Playfulness, in play or not, improves well-being. People who are playful live more upbeat, cognitively spontaneous, creative, and fun lives. Cultivating playfulness in coaching helps coachees to more readily self-actualize, and integrate more meaning, depth, creativity, spontaneity, wit, and optimism into work, play, and relationships.
Introduction

Play and playfulness have long been shown to promote the well-being of children. Only in recent years (emerging in the 1950s and resurfacing in the early 2000s) have researchers focused on the value of play and playfulness for adults. It turns out that play and playfulness are sources of well-being for adults, both at work and home.

Most compelling is the idea that playfulness is a prerequisite for the most effective results of play. It is not merely play alone that creates well-being in adults, but the combined impact of play and playfulness that truly makes the difference.

Understanding Play and Playfulness

Researchers make a key distinction between play and playfulness. And, while universal definitions don’t exist, we see a broad stroke understanding of how play and playfulness differ. Quite simply, play describes the behaviors and actions that facilitate and promote feelings of playfulness. Playfulness is an attitude or mindset that informs how we approach our lives and our interactions with others. It is a cognitive attitude towards being intrinsically motivated and uninhibited, with a behavioral orientation toward fun-seeking and spontaneity.

The two are connected, but do not always happen together. One can approach their work, relationships, and even hardships with an attitude of playfulness, meaning they bring creativity, spontaneity, wit, and optimism to the experience without engaging in organized play. Play can also occur with or without an attitude of playfulness. Picture a mandatory professional development activity at work in which everyone is required to participate, or a football game in which a child is forced by their parents to play. In both cases, the participants are engaged in play, but may do so begrudgingly. This is play in the absence of playfulness and is unlikely to yield much of the benefits made possible by enjoyable play.

While both can exist separately, researchers agree that playfulness is integral to reaping the benefits of play on well-being. Without it, play can actually perpetuate negative feelings (like resentment) and stifle well-being, ultimately proving to be counterproductive.
Benefits of Play and Playfulness

Intimately connected to play and playfulness are their enhancement of well-being and flourishing. The American Psychological Association defines well-being as a state of happiness and contentment, with low levels of distress, overall good physical health and outlook, or good quality of life. Flourishing builds upon well-being as it also involves being “filled with vitality and functioning well in one’s personal and social lives.”

Looking through the positive psychology lens, both play and playfulness have the capacity to increase well-being and human flourishing. In particular, the attitude of playfulness has been shown to be a highly beneficial mindset. People who are playful live more upbeat, cognitively spontaneous, creative, and humorous lives.

Playfulness, in particular, is connected to Seligman’s character strength, humor, a strength associated with transcendence. That means playfulness can enable us to find deeper meaning and connection among our existence, our interpersonal relationships, and the larger universe. Through the lens of transcendence, playfulness adds meaning and depth to our lives. From a more practical coaching standpoint, both play and playfulness can improve goal-setting and implementation, change creation, and self-actualization.

Benefits to Coachees

As scholars begin to apply this work to the science and practice of coaching, they suggest that a commitment to play together with an attitude of playfulness can be cultivated in coaching.

Cultivating play and playfulness are valuable when coachees want to:

1. improve problem-solving skills
2. cultivate deeper professional and personal relationships
3. learn to be more flexible and creative
4. cope better with difficult times
5. adapt to unexpected challenges
6. deal with high levels of stress
7. create new opportunities for enjoyment
Cultivating playfulness in coaching means helping coachees adopt an attitude and mindset that integrates creativity, spontaneity, wit, and optimism into work, play, and interpersonal experiences. This involves a combination of mindful practices and activities that engage the coachee in not only the experience of play, but also the attitude of playfulness. The article suggests that coaches can help coachees cultivate playfulness through some of the following exercises:

- Dancing or singing together, for couples
- Creating environments conducive to playfulness in organizational contexts
- Encouraging the coachee to recall times in the past when they felt playful
- Keeping a playfulness diary
- Engaging in interactions with people who the coachee identifies as playful
- Incorporating creative activities and approaches within coaching sessions that induce a playful experience.

The goal is to not merely play more, but to introduce the interplay of play and playfulness so that the impact can be an internal, integrative, and interpersonal transformation. As coaches begin to integrate an attitude, mindset, and worldview of playfulness, play can become a natural and seamless part of their lives. A clearer understanding of the distinctions between play and playfulness (and the critical importance of playfulness in the benefits of play) can help coachees use playfulness to transform their worldview and quality of life.

**Achieving Buy-In for Play and Playfulness**

When working with skeptical coaches and organizations, it can be helpful if the coach shows the proven benefits of play and playfulness and how they work—how the mindset and behaviors of both can stimulate growth, development, satisfaction, and productivity. Be adaptive and flexible in how you describe play and playfulness, as coachees and organizational leaders may have a different take on what playfulness means for them and their organizations (for example not seeing them as serious endeavors). Ideally, the cultivation of playfulness for individuals and organizations integrates their understanding of play and playfulness while generating new and innovative ideas.
Conclusions

1. There is a profound difference between play and playfulness. Play is an action. Playfulness is an attitude.
2. The benefits of play are stress relief, mental and physical agility, and deeper human connections.
3. The benefits of playfulness, an expression of the character strength, humor, include enhanced coping skills, practice with strategic thinking, and interpersonal skill development, as well as more flourishing and moments of transcendence.
4. When we embrace a mindset of playfulness, we enable possibilities for transformation from the inside out.

Key Takeaways for Coaches

1. Cultivate more playfulness in your own life.
2. Cultivate play and playfulness in coaching with your coachees through a series of practices and mental exercises that introduce them to new ways of thinking and new approaches to life.
3. Engage in coaching questions to cultivate playfulness, such as:
   - Describe what play is like for you.
   - What playful moments in your life can you recall?
   - What do you perceive as constraints, that inhibit your feelings of playfulness?
   - How do you integrate play into your daily, weekly, and monthly routine?
   - What would enable you to engage in play more regularly? What would regularly look like for you?
THE MOMENT YOU START SEEING LIFE AS NON-SERIOUS, A PLAYFULNESS, ALL THE BURDEN ON YOUR HEART DISAPPEARS. ALL THE FEAR OF DEATH, OF LIFE, OF LOVE - EVERYTHING DISAPPEARS.

RAJNEESH

Citation:


Summary Figures:

PLAY

The thinking, actions, and activities which express, facilitate and promote feelings of playfulness.
PLAYFULNESS

A cognitive attitude towards being intrinsically motivated and uninhibited, with a behavioral orientation toward fun-seeking and spontaneity.

BENEFITS OF PLAY & PLAYFULNESS

PLAY (A DOING VALUE)
- Improved Physical well-being
- Practice for future skills
- Interpersonal development
- Cultivates playfulness
- Strengthens ability to plan for unexpected

PLAYFULNESS (A BEING VALUE)
- Stress Reduction
- Important to human flourishing and psychological health
- Positive worldview
- Enhanced resources for coping
- Utilization of character strengths
- Reinforces playfulness for others
- Seamlessly plans for unexpected
PLAY & PLAYFULNESS EXERCISES

For couples:
Dancing or singing together

Keeping a playfulness diary

In organizational contexts:
The creation of environments conducive to playfulness

Engaging in interactions with people who the client identifies as playful

Encourage the coachee to recall times in the past when they felt playful

Incorporating creative activities and approaches within coaching sessions that induce a playful experience