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INTRODUCTION

Strength and conditioning practitioners possess expectations that will be exercised through their professional work. The purpose of this article is to briefly identify the expectation dynamic for strength and conditioning practitioners and to provide a practical mode for operational thought. Expectations can be mutually agreed upon or individually held. Additionally, expectation is a mutual reality in that it can be placed on the strength and conditioning practitioner by the organization or placed on the organization by the strength and conditioning practitioner. Unmet or misaligned expectations may be addressed through a proactive thought process. The consequences of not addressing the expectation gap are significant. However, with focused effort and the demonstration of appropriate professional acuity, strength and conditioning practitioners can assure expectation-based alignment.

EXPECTATIONS

The fast-paced, ever-evolving world of strength and conditioning is closely partnered with the concept of expectation. Exhaustive study of the concept of expectation would be helpful. For the purpose of this article, three types of expectations that strength and conditioning practitioners encounter will be considered: organizational expectation of the strength and conditioning practitioner, strength and conditioning practitioner expectation of the organization, and subgroup expectation of the organization.

Expectations are often sponsored collectively at the organizational level. Quality elements are segmented and promoted in accordance with large-scale outcomes sought after by multiple stakeholder groups (6). Quality elements can be simplistic in nature and include responsibilities, such as arrival times and location assignments. More advanced elements, such as performance in relation to newly formed initiatives or mutually agreed upon team performance benchmarks, are also included (6). These expectations might vary according to administrative personnel. Also, these expectations can change over time with societal changes and advances (10). Generally, from an organizational standpoint, expectations may be driven by things like mission, vision, core values, policy, or mutually agreed upon performance benchmarks. This type of expectation is formal. Effective organizational expectations are measured, evaluated, and reviewed (12). Often, organizational expectations will be overseen by administration or larger governing groups, such as boards or trustees.

However, expectation should not solely be viewed as an organizational reality. Expectations can be personally held by individual strength and conditioning practitioners. This type of expectation is informal and will not be officially reviewed (12). Personal expectations are handled internally and typically tied to the satisfaction of an individual strength and conditioning practitioner (9). Generally, personal expectations will align with contractual obligations and best practices in the field.

Interestingly, organizational realities, such as working conditions and compensation, might influence personal expectations, but do not dictate their formation (10). For example, if someone possesses a strong ability to perform a certain behavior, the expectation of outcome will include the assumed consequences associated with the behavior's performance (5). Expectations may originate from a variety of places. Using a more individual lens, expectations might come from previous experience, personal beliefs or standards, learned traits, or job requirements.

It is possible for subgroups of strength and conditioning practitioners to share specific expectations beyond what is stated organizationally. Stakeholder subgroups might not have complete agreement in all areas of personally held expectations (1). However, on certain items, the subgroup will identify a connectedness that either iterates organizational efficacy, inefficacy, or highlights personal fulfillment. Subgroups are dynamic in that they can be scaffolded to include senior or junior staff and are inclusive of multiple ranking types (12). This sort of expectation is informal in nature but informal review of the items can feel formalized due to group communication.

UNMET EXPECTATIONS

The three types of expectations have a common theme in that they each possess the capacity to go unmet. Focusing on what to do when expectations are not met is a worthwhile endeavor. Unmet expectations could be defined as "the perceived difference between prior expectations and actual experiences in the workplace," (8). While the generation of expectations is a rather simple task, the conjoining of what is expected versus realistic potential is much more complex. Common areas of unmet expectations in strength and conditioning are:

- Facilities (e.g., space, upgrades, access)
- Funding
- Equipment
- Staffing
- School or organizational communication
- Athletic department or athletic director vision
- Access
- Professional development opportunities

The inherent benefit of unmet expectations is that they provide an opportunity for response. The response to unmet expectations can be found through myriad sources. The formal evaluation process can aid in addressing unmet expectations held by the organization or the individual strength and conditioning practitioner. Additionally, proactive communication or committee work are effective means in handling expectations (10). The communicative process (whether shared between individuals or a larger group) will aid in clarity, which can reveal the accuracy

of an unmet expectation (12). Unforeseen changes, such as administrative turnover or position changes, can also impact unmet expectations (10). What requires a deeper examination than onsite efforts within the context of a current placement is the unique foundation of the strength and conditioning practitioner in relation to the field. Previous experiences including placements and associated engagement with the field will guide the strength and conditioning practitioner's thinking (11).

Currently, no common consensus exists on educational or internship experiences required for strength and conditioning practitioners (2). However, common practice in the field is to acquire myriad practicum-type experiences prior to paid work. The complexity of stipend, part-time, and full-time positions lends to the practice of multiple transitions prior to the accomplishment of long-tenured roles (4). With the expansive growth of the field, strength and conditioning practitioners are being influenced by a wide network of professional colleagues, clinics, and publications (10).

The prevalence of exposure in the field is necessary for strength and conditioning practitioners to promote the legitimacy of their work (4). Equally, the accessibility of information is an important tool for growth. However, with these helpful realities comes an unintended companion of expectation. It is possible that the diversity of experience enhances expectations that may have more to do with what strength and conditioning practitioners experienced in previous settings rather than an honest understanding of the present appointment. But placement is pinnacle in this regard. Strength and conditioning practitioners who have engaged in ideal settings might be shielded from the realities of a less than ideal setting. Conversely, those who have been placed in less-than-ideal settings could feel stuck and disenchanting. Extenuating implications of these realities then become cyclical. Regardless, the developed expectation criteria by strength and conditioning practitioners with limited contextual experience can be detrimental in current or future placements.

To be clear, expectations in and of themselves are not all bad. However, expectations alone are not capable of changing a culture or bettering performance. Additionally, misaligned expectations can fracture relationships, enhance emotional exhaustion, and lead to positional burnout (1). Perhaps, most importantly, expectations excuse one entity of responsibility while solely placing the onus of performance on a different entity.

THINKING A-C-T-S

In order to combat improper expectations, strength and conditioning practitioners must differentiate between realistic prospects in their current setting against realities that were or are existent in other field-specific placements. Proactive planning should be seen as a necessary action step to address expectations. Planning in this sense can be demonstrated through an intentional thought process which accounts for past experiences and suggests reflection on the characteristics of the current placement.

To accomplish this, a process-based acronym to aid analytical thought is suggested:

- A** – Assess
- C** – Consider
- T** – Time
- S** – Specify

ASSESS

Strength and conditioning practitioners must determine the capacity of their current placement. In order to do so, they must reflect upon items such as: past decisions, behavior of the board, personality of athletic administrators, funding, and facility allocation. Honest assessment will promote a better understanding of the actual potential present in the current setting of the strength and conditioning practitioner. When true potential has been identified, expectations should be tied to what is actually possible, not what should be possible.

CONSIDER

When assessment of pertinent organizational entities has been completed, strength and conditioning practitioners must determine what can be done to promote development in their setting. A period of reflection, based on previous assessment, will lead to the pursuit of more realistic action steps to support the efforts of the strength and conditioning practitioner and their program at large. The importance of needs and program-based considerations should be taken into account. Foundational items of greatest importance must outweigh the desire to implement things that would be ideal. For example, if the facility does not have enough equipment to support scheduled team workouts, it is of greater importance to address this matter than to press administration on a wall paint upgrade in the strength and conditioning practitioner's office.

TIME

While assessment and consideration are necessary, genuine application of position-specific review requires patience. Common unmet expectations (such as those stated above) cannot always be remediated with identification or logical communication. Strength and conditioning practitioners should anticipate a season of waiting between requests and collective action. Additionally, when follow-through is achieved, the season of waiting can be used as a foundation for trust between the strength and conditioning practitioner and the school or organization.

SPECIFY

Just as in programming, specificity must be used when balancing expectation. What the strength and conditioning practitioner identifies as a need or useful expectation should be targeted, clear, and easily consumable for multiple stakeholders.

While ACTS is a tool for assistance, it is not an encompassing cure-all. ACTS should be seen as a mechanism for expectation-based focus. Expectations should be paired with existing potential.

Additionally, a mutual understanding between stakeholders is beneficial for the implementation of ACTS. Prior experience and best practices in the field might inform the ACTS process, but outcomes should be unique to the considered setting relative to existing capability and shared intentions. The use of ACTS will aid strength and conditioning practitioners in concentrating on the elimination of the gap in expectation. However, there are potential consequences when expectations remain unchecked.

THE PROCESS

Strength and conditioning practitioners could be exposed to a series of harmful emotions due to expectation misalignment. First, professional agitation could set in. Agitation in this sense should not be seen as an emotive response fueled by anger; rather, a professional agitation due to an inability to exercise meaningful personal performance, provide assistance to the organization, or promote the field at large. When expectations are not met, strength and conditioning practitioners can become agitated with athletic administrators or boards who they perceive do not act in their (or their program's) best interests. However, agitation is not distinct from action. In this portion of reality, there will be continued communication with administration and active attempts to address matters in real time.

The emotion of agitation will lend to stagnation. The characteristic of stagnation will be driven by a sense of hopelessness that since their expectations cannot be met, there is no use in "fighting" for the change desired. The difference in expectations versus reality will stagnate the strength and conditioning practitioner as the weight of their skewed view of potential permeates repetitive thinking. Finally, the combination of personal frustration and professional stagnation can lead to career investigation. The often-false cliché of "the grass is greener on the other side" becomes an attractive legitimization when the sensation of feeling "stuck" due to unmet expectations is a prevalent daily thought.

A much healthier way of avoiding the harmful emotional path that leads to career investigation is the use of ACTS. ACTS will introduce strength and conditioning practitioners to attaining accurate expectations through a great amount of intentionality. Strength and conditioning practitioners are far too organizationally valuable to be enticed by a faulty flow of thought. How the individual strength and conditioning practitioner applies intentionality to the ACTS process is largely subjective. Generally, three traits of professional capacity will be required to be enacted together. Figure 3 illustrates the connectedness of the professional competencies needed for proper expectation-based processing. However, it is recommended that the characteristics of humility, empathy, and perseverance be used in conjunction with the ACTS phases.

The demonstration of humility is a difficult task, especially in the face of valuable prior experiences and acquired knowledge. Humility can overcome the personal pride and may encourage connection with diverse stakeholders in an

attempt to align expectations. The goal for all strength and conditioning practitioners is to support their programs and advocate accordingly. The professional attribute of humility may help connect strength and conditioning practitioners to solutions because the actualization of potential is the primary shared purpose.

With humility comes the concept of empathy. Empathetic concern speaks to the strength and conditioning practitioner's ability to anticipate the magnitude of existence being lived by those who are on the opposite side of their unmet expectations. This type of thinking challenges the person to find interconnected themes with others (3). When proper empathy is in use, strength and conditioning practitioners will spend more time considering the demands placed on others within their school or organization. In doing this, the assessment and time portions of the ACTS process can be used with great efficacy. With multiple stakeholders involved and validated, traction is possible.

Finally, perseverance should be on display. When using ACTS, strength and conditioning practitioners must not be passive. Perseverance speaks to the innate ability to advocate for what is possible and what is necessary in an appropriate fashion over an undetermined period of time (7). An indicator of perseverance is a demonstration of grit independent of circumstance (7). While perseverance might not always be easy or seem fair, if the expectation-based outcome is achieved (and all stakeholders benefit) then the patience it took to practice perseverance was worthwhile. ACTS will require perseverance both personally and professionally.



FIGURE 1. CONNECTEDNESS OF COMMON AREAS OF UNMET EXPECTATIONS



FIGURE 2. FLOW OF MISALIGNED EXPECTATIONS

CONCLUSION

Expectation is a complicated reality for the modern strength and conditioning practitioner. Expectation can be held by an organization, individual, or group of individuals. Unmet expectations can prove to be a challenge but also provide an opportunity for alignment. By assessing the potential of their current setting and considering specific actions that can take place over a period of time, strength and conditioning practitioners can avoid expectation-based misalignment. The incorporation of ACTS is a tool available for guided thought. With ACTS, strength and conditioning practitioners do not need to focus on their expectations because they are fully committed to meeting realistic needs and working tirelessly on behalf of those who come under their influence.

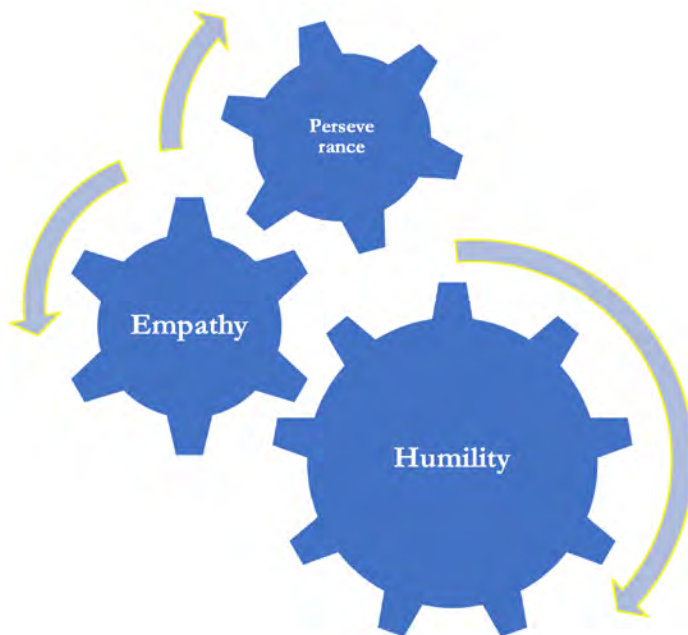


FIGURE 3. COMPETENCY CONNECTEDNESS FOR EXPECTATION-BASED PROCESSING

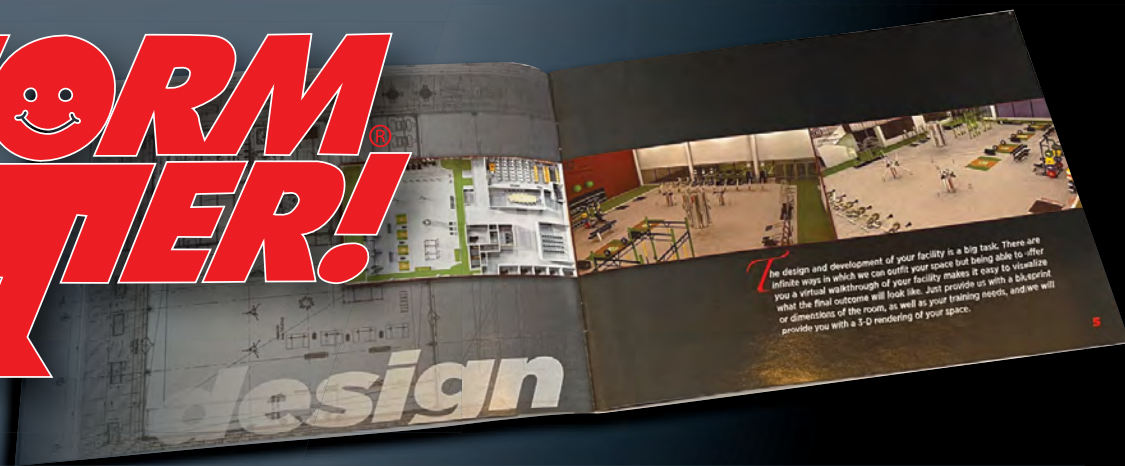
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Craig DeAngelis is currently serving as a strength coach at the interscholastic level, physical education teacher, and as Adjunct Faculty at Liberty University. DeAngelis has degree distinctions from Central Connecticut State University, Liberty University, Southern Connecticut State University, Pennsylvania State University, and the United States Sports Academy. He has an academic focus on organizational behavior and leadership.

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