

**Case Study Final Project**

Matthew J. McCarthy

University of Western States

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Dr. Maryrose Blank

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## Case Study 11 - How Dan Manages Coach-Induced Stress

Dan is a redshirt sophomore linebacker on a D-1 collegiate football team. He came out of the Fall season as a starter, but a coaching change occurred and he is in a fight for a starting spot again in Spring practice. Dan had a bad first scrimmage where he graded out at 55%, but he played extremely well after in both practices and scrimmages. Dan's coach seems to like another player a lot for Dan's position, and even though Dan seems to have clearly outplayed his rival, scrimmage grades don't reflect his superiority. Dan has tried to talk to his coach twice, the first time to have him explain his scrimmage grade and the second time to ask what he needed to work on to get more time with the first team. In both cases, his coach seemed to get upset with him and accused him of being "selfish" and putting his personal needs ahead of the team.

**What does "primary appraisal" tell Dan? Is there a potential threat or challenge to his physical and psychological well-being goals?**

Dan is engaged in a stressful event and using the primary appraisal cognitive process, it is safe to decide his coach is using (Cotterill, 2017), which contribute to the loss of his starting position. There are no indications of a physical challenge, but a few psychological manipulations are at hand.

According to self-determination theory, psychological health is predicated on *autonomy*, *competence*, and *relatedness* (Cotterill, 2017). When these needs are thwarted a lack of perceived control results in anxiety, hopelessness, burnout, and dropout (Cotterill, 2017). Psychological needs thwarting behaviors include controlling the use of rewards, negative conditional regard, and intimidation (Cotterill, 2017). The coach is presenting thwarting by withholding the reward of feedback on performance. He is using negative regard with body language and accusations of "selfish" behavior. Finally, he is using intimidation Dan telling him he is putting his personal needs ahead of the team.

Stress guru Richard Lazarus suggests athletes appraise stressful information in three ways: competitive demand, personal control, and coping strategies (Burton, 2008). These are similar to Cotterill's categories and give a practitioner two similar views of stress management.

**What does Dan learn from "secondary appraisal?" Does he feel like he has enough "personal control" over the situation to reduce or eliminate the threat? Can the problem potentially be resolved? Does Dan have the "coping potential" to make things better?**

Secondary appraisal is the cognitive process where an athlete figures out the source of stress, determines if they believe they have the ability to overcome the stress, and then how to cope with the events (Burton, 2008). Dan feels he has outplayed his rival, so we can assume he feels he has the capabilities to perform as the starter. The source of his stress is a little more complicated because it is currently out of his control and largely unknown. He performed poorly at a scrimmage, feels the coach prefers another player at his position and has received negative feedback from the coach on two occasions.

While Dan does not have control over his coach's feedback or feelings, he would feel some resolution of the current situation with communication from his coach that reduces his uncertainty. Specifically, the coach is not letting Dan know where he stands. Dan can potentially lead the coach towards an area where he is comfortable giving him feedback, but as the saying goes, you can lead a horse to water but can't make it drink. Dan has the desire and seems to have the capabilities to improve his performance and this situation.

**What type of a "coping program" should Dan try to implement to effectively deal with his stress? Should he use "problem management" coping strategies? If so, what? Should he use "emotion management" coping strategies? If so, what?**

Dan can work to resolve the situation by using a coping strategy to reduce uncertainty by continuing to ask for understanding and for the coach to clearly define the standards for his position and what he needs to expand his role (Burton, 2008). Dan does not have control over the coach sending vague nonverbal and negative messages that leave him unclear of reasons for his disapproval. Dan can use the coping strategy of deploying constructive confrontation skills with the coach and others to solicit corrective feedback and get clear expectations (Burton, 2008).

Dan has a large problem and therefore the use of all four problem management strategies is required (Burton, 2008). Unfortunately, Dan is at a huge disadvantage in using competitive engineering

and problem solving (Burton, 2008) without useful feedback from his coach. To compensate he can put more emphasis on personal engineering and mental plans (Burton, 2008). By setting personal progress and performance goals he will increase his confidence in his own abilities. By using imagery for adverse conditions and building back-up performance and recovery plans, Dan will be better prepared to deal with a lack of communication and hostilities; and increase his confidence.

Emotional stresses usually present as arousal-induced behavior like pre-event jitters, and thought-induced anxiety, like psyching one's self out before an event (Burton, 2008). If things do not improve with the coach Dan's emotions could get raw and emotional management skills will help counter negative thoughts and keep in motivated. Dan could employ Ravizza's 7 Rs of responsibility, recognize, release, regroup, refocus, ready, and respond to understand what is in his in his control & our of his control to rationalize his emotions and motivations.

**What type of preparatory stress management should Dan make use of prior to practices and competitions? How are these stress management strategies targeted? What type of reactive stress management techniques would be most helpful to Dan during practices and particularly competitions to handle anxiety? What types of anxiety are these techniques targeted to handle? How?**

Proactive stress management strategies help athletes lower stress levels and develop greater emotional control (Burton, 2008). Using total relaxation and playing self-talk scripts would remind Dan of his skills and enhances emotional control (Burton 2008). To build his self-talk recording, a great technique is to use ESP journaling (Zinsser, 2022) where Dan records efforts, successes, and progress in a journal. Remembering constructive events provides him with a library of successes to reflect on and build confidence.

Reactive emotional management will help Dan maintain composure, control, reduce anxiety, control anger, and manage frustrations (Burton, 2008). Incorporating rapid relaxation and positive self-talk cues (Burton, 2008) into his training will help counter negative thoughts. Dan will want to practice these skills till they become automatic (Burton, 2008). Practicing cues like, "I can do hard things" during

practices and scrimmage will help the behavior become automatic because when the stress hits, we fall to the level of our training.

**How will "challenge appraisals" impact intrinsic motivation? Why? How will "threat appraisals" influence intrinsic motivation? Why?**

Challenge appraisals allow athletes to put a positive spin on competition and prompt athletes to look at obstacles as opportunities to overcome and achieve success (Burton, 2008). Rather than looking at his situation as the coach is giving away my position, Dan can choose to look at it like the coach wants more out of me. He wants me to figure it out on my own, and "I know I can do hard things!" Dan is giving himself process and performance goals and the framework to keep working hard to achieve them.

Conversely, threat appraisals cause fear of failure, pessimism, and ineffective coping strategies that impair performance (Burton, 2008). If Dan tells himself the coach wants him to fail and repeats these thoughts, he is sure enough setting himself to fail.

## References

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