

CASE STUDY

Raising the Bar: Performance coaching using Thinking Styles®

Executive Summary

Performance coaching is different from executive or personal coaching in its focus on specifically improved performance by direct action. The primary focus of Thinking Styles in performance coaching is to understand how an individual thinks and how that could hinder or enhance their performance. The secondary focus is to understand how the cognitive preferences of the performer's coach may be affecting the way they are coaching. After using Thinking Styles, Julie Crane, a potential Olympic high jumper for the 2008 Olympics, not only jumped a personal best, but she achieved it under the stress of competition conditions.



The Objectives

Julie Crane and her coach, Alex Caan, wanted to explore how Julie's Thinking Style preferences affected her performance, to see how changing her thinking could lead to performance improvements. Secondly, they wanted to explore how Alex's Thinking Style preferences affected the way he coached her to see if changes made there might also lead to performance improvements.

Using Thinking Styles

After both Julie and Alex had completed their Thinking Styles profiles and both had received individual and combined feedback, it became apparent that Alex had been using the "wrong" language to influence and encourage Julie, using the words which suited his own cognitive preferences rather than hers. This meant that Julie had to "translate" everything that he said into language which was more meaningful for the way her brain works. This is a complex and difficult process which can lead to misunderstandings; it is much more effective to give the brain an instruction it can understand, in the language it prefers for filtering and processing information. Once Alex understood this and began using the language which Julie preferred to hear, he could coach her more effectively and she could really benefit from his experience, knowledge and skills.

In a way, it is "easier" to coach for high performance with athletes, as the results are immediate. This is not often the case with individuals or teams in organisations where their goals tend to be more long-term and therefore their achievement takes longer. Performance coaching is an ongoing process, it is not a one-off, and the effectiveness of a coach depends on their ability to flex their approach to the cognitive and behavioural preferences of those people they are coaching at any specific moment in time.

Thinking Styles

Thinking Styles is a psychometric instrument which measures people's preferences for twenty-six different types of thinking, and therefore someone's likely approach to tasks, problem solving and relationships. The Thinking Styles report also gives techniques for developing flexibility in all the cognitive styles, including their associated language patterns and behaviours.