

# A question of belief

## Banishing perceptions that are a hindrance and unhelpful is key to the art of successful coaching, says Dr Brian Hemmings

The great American basketball coach John Wooden once said that sportsmen and sportswomen should focus more on their character rather than on their reputation. Wooden remarked that character was 'what you are', whereas reputation was merely 'what others think you are'.

In nearly two decades of working in golf with PGA Professionals and elite players I hear a lot about pressure and see where coaches and players become overly worried about their 'reputation' rather than knowing and trusting in their own 'character'.

Here I witness the limiting beliefs people have about themselves and the perceived *consequences* of poor results. Often players will underperform because they feel pressure about how they might be viewed by others if they fail. This can also affect coaches as they sometimes feel their own reputation is determined by the performance of those they coach when, in reality, performance has so many variables and the coach only contributes in specific ways. In essence, being overly concerned about your reputation creates instability because it involves the perceptions of others as it is not under your control.

Knowing the impact of limiting beliefs should give you the motivation you need to change them for yourself or to help players when you sense this is an issue. A healthy belief puts you into the right frame to have the best *chance* of success. It is also true that negative beliefs and thoughts have a huge impact on performance, so if we find it difficult to be positive then we must at least learn ways of *managing* negative thinking to keep it to a minimum and hence give ourselves a chance.

In the previous two articles I have written about the need for effective listening in coaching. Particular words to look out for are *must*, *should* and *got*. For instance, 'I **must** make the cut; 'I **should** beat this opponent'; or 'I've **got** to win'. These words reveal very rigid, inflexible beliefs and create unnecessary pressure as they result in patterns of 'all or nothing' negative thinking. It is much better to frame performance beliefs with a *prefer* approach. For example, 'I'd **prefer** to make the top ten'.

Often these beliefs hinder players' views of themselves, their golf, and of their potential success. So in 2014 improve your coaching by listening carefully to the words your players use. They will reveal much about their thinking patterns and the performances that follow.



■ 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](http://www.golfmind.co.uk)).

### Considering your 2014 Continued Professional Development?

Dr. Brian Hemmings has released a fully online Golf Psychology Coaching Certificate course that is approved by The PGA of Great Britain and Ireland and the PGAs of Europe,. It carries 100 CPD points and has been completed with great reviews by more than 350 PGA pros and coaches worldwide. Go to [www.golfpsychologycoaching.com](http://www.golfpsychologycoaching.com) for full details.

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Phil Allen, PGA Professional, Holland