

## **Non-Verbal Approaches to Increase Team Self-Awareness:**

### **When words are not enough**

Abstract: Sport psychology consultants working with teams are often presented with problems in relationships and communication among the athletes or with the coaches. Sometimes, words are not enough to clarify the nature of the difficulties that team members are experiencing. There are several possible reasons that this may occur. For example, it may be due to the athletes' reluctance to expose their feelings, a hesitancy to discuss their ideas, or an uneasiness to reveal what they want. Fear of disapproval by coaches or teammates, as well as embarrassment about speaking out can also be factors. In addition, some athletes may not know how to describe the problem in words. This experiential workshop is intended to help consultants increase athletes' and coaches' awareness and understanding of such problems. To assist in achieving this goal, non-verbal approaches will be described and demonstrated. The underlying purpose of all these exercises is to increase awareness for both the group and the individual. They involve elements of risk-taking, feeling, and doing. These exercises will involve the workshop participants in roles as athletes and coaches of the same team. They will include: group sociograms, sub-group identification, influence lines, pairings, inclusion structures, approach-avoidance steps, and decision-making tasks. Participants will then have the opportunity to discuss their experience with the exercises, and how they might be applied to different situations with teams.

1. Inclusion exercise: Instruct group members to place themselves as close to, or as far from a designated spot on the floor that represents the center of the group (i.e., how much they feel they really are part of this group). When they are all placed, tell them to look around and notice where others are. Then ask them to move to a place that they would like to be, or to remain where they are. Ask those who moved, is there something that prevents them from making that change in real life. For those who didn't move, ask whether the reason they remained stationary was that they were 1. satisfied where they are; 2. reluctant to reveal what they wanted; or 3. some other reason they are aware of.

2. Group Sociogram: Have the group stand in a random arrangement, then ask them to move, and place their right hand on the left shoulder of the person: that they know best; after that, then the person they know least; after that, then the one they want to know better; and last, the person they feel uncertain about or tension with. Every person moves to their choice, even if there are several hands on their shoulder (take them all with you). Allow time between each instruction for people to look around and see where others are, and to pay attention to how they feel.

3. Influence line: Ask the group to form a single straight line, and place themselves along the line in accordance with the amount of influence they exert in this group. No doubling up or stepping to the side is allowed. It must be single file. When they are in a single line, suggest that they look up and down the line to see who is where, and be aware of what they are thinking, feeling and wanting. After that has been done, tell them that they can now move themselves or anyone else to a different position according to their own opinion of who belongs where.

4. Approach/Avoidance: Ask for two people who are uncertain about or feel tension in their relationship with each other to come forward. (Use the last exercise in 2. if they are part of a

group. If no one volunteers, use your intuition and "pick two volunteers"). Tell the others (if there are others) to observe carefully what occurs. Remind the two people doing the exercise of the importance of not speaking at any point. Have them face each other about 15 feet apart. Tell them that are to alternate taking one step at a time in any direction, forward, backward, sideways, or diagonally. The step is to be an expression of how they are feeling toward the other person or what they want right before they take a step. Tell them you will let them know when the exercise is over. When there has been some closure, ask each of the participants what their experience was during the exercise. If necessary, help them to be more specific. After that, ask the observers what they noticed.

5. Non-Verbal Expression: After reminding the group about not speaking during the exercise, have them arrange themselves in a circle, and look around at each of the other members. When they are ready, they may go over to any other member, non-verbally express their feelings toward them, and return to their position in the circle. Instruct them to be respectful of the other person's space in expressing their feelings. Each person must take at least one turn.

6. Decision-making: Remind them of the non-verbal requirement. Instruct the group to divide into two groups, and give no further instructions. Observe how they go about doing it for later discussion. When they are two groups, instruct them to choose a leader, and give no further instructions. Observe how they do it, with particular attention to who made the decision or exerted the most influence (the covert leader).

7. Sub-groups: Depending on the make-up of the group, you can select any of the following ways to divide them into sub-groups. The closer you get to what's really going on in the group, the more relevant it will be for the group's functioning. Ask them to divide up according to: their age, gender, birth order (oldest, middle, or youngest), cultural (language, birthplace, time in this country), region of US they were born in, or color. (I think sexual identity would potentially have undesirable consequences). With every division into sub-groups, give them each a task about the thoughts, feelings, desires, and consequences of being a member of their sub-group.