled with humor. A touching sharing of Jim’s “life performance ”— now creatively expanded with the help of a complete stranger, in front of his colleagues — has taken place, at of all places, an Executive Education program.

The performances continue. There are golf games gone awry, early morning scenes with children getting ready for school and on the way to work, multiple conversations on multiple cell phones, catching that first big fish. All are redirected to be seen in another light, with another character, built upon and changed: “Let’s see that in Russian,” “from the viewpoint of a computer,” “as a fish,” “as a modern dance.” Endless variations of direction, endless variations of improvisation, input from all involved, responded to in different ways by the audience.

The last partner to perform is Teri, one of only two women in the workshop. She’s from Michigan, and tells and acts the story of visiting a plant for inspection and the difficulty in getting the employees (all male) to listen to and respect her. David directs.

DAVID

Thank you! *(All applaud.)* Okay, let’s see thirty more seconds. Margo, Adam and Cathy, please come on stage. *(They join Teri on stage.)* Teri, Motown called, and they want to make a record of the “ ‘No Respect at the Plant’ Blues.” Cathy and Margo and Adam will be your backup singers. Let’s hit it, thirty more seconds.

The three trainers position themselves behind and to the side of Teri. Teri protests, saying she can’t sing...we didn’t ask anyone else to sing...I don’t know what to do...David urges to give it a try. Then Teri

swings into action. Every line she speaks/croons turns into a refrain for the “Teriettes.”

TERI

I went to the plant on Tuesday...

TERIETTES

Tues-day.

TERI

I got oil on my new shoes.

TERIETTES

My new shoes.

TERI

So is it any wonder...

TERIETTES

I got the “No Respect at the Plant” blues...Ooooh.

DAVID

Thank you. *(All applaud.)*

Scene Five. The Second Debrief

CATHY

Great. Everybody give yourselves a hand. That was terrific. *(She sits on a chair in front of the stage, facing the semicircle.)* So what was that like? What was it like to see your colleagues perform in that way, and to perform in front of one another?

WALT

Scary.

TERI

It was scary waiting for my turn, I wanted it to be over.

CATHY

Uh-huh.

WALT

Yeah, but once you got up there—

TERI

I didn't think about it so much, and it was much easier when the real actors came in.

CATHY

Do other people agree with that? (*A chorus of assent.*) Was this harder, or easier than you might have thought?

WALT

Harder.

ANDREW

But I thought everybody else did a great job.

JIM

(*Half-seriously.*) Yeah, who knew we had so much talent?

CATHY

Say more.

JIM

I mean, I didn't know that we could be so creative. If anybody had told me that we'd all be acting on stage, uh, performing and doing all that movement stuff I would have said they were crazy.

CATHY

Well, what do you think about that? That you are all in fact performers — you *can* perform, you *do* perform — the things we were talking about at the start of the session. Let's talk about that: what's the relationship between this performing and your ability to coach and develop people?

BARRY

I can see that there is one. I never thought of it that way before this. I mean I thought it was amazing how you guys came up with these different directions for us... and when

you did that, I thought our performances the second time were better than the first.

CATHY

What about the environment we created here together? Going back to Jim's point earlier about how surprised he was to see people up on stage, performing, how he never would've imagined it. What was it about the environment that made that possible?

ANDREW

Oh...we were all equal. Equally bad!!! (*Big laugh in the room*) No, but in all seriousness, that made a big difference. We were all in it together, and we all didn't know how to do it. And that it was possible to make mistakes, or make a fool of ourselves. It was a big relief.

JIM

I was thinking when I was watching how good it is to laugh. I cannot remember the last time I laughed so much.

WALT

Yeah, we don't laugh very much at the office.

CATHY

Yeah, I can imagine that. (*She pauses and nods her head*) What do you want to do about that?

WALT

There's nothing *to* do. It's a question of time. There's so much time pressure we never laugh. And coaching's the same. I'd like to but there's never enough time to coach.

CATHY

Well, maybe coaching — and laughing — is not something that you *stop* to do, or *take time* to do. Maybe it has more to do with changing the total environment, so that

coaching, supporting — maybe even having fun — are things you do all the time, in an environment that you create every day. Maybe the way to think about it is as an on-going performance, it's built into the way you normally work. Coaching and mentoring are desired elements of the day-to-day environment in this organization. Now I know you're not going to ask the people that work for you to perform their lives in sixty seconds — although in my opinion, that wouldn't be a bad idea. But can you create an environment in which people feel supported enough that they'll try new things — and be rewarded and responded to for that? Can you yourself be more open, in your relationships with your peers and the people who work for you? Can you be more human? Think about how much better your coaching would be if you knew some more about the human being you're working with.

TERI

I think we can all be a bit more human. And I think that makes all the difference when you're coaching someone. I don't want to do what someone is telling me to do if they're really just criticizing me and dismissing everything I have to say. That's what I liked about the one-minute performances. You guys actually used what we said.

CATHY

Yes. In fact, that's what we're completely focused on. How can we work with and be creative with what you're bringing to the table — or the stage! Okay. Great work. We're going to take a break...it's 10:10; be back in here and ready to go at 10:20, when we'll unveil The Coaching Challenge.

INTERMISSION

Act Two. The Coaching Challenge **Scene One. The Coaching Conversation**

The executives spend most of the break on their cell phones. A few stay behind to quiz the POAL trainers about their work with other groups of executives, or about their professional acting projects. One partner has a daughter who wants to become an actress, and asks Margo for advice about acting schools. Another asks about breathing and slowing down — is that something we really recommend? At 10:25, Adam calls the group back to order. He sits on the front of the stage, consults his notes frequently and fiddles with his eyeglasses, which are in his lap. He doesn't seem entirely comfortable, or prepared.

ADAM

Okay...uh, we started with a demonstration of directing a scene, then, um, Cathy talked to you a little bit about coaching and the importance...*(He looks at his notes.)*...the importance of creating an environment that allows people to try new things and to...*(He looks at his notes again.)*...make fools of themselves. Then we did the slow movement warm-up. *(He stops suddenly and calls to David, who's in the back of the room.)* How was that?

DAVID

(Stepping forward.) Not bad. That was a good start. Whenever you made eye contact, that made a huge difference. Good. Do you need your notes?

ADAM

Well...

DAVID

Can you speak without them?

ADAM

Yeah, I guess I could.

DAVID

You can always hold them. But try not to look at them unless you need to. The more eye contact the better. Now, what character are you playing?

ADAM

Well, I think I'm sort of like the authority figure...

DAVID

Is that the same as you were before the break, the actor/teacher...?

ADAM

No, no. It's more like a professor. An authority figure like a professor.

DAVID

Okay. Well, I see you have your glasses there. Why don't you try wearing them?

ADAM

You think...?

DAVID

Yeah.

ADAM

Okay. *(He puts on glasses.)*

DAVID

Want to try it again?

ADAM

Yes.

DAVID

Great. And stay standing. That's a lot more authoritative, too.

ADAM

Okay.

DAVID

Good. Try it again.

David recedes. Adam tries it again, with marked improvement. He seems confident, has authority and relates to his audience. The glasses seem to reinforce his character choice, and he succeeds in speaking without consulting his notes.

ADAM

Better?

DAVID

Much. I especially liked the part when you gesture and...

They trail off the stage, in conversation that we can no longer hear.. Cathy steps forward to address the senior executives.

CATHY

An example of a coaching conversation. Maybe a coaching conversation that was a little unrealistic...*(Participants laugh.)*...but I think you get our point.

Scene Two. Coaching One Other

(As Margo passes out laminated cards that contain the seven qualities of a good coach.)

It's time to move into the Coaching Challenge, which is a competition. You're going to have a chance to coach and be coached by each other. First we need to break up into two groups.

She divides the room into two randomly selected groups, one of which heads off with Margo and David to another room. Once they are gone...

ADAM

Everyone, right now, turn to someone sitting near you. Good, that's your partner. You'll be working in pairs. Each team will select a yellow card from the ones Cathy is holding out in front of you now. Each card contains the name of a fictional product or service

that you're going to pitch. Okay, look at your cards. (*What they see on their card is an unusual product, such as Whistling Lessons, Clumsiness Counseling, Robot Pets, Taxidermy, etc.*)

Later on, you'll be preparing an oral sales presentation, but right now you have five minutes to brainstorm and flesh out the *specific* details of your product. (*A power point slide appears on the screen*):

- What is the name of your product and/or company?
- What's your competitive edge?
- Where are you giving/doing your sales presentation? And to whom? (Who is in the room and/or who is listening/watching?)
- Who are you? What character is each of you playing in the presentation? (They should be different and distinct from one another.)
- Decide the form of your presentation. It can be varied...and you can be creative!

Any urgent questions? Good. Please begin.

Five minutes later, in the other room...

DAVID

Time's up. Here's the next step: You will now have about 20 minutes to prepare a two-person oral sales presentation of your product. The presentation can be no longer than five minutes, and the time should be evenly divided between the two of you. Each of you should have at least a one-minute block of speaking time at a stretch — don't organize it so that each of you does a sentence, alternating back and forth. That

would make it very hard to coach one another.

Now, we want you to work on this presentation in a particular way. Take the first couple of minutes, and only the first couple of minutes, to quickly map out your presentation: its structure, how you'll divide the content, what each of you is talking about, etc.

We are providing for only minimal planning in the way you might typically do it, or think about it. We are specifically instructing you to work on this as a *performance*, with each of you functioning as both an actor and as a coach/director. This means that you have to resist the urge to plan, plan, plan, and you will take the plunge and get up on your feet and rehearse, without having it all planned out in advance.

So, for most of this 20 minutes, you're going to improvise — as you've been doing all morning — and rehearse the presentation on your feet. No matter how long you plan — and we're not against planning — everything changes when you actually begin practicing your performances. This is also when you make discoveries that you never get to in the process of planning.

When one of you is "rehearsing" and/or "practicing," the other is functioning as a coach/director. This is important — we are asking you to literally coach your partner through his or her part of the presentation, and vice versa. As you work, Margo and I will periodically come over, politely interrupt you, and work with you on the coaching process.

MARGO

One more note: Right now, in the other room, the other group is going through the same process as you. Ultimately, we're go-

ing to come back together, and one team from our group and one from theirs will perform their sales presentations in a final competition. To select the representative team in each room, we'll have a playoff in 20 minutes.

DAVID

Any burning questions? Good. You now have twenty minutes. Go!

The pairs set to work. It's a chore to get them on their feet and rehearsing. If left alone, it's plain they'd spend the entire twenty minutes planning — that's in their comfort zone — and no time practicing. After three minutes, only two of the seven teams have begun the rehearsal process. After four and a half of the twenty minutes have passed...

DAVID

If you haven't already, you should now get on your feet and start improvising the presentation.

All but one of the pairs begin rehearsing. Margo and David walk up to that remaining pair, Nick and Barry. They rise.

MARGO

Okay. How's it going?

BARRY

Fine. Good.

MARGO

What's your product or service?

NICK

Helicopter transportation.

BARRY

(Smiling.) We're Whirlybirders, Inc.

DAVID

Okay. What are your roles?

BARRY

I'm the money guy, and Nick's the pilot.

DAVID

Tell me more about that.

BARRY

He's a daredevil...

NICK

A former Green Beret.

DAVID

Uh-huh. So your character...

NICK

Is a tough guy. Very direct.

BARRY

Yeah. I think you can run in, and sort of whip off your sunglasses before you speak.

DAVID

(To Nick.) Does that work for you?

BARRY

(A bit tentatively.) Uh...yeah, yeah.

DAVID

Okay, let's see that. Let's see the first minute or so of your presentation, with Barry running in and whipping off his glasses.

They practice. Nick coaches Barry, and vice versa. David and Margo visit the other pairs and work with them as well. Meanwhile, in the other room, Cathy and Adam are working with the team of Walt and Teri, whose service is Robotic pets.

CATHY

So, Walt, if you're the mad scientist who in-

vented the robotic pets...Teri, what's your role?

TERI

I'm the sales director.

WALT

Yeah, talk about the price structure and the programming for home security protection.

TERI

Uh-huh.

CATHY

That's good. But those are content issues. Let's talk about Teri's performance outside of content. Talk some more about her character and approach.

Cathy and Adam work with Walt and Teri for another minute or two, then visit the other group. After the 20 minutes have expired...

Scene Three. Performing the Coaching Process

ADAM

Time's up! Everyone have a seat. Now we mentioned before that we would have a playoff to choose our representative team. So now we're all going to see a performance by each of the teams, to help us make the decision.

CATHY

But there's a twist. What we want you to perform right now is not your sales presentation. Instead, we'd like to see a two- to four-minute performance of your coaching process! Perform what you've been doing for the past 20 minutes!

ADAM

Your performance of coaching might include some of the sales presentation itself, but we don't want that to be the focus. We want to see how you coached one another. And, if you didn't coach each other — well, you have a second chance!

CATHY

Now, like your one-minute Performances of a Lifetime, this is wide open: You can perform a key coaching moment that made a big difference; you could show us the entire process boiled down to four minutes; whatever you want. After every team has performed, we'll vote by a show of applause for the best coaching performance, and that team will be our representative in the Final Playoff.

ADAM

Since we've thrown you a curve, we're going to give you another few minutes to work on the performance of your coaching process. Please go ahead.

After a few minutes to plan, each pair does their performance of a coaching. These vary widely. Some coach mostly on content and not performance, some don't. Some use flip charts and notes, some don't. Some have strong give-and-take in their coaching; some have a clear leader-and-follower dynamic. After all the coaching performances, the teams vote. Teri and Walt and their robotic pets business — Robopets — is chosen to represent the group in the playoff.

In the other room, the winning team is Jim and Andrew. Their service is clumsiness counseling. The winning edge is their spin on the service: Their imaginary service, Oafs "R" Us, teaches clients how to be clumsy.

DAVID

Okay, now we have fifteen minutes for collective coaching. Let's see the entire sales presentation from beginning to end with no stopping, and the group can give notes.

Jim and Andrew run through their sales presentation. It's a comedy of errors; the collective coaching focuses on a grab bag of schtick that makes it even funnier. When fifteen minutes are up, the entire group heads back to the main room, where Cathy and Adam and their group have been coaching Walt and Teri through Robopets. A lot of this involves tweaking Walt's mad scientist and Teri's slick sales director. Cathy reminds the "collective coaches" several times to build on what's been done — to be positive — and specific. (Their tendency is to be negative and general.)

The entire group watches the playoff with great interest and enthusiasm. Both duos "step up;" and in their final performances rise to the occasion and use the energy of the audience to raise their performance levels even higher. The final vote is a tie.

Scene Four. The Final Debrief**CATHY**

Terrific. Let's give both groups a hand. Good work everybody. Take a few minutes now to write in your journals, any thoughts, random or specific, about all the activities you went through today. What was it like to do? What did you learn about the other partners? How was it to be coached by each other? How are you as a director? What are some things you saw about yourselves and one another that you think are helpful or important? Take a few minutes and we'll debrief a little bit when you're done.

Participants write in journals provided for personal reflection during their week of ex-

periences at the Executive Center. Margo circulates with additional pads and pens for those who've forgotten to bring them. After a few minutes, Cathy begins the debrief.

CATHY

Okay. What do you think? Let's talk coaching and directing. What have you got?

NICK

I'm thinking about how you respect someone who doesn't ask you to do something that he wouldn't do himself. That fosters respect.

CATHY

Uh-huh.

NICK

You want to feel that somebody who's telling you what to do has already been through it and knows the ropes.

ANDREW

It's more than that. It's what you were talking about before, Cathy. Even if you have a specific way of doing things, it's establishing an environment that lets people know they can have input, and also maybe letting them do things in a way that's different from the way you do them.

NICK

Maybe. *(A few partners laugh.)*

CATHY

Okay, maybe. Why is it hard to support people to do things in ways that are different than your way?

WALT

Oh God — I don't know. Frankly, I don't even know if I've even thought about it!

TERI

Well we certainly haven't talked about it. I

think it's a big issue for us. I mean, we're not trying to turn people into automatons, are we?

CATHY

I hope not — but that might be what passes for coaching sometimes. You know, it's a lot harder to work with the real person. It puts greater demands on you when you work creatively to support and connect and direct someone. It's easier just to tell people “do it this way.” But that doesn't grow anybody, doesn't invest in the company, and it doesn't access all of the wonderful talent and resources that you have in your midst.

WALT

How do you get better at it?

CATHY

Well, one thing is to consciously perform all the time. Even in everyday life. Start looking at everything as a scene, in which you are a character, an ensemble member, and a director. That gives us the framework to explore and make different choices. We're not just bringing in this performance stuff to give you a metaphor to work with. These are actual tools and a way of being that allows you to see more than what “meets the eye.” And, you should practice!

TERI

Sometimes I think it's a time issue.

WALT

Time is always a problem.

TERI

But I think if we look at coaching as an environment issue, it shouldn't take any more time. It's a qualitative issue, not a quantitative issue. Isn't it?

ANDREW

To me, this is all about being a human being. And it's about being vulnerable. I'm not talking about crying all day long at the office when the going gets tough — I just mean that we're human and that's part of it. It seems like if people we're mentoring don't have any idea of what it took for us to get to where we are — then they won't see in themselves the ability to move ahead as well.

BARRY

That's a great point.

The debrief continues for another fifteen minutes, covering (among other issues) trust, different styles of coaching, and what it means to see through “the coaching lens” all the time.

CATHY

Well, it's twelve-thirty. I'm sure everybody's ready for lunch. Thank you for a great morning, and enjoy the rest of your day.

All applaud.

CURTAIN

PART TWO THE THEORY

A Practical Psychology of Performance

Performance of a Lifetime's innovative performing arts consulting is part of a new psychology, a new view of what it is to be a person. What is this new view?

People are Social Beings.

In this new practical psychology, we don't look at people as self-contained, isolated individuals who "come together" when we need to accomplish certain tasks. We're social beings — we're relational, connected, and part of something larger than ourselves. We and the world we live in are continuously emergent, complex and not always predictable — because we and it are always transforming. Human beings are much less fully formed and fixed than we are characterized by fluidity, multiplicity, complexity and creativity. And from the business point of view, it's the relationality, the connectedness and the collaborative nature of human action that "gets things done."

People are Performers.

An exciting part of the new psychology is its focus on people as *performers of their lives*. Those who call themselves "performative psychologists" believe that our ability to perform — to pretend, to play, to improvise, to be both *who we are* and *other than who we are* — is key to our emotional, social and intellectual lives. They prefer the language of the theater to psychological jargon because it does a better job of capturing the fact that people are socially connected and are always creating things together. For example, these psychologists see the world as a series of "stages" upon which "ensembles" (groups, teams) create the millions of "scenes" (scripted and improvised) of their lives.

For discussions of performative psychology and a dramaturgical approach to human life, see *Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction* (Gergen, 1994), *Performing Psychology* (Holzman, 1999), *Performance of a Lifetime* (Newman, 1996), *The Drama of Everyday Life* (Scheibe, 2000).

Even though theatrical performance has been a part of psychology for years, until recently it has been limited to traditional psychotherapeutic work. The idea behind psychodrama and drama therapy, for example, is that by "acting out" instead of "talking about" their lives, people will reveal things that they can't or won't otherwise. In addition, some therapists use drama techniques to encourage interpersonal relationships and group values as a way for people to learn how to express their problems with the group or a group member (Johnson, 1982). Emphasizing the *collaborative activity* of performance, as performative psychologists and Performance of a Lifetime do, is different from both traditional psychoanalytic and group dynamics approaches in that its focus is on the ensemble activity of creating the performance. It taps into our capacity to work and play, to learn from and teach, and to create well with others. In this way, the approach we use has similarities with some of the newer psychotherapies that emphasize the collaborative creation of the therapy itself. Some well-known examples are narrative therapy, social constructionist therapies and social therapy, the approach that has most strongly influenced Performance of a Lifetime.

See *Narrative Therapy in Practice* (Monk, Winslade, Crockett and Epston, 1997), *Therapy as Social Construction* (McNamee and Gergen, 19) and *Let's Develop!* (Newman, 1994).

The idea of people as performers comes also from child development theory, primarily from the theory of a Russian psychologist of the 1920s and '30s named Lev Vygotsky. He observed that very young children de-

velop because they are allowed to do things they don't yet know how to do — indeed, they're enthusiastically encouraged to do so! Vygotsky described it as “performing a head taller than they are” (Vygotsky, 1987). Children perform all the time, without a physical stage and without fear of making mistakes. They *perform their lives*: they play with words and sounds before they know the language, they creatively imitate who and what they are not — “flying” a plane, “reading” to their stuffed animals, “dancing” and “singing” along to a music video. And they couldn't do all that unless the adults around them participated in the ways that they do — with acceptance, support and creativity (in short, as good directors and coaches). This is the discovery that is so valuable about Vygotsky's work: that children develop so quickly and learn so well because they and we create environments in which they can *become*.

Recently, psychologists and educators who work with and study school-age children and adolescents have also begun to notice how valuable the performing arts are. Even though it rarely reaches the front pages of the newspapers or the nightly news, there is evidence that the single best predictor of success in school and life may be participation in some performing arts program, either in school or outside of school. According to this research, when young people are given opportunities to perform in new and different types of roles, they come to see themselves as capable of acting outside and beyond the expected, something essential for continued intellectual, social and emotional growth. Unfortunately, most young people have few opportunities to act outside the constraints of the expected role of student or outside the structure of curricular and extra-curricular requirements.

See the following reports and articles: *Involvement in the Arts and Success in Secondary Schools*, (Catterall, 1998), *Urban Youth Development-*

Broadway Style (Dutton, 2001), *Performative Psychology: An Untapped Resource for Educators* (Holzman, 2000), *Making Learning Work* (Heath, 2001).

What does all of this have to do with corporate executives? Here is how performative psychologist Lois Holzman (who serves as learning strategist for Performance of a Lifetime) puts it:

If performing is how we learn and develop, then don't the “living organizations,” “learning organizations” and “passionate organizations” that business leaders are now speaking about need to recognize themselves as “performing organizations?” If creativity and growth come into existence when people together create stages for development in the home, the school, the theater, the community center, the ball field and the therapy office, can management and employees learn to create them at the workplace? If getting up on a stage puts you in touch with your “performing self” — teaching you that you can always create new performances of yourself — and has been shown to help adults, teens and children create better functioning and happier families and peer groups, might it not do the same for teams and workgroups? (Holzman, 2000)

People are Improvisers.

To most people, improvising means being spontaneous, dealing with the unexpected, breaking with a script and not following the rules. In this sense, all of us improvise some of the time. Sometimes we're okay at it, but at other times we become frightened or frozen, especially when we have already decided how things “should” go. That's when we can get into not listening and, worse, blaming others.

To professional performers, improvising has another, more complex meaning, which the Performance of a Lifetime approach has incorporated into its training and consulting. Improvising refers to the set of tools and methods that actors use to generate scenes, stories and conversations without a script. Skilled improvisers literally create action — they make things happen — on the spot. They create their setting, characters and plot by working off each other. In order to do so, they have to listen with an openness that is rare in other discourse situations. They have to listen in order to create; not to evaluate, assess or negate. Otherwise, the scene won't go anywhere.

In a way, good improvisers are doing with adults what the rest of us do when we speak with very young children. When a 10-month old says, “ba-ba” we aren't critical or negative, but rather we accept the utterance and keep “the conversation” going (saying, perhaps, “Yes, it's time for your bottle” or “Uh oh, you dropped your bottle, I'll get it for you”). But ordinary conversations, including those at the workplace, are rarely improvised in the theatrical sense. Ordinarily, people tend to listen very selectively to what others are saying — we listen in order to hear something we agree or disagree with, to assess the “truth value” of what is said, to size up the speaker, or to hear the pause that signals “it's my turn now,” etc. Practicing theatrical improvisation can help turn this around, because performing improvisationally is working with everyone and everything available in a continuous creative process. Just as children become speakers through this process, adults too can become more creative and collaborative communicators — and more effective teachers, mentors and coaches.

People Make Mistakes.

In closing, I want to share one more thing about this practical psychology of performance. It's something Fred Newman, the founder of the Performance of a Lifetime approach and a psychotherapist and theater director, once said about making mistakes and having another chance. As an actor and a trainer, his words touch me deeply: “From our point of view, performance might have nothing to do with being on the stage. We think you can perform at home, at work, in any social setting. In plays, if we don't get it right the first time we can do it again and again and again. Why can't we do it again and again in life situations? Maybe we can.” (Newman, quoted in Dan Friedman, *Theatre InSight*, 2000).

To me, the essence of good coaching — seeing new possibilities and helping others to explore them — is conveying “Maybe we can...”

End Note - Discussions of performance in the sense of theatrical performance (rather than performance outcomes) are relatively rare in the business field, with the notable exception of Pine & Gilmore's *The Experience Economy — Work is Theater and Every Business a Stage*. At the same time, the number of firms using some form of theatrical performance and improvisation in their management consulting, organization development and leadership training is steadily growing and gaining media coverage; in recent years articles appeared in such publications as *Fast Company*, *Forbes, Inc.*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Wired*, *the NY Post*, *the NY Times*, *the Atlanta Constitution and Journal*, *O the Oprah Magazine*, and *Harvard Business Review*.

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Mental Strategies of Elite Mount Everest Climbers

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Abstract

This study explored the mental strategies used by elite Mount Everest climbers to prepare for and overcome obstacles while climbing the mountain. Individual interviews were carried out with 10 elite climbers who successfully reached the summit of Mount Everest. High altitude climbing differs from many other pursuits because of the constant threat of danger and potential death. Common strategies of success were identified, as well as factors that created the greatest challenges on the mountain. This study provided meaningful insights into how these elite high altitude climbers mentally prepared for the climb and maintained an effective focus on the mountain. The main areas addressed include detailed planning, mental toughness, focusing, mental imagery, short-term goal setting and belief in one's capacities. This article presents practical suggestions that can be applied by other high altitude climbers, or anyone else in pursuit of a big vision or extremely difficult goal.

Introduction

The number of athletes partaking in extreme sports is continually rising (Shoham, 2000). Extreme sports, such as high altitude climbing, deep sea diving, and skydiving include a high level of physical risk. In such sports, the consequences of error can be fatal. High-risk sports differ from other sports in that participants knowingly face the risk of a serious injury and even death when judgment or equipment fails (Lyng, 1990). The physical and mental demands of high-risk sports are high (Ryn, 1988). Many of these sports involve dangerous elements,

such as severe weather or high speeds. These dangers create intense challenges for the athlete. An increasing number of people are becoming attracted to the risks, as well as the physical and mental tests associated with extreme sports. The rise of active participation in extreme sports is reflected through new television shows such as Extreme 180, and magazines such as Rock and Ice and Extreme Skiing.

High altitude climbing is a prime example of an extreme sport that has become an appealing challenge for an increasing number of people (Ryn, 1988). It is widely recog-

nized that high altitude alone exacts a very heavy toll from a person's energy and resources, both physical and mental (Emerson, 1966). According to Bahrke & Shukitt-Hale (1993) lassitude, weakness, breathlessness, and retardation of thought and action were the principal effects of high altitude, and were always present over 5485 meters. Furthermore, climbers who attempt to summit an 8000 meter peak may be exposed to environmental obstacles such as avalanches and extreme weather conditions. They may also be faced with internal barriers such as fatigue, intimidation, and loss of focus or will. High altitude climbing is a complex, high risk, high endurance sport. Effective mental strategies are required to successfully complete the challenge.

Elite athletes across a wide range of sports have been found to possess certain mental strategies related to exceptional levels of performance. In a study carried out by Orlick and Partington (1988), statistically significant links were found between Olympic performance outcome and certain mental skills among elite athletes in 23 summer Olympic Games events. Common elements of success were identified as quality preparation/training, setting clear goals, imagery, simulation training, mental preparation for competitions, focus, and on going learning. In another study on psychological skills and exceptional athletic performance the authors found that relative to their non- elite peers, national level athletes across 17 sports reported stronger skills in anxiety management, concentration, motivation, mental preparation, and self-confidence (Mahoney, Gabriel, & Perkins, 1987). According to Orlick (2000), there are seven critical elements of excellence that guide the pursuit of performance excellence on a consistent basis: commitment, focused connection, confidence, positive images, mental readiness, distraction control, and ongoing learning.

These mental components have been found to help elite athletes excel in a variety of domains.

The challenge of climbing Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world (8848 meters), has continued to gain popularity ever since Sir Edmund Hilary and Tenzing Norguays' first ascent to the summit in 1953. Every year, groups of elite mountain climbers from around the world set out to reach the top of the mountain and solo attempts are also made. An average climb to the top of Mount Everest takes two months, including periods for rest and acclimatization. It requires about a week of trekking through the mountains just to reach base camp. Once climbers have set up camp at the base of the mountain, they will go through four more camps (one, two, three, four) and then try to reach the summit. After reaching a camp (one, two, and three), the climbers will return to the previous one (for a couple of days) to allow their bodies to properly adjust to the altitude. The final push to the summit requires that the climbers wait for a window of opportunity, due to the weather, and attempt to climb from camp four to the summit. Only a small percentage of people who set out to climb Mount Everest successfully reach the summit. According to Egan (2001) over 300 climbers making this attempt died in the pursuit. Some reasons for failure include death, high altitude sickness, loss of will, loss of focus, injury, fatigue, and extreme weather conditions. With the inherent risk and potential for serious injury or death, it is believed that tremendous physical endurance and mental strength are essential for such a climb to be successful.

Previous studies have largely ignored the mental strategies used by elite climbers. The majority of research on mountain climbers has focused on sensation seeking needs

(Breivik, 1996; Freixanet, 1991; Rossi & Cereatti, 1993) and on the personality profiles of climbers (Breivik, 1996; Freixanet, 1991), as well as on the psychological effects of high altitude (Ryn, 1988). Research on the mental strategies used by high altitude climbers is lacking and warranted. By exploring the specific mental strategies used by elite Everest climbers, insights were gained that can help other climbers, and performers in other high-risk domains.

Method

Seven male and three female elite Mount Everest climbers participated in this study. All participants successfully reached the summit of Mount Everest at least once. Their age ranged from 29 to 65 years ($M=38.2$) at the time they reached the summit. The participants included one solo climber, three expedition leaders, and six climbers from various group expeditions. In terms of country of origin, 40% of the participants were from Canada, 40% from the United States, 10% from Sweden, and 10% from Pakistan.

Individual interviews were arranged through personal contacts. The researcher informed each participant about the purpose of the study. After the participants agreed to take part in the study, arrangements were made to conduct interviews at the participants' convenience. One 60 -90 minute recorded interview was conducted with each participant. The questions were predominately open ended which enabled participants to express themselves without feeling constrained.

Data Analysis

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. A copy of each participant's transcript was sent to him or her and each participant confirmed that the information accurately reflected their perceptions.

The purpose of the data analysis was to understand and accurately report the participants' experiences and realities, particularly with respect to the role that mental strategies played in a successful climb. The initial step in the qualitative data analysis involved being fully absorbed in the interview, listening to the interview tapes, being fully engaged in the process of transcribing each interview and reading the interview transcripts (Maxwell, 1996). The next step involved re-reading each transcript carefully, highlighting areas where mental skills or mental strategies were mentioned or discussed, and then assigning a temporary name or label to each mental strategy. The first and second author of this paper worked collaboratively to code individual responses into categories that brought together similar ideas, concepts, or themes (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Results

The results from the 10 interviews revealed that elite Everest climbers used various mental strategies to prepare for the climb, successfully climb to the summit, and safely descend the mountain. These climbers also faced and successfully overcame various obstacles on the mountain. Themes that emerged from their interviews are discussed in conjunction with direct quotes from the climbers in order to preserve the participants' realities in their own words. Their mental strategies are presented below in three phases of the climb : the preparation phase, the ascent, and the descent.(see Figure 1).

Preparation phase

Effective mental preparation for climbing Mount Everest is crucial to the success of reaching the summit. All 10 participants spoke of the importance of preparing for the challenge mentally, as well as physically and logistically. The most prominent mental strategies used by the climbers during the

preparation phase included detailed planning, imagery, and developing mental strength.

Detailed Planning

Part of what allows successful Everest climbers to stay focused and remain confident on the mountain is their commitment to thoroughly plan for the adventure. The actual climb takes about two months, including various acclimatization stages, rest days, and the final push to the summit. Climbers must remain focused, committed, and healthy for a prolonged period of time to be successful. To increase their chances of being successful, all of 10 climbers began planning for the expedition years ahead of time. Climbers were asked to share their preparation activities prior to climbing Mount Everest. Many spoke of detailed logistical planning, as a key component for being successful and completely prepared for the expedition.

I ran through the whole expedition in my head from start to finish a year ahead of time. I thought about how much food we were bringing, what would be the twelve and a half tons of gear and food we would need to bring on the mountain, how it would all unfold from permits to hiring the porters to bringing it all to base camp, what the schedule would be at base camp, how would we live out the two and a half months on the mountain, and the Khumbu icefall. I basically planned the whole climb before leaving for the Himalayas. I then relived it in my head day after day. (Climber 10).

I believe that it is all about the planning and preparation. Understanding what you are getting into and understanding to a point that it is intuitive. Everything that you are doing you don't want to have to think about it, you want to do it

naturally. Building in redundancy and contingency factors should you come across a set back you can step back and assess the obstacle and deal with it because you planned it out thoroughly. I learned everything I had to learn about the subject matter in order to eliminate possible setbacks. (Climber 5)

Imagery

Closely related to the strategy of planning is imagery. 'Seeing' and 'feeling' themselves execute certain moves or strategies was a common practice in mental preparation prior to the actual climb. Climbers reported using imagery as a strategy to help them perform through difficult phases on the mountain.

I imagined myself on the summit. I also saw myself climbing and having a positive outlook getting there. (Climber3)

I imagined myself getting to certain places on the mountain. I imagined how I was going to get to the Hilary Step, what I was going to feel like even though I couldn't actually feel the emotion or the physical hurt because it was all in my head. I imagined what I was going to feel like, so when I got to that state and that was how I felt I would know what it is and keep going. (Climber 10)

I would see myself walking up to the summit. And then I would see myself on the top of the mountain." (Climber 7)

I visualized a hard day climbing. Climbing a mountain is one step at a time. I visualized one step at a time. (Climber 8)

Developing Mental Strength

Another mental strategy used by climbers to prepare themselves for the climb was committing themselves to develop their mental strength. For example in training, these climbers spoke of frequently increasing their physical limits and the level of their discomfort. They felt that pushing themselves physically and mentally enabled them to gain emotional strength and in turn, develop the mental toughness needed for the Everest challenge. This preparation strategy was believed to be a crucial element required to successfully climb the mountain. When the participants were faced with obstacles that could have impeded their success they relied on their previous experience and mental strength to overcome the potential setbacks.

I would consciously push myself in training. I would run up Sulfer mountain after a day of climbing and I would push my time. Or, when I would run and cycle and I reached the point where I had enough, and I wanted to back off, I would push that threshold. Pushing that threshold affected the way I climbed mountains. When I was climbing in 1985 I was hit by a rock on the first day and it broke my shoulder. I didn't know that at the time and I still kept climbing as I thought I should be able to work through the pain and push the pain and discomfort. I thought that it would be a lot worse on big mountains. So, I would push that threshold. (Climber 4)

...and that comes with past experience where you were able to get through things: to have the strength to say yes. The greatest most single thing is to experience hardship. And, I have suffered a lot on other expeditions before going to Everest. People often ask me what it

takes to do Everest and to be honest it is a life time of suffering. That is what you draw on, that ability to say I can sustain the suffering. Climbing Everest is like an aching tiredness that goes right into the depths of your soul. So, the first time hardship shows up on Everest, and it is a very long suffering period, you are able to endure because you say yes I have suffered like this before and I have suffered for protracted periods of time. (Climber 1)

The Ascent

Successful Everest climbers incorporated various mental strategies on the climb to the summit (see table 1). Climbers were asked to share some of their thoughts and feelings, from the time they left base camp to the moment they reached the summit. They were also asked to talk about the obstacles they faced and how they overcame those challenges to reach the summit. These elite Everest climbers reached their ultimate goal largely because of their mental toughness, focusing skills, short-term goals, a connection with their bodies, team support, imagery based on successful past experience, and confidence in their abilities to reach the summit. All climbers experienced extremely challenging obstacles on the mountain, such as oxygen depletion, high winds, extreme cold, exhaustion, fear, and conflict with other climbers. All were successful at overcoming these obstacles with the help of the following mental strategies and perspectives.

Mental Toughness

In preparing for the climb all the participants spoke of the importance of developing mental strength. Their mental strength was clearly evident in overcoming obstacles on the mountain. All 10 climbers had the ability to endure the emotional discomfort and con-

tinue climbing through the physical strains induced by the lengthy stay at high altitude.

I believe that being mentally tough is the most important skill when climbing Mount Everest. Because of all the pain and discomfort involved you have to be able to endure. And this skill is unique to climbing because in no other sport is there so much discomfort and potential for tragedy. From cold weather, 24/7 to extreme periods of fatigue, on the summit push we climbed about 15 hours straight and that was throughout the night, you have to be strong psychologically (Climber 4)

I think that all three elements – emotional, mental, and physical are important. The emotional and mental can be more important. What you need is the desire and the ability to focus on the task. The success rate on Everest is miniscule. There are lots of reasons for that. Having all three at the same time, being strong emotionally, mentally, and physically are needed for a successful bid, as well as a dash of luck! (Climber 10)

I would say that mental toughness is one of the most critical elements needed to climb high altitude peaks. It really is not easy when you are above 7000 meters, your body really isn't acclimatizing at that altitude so you are not feeling good, you are not sleeping well, normally you do not eat well. Being strong mentally and putting up with the discomfort helps a lot with your success. (Climber 2)

Focusing

These climbers were extremely skilled at focusing on the right things at the right time, on the mountain. They all spoke about how important focusing was in helping them per-

form through obstacles during the eight week climb to the summit of Mount Everest. Focusing included getting into a zone, breathing, monitoring their pace, directing their physical and mental energy to the immediate challenge in front of them, and riveting their attention to the task at hand. Their focus was very much engaged in the step by step process. Focusing allowed these climbers to eliminate distractions, keep concentrated on the task at hand, and achieve their day-by-day, moment-by-moment objectives.

Very few times on Everest would I ever let emotion in. Down in base camp hanging out in my tent, I would have memories of my wife and son, such as cards or letters. That was a safe point. You could allow your guard down. On the mountain you couldn't. There was too much responsibility for yourself and for others. You had to stay focused. To know me is to know that you won't find a more competitive, focused, and determined person. (Climber 5)

One thing I will say about myself is that most people see me as driven, and a lot of male mountaineers view me as driven. Yes I am driven. Climbing Everest is a lot of time, money, and involvement. So, I am very driven. But more importantly is my focus. In my younger years I competed at the international level in mountain biking so I have the ability to focus. I take climbing very seriously. I stick to the task at hand, that is my motto (Climber 4).

I visualized one step at a time. Climbing a mountain is one step at a time. You definitely want to be focused on summiting, but you really need to focus on the day to day and that is the key to being successful. Performing well and do-

ing the right thing each day to prepare yourself mentally and physically for the climb gets you to the summit. You can't focus only on the summit. It is kind of like the forest metaphor and the trees. You have to look at what is in front of you. You have to look at the pine needles before you look at the tree, before you look at the whole forest. I have seen climbers who are so focused on the summit that they can't focus on doing a good job and getting through the ice fall safely. You have to be strong, healthy, and hydrated and focus on eating and sleeping and resting enough. (Climber 8)

Summit night is like a dream walk, your brain is functioning on its most basic levels, your mind riveted on the task at hand – to keep moving your feet, to breath purposefully, to not stop until you can go no higher. (Climber 6)

We have the next 9 or 10 hours of climbing to do so I just focused on my breathing and on my heart beat. I got into a zone and everything just started falling into place. Before I knew it I was just climbing, climbing like a machine playing music in my head. I paid attention to my heart beating as I played music in my head breathing and keeping the beat going. The hours would pass, one hour after the next trying to climb through the cold until finally the morning came. (Climber 10)

While speaking about maintaining an effective focus on the mountain, some of the climbers also discussed how they were able to redefine pain, accept discomfort and focus this information in constructive ways. This kind of focusing which often originated from connecting with their bodies helped them get through some extremely physically demanding phases on the mountain.

I experienced a great deal of discomfort. Altitude is discomfort. The first couple of times in altitude were the worst because I was unsettled and stressed by the discomfort. By the time I got to Everest I had got my acclimatization and my response to pain down to a science. In fact the strategy of living and thriving at altitude was part of the appeal of climbing in these big places for me. I learned to perceive pain as information not necessarily as the warning alarms we were programmed to think it was. I would respond to the information by slowing down, drinking more, altering my sleeping arrangements, or eating more. The biggest challenge was discerning the harmless pain from the warning bells. What is danger pain and what is just plain discomfort? More experience led to more confidence in my ability to judge. (Climber 7)

...I would not call it suffering, I would call it discomfort. For example, if you are competing in a race, there is a difference between discomfort and pain. The pain is if you are injured and something is really wrong and you shouldn't be racing. In high altitude climbing however, discomfort is a normal part of the game and I believe in accepting the discomfort as a normal part of the feel on the mountain. (Climber 4)

I believe that high altitude climbers need to make friends with the discomfort and suffering involved on the climb. For me, experiencing and embracing the pain makes me feel alive. And, when I feel alive and vibrant I push forward. Accepting and thriving off the pain helped me get through the challenges I faced on the mountain. (climber 6)

Short Term Goal-Setting

These climbers spoke of the importance of setting short-term goals while climbing the mountain. They set specific, relevant, daily goals through the entire expedition to the summit. The climbers felt that short-term goals were crucial to their success on the mountain, because this ongoing process enabled them to remain focused on the task at hand, and to not become overwhelmed by the size of the goal or of the immenseness of the experience. Short-term goals helped these climbers stay focused and committed to the ultimate goal of reaching the summit and coming back down alive.

Some climbers put their goals in the wrong place. They put it on the top of the mountain. You should really make your ultimate goal to come back to base camp. It is important to reach the top, however when it is too dangerous to continue you should be able to turn around even if you are close to your objective. Also it is important to set little goals along the way. (Climber 7)

Don't aim for the end goal just yet, because you have to go through all the obstacles along the way. I always kept that in mind. I said to myself, I am going for the top, that is my goal, but I am going to go through it step by step. From that step, I am going to go on to the next step and so on, all the way to the Hilary Step. (Climber 6)

Remembering Lessons From Past Experiences

Some climbers talked about the importance of drawing on past experiences in order to persist through the struggles and difficult moments on the mountain. They spoke about learning from each past climbing experience, by drawing out insights or lessons

to help them prepare for potential tough conditions in this expedition. Through their numerous previous experiences in high altitude environments climbers gained a strong foundation of knowledge and drew upon it when they were faced with life threatening or challenging times.

It was this accumulation of experience and the lessons gained from the failures, epics, and hardships that proved to be our most valuable asset and investment in tackling Mount Everest and coming back alive. (Climber 2)

I think it is important to learn from past climbing experiences and use what you have learned on Everest. Learn what works for you and what doesn't. For example one of the main things is drinking a lot. When you don't drink you become dehydrated and it affects your performance and your ability to acclimatize. So you learn little tricks to help you out and be more efficient up there. Like right when you get into a camp you start boiling snow and start drinking instead of waiting till later when you don't feel like getting out of your tent. You learn how to stay warmer, learn what systems for your feet work, so it gets easier and as a result your mental state improves. (Climber 9)

...you are drawing on past experiences. You may feel overwhelmed by your senses at the time but if you can go back to a place when you were younger, where you had a bad experience or several bad experiences and draw strengths from the fact that you are here now and those experiences didn't stop your life from going on. You will get through it. And that comes with those experiences from the past where you were able to get through things. (Climber 1)

Belief in Your Capacity

Some climbers spoke about the importance of believing in themselves and their capacity to complete their mission and return safely. This was a key factor in their success on the mountain. Their belief and confidence on the mountain was strengthened by drawing on real-world evidence that demonstrated their capacity to perform well under harsh conditions. This included revisiting past successes and lessons learned from previous set-backs. Finding reasons to believe in themselves helped these climbers to stay positive and persistent when faced with obstacles on the mountain.

I believed in my ability to make it to the top from day one, from the moment I made this decision three years ago. It was actually a dream of mine for 10 years. When I climbed and summated Mount Aconcagua, somehow I just knew I could climb Everest. I never told anyone that I knew I could climb it. I didn't want to sound arrogant, but inside me, I seemed to know it. But then came obstacles, and so I had to decide how much I believed in my dream. Often I thought that it was not going to happen, you have run into a brick wall here, and a brick wall there. But I kept pushing on and I didn't give up on my dream. Sometimes you just need that belief in yourself to keep you going and to get through the obstacles. For example, at the Hilary Step I realized a goal of mine and that gave me the confidence to go after my next objective. One advantage I have is the belief in myself. (Climber 10)

I failed on Everest four times before reaching the summit on my fifth attempt. What made the fifth attempt different was that I really had the confidence that I could do it. I trained a whole lot harder and as a result I felt stronger physically.

I think that was the major difference concerning my mental state. (Climber 7)

It is important to train physically hard because that helps with your confidence on the mountain. In turn your confidence reflects what is taking place as you are climbing. I think that it comes down to experience to be honest with you. Experience breeds confidence. I often thought back to past climbing expeditions where we succeeded and used those memories to feel strong and sure of my abilities. (Climber 2)

Team Support

Working together and supporting teammates on the mountain was mentioned by some of the climbers as being an important component for reaching the summit. Some climbers overcame obstacles on the path to the summit with the encouragement and strength of their teammates. For these climbers, supporting one another and believing in one another as climbers was an important element of their success on the mountain.

It is not always about being positive because I remember the day I was going for the summit, there was one guy on our expedition that I did not really like. He wouldn't be someone I would select as my climbing partner. When I wanted to go down when I thought there was no hope of going on however, he was the guy who said hey wait a minute, we have come this far. I am not turning around now when I know that I can still go on. And he was the guy who drove us out of our moments when we began getting comfortable. It is not always about being nice to one another, it is about challenging one another and motivating. (Climber 9)

The Descent

Climbing Mount Everest is not over until the climbers have returned from the summit of the mountain to base camp. Descending the mountain (to base camp) usually takes up to two days. Climbers will attempt to descend as far down the mountain as possible, however they normally rest at camp four or camp three before leaving the next day for base camp. It is clearly evident that mental strategies are not only employed as climbers ascend the mountain but they are also utilized on the descent.

Focusing

Focusing is one of two critical mental strategies required for the successful descent from the summit of Mount Everest. Most of these climbers said that because they were so tired and worn out after reaching the summit, they had to really focus what remained of their energies on the dangerous, step-by-step task of the descent. Some climbers felt that focusing is even more important on the descent than on the ascent.

It is even more important to focus during the descent because your body is not responding the way it should. You are so tired and depleted from the climb that staying focused on every step in front of you is crucial. Otherwise things like clipping a crampon can occur. (Climber1)

The descent is historically where climbers make mistakes and the post summit adrenaline is gone. I am always very focused in the mountains, but during the descent my focus is at its peak. When guiding it's looking out for the clients, checking and re-checking anchors, fixed lines, watching weather, other climbers etc. Until we exit the icefall and all the members, both climbers and Sherpas are

safe, my guard and focus remains heightened. It's not that I lose the joy after having reached the summit, but it is like bitter sweet until we are all safe. Respect for Everest is key to living and having the opportunity to return and celebrate. (Climber 8)

Short Term Goal-Setting

The second important mental strategy that climbers mentioned as being critically important on the descent was setting short-term goals as they descended the mountain. Setting small, realistic, achievable goals helped the climbers stay focused and committed to the successful descent experience.

Setting short-term goals is really important when coming down the mountain. The goals I set were realistic. Because you are so tired and worn out on the descent, it is crucial that you set these small goals so you don't become overwhelmed by the experience. When you are climbing you always have to keep in mind that the summit is only part of the climb. In my opinion a climb is only successful once you have reached base camp from the summit. You also need to monitor your reserves because climbing from the summit to base camp is long. (Climber 3)

Impact Climbing Everest had on Participants Lives

Climbers were asked whether climbing Mount Everest had influenced their lives in any meaningful way, and if yes, in what way. Seven of the 10 climbers felt that this experience had a profoundly positive impact on their lives. Most gained confidence in their ability to take on new challenges.

The first time I climbed Everest it absolutely changed my life. It opened doors

for me. And it was almost like, this will sound really corny but I want to tell you anyways. It was almost like I had a big energy shift on Everest. When I came down from the mountain I approached the world in a different way. And maybe it was because I had achieved what was a big dream for me. It just seemed like it opened new doors and my life changed now that I have done it a second time. I think that my life is changing even more in some ways and that has never happened with any other mountain. I will tell you right now that it changed my life tremendously. (Climber 4)

Sometimes you just need the belief in yourself to get through the many obstacles. I realized that they didn't stop me, it was questionable at times but somehow it worked and I made it through so many obstacles. And, that has given me the self-confidence to go after other objectives. Next year is a triathlon; I am going to do the qualifier for the Iron man in Hawaii. That was a goal I made 10 years ago. After Everest I pulled out my goal sheet and I looked and said what else do I want to do. So, Everest gave me the confidence to say even though I don't know the end result and I don't know what obstacles are in front of me, I will go and try because in the end you realize it is not the goal, it is the road you took, the traveling, the experience, the obstacles, and how you overcame them and everything you saw along the way. The entire two years planning and climbing on the mountain were amazing. (Climber 10)

It changed my whole life. For one my career changed. I became a motivational speaker even though I hated it, I was terrified of it but I wanted to conquer this fear more than give into it. I tell my story

to organizations and corporations about 30 times a year. I speak for an hour. My story parallels their own aspirations and for them it is a refreshing context. I also learned that by doing well in one arena, I have the confidence to tackle new challenges; challenges that are outside of my expertise which have led to further diversification, liberation, satisfaction, and balance in my life. (Climber 9)

Recommendations for Others

Climbing Mount Everest

These successful climbers were asked if they had any advice for other climbers who hope to climb Mount Everest. They recommended that anyone who wants to succeed on Mount Everest should gain lots of high altitude climbing experience, train hard physically, mentally and emotionally, and thoroughly preparing for the climb.

I would tell someone who wanted to succeed on Everest to gain climbing experience, and to train very hard emotionally, mentally, and physically. Anyone under stress and extreme pressure who performs in a high-risk environment has to trust the fact that they have trained everything that is under their control. I would also suggest that climbers go under a series of extreme challenges so you can practice relying on your training to help you. When you go numb mentally which is often the case on Everest you can then rely on your past experience to get you through. (Climber 1)

Train, train and train. By training I mean go and climb as many high altitude peaks as possible. Only by being in the mountains can you learn tricks to help you. It is important to be wise on the mountain. Wisdom comes with actual experience. For example, learning

weather patterns so you know when and when not to climb. (Climber 6)

I would tell someone who wanted to climb Everest to train extremely hard and get lots of experience. I know that is what helped me the most. Spend a lot of time in the mountains. For example, learning rope skills. Go to another 8000m peak first, before going to Everest and that way you know how you are going to do on supplemental oxygen. I think a lot of people go to Everest with not enough experience. And Everest is very expensive. I would say take your time. Take a very focused path. Train hard, and learn your skills. You have to know how to jumar before you go up the Khumbu icefall. Don't try and learn it there. I saw one guy on our team who felt so sure of his skills and then it came to a point where we were doing a lot of repelling and a lot of jumaring and he didn't know how to do it. You can not be learning that stuff on Everest. Mount McKinley is actually a great training peak. It is as cold as you can only imagine up there. Then go to Aconcagua. It is not as cold but it is higher so you will gain experience in high altitude. Take a very gradual path. Those who take their time have no problem on Everest. Everest has a very sharp tail and it is a big mountain. You can get into a very bad situation very quickly. When things go wrong they go very wrong, and lots of people underestimate it. I trained so hard, and I was so happy that I was so fit because when summit day came it was not a problem. It made it a nice experience. It is important to enjoy the process. If you can go as a woman and be really strong physically and technically then you are a step ahead because everyone expects you to be the weakest link. (Climber 5)

Discussion and Reflections

Mountain climbers have emphasized the importance of mental strategies and detailed preparation in their own diaries, journals and personal reports. This was the first study focused on doing an in-depth exploration of the mental strategies used to perform successfully in the high-risk sport of high altitude climbing.

It is clear that climbing Mount Everest is an extraordinary physical, mental, and emotional test. Climbers must cope with constant danger, potential death, sleep deprivation, extreme cold, fatigue, avalanches, and various other potential setbacks for over a two-month period. It was fascinating to learn about how these Mount Everest climbers successfully applied various mental strategies in such extreme circumstances.

As a result of talking at length with each climber, it became very clear that success on Mount Everest is very much about having the proper mindset and focus. It was essential that climbers develop strong mental skills and apply them during training and while climbing the mountain. Being physically and technically strong, and being prepared logistically were also critical aspects of a successful summit. However, most of the climbers emphasized that what separated them from the many other climbers who did not succeed on Everest was their mental strength and their ability to apply mental strategies during hardship.

Some of the mental strategies used by the elite climbers in this study are similar to the mental strategies used by top athletes in various other sports. For example, in preparation for climbing Mount Everest, these climbers used positive imagery, engaged in detailed planning, and developed their mental strength during training and when climbing other mountains, to ensure success. Orlick and Partington's (1988) extensive

study on mental links to excellence found that successful Olympians also used positive imagery, engaged in detailed pre-competition planning, and developed their mental skills during training and lead-up performances to prepare themselves to perform to their capacity at the Olympic event.

Developing mental strength and skills for focusing through adversity is important for success in many pursuits. However it is an essential preparation strategy in successful high altitude climbing. The consequences of error, or losing focus even temporarily, can result in total mission failure or death. Successful high altitude climbers probably work on strengthening their mind-set, focus and resolve in training because they know they will be faced life threatening obstacles on the mountain. Experienced climbers know that mental toughness and skills for focusing through adversity and discomfort will be required to succeed and survive. When you have to endure a tremendous amount of discomfort for a long period of time, focusing on the right things can become a great asset.

The results in the ascent phase of climbing Mount Everest provide support for Orlick's (1996) seven critical components of personal excellence. Orlick's Wheel of Excellence represents a conceptual framework for the pursuit of excellence based on the results of in-depth interviews with hundreds of world-class athletes (Orlick & Lee-Gartner, 1995; Orlick & Partington, 1988), as well as ongoing work with individuals engaged in other high performance pursuits (Orlick, 2000). The seven elements of excellence in the model include commitment, belief, positive imagery, mental readiness, full focus, distraction control, and on-going learning. As the Mount Everest climbers shared their journey of how they successfully negotiated the challenges of the mountain, without prompting they spoke of the importance of

using all of the elements from the Wheel of Excellence to help them overcome obstacles on the path to the summit. By acting on these mental perspectives and strategies, the high altitude climbers to reach the summit and return safely to base camp.

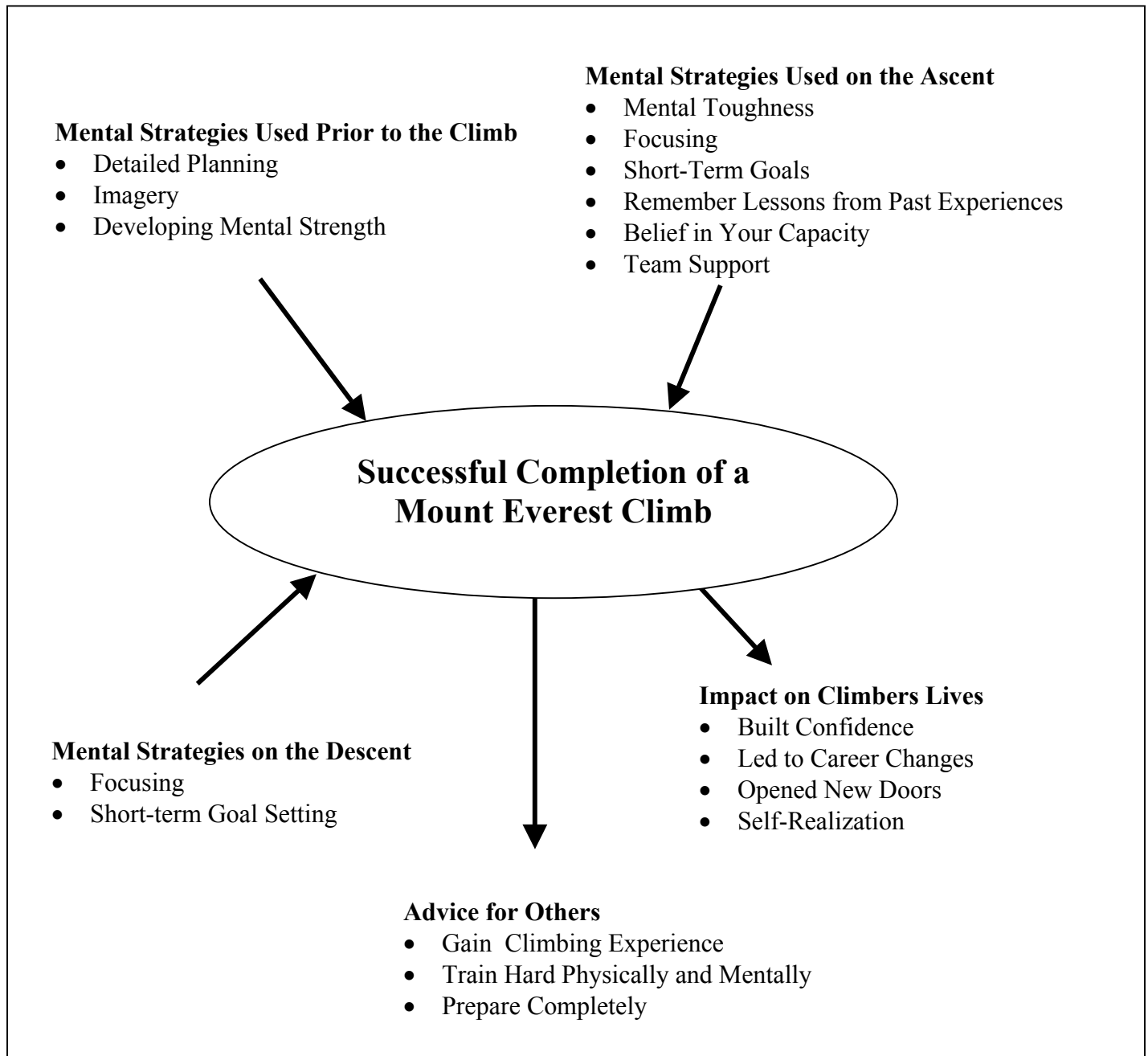
These climbers also spoke about a specific focusing strategy they used during the ascent, which included connecting with their bodies and redefining pain. A similar strategy has previously been reported to be related to enhanced performance in long distance running (Patrick & Hrycaiko, 1998; Schomer, 1986; Silva & Applebaum, 1989; Tammen, 1996). Many of the successful Mount Everest climbers in this study were able to read their bodies and adjust their focus to succeed with the immense effort involved in reaching the summit.

These Mount Everest climbers also reported using some mental strategies previously described by astronauts and surgeons engaged in high risk missions. For example, Orlick (1999) interviewed an astronaut who was a former fighter pilot, test pilot and the first Canadian to fly as a mission specialist, to pilot a docking with the space station, and to operate the Canadarm in space. The purpose of this interview was to explore the mental strategies used by this astronaut to excel in this highly demanding pursuit. The results revealed that detailed preparation, focus, imagery, and on-going learning were key strategies for success. An example of preparing fully for space flight included figuring out what it is you are trying to do and having a clear picture of that, followed by developing a clear picture of what you can do for all the possible things that can go wrong (Orlick, 1999). Similarly, high altitude climbers spoke of the need to develop a plan ahead of time to be fully prepared to successfully overcome potential setbacks on the mountain. In a highly dangerous and

demanding environment like climbing Mount Everest there is little time to stop and reflect in a crisis situation. Climbers and astronauts need to be prepared to react immediately to overcome potentially life threatening obstacles.

In another revealing interview conducted by Orlick (2001), one of the world's leading

cardio-thoracic surgeons was asked about the mental strategies he used to perform and deal effectively with the element of uncertainty in the highly demanding domain of high risk, life threatening surgery. The mental strategies he spoke about as enhancing the probability of success included preparation, optimism, full focus on the step



in front of you, belief in yourself and others, and teamwork. The performance requirements of flying a space shuttle, performing high risk surgery, and climbing Mount Everest are very different. However, the similarities of the mind-set and focus required to be successful are clearly evident. Achieving a difficult goal under conditions of extreme risk and stress, requires a special kind of mind set and focus.

Given that many of these Everest climbers felt that success on Everest is 70% mental, it is important that we continue to learn more about what it takes mentally to reach different kinds of “Mount Everest summits” and return safely. Much has been learned from these high altitude climbers that could help other climbers, as well as performers engaged in other disciplines in their pursuit of excellence. It makes sense that to prepare for a challenge like this, one should prepare fully, train hard both mentally and physically, and gain the required experience. Because of the fatigue and discomfort associated with high altitude, climbers need to train as much as possible in the natural environment so that their actions become instinctual when they are on Everest.

The more familiar and natural we are with ourselves and within our specific performance environment, the better the chances of success.

We leave you with the following quotes which sum up the Everest experience reflected by some of the special people we had the pleasure of interviewing and learning from.

High altitude mountaineering is a game of endurance. What happens is that you begin very strong and focused but as we climb higher people lose weight, get sick, and they tend to get tired and don't

sleep as well. A whole new host of challenges present themselves and if you start out with 8 people on your expedition there are always people who drop out. It is a game of attrition. I try and stay healthy, get a lot of sleep and I prepare myself mentally. I know that summit day is going to be an 18 hour push so I try and have as much tenacity as possible to last as long as possible.

It is a matter of continuing to climb no matter how uninspired you feel, when there is nothing left to push you physically, you rely on your psychological strength and abilities.

You have to be driven, summit driven. You have to want it very badly. At some point you think what am I doing this for. Is it something that I really want to risk my life for. So all those questions you want to answer early on in the journey so you don't spend a lot of time trying to work them out on the mountain. I am a pretty happy guy. I have a great life, a good job. I love my wife and family and felt I was risking a lot for the climb. I questioned why I was there. Many people back home also wondered why I wanted to climb. It was important for me to answer these questions ahead of time and stay committed to my dream.

Climbing for me is a highly personal spiritual thing. When I go to the mountains, it is like practicing my religion. The beauty of what I see is really important to me and really effects me. I think that we are all looking for different things when we go to the summit of a mountain and for me it is a very personal feeling. The experience is more important than the physical achievement.

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Lessons Learned from Graduate Students' Early Consulting Experiences

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Abstract

High quality, experiential training for graduate students entering the performance enhancement consulting field is extremely important. Silva and colleagues (1999) recently argued that students are being left to learn through trial and error, leading to mistakes, and limiting credibility. Although sharing experiences, lessons, and insight can not replace supervised experience, it is an important component of graduate students' training. The purpose of this article is to share lessons learned from graduate students' experiences in a sport psychology consulting internship setting. Lessons are discussed in terms of essentials for getting started, practical lessons for all consulting experiences, team interventions, individual consultations, and lessons based on global reflections.

Lessons Learned from Graduate Students' Early Consulting Experiences

In the field of sport psychology, it is well known that applied research has not received the same attention as academic research (Simons & Anderson, 1995). Recently Silva, Conroy, and Zizzi (1999) outlined a number of the current issues confronting the advancement of applied sport psychology. In particular, Silva and colleagues highlighted that a more proactive initiative is required in training graduate students, reiterating concerns about applied training and supervised experiences being underdeveloped. Silva et al. argued that students are being left to learn through trial and error, which is leading to a greater probability of mistakes, and limiting credibility of the profes-

sion. While the extent of this problem may be the source of some debate, few would argue the necessity of appropriate graduate training for applied work.

Durand-Bush and Bloom (2001) recently addressed and summarized the limited literature pertaining to graduate students in applied sport psychology. Some literature has addressed academic training areas such as student satisfaction with supervisors (e.g. Anderson, Van Raalte, & Brewer, 1994), other studies have looked at graduate students' career options (e.g. Waite & Pettit, 1993). Durand-Bush and Bloom provided insights based on their own experiences. They emphasized the importance of "shopping" around for a suitable graduate program and selecting courses that provide solid knowledge and skills for consulting. They

also suggest that internship opportunities should be examined for their number of supervised hours and their possibility to lead to certification. Once consulting experiences begin, Durand-Bush and Bloom outline trusting relationships and skillful knowledge as key to consultant effectiveness.

Other applied sport psychology consultants and researchers (Gould, 1998; Halliwell, 1990; Halliwell, Orlick, Ravizza, & Rotella, 1999; Holt & Streaan, 2001; Orlick & Partington, 1987; Ravizza, 1990; Rotella, 1990; Simons & Anderson, 1995) have focused on consultants' experiences, their effectiveness, and their lessons learned; however, this work is also limited. Recently, through a self-narrative research design, Holt and Streaan (2001) discussed issues related to professional training, supervision, consultant athlete relationships, and the need for reflective practice in applied sport psychology. Halliwell, Orlick, Ravizza & Rotella's (1999) "Consultant's Guide to Excellence" addressed practical issues associated with consulting in areas including getting started, delivering a program, and making a difference. Gould's (1998) chapter "Insights into effective sport psychology consulting" provided guidelines for successfully implementing an educationally based mental skills training program. His guidelines are specific to the areas of gaining entry and connection, identifying program objectives, identifying specific strategies to achieve program objectives, scheduling mental skills training, and evaluating program effectiveness. A study by Simons and Anderson (1995) compiled the personal perspectives of 11 consultants who had been practicing "in the field" for two to four decades. Perspectives were presented in the form of lessons learned and advice for newcomers. In addition, many established and recognized consultants have presented their experiences working with professional teams (Halliwell, 1990; Ravizza, 1990; Rotella, 1990), while Orlick and Partington (1987) offered a com-

prehensive analysis of athletes' perceptions of consultants' effectiveness. While all of this literature has presented solid knowledge and contributed to the advancement of the applied field, the amount of practical literature for the applied sport psychologist remains minimal. Furthermore, with the exception of Holt and Streaan's (2001) article, all of these papers have been written by experienced consultants. While their lessons are beneficial for others to learn from, they are the lessons of experienced consultants, rather than those of beginning consultants.

The purpose of this article is to share lessons learned from graduate students' experiences in a sport psychology consulting internship setting. There are many essential components to applied sport psychology graduate students' training. We believe that supervised experience is essential. While there is clearly no replacement for supervision from an experienced consultant, given that many graduate students are not being provided with such, we believe our knowledge is worth sharing, as learning with and from colleagues and peers was one of our greatest lessons as consultants-in-training.

Our Internship Experience

In the fall of 2000 seven of us began the first year of our masters' program at the University of Ottawa. We quickly realized the uniqueness of the group, having just arrived from all parts of Canada, the Caribbean, and the United Kingdom, with backgrounds in psychology, human kinetics, coaching and teaching. During the fall term we read a great deal of applied literature through our coursework, enrolled in a micro-counseling course, and discussed many topics in our intervention seminar. Prior to beginning our internship, we experienced the fears and anxieties that most graduate students face prior to embarking on a consulting career. The possibility of influencing an athlete's performance, outlook, and approach to their sport was concerning, but through the winter term

we overcame our self-doubts, and one by one we began our consulting experiences.

Our intervention contexts were extremely diverse, as we worked with teams and individual athletes ranging from youth to master athletes, and recreational to elite level athletes. Sports included hockey, badminton, soccer, road racing, track and field, swimming, cross-country, basketball, triathlon, golf, tennis, football, cross-country skiing, and power-lifting. Each of us completed a minimum 360 hours required for credit, while some of us exceeded this requirement. Throughout the internship, we had an excellent support system, with a committed supervision program, as well as eager classmates constantly wanting to discuss and debrief early consulting experiences. We came to develop an enhanced comprehension of consulting and intervention, while fostering a much better understanding of our own strengths and weaknesses. Now, as we continue in the field, we are increasingly aware of how valuable it was to have had such comprehensive training and such diverse opportunities. It is for this reason that we are sharing our lessons.

While these lessons are based on personal experiences, we believe that they can be beneficial for all graduate students beginning applied work in sport psychology, and may also be of interest to experienced consultants and supervisors in the field. Although between us we could list hundreds of lessons, we have chosen to focus on the lessons that we believe are particularly pertinent to beginning consultants, as well as the lessons shared most commonly among us. These lessons have been categorized into five areas:

- essentials for getting started,
- lessons for all consulting experiences
- lessons from team interventions
- lessons from individual consultations
- lessons based on global reflections.

Essentials for Getting Started

To begin, we have outlined the five lessons from our experiences that we believe are most important for all consultants at any time, and particularly essential for consultants who are getting started. Being confident, developing a rapport, learning the language, keeping it simple, and being present have been addressed to some degree in the literature already (Durand-Bush & Bloom, 2001; Gould, 1998; Halliwell, 1990; Halliwell, Orlick, Ravizza, & Rotella, 1999; Orlick & Partington, 1987; Ravizza, 1990; Rotella, 1990; Simons & Anderson, 1995) however, we are reiterating them, as they were key lessons for us in our early experiences

1. Be confident. Halliwell, Orlick, Ravizza & Rotella (1999) suggest that quality consultants “project [their] commitment and confidence” (p. 31). The importance of consultant confidence cannot be undermined. When starting out in this profession, and even once we began to establish ourselves as consultants, there were times when we had self-doubts. “Lack of confidence” experiences tend to snowball. Athletes can tell if you are lacking confidence, and consequently have less interest in what you have to say. You must believe that you have learned the important elements of mental training and that you can help to facilitate positive change in people’s lives. Of course, you will always have more to learn, as the best consultants never stop learning, but do not be afraid to acknowledge that you already do possess many of the skills necessary to be an effective consultant.

2. Develop a rapport. We quickly discovered that making a good connection with athletes was a priority. We found that regardless of the skills we might possess, we were almost useless if athletes did not find us approachable and trustworthy. In a team setting, a conscious effort is required to meet, interact, and open the lines of communication with each individual

athlete early in the season. “Hanging out” before or after practice, and chatting over a meal or while driving to a game provide opportunities to enhance the athletes-consultant relationship. When working with individual athletes, we found that early attendance at a competition helped to build rapport.

3. Learn the language. We realized immediately that without comfort and knowledge of the athletes’ sports, we were not credible; however, we learned that this education process could be fun. We went to games and competitions with friends who knew the sport and exhausted them with questions. We were keen Olympic viewers, eager fans of professional sports, and tried new sports ourselves, as part of “the job”!

4. Keep it simple. As eager beginner consultants, we sometimes caught ourselves trying to do too much (e.g. race planning, goal setting, and imagery in one session). We found that targeting one area at a time was most beneficial to the athletes, as they had difficulty making gains if quality time was not granted to an area. At times, we also found ourselves “over-analyzing” situations or individuals. We discovered that it took skill to break ideas into simple and practical terms, but that simplifying usually provided clarity and focus, especially when an athlete was confronting obstacles.

4. Be present. Also due to our keenness and eagerness, we often felt the need to be doing something. With time we learned that our background presence was far more effective than “in your face” intervention. In essence, we came to realize that we were “doing” something simply by being present. As Halliwell & colleagues (1999) state, “it is best to be low profile with high impact” (p. 52).

Practical Lessons for all Consulting Experiences

In extending what we feel are the essentials for getting started, the following are lessons and strategies that we feel are practical for all consulting experiences.

1. Use mental skills yourself. Leading by example was a major part of our consulting philosophies. Skills such as distraction control, visualization, refocusing, and maintaining a positive outlook were key to our successful consulting experiences. Halliwell and colleagues (1999) also emphasize this point, suggesting that it is important to “be a good model of what you are teaching” (p. 47).

2. Don’t create issues if none exist. As beginner consultants we were sometimes so eager to help athletes that we occasionally believed athletes were facing obstacles or challenges when in fact they were not. It is difficult as sport psychology consultants not to form beliefs and expectations about certain individuals based on past experiences, however such expectations can have dangerous consequences, and led us to make false judgements about athletes. It is important to enter consulting with an open mind, as each situation is unique.

3. Be careful with homework. While homework is a good way to stimulate athlete reflection and monitor progress, we found that focusing too much on homework turned some athletes off. We learned to be weary of this and to respect different learning styles, as some people like to write and read to learn while others prefer to listen or verbally interact to learn. Rotella (1990) echoed these concerns, stating that he avoided all types of psychological testing. In attempts to limit athletes’ paper work, we used primarily post-event evaluation forms, comprised of concise and relevant questions, a strategy also suggested by Halliwell and colleagues (1999). In addition, we found that pa-

per work was almost always a struggle to get back from athletes. If a form was “required”, we had athletes fill it in during a session rather than sending it home.

Lessons from Team Interventions

Given the great differences in consulting contexts, we chose to address the lessons learned from team and individual settings separately. The following are the lessons and strategies we adapted when working in team settings.

1. *Be prepared.* We found that with preparation, the quality of delivery increased. While having back-up plans and being organized for every session took time, our efforts were always evident in the quality of our work.

2. *Ask athletes what they want.* In a team context, it is often the coach who has brought you in to work with the team, and therefore it is the coach’s ideas with which you are familiar. It is important to know where the athletes are coming from: what they believe to be their strengths, weaknesses, concerns, and how they see your role. Reassessment throughout the season is also important. Ask them, “How are we doing on this? How can we do better? Have our goals changed?” Also, have them complete a midseason consultant evaluation, so you know how you can be more effective for the remainder of the season. Several other authors (e.g. Durand-Bush, 2001; Gould, 1998; Rotella, 1990) have emphasized the importance of regular “checks” with the athletes, ongoing feedback from the athletes, and program evaluation.

3. *When working with young teams...* As beginner consultants we were recommended and thus selected to work a great deal with recreational, club, and league level athletes. We found these groups provided us with completely different experiences than higher level athletes. A specific challenge we encountered

frequently with young athletes was their lack of attention, despite their genuine interest in our presentation. We developed a number of strategies for this, including a talking tool (e.g. hockey puck), the use of practical activities and demonstrative games, and breaking into smaller groups.

4. *Everyone’s presentation style is unique.* It is important not to be so caught up in modeling a mentor’s style and following the “rules of consulting”, that you forget to be yourself. Learn from your mentors and be aware of the rules of consulting, but do not let this take you away from acting naturally. Everyone’s unique personality brings unique strengths to their work with athletes.

5. *Working with coaches...* We quickly learned the importance of having the support and trust of the coach. Some of us worked with coaches whose values differed from ours, which was very challenging. Recognition of our different views often facilitated communication, but we did not find any approach to offer a perfect solution. Halliwell (1990) and Ravizza (1990) have also given attention to the welcome challenge of meeting athletes’ needs while maintaining a positive working relationship with coaches. Ravizza suggests monitoring the time spent with athletes versus coaches, and making a conscious effort to “hang out” in places where informal interaction with athletes is most likely to occur.

6. *Athlete confidentiality...* Despite being clear with coaches from the beginning about our obligation to respect athlete confidentiality, we regularly encountered coaches who challenged this, an obstacle also highlighted by Durand-Bush and Bloom (2001). A few strategies we found to facilitate potentially awkward situations were to be prepared for coaches’ “How are they or What did you talk about” questions, following a meeting. In certain circumstances we asked the athlete, “Is this something that we

could share with Coach, or would you rather keep it between you and I?”

Lessons from Individual Consultations

1. Let them lead. While education sometimes plays a role in consulting, we learned to be wary not to abuse the teacher/leader role. Learning about what was driving the athlete and what they felt they needed was most important. We learned to start where the athletes were, and let them take the lead. We probed them into self-discovery, while being cautious of “over-guiding”. Athletes seemed to gain the most through active learning and empowerment, as this increased their confidence and belief in themselves.

2. Don’t “jump the gun”. As beginner consultants, we were sometimes so eager to solve problems that we “jumped the gun” on intervention. We wanted to provide all the answers at that moment. We came to recognize the importance of learning as much as possible about an athlete before trying to provide them with direction. We also found e-mail useful if we had any further ideas, questions or suggestions following a session.

3. Good questions. Patient answers. Good consultants ask good questions... They also wait to hear the answers. We found that in order to learn about athletes, we had to ask them challenging questions; however, we sometimes forgot that challenging questions require time for thought and reflection. Eventually, we learned to be comfortable with silence, and to give athletes this time. Initially however, we found the “seven-second rule” useful: after asking a question, we would count to seven slowly in our head, giving the athlete the opportunity to think about the question and develop a response. Halliwell, Orlick, Ravizza & Rotella (1999) emphasize a similar message, suggest-

ing that consultants “ask pertinent questions” (p. 33) and “be the greatest listeners [they] can be” (p. 15).

Lessons Based on Global Reflections

Finally, we have compiled our lessons based on global reflections of our internship experiences. These are lessons that we came to develop only after hundreds of hours of experience as young consultants, and are lessons that we feel are key to maximizing our effectiveness throughout our careers. Each of the lessons, including being ready for teachable moments, expecting the unexpected, acknowledging that everyone’s different, determining our role as consultants, and knowing our special place are lessons that have been addressed by others (Durand-Bush & Bloom, 2001; Halliwell, 1990; Halliwell, Orlick, Ravizza & Rotella, 1999; Orlick & Partington, 1987; Simons & Anderson, 1995). We feel there is benefit in sharing our unique perspective of these lessons.

1. Be ready for teachable moments. We have learned never to be inconvenienced by athletes asking questions or sharing concerns at seemingly inopportune times. In fact, we have come to realize that the “advice” given in these situations should be taken most seriously, as you are clearly addressing a real concern of the athlete’s. Although unpredictable, being open to these moments is imperative. Furthermore, as Halliwell (1990) emphasizes, it is important to be aware of cues from athletes that indicate they would like to talk.

2. Expect the unexpected. Flexibility is considered a distinguishing characteristic of “great” consultants (Orlick & Partington, 1987). The importance of being prepared, flexible, and adaptable cannot be overstated, particularly in performance situations. While outcomes cannot always be planned for, an appropriate response to whatever happens on the court or playing field is essential.

3. *Everyone's different.* Differences exist in age, gender, sport, level, and of course, from one individual to the next. We found that it was important to be aware of these differences when addressing a new group. We had to remind ourselves that all athletes work at different speeds, and learn at different rates. Given that all consultants are also unique, it is natural for a consultant to find it easier to relate to certain groups or individuals. However, a good consultant will make an effort to relate in positive ways with every group and individual.

4. *One piece of the puzzle or part of the everyday process?* As graduate students, we were eager to undertake any internship experience offered to us, and to be as involved as possible. We need these experiences to grow and become competent. Now that we are professionals in the field, our priorities have evolved to include making a living and keeping some balance in our lives. Consulting requires a lot of time and energy to be done effectively, and it is impossible to be everything to everyone. Before beginning consulting work, particularly with a team, it is important to be clear and up front about your level of involvement. While it can be very exciting to be “part of the everyday process”, on board with a team, a consultant's role sometimes requires providing only “one piece of the puzzle”. While both circumstances can be very rewarding, being “part of the everyday process” requires a much more significant commitment of time and energy. If this is your profession, proper compensation must be assured for such a large commitment. We have also found that in order to avoid being “spread too thin” and losing effectiveness, we must turn down some consulting requests. Most experienced consultants agree whole-

heartedly; as Halliwell (1990) suggests, “it is important to keep proper balance in [your] life”.

5. *Know that special place.* Our role as sport psychology consultants is very important, and requires a careful balance of behaviors. We must be present, but not overly present. We must be prepared for lots of “sit and wait” time, and be sure that we take time for ourselves. It is important to develop a good relationship with the athletes, but we must not cross the lines of professionalism (Durand-Bush & Bloom, 2001; Simons & Anderson, 1995). Indeed, it is a delicate balance, but once you find your “special place”, it is a rewarding role.

Summary

There a need for additional literature in applied sport psychology, particularly pertaining to high quality consultant education. We have attempted to make a contribution to this domain, by sharing our lessons, which were gained through our positive experiences as graduate students in a structured and supervised internship program. It is our hope that important issues concerning quality graduate training in performance enhancement and applied sport psychology will be given adequate attention in universities and training centers around the world. Until then, we believe that this article will help other graduate students avoid some mistakes often made by ‘beginning consultants’. Although our lessons are based entirely on early consulting experiences, we believe that our knowledge and insight may also benefit experienced consultants and consultant supervisors.

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About the International Society for Mental Training and Excellence (ISMTE)

Introduction

Founded in 1989, the focus of the ISMTE is excellence in performance and excellence in living. The founding President, Lars Eric Unestahl, organized the First World Congress in Örebro, Sweden, in 1991. Terry Orlick became the second President in 1991, hosted the 1995 World Congress in Ottawa, Canada and initiated the Journal of Excellence. Keith Henschen became the third President in 1998. Keith and Rich Gordin hosted the 1999 World Congress on Mental Training and Excellence, in Salt Lake City, USA. The 2003 World Congress on Mental Training and Excellence was hosted by Pavel Bundzen in St.Petersburg, Russia.

Vision

Education and Training for better people, better performers and a better world.

Mission

- Promote Excellence in Sport, The Performing Arts, Education, Work, Health and Life.
- Create, collect, produce and share valuable, practical resources and educational opportunities for those in pursuit of excellence, and those assisting others in pursuit of excellence.
- Serve as a vehicle for the on-going advancement of knowledge, education, interventions and consulting in Mental Training and Excellence.

Focus

- Excellence within multiple pursuits: Sport, Performing Arts, Workplace, Health, Education and Joyful Living.
- Committed to a truly applied orientation with practical research and experiential knowledge as a base.
- Focused on what is relevant in the real world of application to Quality Performance and Quality Living.
- International in orientation and scope, open to learning from people in different fields and different cultures who are committed to excellence and the value of shared wisdom.

Mental Training

Mental Training is centered on the systematic training and nurturing of mental skills, perspectives and positive life skills that are linked to performance excellence and quality living. Mental Training embraces teaching, coaching and nurturing positive perspectives, positive planning, focusing skills, refocusing skills, imagery skills, goal setting skills, teamwork, collaboration, commitment, confidence, mental and emotional preparation, distraction control skills, stress control skills, positive mind-body connections, balanced excellence, positive living skills and ongoing learning.