The Inner Game of Coaching

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Abstract

This study adopts a heuristic phenomenological approach and investigates the occurrence and effects of the Inner Game (Gallwey, 1974) from a coach's perspective. Published research both in business and sports coaching areas is reviewed together with associated psychological theories, in order to begin to determine the coping strategies that experienced coaches use to manage their Inner Game. One of the major challenges facing practicing coaches is their ability to control and regulate their response to Inner Game interferences and maintain a professional relationship with the coachee. The study reports the personal experiences of nine practicing coaches and through a semi-structured interview technique discovers the various reactive and proactive coping strategies in use to regulate and control internal responses to the mental and emotional interferences caused by the Inner Game. The findings also show how coaches build resilience to the Inner Game and minimise their exposure to it.

Key words: Self talk, psychological skills, Inner Game, performance, psychological interferences

Introduction

Whenever, we set out to achieve a personal goal or ambition we often experience an internal critic or inner voice that interrupts our thought processes and passes judgment on what we do. This phenomenon is just as apparent for coaches as it is in ordinary walks of life. Coaches also harbour self limiting beliefs about their role and capability and sometimes experience psychological interferences whilst they are coaching which can affect their performance. Gallwey (2004 pp 1-9) termed the interaction of these psychological interferences, the "Inner Game" and he likened it to "a conversation that goes on inside our heads" between two players whom he calls Self 1 and Self 2 suggesting that the Inner Game is a form of self talk dialogue. The important questions are: what triggers this inner dialogue and psychological interference; when does it happen for coaches and more importantly, what coping strategies do experienced coaches use to minimise the impact of this phenomenon on their performance and effectiveness as a coach?

After a short review of the literature and a description of the methodological approach I present a summary of the main findings and conclusions from the study.

Literature review

The term 'Inner Game' is not as widely used in academic literature as it is in the practical, mainstream coaching books and consequently a strategy was needed to facilitate the search for more academic research articles that would shed light on this phenomenon. The change in the search criteria from Inner Game to other related concepts revealed the following: self talk (Hardy 2006, Spalding 2005 and Weikle 1993); communication (Shedletsky 1989); performance (Gallwey 2004, Kearns, Forbes and Gardiner

2007, Neighbour 2007, Thelwell, Watson, *et al* 2008, Weiner 1990, van Raalte, Brewer, *et al* 1994); potential and barriers to learning (Claxton 1997, Gallwey 1974). These sources also usefully redirected the focus of attention toward a limited number of interesting American studies about self talk and psychological skills used by elite athletes, coaches and health care professionals. Various chapters from popular coaching psychology text books and academic journals also provided the important theoretical background necessary for a research inquiry into the Inner Game. (Peltier 2001, Seligman 2004, Lee, 2005).

It became apparent after conducting the literature review that many of the coping strategies used to enhance the performance of elite athletes and their coaches were also the cause of Inner Game interferences and involved the use of psychological skills, cognitive behavioural techniques and positive psychology. (Hardy 2006, Thelwell, Watson, *et al* 2008, Weikle 1993).

Methodology

The decision to conduct a qualitative phenomenological research study and adopt a heuristic approach was made because subjective experiences like the Inner Game only exist within the mind, and because of this they are difficult to define objectively or to measure or observe scientifically as separate or isolated experiences (Robson 2002, p. 23). Additionally, because I wanted the opportunity to participate in the study and learn more about my own Inner Game, the heuristic approach seemed to be the most appropriate methodology to adopt.

The heuristic process is a long, time consuming, in-depth process that involves self search, self dialogue and self discovery (Moustakas, 1990 p. 15-27). By following the six concepts of heuristic inquiry described by Moustakas (1990) I was able to:

1. Establish and communicate the real focus of the investigation, i.e. the essence of the inquiry, the focus of the investigation, or the intellectual puzzle to be solved (Moustakas 1990; Mason 1996);

2. Understand every possible nuance, texture, fact and meaning of Inner Game experiences through the process of self dialogue and indwelling which involves periods of deep concentration;

3. Acknowledge the power of tacit knowing and intuition;

4. Create an inward space that is clear and uncluttered where thoughts and feelings can flow freely;

5. Recognise that "the meaning of any human experience depends on the internal frame of reference of the person who has had, is having or will have the experience" (Moustakas, 1990 p 26).

Whilst the different phases of the research process were closely aligned to Moustakas' (1990) approach, they were adapted and shortened to accommodate the timescales and deadlines set for this study. The different phases were as follows: Initial engagement; Immersion; Incubation; Illumination; Explication; Creative synthesis

The data collection process involved the sourcing of primary data from academic and mainstream psychological coaching literature and secondary data from semi structured interviews and a reflective

journal. Throughout the data collection phase of the study every effort was made to create an atmosphere that would encourage trust openness and self-disclosure without any "Inner Game" interferences getting in the way.

One way in which I created this sense of ease for myself was to use a reflective writing technique called Morning pages where free flowing thoughts are captured on paper (Cameron 1992). Morning pages is a concept first developed and described by Janice Cameron (1992) in her book The Artist's Way. Cameron believed that writing morning pages helped artists optimise their creativity by distracting or quietening the left side of the brain (termed "the Censor") so that the more creative, right side of the brain (termed the "Artist's brain") was able to express itself without interruption or judgmental thoughts or 'Inner Game' interferences, getting in the way. Morning pages are usually about three pages long and take about 45 minutes to complete and they are written first thing in the morning before doing anything else. This way the mind is fresh and uncluttered and ready to capture a continuous record of free flowing thoughts on paper as they occur within the mind.

Moustakas describes immersion as the process whereby "the researcher comes to live and grow in the knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon and understand their experience more fully" Moustakas (1990). After writing a series of morning pages I felt more immersed in and aware of my Inner Game, and a growing awareness of what triggered it, when it was most active and how I was currently dealing with it.

Interviews were conducted with nine coaches; four male and five female. All were experienced practitioners currently involved in coaching supervision. The decision to work with a sample of experienced coaches was taken because it was assumed they might have developed more coping strategies than novice coaches.

Interview questions were designed to find out more about the coaches' experience of the Inner Game, when it happened, what it was like, what triggered it and what coping strategies they were already using to manage it. The main purpose of the interviews was to explore qualitative aspects of the phenomenon of the Inner Game and illuminate meaning through descriptions, illustrations and metaphors rather than by measurements ratings or scores. Each interview was recorded and participants signed a consent form and gave their permission for their data to be used in the study and for it to be published.

The four questions posed at interview were as follows:

1   How do you imagine or picture the "Inner Game" at work in your mind when you are coaching? Describe what you think, feel and see.

2   Describe a real coaching situation where the "Inner Game" was at play. What happened and how did you think, feel and behave?

3   When are you most aware of "Inner Game" obstacles; before, during or after a coaching session?

4   What coping strategies do you use to manage the "Inner Game" obstacles you experience when coaching?

Data analysis involved periods of deep reflection where thoughts and ideas emerging from the data were left to incubate and grow into themes and patterns (Moustakas 1991 p 27-29). Mind mapping techniques (Buzan, 2003) were used to cluster, capture and make meaning of the data. One of the early mind maps captured the different trigger points that appeared to be activating Inner Game interferences. The creative synthesis stage (Moustakas 1991 p 31-32) was where the data became more meaningful and alive. During this stage the narrative descriptions of the coping strategies coaches described were translated into metaphorical descriptions and mental images in readiness for writing up the findings.

Findings

Many of the trigger points identified related to issues about the coaching process, the coaching relationship, the coaching conversation and perceptions of what it meant to be professional. In addition feelings of being stuck, perceived changes in body language, misconceptions and misunderstandings in communication, unexpected or prolonged silences or poor time management and the evoking of strong emotional responses were all said to trigger the Inner Game.

The findings also suggested that coaches were employing two main types of coping strategy when coaching; one termed "reactive" and the other "proactive". The reactive strategies were employed mainly during the coaching session and they enabled the coach to react and quickly regain control of a difficult situation. Alternatively, the proactive coping strategies were used to build resilience and reduced vulnerability to Inner Game interferences.

Before describing the components of the reactive coping strategy in more detail it is useful to examine the different functions and dimensions of self talk taken from Hardy's (2006) review of the self talk literature because the findings suggest that its nature and function plays a significant part in managing Inner Game interferences. Hardy (2006) described six main dimensions of self talk in his review of the self talk literature. The first dimension related to whether the self talk is positive or negative and he termed this the valence dimension. The second was the overtness dimension and this related to whether the self talk was spoken out loud, i.e. overt or covert and going on inside the coach's head. The third dimension described self talk statements that are ether assigned or freely chosen and one good example of this is illustrated in an extract from Coach F's transcript where assigned and freely chosen self talk statements generated in the mind of the coach are used:

> "… The reason I was struggling was because the Inner Game going on for me was: 'John, (*coach is talking to himself*), you're a coach you should be able to coach (*freely chosen self talk statement*)' … and then feelings around 'well the best coach in the world couldn't coach this guy' … then it led me to one of the messages we play which is that we should be able to able to coach everyone (*assigned self talk statement*) and course not everyone wants to be coached".

The fourth dimension relates to whether the self talk was interpreted as being motivational or demotivational. The fifth dimension is called the frequency dimension and as the name suggests it relates to the pace and frequency of self talk. And finally the functional dimension relates to whether the self talk is instructional or motivational.

Self talk is an interesting phenomenon on its own and since it has been shown that it plays a role in managing the Inner Game, it is important to reflect back on each of these dimensions in order to provide meaning to the verbatim extracts taken from the transcripts that follow.

Reactive coping strategies; the Inner Game kicks off

When the Inner Game kicks off or is triggered the coaches use a reactive coping strategy that has four components and these were represented metaphorically as:-

- The circuit breaker
- The auto pilot
- The pressure cooker
- The Inner compass

The four different components of the reactive coping strategy are interrelated and interconnected and constructed using different combinations of self talk, quick relaxation techniques and changes in the focus of attention, with self talk used the most.

The circuit breaker
The first coping strategy was represented as a circuit breaker. This metaphor symbolizes the felt sense of separation or disconnection that temporarily breaks the level of rapport between the coach and coachee and leads to the coach's feelings of anxiety, self doubt and inadequacy. Coach A described the experience:

> "As I become aware of the Inner Game I become aware of something else in my head and an inner dialogue sets up, although it is not quite an inner dialogue; it's a sort of separation."

Once the coach notices this sense of separation from the coachee, and is aware of the Inner Game at play, the coach interrupts the cycle of interference ("something else in my head") and quickly redirects energy and focus of attention back onto the coachee thereby regaining control of the situation. At this point the auto pilot takes over and further stabilizes the situation.

The auto pilot
The term auto pilot is often used in day to day parlance to describe situations where an individual will switch from a rational thinking mode to a more intuitive way of thinking which is quicker and more effective in an emergency.

Coaches A and J both described situations where they went into auto pilot mode after experiencing a situation where an unexpected disclosure or sudden silence or change in the coachee's body language caught them off guard and triggered their Inner Game.

When switching to auto pilot the coaches described how they shifted their focus of attention onto what was important, and used their self talk and quick relaxation techniques to ease their cognitive emotional and somatic anxiety state and stabilize the situation. Below, are examples taken from Coach A and J's transcripts that illustrate what happened:

"I went pretty open with my body language and regulated and controlled my feelings and just said I can notice what is happening." (*Example of managing somatic anxiety state*) - Coach A

"What I need to do is just give her as much of what she wants as possible and just do the best I can in this situation, so we did some problem solving and action planning." (*Example covert instructional self talk*) - Coach A

"I focused my mind on key messages" (*Example of change in focus of attention*) - Coach J

"I tried to maintain a presence of calmness with my physical behaviour and tried to show him that I was still competent and could still help him." (*Example of managing somatic anxiety state and covert positive self talk to protect sense of self efficacy*) - Coach J

These extracts illustrate how coaches A and J intuitively went into auto pilot without the coachee detecting any changes in their psychological or physiological state. In stressful situations it is difficult to contain feelings of anxiety and stress; however Thelwell et al (2008) suggest that coaches need to be able to avoid portraying cognitions or behaviours that indicate an inability to cope with the situation because stress can be contagious.

The Pressure Cooker
Being able to contain feelings of stress so that they are not detectable by the coachee was an important aspect of the fourth reactive coping strategy described by coaches and this was particularly important to Coach A because he remarked on how contagious stress could be.

The fourth strategy is therefore represented metaphorically as a pressure cooker because in much the same way a pressure cooker regulates the pressure inside the pan so that the build up of pressure inside it is not detectable from the outside, it seems that experienced coaches control and regulate their emotional and somatic state to avoid the risk of the coachee noticing how they might be feeling.

The pressure cooker strategy relies on self talk, a shift in the coach's focus of attention and quick relaxation techniques. This is illustrated in the following two examples:

"Self 1 was kicking in with all sorts of reasons why I can't do it, so what started to happen was that I tried to maintain a presence of calmness with my physical behaviour and tried to show him that I was still competent that I knew I could help him." - Coach J

"One of the things I do is focus on my breathing and not changing it but just noticing where it is because then I just can't help being back in the moment.."
(Example of quick relaxation technique and shift in focus of attention) - Coach A

Each of the reactive coping strategies described so far have focused on regaining control over the situation. However, the final reactive coping strategy is less about stabilizing the process and more about regaining some sense of direction and keeping on track.

The Inner Compass

The final reactive coping strategy is represented metaphorically as an inner compass or internal navigational instrument that keeps the coach on course. The inner compass is an internal dialogue that goes on inside the head of the coach when they are in uncharted territory.

Quotes taken from the transcripts illustrate how the self talk dialogue spurs the coach on rather than allowing them to dwell on the negative. In essence, it is an internal from of verbal persuasion that is motivational, reassuring, affirming and instructional in nature that gets them back on course:

> "So a coping strategy is my other positive self providing reassuring messages I continually tell myself; it will be okay, you have been here before; and the phrase "trust the process" comes through in the sense that I just keep talking and saying it will be alright." (example of frequent motivational instructional self talk) - Coach J

> "Perhaps it comes with experience; 95% of the worry in the world is about stuff that never happens and so some of the anxiety I am experiencing before a coaching session is about not being good enough and I have been coaching for 15 years and I don't think I have ever had a session where I have said to myself I haven't been good enough…so maybe it comes down to; I forget who once said it but believing, "you are enough." - Coach F

> " If I allow that side of me to take too much hold, I think I go off down a road that takes me into feelings of can I really do all this, can I really cope, can I actually be an effective coach and will it all work; ……….I don't often go very far down that road but those are the feelings of almost panic but not quite come to the fore but the more I have been doing coaching the less often those thoughts and feelings come to the fore." - Coach G

In summary, the Inner Compass works as a navigational instrument and uses the knowledge and skills and self efficacy resources (Bandura, 1997) the coach has acquired over time to deal with the challenging situation. The reactive coping strategies involve the use of self talk, quick relaxation techniques and refocusing of attention and they are generally used during a coaching session when a coach needs to quickly regain control of their psychological and physical state and manage the situation.

Proactive coping strategies; taming the Inner Game

There appear to be two main proactive coping strategies used by experienced coaches. The first is about building awareness and the second relates to planning and preparation. Coach E said being psychologically and physically well prepared helped her "tame her Inner Game":

> "To me it is so much about the frame of mind I come to it actually, because I think most of it, I can challenge and I can be prepared and I can work on. I am sure there are some spots that will be harder for me than others, but if I have a lot of pressure on myself to be successful and to be good then, my feeling is that its more in-play."

> "So beforehand I try to prepare for each coaching session and then I try to tame my inner Game. I try to be accepting of it, sort of allow it and let it pass, saying oh, so there it goes; some more interference then, and laugh at it instead of making a big deal out of it.

"Also if I can be quiet before I see people or go to people. So sometimes I go somewhere else and I try to be early and have a quiet moment like 5 minutes of meditation as I try to be with the breath; "

"I try to think of times when I have let everything go and normally it works very well. So it's like a little bit of a pep talk to myself; you can do it; you are ok; It works. So I have quite a lot of tools and I do use them, so it is about the preparation for me." - Coach E

In this extract from Coach E the sense of acceptance and inevitability of Inner Game interferences is reflected and this was apparent in other coach's transcripts. Furthermore it is also clear that the Inner Game affects even the most experienced of coaches and they saw awareness, preparation and planning as key survival tactics as the comments from Coach A below illustrate:

"The first thing is noticing that it is happening;… then I think there are things about how Self 1 enacts itself; …and what does the coach do generally about their own inner critic or has the coach done work on their own self esteem and their abilities;

"Then one of the tools I have got is the emotional intelligence piece about noticing monitoring and regulating the emotions; I think to journal it; (…) and also to just realise that it does happen and almost to accept it because it will take a lot of effort to get rid of it (…) "

"and then to say, how can I get used to it and to see if there are any patterns and see if there is anything positive in it and; (…) is there anything in particular about these sessions?. So is it always 'this client' that I experience the Inner Game with or alternatively do I always get this Inner Game experience irrespective of who I deal with?"

The findings have shown that all of the coaches in the study regularly reflected on their coaching and supervision experiences. Reflective practice is one of the corner stones of good coaching practice and metacognition is one of the outcomes of reflection. (Moon, 2006 pp 89,100,145) Metacognition is a psychological skill, described by Flavell (1976, p232), that refers to the ability to step back from a situation and view it from different perspectives. Metacognition also refers to high order thinking which involves control over the cognitive processes engaged in learning, Moon (2006).

The coaching industry is rapidly changing its attitude to coaching supervision (Bachkirova, 2008) and it is becoming a more acceptable part of professional coaching practice. There are many benefits to coaching supervision but in relation to this study it appears to help the coach to focus on and talk about areas of their coaching practice where they are more vulnerable to Inner Game interferences.

Whilst coaches' abilities to tame their Inner Game is affected by their level of awareness it is also dependant on the amount of planning and preparation that precedes a coaching session and determines their readiness to coach. Preparation involved a range of developmental activities that enabled the coach to build and strengthen their resilience to Inner Game interferences and improve their coaching performance. Some were short term maintenance activities designed to keep coaches fit and on top of their Inner Game whereas others were longer term investments designed to improve and optimise their overall performance.

The maintenance activities involved the development and use of psychological skills such as visualization, relaxation, meditation and self talk before and after a coaching session so that the coach was always in the right psychological state to coach. Alternatively, performance enhancing activities involved the coach in longer term, developmental activities that continually strengthened their sense of self efficacy and gave them the courage and the confidence to take on more challenging tasks.

Bandura (1997) suggests that "a strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being" and that a person's beliefs about their worth and value can be developed by four main sources of influence; mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, positive role models and learning to control and regulate somatic and emotional anxiety states. In this respect self efficacy theory offers some useful guidance because mastery experiences build resilience to negative self talk messages that seek to undermine the coach. Another source of influence comes from what other people say to us as coaches and in this respect supervision and networking expose the coach to positive role models who are willing to offer them support and feedback. Finally, by learning to control physical and psychological interferences by using psychological skills such as self talk, relaxation, imagery, and visualization, coaches can manage their somatic and emotional anxiety state and 'keep on top' of their Inner Game.

One other interesting finding from the study suggested that coaches were also managing their Inner Game interferences by consciously recreating the core conditions that create flow experiences. Flow is a subjective state of intense engagement where a person loses self-consciousness (Wesson and Boniwell, 2007). It is a state that enables individuals to focus on tasks more fully and maximize their performance and flow theory suggests that flow states happen when we give ourselves challenges that are aligned to our strengths and professional goals.

Wesson and Boniwell (2007) identify research where the core conditions that encourage flow experiences are described (Ashby, Isen and Turken, 1999; Seligman, 2004). These studies conclude that using adopting a strengths coaching approach leads to increased engagement, energy and motivation that results in positive emotions. In addition a more recent research study conducted by Csikszentmihalyi. Abuhamdeh, and Nakamura (2005), suggests that having a clear set of goals, a balance between perceived challenges and perceived skills, and clear and immediate feedback are also factors that encourage flow.

During the interviews three of the coaches described coaching experiences where they were in a state of flow and unaware of Inner Game interferences. Here are two examples from Coach D and G's transcript:

> "I think it is about focus so when I am coaching someone and if I am in flow while I am coaching someone everything that is going on around me kind of just disappears. So for example I remember early on in a coaching relationship, in fact I think it was the very first session that I had with this guy, we met at this hotel and I walked in there and the noise level was insane and I remember sitting down and thinking how am I going to be able to remain focused with all this going on….. But, by the end of the session it wasn't there anymore, it wasn't even on my radar. So all those potential distractions kind of disappeared because you are so focused on what that person is saying." - Coach D

> "I can think of sessions where the analogy of the sporting analogy would be of being in the zone where I have been conscious that in one sense I have been using all the tools and techniques I have been taught but using them in a totally instinctive manner (…) the whole session just flowed and

things happened (…) however much I had prepared I couldn't really have thought through what I did at that particular moment its been an instinctive use of what ever knowledge and skills I have got." - Coach G

Whilst it is clear that flow experiences helped Coach D and G concentrate more fully on the situation and deal with the distractions this study has not highlighted a clear association between flow experiences and the absence of Inner Game interferences. However, it has suggested that coaches who experience flow in coaching situations are less aware of Inner Game interferences.

Another interesting finding of this study relates to the coaches' perceptions of their Inner Game. In many of Gallwey's books the Inner Game appears to be represented as a phenomenon to be feared, rather than as something that could be trusted:

> *I sometimes think of Self 1 as an alien in me that pretends to be me but it is in fact the voice of those other than me that I have unconsciously incorporated into my internal dialogue; this voice establishes expectations, issues commands and attempts to define my reality as if it were my boss; (…) it sows doubts that undermine my sense of wholeness, autonomy adequacy as an individual. I call Self 1 an alien not because its content is always false and harmful but because it wants me (Self 2) to accept its dictates independent of my own direct experience of understanding.* (Gallwey 2004 pp. 28-29)

Whilst coaches in the study described the more threatening of two players in their accounts of Inner Game experiences, they also recognized that the judgmental, critical player was of value in the sense that it alerted them to a learning opportunity they might not have noticed. Additionally some of the coaches described their Inner Game as companion, an ally and a critical friend 'looking or watching out' for them as illustrated in the following extracts.

> "it is something that I am conscious of I suppose it is a part of me that I am conscious of that I know exists inside me(…) its not a voice and there is nothing particularly visual about it either(…) it doesn't work for me in that sort of way and I suppose that the Self 2 bit of me is the bit that sort of tells me that I have got all these coaching type of resources inside me and I just know they are there and I can draw on them whenever I want to and I can draw on them instinctively." - Coach G

> "I suppose Self 1 yes Self 1 does make a useful contribution in that Self 1 is the bit of me that probably provides some self discipline in terms of thinking well ok however much of this coaching stuff you have done and however competent you think you might be there is always something to learn." - Coach G

> "For me the Inner Game is something I always play and I think it adds to my capability as a coach to not only noticing what the client is doing but also noticing what I am doing and the affect the client is having." - Coach J

Limitations of the study

The findings of this study have illustrated how experienced coaches appear to use two distinct coping strategies to tame their Inner Game. However the limitations of the study need to be considered alongside

these findings. Some obvious limitations relate to the small size and short duration of this heuristic study which clearly limited the time spent in each of the different phases of the research process such as the incubation and immersion phases. Additionally, the choice of data collection methods, particularly in relation to the decision to use morning pages to collect data made the analysis more difficult. Moreover, whilst the decision to work with experienced coaches has contributed significantly to the findings, I am left wondering how novice coaches experience and manage their Inner Game. Finally, whilst the four questions posed at interview gave the coaches the opportunity to talk freely and openly about their Inner Game experiences, a simple, less structured approach inviting coaches to tell stories about their Inner Game experiences may have been less constraining and therefore more appropriate, given the focus of this study.

Conclusions

The main conclusion of this study is that experienced coaches use two main coping strategies to manage the psychological interferences they experience when coaching. The first, a reactive coping strategy enables them to cope with situations that arise during a coaching session and the other, a proactive coping strategy, helps them build resilience and reduce vulnerability to Inner Game interferences before they happen. I have therefore concluded that coaches who take steps to maintain their "fitness to practice" and continuously improve their standard of coaching performance through an investment in long and short term development activities, appear to be more physically and psychologically prepared for coaching encounters.

A further conclusion is that both coping strategies are constructed from a range of psychological skills such as self talk, visualization, and reflection and are designed to improve motivation, self esteem, self confidence and personal drive. Interestingly, whilst self talk appears to be used more than any of the other psychological skills further research would need to be undertaken to clarify how much coaches trust their self talk because from the evidence presented it is unclear whether they do or not because they appear to later question their actions during supervision.

One other conclusion is that the Inner Game is a phenomenon that affects even the most experienced of coaches. Therefore through the process of reflection and supervision coaches can be better prepared for more challenging coaching sessions because they have developed an enhanced or more acute level of awareness of what an Inner Game experience is like for them and what actually triggers it. Additionally, it appears that if coaches are aware of their coaching strengths and weaknesses they can be more confident about taking on more challenging and stretching coaching assignments that strengthen and build self efficacy beliefs ('coaching muscles') because they know that it is within their capability. Also coaches who proactively maintain their physical and psychological fitness to coach may well have that 'competitive edge' because they are better prepared and in a state of 'psychological readiness' to coach.

As a closing point, and from a professional perspective, the process of openly talking about Inner Game experiences in coaching networks, on coaching courses or in supervision is to be encouraged, particularly during the formative stage of coaches' development as this provides the opportunity for them to share their experiences openly with others and to develop more effective Inner Game coping strategies earlier on in their coaching career.

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