

Mental training plan pays off for Souths

Jason Clout

Training their players' minds to deal with chaos on the football field has been integral to the success of NRL premiers South Sydney.

Before their memorable grand final win last season, the Rabbitohs employed mind trainers Out of Your Mind, which is run by Derek Leddie and Samantha Graham. Souths coach Michael Maguire has brought them on board again this season for an expanded program.

One of the things the trainers found when they came to Souths was that a sport like rugby league only partially conformed to the expected and predictable, said Mr Leddie. It goes to the heart of one of their major points, which is – in business and sport – working longer and harder does not necessarily produce more efficiency because creativity might be lost.

"Things like set moves and other things in the game where they spent a lot of time training only occurred a bit more than half the time in a match. The rest is what we call chaos, so it was learning how to deal with that."

That chaotic element is resonating with business as well. Mr Leddie spoke recently to a group of executives who were keen to "know about the unplanned things in business".

Souths' director Nick Hatzistergos is also the managing director of accountancy firm William Buck. The firm's

director Graham Spring says the Out of Your Mind trainers were included at the firm's recent strategic planning sessions in the Hunter Valley in NSW.

"Our experience is this system produces tangible results," said Mr Spring. "Threats in everyday life are not from sabre tooth tigers any more, they're from the everyday stresses of life. What is different about mind training is that it combines meditation with yoga which relaxes the body. The science behind it helps us understand what is happening to our mind and body."

For Ms Graham, the initial question of how to aid the Rabbitohs was to build resilience.

"Our training for sport and business is not dissimilar. But what is unique is the form of the challenge. So in league it might be, I have let in a try. However, now the question is what is the next job I have to perform, to keep coming back, no matter what."

One result can be less unnecessary communication. Decision making can be faster as it is less hindered by stress or other mental problems – what some call the ruminations of the mind. "Our saying is go to the balcony, things are clearer. What do you need to do next," says Ms Graham.

For Mr Leddie, training the mind has potential cost savings for business. He argues a lot of absenteeism is related to mental illness. "There is a lot of money being spent on gyms and nutrition which is good, but less so on the mind."



South Sydney Rabbitohs captain Greg Inglis. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES