HIRING quality athletic training personnel is a difficult and time-intensive task that is a standard administrative duty. Considerable effort is expended in the process of gathering and reviewing applications and conducting interviews. A resume will get a candidate into the interview process, but it is one’s personal attributes that get the job. In actuality, the final selection decision is often based on seemingly intangible personal characteristics that are not apparent through academic degrees or clinical experience. Personal characteristics are significant and essential in the effective practice of athletic training. The challenge, therefore, lies in identifying personal characteristics that are associated with effective clinical care during an employment interview. The purpose of this report is to provide a brief review of effective health professional personal characteristics, also known as dispositions, and provide a method for better identification of these characteristics during the interview process.

The term “disposition” refers to an individual’s perceptions, attitudes, or core beliefs regarding the world and the people and things in it. A correlation has been established between clinicians’ dispositions and their ability to develop an effective therapeutic relationship with patients. Dispositions are the personal characteristics that influence and serve as the root of clinicians’ behavior. Although sound content knowledge and clinical skills are the requisites, personal dispositions have been shown to be a more reliable at discerning highly effective from ineffective clinicians. In the final analysis, it may not be what the clinician knows, but rather who the person is that makes most the difference. It is the ability to relate to others on a human level in combination with knowledge and skills that allow clinicians to be most effective.

The identification of these dispositions is a valuable addition to the interview process. Currently missing is the construct and tools by which to reliably identify the personal dispositional characteristics that are essential for a person to be truly effective. The study of health professionals’ development of effective helping relationships provides this construct.

The Helping Relationship

The model of dispositions presented in this article is based on research on the development of effective helping professionals.
Helping professionals are people concerned with assisting their clients in attaining prescribed personal or health-related goals. The helping professions research includes counselors, therapists, teachers, nurses, and pastors.\textsuperscript{7-9} The domains of treatment and goals of care within each profession may be different, but stated outcomes hinge on the ability to influence the behavior or misbehavior of clients, patients, or students.\textsuperscript{7,8} Clients must be inspired to actively participate in the process and adhere to a corrective program.\textsuperscript{7} Much of this ability to encourage and inspire clients to be active and committed participants in their own improvement comes from the quality of the therapeutic relationship built between client and professional. Its foundations lie in the dispositions of the helping professional.\textsuperscript{6} While strong content knowledge and clinical skills are required, it is a clinician’s dispositions that influence how he or she manages the appropriate course of action for each client.\textsuperscript{7,8}

**Interviewing for Dispositions**

The goal of assessing dispositions during an employment interview is to evaluate a person’s underlying dispositions (i.e., motives) rather than their specific clinical actions. The interviewing method requires a two-part approach to emphasize dispositions. The first step is developing questions that focus on dispositions and the second is to correctly interpret job candidate answers.

Optimal disposition-focused questions are open ended, which require description of a professionally-related experience that has personal meaning.\textsuperscript{9} For example, “Can you describe a difficult professional situation you have encountered in your practice and how you handled it?” The interviewer should be prepared to listen well and encourage the candidate to richly illustrate thoughts and actions in given situations. Follow-up questions can ask the candidate to explain the rationale that guided professional actions. Examples of such questions are, “How did you come to choose that particular type of action?” or “How do you feel about those actions now? What would you change now if you could?” The more the candidate talks and the more involved the candidate gets in the answer, the more likely one is to glean quality information about a job candidate’s core dispositions.

The second essential part to this approach addresses how the interviewer evaluates the answers. The goal is to identify the disposition behind a person’s actions and not judge the correctness of the actions.\textsuperscript{9} The interviewer should attempt to avoid assessment of the clinician’s individual actions from one’s own personal perspective, which can interfere with accurate the assessment of dispositions.\textsuperscript{9} The most common error is to assess the answer based on what the interviewer’s personal preference for handling presented circumstances. Not all clinicians will make identical treatment decisions, but there are common underlying dispositions that are universal to effective practice.

The research on the helping professions suggest four general areas of dispositions that can be used in the identification of effective health clinicians: the perception of self, the perceptions of others, the perceptions of purpose, and frame of reference.

**Perception of Self**

Perception of self refers to how people view themselves in relation to others.\textsuperscript{6-9} The ability to identify with others is to perceive experiences in terms of the other person’s feelings or to attempt to understand what it must be like to be in “another’s shoes.” To identify with others is a major facet of empathy.\textsuperscript{6-9} An effective helping professional will describe experiences in terms of the other person’s point of view and will take joy from others’ accomplishments as well as feel sorrow for their failures.\textsuperscript{9}

Figure 1 provides example statements from identified and unidentified persons. Both statements essentially express the same action. The athletic trainer has to remove an athlete from participation against the will of the coach. What makes the first statement different than the second is the subject expresses the point of view of the coach. The second statement labels the coach as a “difficult” person and only seems to see one side of the situation. Both actions may be correct, but the second statement indicates a person who is less likely to identify with others.

**Perceptions of Others**

A clinician who is capable at developing a good therapeutic relationship is someone who perceives others as able.\textsuperscript{7,9} This is the belief that others have the capacity to and must ultimately take responsibility to deal with their own problems. An effective health professional sees the patient as an aid to achieving wellness goals.