

Understanding clients' different personalities

Mind coach Karen Francis explains a simple approach that can help coaches ask pertinent questions to find out the most effective way to really connect psychologically with their clients



Many years ago when I first started playing golf, I used to end up in arguments with my coach mainly around me wanting to hit balls and my coach wanting me to practise without hitting a ball.

I found this so frustrating that in the end I found someone else who would happily let me hit a lot of balls. Years later my partner came in complaining that he didn't feel he learnt a lot because he hit a lot of balls, but didn't know what he was meant to be doing.

What is going on in these scenarios?

Firstly, I tend to be a strategic thinker and respond to a quick overview and then straight in to action where I can feel my way through. My partner is a detailed thinker and likes to have the facts before committing to action.

As a coach, understanding this as a fundamental first step will really help in a person being comfortable with your approach. Asking a question such as 'what was the traffic like on the way in

today?' as you amble over to the practice ground will elicit a 'no problem' or 'rubbish' from someone strategic, and a 'Well, this happened and that happened, etc' from a more detailed thinker.

Towards or away from

'What would you like to get out of today?' is a question most coaches ask their clients and being able to pick up on some very subtle language they may use in their response can be really helpful in understanding what encourages them in to action.

Generally, most people are either motivated to work towards a goal or away from a problem and by understanding this, coaches can adapt the way they engage with a client who will then be more likely to commit to the coaching sessions.

A 'towards' person will use expressions such as 'attain', 'obtain', 'have', 'get', 'include', 'achieve', 'benefit from', 'accomplish' whereas an 'away' person will say 'can't', 'solve',

'prevent', 'avoid', 'what's wrong', 'get rid of'. For instance, a client who says 'I want to work out why I can't get my weight through' is an 'away from' person and would respond well to 'Ok, let's look at how we can solve this for you' rather than 'I'll be able to show you what you can achieve today' which would suit a 'towards' person style.

Options or procedures

Finding out whether your client is seeking new ways to approach training or whether they are happy to stick to tried and trusted routines is imperative if you want them to keep coming back.

A question such as 'Why did you decide on coaching lessons?' will give you some useful cues to pick up on.

An options person likes new opportunities and finding alternative ways to do things which can be very motivating when they are looking to improve their game, but more tricky to get them to stick to following a set procedure. They use language such as 'new', 'try', 'challenge', 'interesting', and allowing them freedom to change things or be spontaneous, and using words such as 'alternatives', 'possibilities', 'choice', 'new' and 'different' will more likely keep them motivated and on board.

A procedures person likes to follow a set way and is more interested in 'how to do' things rather than 'why' which is particularly useful with repetitive training, but challenging when change is needed to their existing routine. They use language such as 'the right way', 'how to', 'tried and true', speak in procedures – first... then... lastly and ensuring everything is fully explained using words such as 'correct', 'known', 'understood', 'tested', 'proven', 'the right way', will provide a solid training base.

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