

Four Factors of Performance Enhancement

An official's emotional state when officiating an event has a definite effect on that person's expectations of success. The relationship between expectations, emotions, and performance outcomes is strong. A positive emotional state will usually lead to positive expectations for success, while a negative state will do just the opposite.

However, a poor performance does sometimes occur when you are in a positive emotional state, and when this happens, the official will respond based on previous experiences, becoming upset by the experience or accepting it as a lesson on how to improve for the next time. Be careful not to allow the people you're coaching to set unrealistic expectations for success—no one has ever officiated the "perfect game" – you can't be everywhere at all times.

What you must realise as an official is that people often fulfil their own prophecies, so the performance outcomes will reflect their expectations. These expectations will, in turn, affect four factors that are essential to effective performance enhancement: attention, focus, perception, and time on task.

Attention

Attention refers to how an official tunes in to the environment they are officiating in. There are two continua of attention—broad to narrow, and general to specific—which are determined by what the official is observing from the players/athletes, and the environment. A rugby referee who arrives at the breakdown has a number of things going on in front of them that they need to pay attention to in order to make the right ruling.

How much attention an official pays to what's in front of them, definitely affects how well they perform. To improve performance, the official needs to concentrate their attention on the task at hand and minimise distractions if distractions will be harmful.

Focus

Officials must be able to focus on what they are doing. If they are distracted or just not interested in the job, performance will suffer. Think of a cricket umpire – they are out on the field for a long time and need to stay focused despite the fact that there may not be a lot happening. As soon as you drift off you may miss an important play, and your performance suffers.

Focus requires an almost meditative state of concentration. It is what people call mindfulness—but *mind fullness* might be better: keeping the mind *full* with the task at hand. When you ask officials to focus, you are asking them to stay tuned in to what they must do regardless of what is going on around them. That's why football and basketball teams practice in stadiums and arenas with crowd noise piped in. The coaches want players to remain focused on the task at hand despite the distractions. You can help people dramatically improve their performances if you just help them maintain the proper focus through emotional control.

Perception

The level of emotional control affects an official's perception of a situation. People who are upset or angry tend to perceive things differently than those who are relaxed. People who are in a state of optimal arousal (emotional control) perceive events differently than everyone else.

In fact, when you are in a state of optimal emotional arousal, you can experience what is commonly called flow. Being in 'flow' means your attention is properly focused; the game or event is challenging, your emotions are in an optimal state, so the players can do their thing with minimal intervention. In other words, you are not thinking about what you are doing; you are just doing it.

When officials and athletes are in flow, their perceptions become very acute and their emotions reach a state of euphoria. Time and motion seem to slow down, movement and thought become effortless, and positive emotions flood the mind-body system. If you can help people achieve this state of flow more often, not only will their perceptions improve, but their overall performances and productivity will greatly improve.

One way to do this is to start slowly – officiate your sport at a basic level where you are more likely to ref a good game, and this will enhance your self-esteem. As your skills and knowledge improve, choose a more challenging environment to test yourself.

Time on task

The last area that the emotional state of the official affects is the time on task. Officials who are in a positive emotional state (flow state) can perform indefinitely. Since "time stands still," they just keep on going. However, when officials are in a negative emotional state, they will do anything to get away from the task. The negative emotional state begins to cycle on itself and cause a continuing decrease in performance.

Improving performance in this situation requires a good look at why the official chose that sport to officiate, what about that sport they enjoy, the rewards they get from officiating or what level of recognition they are looking for. When they can answer those questions, they're more likely to have fun officiating. This will directly affect the flow for the players and spectators.