

Motivating commitment

By Jacky Abbott

DR GEOFF BOND from the AIS says that as a young and vibrant police force, the AFP can be compared to a team of athletes.

Dr Bond, an expert on sport and business motivation was addressing an executive luncheon at Barton Staff College about identifying the crucial psychological factors in improving control of performance and psychological management.

Dr Bond has accompanied three Australian Olympic teams overseas and has made a study of the phenomenon of achievement in sport and in business. What distinguishes winners? and why don't some very talented people ever quite make it?

He believes the answer is commitment, particularly in the increasing professionalism and accountability of today's sport. In a changing environment (which he compared to that facing the AFP today), the challenge is to cope, to adapt, to run with change - and then to do something special with it.

What is commitment? Is it developed? Can it be learned or is it inherited? What is the ingredient, the key that needs to be turned to get the end result that the coach - or the manager - wants, in order to get the most from those with talent and potential?

Goal setting, teaching and communication skills and the use of positive reinforcement are all important tools in imparting a set of mental skills. However the AIS is now beginning to recruit on commitment rather than talent and potential and is finding that all the rest follows from there.

Talent can be a disadvantage, Dr Bond observed. People of high talent often get by without effort or sacrifice and never develop an effective work ethic. They never find the 'fire within'. Only a small percentage of the population seems to have it and there are not enough of them to fill all the important jobs - the middle group has to be converted.



This can be done by exposure to certain kinds of experience. Unforeseen adversity sometimes does the trick, or attendance at some 'special event' such as the Olympics can provide inspiration. Role models can fire the enthusiasm at an early age.

Not much has been written on the subject of commitment. Dr Bond cited a videotape called "Sixteen Days of Glory" made by the decathlete Daley Thompson in 1984, which exhorts the performer to 'look over the cliff' - to take a few risks.

Applying these concepts to the AFP is not difficult. A lot of coping has to occur at all levels given the changes going on in the force, Dr Bond said. The committed achievers will cope; others will find excuses to explain their inability to do so. It will all be 'someone else's fault'. Managers will have to be confronting, when the chips are down or duties not up to scratch, and question the commitment of their staff, he warned. Peer group pressure can drag the standard downward; people sit back and are 'content to be average'.

He also warned against looking too far ahead and getting overly focused on the outcome rather than the process; the athlete or employee can 'choke up' and perform poorly. If the focus is right, the outcome will look after itself, almost as if by accident.

Dr Bond believes that the removal of competitiveness from the education system has been a 'disaster'. Life is competitive, after all. He does not believe however that the old system of exams and seniority should be returned; a new set of performance indicators that measure commitment, not intelligence, is needed.

In proposing the vote of thanks, Assistant Commissioner Peter Dawson agreed with Dr Bond's image of the AFP as a decathlete, fit and multi-skilled, and prepared to look over the cliff. There are some in the AFP who are not quite sure yet where to look, but the environment is now more propitious. He observed that PMP is all about commitment; to people and to managing their performance.