

Swinging with confidence

In the second of two articles, Dr Brian Hemmings continues to explain how to build a player's self-assurance

In last month's article I outlined how coaches can influence confidence in their players and teams through two methods: performance accomplishments ('I've done it before, so I can do it again') and vicarious experience ('if they can do it, so can I').

In this second part I explain two other simple ways how sport psychologists might set about building confidence in players through the concepts of verbal persuasion and emotional arousal, and in that process suggest how PGA Professionals could also adopt the same methods.

Verbal Persuasion

'Verbal persuasion' is the third most effective way of building confidence in a player. Players may apply this themselves through positive self-talk, however, the persuasion *often can come from others*, particularly the coach.

A good coach will always give positive comments about skills, performances and feedback about progress. However, also try to ensure your player uses positive self-talk for themselves. This may sometimes mean helping players identify when the words they use display a pessimistic attitude. Remember being positive does not mean being unrealistic. It is also important that your players have people around them who give good advice and provide them with a positive environment in which to flourish.

In short, verbal persuasion refers to a player or other person 'telling them they can do it'. Remember it is a weaker form of confidence building than performance accomplishments and vicarious experience.

A team exercise using the principle of verbal persuasion

Why not do this exercise to try and influence individual and team confidence? I have used this many times with international men's/boys/ladies/girls teams and have also seen it applied in county golf. Players really enjoy this and it has the desired effect.

- Each player to anonymously write two positive statements about every other player on the team and themselves (one sheet completed per player, see example)
- Coach collates all sheets and cuts out and places each players' comments in a separate envelope (in this team of six example, they would end up with six sets of comments)
- Each team member should end up with an envelope with a set of statements about them from the team
- Think of the best time to distribute to team (the night before competition starts, for example)

TEAM CONFIDENCE	
County Men's Team, 2012	
List 2 reasons why you are pleased the others are on the team with you, & how/why they will increase the team's chance of success (the reasons can be mental/physical/technical, what are their strengths?).	
John	1. Great putter/holes everything 2. Gives everything he's got
Billy	1. Never quits, never gives up, never beaten 2. Superb ball striker
Fred	1. Always contributes – makes team feel good 2. Good chance of a point every time he plays, great matchplay record
Ronnie	1. Always positive, great to have around 2. Brilliant around the greens
Dave	1. Tee to green best in county 2. County Champ – a winner

Emotional Arousal

Players also rely partly on their emotional states in judging their capabilities and their confidence. Positive moods enhance confidence and despondent moods diminish it. Mood also affects judgments and will inhibit a player from making good decisions on the golf course. It is not the sheer intensity of emotional and physical reactions that is important, but rather how they are perceived and interpreted ('*my body feels like I can do it*').

Players who have a high sense of confidence are likely to view their state of arousal (how they feel) as energising for performance, whereas those who are beset by self-doubts regard their arousal as debilitating. For instance, Jack Nicklaus often stated when he was in contention he found the stress of the situation and the emotions flowing through him to be exciting and helpful to him. Coaches can also help players to reappraise the arousal they feel to help them become more confident.



Dr. Brian Hemmings has been lead psychologist to England Golf since 1998, is author of the book 'Mental Toughness for Golf: The Minds of Winners', and is author of a fully online Golf Psychology Coaching Certificate course (see www.golfpsychologycoaching.com for full details). For a price reduction type in the promotional code PGA to reduce the price from £295 to £219.