



Transformational Coaching:
**An evidence-based approach to optimising motivation and enhancing
performance excellence in athletes**

This short, informative resource discusses the meta-cognitive model of transformational coaching and outlines how coaches can incorporate this model into their coaching. Only the fundamental aspects of the model are presented; however, a more comprehensive discussion of the model and its theoretical origins is available in the transformational coaching handbook.

Who Has Produced This Resource?



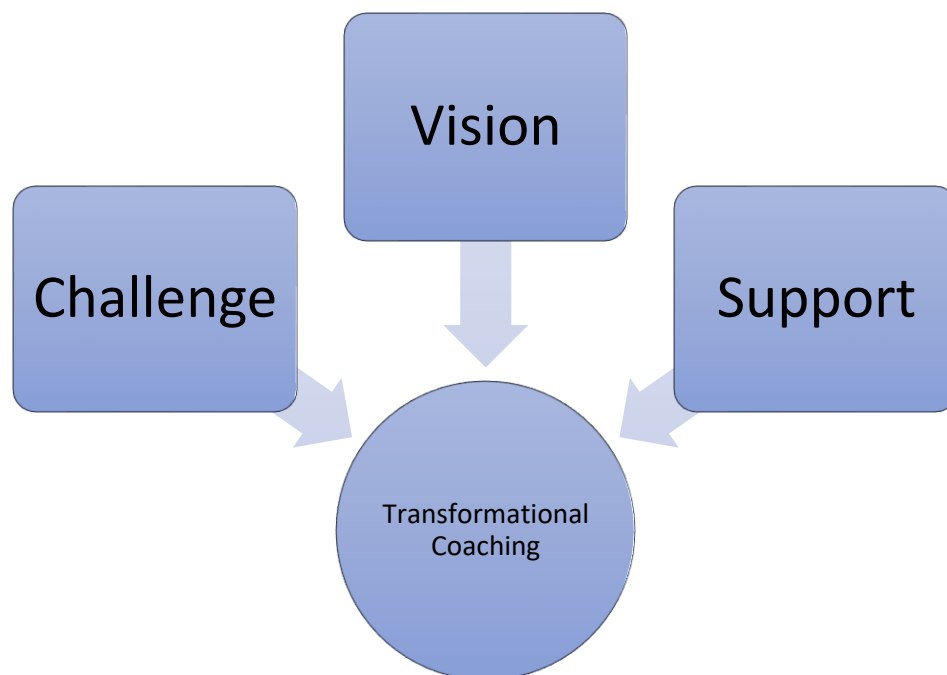
This resource has been written by Joe Varga (left), *BSc, MBPsS (GBC)*, and Professor Tim Woodman (right), *PhD, CPsychol*. Joe graduated top of his cohort with a 1st Class Honours degree in (BSc) Sport and Exercise Psychology from Edge Hill University and is currently completing his Masters of Science (MSC) degree in Sport and Exercise Psychology at Bangor University, projected for a Distinction.

Previously, Joe has published research on life skills development through sport and conducted research exploring how one's attentional focus during movement execution can impact skilled performance. The resource presented here and others elsewhere for Squash Wales, including the hosted webinars, form part of a period of supervised experience.

Professor Tim Woodman is a leading Professor of Performance Psychology; is world-renowned for his work on personality, stress, and anxiety; and is supervising Joe during his period of supervised experience. Both Joe and Prof Woodman are members of the Institute for the Psychology of Elite Performance (IPEP) in the School of Sport, Health, and Exercise Sciences at Bangor University. Joe can be contacted at: jjv20zcn@bangor.ac.uk or through his Twitter: @JosephVarga7 and Prof Woodman at: t.woodman@bangor.ac.uk. Both welcome questions, comments, or feedback, and are happy to hold an informal conversation on anything contained in this resource or on Sport and Performance Psychology more broadly.

What Is The Meta-Cognitive Model Of Transformational Coaching?

The meta-cognitive model of transformational coaching is an applied model previously developed by IPEP during collaborative research with the Institute of Naval Medicine. Its benefits include being a simple, easy-to-use model that still remains effective at, for example, increasing athlete motivation and enjoyment, and optimising coaching that targets the pursuit of performance excellence. Simply, the model gives coaches the opportunity to be a more transformational coach, but in a much easier, straight-forward way than previously possible. The reason for this is that instead of having to remember and practise deploying a handful of key behaviours (as what previous models require), the meta-cognitive model simply requires coaches to incorporate three components into their coaching. These components are: (1) providing a **vision** for the future, (2) providing adequate **challenge** in pursuit of the vision, and (3) providing enough **support** to athletes when challenged to achieve their vision.



What Does Each Component Mean?

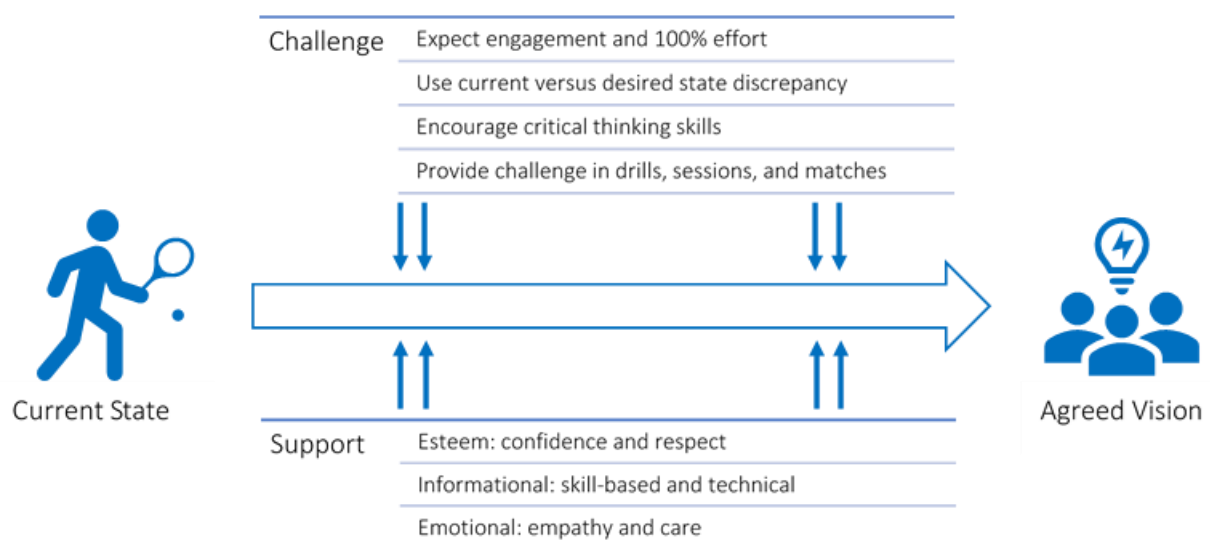
Vision refers to the extent that an athlete holds and endorses a true, meaningful, and inspirational future image of themselves in Squash. That is, a vision crafted solely by a coach that is not internalised by the athlete, is not a meaningful future image. It is often easiest to simply speak with an athlete and come together to build an appropriate vision; ask the athlete what s/he wants to achieve. Challenge is defined as the discrepancy between where an athlete currently is in their development and the desired end state (e.g., competent

Squash player or elite/national player). The greater this gap, the greater the perception of challenge. Athletes are then challenged to achieve the desired state in drills, practice sessions, and competitive experiences. Support is provided alongside challenge to prevent, for example, amotivation or burnout, and refers to emotional (care, empathy), esteem (confidence, respect), and informational (technical, skill-based) support.

Support and challenge should balance each other out. In other words, imagine a seesaw; challenge is on one side and support on the other. Your goal would be to ensure that the seesaw remains balanced, and one side does not overwhelm the other. In essence, too little/much challenge or support is harmful (although for different reasons). To understand the optimal balance of support and challenge for each athlete, speak to parents, other coaches, or the athlete themselves. Also, monitor the athlete's behaviour and listen carefully to their tone and what they say. We will now consider some of the ways that you can provide vision, challenge, and support in your coaching, and we present a diagram of this below.

How Can I Use The Model To Help Guide My Coaching?

The below diagram shows how vision, challenge, and support combine and impact athletes and their learning. We will next discuss each component in a little detail to show how you can incorporate each into your coaching.



Vision

Discuss goals, express your confidence in the athlete, provide a meaningful role, and incorporate a collective vision; for instance, *"I know you want to be a pro, and I want to see you become a pro, so let's work on this together"*, or *"what are your goals for Squash? Do you want to become a professional, or just a good player?"*. To help an athlete maintain their vision, you can incorporate subtle reminders into your feedback; for example, *"in the future I'm going to help you get better at using this shot because you'll need it to turn pro"*,

“remember, practising your drop shots is important because at elite-level they need to be consistently accurate”, or “come on, I know you can become a good player and you’ve got this in your sights – keep working on that technique”. Lastly, remember to cultivate a vision that the athlete fully endorses. Specifically, if an athlete wants to turn pro, develop a vision of becoming an elite player, whereas if an athlete simply wants to become competent and enjoy playing, build a corresponding vision.

Challenge

To challenge an athlete, make sure that you cultivate opportunities that allow him/her to test their limits. To do this, it can be useful to set some challenging but achievable goals. These do not necessarily have to be agreed in advance; they can be agreed somewhat in-the-moment. For instance, you could say, *“in this drill, I’m going to feed 10 serves to you; they will be challenging but aim to return at least 5”.* To complement this, ensure that you promote challenge by expecting 100% effort during your sessions. This is an easy, quick, and effective way of generating challenge. Another way to challenge an athlete is to get him/her to generate solutions to problems that might or do emerge. As an example, you could say *“what can we learn from this drill; why am I using this drill?”* or *“when things do not go as planned in a game, what can you do to change things? How could you change your game/tactics/strategies?”.* You could also ask an athlete to consider what alternative shots are available to him/her in a specific game situation. Lastly, remember to use the discrepancy between where an athlete currently is and the desired state. This should be done in an inspirational and motivational manner (e.g., *“good effort today, you’re well on your way to becoming a top player”*), and not a brutish or intimidating one (e.g., *“another session completed, well done, but there’s still a large gap between where you’re at and becoming a top player – there’s a long road ahead”*).

Support

For esteem support, you should provide feedback and encouragement that supports an athlete’s confidence (e.g., *“that was a great shot Sam, terrific racket swing”*). In terms of emotional support, it is important that you display sensitivity and empathy. For instance, an athlete might be suffering from a string of poor performances or has been left disheartened after performing poorly throughout a drill. It is important to be empathetic; for example, *“I know you were feeling a little down after perhaps not performing so well in that last drill we did – how are you feeling now?”.* For skill-based support, provide feedback on technique and movement; for example, *“remember to keep your feet shoulder-width apart Sam”,* or *“could it perhaps be that you’re struggling to reach your opponent’s shots because you are standing too far off the T?”.* As this last example statement demonstrates, it can be useful to combine support with challenge to encourage athletes to think for themselves. A final point to consider when providing support (& challenge, too) is to consider individual differences. Some athletes may need slightly more esteem support (e.g., due to general low self-esteem), whereas others might require more technical support (e.g., due to frequent lapses in concentration).

Want More Information On Something In This Resource?

We discuss the meta-cognitive model, but also transformational coaching more broadly, in more detail in the accompanying handbook, including research that supports transformational coaching. We suggest you first read through the handbook or consider sending either (or both) of us an email. We welcome questions and comments!

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