

# Safe Sport and Building a Physically and Psychologically Safe Culture

---

[werthner@ucalgary.ca](mailto:werthner@ucalgary.ca)

DIVING  
PLONGEON  
CANADA

## What I will talk about:

- (Safe Sport)
- Psychological Safety
- *Leadership* — clear purpose, effective communication, building trust and self-responsibility, a learning culture
- *Challenge and support*

# Psychological safety

- **Edmondson (1999), Edmondson & Lei (2014)** – a group level approach – “a shared belief by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking.”
- **Bean et al., (2020)** “an environment that allows youth to feel both free from being physically harmed and accepted and respected”
- **Two aspects** – not be rejected for being oneself; mistakes will not lead to negative consequences

# Psychological safety – *in a high- performance sport culture*

- concerns with the definition
- concerns with how it “fits” for high performance sport
- lack of awareness with potential disadvantages

Sarkar – “The potential danger of translating research that’s been done in business to sport is that elite sport is inherently unsafe. Things like selection or funding are not in people’s control and it automatically creates an unsafe environment. It might be a case of not necessarily creating psychological safety per se but managing traditionally what are psychologically unsafe environments.”

# So how does it translate, when....

- selection processes
- Individualistic, determined
- variability within the “team” – i.e. funding, sponsorship
- “comfortable” ??
- “accountable” ??

# And....

- need to be able to ask questions
- to provide feedback
- to take risks
- need to address issues
- need to understand the buzz words – athlete-centered, coach-led, psychological safety

[werthner@ucalgary.ca](mailto:werthner@ucalgary.ca)

# Creating a learning culture - three challenges

## #1

- **Self-awareness** - awareness of your strengths and weaknesses, and how your behaviour is affecting others
- **Emotional control** - Managing oneself well in the inherent stress of the high- performance environment

**Essential - a willingness to look deeply at your behaviours and be open to learning, and therefore potential change**

# Creating a learning culture - three challenges

#2

- Effectively managing conflict/issues

*“The conversation is the relationship”*

Susan Scott, Fierce Conversations

werthner@ucalgary

---

DIVING  
PLONGEON  
CANADA



# Creating a learning culture - three challenges

**#3**

**Leadership – requires making decisions**

**Challenging (“demanding”) and supporting (“relational”)**

**Builds resilience, builds agency**

(Din et al., 2015; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2012, 2015; Ungar, 2013, 2017, Vande Broek, 2020 )

---

werthner@ucalgary

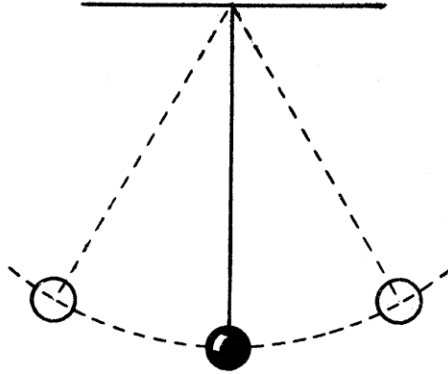
DIVING  
PLONGEON  
CANADA

# Creating a high-performance culture that *challenges* and *supports* an athlete/team

Is the athlete ready  
for more  
challenge?



Does the athlete  
need more support?



## Technical

- the sport, and sport science

## Leadership

- Strong values, clear vision and purpose, effective communication skills

# Leadership

– clear on purpose, and clear, concise and consistent on messages

- Do the athletes know what's expected of them?
- Are they clear on the Diving Plongeon Canada goals?  
On their individual goals?
- Do they have specific objectives for each training session?

# Communication

We all communicate, but.....

How good a communicator are you?  
What is one situation you find challenging?

# “Lavish Communication”

(Max DePree)

## Three key components:

- **Active listening** – listening to understand, asking questions
- **Clear and concise messages**
- **Effective interventions** – willing to act, to intervene

# Challenge:

1. Do I convey the purpose of the team/individual clearly, concisely and consistently?
2. Do I actively listen to the athletes?
3. Am I willing to change my behaviour when I recognize my mistakes?
4. Do I proactively deal with issues when they arise, intervene, have the **difficult conversation(s)** vs ignoring the problem?
5. Do I seek help to improve, to deal with persistent challenges/issues?
6. Can I convey a demanding, high level of excellence while also supporting athlete agency?
7. Am I clear with my sport science/sport medicine support staff about their roles, their boundaries? Am I clear to the coach/team I work with about what is needed?

# Key Takeaways:

**Challenge and support** – your critical task

**Effective communication skills** – listening, asking questions, speaking clearly and concisely, managing conflict

**Open to feedback, and on-going learning**



**Merci**  
**Thank you**

---

[werthner@ucalgary.ca](mailto:werthner@ucalgary.ca)

**DIVING  
PLONGEON  
CANADA**