



BTS Corner is a bimonthly contribution from Cathy Spencer-Browning, National Training and Program Director for Body Training Systems® (BTS).

As we mentioned in the previous installment of BTS Corner, BTS conducted in-depth customer research on all of its programs. The results showed that, above all, participants want more coaching. Teachers that were consistently rated the highest were those who provided high-level coaching to their participants.

This installment will explore some techniques for becoming a more effective coach. We will explore these techniques in relation to the Five Key Elements of Awesome Instruction (...oops, I mean coaching!). In Part One, we will cover the key elements, Pre-choreography and Physical Execution. In Part Two, we will cover Instruction, Performance and Communication.

Pre choreography

In order to become a more effective coach, you must first master the choreography, or material, you are presenting. There are various stages that you will go through when learning pre-choreography. Two essential stages are **conscious competence** and **unconscious competence**¹². Conscious competence is where you know the choreography, but you have to think about the moves as you deliver them. This state of mind takes up unnecessary room in your brain. If you are overly aware of the choreography, or are "inside-out" focused, you are putting yourself first and your participants second.

You must master the material you are presenting

One scenario when conscious competence can interfere with coaching is when you try to learn the material in your head instead of practicing the moves in a class setting. Imagine that you are driving to class in your car. At the last minute, you change your mind about material or a track you would like to use, but you discover during class that you don't know it as well as you should. Although you might have "learned" it in your head, you likely have not practiced it while speaking to an audience. All of a sudden, you are in front of the class thinking that the experience is a lot different live than it was "in your head."

The next stage of learning is the optimal delivery state, or unconscious competence. Unconscious competence means knowing the choreography without having to think about it. Other than instruction, a common example of achieving unconscious competence is driving a car for many years. You get from point A to point B without having to think. Similarly, if you can remain somewhat unconscious of the choreography, you have room in your head to focus "outward-in," or on your participants, rather than on yourself.

In short, you should know your choreography to the point where you do not have to think about it. The key to reaching this state is to effectively practice choreography. You must somehow mimic the live audience. For example, when preparing to present new material, practice teaching with your fellow instructors leading up to the event. Avoid trying to learn and practice the material in your head, as this is not a real teaching experience. You may have noticed that the participants are ALWAYS perfect at following you "in your head!"

Physical Execution

Using physical execution to coach more effectively means turning your body into an effective visual coaching tool. Everyone has heard the saying that it is not what you say, but what you do that counts. Relaying visual information at the right place at the right time through body language is one of your most powerful coaching tools. However, in order to use your body as a great coaching tool, you must first have extraordinary physical execution.

The next step is to draw the participant's attention to your physical execution. Mirrors can detract from the participant/coach connection. As soon as there is a mirror at the front of the room, it has gravitational pull. All of the participants are drawn to look at themselves. In an environment without a mirror in front, participants are drawn to the instructor. On the other hand, if you have mirrors in your room, you have to work harder to get their attention. Either way, you should always engage them by using sentence starters such as, "Look at where my feet are," "Look at the position of my...", or "Watch what happens when my..."

Physical execution also promotes and displays intensity of movement, which will encourage participants to work harder. I have received coaching for video and television presenting in the past. I was once told that in a television medium, everything has to be about 30% bigger, bigger gestures, bigger expressions, bigger voice inflection, in order for it to land with the viewer. Consider physical execution the same way. You have to execute bigger and better in order to encourage the participants to challenge or improve themselves. Excellence in physical execution also promotes a more intrinsic understanding of how a movement should look and feel. In doing so, your instruction becomes more kinesthetic and focused.

Putting Words Into Action

In order to become an effective coach, you must practice mastering your choreography and physical execution. One means of practicing is to videotape yourself teaching a class and assess your own mastery of choreography and physical execution. Take sporting events, for example. Every great coach knows the power and value of videotaping when coaching athletes. So, why not apply that same concept to yourself? Reserve a date to videotape your class and thoroughly assess yourself. Once you make a list of improvements to be made, practice them outside of class so that you can carry more competence into the class environment.

In the next installment, we will examine the final three Key Elements of Awesome Coaching: Instruction, Performance and Communication.

¹ Four Levels of Competence; the "Kirkpatrick Model" by Donald L. Kirkpatrick.
² Creative Training Techniques Handbook, second Edition by Robert W. Pike, CSP



As the National Training and Program Director for BTS, Cathy is responsible for the development and organization of training, programming, continuing education and management systems. Cathy also served on the ACE Faculty Advisory Board and was recipient of Australia's 2001 Fitness Professional of the Year Award and Can-Fit-Pro's 2002 Specialty Presenter of the Year Award.

