



Coaching Resources from Bobski.com

An example of how a coaching intervention for a pupil who presents an appearance of hesitancy might develop.

The coach asks the pupil “What needs to happen this week/session/lesson in order for you to feel that it will have been a success?” The answer comes - “ I’d like to ski with more confidence”. What should the coach do?

In this instance, the first requirement would first be to hang back a little, and work toward obtaining more information. Notice, to begin with, that the question has not been answered. Quite possibly this will be because the pupil doesn’t *know* what needs to happen, all she knows is that she feels she would like “to have more confidence”.

Secondly her reply is couched in language that is full of significance, and at this stage with not much meaning for the coach. Indeed if the coach felt s/he knew what the pupil meant s/he would almost certainly be wrong, and be merely mind reading.

What do her words mean?

To begin with the pupil used the words “I’d like ...”. This might just be a form of words she habitually uses, but it might also be that it indicates a slight preference only, rather than a much desired goal. If so, then her motivation may well not be sufficient to enable her to put in the effort or commitment she will need in order to achieve her desire. So perhaps firstly the coach needs to gently investigate the pupil’s motivation.

The pupil naturally uses the word “ski”. But words are just labels. It is highly likely that “to ski” means something very different to the coach than to the pupil. What *kind* of skiing? In what terrain? At what speeds? And so on. Here again, a good coach will want to do a considerable amount of detective work to ascertain just exactly what the pupil *means* by “ski”.

Even more significant perhaps is the word “confidence”. This noun is actually a nominalisation; it is a construct from a verb, and actually doesn’t describe anything at all. It *appears* to describe something, but you couldn’t take that something away in a wheelbarrow. It actually refers to a state of being which results from some *process* or other, comprised of things the pupil *does*, but at this stage we don’t know what those things are.

This skier is very accomplished



When John Shedden first said to me that “we get good at what we do”, I quite wrongly thought that what he meant was that “practice makes perfect”. But that was not at all what he meant. What he was saying was literally that we get good at what we do. So in the imaginary scenario I have laid out, we have a skier who through practiced repetition has become very good at bringing about a

skiing outcome which does not deliver her of a life experience she enjoys or wants. What is worse is that she has become very good at it.

So, the coach needs to establish what the pupil really *does* want. And this can only be done by questioning and listening very carefully. The coach needs to know all the modalities of the reported lack of confidence - when does it occur? Is it constant? Does it vary? How intense is it? How does the pupil *know* when they have “too little” confidence: what tells them? Through which sensory channels does the pupil obtain the knowledge of the supposed lack?

Or is the pupil really just saying - “I feel scared at times, when I ski”. If so, that will lead to a different menu of questions.

So, what is the *job* of a coach?

The coach will likely have been able to watch the pupil do some skiing, and will already be aware of certain technical shortfalls in their skiing, but it would be most unwise simply to pick on one or more of them and immediately proceed to “teach them how to ski better”. It is perfectly possible that even if a technical improvement was brought about, the pupil might not even be aware of it, and would

not then obtain the kind of experiential improvement they seek.

It is most important to help the pupil find a way of being *specific* in their goal setting, and also to help them establish for themselves a process through which any changes in experience will be brought into their conscious awareness.

An instructor's job is pretty much dictated by the industry which structures their training. This invariably means applying a set of often very fixed sequential steps of technical progressions, getting the pupil to do "exercises" or practices. The idea is that skiing can be "taught", and that a skillful skier demonstrating what to do is the best way of doing this. It might work, sort of, at the very beginning of someone's skiing career but after that its efficacy is scant.

So what is the job of our coach in my imagined scenario? Is it to demonstrate confident skiing so that the pupil can learn vicariously by watching, and then emulate it? And if not, then what function should a coach be performing for their client?

I suggest that this function is *to act as the catalyst which enables the **pupil** to bring about for themselves the **changes** they seek*. This is a very different mental focus, and derives from a belief which any coach must have in order to be able to coach rather than "instruct". That belief is that every pupil already has within them every resource they need, in order to bring about the changes they seek. Our job as coaches is to help them to find those resources, to learn to access them, and to learn to apply them.

It is not the job of the coach "to **do** something". It's the coach's job to help the pupil do something. Of equal importance, it is our job to ensure that the pupil can **know** what they are doing, and can become aware of any **changes** which occur.

What to do , how to do it.

There is a line in a song from The Sound of Music which says - "nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever did". Using this principle the coach should be able to identify a technical issue in the pupil's skiing which leads to the ski behaving in some way which unsettles the pupil, or at least does not reassure the pupil that all is well.

AFTER a thorough questioning period, and only when the coach is absolutely confident that s/he

understands fully what changes the skier wants to achieve, then we can suggest *doing something*.

We must suggest only **one** thing. And we and our pupil have only two options if we want a different outcome. Since the outcome is the result of things already being done, then the skier will need to either do something different, or do something differently. These are the **only** two options.

Albert Einstein once opined that most people spent their entire lives repeatedly doing the same thing in the hope of getting a different result!



What is to be done needs to be negotiated with the pupil, and agreed upon.

Next, it has to be agreed how the pupil will become aware of what they do (as opposed to what they may *think* they are doing). It will also need to be agreed how the pupil will recognise any difference in outcome, good or bad. **It**

doesn't matter whether the new outcome is better or worse. What matters is that the pupil has a mechanism, through her selected sensory channels, which will enable her to become *aware* of the difference.

Basics

There are no "mistakes", only learnings; no "failures", only feed-back.

It surely does not need saying that only the easiest of terrain should be selected, and that no long runs are done - learning is best achieved by doing one simple thing at a time, repeatedly, on short runs of not more than a couple of hundred metres at a time, **maximum**.

Experimenting with the changes in this way, is like eating elephants - you can do it if you don't try to eat too much at once.

All of the important techniques of giving feedback need to be applied of course, and if you don't know what those are you need to go and find out quickly, and become adept with them before you commence working with any more skiers.

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