

Geezer Senior Focus - Who?

All “good” coaching is always student centered; i.e. the student is the focal point. Therefore, for effective coaching, it is paramount to understand the nature of the student.

In addition, for a coach to focus on the student, the coach needs to also understand himself. Hence, the importance of sociology and psychology in teaching skiing...

Gaze out across the snowy mountain tops. Watch the squirrel scurry across the snow. Inhale the scent of the pine trees. Feel the breeze on your cheeks. Look across at your friend, smiling. Inside the lodge, sip your hot tea while you listen to some uplifting music, with your feet up warming by the fire. All this nourishes our hearts, our spirits. We are spiritual beings - at least this is what I am here defining as that part of your spiritual nature.

It is important to recognize and give precedence to your spiritual being especially when coaching seniors. As we geezers become more geezered, our priorities in life shift to people, to relationships, to other living beings. People are more important than things, for most seniors. (At least for us older senior skiers!)

In coaching seniors, cherish and encourage relationships, the wealth of their histories as well as the present beauty, awe and power of the mountains and weather. Coaching seniors is more being “with” them, developing the relationship, not so much as being the “coach”, but as a friend, another being.

Number one in importance with seniors, as with anyone, is the heart, the spirit. People are precious.

However, we are more complicated than a simple spirit - we also have gray/cray processors in our heads, emotions to motivate or freeze us, and free wills! PSIA has partially recognized this in its promotion of the C.A.P. model. The **c**ognitive domain is that of the mind. The **a**ffective domain is that of the emotions, the feelings. The **p**hysical domain is that of our aging bodies that are beginning to wear out...

In our geezer model, the cognitive and affective domains are what I group together as part of our soul, however, added to the cognitive and affective aspects of our being, is our free will. We are spirit beings who have souls and live in bodies. (Some of you might disagree, but please humor me here for the purposes of developing an effective geezer “who” coaching model.)

New learning can occur in all areas of our being, however, in seniors, the affective domain is especially important in “allowing” learning in any area. We learn more quickly and can even be “tricked” into learning when there is some positive emotional content also present. However, before you can set the emotional stage, the physiological needs must first be addressed. Maslow’s hierarchy is indeed valid. So, hold that thought about the importance of the affective realm of our being, and let’s first look at our wonderful bodies, our physical realm.

In seniors, there is a very diverse range of physical aptitude and health. Not only do our bodies age at various rates, but the longer we live, the more opportunities we have had for physical injury. Be a bit more careful with those new knees and hips!

When skiing with us geezers, we need to also be more cognizant of sight issues. Appropriate eye wear, light enough lenses are very important. Flat light conditions need to be avoided when possible or at least treated with great care and respect! SAFETY, fun and learning!

Many of us are also beginning to not have as acute hearing as we used to. We might not be as aware of approaching disaster from behind or the sides. Trying to address the group in noisy locations such as near lifts or operating snow guns is also not very effective.

Skin protection from the sun, wind and snow is also critical, as is proper clothing to keep warm.

Although some may feel as strong as ever, there are some smaller muscle groups that are not quite the same as they used to be. Remembering to breath will help with all types of strength issues.

Never forget proper nourishment and never pass a restroom!

With those physiological needs addressed, next the needs of safety and security need to be addressed (Maslow still). Coaching some “new” techniques and paying attention to conditions and terrain selection, or at least sharing that as an objective of the coaching session, will at least begin to help satisfy the safety needs.

(More suggestions and techniques that will help to satisfy the “safety” needs, are addressed in other focus articles on the “what”, geezer skiing techniques.)

After the physical and safety “needs”, affective domain “needs” come next in teaching most age groups, but especially the senior geezer group. Seniors learn so much more quickly with emotional “hooks”. PSIA in the 1960’s came out with “Safety, fun and learning.” Notice the “fun” before the “learning”. Fun promotes learning, but also do **trust** and **respect, appreciating** and **caring**. Being “inclusive”, being part of the “group”, belonging is also part of this domain.

Side Note: I like to equate parts of the physical body to parts of the soul. In the body we have the bones that give the body the structure; then there are the muscles that move the bones; and, simply speaking, there is the blood that carries the life to the muscles and bones. (Of course, there are the other physical systems that are of importance to life, however, for illustrative purposes here, it's bones, muscles and blood.)

In the soul we have the mind, the emotions and the will. The mind, or cognitive domain, serves a function similar to the bones. Our logical brain creates a framework for understanding and working with the real world around us - the bones of the soul. Our emotions, or affective domain, motivates us - the muscles of the soul. Our will, our judgements and choices, give life to the soul - the blood of the soul.

Back to the affective domain, the emotional realm - As a coach, it is important to encourage and nurture the group and individuals affective realm. Doing so will set the stage for learning, so that both cognitive as well as physical learning may occur.

The **cognitive** domain in seniors is very very well developed. We’ve had many years to develop our own framework of understanding of this world. We have learned to trust and rely on our framework. Twenty year olds are still “discovering” and learning with very malleable, and developing frameworks. Geezers are wise with solid and mature frameworks - or at least we think we are!

This is where Bloom’s hierarchy applies: 1. knowledge; 2. comprehension; 3. application; 4. analysis; 5. synthesis; and 6. evaluation - then add in 7. creativity. Geezers have a developed framework of learning, that they will use to measure/evaluate any new information you may give them. To younger coaches, it may seem that many seniors are “slow” at processing new information, however, this is often only their perception of the seniors. The seniors are absorbing, filtering, comparing, and evaluating that “new” information much more in depth than their “younger” coach is often even capable understanding... go geezers!

Blooms top of the hierarchy, evaluation, also leads us to our free will, a part of our soul. (However, our will is as much part of the soul as the spirit.) Seniors are very adept in the area of evaluation and choice and quite a bit more stubborn than youth. For our purposes here, suffice it to say that besides the mind and the emotions, we have a will.

In coaching seniors, it is necessary to operate in the cognitive realm because, the coaching seniors need is often updating their “dated” ski techniques. This means replacing their “old” knowledge and understanding of skiing with our “modern” ski techniques. Only when the “new” understanding is embraced, can the seniors begin to be able to apply it, to make their own skiing easier and more fun.

When we were young, with strong, indestructible bodies, we would experiment and dive headlong into “new” information and “learning”. However, as geezers, we need to “know” in advance that something will be safe and helpful, before we will even consider “believing” it enough to “try”! Seniors need to have the trust and confidence in both their coach as well as the “what” our coach is showing us.

So, the coach needs to work with geezer spirits, geezer emotions, geezer knowledge, geezer wills, as well as geezer bodies!!

We are indeed an integrated composite of our spirits, our souls and our bodies. In order to actually promote learning, a workable understanding of who we are is paramount. Wholistic coaching is critical. Wholistic coaching is impossible without an understanding of us geezers.

In addition to understanding humans as spirits, souls and bodies, the effective coach must also be aware of the diversity and great variety of our population!

Humans come in many “flavors” as described by many other psychologists with a variety of “learning styles” (Kolb’s “feeler/thinker/doer/watcher”; and McCarthy’s “active/reflective, big picture/parts”), “functioning types” (Jung’s “focus-extrovert/introvert, learn-data/intuitive, decide-logic/value, adapt and orient to world-perceiving/judging“), “multiple intelligences” (Gardner’s “verbal/logical/spatial/kinesthetic/rhythmic/interpersonal/intrapersonal”). All the above “flavors” have been extensively described and dissected in other books.

Suffice it here to simply say that the coach needs to be aware that these various types/styles/flavors exist. This will help coaches remember patience and tolerance of differing peoples and not give up trying something “different” to help people have fun and maybe even learn!

In summary, here is the senior geezer hierarchy for who we are:

Spirit beings with free wills

Social beings

Feeling beings

Thinking beings

Physical beings

This is the “who” seniors are - in addition we seniors still like to improve our skiing, so our coaches had better know their “stuff”!