

Coaching Corner

Doug Cooper says everything boils down to how we view success and the goals we set ...

HOW SUCCESS and achievement is viewed by you or your learners is at the heart of everything we do in our coaching and learning. It is what makes us 'tick', it is what motivates us to 'keep going' or leads to us 'giving up'.

When faced with a difficult rapid, awkward rock hop or challenging surf break what goes through your mind? Perhaps you are reflecting on previous experiences and success you have had, view it as a challenge you are ready for that will improve your performance and know that whatever the outcome learning will happen and you will improve from it. Or perhaps you listen to what others are saying knowing if they can do it you should be able to do it, wait to see the first person give it a go comparing their performance with what you should be able to do, working out who you perform better than in the group to help with this.

After you have paddled the rapid, done the rock hop or surfed the wave what do you think then? Perhaps you reflect on whether there is an improvement on past personal performance, work out whether it felt better then before or perhaps you enjoyed it more then previous experiences and were more relaxed. Or perhaps you reflect on whether you got the best line of the group, paddled better then others or were more confident then other group members.

What is achievement, what makes us successful?

Achievement has been deemed as being able to develop or demonstrate higher rather than lower ability; if this is achieved we would view ourselves as being successful. The interesting thing though is we all view 'higher or lower' ability differently and therefore my success may not be the same as your success.

There are two main ways we view success: 'social comparative' where success and higher/lower ability is referenced against those around us or against other people's previous performances. 'Self-referenced' where success and higher/lower ability is referenced against your own past performance and personal bests.

It all boils down to how we view success and the goals we set

We all know that goal setting is essential for us to improve or develop our learners; however the goals we set will be based on how we view success:

Mastery/Learning/Task Goals

These would be linked to self-referenced success and are orientated towards developing new skills, understanding the skills, improving competence and



Is the goal the journey or the destination?

feeling like you are mastering the skill. Improvement is the goal, an increase in mastery is an end in itself.

Performance/Ego Goals

These would be linked to social comparative success and are orientated towards doing better than others, surpassing others standards, achieving success with little effort and making as few mistakes as possible. A sense of worth is important and winning/being better than others is the goal.

What goal is for me?

As with everything there is a time and a place for all goals, whether it be mastery or performance. That said, whatever your level or performance or whatever level of learners you coach; there is a lot of evidence that a mastery approach needs to be in there somewhere.

Intrinsic Motivation

When we work with mastery goals we focus on personal effort and improvement, learning from our own performances and this is all very intrinsically motivated. There is lots of research that provide overwhelming support for the benefits of this (e.g. greater performance development, well-being and enjoyment, continued participation and optimal functioning).

Achievement Behaviour versus Failure Avoidance

How do we view failure? Do we see it as something we learn from, thus it fuels our journey to achieving success; or do we see it as a negative outcome and something we try to avoid in our performance?

Research suggests that a mastery approach to our goals elicits a motivational

pattern likely to maintain achievement behaviour, not fearing failure as it is all part of learning; whereas a performance approach to our goals fosters a failure-avoiding pattern of motivation, fearing failure due to it representing poor performance.

Anxiety

Performance anxiety can have negative effects on performance, enjoyment of activity and personal health. Research suggests that a mastery approach is related to lower anxiety in performers. It achieves this as it counteracts anxiety by reducing social comparison pressures seen in a performance approach; it focuses on the controllable effort as opposed to the non-controllable outcome.

Summary

We will all view success differently and have different focuses on our achievements. These will be based on a more socially comparative or self-referenced viewpoint, and it is these approaches to how we set our goals that underpins our motivation to perform and learn. To adopt a more self-reference view of our learning and performance has many advantages, the question is do we do it?

As coaches we have a privileged influential role in shaping our learners goals and motivations, do we support them in self-referenced approach or socially comparative? Next time you're performing or coaching stop and have a think: What is motivating me? What type of achievement goals am I setting? Perhaps try a more self-referenced mastery approach, see if there is a difference ...

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