

FROM GOOD TO GREAT

PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS IN THE TRAINING
OF SNOW SPORTS INSTRUCTORS

An international, cross-border cooperation for the further
development of basic attitudes of instructors and trainers
in snowsports education and instruction.



SPEAKER:

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The lecture focuses on the psychosocial aspects of ski-teaching as this is a big lever that makes our work more effective and satisfactory. Both for instructors and clients.

This is considered from three perspectives:

1. Individual: relevant intrapersonal processes such as body-mind-interaction (Andrea)

2. Group: relevant interpersonal processes such as group dynamics (Norbert)

3. Coach: relevant attitudes of the ski instructor or trainer (Jakub)

A person who wants to leave his or her comfort zone and develop beyond the current "I am" or "I can" needs an optimal balance between security and challenge.

This ambivalence occurs in the individual person in internal body-mind-processes which are determined by needs, past experiences and reality construction. This ambivalence is reflected in the dynamics between the different group members. We explain important group dynamic models that can support the instructor in taking best decisions by observing social processes in the group. The aim is to enhance traditional teaching process, improve motoric learning and the social well-being experience in the group.

To walk the talk, it is necessary to develop or transform the instructors attitude. Therefore, we finally show examples how good coaching influences every day training situations.

OUR THESIS:

We are doing a GOOD job if we give perfect explanations and demonstrations in the right terrain, if we deliver brilliant motion analysis and corrections, and if we use unique methods and tasks in our work. A good job turns into a great job if we do all this well and additionally help people stay within their psychological comfort zone and coach them so they can go beyond the limits of their physical comfort zone.

➡ Sounds easy?

It is, actually – if we consciously consider some relevant neurobiological and social aspects. This is what we are going to talk about today.

We are Andrea, Norbert and Jakub. We met at Andrea's workshop at the last IVSI Congress in Japan two years ago and quickly found out that we were on the same wavelength when it comes to the question of what it takes for people to fully realize their potential in snow sports lessons.

And by that we don't mean technology and methodology in the narrow sense of the words. We are interested in the intrapersonal and interpersonal connections and the way in which a snow sports instructor can utilize them for optimal effect.

➡ This results in the structure of our lecture:

Andrea will talk about the neurobiological basics – i.e. the intrapersonal factors.

Norbert will then discuss the interpersonal factors, the topic of group dynamics.

And Jakub will conclude with answers to the question of what the snow sports teacher should do and avoid doing so that people can fully develop their potential.

We believe that these aspects are highly relevant if we want to offer not only good, but great snow sports lessons.

Explanation, demonstration and motion analysis are fundamental building blocks – but in order to fully reach the human being, we need profound know-how of neurobiological and group dynamic aspects and a professional attitude corresponding to that of a coach.

Neurobiological aspects

Facts that influence us – without us being aware of them

My main interest is in the area of interaction between people. This is where I come from and this is the area in which I work as a management consultant and coach. As a result, I have become more and more interested in neurobiology as neurobiological facts have a great influence on the interpersonal level. The more I learn about that topic, the more I am convinced that it is not enough to focus only on social skills and theories, neither in management education nor in snow sports education. If we want to raise the quality of what we do to a new level, we need to understand what happens between our body and our brain, mostly at an unconscious level.

What happens when the brain perceives a threat?

Amygdala hijack

Why are neurobiological aspects relevant to our work in the snow? Let me start with a short story: Imagine running in the woods at dawn, alone. After a mile or two, you suddenly face a large figure... you can't identify exactly what it is, but somehow it looks like a bear.

At this point, your thinking mind instantly goes dark and the emotional floodgates open even before you know it.

Your muscles tense up, your heart rate goes up, and maybe your organism starts sweating.

Even before your prefrontal cortex (where thinking is located) can sort out this perception and consciously decide whether it's a dangerous grizzly or a harmless shape you are facing, the amygdala – a small almond-shaped object that is part of the limbic system which plays a central role in remembering whether something should be



approached or avoided – activates an unconscious, strong excitation that quickly and indiscriminately decides between the three possible emergency reactions which are fight, flight or freeze.

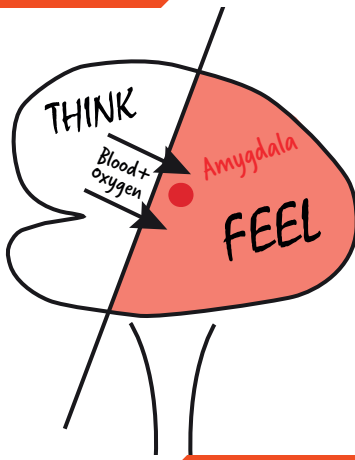
In other words: The limbic system (of which the amygdala is a part) can process stimuli before conscious awareness sets in.

We call this an "amygdala hijack", meaning that the amygdala takes command.

The amygdala follows a simple pattern: approach or avoid.

When a person encounters a stimulus their brain will either tag the stimulus as "good" and engage in the stimulus (approach), or the brain will tag the stimulus as "bad" and will disengage from the stimulus (avoid).

This approach-avoid response is a survival mechanism designed to help people stay alive



by quickly and easily remembering what is good and bad in their environment.

Social neuroscience shows us that the brain uses similar circuitry for interacting with the social world. When a human being senses a threat, the resources available for overall executive functions in the prefrontal cortex will decrease. The result is literally less oxygen and glucose available for those brain functions involved in linear, conscious processing. People are more likely to react defensively to stimuli. Small stressors are more likely to be perceived as large stressors.

Due to the overly vigilant amygdala, tuned more to threats than rewards, the threat response is often just below the surface and is easily triggered.

In the case of a real grizzly, most probably everybody would give an avoid-response. In many other situations, different people will react differently.

We must be aware that it is not important whether a situation is actually and objectively threatening. When person A subjectively experiences a situation as uncontrollable and frightening, the program starts running. Person B might well be standing next to A and experience the exact same situation in a completely different way, remaining calm and in full possession of their cognitive abilities – wondering why person A is freaking out.

Factors that guide action in social interaction

▣ The SCARF Model (source: David Rock, Neuroleadership Institute)

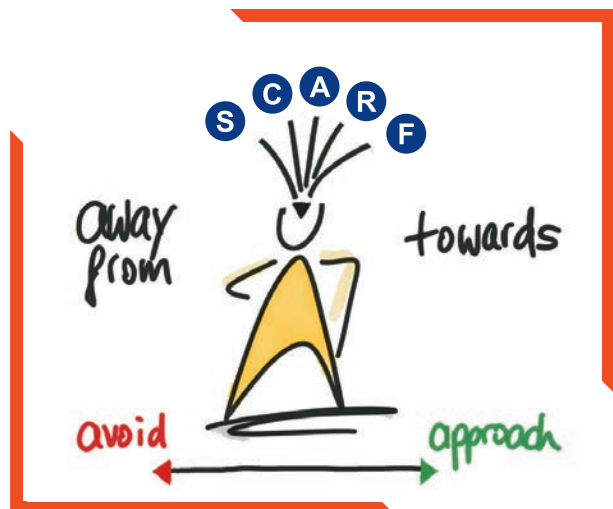
What does the story of the bear and the amygdala hijack have to do with us as ski instructors?

We're not telling you this to keep you from putting a group in a challenging situation.

We are telling you this because this pattern can also occur in "ordinary life", for example during a ski, snowboard or telemark course, in an attenuated form. It doesn't always need a bear to put a person in a state of emergency.

The human need for security is well known, because for millions of years we have been protecting ourselves from unpredictable dangers.

With the development of our civilization, our human needs system has also evolved and in addition to real survival needs, today we also differentiate between factors that guide action in social interaction. There's a lot of research on that. Based on studies, Dave Rock has developed a model that describes the five most relevant needs in the context of social interaction. What are these five factors?



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➡ **Certainty – the need of our brain to predict the near future.**

Our brain is a pattern-recognition machine that constantly tries to predict the near future.

Without prediction, the brain will expend dramatically more resources, involving the more energy-intensive prefrontal cortex, to process moment-to-moment experience.

This is like a flashing printer icon popping up on your desktop when there's a paper jam – the flashing cannot be ignored, and until the jam is removed it is difficult to focus on other things.

➡ **Relatedness – being “in” or “out” of a social group.**

Relatedness is a driver of behavior in many types of teams, from sports teams to organizational silos: People naturally like to form “tribes” that let them experience a sense of belonging.

In the absence of safe social interactions, the body generates a threat response also known as feeling lonely. This explains why one feels better at a party knowing three people rather than just one.

➡ **Status – is about relative importance, pecking order and seniority.**

Some research shows that a reduction of status resulting from being left out of an activity lights up the same regions of the brain as would physical pain.

One's sense of status goes up when one feels “better than” another person. In this instance, the reward circuitry is activated, which in turn increases dopamine levels – and dopamine is the lubricant for any kind of learning process.

➡ **Autonomy – the perception of having things under control and of having choices.**

The degree of control that organisms have over a stress factor determines whether or not the stressor changes the functioning of the organism.

This means that a stress trigger does not always have the same effect on everyone, but that the feeling of autonomy of the individual person is decisive for how much or how little the stressor impairs the organism.

➡ **Fairness – perception of fair exchanges between people.**

Fair exchanges are intrinsically rewarding whereas unfair exchanges generate a strong threat response. This sometimes includes activation of the insular cortex, a part of the brain involved in intense emotions such as disgust. People who perceive others as unfair do not feel empathy for their pain and, in some instances, will feel rewarded when unfair others are punished.

Each of these five factors (or domains) can be “triggered” both positively (approach) and negatively (avoid). We can imagine a continuum from minus x to plus x on which our experience can take place from moment to moment. In our role as trainer, teacher, coach we have a big influence either way – we can easily send out avoid or approach signals. In this context, our inner attitude plays a much bigger role than anything else. Jakub will talk about that in more detail later.

➡ **What does that mean for us, in the snow?**

If we want our participants to achieve their full potential, we must ensure that they are emotionally and mentally in their comfort zone – because only then will they be able to move beyond their physical comfort zone. In general, one could say: A person needs an “optimal set” consisting of comfort zone and challenge and an “optimal oscillation” between a sense of security and freedom.

Take-home messages up to this point:

- 1 Our system, which consists of an interplay of perceptions resulting from external and internal processing, follows a simple pattern: approach or avoid.
- 2 In stressful situations the midbrain / amygdala takes command and triggers a fight, flight or freeze reaction.
- 3 Stress is not only caused by objective external dangers, but also by social factors - SCARF.

We know the factors that have a relevant influence on the learning process of a snow sport student:

- ⇒ There are external factors like weather, snow conditions, terrain.
- ⇒ There are interaction factors like group dynamics, behavior and attitude of the instructor or trainer.
- ⇒ And there are individual, internal factors: one's own physical condition and internal processes like body-mind processes.

The external factors are not covered in this lecture. Interaction factors will be covered by Norbert and Jakub later.

And I will now focus on other internal and individual-specific processes:

Internal body-mind processes

This is all about the question of what we as teachers should avoid and what we should specifically promote so that our learners can reach their potential and learn in a good way in our courses – regardless of whether it's a snow sports course or an instructor training.

What we are not looking at here are the processes between brain and muscles and what it takes to trigger muscle contraction.

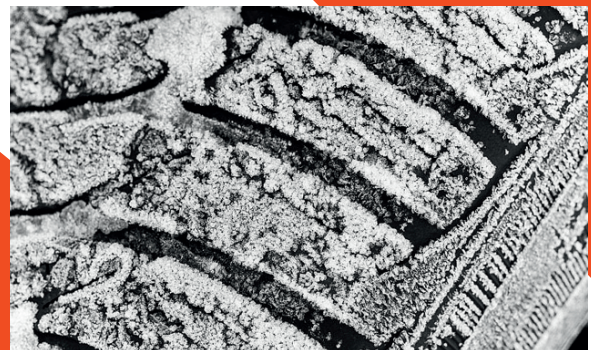
Brain research and the adjoining discipline of embodiment give us countless research results that are interesting for our work. At this point I will focus on two aspects:

- ⇒ The fact that our brain constructs reality.
 - ⇒ The realization that there is "two-way-traffic" between our head and our body.
- I will briefly touch upon these two aspects and explain what this means for our work as snow sports instructors or trainers.

We construct our own reality

There is for example our visual sense with which we create our reality. What do you see here in this picture? A crust of bread? A field? Or a snow-covered car tire? Yes, in real, actual reality it is a car tire. But in your reality, it can easily be something different.

We do construct our reality not only by our sense of vision but also on a holistic level. Have you ever come across people who had diarrhea during a whole week of snow sports training, telling you that



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their knees turned so wobbly facing a mogul slope that they could have melted like a scoop of icecream in the sun... while others in the group were bursting with self-confidence and welcomed the mogul slope as a nice challenge? Be aware that this difference isn't just due to motor skills!

Imagine you are dreaming of a difficult test you are afraid of - you wake up sweating, you are breathing fast and your heart is pounding like mad. Have you ever experienced anything like this? The body reacts

to the stress - regardless of whether the stress occurs in the waking state or in a dream. Later in the night you dream of your lover snuggling up to you, embracing you and kissing you passionately - and again ... your body reacts as if you were awake. The reason is that our brain does not distinguish between real reality and our ideas. It doesn't take more than imagination for the brain to perceive stress in one case and love or sexual arousal in the other, and to send the corresponding signals to the organism.

What does that mean for our work?

We have to ensure that people have access to their positive resources and approach their respective challenges with positive thoughts and connotations. Any kind of bad joke, threat or sarcasm will lead them in the wrong direction.

Two-way-traffic between mind and body

The classical view is based on the simple idea of learning that stimuli and events act on an organism from the outside, perceived by the senses, and that the brain triggers a reaction in the body. This is the classical top-down-approach.

This view is not wrong, but it is definitely not complete, since it does not include the (often subtle, but also very tangible) effects of the physical condition on the mind or the processes in the brain.

As an athlete, you know the "top-down approach" well, for example from mental training: you can promote motor activity or muscle activity by simply imagining a movement. Or you imagine a giant slalom course mentally and your organism simulates this activity. The connection from your head (mind) to your extremities works well.

Much less we use the reverse direction, the "bottom-up approach", where communication starts from the body.

Embodiment researchers assume that it is not only emotions and cognitions that influence the

body, including gestures and facial expressions, but conversely that body states or postures have a massive impact on our emotions and thoughts. It is believed that the state of the body has a direct influence on the processes that occur in the more highly developed parts of the brain. Put simply, when we think or feel something, something happens all over our body. And vice versa, we can influence our thinking and feeling through physical changes of state. Charles Schulz already knew this when he created this Peanut Strip in the 1960s. The message is: As I go, so I feel - and as I feel, so I go.



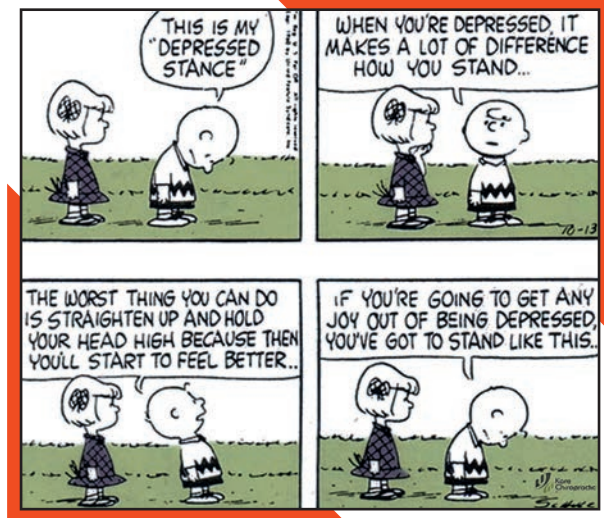
➡ What does this mean for our work?

First: We can positively influence the way our clients or participants deal with emotional stress by simply getting them to change their posture.

Second: We shouldn't only operationalize the top-down approach (I explain and demonstrate, you listen and follow), but also the bottom-up approach by letting people first experience a movement, then focus their attention on the relevant body perceptions and let them verbalize what they felt and did in a third step.

This is "Do – sense – describe" instead of "describe – do – get cognitive feedback".

Be the facilitator who creates situations where people can learn from their own experience.



Summary

- 1 If you're facing a grizzly, your amygdala will most likely take command – we call this an amygdala hijack. But sometimes smaller events are enough to trigger this response – for example your mother-in-law's surprise visit.
- 2 While thousands of years ago the majority of our needs were for survival, today we also have social needs – which can trigger the same processes in our organism. There is a model named SCARF which describes this topic well.
- 3 It is not decisive whether the trigger is a real, perceptible and objectively bad phenomenon. Our brain constructs its own reality. The decisive factor is how much significance we give to a phenomenon – based on which an approach or avoid response is triggered.
- 4 And interestingly, there is oncoming traffic in our body-mind system: the influence not only works top-down, but also bottom-up.
- 5 Therefore we can, for example, influence our emotional state with our posture – as Charly Brown already knew 50 years ago.

Sources:

Damasio, Antonio (1994): Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain

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Levine, Peter (2010): In an unspoken Voice. How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness.

Rock, David (2008): SCARF – a brain-based model for collaborating with and influencing others

Schulz, Charles M.: Peanuts

Storch, Maja / Cantieni, Benita / Hüther, Gerald / Tschacher Wolfgang (2010): Embodiment – Die Wechselwirkung von Körper und Psyche verstehen und nutzen

Group dynamics

Improving the learning experience by observing group dynamic processes

In her presentation about „Psychosocial Aspects in the Training of Snow Sports Instructors“, Andrea has addressed those aspects that happen on the psychological level, that is to say in the individual him- or herself. I will now focus on the social aspects, that is on the interactions between individuals, all the while taking into account the effects of these interactions on the individual members of a group.

For a number of reasons, I have a particular affinity for my topic today, „group dynamics and their influence on learning“:

On the one hand, I have been leading sports groups for a long time, as have most of you here. On the other hand, I have been engaged, as a group dynamics coach, in the systematic observation of groups

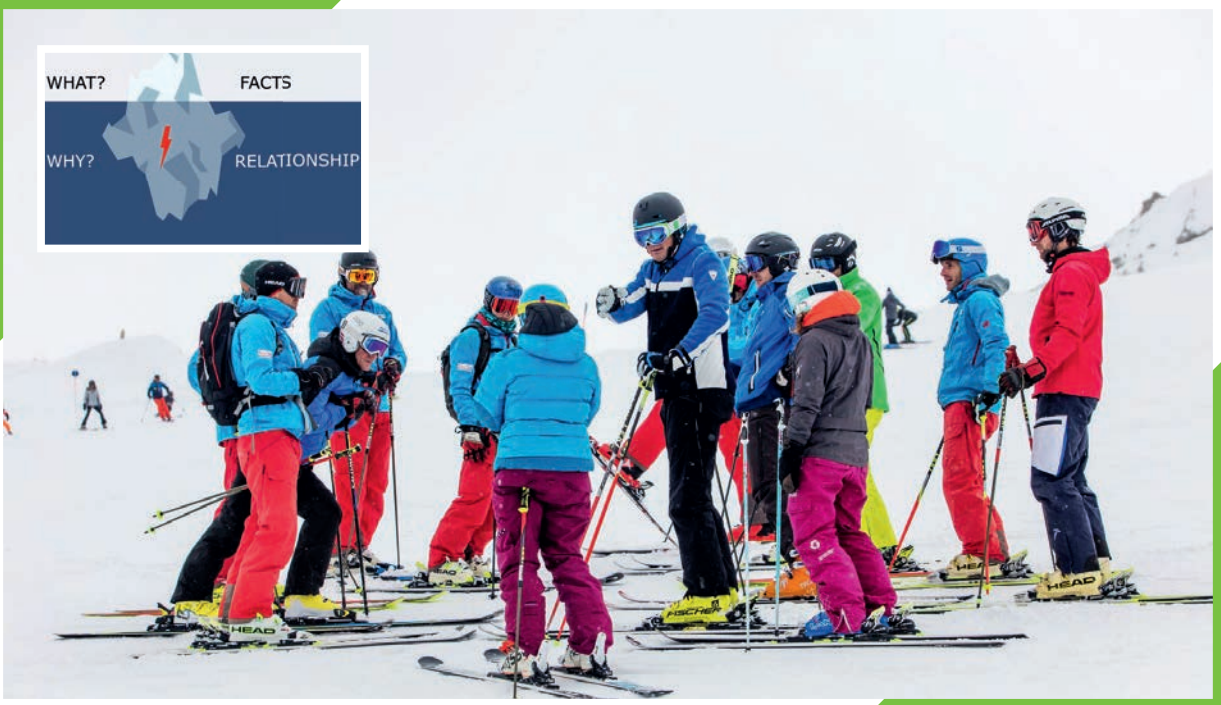
and their behaviour for many years, advising teams with a focus on improving their performance.

Today, I would like to share with you my insights into how to systematically observe group processes with the aim of improving the learning progress in skiing. I will derive from this concrete ideas on how to apply these findings to ski tuition.

Following up on what Andrea has told you, let me call to mind the SCARF neuroleadership model and its key message:

❑ **If you are left out of a social activity, this feels like real physical pain in our mind, meaning that the same regions of the brain are activated.**

None of us would even think about teaching a student something new when they are in pain (for example



because of a boot bruise or „shin bang“) or under particularly difficult conditions (for example, in freezing cold weather). But there are socially difficult situations (which are painful, too) that occur in our ski groups every so often and are sometimes even caused by the group leaders themselves.

The three models below show you how group behaviour can be observed:

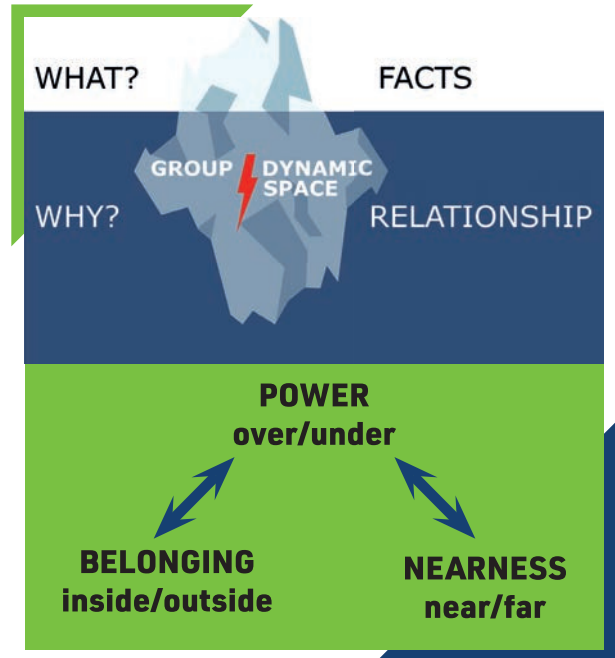
- 1 the Iceberg model
- 2 the Group Dynamic space model
- 3 Rank Dynamic model by R. Schindler

Many of you will be familiar with the first model, the Iceberg model. I am using it here to prepare the mental ground for the other two models. Remember: about one-ninth of an iceberg is visible above the surface, the rest is submerged in water.

If we now look at the the group here having a discussion, we could easily assume that the group members are limiting their debate to technical, factual issues (the visible part above the surface). But according to the Iceberg model, there is a relationship level too, that is negotiated at the same time in any discussion. In order to make this part of the iceberg below the surface easier to observe, it helps to use the Group Dynamic Space model developed by Antons, which describes this relationship level using the three dimensions of power, belonging and nearness. We will see later in my presentation that these dimensions also influence each other.

Let's start with the dimension of Belonging

Humans are social beings by nature because they depend on their fellow human beings from birth. A sense of belonging is therefore a vital dimension, especially whenever we start working with a new group.



- ⇒ What are people faced with as members of a new group?
- ⇒ How do YOU feel when you take on a new group?

Most of the time, we will be preoccupied with our expectations and fears.

For example:

- ⇒ Will the group meet my needs?
- ⇒ Will I fit in, will I be able to integrate?
- ⇒ How do I have to behave in order to fit in?

The SCARF domains of Relatedness and Certainty use very similar notions.

Everybody who faces a new situation is preoccupied with these and similar expectations and fears and will look to the group leader for guidance. In this initial phase, leaders have a very big influence on groups and are laying the foundation for the future working climate in the group.

I suppose you have all come across ski groups whose leaders have consolidated their power, which is taken for granted by all, right from the

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start. We know that there are great ski instructors – or should I say great skiers – who demonstrate their technical proficiency from the outset. This makes the group members stand in awe of their instructor, makes them more dependent on him or her and will probably increase their fear at the same time. Because if performance is the prime commodity traded in a social environment, this is likely to be perceived by some as a threat for the dimension of belonging. In sports groups, there is another well-known phenomenon that comes under this dimension. It is mostly an unconscious one: categorisation based on people's equipment. Who are the fastest in the group – what kind of skis, boots or other equipment are they using... and where do I come in? If group leaders then start making fun of someone's gear (and I have experienced this myself), then they have certainly done their bit to make people feel insecure even in this initial phase, because their student's sense of belonging is challenged and becomes a matter of using the right kind of equipment.

Here, some examples of how to create a sense of security and belonging:

- ⇒ Getting to know each other by name
- ⇒ Finding out who knows whom and how well – this gives social orientation
- ⇒ Actively encouraging contact between different group members during the initial phase
- ⇒ Sharing ideas on how to spend the time together
- ⇒ Putting the group/the WE first

This way, the group is giving itself a mandate. The group leader could also ask about people's skills and experience for moving about in the high mountains in winter. This is probably not an appropriate opening question to put to a kids' group, but it is interesting for adults to know whether there is a paramedic or mountain rescuer etc. on board.

All of the above will make the group members less dependent on their leader and give them a sense of security and belonging.

And by the way, we are all familiar with rituals that promote a sense of belonging and security from good kids' tuition, like starting and finishing lessons together, giving the group a name, choosing a group symbol, and so on.

What I just said about creating a sense of belonging shows you that the different dimensions of the group dynamic space cannot be separated from each other, as I said at the beginning. That is why there has been a lot of talk about the dimension of power already in this part of my presentation. Let's take a closer look now:

The dimension of Power-closely linked to the Autonomy domain in the SCARF model

Human beings have a basic need to help shape social situations and to make a contribution to shared labour and leisure.

For our purposes, it can therefore be useful to jointly define, for example, technical skiing objectives for the whole group and thus give the entire group orientation for the week. We all know that if the ski instructor pays close attention to all group members and doesn't just teach a „run-of-the-mill“ programme, this will have a positive impact on the group's motivation. In other words, a participatory approach with shared objectives is often useful for enhancing motivation (basically, this is sport psychological motivation work in the classical sense).

Of course, participation can play an important or even decisive role for the way we socially interact with others.

Various member countries have, in recent years, included aspects of participation and involvement



in their methodological concepts. Among others, Germany sets a good example of how important it is to take body perception seriously and work with it (Andrea with the FB concept „in order to ski like you, I had to make these changes to my skiing“, or Austria with their WIR concept of perception, inner view, reflection, or Canada with their concept of „give a task and ask a specific question“).

Interestingly, it is a challenge for many group leaders to put these concepts into practice.

Together with international colleagues, we have developed the hypothesis that the group leader's fear of power loss could be at least partly responsible.

It is certainly not easy and often even embarrassing for us to reflect on our loss of power, or our often unconscious need for power. All the more so because power often has a „function“,

like stabilising our self-esteem, compensating our weaknesses, making us feel secure.....

It can therefore be extremely useful to come to terms with one's own emotions as a leader. This helps us to better understand our actions as group leaders and to further develop them.

In the section on belonging, I mentioned that leaders of new groups are automatically ascribed a lot of power. This power can be used with very different effect: for the further self-aggrandizement of the leader, or for creating a framework that allows all group members to develop their best potential.

The dimension of Nearness

Group dynamics are also about who is close to whom and whether the level of closeness is considered appropriate. If nearness levels differ within a mixed group (I am in the group with my friends versus I don't know anybody in the group), it makes social orientation a lot easier if we define at the very beginning who knows whom and how well they know each other. Just imagine that two people are cracking jokes all the time (in their own lingo), while you yourself are new and don't even know they are friends - this makes it difficult for you to join in.

The dimension of nearness is also important because a leader might look after all group members more or less equally, or might favour „teacher's pets“ very early on. This often makes the other group members feel „invisible“, which brings us back to the SCARF model and its dimension of Fairness.

Again, nearness is linked to the dimension of power. If nearness leads to close relationships within the group, these relationships will have more influence on group dynamics than an individual person.

Keeping the following questions in mind during their work will give instructors a better understanding of the social interactions in their group.

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Let me sum up the Group Dynamic Space model:

➤ Belonging:

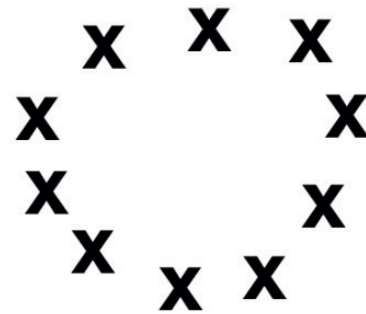
People who feel they don't belong perceive this as threatening. The mind experiences social exclusion as physical pain.

➤ Power:

Opportunities for participation and involvement increase motivation. Power demonstrations of the instructor help him/herself more than his students.

➤ Nearness:

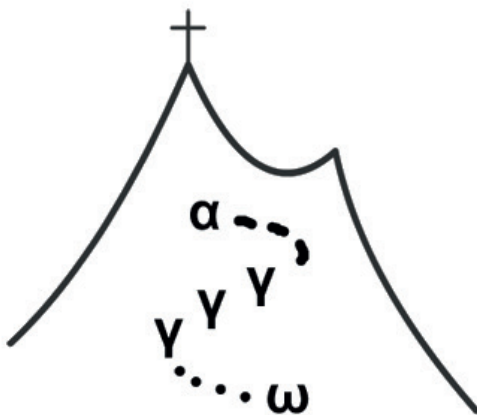
Balanced attention by the instructor promotes a good learning climate in the group.



first many suggestion
but no following

then

one person brings a topic
- which is followed



α ... is leading into the direction
of the topic

γ 's ... follow the initiative of α

ω ... brings in the ambivalence
elated to the topic

➤ Our third model is the Rank Dynamics Model

by Viennese group therapist Raoul Schindler (1923 - 2014). He is one of the relevant personalities of Austrian group dynamics science. The terminology of his model, such as the term alpha male, have become part of our everyday language. But his model has much more to offer leaders than mere terminology so I will introduce it here.

Let me say at this point that the model uses the same dimensions as the group dynamic space model, with the focus on the dimensions of power and belonging.

I will now use this sketch to explain Schindler's model for observing group dynamics as graphically as possible.

So please imagine all the x-es are so many people who come together as a group for the first time to spend time together. Often, there are some initial suggestions on what to do. Also, it often takes some time for a suggestion to be accepted

by several group members who take the initiative for a topic. Schindler calls the topic G. The person who leads the topic takes the rank of alpha in this phase of the process.

In our case, the alpha person is leading the initiative to climb a mountain.

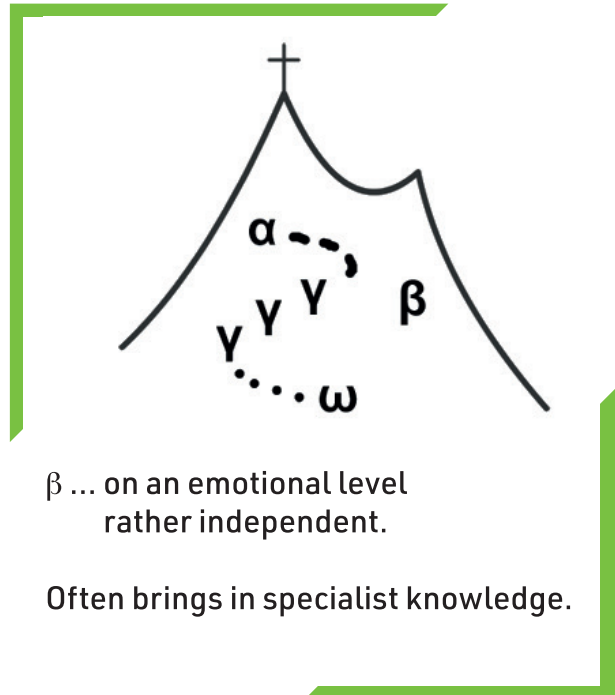
The gamma people follow the initiative led by alpha, some happily, some rather tentatively. The omega person brings up the rear. Of course, omega is not necessarily last in actual reality, but is the most reluctant person to join in the climb. Omegas personify the element of ambivalence in the group. In other words, the person that verbally expresses resistance to the current group initiative or makes this resistance visible in their behaviour (our omega person), is important for expressing a need on behalf of a small part of the group. In ski groups, manifestations of resistance can take the form of holding back, withdrawal, silent opposition or turning up late for class. Sometimes, group members will roll their eyes every time an omega person asks a question or raises a concern. People who remain omegas too long will be marginalised and are in danger of losing affiliation with the group.

Let me take this opportunity to specify a few terms that are used differently in everyday language. These terms are „alpha male (or female)“ and „black sheep“.

➡ About alpha and gamma

In his social group model, Schindler does not define alpha as the strongest person, contrary to the common idea of alpha animals in a chicken yard. Rather, alpha persons are those who best meet the needs of the other group members at a given point in time, which is why the others follow him or her.

This means there is strong interaction between alpha and gamma persons. Also, in Schindler's model the alphas can change depending on the situation. This is a sign of healthy group dynamics.



➡ About omega:

Omega, often called the black sheep, is not trouble personified. If you think of the actions of individuals in terms of their significance for the group, omega stands for a small part of a group. Therefore, it doesn't make things easier to kick out the omegas as they will only be succeeded by a new person who expresses ambivalence on behalf of the group. If you get rid of group members by more or less subtle means, or threaten their sense of belonging, this can even turn into a threat scenario for the whole group. Rather, it can be useful for the leader to find out about the specific needs that omega contributes for a small part of the group. I have often seen omega opinions giving important impetus to group development.

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In most groups, there is yet another position:

➡ The position of beta:

Emotionally, he or she is relatively independent with regard to the current initiative and can therefore be a good expert adviser for the group.

Since betas aren't so emotionally involved in the matter, they are able to observe better and contribute more from their relatively uninvolved outside position. For Schindler, good group leaders are those who can assume any rank or position in the group as required by the situation. Therefore, I should emphasise that it is absolutely unnecessary for a ski instructor to always lead from an alpha position. On the contrary! I would invite you to experiment with different ranks and, above all, to adopt a beta position again and again.

From a beta position, you are able to keep an eye on the emotional state of the entire group. I consider

this extremely relevant for security reasons. What do I mean when I say security in this context?

- ⇒ A beta position lets me observe who in the group is in danger of losing their sense of belonging. It often happens that of all the people in the group, it is the omegas who sustain a physical injury.
- ⇒ After this description of the complex interpersonal processes between the group members, and between the group members and their leader, I want to emphasise that a theoretical understanding of Schindler's rank dynamics cannot be more than a stimulus for personal development. The personal growth of group leaders requires constant re-considering of their own position in the group.

The slide below sums up the most important points of the model:

Alpha is not in this position because of personal qualities - but in the interplay with the needs of the Gammas.

Leadership isn't limited to Alpha - on the contrary, it helps to change rank: for example, leading in Beta can be useful for observing group dynamics.

If lead is rigid in Alpha - it will be more difficult to recognize the Omega needs.

Omega expresses something for a small part of the group (it is helpful to be able to hear it and to include it in your own planning).

**My closing slide is an invitation for reflection:
Imagine you are having lunch with your group in the middle of your ski week. Now consider which of the two communication scenarios should prevail:**

You as the group leader at the centre of the conversation, or communication sustained by all members of the group?

In my opinion, the group is doing fine if in the course of a ski week, everybody contributes to communication and different people keep the group dynamics going.

How we use our position of power is greatly dependent on us as group leaders: we can use it to

increase our own power and feel superior, or to empower our group members.

In our lecture group, we also talked about what could induce instructors to give this slightly different working climate a chance.

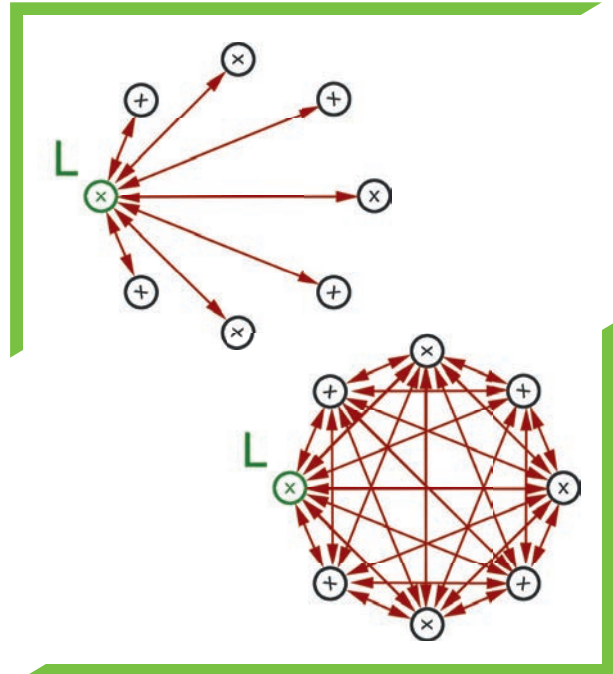
Let me refer back to the basic idea behind the presentation: a better learning experience for our students (by providing a social framework that keeps them in their psychological comfort zone) on the one hand, and a huge learning opportunity for us ski instructors, on the other hand.

An opportunity to learn what?

- ⇒ to observe and understand groups;
- ⇒ to be able to assume different ranks within a group,
- ⇒ and thereby, to enlarge your own social scope for action;
- ⇒ and to realize that it is not always necessary to be the driving force yourself, but that processes can be supported together.

Finally, let me bring up a topic that is especially important to me as the father of two daughters. In recent years, it has been part of my job to deal with the issue of sexual assault in sports; I have also been taking part in a joint effort to introduce preventive measures in this sphere. For me, a participatory group climate is one of the most valuable preventive aspects, an atmosphere that is conducive to the autonomy of every individual and of the group as a whole. Sexual harassment in sports groups thrives best on a breeding ground that is well described by this coach's imperative: „it's my way or highway“.

My statements should encourage you all to actively contribute to a new culture that prevents any such incidents.



That said, I will now pass the floor to Jakub and the coaching part of the presentation. Jakub will provide the direct link between many of these ideas and the participants.

Summary

- 1 The social surrounding has a deep influence on our learning possibilities. If you are left out of a social activity, this feels like real physical pain in our mind, meaning that the same regions of the brain are activated.
- 2 Opportunities for participation and involvement increase motivation. Power demonstrations of the instructor help him/herself more than his students.
- 3 Balanced attention by the instructor promotes a good learning climate in the group.
- 4 As a group leader it is valuable to have a second look at the black sheep of the group. What needs does he /she represent for the group.
- 5 A participatory group climate is one of the most valuable preventive aspects against sexual harassment, an atmosphere that is conducive to the autonomy of every individual and of the group as a whole. Sexual harassment in sports groups thrives best on a breeding ground that is well described by this coach's imperative: „it's my way or highway“.

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Turning a good instructor into great coach

What should we, as snow sports instructors, do to enable people to develop their full potential, knowing how big an effect body / mind connections, group dynamics and attitudes have on an effective learning process?

➡ **Firstly**, make sure people are in the comfort zones: the issue is extensively covered by Andrea and Norbert. The "attitude guide" will hopefully help you in achieving that.

Attitude guide is of course an oxymoron; we believe that people will not change their attitudes just because they have read a guidebook on it.

But as coaches we also know we may be wrong, given powerful neuroscientific and group-dynamic

evidence, some people may find it useful and may be open to change.

So here it is;

It is built around SCARF model by David Rock and presented by Andrea in the first part of a lecture, referring to the main factors driving human behavior in social context. It describes the activities we should endorse (approach): marked in green and the activities we should discourage (avoid): marked in red.

The Model that you see is a tool that could help the instructor remember about SCARF principles better and connected with coaching allow for a fantastic ski lesson.

I would like to concentrate on this in the next part of this article. I deeply believe that coaching makes learning process more enjoyable and effective.

The following insights are based on 24 years of ski instructing and a 20 year coaching career.

Coaching – what is it ?

I define coaching as assistance in achieving desired results or solving problems by setting into motion the talents and strengths of a coached person/ persons by asking right questions, expressing empathy or even by mere presence.

Naturally we need to coach differently during individual and group lesson, during ski course for beginners and for advanced skiers or training for future ski instructors. The good news is that principles described here work in all cases.

How to use coaching ?

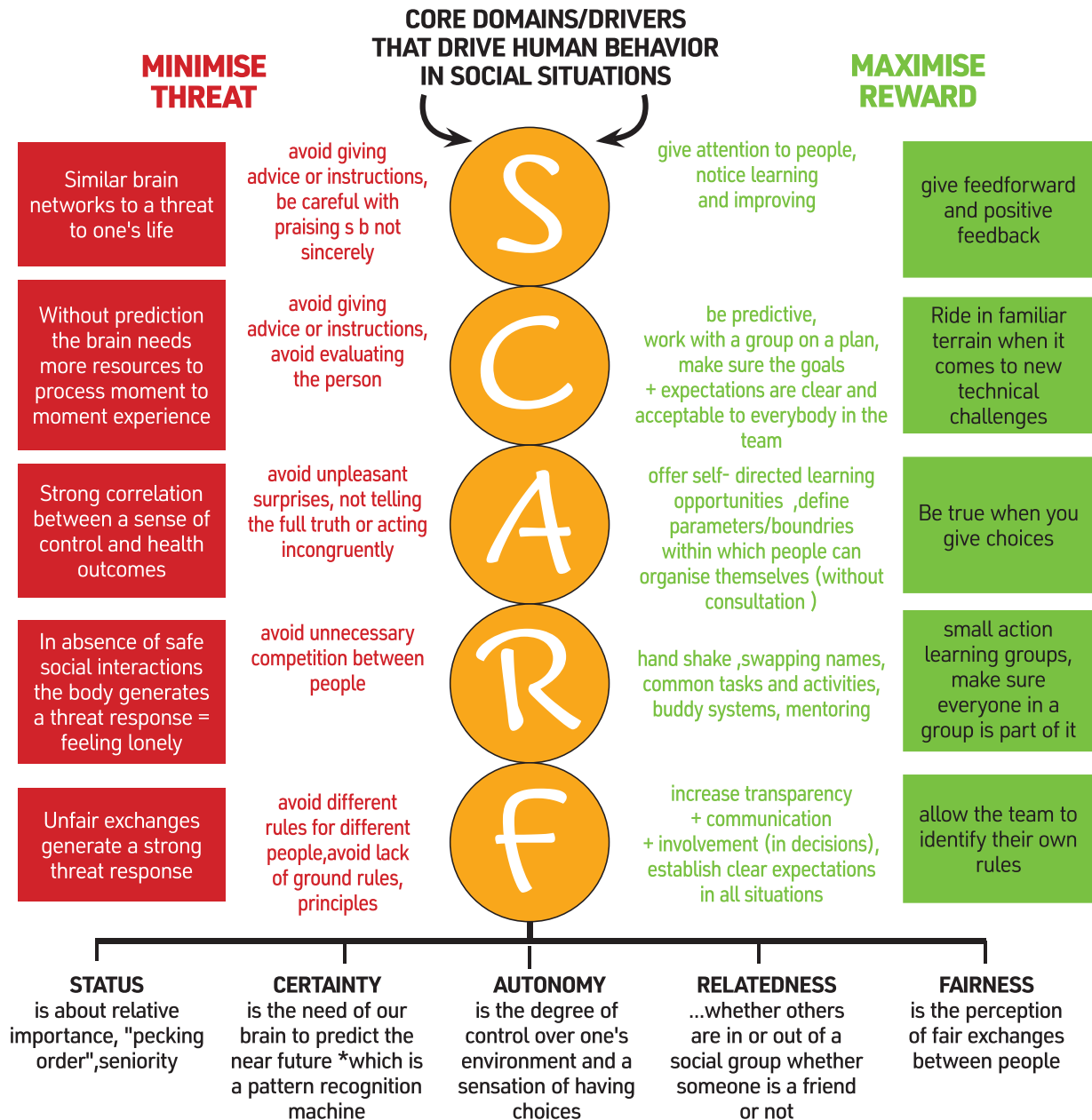
When you have achieved the level of a good instructor, you are a master of;

- ➡ Explanation
- ➡ Demonstration
- ➡ Terrain
- ➡ Motion Analysis

The approach-avoid response is a survival mechanism designed to help people stay alive by quickly and easily remembering what is good and bad in the environment (Amygdala!)

Framework that captures the common factors that can activate a reward or threat response in social situations.

Several domains of social experience draw upon the same brain networks to maximise award and to minimise threat as the brain networks used for primary survival needs



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- ⇒ Correction (or Feedback)
- ⇒ Relevant Methods and Tasks

What happens then? How can you move on and become an inspirational facilitator and guide, in other words become an excellent ski coach?

By applying coaching principles and tools you turn:

- ⇒ Instructing **into Coaching**
- ⇒ Authority **into Partnership**
- ⇒ Lecturing **into Engagement**

There are a large number of coaching tools and principles, in this article I will present just a few examples which, in my opinion, are the most effective.

1 **Serve your clients (And make them smile by doing a great job)**

However important tools and models are, you should start a lesson on a lighter note. Always start with a smile, a warm greeting and introductions. Following greetings a warm-up is the good occasion to have a bit of fun and get to know each other better. We all know those teambuilding exercises, for example there is a good guidebook by Andrzej Mrowicki and Dariusz Nawarecki devoted exclusively to them. Then

we need to ski a lot and have good time together. I show my dedication to doing the job well and my willingness to **serve** the clients in the first place. They must feel that I care for their needs and for each individual. I believe empathy is not always a God's gift but you can learn to become more empathic.

2 **Form a contract**

The basis for coaching session is a contract defining the rules of working together. This ensures the total confidence and trust which is important with individual and group coaching.

The contract in ski lesson I take as understanding and acceptance of boundaries we should not cross and limitations of a participant or the group and the coach.

Make sure the contract in group lesson is genuinely accepted by everybody, everything is said loud and clear.



3 **Set the aims and objectives by defining the goals and setting intentions**

Here we need to observe the differences between future instructors and recreational skiers.

Of course in case of future ski instructors, goals seem to be set clearly in advance, they want to

obtain the paper, official permission to work and formal confirmation of their teaching abilities. However when we look closer, even in such groups goals differ significantly. For example, some of them focus on gaining technical skills, others might need more methodological tools, others desire to gain experience in ski teaching.

In case of ski school clients the choice of goals could be even wider. People look for technical skills, just fun in skiing, good company, safe guidance during their adventure.

The setting and understanding the goals (by the clients themselves and the instructor/coach) is critical for understanding real intentions (intention is more than a goal). Intention helps to realize what we are here for. Intentions are often hidden under the surface of our privacy zone. If we bring intentions to fore, inevitably new energy will appear.

To achieve that, I talk to my clients in gondolas and on lifts, asking for their story, also telling mine, if they're interested. This conversation continues through our time together, of course with respect for people's needs for privacy. The more I am open and ready to talk, the more I learn from people. At the end of the day, 2 or 3 I know what they are here for and how can I serve them best.

Why setting and understanding goals and intentions is so important can be explained by a famous business joke: "if you do not know where you are going to, you will get there".

4 Be an invisible leader – pacing and leading

This means that you are not always at the front, not the hero of the day. It is the client who should come first and share opinions: which could be different from yours.

I have this methodology in mind especially with clients who have high ambition and reasonable skills. I start with giving them time and place to express their techniques and theories – listening

carefully what is in it for myself – maybe new interesting exercise or some new teaching skill. Then we drill down – exploring in more detail a particular element of skiing – inviting to cooperation the whole team if we are in a group. We try different exercises, encourage input from everybody. All the time I have in mind that we are here to fulfill the needs of my clients and discussions and exercises should lead to a goal (as the very discussions are usually not the goal). That goal is very often improving skiing technique with intention to impress the audience. My role is to direct discussions and exercises gradually into fulfilling this goal along with the goals of the team. Being a kind of invisible leader.

5 Promote teamwork – reinforcement of the learning process.

The good news is that the most effective teams are composed of varying personalities. Just like groups of people usually are! These differences are beneficial, because members of the team assume different roles in the team, that are often complementary.

We want people to mix and collaborate, communication and collaboration allows for synergies



3. COACH

to come to the surface. Synergies in action allow for additional value in the team. More value than the sum of values each individual can create.

How to achieve this?

Here is Robert Dilts' prescription ;

Let the team ask themselves following questions:

- ⇒ **Resonance** – What is the same? Where do we connect?
- ⇒ **Synergy** – Where are we different? How can those differences complement one another?
- ⇒ **Emergence** – What new can come through our interaction ? What else becomes possible?
He calls it a „generative collaboration“.

6 Use feedforward – alternative method of mistake analysis and competence development

It is critically important, how you give comments. Giving just negative feedback is highly ineffective. People love appraisal and hate judgment. Use feedforward;

Difference between feedforward and feedback is concentration on solutions instead on problems. Feedforward is looking into the future while feedback is about the past.



Feedforward is usually well taken by students and clients as it has no element of judgment and no negative emotions arise. It creates space for improvement and students receiving it do not waste energy looking for excuses.

As Marshal Goldsmith says – it is easier to show to the people things they can do better than prove them wrong.

We should not skip feedback completely but use both methods according to your best judgment of the situation

Norbert gave an example of practical feedforward on snow – very much along SCARF and coaching principles:

- ⇒ Assuming that people learn better when knowing more about their movement, give skiers awareness exercises exploring critical parts of movement;
- ⇒ Explore the functions of movement by going into extremes
- ⇒ Let them decide if it is useful for their skiing and if not, research further

Let participant describe own experience / movement with own words. This has two positive effects:

- ⇒ awareness grows by finding words for a body experience
- ⇒ coach/trainer gets a picture of the participant and can thus built next steps.

7 Avoid your own agenda

Apart from a lot of good things you should do, there are a couple of things you need to avoid on the path to becoming a great coach;

I call them **“Too much’s”** – the risks of every coach/instructor . (It is of course natural and ok wanting to be liked , wanting friends , expecting results etc. – the problem starts when we go out of

balance and those desires become the main driving force of our activity as instructors/coaches, when we forget that our primary role is to serve our clients):

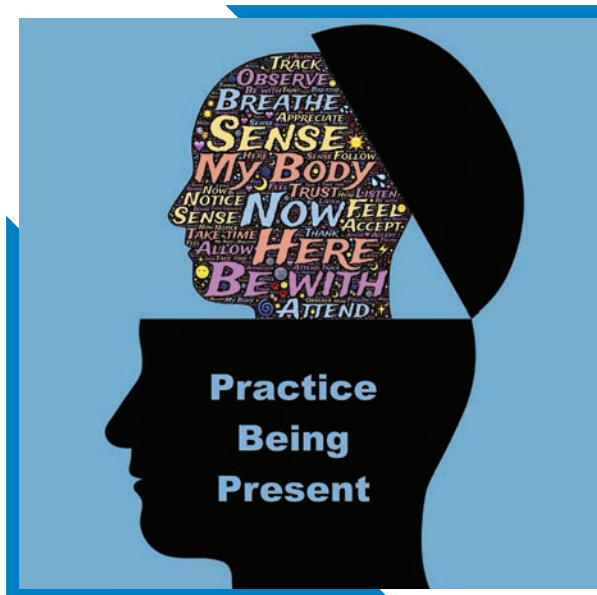
- ⇒ wanting to be liked (desperately),
- ⇒ wanting friends (desperately)
- ⇒ proving your skills (sports skills or coaching skills by newborn coach),
- ⇒ wanting results (not conforming to a client's wishes and maybe with wrong judgment),
- ⇒ needing students/income (desperately)
- ⇒ wanting to heal yourself.

8

A bit of anxiety is good! Accept it!

A small dose of anxiety is beneficial and natural. It means that you care about how you do your job. Too much is harmful, like most things in life. The best practice in dealing with too much anxiety is to accept it (great lesson to coaching from zen philosophy).

Recognising emotional state our students are in is very important and a key to managing it. I am referring here to bottom up and reverse connection between mind and body that Andrea



described and group dynamics influencing emotional state of individuals described by Norbert.

Assuming that every kind of turn requires different "state" or let us call it a "feeling", managing emotional state during turns can be a great learning tool. Be it with the help of music or breathing exercises or other.

Conclusion

- 1 We need to become great coaches and develop our clients during enjoyable, outstanding and memorable snowsports lessons
- 2 To make this possible, we believe that ATTITUDES MUST CHANGE!
- 3 Let us take example of good universities, schools, businesses who use coaching, thus making learning/teaching more effective and creating more satisfaction and wellbeing for both instructors and clients.
- 4 If every course for future instructors had in the schedule a couple of hours led by an experienced coach, if every ski teaching manual included a section devoted to understanding how humans learn, group dynamics and elements of coaching principles, life on the slope would be much easier..

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