

Hugh Gilmore



DANNY LENNON:

Here we are. Hugh, welcome to the podcast. Thanks so much for joining me today.

HUGH GILMORE:

No problem, my pleasure.

DANNY LENNON:

I am very interested to have this chat, both from, I suppose a selfish perspective of trying to improve performance in sport as I think pretty much everyone, even all recreational athletes, but as well as trying to get some more evidence based recommendations out there for people who are perhaps coaches or athletes themselves, because the area of psychology, as I am sure you are aware, can often throw up some stuff that isn't so evidence based when it's not coming from the right sources. So maybe before we get into any of the specific areas that I want to ask about, maybe give people some idea of your background in terms of what really brought you to where you are now, some athletes and organizations you've worked with and your kind of role through both academia and in practically working with athletes as a psychologist.

HUGH GILMORE:

I suppose starting off, I finished my masters, I think it was 2014 in sports psychology, and then from there I started a plan with weightlifting and I put together a project with

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Irish Weightlifting and then also was on the committee for Northern Ireland Weightlifting and club GoLift. At the same time I was working with Queen's Sigerson footballers as well and working with a guy called Alex Mardan; he was an international runner in the 400 meters from Romania. I ended up then – actually somehow I got a job with the EIS, British Weightlifting and I think it was mainly because I was a psychologist and somebody going through the supervisor experience process, I had both the understanding from a weightlifting coach perspective but also as a psychologist. I wouldn't have said I was a very good psychologist when I got the job, I don't think I was really a good one but I seemed to be getting on all right.

And then at the moment recently, I've been working with – I was still working with British Weightlifting, with their Paralympics Powerlifting side. So I've supported them through the Rio campaign, towards the Rio Olympics, Rio Paralympics and also British Weightlifting with their Olympic weightlifters towards the Rio Olympics. I am still working towards Tokyo now, we just finished off at the back of a successful Commonwealth Games. But unfortunately because weightlifting is no longer funded through UK Sport, they lost the funding, only the Paralympics side is funded. And then I took one position as well at the same time as one of the directors for the Netball Northern Ireland. So I am on the Board of Directors there, responsible for performance and I also currently work with British Athletics futures programme, their development side of things. Yeah so that's my background in terms of psychology and sport and where I've been.

DANNY LENNON:

Perfect. I think I will touch in on some of those things as we go through the course of this conversation because I think they will pop up in various different areas. But from the outset, before we talk into some real specifics, I am just wondering do you feel that there are some misconceptions I suppose among athletes as to

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the actual role of sport psychology or is there a disconnect between how maybe many athletes view sport psychology and its role versus how you would perhaps look at it?

HUGH GILMORE:

I think the biggest issue, I am sure you are probably the same about nutrition, is there's a massive amount of misinformation out there, lots of things that have face validity or assigned good that make us think that we know what we are on about, assign them quite useful and unfortunately that's the industry that's part of a lot of people trying to sell things and products to do this psychology and it causes misinterpretation. So, for example, you just need to go on Ted, I am sure you've heard of Ted Talks to find something that's probably not too evidenced based, so you can look at Amy Cuddy's stuff on power posing, that's all been disproven; Grit by Angela Duckworth for example, and this idea that people need grit, that's just a relabeled concept of conscientiousness and that's being sold as an important thing. And similarly, that is Winners and Whiners research in attribution causes for things or the beliefs, the core belief.

So I think there's a lot of information where people are trying to repackage all things, but then you've also got other things which are just complete pseudoscience like neuro-linguistic programming or NLP and there's a great meta-analysis on that by Witkowski and it just takes its time and actually Richard Bailey recently published a paper on pseudoscience in sport and NLP who's in that along with things at Myers Briggs as being pseudoscience, that's a personality profile. So you've got these things that are pseudosciences, then you've got things that are relabeled and repackaged because they are easily sold and they are socially desirable ideas. And they are right there on the field and then you've got a sports psychologist who's trying to do their job. And the first thing you are asked is what do you do, and the reality is you are there to help the athlete understand their beliefs, their thoughts and their behaviors

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towards an endeavor that they are trying to achieve. But then similarly if you are working in a system with nutritionists, with physios, with performance lifestyle, with S&C coaches and with coaches themselves, you are going to be working on basically multidisciplinary teamwork and how that environment works and how that engages with the athletes. Because, as humans you are talking about do I understand or do people understand what a psychologist does, probably there's a bias called false consensus bias and communication is actually quite hard for people to understand each other what they mean and what's expected of it. I am sure, breakdown communication and understanding is one of the biggest things.

That's my understanding overlap of my athletes, we are working together in alliance, somebody does the athlete's understanding, nutrition, psychology, S&C, the program are the overall goals overlap with the multidisciplinary team. So there's communication issues all over the place and not just because communication is difficult in humans.

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah, for sure, there's a number of things there that I think are probably important. One obviously on some of the pseudoscience or misinterpretations of actual research that's out there, and I guess maybe that's a product of it just being easier for certain athletes who don't maybe have access to a sport psychologist for them to go and look at either pop psychology or self-help books, stuff like that where it's more likely they are going to come across some of this incorrect information, right?

HUGH GILMORE:

Well, it's easy but more importantly what's important is that how easily does the concept fit into that athlete and what are the consequences of that. So there may be positive consequences from a pseudoscientific intervention. I will give you a really good example. One of – you might have heard of Steve Peters and his Chimp Paradox? And

Steve was well-renowned and worked with loads of people and there's a psychiatrist which, as you know, after becoming a doctor, you are going to study psychiatry, and that's all fine, but I spoke with him, questioned him at one of his conferences where I said first of all the Chimp Paradox if you've got only one tool, such as a hammer, you treat every problem as a nail, when does this Chimp Paradox approach not work. And his response was it works all the time every time, if it doesn't work with somebody I don't work with them. And straightaway that's a red flag to me because that's confirmation bias.

And the next question was, okay, what's the mechanism behind it. He talked around the mechanism essentially that there is activity in the hippocampus compared to the rest of the prefrontal cortex is more dense and nerves travel faster and we are essentially always switched on to look out for danger. But he said, I could go and look up the research myself. I am not – but again, that's the mechanism, it's not actually a process of how you get somebody to change. And certainly that's an in-built process, it's not something we can physically change in someone, we need to know the tools to actually help somebody deregulate so they are not always in a state of anxiety or threat.

And then the follow-up question was does the idea of a chimp inside our head not create a homunculus argument, not make fancy words for saying who's in charge of the chimp. Is there another chimp inside the chimp's head? Where does this end, it's like a Russian dull argument essentially. So he wasn't really happy with that, because essentially I've taken his book and in three questions, taken it apart in front of his audience. No, he wasn't happy, but he spoke to me afterwards and we actually had a good conversation. But the thing is, that idea is salesy, it's easy to grasp, we understand that we do lose our temper and we have to control it, we are logical but the consequence of it is it also takes responsibility, where, for the person,

if you can blame the chimp, if you can blame the idea, so what's the contraindications of any intervention, where does it go wrong; and if you are blaming the chimp, then you are not in a space where you can grow or we can learn or you can take responsibility or what – psychologists like the term autonomy.

So if you create an idea, the consequences of that idea might be that it backfires against the process of actually changing the person and helping the person move towards the place where they want to be or more behaviors where they want to behave the way they want to be. I think, there's a really great paper, I can't remember, I think it's Cebador or somebody like that, about metaphor and decision making; so if you, for example, treat crime, a virus and you feel crime is a virus, people will be more likely to treat the sources such as poverty and inequality in society and opportunity; whereas if I label crime as a beast, then you are more likely to have harsher penalties and more difficult, a more abrupt and severe consequences for people to make in crime. So if the metaphor and this is what should keep you up at night is if the metaphor or the understanding of your world is incorrect then maybe influencing your behavior in a way that you are not actually aware of that, that's just scary when you think of that, that people's core beliefs or core understandings which maybe based on metaphor from a book that's been sold here could be completely wrong, it could alter new behavior.

So that's why I think if anybody does know me, they know I am quite outspoken and maybe even too challenging at times, about the over-reliance of psychology on metaphors or things like that, which without actually considering their contraindications, I don't know if I answered the question, but I think it's something towards there.

DANNY LENNON:

With this kind of understanding that there may be some misconceptions within sport

psychology or at least psychology that athletes are maybe using in a misguided fashion, when we start to look at some of the strategies that could be useful for athletes that are evidence based, there's probably two different ways I would like to talk about this, first is maybe if we look at some kind of acute strategies because I think this is what most athletes tend to think about a lot of time, what can I do as I am going into training or before a competition or a game that may help, and then maybe afterwards we can look at some of the long term, bigger picture stuff which I think sometimes, at least in my experience a lot of athletes can forget about or maybe not recognize as part of this whole deal in terms of planning long term. So to start with some of the acute strategies, I suppose one of the typical questions I am sure you've had many times from athletes is as they are preparing on any given day to try and maximize their performance as they are going into the gym to train or if they are going out onto the field, if there's a practice session, is there a couple of useful things, straightaway that any athlete can start implementing, that might be useful or how do they even start thinking about incorporating any useful practices.

HUGH GILMORE:

First things first, the biggest thing a sport psychology can do is enhance somebody's confidence and the biggest source of confidence is past previous experience. So what have they done like that, and what that means is how can you replicate training within the training environment, so for example, same as this is going, I tell all the people who are going to the European Powerlifting Conference, if you are a powerlifter and you are going to your competition, have you done your warm-up weights, have you done them in competition, and similarly have you done them in a situation where you might have to warm up within 10 minutes or warm up within 30 minutes depending on how the board changes, so the actual dynamic of the competition environment might change and your – when you come out to

do your weight, and because of that, then you must be able to adapt to the changes within the environment and you are going to have a higher likelihood of being adaptable to that if you have adopted within the adrenal environment. So if you've done training whereby you have to warm up in 10 minutes and warm up in 30 minutes or you've got delays in between your lifts and like a competition, so it's actually replicated in some of the competition in your training, I think that's the biggest thing that you see going wrong.

And you can see, I mean, it doesn't matter whether that's in hurling or Olympics Weightlifting or running, a lot of different things happen in competition day. One of them is obviously weigh-in, refueling, even though logistics of getting to your competition, those logistics create stress and that stress brings in uncertainty. So you want to do everything you can to realize that you are competent in uncertainty. And if you become competent in uncertainty, you become competent whenever you are competing essentially. That would be how I would underpin it.

A great sort of model that I used, you've got three things, you've got perceived importance of the competition, perceived demands or task demands of the competition and your perceived resources. So as a coach or athlete, if I was becoming stressed, and if you imagine like you've got the Inverted U Theory or the Catastrophe Theory but we are trying to bring somebody's level of arousal to an optimum level. You can understand what to change when you look at the demands of the task versus the resources that they have and the importance. So by increasing the importance, I could say that an athlete or an athlete could say themselves, look it's just the competition, it doesn't matter, I've still got another attempt to qualify, it's not that important or it's just my first attempt. And they can reduce the importance of the action, that would reduce the

pressure. Similarly, the task demands, somebody might be nervous about going out to take a deadlift or going out to the bench or take a free hurling but they can reduce the demands by focusing on the very small aspect of the first part of the skill, which is kind of go out, take a deep breath, grab the bar and get set underneath the bar and everything else will fall into place or similarly within a free, within hurling, can I go out, get myself lined up, set myself over the ball and just roll it up onto the stick.

So you've reduced the demands of the task by not getting them to focus on the full task, and that then will obviously make it more achievable. Everything else, if they are a decent competitor, it should become automatic from that stage, so you are just essentially telling them to put the key in the engine and get it started. And the other thing is resources, you can then get them to draw on or if they can draw it on themselves, what are my resources here, I've done this weight before, I've hit 3-0 from this distance before, I am trained, amplifying their recall of those previous successes will enhance their level of confidence in that environment. Similarly, if I wanted to create pressure, I could do the opposite with all three of those areas. So that would be a very good strategy.

I think, there's also, you could go into that pre-performance routines as well, and there's a good bit of research in those. And some people might confuse pre-performance routines with rituals and what pre-performance routine is essentially creating that level of arousal through self-talk, through visualization, through physical preparation and understanding how you optimally create a pattern that gets you in a place where you are ready to lift. And they are very important in advanced people so everybody uses the example of Jonny Wilkinson because of his strange dance when he was kicking in rugby. That is essentially him getting into a pattern

that he performs, he focuses on the pattern, which allows a skill or a behavior, which allows a skill then to become automatic, because the problem is when you are very competent as a performer, if you think about the skill, then it actually brings it back from this competent stage automatic learning or autonomous stage and then to the cognitive stage when you think about it.

And if I asked you to get up now from your seat, and think about how you walk and walk around the house, there's a good chance you will find that it's very clunky and not smooth and the reason is because you are actually thinking about it as opposed to whenever you walk normally about the place, it's very automatic. So you have to occupy the head if you are an experienced performer whereas if you are an inexperienced performer you want to keep things simple and just like a simple queue that they can focus on or simple task so that it's not overwhelming.

DANNY LENNON:

Perfect. So there's I suppose three big ideas there which we can pull back each into some different level of detail. Obviously, you just mentioned some pre-performance routines that you can talk about. Arousal was another one, I definitely want to get into some stuff around that. And then the first part that you mentioned right at the outset there was trying to enhance confidence in the task at hand or whether that being a specific task or the competition in general, and within that building confidence through looking at their perceived resources, perceived importance, and perceived demand. One thing that maybe would stand out that differs between sports is if you take that example of someone drawing on previous success whether that's in golf or football or taking a free or any of the examples we can think of where someone will have done it before, to varying different levels of performance and then trying to use memories of their highest performance as a good way to

show them that they can actually go and do this thing.

For something like weightlifting, when you are working with weightlifters, where inherently a lot of the time they are going to be trying to break personal records, so by nature, they can't hit that specific performance at least in terms of the absolute loading the bar previously, how do you go about still building that confidence that they can do it even though they wouldn't have actually done something like that before?

HUGH GILMORE:

So in that situation, what you are actually looking for is does the training indicate that the performance is there, so if you can hit a double with 160 in the bench, all right, what does that indicate, what do you think that could indicate for your one rep max? So historically, if you've done a double say at a 100, it maybe that you've got 103 in the tank. If your training, so let's say you've got 3 kilo, then increase on any double that you can do, if your training then indicates that you've done 170 for double, chances are you can probably hit 172 or something, 173, and that should be easy enough, given past results. So in elite performance, we rely a lot on data, so we understand that if somebody is hitting PRs in all the rest of their lifts and all the rest of the accessory lifts, that are up over time, means that the potential is in the tank for a new PB. So you can nearly even see the PBs coming whenever they are hitting PBs in accessory lifts or rep maxes, and that then becomes something that you can base the source of confidence on.

Similarly, like within weightlifting I think, I was speaking to Shawn Jaffe who was the former S&C scientist for British Weightlifting, he's now at St. Mary's Twickenham university, lecturing there, he was saying that we want people to be back squatting their one rep max, that allows them off their ratios to hit the lifts that they want to hit in competition eight weeks out. So eight weeks out they know they've got the strength there to do it. That gives them

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confidence and then after that the rest of their weeks is built bringing the training towards intensity, refining the technical work of actually competition skill as opposed to maybe partial lifts or hangs on bars, things like that. So confidence comes from training numbers, you have to look at other sources to bring your confidence in. Similarly, people go into championships status within hurling or Gaelic football or within netball and it will be based on the work that they've done.

A great analogy that I heard somebody use before was everybody talks about the harvest but nobody talks about the farming, and if they'd done the farming, if they'd put the work in, then you are going to reap the harvest but chasing, don't really like to chase but it makes perfect sense as I understand it.

DANNY LENNON:

With that I do want to get onto this concept of arousal because at least for me personally this is something I've been interested in, I ended up doing my final year project for my undergrad degree actually on this concept of looking at is there an optimal arousal level for athletic performance. And so, essentially for people who maybe unfamiliar, just this idea of how psyched up should we get as opposed to not psyched up enough or overly psyched – or generally that's what people may think of it as – obviously within arousal for sporting performance, there's a number of different models that are being proposed over the years in different hypotheses, just based on where the kind of current literature is at what do you think is the most accurate way to view or is there a best model right now for viewing optimal arousal levels for performance?

HUGH GILMORE:

What I would say to you is I am not an academic as such, I don't deliver lectures and I am not a big researcher in that area, but from that applied point there's a best model and that's the model that fits you, and your history, your performance history. So if we find out for example that you've been over-aroused and

that affected your performance, and we find out you'd been under-aroused in another competition, we are going to have a conversation around that and try and work out what's known as the individual zone of optimal functioning or IZOF model. I mean, regardless of that, it's basically from an applied perspective, it's not about a model. George Box was a statistician, I think he was one of the people who helped with code breaking in the World War and he said all models are wrong, but some models are useful.

So if we look at that from an applied setting, I want to know what is it you do to hype yourself up and when are you too hyped up, what are the signals around that, and similarly when are you not hyped up enough and how do you bring you up. So can we move between over hyped up and under hyped up or over aroused and under aroused so that you have control of that situation. Another really good thing is that your appraisal, so there's like appraisal models within psychology: primary and secondary appraisal. So you might appraise that your "heart rate is beating" and then because your heart rate is beating your secondary appraisal might be "oh no I am nervous because my heart is pounding". But one of the things the things I do with people is get them to write down all of the symptoms of being excited.

So I want you to imagine, you've just asked the girl you fancy out on a date or it's Christmas morning and you are a kid again, how are you physically going to feel, what people will write down will be, my heart rate is pounding, my palms are sweating, I've got butterflies in the stomach, I feel nervous and jittery, I've got this jittery energy. And those physical symptoms will be the physical symptoms of excited. And then what I'll do is go stick on a video of a guy called Jamie Kingston doing a backflip on top of a bridge in Prague and what that causes in people when the first time they see something like that, is it causes jitteriness, it causes blood to rush out to their stomach, it causes the heart

rate to beat because of more neurons and just recognizing the danger involved in that, it makes people feel uncomfortable. And what you find is that the physical symptoms of excitedness and over-arousal are the exact same as the physical symptoms of nervousness.

So when you actually appraise that, those symptoms come about because of the adrenal glands dumping in adrenaline into your body to say it's fight or flight time, and one situation you perceive it as being excited and ready but in another situation you perceive it as being nervous, and there's no difference between the two. So what you need to do is start appraising it as whenever you feel nervous, you go that's nervousness but it's also excitement, it's also adrenaline and it's also adrenaline that's going to help me run faster, hit harder, jump higher or whatever it is you are about to do. So I think it's that cognitive appraisal of what's actually happening within your warm-up or preparation. I think also the other one that I think as every psychologist you go to it's just better breathing – I mean, if we take a deep breath and breathe in slowly, breathe out slowly, it naturally seems to bring us back down from that edge of being nervous because we calm down a bit.

And I suppose another great tactic within that in terms of – I know I am not specifically talking about models here, but from an applied point of view is can I give time and space to any decisions or actions that need to be made, and it takes the pressure off people, and that then allows you to get in control of your level of arousal more so.

DANNY LENNON:

Right, yeah. I totally get that, and as you perfectly put it, I think models are there to give us a general guide of what might play out most of the time on the average but really for a lot of things, when it comes to apply practice, probably aren't all that much informative for the individual. One thing I do want to ask about was earlier when you mentioned looking

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at perceived resources, perceived importance and perceived demand, and how we can maybe use some strategies, maybe in some cases to lower them or to decrease the pressure, to move some of them downwards, presumably then there might be cases where we might want to go the opposite direction. I am just thinking in the same way that we sometimes can have too little or too much arousal, could it be the same with say the demand on the athlete or the challenge that the athlete feels from a certain thing if that goes too low, then that can negatively affect performance just as much as the challenge or the demand feeling too high?

HUGH GILMORE:

I believe there's research actually on how over-confidence can create underperformance. So essentially it creates an arrogance in that you don't put the same effort in and that's how people then get, you know, then underperform and there's loads of examples of that on YouTube where you see people who are like just about to cross a finish line in athletics or whatever and somebody then speeds on past them. So, I think it's a case of – and this is actually, if you want to take one thing away from me and my understanding of psychology, as everything is good, everything is bad, you have to understand where the optimal level is, so you want confidence but you don't want arrogance, you don't want low confidence. You want that, to use a term, the Goldilocks zone – you've heard the story of Goldilocks – it has to be just right, and you have to be able to get that just right amount of it and tab your performance. Too often, we think about things and oh we just need more confidence, you can have too much, we just need more planning, you can have too much. What's the cost or what's the contraindication of whatever it is you are trying to increase? It could well be that you might perform best when you are actually at a low level of arousal.

So I think it is about finding that Goldilocks zone with whatever it is you do. If you are going to try to raise somebody's sort of arousal, I

suppose really what you are looking for is increasing the importance of that and increasing the demands of the difficulty of the task. And I think again, if you look at skill learning, people learn skills faster whenever they are difficult and complex but they have to be within what's known as Vygotsky Zone of – ZPD, Zone of Proximal Development. So that has to be just far enough in front of you that it's challenging but achievable, but not too far that it's too challenging, and generally then it can't be too close to you or too easy, otherwise it won't be challenging and it won't develop you and you won't engage in it with the same amount.

And again, that research again would overlap with flow states and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi who wrote a great book on flow, that's a book worth reading. So yeah, I mean, it's all about does the challenge meet the needs of learner. If somebody is too under aroused or too high at confidence that they are not getting up for it, it's either not a challenge and they shouldn't be there or it's probably complete lack of appraisal of the severity of the situation in front of them.

DANNY LENNON:

One thing I wanted to get into was maybe looking at long term strategies as well, because we've obviously talked about some things that can be applied acutely or at least that are looking at upcoming performance. And as I said earlier, I think a lot of athletes probably think about those things. For the, I suppose, role of a sport psychologist, it can obviously extend far beyond that and I am sure you take a much wider view of how you can help an athlete and a lot of that is probably down to the over the long term of things that you want to change. So, I mean, you can correct me if I am wrong on some of the stuff we will get into and I am sure there's many areas that you can point out as well. But I think one that's probably an obvious place to start for some people is this goal setting and how people can plan in long term using appropriate goal setting strategies. So with goal setting, I am sure it's probably

very similar to what we saw earlier where there is lots of information on this topic that people can get access to, however, it's not all created equal a lot of the time. So what are some of the, I suppose, fundamental things you feel athletes should know about goal setting and what are maybe some common mistakes or misconceptions they may have around what goal setting exactly is?

HUGH GILMORE:

Okay, so goal setting is – it's nearly like a panacea for every single problem that you have, and the first thing is that it doesn't work if you don't do it right and very few people do it right. So, if I am going to set a goal to lose weight, or I am going to set a goal to go to Olympics, the same things apply, one is does it fit in with your life, not are you setting a goal for that end result. So what you want to look at is does the person have adequate goals for their entire life and does it fit in with their concept of what they are trying to do in their life. Because if their life is boozing down the pub or if their life is more so to do with social stuff or getting away to places and seeing the world, it's not going to be as controllable or as optimal for me to prepare for the Olympics or try to lose weight.

So one of the ways I approach this is very basic way, that's outlined in the book, *Sporting Body, Sporting Mind*, which is one of the first books I ever bought. And it was essentially write down everything you want to achieve in your life in five minutes, write it down the page, take another page, after five minutes, you stop writing, chances are most people will write down five or six things, and then you realize, well, if that's all I want to achieve in my life, I am not going to have a great life.

And so you take another page and you write down what do you want to achieve in the next five years, five years is actually something you can plan for, you can probably, you can't really plan for your whole life, it's going to be lots of unknowns pop in but five years you might be

able to plan for with some degree of certainty. And you write down everything you want to achieve in the next five years, then you go shorter again, what's everything you want to achieve in the next year say, do the same thing, spend five minutes writing everything down. Then you go down to the next month or next three months, a small period of time, do the exact same process, spend five minutes writing everything down.

Then go through what you have in all those pages and label two As, two things in each page with B and everything else is a C. So what you've done is you just prioritized everything that's important throughout each time period within your life, and then you can see what actually links in and what doesn't link in, and does that relate to with this supposed idealistic goal that you might have in your head. If you can get your goals to fit in with your overall life, then you've got a good chance of success, because what you have is in agreement with your understanding of your life and also this short scale or a big hairy audacious goals as it's called in some lecture.

So the reason I take that approach is because everyone is forced by this idea of smarter goals, specific measurable achievable time based or whatever. And actually if you look that up on the internet, you can get many different words for the SMART and it becomes confusing. We can go and take research and summarize it down to five ladders and take that 30-40 years of research is summarizable to five ladders, that's just a tool and we need to be critical about the tool, and there's a paper by Shepherd that is very critical on it, it's called Will the Real Goal setting Please Stand Up, kind of like M&M. But where I will go with that, the goals then, people think that you have to be positive and being positive is actually a terrible thing when it comes to setting goals, because if you think it's going to be easy, chances are you are going to feel frustrated.

You have to then identify what are the blockers, what are the things that are going to prevent you doing that. So the thing that might prevent you from going to the Olympics or losing weight might be your social circle, your friends, your family or the activities that you take on the side. And then you are going to have to start and weigh up what life changes you make. So you have to identify the blockers and then come up with a plan to get around the things that are going to block you from the goal. More often than not, I find the performance is limited by things as opposed to enhanced by things I do. And what I mean by that is I look for the things that hold back performance and try and remove those, because that's easier and that's like removing a dam from a river, as opposed to trying to build a river because people I suppose get quite deeper, people work in a complex system and they are themselves a collection of systems whether it be sales, muscle tissue, habits, the patterns and the social patterns and networks they are in, a very complex river and it's very hard to build something as complex as a human or human behavior. So what I find is much easier to actually remove things that are going to prevent achievement and that's the first step of setting goals.

There's good research by Gabriele Oettingen on mental contrasting with implementation intentions, which essentially is what I just said, find out what you are going to trip up on and how you are going to deal with it and the implementation intentions are what am I going to do when this trip-up happens. So I worked with a sprinter and one of the things that he was worried about was getting injured. So as you can imagine, he was getting ready for big competition, did rather well. But he was worried about getting injured and especially whenever he put on spikes because he was thinking if I put on spikes, I'd increase my traction on the ground which increases forces, which increases load on hamstrings and increases risk, and you are even more stressed

when you are ready to compete at your best, because that's when performance is most vulnerable because you are at the highest level of performance, therefore your system and your structures are under stress at that time, so a very logical fear.

So what we did was we did an “if... then” plan; if you get injured what's the protocol, how do we deal with, was it assessed, get range of motion, get a rehab plan in place and begin the treating towards the next event with the rehab plan in place. As luck would have it, he did get injured and the feedback I got from him was it was brilliant, it's the first time I've been injured and knew straightaway within two minutes what was going to happen. Because he had that plan ready and as a result he was able to get rehab, maybe not fully, but to a point where he was able to go off and compete and did a good show in the next competition which was the biggest one that I've been training for with him. So it's like do you have a plan for when it goes wrong and that's how you set goals effectively.

So the idea of having a plan which essentially looks to overcome any obstacle that comes into your way is how you should set goals. So you've got that aligned overall structure that fits in with your life but then strategies that deal with any setbacks that you are going to face along the way is essentially how you set goals. And you have to be able to adapt to those situations that come up, but similarly over that process of working through your three-month or six-month to a year to your five-year goals and your life goals, you are going to actually start to change those. Some goals will drop off, some goals will drop in as you achieve ones and new goals come in. So it's important to redo that process periodically if you want to be a properly goal-driven person.

DANNY LENNON:

Yeah, that's excellent. I think it's worth recapping for people on one of those particular things you mentioned around, I suppose pushing back against this mantle of always

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having to think positive, particularly when it comes to goal setting like you said of putting something in place and then just blindly thinking this is going to happen now because I am setting as a goal and it almost doesn't allow you to I suppose be able to cope when things are presumably for every worthwhile goal at some stage is going to get tough. So a better strategy you talked about was essentially planning for the worst via using these implementation intentions, so by saying if X happens, then Y is going to be the response, and then you are already building in this kind of, I suppose, robust ability to cope with challenges along that path. Is that kind of a correct way to think of it?

HUGH GILMORE:

Yeah. That's essentially – probably summarized it a lot more succinctly than I did.

DANNY LENNON:

Not at all, I am just going off your work, so all credit to you on that. We are coming up call to time here Hugh so we will start wrapping things up. Before I get to the very final question, for people who are maybe interested in finding you on social media or more of your work online or the blog or anything like that, where is the best place for them to get in contact with you online?

HUGH GILMORE:

I suppose if you want to get in contact with me, you can check my website, which is under development sort of, it's work in progress, I am not a very technological person. But if you want to see my answer or retweets about things, you can check me out on Twitter and that's @hughjgilmore, and so either podiumpsychology.com or hughjgilmore. I do have a Facebook but again it doesn't get updated much as well, so that would be where I would go to and feel free to drop me a line if you have a question or anything that will be relevant for the European Powerlifting Conference in Dublin.

DANNY LENNON:

Perfect. And for everyone listening, I will link up to any of that relevant stuff in show notes of

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this episode, so you can check all of that out. And with that Hugh that brings us to the final question that I always round out the show on, and this can be to do with anything even completely outside of today's topic if you wish. It's a big broad question and it's simply: if you could advise people to do one thing each day that would have a positive impact on any area of their life, what would that one thing be?

HUGH GILMORE:

Speak the truth where they know it and take responsibility for speaking it. If you do that, you are going to get somewhere and be humble when you do it because you can't really ever know the truth, so present it in such a way so it's essentially engaged and finding that truth and take responsibility for it. Most people will sit by and not challenge or speak up and I think you want to really get somewhere when you actually say look I don't understand or I disagree if you've got evidence for it. And that's whether you are sitting on a Board of Directors or you are a coach or a player, it doesn't matter, speak the truth and take responsibility for speaking it.

DANNY LENNON:

I like it, a brilliant way to run this out. I really enjoyed that and I really enjoyed the discussion today Hugh, so thank you so much for taking the time out to do this.

HUGH GILMORE:

No worries, my pleasure and it's quite an honor to get on this podcast, considering all other great people you have on your list, so thank you very much, it's a pleasure to have me.

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