

PT 1 – Mind's Eye for the PT

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This blog delves into the art of coaching (I am calling working with a client “coaching” for the purpose of this article).

I work in an environment full of newly minted PT’s (many straight out of a CERT III/CERT IV/Sports Science Degree) and what is very evident and in my opinion a huge downfall for the industry is that these PT’s whilst having some level of theoretical knowledge have all but no technique analysis skills’(Mind's Eye for exercise technique) resulting in clients being trained with poor technique.

There are two main issues with this current state of play:

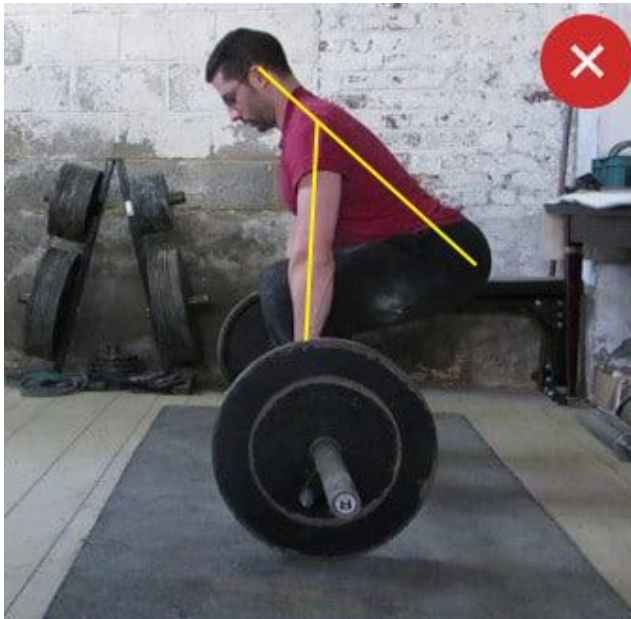
1. The PT doesn’t know what correct technique looks like in the first place, and
2. The PT doesn’t know how to correct poor technique when they are confronted with it.

Regarding point 2 – Experienced PT’s will have developed a series of “coaching cues” that they can use to assist the client in developing the correct technique. This is sorely missing with the beginner PT that typically comes from these Certifications.

What is a mind's eye model of performance?

When I talk about a mind’s eye model, what I am referring to is a technical framework that the trainer has in their mind as to what the correct technique should look like when the client is performing some activity.

A example:



An inexperienced trainer will typically not see that anything is wrong with the left image – but the experienced trainer will have a “mind’s eye image of the correct technique (Image 2) and also understands that the deadlift is not the same position as a squat and that the back does not need to be vertical – this knowledge then allows the experienced trainer to realise that the image on the left has the athlete too far back on their heels, body too upright and shoulders not far enough forward of their hand position.

Why is this position important?? This is then the next level of coaching expertise, if you attempt to lift the bar in Image 1 – the athlete’s knees will get in the way resulting in poor technique and excessive load exposure to the lower back as they move the bar around their knees, BUT in image 2, this new position results in the knees moving automatically out of the way when lifting, allowing for a more vertical bar movement throughout the lift.

How do you develop a Mind’s Eye model for all the lifts and exercises you will experience within your trainer role?

I am of the age that I clearly remember pre-internet days – and today with access to 1000's of hours of training videos streamed directly to your phone or PC it is hard to remember how one educated themselves in the “old days”. I was fortunate to have access to the Australian Institute of Sport Information centre and spent countless hours in their library watching training videos (on VHS) which started me on the path of developing the skillset needed to become an effect skills trainer. Now you can access high quality video footage of every sort of exercise you would want with great skill technique and coaching cues.

Before developing the skill of technique correction, you have to watch enough high quality skill performance to develop your basic skill model in your mind that you can then apply to every subsequent performance.

There is no substitute to time on task – and the more skilled people you see perform exercises (people with different body shapes, limb lengths, etc), the better your eye will become to be able to detect anomalies in technique.

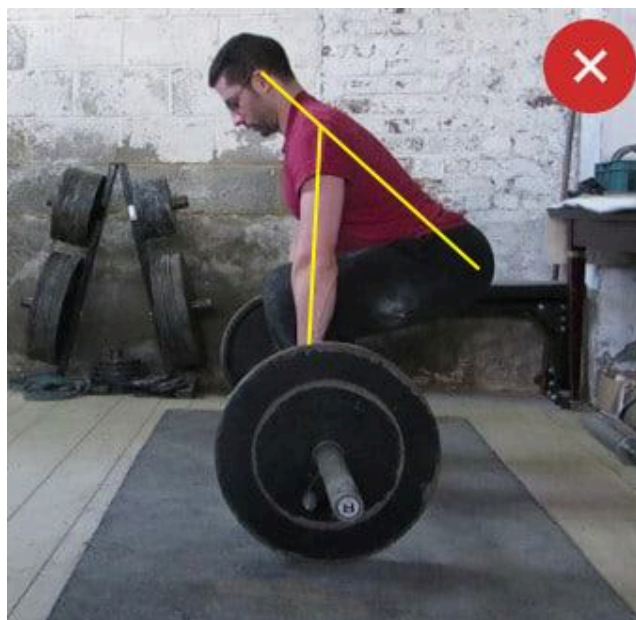
Biomechanics & Kinesiology

An absolute key to developing a good mind's eye technical model is to have a basic understanding of both Biomechanics & Kinesiology.

Biomechanics allows you to better understand how forces are generated and efficient versus inefficient movements patterns when performing exercise, and

Kinesiology allows you to be able to determine which muscles move what joints and this allows you to determine which muscle or muscle groups might be the limiting factor in the client's ability to perform an exercise with good technique.

If we go back to my earlier example:



Biomechanics allows me to understand the role Torque & Moment Arms play in the correct performance of a deadlift, whilst Kinesiology allows me to understand which joints/muscles are going to potentially be the limiting factor in successfully and correctly lifting the weight off the floor.

With all the PT's I work with I strongly promote they develop a high level of kinesiological understanding of all main joints & muscle groups combined with a strong anatomical knowledge to know where muscles are situated and how they function under different joint positions.

For a detailed evaluation of the importance of kinesiology in your PT career – check out my blog article (What is Kinesiology and why it is so important for the PT?)

SUMMARY:

1. A mind's eye model is a technical framework in your mind that you can apply against any client when performing a particular exercise allowing you to determine what aspect of their technique is incorrect.
2. A base knowledge of Biomechanics, Anatomy and Kinesiology then allows you to make the appropriate changes to fix the technical error.
3. Time on task (viewing elite performance) is key to developing your own mind's eye model of exercise.

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