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IMPROVE YOUR...

– FACING STRESSFUL & CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

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IMPROVE YOUR...

FACING STRESSFUL & CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

When we experience a stressful situation it can trigger negative and catastrophic thinking, causing you to become concerned and fearful. It is a normal human reaction but we should not allow these feelings to prevail and occupy us. Thinking about bad and catastrophic consequences leads to fear and anxiety, which blocks our creativity, resourcefulness, and the ability to search for solutions.

When we become aware of our negative thoughts and feelings, it is important to take a step back and learn how to cope with this negative emotional state. **By our nature, we are resourceful and adaptive.** We are able to cope with various stressors and uncertainty but we need to learn how to use them. In stressful situations, we should (as fast as we can) **activate our resources, solution-mode thinking, and recall the strengths we have.**

EXAMPLE 1: During your career, you may experience many stressful situations that can have a greater impact on your performance, mental state, and general well-being. Injury in the middle of the season, an official complaint from one team after the game, sent home from the tournament after 'big' mistakes, losing a job, or some personal life issues, etc. are just a few examples that you may or you already have experienced during your officiating career. Once you have experienced them it may seem that it is 'over for you' or that something catastrophic will happen in the future. It may seem like that, but remember you are able to face this with many strengths and inner resources you have. In these situations you should focus on your ability to adapt and activate your flexible, creative, solution-mode thinking style: "What can I do in this situation?", "What options and solutions do I have?", "Which actions should I take?", "Which skills and strategies should I use?"

As we go through life we experience 'highs and lows'. It is particularly in the low spots where we find out what we are made of. When you face big problems and experience the process of overcoming them, then you become more resourceful and stronger than you've thought you could ever be because you know – 'you survived'!

There are many ways to efficiently cope with stressful situations but here are presented only a few general guidelines on how to face stressful long term challenges.

FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS

- Stay focused on solutions, tasks, actions, and creativity!
- Active coping is an adaptive way of dealing with stressful events. That's why it's essential that we focus our energy on what matters most to us.
- Ask yourself, "What can I do to stay strong and proactive?" The answer to this question will help you make priorities and define what is important to you. "I choose where I am going to put my attention. I choose what am I going to do, and what actions will I take!"

EXERCISE 1: ACTIVE COPING

Active coping refers to strategies that are directed at problem-solving to deal with a stressor and to reduce its effects. People who engage in active coping rely upon their own resources, skills, and strategies to deal with a specific situation.

- First, identify things under your control in this specific stressful situation. Things that are under your control include your effort and attitude, your reactions and responses, your behaviour and actions you take.
- Second, identify things that are not under your control in this specific stressful situation.
- Third, think about and write down the actions you are going to take! Actions that are fully within your power, that are specific and effective. Think about what resources, specific skills, supports, strategies you have and how can you include them to actively cope with this situation.
- "What solutions do I have?", "What skills and strategies can I use?", "What specific actions am I going to take?"

Include actions like problem-solving techniques, investing more effort in one area, re-framing the meaning of the problem, learning a new skill, improving your knowledge on some topic, redefining your values, and many other specific actions and activities.

CONTROL THE CONTROLLABLE

- Recognize the things you can always control and use them effectively.
- Many circumstances in our life are out of our control. There are limits to personal control in some situations, but our response and attitude certainly are controllable.
- In situations of stress, the only way to enhance personal control is to deal with the emotions that result from this experience, reframe the meaning of the situation and engage in some activities to cope with the consequences.
- Remember, you are in control of your effort, attitude, actions, and emotions, your strength is in your ability to manage the way you respond to what is happening around you.

FLEXIBLE AND CREATIVE THINKING & CONSTRUCTIVE SELF-TALK

- Practice activating your flexible and creative thinking. Be creative and innovative in a way how you think, behave and what can you do. Choose self-talk that is inspiring, constructive, and productive!
- Try to keep your thoughts and self-talk positive and avoid the habits that lead to negativity and unhealthy behaviours. Tell yourself: "I want to focus on my desires, my tasks, my responsibilities, not on my fears."
- Remind yourself that the fear comes from a primitive part of your brain that wants to take over. Scan fearful thought so you can look at it in a rational manner. It is not easy to think well under challenging and novel situations, but it is important to try and repeat it.
- Learn how to become more agile in your thinking and prepare for all possible outcomes. Ask yourself, "What is the worst that can happen?" It is not pessimism, it is a powerful question because it prepares you for the worst so you can think and plan how you could handle it. This question challenges us to look at all possibilities we have and those that we can create. When we do so, we expand our ability to cope and adapt to different stressful situations, making them look more manageable.

EXERCISE 2: "WHAT IF ... ?" SCENARIO

When we tell ourselves "What if something bad happens?" we often identify the potential danger. Each time we do this there are many positive possibilities. Yet, we fail to see them because fear blocks our creativity and innovation. If we primarily see bad possibilities and not the good ones, we develop an unbalanced and unrealistic view of the situation. Therefore, try to come up with at least three possible solutions for each negative consequence.

- Ask yourself about the consequences: "What if something terrible happens?", "What if all goes wrong?", "What if I get sick/injured?", "What if I lose my job?"
- Ask yourself about possible solutions: "Did anything similar happen before? How did I cope with it?", "Do I have any other options or solutions?", "Who could I call on to help me get through it?", "What resources, skills, and abilities would be helpful to me if this happened?", "What would a friend tell me about my worry?", "What can I do that is under my control?"

By simply thinking through the likelihood and possible outcomes of a catastrophe may help you to decrease the anxiety towards the potential situation you are fixed on.

This kind of thinking requires to set the mind into a solution-oriented mode in any problematic situation. If we start thinking that everything is going to be perfect and there will be no problems or consequences afterward, this will definitely not be a productive or effective way of thinking. We do not know for sure what the future holds. Similarly, we cannot predict events. What we can do, however, is to take actions we can and prepare for the future. By doing so, we give ourselves directions and stay mentally strong.

RECALL YOUR STRENGTHS

- Identify the strengths, skills, and abilities you already possess that could be beneficial to face this situation.
- Think about the similar situation you had experienced before and the way you have overcome it. "How did I face similar situations before?, Do I have another solution/idea?"

EXERCISE 3: REBUILD YOUR STRENGTHS

MY STRENGTHS

- Think about and write down the strengths you already possess.

NEW EXPERIENCE

- Think about and write down the strengths you think you will gain (or you are already developing) by experiencing this specific situation? For example, injury in the middle of the season, an official complaint from one team after the game, sent home from tournament after 'big' mistakes, losing a job, personal life issues, etc.

HOW IT WILL BE VALUABLE IN THE FUTURE? WHAT HAVE I LEARNED FROM IT?

- Which skills and experiences you have gained from overcoming these situations will be useful for you in the future? How this new experience will be valuable in the officiating environment? What are the 'new strengths' you will gain/ you have gained experiencing this situation?

Remind yourself of strengths and competencies, on how you are resourceful and adaptive. How valuable experience you have as a referee as you manage to face many stressful situations and challenges during a season and even during a single game. This insight will help you to face other different stressful situations.

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