

An Eclectic Approach to Sport Psychology Consultation

Abstract

Our education and training in graduate school become the foundation upon which we build our professional experience. As practitioners, what we do derives from multi-dimensional considerations. It is at least a blend of what we have learned – from teachers, colleagues, clients, books, and journals, and what we created from our own experience. What we do depends too on our own thoughts, feelings, needs, and wants. Hopefully, it also derives from the people we are trying to help, the situations we deal with, the focus of the work, and the techniques we use.

This workshop will provide an opportunity to observe and participate in a presentation of an eclectic approach to sport psychology consultation. The presenter will describe an approach that incorporates four different theoretical foundations, and demonstrate a synthesis of these theories, blended together by a philosophical perspective of interviewing. With volunteer participants from members of the workshop, the consultant will illustrate this approach in real life interviews. After each interview, there will be ample opportunity for discussion and questions.

Theoretical Foundations

From my medical research background - the importance of careful observation and evaluation--to inquire how something worked, what happened that made a difference

From psychoanalytic theory - all behavior has meaning, past events and unconscious processes influence present functioning; the relationship between practitioner and client is critical.

From gestalt therapy - the significance of awareness and of present experience--how the athlete is functioning in the “here and now.”

From transactional analysis - the child within, and its influence on communication/relationships.

Cognitive therapy - thinking is the major determinant of feelings and behavior (and I regard feelings as the important mediator between thinking and behavior).

Philosophical Perspective

Although originally trained as a clinician, with a background in medical research, I've come to see myself more as an educator. This change involved a shift from the medical model of illness and disease to a growth and development model, in which problems are seen as the result of learned thinking patterns. The focus of my work with athletes and others is to help them change those patterns that contribute to distressed feelings or troublesome behavior, and to remove the barriers to their optimal functioning. This focus is primarily on present experience, based on the hypothesis that past negative experiences might recede into the background, were it not for the fact that present patterns of thinking and feeling keep them in the foreground. I believe that what we learned in the past can be changed by what we learn in the present.

Principles of Technique— process-oriented, experientially based – rather than skill-based.

My Agenda- understand experience; identify barriers; initiate beginnings.

Follow, lead, follow - Entry points - I listen very carefully as the athlete (coach, parent, etc.) describes thoughts, feelings, wants, or problems. In describing their experience, athletes will often say something that is an opportunity for more in-depth exploration. At this point, I call it an “entry point,” I shift from following what’s being said to leading, i.e. offering some comment or question that encourages the person to consider an alternative perspective, or a deeper exploration of the issue. I then shift back to following by listening to the reaction to what I introduced. This cycle of following, leading, following, continues throughout the whole session.

Importance of language - The language used by a person is followed very closely, because it not only expresses present thoughts and feelings, but also contributes to their development.