

Pin back your ears

Dr Brian Hemmings outlines the techniques involved in factual listening

“Players need to know that you care, before they care what you know.”

In last month's article I wrote about the importance of effective listening in coaching to gain accurate information, and to understand the ever changing needs of different players.

The quote above implies the importance of relationships in coaching and of players knowing that the coach 'cares' about their needs and development.

To that end, I believe effective listening is the factor that demonstrates a coach cares - that you care enough to listen intently even though you are busy.

I have met countless players who describe great coaches as those who are great listeners. In fact, the world famous coach and PGA Master Professional Pete Cowen once remarked to me that the two simple words that set him apart from other coaches were: 'I care'.

In my previous article on the subject, I described the barriers to listening in coaching. In this one, I will describe what psychologists call *factual* listening. This involves the application of a specific set of active techniques referred to as *summarising*, *paraphrasing* and *clarification* to gain accurate information and, importantly, to ensure a player feels they have been heard and fully understood.

Summarising is the skill of accurately and succinctly recounting the range of information presented by the golfer, highlighting the prominent features of their story, and stating this back to them. Summarising can enable the coach to gather and integrate various strands of information given by the player, which can then be presented back to them. The process of presenting information back to the player provides the opportunity for both coach and player to confirm mutual understanding.

Paraphrasing is the skill of presenting back what the player has expressed, although be it in a different order or sequence from the one given by the player. Coaches can demonstrate that they have listened effectively by providing their understanding from what they have heard, which can be either confirmed and/or challenged by the player. The different order of presentation of information by the coach provides the opportunity for players to 'hear' their own statements from an *alternative* point-of-view, creating the opportunity for them to arrive at a new personal perspective and understanding.

Clarification is a process the coach may use to ensure an understanding of what the player has disclosed in the way in which the player intended it. This may include the use of paraphrasing,

above, and other specific questions to access the information the coach requires to ensure their own understanding is accurate (e.g. to fill in gaps about facts/events/shots from a recent round or tournament that you need as a coach to fully understand the player's story).

You don't need to be a psychologist to be a good listener. The above fundamental techniques are the cornerstone of building effective relationships with players. Albert Einstein once said he didn't *teach* his students anything, he merely tried to *create the right conditions* in which they could learn. Try and incorporate effective factual listening into your coaching and you will be going some way to creating great learning conditions for your players. Listening intently is a clear signal you care a great deal.



■ Dr. Brian Hemmings was lead psychologist to England golf during 1997 to 2013. During this time he helped develop the mental skills of the best emerging English golfers including Ross Fisher, Danny Willett, Tom Lewis, Tommy Fleetwood and Chris Wood. He is author of the book 'Mental Toughness for Golf: The Minds of Winners' and also runs Masterclasses for sport psychologists and golf coaches (www.golfmind.co.uk).

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In addition, he has released an online Golf Psychology Coaching Certificate course that is approved by The PGA of GB&I (100 CPD points) and PGAs of Europe, and has been completed with great reviews by more than 350 PGA pros and coaches worldwide. The course can be completed at home and full details are available at www.golfpsychologycoaching.com. For a price reduction of 25 per cent (from £295 to £219) type in the promotional code PGA.

"This course will assist in the continual development of our mental game questionnaire and mental coaching processes for me and my coaches to use at our golf school which is essential for our students to attain their goals."

Justin Parsons, PGA Professional, Director of Instruction, The Butch Harmon School of Golf, Dubai Sports City