

# PERFORMANCE EXCELLENCE MOVEMENT

ASSOCIATION FOR APPLIED SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

2010 Publication

## About the Initiative: What Is PEM?

### Mission Statement

The Performance Excellence Movement (PEM) is designed to increase student, practitioner, and public awareness of the application of sport and exercise psychology skills. PEM also serves to increase awareness, knowledge, and skill set in relation to how sport and exercise psychology expertise can be effectively applied in a number of domains. The hope of PEM is to provide readers with interesting information about how some of our colleagues successfully apply their sport and exercise psychology techniques in their field and in other areas.



<http://www.collegesportsscholarships.com/history-track-and-field.htm>

### Objectives for 2010

1. Yearly publication of a PEM Newsletter dedicated to exploring the use of performance enhancement skills in unique settings.
2. Increased AASP student member involvement in student initiatives through submission of articles for the PEM Newsletter.
3. Recognition of AASP student and professional members' contributions to the sport and exercise psychology field through member profiles in the PEM Newsletter.
4. Inclusion of evidence-based practice or peer-reviewed research wherever possible.
5. Distribution of the PEM newsletter to a broad audience, including AASP students and regional representatives, the AASP website, and appropriate non-AASP forums.

### Goals for 2010 Newsletter

1. To recruit dedicated AASP student members to become more involved in AASP by contributing well-written and empirically-based articles to the PEM newsletter.
2. To interview performance enhancement professionals from a range of performance contexts to share their expertise through the PEM newsletter.
3. To distribute the final PEM newsletter to AASP students and professionals via email and the AASP website.

### How Do I Become Involved?

- CONTACT THE EDITORS TO LEARN MORE
- SUBMIT A PROPOSAL TO WRITE AN ARTICLE
- READ THE NEWSLETTER AND SPREAD THE WORD
- ATTEND CONFERENCES TO MEET THOSE INVOLVED
- GIVE FEEDBACK TO THE EDITORS

### Inside This Issue

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## Student Articles

### The Unique Demands of Famous Athletes: Implications for Novice Sport Psychology Professionals

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<http://www.austinchronicle.com/gyrobase/Issue/story?oid=oid%3A767836>

One needs to look only as far as the television, computer, or newspaper to catch the latest on-field accomplishments of today's famous athletes. As if this work-related attention were not enough of a potential stressor, consider the wealth of information accessible to the public concerning their off-the-field lives, courtesy of Facebook, Twitter, *People Magazine*, and the camera phone. According to Stier (2007), famous athletes are those who have a unique set of needs and demands that surpass those of non-famous athletes (e.g., aggressive media, beckoning fans, friends and/or family who bask in the athletes' reflected glory). While both the anecdotal (Begel, 2010) and research literature (Stevenson, 1990; Stier, 2007) point to the obvious stress associated with these demands, few researchers have examined how famous athletes experience the compounded pressures resulting from their stardom. Moreover, there is little, if any, documented work providing guidance to sport psychology consultants working with high profile clients.

The desire to better understand the needs of this unique population, in conjunction with the paucity of literature in this area, prompted our interview with a sport psychology consultant who has experience in working with famous athletes. With 20 years of applied sport psychology experience and 15 with famous athletes, this consultant has shaped her practice using a systems approach to facilitate the psychosocial development and mental skills training of elite athletes and teams. She works with those from the junior elite to the professional and Olympic levels in both individual (i.e., running, golf, tennis, skiing) and team (i.e., soccer, football, ice hockey) sports, obtaining clients exclusively through referrals. The following is based on information gathered from her interview.

#### Interview with an Expert: Best Practices and Lessons Learned

With the popularity of reality television, an increase in instant celebrity, and the ability to appear on five magazine covers simultaneously, the average person may secretly wish for a life of adoration. What the average person, and the novice sport psychology consultant, may fail to realize is that a life in the spotlight can negatively affect famous athletes both off- and on-the-field, including their sport performance (e.g., Tiger Woods, Ben Roethlisberger). Fans who follow the non-sport lives of their favorite athletes by participating in blogs and interactive websites (e.g., <http://www.playerwives.com/teams/nhl/>) and showing up where they grocery shop and eat dinner after games, have the potential to disrupt their psychosocial development and life balance. Athletes' inability to socialize with family and friends, continue their educational pursuits, and generally have a life outside of sport, may skew their identity towards that of "an athlete." In turn, their motivation may shift solely towards athletic pursuits and prompt them to question whether their career is worth losing other parts of their identity. Additionally, the immediate and continuous analysis of every game and representing their nation with every performance has the potential to affect athletes' stress levels, confidence, ability to concentrate, and therefore performance (Gould, Dieffenbach & Moffett, 2002).

Information about these unique demands and stressors is necessary for consultants who might work with famous athletes. In regards to the aforementioned information, the expert sport psychology consultant addressed the importance of maintaining social connections, identifying priorities, and creating a mastery orientation to help athletes cope with the varying effects of fame.

"BOTH FUTURE RESEARCH EFFORTS AND ETHICAL PRACTICE ARE NECESSARY TO ADEQUATELY SERVE THIS UNIQUE POPULATION."

## Student Articles Cont'd

### 1. Help Athletes Maintain Social Connections

Social networks are comprised of people who provide a sense of liberation and grounding for athletes in the spotlight. One challenge faced by many famous athletes is an inability to stay connected to their social networks, often because of a busy travel schedule and long distances. If an athlete frequently laments the difficulty in maintaining long distance relationships (e.g., with family members, friends, a partner), the sport psychology consultant may help the athlete to brainstorm feasible options for staying in touch. The consultant can guide the athlete toward the use of technology (e.g., Skype, text messaging, secure Facebook and Twitter sites, email) as a way to maintain connections and thereby experience a sense of normalcy in what may feel like a surreal existence.

Similarly, inclusion of famous athletes in modified family traditions can also help them to maintain interpersonal connections and therefore a sense of life balance. For example, the sport psychology consultant may assist the athlete in brainstorming ways to establish new family traditions to accommodate his or her uncontrollable game schedule. In one particular case with a professional football player, moving Thanksgiving dinner from Great Aunt Ruth's house to his house or to the location of the game, was one way to include the athlete in the celebration while accommodating his inflexible in-season schedule. As with the use of technology, this strategy helps athletes maintain social connections important to his or her success both on (Iso-Ahola, 1995) and off the field (Nunez, Martin-Albo, Navarro, Sanchez, & Gonzalez-Cutre, 2009).

#### HELP ATHLETES:

1. MAINTAIN SOCIAL CONNECTIONS
2. IDENTIFY PRIORITIES
3. CREATE AND MAINTAIN A MASTERY ORIENTATION



<http://www.passportgold2010.com/blogs/passport-gold-2010/2009/dec/05/fun-facts-about-the-world-of-figure-skating/>

### 2. Help Athletes Identify Priorities

Along with maintaining social connections, famous athletes are also encouraged to set priorities as a means of managing the continuous barrage of requests for their time and energy. From on-field performance expectations to sponsor commitments to family obligations, famous athletes must work to balance their needs with the demands of the environment. For example, a professional tennis player may be willing to sign autographs or visit a children's hospital after practice, but must limit the amount of time spent so that she can eat lunch and get to her physical therapy appointment — both of which are necessary to maintain optimal on-court performance.

Sport psychology consultants may therefore need to assist this type of athlete in becoming appropriately narcissistic. This work involves helping athletes to identify and prioritize the activities necessary to facilitate their athletic success and concurrently identify commitments that can be postponed until the off-season or averted altogether. Part of this work may involve reminding the tennis player above that her biggest commodity is her on-court performance and devising strategies to meet her work and personal needs while maintaining professionalism and life balance. For example, the tennis player should be encouraged to work with her management group or tour officials to establish ground rules for the in-season or match days (e.g., no pre-match interviews, participation in pre-tournament media days) so that she can eliminate potential distracters that might interfere with her preparation and performance. Once

this black-out period is over, the athlete can then engage more fully in the non-sport obligations associated with her career. As with technical skills such as a serve or a volley, focus and concentration are important mental skills (Nideffer & Sagal, 2001) that athletes can develop and utilize in an effort to prioritize and compartmentalize thoughts and behaviors.

### 3. Help Athletes to Create and Maintain a Mastery Orientation

In addition to being skilled in identifying priorities, famous athletes must also learn how to develop and embrace a mastery orientation. The constant push for results is a challenge for athletes at any level of competition, but the internal and external pressure to achieve at a consistently high level can be exponentially greater for famous athletes (e.g., record-setting performances, endorsement deals, performance-based salary bonuses, invitations to select teams, best of all time labels). In an effort to help elite athletes cope with a myriad of stressors, the sport psychology consultant may work with them to develop and consistently apply a mastery orientation to all activities. For example, a National Hockey League center whose objectives include playing better and getting more ice time may be encouraged by the consultant to focus on controllable factors that

## Student Articles Cont'd

will facilitate achievement of his aims (e.g., moving his feet, maintaining pre-shift routines, off-ice conditioning), rather than focusing on factors beyond his control (e.g., offensive system employed by the coach, the line on which he is playing, special teams play). This focus on mastery is recommended for use with athletes who compete at any level, but may be most important for those who must perform under the biggest spotlight.

### 4. Identify and Prepare for Challenges as the Sport Psychology Consultant

Sport psychology consultants working with famous athletes may encounter challenges that are different from those faced when working with athletes at different competitive levels. Chief among them is to refrain from making assumptions about the lives of high profile athletes. You should maintain an awareness of your own preconceived notions as well as media portrayals of famous athletes, as these may differ from the athletes' actual personas. This awareness will facilitate the development of a genuine helping relationship and ensure accurate and empathic understanding while allowing clients to freely strive towards actualization in all aspects of life. As such, sport psychology consultants are encouraged to meet athletes *where they are*; that is, addressing goals and concerns presented by the athletes themselves and not the latest sports blogs.



[http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/Sport/Story/STISStory\\_567011.html](http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/Sport/Story/STISStory_567011.html)

### Closing Thoughts

With their own biases in check, sport psychology consultants can work with famous athletes to maintain social connections, identify priorities, and create a mastery orientation. Such efforts will aid famous athletes in enhancing their sport performance, while maintaining a sense of balance with other parts of their lives. While our expert consultant's insights are important for sport psychology consultants, research is needed to augment the scientific literature in this area so as to more systematically and thoroughly inform professional practice. Therefore, both future research efforts and ethical practice are necessary to adequately serve this unique population.

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## Student Articles Cont'd

### The Imagery Experiences of an Actor

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Performing artists and athletes are similar in that they both want to perform their best, which requires optimal physical and psychological skills. While the use of psychological skills to enhance performance has been well documented in athletes, these practices have not been extensively studied in the performing arts, although some literature has focused on this aspect (e.g., Poczwardowski & Conroy, 2002). While there are a range of psychological skills that could be useful in the performing arts, this article will specifically focus on imagery. The following definition of imagery by Wallsbeck and Weibull (2009) is used in this article:

The voluntary or spontaneous creation or re-creation of an experience which may occur in the absence of the real stimulus antecedents normally associated with the actual experience and which may have physiological and psychological effects on the imager (a modified version of Morris, Spittle, & Watt's, 2005, p. 19, definition).

Since previous studies have not extensively examined how actors use imagery, we interviewed an experienced 52-year-old actor about his imagery experiences. For this exploratory interview, his imagery experiences were evaluated using the Individual Profile of Imagery Experiences (IPIES; Weibull, 2008), followed by questions to obtain additional information.

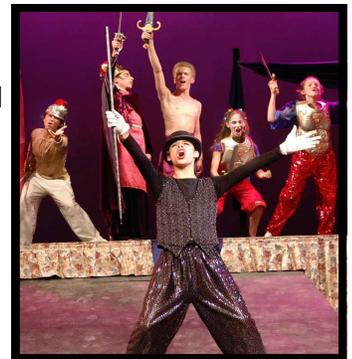
#### What We Learned

##### Developing Imagery Skills

Overall, the actor believed that imagery was an immensely useful tool. Although he could not remember when he learned imagery techniques, he reported that he developed the skill over time without any formal instruction from an expert. In short, he learned through trial and error and personal experience. However, the actor believed that psychological skills training from a professional, in addition to practice, could have been an interesting way to improve his imagery techniques.

##### Specific Imagery Techniques

The actor most frequently used imagery to "find" his character. He repetitively imagined how the character would behave in varying situations (e.g., how his character might drink coffee, how he or she might walk) in order to make that character increasingly vivid and real. While this mental practice was essential prior to performance, the actor admitted that the use of deliberate and voluntary imagery of his character during the show could interfere with his performance on stage. However, spontaneous imagery during performance was sometimes useful and necessary to solve unexpected problems. For example, if he was caught with a glass in his hand for longer than he should according to the script, he experienced imagery to help him identify ways to make the glass disappear as smoothly as possible (e.g., strategically place it behind a prop on stage).



<http://www.actingschool.ws/>

In describing when and how he used imagery, the actor also discussed the importance of vividness and incorporating all of the senses. Although he was unable to explain how he created these vivid images, he reported that vividness during imagery was necessary to be a competent actor. In sport, it is often more important to include the senses most relevant to the situation as opposed to implementing all of them. For example, the gustatory sense (sense of taste) when imagining a javelin throw may not necessarily help performance because it is not relevant to throwing a javelin. However, all of the senses may assist an actor in imagining their character and making that character come to life for an audience (e.g., imagining the character sitting on a porch on a hot Sunday afternoon, smelling his coffee before he drinks it).

**Student Articles Cont'd**

**Performance Effects of Imagery**

The actor’s experiences of imagery had both facilitative and debilitating effects. Facilitative imagery means it had positive effects for the actor. For example, the actor used imagery before the shows to help him to find and experience the pre-performance “emotions” he believed were necessary to succeed. Debilitative imagery means that the imagery had negative effects for the actor. For example, the actor found that images of an unsatisfied audience or something going wrong on stage were difficult to control and undesirable. However, the actor reported that these debilitating images became less frequent with more practice and experience.

**Implications for Future Practitioners**

Several authors have suggested that self-awareness is a cornerstone when it comes to psychological skills training (e.g., Ravizza, 2010). The actor in this exploratory interview was aware of and understood his imagery use. This heightened sense of awareness may be due to the nature and demands of acting and the importance of fully experiencing the behaviours and feelings of the character. The same sense of awareness may also be useful in sport, where the sport psychology consultant aids athletes in understanding themselves. The consultant may also help athletes identify when and how specific psychological skills will work for them.

For sport psychology consultants who are working with performing artists, it is critical to understand the importance of using vivid imagery and incorporating all of the senses. With such a wide range of characters and situations that performing artists need to imagine, using several senses is important in order to make the scene and/or the character as vivid and real as possible. To help athletes or performing artists achieve vividness, sport psychology consultants might encourage their clients to use imagery frequently as part of their performance routine, deliberately incorporate all of the senses in practice, maintain focus throughout the imagery experience, and to use imagery in a purposeful and strategic fashion (e.g., after a good show or a successful scene).



[https://faculty.rpcs.org/susongs/acting\\_styles.htm](https://faculty.rpcs.org/susongs/acting_styles.htm)

Other implications for professional practice include working with performing artists or athletes on controlling debilitating images. Two methods that have been successful with this issue are implementing a range of specific imagery exercises and using a trigger associated with positive performances (Weibull, 2006). Imagery exercises, such as changing the image in terms of content, colour, sound, and intensity of feelings, can help improve the performing artist or athlete’s imagery control. This has been shown to be effective in working with an elite tennis player (Weibull, 2006). Sport psychology consultants can also help the performing artist or athlete to develop a trigger word or behaviour (e.g., saying the word “focus” or clapping their hands) that can be used in combination with imagery training. When positive images become associated with certain triggers over time, these triggers can be used to stop debilitating images when they occur.

**“IT IS CRITICAL TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF USING VIVID IMAGERY AND INCORPORATING ALL OF THE SENSES .”**

Throughout this interview, the actor reported that he could improve his imagery use through practice, but we learned that he did not have sufficient knowledge for this improvement. With this in mind, we asked if he had considered working with a professional who could help him improve his imagery skills (e.g., sport psychology consultant), but he explained that there is not much of a focus on psychological skills in the theatre setting. However, this interview has demonstrated that imagery can be an incredibly useful tool for performing artists, with the field seemingly open for sport psychology consultants to become involved. The question now becomes...what are you waiting for?

**References  
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## Lessons from the Experts: Sport Performance Domains

### A Note From the Editors

*Students in the sport psychology field are often interested in developing the necessary skills for becoming certified sport psychology consultants and assisting athletes and teams in improving performance. Others may be interested in applying their psychological skills training techniques to a variety of other performance domains, such as the performing arts or business. To assist in the learning process, professionals in the sport psychology field were asked to share their expertise by answering a series of questions related to their work in sport and non-sport performance domains.*

*Before reading on, it is important to note that the responses received were diverse and dynamic in nature and may raise some important questions and discussions among students and professionals. While the following responses in no way reflect the stance of AASP or the editors of this newsletter, they do demonstrate several unique and significant perspectives from those practicing in the field. To the students reading, we encourage you to consider these perspectives and to join in a productive and constructive discussion on the issues raised. We invite you to formally submit your comments for potential publication in the next newsletter so as to continue this important exchange of thoughts, ideas, and impressions. Please use the online feedback form available on the PEM Student Initiative page on the AASP Website (<http://appliedsportpsych.org/students/pem>).*



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#### **How do you pitch your services to the athletes and teams with whom you work?**

My first step with all the athletes and teams with whom I work is to “educate” rather than “pitch.” We are still in a day and age where the consumer of sport psychology has little idea of what applied sport psychology should/could look like. If you ask 10 people on the street what a sport psychology professional does, you are likely to get 10 different answers.

With this in mind, I think educating the potential client is the first step. What is the role of sport psychology in the life of an athlete or a team? Some of my answers - help them learn how to respond most effectively to challenges, improve the quality of practice, and ultimately speed up experience (i.e., although we are all mentally tough at age 30 or 40, this is usually too little too late for an athletic career). Secondly, educate the athlete about what is professional and ethical practice with a reminder that the athlete leads the way in the process and that clinical issues should be dealt with by someone who specializes in these concerns (i.e., a psychologist).

My specialty is understanding the culture of sport and player development. When necessary, I believe a team approach between clinicians and performance enhancement specialists does the most right by the athlete. It keeps the roles clear and the foci of services for the athlete clear. I also educate my client on how I will operate within the sports system in which they compete — who I report to and how little or how much I will tell them. I always work for the well being of the athlete in front of me first and want him/her to be clear with and to be able to trust me on this.

#### **What has challenged you the most as a certified sport psychology consultant?**

Two things.

First, managing the expectations of parents of young children is a challenge that arises on a regular basis. For the most part, parents are terrific. However, in this day and age, I receive regular calls from parents of 10 and 11-year olds asking me to work individually with their child. Philosophically and ethically, I am quite wary about these requests. Private performance enhancement consulting for a 10 or 11-year old is, in my mind, more often than not unnecessary and can only feed into the over-seriousness that has crept into youth sport. However, after listening and understanding the parents’ genuine concern for the wellness of their child, I strive to serve as a consultant and resource for the parents rather than

## Lessons from the Experts: Sport Performance Domains Cont'd

work extensively with the child. Cognitively, the child is not ready, nor is the work often necessary for the child. However parents often need support and guidance in this weird, wild world of youth sport in which we live. Between town teams, travel, AAU, and the rest, it can be a stressful landscape to parents, and a sport psychology consultant can be a sounding board in helping navigate it. It is really important for a sport psychology practitioner to be able to be both honest and nuanced when working with parents, in efforts to facilitate the best sports environment for the kids.

Second, I find the internecine fighting within the field very frustrating and, yes, challenging to me as a professional. When I entered the field fifteen years ago, there was some concern about what an applied professional should call him or herself... was "ist" appropriate and stigmatizing? Now there is a debate between the clinically licensed versus those trained in kinesiology. This debate is a problem within the field, and I feel that it is unnecessary and divisive.

The reality is that there is a place for everyone at the table of applied practice. At the end of the day, professionals should practice ethically and clearly understand the culture and clients with whom they work. Unfortunately, this discussion has turned into a turf war that has inhibited the growth of applied practice. I believe this debate has distracted from the improvement of the field. Diverting attention from improving evidence-based/quality practice and educating the public well about the positive resource a Sport Psychology Consultant (SPC) can be to them. There are plenty of athletes for everyone. Competent, caring, and ethical professionals should find plenty of work. It is a challenge to watch the field grow slowly and, at times, poorly because of failure to get past a moot debate. The longer it goes on, the more it encourages practicing professionals to disengage from AASP and other professional organizations.

### What is the biggest lesson that you have learned from working with athletes and teams as a certified sport psychology consultant?

Listen, listen again, and go slow. At the end of the day, the highest level athletes do not want a quick fix or a trite mental skill to improve their performance. They want a collaborator who allows them to learn more about themselves and their approaches to sport, and who educates them in an athlete-centered manner.

This also goes for working with coaches and within an organization. The best way to serve team coaches well is to listen to them and help them listen to themselves. Some of the best "work" I have done over the years is simply sitting in a coach's office between periods or halves and let them babble for 10 minutes or so without my saying much more than, "O.K. . . coach 'em up coach."

### What is one piece of advice that you would give to future certified sport psychology consultants?

Throughout all of your work, create opportunities for others and grow the field. Perhaps one of the most disappointing experiences in my entire career was the conclusion of an hour long discussion with a Division I athletic director. It finished with him saying, "Adam, I like you. I've enjoyed our discussion and I look forward to more in the future. This being said, I will never hire a sport psychology consultant again. Our basketball team worked with someone last year. He came in three times, took our money and ran." Somehow I had managed not to get a job because of the practitioner who came before me. Throughout your career you will have opportunities to work in many different settings with many different athletes. For yourself, enjoy it and do good work. For us all, leave the athletes' and coaches' appreciation of and thirst for sport psychology in tact or even greater. As they say, "A rising tide floats all boats." In your work each day, help rise the tide.



<http://www.princessroyale.com/>

**"THROUGHOUT ALL OF YOUR WORK, CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR OTHERS AND GROW THE FIELD."**

## Lessons from the Experts: Sport Performance Domains Cont'd



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### How do you pitch your services to the athletes and teams with whom you work?

I'll answer this question in 2 ways. 1) In terms of educating them about sport psychology, I tell them it is teaching the mental and emotional skills to perform more consistently and on demand (when it matters most). To normalize sport psychology, I also often tell them something along the lines of: "I'm not going to teach you anything new (i.e., everyone can relax, visualize, etc.), but I'm going to help you improve these skills through instruction, systematic practice, and generally offering a different perspective." This statement probably isn't entirely true (I'd like to think I occasionally teach somebody something new), but as I said, I use it to normalize sport psychology - and it is mostly true. 2) The other way to answer your question is to say that I am not much of a "pitcher." I am assuming since you are asking about pitching that this is a team I am seeking (as opposed to them seeking my services). Since I am not much of a pitcher, for me it is all about building relationships. After explaining sport psychology to them (using the principles explained above, but with a bit more depth), I basically ask them if it would be okay if I start attending practices just to observe, get to know coaches and players, and learn about the team (norms, language, philosophy, relationships, etc.). This is typically a non-threatening request that it is difficult to say 'no' to. Once I am able to start observing in this way (and, importantly, getting to know the coaches and athletes), I have a much better chance of being able to say something intelligent/helpful when, inevitably, somebody asks me what the heck I am doing there. Before you know it (well, actually, it often takes a few months to a year), you are working with the team. Obviously this approach requires patience, willingness, and sacrifice on the part of the consultant, but I believe there is no better way to gain entry, begin working with a team, and put yourself in a position to experience success.

### What has challenged you the most as a certified sport psychology consultant?

This is difficult because I could answer it on many different levels. I suppose the most interesting and relevant for this audience would be to talk about it from the perspective of working with coaches/athletes. The most challenging situation in this regard was with a team I had a long-standing relationship with. I knew the coaches and players very well. To keep it short (and maintain confidentiality), basically there was an incident where the coach's behavior was antithetical to my philosophy as a consultant. For added clarity and fairness, the behavior was not an ethical or legal issue - it was just unacceptable within my sport psychology world view. So the dilemma was, I did not want to work with the coach or be associated with a program that condoned that behavior, but I felt I was in the best position to help the players cope with the behavior and did not want to abandon them. With the help of tremendous collegial supervision and mentoring, it was clear that the best - and most difficult - solution was to speak openly with the coach about the situation and come to a shared agreement about how to move forward. In the end, I kept working with the team, and to the credit of the coach, much was learned from the situation.

### What is the biggest lesson that you have learned from working with athletes and teams as a certified sport psychology consultant?

That they know more about sport psychology than I do. I suppose I am thinking of elite level athletes here, but I believe aspects of that statement apply to all levels, so let me break it down a bit. One part of the statement is that sport psychology (on an individual level) is about helping an individual perform better. This is impossible without understanding the person, and I am never going to understand them as well as they understand themselves. Thus, they have a pretty good sense of what is - and is not - going to work for them. Plus, they have typically already tried a bunch of things, and this is invaluable

"I WANT TO TAP INTO THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND PERHAPS ADD A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE, A NEW WAY OF LOOKING AT THINGS, OR ANOTHER EXPLANATION FOR THE DATA, BUT IT IS DEFINITELY A COLLABORATION AND NOT A ONE UP ONE DOWN RELATIONSHIP."

## Lessons from the Experts: Sport Performance Domains Cont'd

information. While this doesn't have much to do with sport psychology knowledge, it has everything to do with effective sport psychology service delivery. The other part of my statement (that athletes and coaches know more about sport psychology than me) does have to do with actual sport psychology knowledge. This is the part that applies more to elite athletes and coaches because they have spent so much time training and understanding themselves and their activity. While they may not have the same terminology and connect things in the same ways that I do, they have an absolute wealth of sport psychology knowledge. This does not mean that I can't help them, but it certainly says to me that taking the 'expert' role isn't a great idea. I want to tap into their knowledge and perhaps add a different perspective, a new way of looking at things, or another explanation for the data, but it is definitely a collaboration and not a one up one down relationship.

### What is one piece of advice that you would give to future certified sport psychology consultants?

Become a licensed psychologist (master's level = LPC at a minimum, doctoral level = licensed psychologist preferred). This one is going to be controversial, so I'd better explain it. At the most basic level, it simply makes you better. The things I learned in the process of becoming licensed, while not always directly transferable, certainly have made me a much better sport psychology consultant. And, for what it is worth, the inverse is true as well (my sport psychology training has made me a better psychologist). On a more pragmatic level, I believe it is going to become more and more difficult (both legally and ethically) to practice a profession that has 'psychology' in the title without training and licensure in psychology. I understand that people get around this by not using 'psychology' in their individual title, but it is impossible to ignore that 'psychology' is in the title of the field. That being said, I have a great appreciation for the history of the field and am in no way condemning people that practiced this way in the past or up to the present (or even the near future). However, when you ask about future sport psychology consultants, this is the advice I would give. I should also clarify that I see sport psychology as an interdisciplinary field. Thus, I believe it is just as much a mistake to allow people who are licensed psychologists but do not have specific training and supervision in sport psychology to call themselves sport psychologists. In other words, to be a competent sport psychology consultant, I believe you need specific training in sport psychology in addition to clinical/counseling psychology training resulting in licensure. Unfortunately, this is a long road that we need to correct on the training level (i.e., more sport psychology programs integrating clinical/counseling training leading to licensure).



[http://healthandnutritionexperts.wordpress.com/2009/08/28/life%E2%80%99s-little-changes-%E2%80%93-the-fat-vs-muscle-factor/rowing\\_crew/](http://healthandnutritionexperts.wordpress.com/2009/08/28/life%E2%80%99s-little-changes-%E2%80%93-the-fat-vs-muscle-factor/rowing_crew/)

## Lessons from the Experts: Non-Sport Performance Domains



Amanda Visek, PhD, CC-AASP  
Assistant Professor  
The George Washington University  
School of Public Health & Health Science  
Department of Exercise Science

**In relation to your work with the psychology of exercise/physical activity/healthy lifestyle behaviors, sport psychology, academic, and performance psychology:**

**How do you pitch your services to individuals in these performance contexts?**

My clients have come from word of mouth/referral and the AASP website. The “Find a Certified Consultant” feature has been great for me with regard to gaining clients. Once clients reach out, we assess their needs and how sport, performance, or exercise psychology can best meet those needs. If there is a match between what they need and what I can offer them, then we set up an appointment to do a complete intake. At the start of the intake, if I haven’t already in my previous correspondences with them, we candidly discuss what my services are and are not so that we can dispel any myths or misconceptions they have about sport, performance, and exercise psychology so that they do not have any false expectations.

**What has challenged you the most when working in other performance contexts?**

To really help clients, you have to have an understanding of the demands of their performance area and an understanding of their reality. So when you’re working with clients who perform in a context that you yourself know very little about, you have to be prepared to take a bit more time and effort to ensure that you become competent in understanding the needs, demands, and stressors of that performance context.

**What is the biggest lesson that you have learned from working with individuals in these performance contexts?**

It might sound cliché, but as much as they may learn and grow from our working relationship, I feel that I gain valuable knowledge of context and grow both professionally and personally from our work together as well.

**What tools (e.g., books, articles, etc.) would you suggest for future sport psychology consultants if they are interested in working in other performance contexts?**

The best source of information for working with clients outside the performance domains you typically work with is your clients — use your counseling skills and listen well — indirectly you’ll notice that they provide you with a wealth of information to understand their performance context and presenting issues. Additionally, don’t be afraid to ask good questions that help you to understand their context or worldview — I’ve found that clients enjoy being able to educate and teach me about their performance area. Remember, they want you to understand them and their performance demands and barriers. It’s also always good to do a bit of homework prior to working with them — for example, other great sources are friends and colleagues that have experience in a particular performance context. They can be great for helping you to get a grasp on the



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## Lessons from the Experts: Non-Sport Performance Domains Cont'd

performance context and even a sense for the language and jargon/slang that is commonplace in those contexts. Another source that may be helpful is Kate Hays, "Performance Psychology in Action: A Casebook for Working with Athletes, Performing Artists, Business Leaders, and Professionals in High-Risk Occupations." The internet and search engines such as Google can also be helpful in assisting you to get a flavor for a particular performance domain.

### What are the biggest differences and similarities between working in the sport domain and working in other performance contexts?

The psychological skills that are used are quite similar; however, the manner in which they are applied may differ across performance domains, so you must account for this. Knowing the intricacies of the performers' environment and performance demands will help you to help them more effectively and efficiently apply the various psychological skills.



Charlie Brown, PhD, CC-AASP  
Director of FPS Performance

### How do you pitch your services to individuals in these performance contexts?

I am a firm believer in "servant marketing" — rather than attempting to sell or pitch my services, I follow Stephen Covey's guideline of "seek first to understand." I ask people about their situation, what they find as the challenges of performance, and how they address those challenges. I "listen for the pain" where people are experiencing frustration or difficulty. From the research that Kate Hays and I did for our book, *You're On! Consulting for Peak Performance*, we identified both common challenges of performance across performance domains, as well as universal skills that are involved in achieving peak performance. If I am showing respect for the uniqueness of the performance situation, hear and acknowledge the pain, people are curious about our research and how the principles derived from sport psychology can be applied to their own performance area. Interest is usually not the issue once people learn that I have experience working with athletes competing at the international level; their being willing to pay for services is typically the challenge.

### What has challenged you the most when working in other performance contexts?

It has been extremely challenging at times to deal with the expectations of the medical academic culture on two accounts: First, I encountered the expectation that psychologists are essentially "data gatherers" rather than providers with expertise in their own right. Secondly, I find that academic cultures typically expect that services will be provided for free or at significantly reduced rates. Businesses have no qualms paying for services; performing artists are willing to pay, but typically have little or no money.

### What is the biggest lesson that you have learned from working with individuals in these performance contexts?

Start out by being an anthropologist rather than a missionary. An anthropologist goes and studies the culture, the language, customs, and "the way things work." An anthropologist becomes a master of contextual intelligence. By contrast, a missionary goes in with "the answer" and attempts to convert all the natives. In my experience, the missionary approach to consulting is minimally effective at best, and is often disrespectful of the culture.

### What tools (e.g., books, articles, etc.) would you suggest for future sport psychology consultants if they are interested in working in other performance contexts?



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## Lessons from the Experts: Non-Sport Performance Domains Cont'd

At the risk of sounding self-promoting, I firmly believe that the book I co-authored with Kate Hays — *You're On! Consulting for Peak Performance* (2004, APA) — is a “must read” for anyone considering performance consulting. I also like Kate’s most recent book, *Performance Psychology in Action* (2009, APA). This most recent work is an edited collection of case examples that walks through both the client issues and the decision-making process of the consultant to let one “get inside the consultant’s head” at key choice points during a consultation. I had fun contributing a chapter on “The Consultant as a Performer,” where I share how I apply the principles of peak performance to my performance as a consultant. I would also recommend the article that I wrote a few years back with Dan Gould and Sam Foster on contextual intelligence that was published in *The Sport Psychologist* in 2005.

### What are the biggest differences and similarities between working in the sport domain and working in other performance contexts?

Since I believe in cultural sensitivity and applying contextual intelligence in any consulting situation, I find few, if any, differences. The culture of whitewater slalom racing is different from the culture of swimming, just like the culture of business is different from that of swimming. The principles of performance enhancement as well as the principles of effective consulting tend to be universal; it is always a matter of adjusting those universal principles to the unique culture and context of a specific performer.

### Closing Thoughts

*These four interviews have highlighted a selection of responses from professionals in the field of sport psychology. While the questions were designed to elucidate responses that would educate the student practitioner on the road to becoming a sport psychology professional, some dynamic questions and discussions also emerged. Given that this newsletter is a forum for students to learn about the field of sport psychology, we would like these discussions to continue in future issues of the Performance Excellence Movement Newsletter. Please submit any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the topics in these interviews by using the online feedback form available on the PEM Student Initiative page on the AASP Website (<http://appliedsportpsych.org/students/pem>). We look forward to hearing your responses and continuing this discussion in future newsletters!*

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## **Editors' Reflections**

*Dear Readers,*

*As your editors of this year's PEM Newsletter, we first want to thank all the contributors who made the final product possible. These include the AASP Executive Board and Student Representatives, former PEM Initiative Leaders, the student writers, as well as the experts in our field who so willingly participated in this effort. The PEM Newsletter would not have been possible without your helpful contributions, guidance, and support, and for this we are grateful. We would also like to thank the AASP Executive Board and Student Representatives for the opportunity to serve as the editors of the PEM Newsletter. This has been an educational learning experience for us, beginning with the initial development and design phases and continuing on through the process of recruitment and editing.*

*At the beginning of our term as editors, we believed that the PEM Newsletter was an excellent student publication that could increase student, practitioner, and public awareness of the application of sport and exercise psychology skills. After serving as editors for the past year, we are even more convinced that the PEM Newsletter has the potential to spread knowledge of the potential impact that the field of sport and exercise psychology can have on both sport and non-sport domains. Additionally, we are excited that AASP student members have a venue through which they may publish empirically-based applied articles. These articles, along with the contributions from experts in the field, help to create a newsletter that provides readers with information about sport and exercise psychology techniques and best practices. As your editors, we have tried to create a final product that reaches these goals.*

***Please submit any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the newsletter by using the online feedback form available on the PEM Student Initiative page on the AASP Website (<http://appliedsportpsych.org/students/pem>). Looking to the future, we invite AASP student members to become more involved in the PEM Newsletter and to help this initiative grow!***

*Thank you,  
- Meredith & Dana*