

Choosing a Good Sport Psychologist or Sport Consultant
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You will find in this business that people will advertise themselves as being many things. However, state laws are very clear. If anyone uses the word *psychologist* in their title or *psychology* in the services that they provide, they must be licensed as a psychologist. Some services require legal certification or license and others do not. Therefore, although a license is not necessary for all performance enhancement work, make sure your consultant knows the difference. “Shopping” for a psychologist or consultant is like shopping for a good mechanic...you will be satisfied when you know what you need (and you get it), you know when you need it (and they show up), the price they charge for services is appropriate for the work done (probably less than a monthly yacht payment), and lastly...they are a good match for you/your organization. **Be an informed consumer.** In that regard, here are some questions that can assist you in finding a good match for your athletes and/or your organization.

Academic Background:

- 1) What is/are their degree(s)? [Minimums are masters, preferred is doctoral level]
- 2) When and where did they get their degrees? [Is their academic program reputable? Have you heard of it? There are very few “true” sport “psychology” programs. Most are academically housed in sport science departments (physical education, exercise physiology, kinesiology).]
- 3) Request a copy of their vitae.
- 4) Ask about any special certifications or licenses. If they have them, what are they and what kinds of special services are they entitled to provide? Seeing copies of these would be recommended. If you are uncertain of their credentials, have them clarify. (Don’t settle for a smoke screen.) [Also be leery of credentials that don’t really mean much—other than sounding official.]
- 5) What do they consider as specialties, and does their academic training and experience back it up?

Experience:

- 1) What sports have they worked with (specific sports, men, women, both)?
- 2) Level of competition (club, collegiate, national, international, professional, Olympic)?
- 3) When, and for how long, did they do this work?
- 4) Who are some of the coaches that they have worked with? [This provides you with an opportunity to check references to get their impressions of the person and the quality of services they provide. This is no different than getting references for any kind of position for which you may be hiring.]
- 5) What is the most difficult issue they have ever dealt with in sport, and how did they handle it? [This give you a flavor of how they think they work.]

Other Relevant Questions:

- 1) How do they handle confidentiality...in other words, how do they keep you informed about issues that you should know about *without* violating any of their legal or ethical guidelines? You may even want to ask them for a copy of the confidentiality form (informed consent) that they use with athletes and sport organizations. That way, you know the rules. [Do they reveal the names of individual athletes that they worked with? Or, do they keep this confidential?]
- 2) How do they deal with coaching behavior that they observe and may question, not understand, or think could be more appropriate/effective/ethical?
- 3) How can you, as the coach, provide them feedback (informational/constructive)?
- 4) How available are they to attend training sessions, competitions, or individual consultations for coaches and athletes?
- 5) How can you (coaches/athletes/other) access them between face-to-face contacts (phone/email)?
- 6) What are their fees, and how do you contract with them?
- 7) Will they provide you with periodic written summaries of what they provide?
- 8) What is the length of the contract (i.e., one year), and what are the renewal conditions?

Overall Impression: (Is this person someone who...)

- 1) ...genuinely seems to have a passion for what they do and are most interested in helping you—rather than someone who may have another agenda (personal advertising, getting “swag,” affiliation with your team, etc.)?
- 2) ...can or does understand your sport?
- 3) ...can relate to the athletes?
- 4) ...can relate to the personalities and styles of your coaches and organizational administration/support staff?
- 5) ...seems to know what they are doing?
- 6) ...understands the culture of athletics?
- 7) ...is a good match for us?