

Brain Games Positive Thinking information **Ideas on how to reduce Performance Anxiety**

Adapted from a blog article written by Carly Anderson

<http://carlyanderson.com/recording-for-a-credential-ready-set-relax>

As a general principle in life, it's worth looking for ways to reduce unnecessary self-created stress and anxiety because it's our thinking about a situation that creates stress. There is very little inherent stress for most of us, unless you are doing a lot of physical work. We create stress and anxiety from the way we think.

Note from Carly: It's the early stages of the 2015 US Open Tennis Tournament as I write this, and what I find fascinating is to watch some of these high performance athletes defeat themselves because of what they start thinking about when they get close to winning the match. One young woman today, Caroline Garcia, was serving for the match and lost the match a few games later. The cause? Her game suffered from what seemed like performance anxiety about finishing out the match, and as a result she was no longer present. She lost the match a few games later.

Increase performance by decreasing anxiety

Being mentor coaches preparing coaches for their MCC, PCC or ACC credential, my co-leader, Karen Boskemper, and I are especially interested in how to increase performance and decrease performance anxiety. In our Mentor Coaching Group program, we have coaches coaching a real client, which can bring anxiety to the foreground when they are coaching in front of their peers, even when they know everyone is in the same boat!

Yet even in the individual mentor coaching sessions where our mentees totally get to choose which coaching session to send to us to review against the ICF Core Competencies, the performance anxiety is still present.

It's amazing what happens to our internal dialogue when we start recording coaching sessions, knowing we are going to be assessed.

So what will help us to relax, so we can perform at a higher level without adding unnecessary anxiety? When we're anxious, we're in the future, and not present in the present! And the 'present' moment is the only place you can do masterful coaching from.

Being present while coaching

To be present during an entire coaching session is a skill and mindset to be developed and one we are constantly working with our mentees on. The question is, "What are you being present to?" What are you listening for? What are you ignoring? What questions do you ask based on your beliefs and thinking? And what checklist are you going over in your head to make sure you demonstrate all the competencies? That last one is sure to take you out of being present!

Findings from Neuroscience

Neuroscience is a newer field of science that provides interesting insights into how the brain works and responds. There's a television series on National Geographic that my husband and I love called, "Brain Games" <http://channel.nationalgeographic.com/brain-games/> which Karen introduced us to. One of the episodes is called, "Positive Thinking," with the expert featured being Ms Sridevi Sarma, Assistant Professor, Department of Biomedical

Engineering at Johns Hopkins University. Below is some of what she shared with her words in italics:

Preparing to be present for the coaching session

Many of the following techniques are good for preparing you before starting a coaching session so you are in the best frame of mind to be present with your client rather than anxious about your performance.

The Power of Smiling

“A single smile can trigger a flood of endorphins in your brain comparable to eating hundreds of chocolate bars or being handed a fistful of cash. And just seeing another person smile often triggers you to smile too, which can cause levels of stress hormones to drop and lower your blood pressure.”

Application: Smile, smile, and smile some more immediately before you coach anyone that you are recording including in our group mentoring calls when you are coaching the volunteer client. You could also look at a picture or short video that you know makes you smile!



Effect of Positive Thinking

“Negative thoughts activate your brains right pre-frontal cortex, which sits near your stress center. When your brain releases a stress hormone like adrenaline, it

does a number on your immune system and leaves you susceptible to illness. In other words, positive thinking is actually good for your health.”

Application: Similar to what makes you smile, what can you do to shift out of negative thinking when you know you’re in a bad mood or poor frame of mind, and into positive viewpoint instead? Have some things you’ll think about and say to yourself to shift your mood, before you start that recording.



Posture

“If you want to have a more positive outlook on life, you may want to pay attention to your posture because sometimes your outlook can be influenced by simply striking a pose.

When we hold a pose for only several minutes (for example, a sad face, dejected with arms crossed. Or a happy, positive, smiling with arms out wide pose) it can affect our results.”

Application: Pay attention to your body language. Are you slouching when you coach? Have you tried different postures such as standing while speaking on the phone?



Wide Power Pose

“Studies show your body can play a big part in the power of positive thinking. A commonly held theory speculates putting your body into a wide power pose stimulates blood flow to the extremities and boosts levels of testosterone, a confidence hormone, while also decreasing levels of the stress hormone, cortisol.

In other words the power of positive posture can lead to positive thinking. So the next time you have a big test, a job interview, or asking someone out on a date, try holding a power pose beforehand.”

Application: Try a Wide Power Pose before starting a coaching session.



Music

“According to research by neuroscientist Daniel Bowling, music notes in the major key are similar to those in excited speech while notes in the minor key are more similar to somber speech. This might explain why we tend to associate major key songs with being excited or happy, and minor key songs with being sad or upset.

Recent studies have found that listening to upbeat major key music can boost your mood in the short term, and that you can improve your long term overall positivity by listening to happy music for a period of two weeks. And positive thinking can not only make you feel better, it can make you better at almost anything you try.”

Application: Play your favorite music immediately before you record a coaching call for your mentoring and credential process. It can be any type of upbeat music – rock, pop, classical, etc. Even better is if the music puts a big smile on your face, AND your body language is a Wide Open Pose! And try the two week experiment mentioned above and notice if it supports your overall mood.



Basketball Hoops Experiment

“A woman who had never picked up a basketball and thrown hoops before took ten shots and got zero through the hoop. Then she was blindfolded with a group of people cheering every time she threw the basketball. They cheered even though

she didn't make the basket but she didn't know she wasn't making them. When not blindfolded, the onlookers continued to cheer every time that she took a shot. Again, she attempted ten shots and this time she made four, which is 40% better in a few minutes!

The flipside....A man initially made 9 baskets out of 10 shots which is really good. He was blindfolded and the crowd moaned every time he shot the basket, even if he made the basket. When not blindfolded, the crowd kept making 'boos' and moans' and the crowd's negative reinforcement threw him off his game. He only made five shots which is 40% less effective than his first time through."

Application: Surround yourself with people who want the best for you and will support you.

In closing.....

So much of our success is determined by what is going on inside our head, not outside of our head. So believe in yourself and what you are doing.

If you find yourself engaging in your usual "stinking thinking", surround yourself with people who want to see you succeed and cheer you on. Research shows that when people believe in us and express that belief through acknowledgement and positive comments, our results tend to improve, even if initially we don't believe we have improved. The power of positive thinking, whether you believe it or not, does in fact support your success.