

BUILDING SELF-BELIEF

Karen Francis explains how to help your clients develop a confident belief in their abilities to perform under pressure on the golf course



There are probably dozens of examples you can recall of clients who are consistently striking the ball well during a coaching session, but can't seem to follow this through in a competition. Over the years, sports psychology research has investigated the correlation between belief systems and expectations, and whether this impacts the ability to play well under pressure.

While it may not come as a surprise that studies involving sports people have found that higher levels of confidence lead to better performances, the factors that lead to success are based on the meaning an individual gives to a particular task and/or event. In other words, while your clients may be confident of their driving ability because they 'always hit the ball straight and long', they do not feel the same way about their putting because 'I find it difficult to read greens'.

Key sources of building beliefs

Individuals judge whether they believe they have the capabilities to perform (known as self-efficacy beliefs) through complex cognitive, behavioural and emotional patterns which draw on self-appraisal and self-persuasion gathered from four main sources:

- Past performance success – being able to draw on previous performance accomplishments such as a good shot, well-played hole, or a good round have been shown to be one of the most powerful psychological sources for elite golfers.
- Vicarious experiences – individuals who watch others succeed, and who view their own skills as comparable, may come to believe they too can be successful.

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- Verbal persuasion – comes from messages in the form of verbal and social persuasions that individuals receive from those in their domain who render performance judgements. Additionally, internal self-talk can influence a positive or negative attitude towards a belief in capabilities.

- Physiological states – how individuals interpret the physiological and emotional states they undergo, such as arousal and anxiety, will determine either a debilitating or energising performance.

Typically, those individuals who exhibit high levels of self-efficacy work harder, persist longer and achieve higher levels of performance over and above golfers who doubt their capabilities.

Strategies and interventions

When you ask a golfer how they played, invariably they will focus on the bad shots – 'If only I could have hit my driver, it would have been ok', or 'My putting was rubbish'. To help your clients to reflect on previous performances, asking them to write down five good shots they hit after every round to focus the brain on the successes out on the course. If coupled with being asked to describe them at their next lesson, this will further strengthen their memory of the good shot which they will find easier to draw

on when next out on the course.

Encouraging clients to become aware of their self-talk at a given time during their round can be really helpful, as they often do not realise the level of negative affirmations they tend to engage in. A simple framework called the Three R Formula of Recognise, Reframe and Replace is useful, as it enables a discussion to challenge and develop more productive statements, which reinforces confidence and dispels the negative cycle which is generally inaccurate and creates high levels of anxiety. Examples of this could be motivational statements such as 'I know if I focus on my rhythm I can hit a good shot', and 'When I breathe deeply I feel calm and relaxed'.

Providing your clients with positive feedback in the form of praise, encouragement, skill-related comments and reminders of their capabilities can have a considerable impact on influencing self-efficacy beliefs. 🌟

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