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Self-Talk: Situational Response

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If you think of self-talk as a kind of virtual conversation with yourself it helps to understand that the majority of what is referred to as self-talk are actually just internal thoughts. These thoughts occupy our conscious mind in either a positive, negative, or neutral way and most of the time are not even evident to the casual observer. There are occasions where team mates, coaches, and others who are trained in talent recognition can tell if a player is becoming distracted by their internal thought mechanism. Body language, first and foremost can be a definite tip off that an athlete is becoming combative internally.

When a coach is confronted with situations where their athlete may be showing signs of internal turmoil they may notice a routine change such as taking longer than normal to engage. The quarterback who becomes indecisive pump fakes a pass causing the throw to be late, the basketball player who plants to shoot, then pump fakes with no one guarding them as if deciding whether or not to shoot, the pitcher in baseball whose rhythm between pitches begins to increase or decrease in time. These are all examples which coach's notice during competition and can take action to get the athlete back on track.

By understanding that these thoughts happen in the conscious mindset, where thoughts are active and current it can give an athlete or coach a starting point from which to attack the thoughts and behavior. When athletes hesitate you can be pretty sure that they are deliberating way too much and often will not be successful. This is one instance where the preparation for the event may have fallen short leaving the athlete to question their own decision making. When game planning and preparation are sufficient the

athlete is not shaken off their game by surprises or bad bounces during the game.

This conscious state can be described as short term active thoughts. Decisions which must be made now in response to current situations fall into this category and in all reality take up very little of our brain power. Thoughts come in and go out rapidly and most are not remembered after just a few seconds. Think of a computer; you type in information which shows up on the screen (conscious thought) which if not saved will be deleted from your memory.

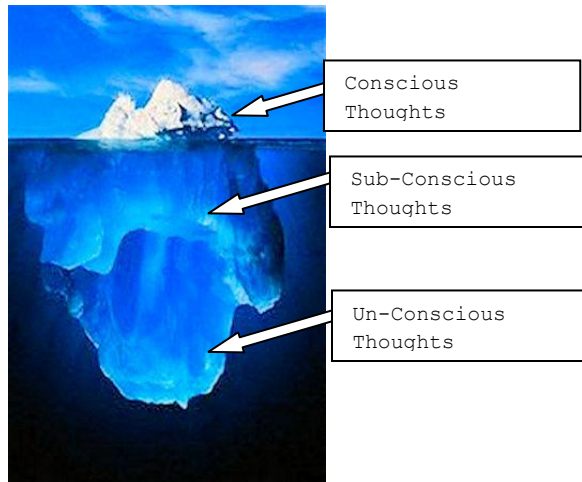
Our subconscious mind can be thought of as a deeper level of brain functioning where items important to us can be stored. For example, you know your phone number but you do not have to keep it in your conscious mind continuously thinking about it. You are able to recall it when you need it. Similarly, a baseball player will learn the coach's signals, then not think about them until the coach indicates a play is on. It is our subconscious that sends the information back to our conscious mind to be acted on. As per my computer example, the subconscious can be compared to the computers RAM where information which is used often is stored in a readily accessible memory device.

Our unconscious mind then can be thought of as our long term storage area where events, thoughts, and situations from our entire life are stored. Remembering an event twenty years in the past is not information that is readily available or even needed, but it can be recalled when an event happens which our mind can compare to previous situations in your life and pull up examples or responses which may have worked in the past to fix an issue today. Following my computer example, the unconscious area of our brain can be compared to the hard drive. The information is in there but it may take a little searching in order to find it.

Another analogy which might make sense is that of an ice berg. The relatively small amount of ice protruding above the water's surface can be compared to our conscious thoughts. As we explore under the surface we can see that the ice berg is expanding in size and gets bigger the deeper it goes. Our subconscious and

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unconscious areas are submerged but are able to hold a much larger amount of information. It just takes some additional searching to find it.



The conscious mind can be seen as our navigator, where the direction of your thoughts are focused, and when our imagination is active. Over-reaction to circumstances which occur without warning is a function of the conscious mind. This over-reaction can be countered by information retained in the sub-conscious with the aid of memories stored in the un-conscious to deal with the problem.

In athletic terms; what is currently happening in a game or event can cause an athlete to focus their full attention in one area (conscious) but the information in a current scouting report eases the stress as the athlete knows they have seen this before (sub-conscious) and then information is brought back from a previous meeting with this team and how you handled this situation the last time (un-conscious).

If this were how it played out all the time success would be in the palm of your hand. But often athletes are caught off guard and do not have previous experience with the situation in which they find themselves currently. The conscious mind is forced to come up with an answer and begins scanning the depths of your memory becoming completely distracted in how to accomplish this task therefore becoming slow and hesitant. Athletes with good reactions and

quick responses are athletes who are prepared in advance for the situation and even though it may not be exactly like a previous experience it is similar enough to allow the athlete to react quickly and decisively. Preparation is one key to avoiding meltdowns during a game. By preparing the mind and body in advance how to handle unforeseen circumstances an athlete can be confident in their ability to perform under duress.

Evaluate your position and circumstances; then build a bullet proof foundation for why you do what you do. You must have total conviction to your plan so there are no chinks in your armor, no doubts. Your toughest opponent will not be the team or player across from you, it will be the casual comments made by those close to you which cause you to think about and question the details of your approach to the game you play (Cook, 2006).

References:

Cook, D. L., 2006, *Golf's Sacred Journey*, ISBN: 978-0-310-31885-9.

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