

## The Law of Specificity

Dr. Ron Kaiser January 22, 2014 No Comments

### The Law of Specificity (Transcription)

Hi this is Dr. Ron Kaiser with this month's podcast. Today I'm going to be speaking about the law of specificity. I don't know how many of you have heard about it, it's actually a term that's utilized mostly in the field of exercise physiology and the laws of specificity basically states that when you practice a certain activity repeatedly and practice it in the proper form, you just simply get better at it.

You develop the appropriate muscles and mechanics of it and you begin to use it more effectively so that people who are pretty committed to a particular activity get better at it through practice, this is one of the reasons why for example high school baseball players are told by their coaches not to practice softball because they are going to get the ball pitched to them in different manner, under hand, it's a different sized ball, it come in spinning differently and so on and it's going to harm their ability to hit a baseball.

Those of us who have tinkered with playing golf know that playing once in a while doesn't really improve our game as much as we would like. Professional golfers play and practice on the continual basis. It's one of the reasons why a professional sport becomes so specialized now-a-days. An individual linemen who has come out of a college program that uses a pro style offense and has experience in protecting the quarter back's blind side will be grafted higher and commend perhaps millions of dollars more than a similarly talented athlete who is coming out of a run offense.

Similarly a quarterback coming out of a pro style college offense assuming that he's good can commend quite of higher graft choice and quite a few more millions of dollars than someone coming out of

an offense that doesn't project that well to a professional game. This not just applies to sports but also other aspects of life for example I really doubt that famous pianists practice for their concerts by playing the violin.

I doubt that famous violinists like Itzhak Perlman, Joshua Bell and so on warm up for their concerts by playing the trumpet. You know it doesn't make sense and it almost seems too silly to mention this but you practice the things that you want to do well. I recently read an article directed at training of police officers and it pointed out how many of them stay in shape by jogging which is an appropriate kind of activity but it also recommended that they ought to get some work in on sprinting because if they're going to run after and apprehend a bad guy very often it's more of a sprint than a cross-country run or a marathon. Any way I'd like to get into the nature of law of specificity as it applies to mental health and positive thinking. And I think that it's important to recognize that if we don't think in a positive manner, if we tend to be the kind of person who says I always like to think the worst so that if something good happens then I'm going to be surprised. That's naturally working against yourself.

If you want to have good things happen it's important to practice thinking in terms of good things happening. If you're going into a social situation and you're thinking of all the potential things that could go wrong, embarrassment, saying the wrong thing, not having anything to say and filling your mind up with those thoughts the odds of you then going in and feeling confident and performing in a manner that you might really want to is really diminished. If you are applying for a job and you really have a lot of doubts about yourself as you go in there. It doesn't seem to make a whole lot of a sense to think that you're gonna go in there and really knock the socks off of the interviewer because you're gonna be so confident.

If you think the worst in about preparing an assignment for school or for a presentation that you're gonna make, it may encourage you to delay because you expect bad things to happens or whereas if you can get excited about the ability to perform well, that's already practiced for performing well. And this applies to lots of things let's say that you are planning to discuss an uncomfortable topic that may lead to a confrontation with spouse or child or coworker or friend. If you think in terms of what do you want the outcome to be, you want this thing to be able to improve your situation so if you go in there thinking this is gonna be uncomfortable there's no way that it's gonna happen in a positive manner.

That's again working against yourself that increases the likely hood of appropriate things that are happening. So what I basically try'na point out is if you want good things to happen practice thinking as if good things are gonna happen. And this is kind of my format for how I like to recommend this, if you want to be successful then I think most important thing is to follow the law of specificity and train your emotional muscles for success. I think it's about a five step process to get there. First is to have the overall attitude of being a positive thinker, of thinking in terms of automatically going to the question what can go right.

Those of you who read my book or spent much time on my website know that that's kind of the mantra that I encourage people to do because a lot of times people think in terms of what can go wrong or don't think about what can go right. I think it becomes critical to use that as first question. So let's assume you're applying for a job. Think in terms of what can go right. Obviously there may be other people applying and some of them may be very well qualified but think in terms of the fact that you're applying because you think that you can do the job appropriately.

If you're calling somebody to ask for a date or to ask to do something with them socially or to invite them to join a group that you're a part of or whatever it may be, don't think in terms of, well, I don't measure up to them or what if they don't like me or what if I'm interrupting their TV show when I call or things of this nature. Think in terms of you know what it is that you want to accomplish and set that as a goal. Because that enables to always assess things as if its meeting that goal or not. So again, overall attitude is the first step. Setting the goal of what you wanna accomplish and then I think it's important as the third step to visualize yourself being successful, giving that presentation, calling a friend and asking them out or to join you in some particular endeavor. Actually getting your-self started on a diet or an exercise program, visualize yourself being successful, there's a wonderful quote from Helen Keller who ironically stated that "the most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight but no vision".

I think that's remarkable quote from someone who was sightless herself but who had plenty of vision. Now once you're able to visualize that goal I think the next logical thing is to begin to take steps towards achieving that goal and I think that this is one of the areas where the traditional psychotherapy tends to break down because I do believe that very often in many therapy situations we talk about things, we talk about making changes, we talk about feeling better and we don't have any way of being accountable for making those changes. While I'm obviously a little biased since it's my program I do like using the exercise cards that I have on my website to enable you to set up a process for taking small steps. If you're applying for a job interview, it would be important to begin to not only see yourself as being successful but to do things that kind of reach that point, to be able to practice in front of the mirror, to be able to get feedback from other people, to be able to inventory yours strengths for that particular position and you can on a daily basis set up steps to be able to do each of those things. If you wanna introduce a reading program to yourself so that you pursue a little

more balanced life with more education, I would encourage you to gradually start with magazine, articles or short chapters, rather than taking on Warren Peace or some other major volume right off the back.

If you're working to improve your social life it would be important to start with small steps of just learning how to make casual conversation on a daily basis in less threatening social situations, by asking directions, making small talk, asking whether a co-worker, friend saw a recent movie that you might have seen or TV show or even discussing the weather, but begin to feel confident in the way that you come across so you get the feedback of knowing that what you have to say is important and accepted to other people and that you do have things to talk about. So again overall attitude is first step, set the goals is second, visualize the third, take steps toward that goal and then continue to practice. So taking the step is one thing, beginning to make that a real part of you so that after you've given a presentation that you continue to feel good about your ability to do so and practice that after you've had a date to be able to continue to not treat that as say the ultimate but to continue to build your social skills and so on. So that you're continuing to practice thinking positively and building skills in the direction that you want to.

I started this presentation by sighting exercise physiology and with the law of specificity that comes from it and I guess it would be appropriate to close out with the term from, that's widely used in exercise physiology I'm sure that you've all heard it is "if you don't use it, you lose it" and that generally is designed to refer to physical muscle and skills but it also applies to emotional muscle and positive thinking skills. Again if you expect to be successful, it's important to bring an attitude of success into the endeavor that you're attempting to do.

Don't wait until the crisis, don't wait until the exact time that you're going to be tested, but begin to think positively and practice having that as a part of your demeanor so that you won't lose it and when you're called upon, you'll be able to use it effectively. As usual I'm always interested in your feedback, particularly if you have some thoughts that can help others please feel free to correspond with me at the website. This is Dr. Ron Kaiser and I'm signing off until next time.