The Coaching Mindset: 
How To Get the Most Out of Your Athletes (part 1)

Looking for ways to maximize your athlete's potential? Unfortunately, having the best training program in the world is no longer enough if you want to get your athlete to consistently perform their best on game day. In fact, often times it is less about your training program and more about how you engage your athletes mentally and the environment that you design (physical, relational, etc).

If you’re like me, the ultimate disappointment for any performance coach is to help your athlete realize physical gains in the offseason and then the athlete not be able to express their newly acquired physical attributes during the season! But what if this scenario could be minimized?

It All Starts Here

One of the key requirements to being able to consistently get the most out of your athletes is through quality communication. Yet this is often a guessing game for many coaches as they try and figure out through observation and interaction what motivates and inspires their athletes. (J. Boone, 2008)

There is an answer to this scenario though....it is a little known science called sports axiology.

Have you heard of it?

Discovered in the early 1940’s by Robert S. Hartman, Formal Axiology, the science of human value, has been validated in over one hundred scientific studies. (Pomeroy, 2005) It wasn’t until four years ago though, that this science was formally introduced to the world of sports and fitness.

Sports Axiology, then, is the science of human value and decision making in sports and fitness. Its mathematical logic structure allows a performance coach to objectively evaluate the unique decision making patterns of an individual based on a value hierarchy. Once this pattern is identified, the coach can then immediately know exactly how to communicate with their athlete so the message will be clearly understood.

The results of the Ready To Play™ profiling instrument allow for a thorough conversation about the athlete in great detail – covering both the mental and the emotional aspects of their performance. The profile results can be compared to actual performance to check on exactly where an athlete entering a training program needs to focus time and attention to add “good-making” properties to their training routine, and take the necessary steps for achieving sustained higher levels of athletic performance. (J. Boone, 2008)
So How Is This Different From Sports Psychology?

Sports Psychology is a social science based on inductive reasoning, observation, and empirical research focusing on personality and behavior, while Sports Axiology is based on deductive reasoning and a mathematical logic structure focusing on value judgment. Another key difference is that Sports Psych uses self-report assessments which have a high degree of subjectivity. Sports Axiology, however, uses a forced ranking instrument which looks at the real-time decision making pattern of the athlete or coach. Below are a few more differences between the two:

The purpose of explaining these differences is not to say that one is good and one is bad. In fact, in an ideal situation combining the two approaches provides the most value to the athlete and coach.

3D Thinking

Just as coaches, trainers, and therapists evaluate tri-planar movement, Sports Axiology is also based on three dimensions of value judgment. Each individual has a unique decision making (value judgment) style based on the pattern of emphasis of each of these three primary dimensions. As shown below, this framework applies to all aspects of interrelating with others.
These building blocks of successful coaching (think, listen, observe, and communicate) all contribute to helping you’re your athlete consistently play their best.

**Systemic Dimension**

Otherwise known as structured thinking, this dimension is built around rules, systems, plans, authority, yes/no type thinking. “It’s my way or the highway!”

This dimension tends to be the most dominant for coaches and trainers as it is about the X’s and the O’s and contains words such as volume, frequency, duration, intensity, form, sets, and reps. The focus is on having the right plan in place and the athlete should not veer from the plan. Coaches who are overly focused on correct technique and ensure that their athletes know the reason or purpose for each exercise are also systemically dominant.

Is this a bad thing? Of course not, but in order to add more meaning (value) to your program and your coaching, it is beneficial to pull from all three dimensions of value judgment. You would not train a football player predominantly in the sagital plane would you?

**Can You Please Talk My Language?**

What happens when this dimension is not the driver for the athlete? Unfortunately, this usually leads to a huge disconnect in the athlete/coach communication relationship.

Based on hundreds of profiling data to date from athletes in four countries, the dimension of lowest clarity in value judgment is the systemic, indicating a lack of knowledge, clear understanding, and purpose of the drill, exercise, or movement pattern. HOWEVER...this also happens to be the dimension of highest emotional engagement for athletes as well. So what does this mean for you as a coach?

First, adapt your coaching language when training athletes from the systemic to include a more situational relevant context along with how the movement feels. This strategy will help you fully engage the athlete allowing you to get your message across in a more meaningful way. For example, instead of cueing an athlete by saying ‘don’t let your knee cave in’ during a lunge pattern, you might could try saying ‘you are putting your knee at greatest risk of injury by letting your knee cave in when you are stopping and changing direction out there on the field’.
This in turn adds more meaning to the value of the exercise pattern and also encourages the athlete to take ownership of performing the pattern correctly.

**A Potential Recipe For Disaster**

The combination of a systemically driven coach with an athlete who has low clarity yet is actively engaged emotionally can be a recipe for disaster. Why? Because the athlete overvalues authority and looks to the coach for always helping them to execute the exercise, drill, or movement pattern the ‘right way’. This creates an environment where fear of failure often rules and the athlete doesn’t want to make a mistake. More importantly, this combination can easily result in a lack of movement exploration and having fun, two critical requirements for athletic development.

While training components are important, we as coaches must be able to communicate in the other two dimensions (doing and feeling) in order to engage today’s athlete. Systemic driven coaching is more about training the athlete. In the words of Vern Gambetta, it is what is done to the athlete instead of what is done with them. They value others and getting results based on the ‘training or developmental system’ first.

**Become the Coach Your Athlete Needs You To Be**

The purpose of Sports Axiology is to use its framework of value judgment in order to add more ‘good making properties’ to an individual (athlete and coach), resulting in making their experience more meaningful and productive for themselves and for those they interact with.

In part two of this article series, we will look at the extrinsic and intrinsic value dimensions and provide practical application of this framework to a training /rehabilitation plan. We will also review a case study showing how a well known performance coach helps an athlete with limited talent become one of the top athletes in their age group.

**References**


Jeremy Boone is the owner of [www.athletebydesign.com](http://www.athletebydesign.com). For more information on Sports Axiology and how you can take the guesswork out of improving your athlete’s mental game visit [www.innertactics.com](http://www.innertactics.com).