

PEAK PERFORMANCE PLAYBOOKS

The Mind and Brain Science of Performance Preparation, Practice, and Optimization

PLAYBOOK I

*PEAK PERFORMANCE
PREPARATION
FOR COACHES*

NeuroMentor®
Institute for Peak Performance

PLAY TO WIN

David Krueger MD

© Copyright 2021, MentorPath® Publishing. All rights reserved.

PEAK PERFORMANCE PLAYBOOK I

The Mind and Brain Science of Performance Preparation, Practice, and Optimization

A MentorPath® Publication. All rights reserved. © Copyright 2021, David Krueger MD

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission from the publisher.

For information, contact:

NeuroMentor® Institute for Peak Performance
1707 Post Oak Boulevard, Suite 145
Houston, Texas 77056

Printed in the United States of America.

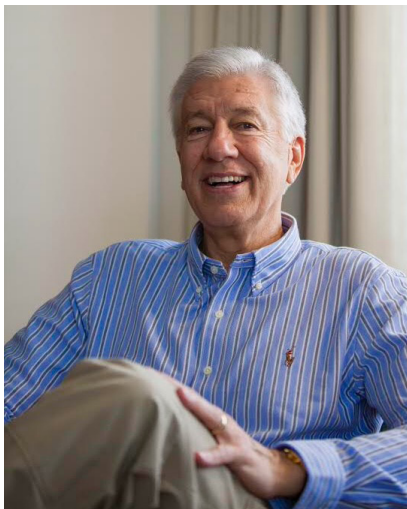
Visit: www.NeuroMentorInstitute.com www.MentorPath.com

DISCLAIMER OF WARRANTY/LIMITATIONS OF LIABILITY

The Publisher and Authors have used their best efforts in preparing the course and accompanying components. The Publisher and Authors make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this course or components, and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. There are no warranties that extend beyond the descriptions contained in this paragraph. Neither the Publisher nor the Authors shall be liable for any damages arising from the use of this course or components, including without limitation actual, special, incidental, consequential, or other damages. This course and any accompanying components are designed to educate and provide information only about the subject matter covered, and neither publisher nor author are engaged in rendering legal, accounting, medical, or other professional services. If legal or other expert services are required or desired, the services of a competent professional should be obtained.

It is not the purpose of this training course and accompanying components to provide all the information that is otherwise available to the Authors and/or Publisher, but to complement, amplify, supplement, and direct the reader to other third-party information and texts. Thus, this text should be used only as a general guide, and not the ultimate or only source of information in this area; the information herein is believed to be current only up to the publication date. Readers are urged to read all the available material and tailor the information and application to fit their respective individual needs. The resources listed in this course are for information purposes only, not endorsements or referrals. Neither the Publisher nor the Authors shall be liable or responsible for any loss or damage experienced in dealing with any such listed resources or providers.

NeuroMentor® Institute for Peak Performance



David Krueger, M.D.

is an Executive Mentor Coach, and CEO of MentorPath®, an executive coaching, training, publishing, and wellness firm. He guides performing professionals to achieve and sustain peak performance.

Author of 24 trade and professional books on success, wellness, money, and self-development, and 75 scientific papers, he is Founder and Director of his own Licensed, Specialty-Certified *New Life Story® Wellness Coaching*, and *New Money Story® Mentor Training*. He is Dean of Faculty for Coach Training Alliance, has trained professionals worldwide, worked with executives of Fortune 500 companies, and develops internal mentor programs for organizations. He was named Top Executive Mentor Coach of the Year for 2021 by the International Association of Top Professionals (IAOTP). Dr. Krueger formerly practiced and taught Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis and was Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Baylor College of Medicine.

He was a founding member of the International Society of Sports Psychiatry, Consultant to the Women's International Tennis Association, and has worked with numerous Olympic and professional athletes and coaches. He is Founder of The NeuroMentor® Institute for Peak Performance, and offers training and private Mentor Coaching for athletes and coaches.

— Dedicated to two outstanding performers, Mariel and Nia —

PEAK PERFORMANCE PLAYBOOKS

The Mind and Brain Science of Performance Preparation, Practice, and Optimization

Introduction

The Peak Performance PlayBooks offer practical guidance for both coaches and players to systematically apply mind, brain, and performance sciences to achieve and sustain optimum success.

PlayBook I. Peak Performance Preparation for Coaches covers the basics of performance preparation in coaching. Fundamentals include facilitating communication with players, coaching the process of change, performance preparation, enhancing player performance, and team development practices.

PlayBook II. Peak Performance Practice for Coaches and Players presents strategies for a systematic application of deliberate practice and optimal performance.

PlayBook III. Peak Performance Optimization for Players includes strategies for sustaining peak performance under pressure, the art and neuroscience of winning, and navigating the challenges accompanying extreme success to sustain it.

Two questions serve as backdrop for this training program:

How can preparation, practice, and performance be developed and applied to consistently generate optimum performance?

How can coaches and players individually and collectively achieve and sustain performance success?

These 3 PlayBooks and Webinars form a blueprint to systematically develop and sustain peak performance. Applications of deliberate practice will offer proven systems to consistently optimize achievement. If you want to change a habit or behavior, or create a new one, focus on the system. The goal is not what distinguishes winner from loser, since both have the same goal. The system involves mind and brain-based principles informing deliberate practice and an ideal performance flow.

The most powerful intrinsic motivation and performance flow occurs when a performance habit becomes part of an identity. “This is who I am.” We then tend to act in alignment with the beliefs and habits forming that identity of remarkable success.

The most effective way to enhance performance preparation, practice, and optimization focuses on who you wish to become – coach, player, team – and developing a proven systematic process to achieve that.

PEAK PERFORMANCE PLAYBOOKS

The Mind and Brain Science of Performance Preparation, Practice, and Optimization

PLAYBOOK I. PEAK PERFORMANCE PREPARATION FOR COACHES

Table of Contents

A. Facilitating Communication with Players

- *The Question Launches the Story*.....2
- *Communication and Connection: Maxims + Steps for Coaches*.....8
- *Learning and Performance Styles*..... 11
- *Information Processing Systems*..... 13
- *Patterns of New Learning: 4 Phases*..... 15
- *Focus on the Right Thing*..... 15

B. Coaching the Process of Change

- *Developing a Performance Growth Mindset in Players*.....22
- *Engagement and Motivation Strategies for Optimum Learning*.....26
- *Strategies to Deal with Change in Players*.....29
- *Evaluate and Address Resistance to Change*.....30
- *How to Mentor Change: 12 Principles*.....33
- *Fostering Psychological Safety and Trust*.....34
- *Shame/Blame vs. Growth/Transformation*.....37

C. Enhancing Player Performance

- *Confidence is a State of Mind*.....40
- *Confidence Priming Blueprint*.....41
- *Guiding Mindfulness Meditation for Peak Practice*.....44
- *The Top 21 Things a Coach Needs to Know*.....45

D. Team Development Practices

- *Fundamental Principles for Team Performance Enhancement*.....48
- *Player Alliance and Team Development*.....51
- *Performance Frameworks*.....52

PEAK PERFORMANCE PREPARATION FOR COACHES

Two anthropologists were chosen to enter separate, essentially identical ape colonies where they would live and observe for a year, not communicating with each other. They and their respective Oxford research teams were chosen because of their remarkable similarities of personality, philosophy, and education.

When the two anthropologists emerged after a year to compare notes, they expected essential similarities but instead found remarkable discrepancies. One anthropologist, after an initial period of transition, was accepted by the apes, integrated into the colony, and achieved a unity and comfort with the apes. The other anthropologist never got beyond the social periphery of his colony, remained careful and vigilant, always seemed on the cusp of a conflict, and never reached a harmony.

The anthropologists could not understand the discrepant results or find any reasons. They and their teams puzzled for months until they finally found one difference. The anthropologist who was the uncomfortable, careful outsider carried a gun. His gun never showed; he never used it; the apes never knew he had it. But he knew he had it; he knew that if things got tough, he had an “out.” The anthropologist who had no gun had a commitment: he knew from the beginning that he would either make it or not on his own.

In retrospect and reconstruction, each of their assumptions created the reality that they experienced.

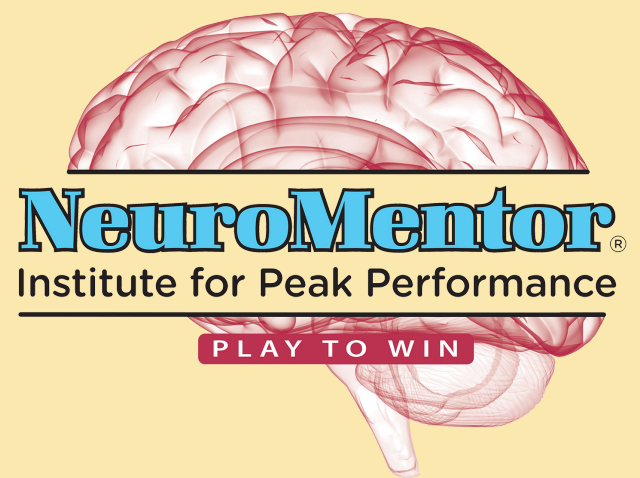
We tell our story. Then our story tells us.

Beliefs become predictors and confirm the reality that generates them. Beliefs take on a life of their own. Beliefs make up our identity. We work diligently to make our beliefs consistent with one another and with our identity. When we change our beliefs, we change ourselves as well as our identity. So, it is not a simple or easy matter.

Neuroscientists estimate that from 90 to 95 percent of our operating system is unconscious. This means that the vast majority of our responses are based on established algorithms for behavioral, emotional, and performance patterns. This operating system ghostwrites beliefs and behaviors—the shadow stories on unconscious autopilot. As we repeat responses, the brain wires those as the default mode.

The neuroscience of performance is based on a bedrock foundation of understanding both mind and brain. We’ll discuss how to create new performance behavior side by side with unlearning old automatic behavior. The approaches to changing behavior that work also consider what this is doing to your personal story and identity.

First, we’ll discuss the basics of how coaches can facilitate optimum communication and collaboration with players. Then we’ll lay out how, specifically, you can make use of this information to facilitate performance enhancement strategies using mind and brain sciences for both players and team.



A. Facilitating Communication with Players

The Question Launches the Story

How can the coach best engage participation by the player and minimize opposition to instruction?

Asking a question will shift the listener's perspective to one of participant, of looking for answers rather than opposing a position or dictate of the coach. Once someone picks an answer, they are more likely to act consistently with that answer. A player is pulled by a question and by the answer much more effectively than he or she is pushed by a command or even a statement. By responding to a question, the player gives more information to the coach and puts the process into an output channel in the answer, which can then serve as guide to commitment. Asking is more likely to change someone's mind and to inspire endorsement and participation than telling is. We commit to that which we help co-create.

Whether dealing with a terrorist or a suicide threat, the hostage negotiator begins with asking how the person is, to make it about that person rather than about the negotiator. A demand, command, or statement makes it about the speaker, not the recipient. Asking a question to engage the thinking of the player creates a collaborative alignment with the player as point of reference. What the player thinks matters. When it matters, they will be more committed to *their* answer.

This is the first teamwork—the coach and player working together.

When I began coaching my son's team of six-year-olds, they were all playing basketball for the first time and didn't know anything about the game. I intuitively decided that rather than going over rules and a lot of instructions, we would have fun. If they were doing ten things as a team, I focused on the one thing that was good practice rather than pointing out what they were doing that was wrong. Particularly when one player did something good, I highlighted this player and what was effective.

Gradually, the number of best practices grew individually and for the team, and their pleasure grew because they learned how to be effective.

Then they were in a position to understand why the good things worked. And things like double dribbles, carrying the ball, and fouling just didn't work so they learned to do something better.

What are the fundamental essentials of communication that the coach needs to be aware of to be effective?

“The biggest block to personal communication is man's inability to listen intelligently, understandingly, and skillfully to another person.”

Carl Rogers

Perhaps the most fundamental skill any coach can possess is knowing how to communicate with players. Not just to guide deliberate practice and performance enhancement but to allow players to open up about worries, insecurities, and fears. Because every player, artist, or business professional will have a slump, a setback, or a choke. The coach needs to know how to hold a mirror to the player for both to look together, collaboratively, as they figure out what to do next and better.

Three keys to effective communication with players:

1. The coach's state of mind.

With self-regulation and self-awareness, the coach needs to be grounded and centered, accessing a confident state of mind.

2. The communication itself, verbal and nonverbal, including tone of voice, feelings and actions communicated.

Both coach and player, when engaged and connected, can communicate at an authentic level, optimizing mutual self-regulation.

3. Appreciating the player's system of perceiving the communication.

The coach needs awareness of co-regulation to establish a grounded connection with the player, leading the way by modeling an optimum state of mind for the player to fully receive all information and process it with open-mindedness.

In all three of these steps, the coach sets the tone and establishes the model for the immediate communication, as well as for how the process is internalized and used as a model for future consideration by the player. Verbal and nonverbal language, along with self-awareness of a regulated state of mind, all become important.

Important reminders about communication:

- *The coach and player both send and receive communication.*
- *Both use verbal and nonverbal language in their communication.*
- *A lack of understanding of the meaning of the message for both sender and receiver can create disruption.*
- *Mixed or unclear messages can create confusion.*
- *Understanding and respecting the communication process can be significantly beneficial.*
- *Repeat what the other just said in order to convey understanding. "What I hear you saying is..." Then the receiver can respond to correct or agree—either way, feeling heard. This establishes a common ground on which the receiver and the communicator can proceed.*
- *Coaching is teaching.*

What are the most important considerations in having productive conversations with a player?

1. Focus on the conversation. Rather than multitasking, thinking about a past event or conversation, or thinking ahead about what you will do after the conversation is over.
2. Listen fully. Listening may be the most important relationship skill you can ever develop. Listening is a total attunement to the conversation of the other person, not planning what you will say next.
3. Summarize the player's perspective. When you articulate the player's perspective, the player feels understood, and this positions for a meaningful conversation. This bonding—activating the neurochemical system of oxytocin—creates a collaborative common ground to proceed.
4. Use open-ended questions. Questions engage the listener to open a mindset of inquiry and collaboration. Closed-end questions can be answered with a yes or no, but open-ended questions require thought and consideration. Further engagement may be to nudge with, "Tell me more." "What else?" "How can we move forward?"
5. Stay in the flow of the conversation. Do not distract with too much information, facts, or inserting your own experience into someone's response.
6. Keep it simple and brief. The four basic principles of good writing are the same as the four basic principles of good conversation: brevity, clarity, simplicity, and humanity.
7. Do not equate your experience with the other person's. It is tempting if someone mentions something that you share in common, such as losing a family member, to share your experience. Or to slip into a suggestion about how to deal with a similar situation as you have had. Remember: *it is not about you*.
8. Remain calm and focused throughout. A consistent soothing, supportive tone of voice will have a neurochemical impact of mutual calming.
9. Remember that the last impression is the lasting impression. When the last communication is positive, it has the most powerful impact on memory and retrospectively framing the entire conversation.

These principles are difficult to follow, because when you are talking, you feel in control, and do not have to hear anything you are not interested in or that is challenging or painful. In talking, you are the center of attention, and everything you say bolsters your position and your identity.

Asking the Best Questions: Appreciative Inquiry in Coaching

“Human systems grow in the direction of what they persistently ask questions about.”

Dr. Diana Whitney

Dr. Diana Whitney, the founder of Appreciative Inquiry, was a guest in my Mastermind group and described systematic studies of Appreciative Inquiry in organizations that show three major aspects:

1. A focus on what works enhances what works. Ask about what you want more of rather than about problems and barriers.
2. Focus becomes reality: a focus on possibility elicits a positive mindset; a focus on problems elicits a problem mindset.
3. A focus on what works awakens possibility—an “aha” experience that boots up a mindset that is more creative, synthetic, and integrative.

Appreciative Inquiry looks at how a person or organization can study and define the best that there is and then use that information to build on what is already working. People have more comfort and confidence to go further when they carry the best parts of the past forward.

Appreciative Inquiry can get much better results than seeking out or solving problems or giving the right answers. It is a complex science designed to not ignore problems but approach them from a different perspective. Appreciative Inquiry shows that collaborative strengths do more than perform—they transform.

The most comprehensive survey conducted on approaches to managing change and enhancing performance concluded that most organizations, teams, schools, companies, and families function on an unwritten misguided rule: to fix what is wrong and let the strengths take care of themselves. What really works is to align strengths so that weaknesses become irrelevant, and to know that some problems can't be solved, but have to be outlived by generating current successes.

An inquiry of exploration and discovery of new potentials and possibilities recognizes the best in people or organizations and affirms past and present strengths and successes as well as potentials. The questions we ask plant seeds for the future. The questions set the stage for what we then find and generate. What we discover becomes the stories out of which the future is both conceived and constructed. An organization's story, just as each individual's, is continually being co-created and co-authored.

How does Appreciative Inquiry work at a brain level?

Evidence from brain sciences research demonstrates how a positive focus is immensely more powerful in aligning intentions and brain energy fields to bring about what we want. Appreciative Inquiry can be applied to self-talk to enhance confidence. Additionally, a confident, positive focus is contagious, and a leader's positive emotions are more contagious than anyone else's. Additionally, peripheral vision literally and figuratively expands when someone experiences confident positive emotion as found by eye tracking and brain imaging.

Why not focus on problems initially in order to resolve and move beyond them?

Studies by Dr. David Cooperrider in many organizations found that asking for problems creates a mindset of problems in the recipient, while asking about success creates a mindset of success. The act of asking positive questions affects individuals and organizations and their performances positively. The positive image creates a dynamic force in the individual as well as in the organization's culture.

For an individual or organization, appreciative inquiry is a foundation of the interchange for any coaching relationship.

Four principles of the process of appreciative inquiry are:

1. **Discovery.** What is working best? Discovery of patterns of success creates a rich context for achieving more. Inquiry about what works well precedes visualizing the future. Start with discovery. We discover before we dream. Every positive question cues a mindset for exploration, a mindset to discover personal and organizational attributes, what people value, and how they hope to enhance the vitality of the group.
2. **Dream.** What is possible? The purpose of possibility is to engage the entire person or system to move forward aligned with values and vital futures. An invitation to dream exercises imagination and looks at possibilities without limitations. The bolder the possibilities and vision, the bolder the attitude and the more successful the potential outcome.
3. **Design.** What options can we create? Study something at its best to further inhabit patterns of success. Attention to creating an ideal situation or organization crafts a clear purpose and set of organizing principles. Design a blueprint of relationships, roles, and responsibilities to further the purpose of an endeavor.
4. **Destiny.** What is your ultimate vision? Live the purpose, principles, and blueprint. Continue individual and organizational innovation to align with vision and values.

Appreciative Inquiry Tools

- *Describe a time that was a high point experience, when you were most engaged and felt most alive and vibrant.*
- *What do you most value about yourself and your work?*
- *What are the core factors that give life to your organization at its best?*
- *Imagine yourself a year from now with everything as you wished it would be. Describe that.*
- *Imagine your organization a year from now with everything as you wished it would be. Describe that.*
- *What's the most important piece of new behavior to establish in order to move forward?*
- *For this big change, what is the first decision/behavior that would give you some traction in the process?*
- *What would demonstrate to yourself that you're moving forward?*

What performance-specific feedback conversations are most effective with a player?

While there is no script for performance improvement feedback, there are some sound principles to incorporate in coaching feedback to a player. While your approach to each player needs to be unique and specific to that person. Here are some considerations as you tailor that approach.

- Prior to a performance improvement conversation, write a brief outline of the facts and issues you plan to cover, and what you intend to say. If possible, review this with a fellow coach or manager for feedback.
- Begin with a positive comment before offering a critique. A player needs to know that you see the mistake as a departure from a usual high level of performance, and it also allows saving face.
- Focus performance improvement feedback on one specific issue or area of concern.
- Solicit feedback from the player about the specific situation or focus. Rather than telling a player what to do, ask for the player's view and assessment to create a buy-in of potential solutions of how to address the issue. Give the player time to think about possible solutions.
- Don't delay the necessary conversation and feedback. Address concerns as soon as they arise. The longer you wait, the more difficult it will be because the player will think the issue needing adjustment is acceptable, since it is not addressed.
- Let the player know your concern. Share what you have observed as specific actual behaviors.
- Clarify the expected behavior, so the player will know exactly what to focus on and do differently.

- Base performance improvement conversations on expectations already communicated. Provide concrete examples of positive performance expectations and specific examples of not meeting those expectations.
 - Explain how this performance behavior impacts the individual player, as well as the team.
 - Think together about potential consequences if the performance issue is sustained and does not resolve.
 - Agree on a follow-up date to reassess performance progress.
 - Express your confidence in the player and his/her ability to improve performance.
 - Address the player's support needs. Know and respect each player's sensitivities and passions. Ask what the player needs from you to be successful, or other training, equipment, or tools.
 - Never embarrass a player
-

Communication and Connection: Maxims and Steps for Coaches

When Doc Rivers, then head coach of the Los Angeles Clippers, was asked what the most important thing was he does as a coach, his reply, "I communicate to my team. Not just collectively as a team, but individually. I have to know where each person is in order to lead them where I need them to be." Doc later added that what he would most like to improve upon as a coach said, "I would like to improve my communication."

We believe our assumptions are the truth. Our assumptions are about who we are, and we see what we believe. Whether we are right about our assumptions never comes into question, because we live them to make them reality. It's just the way things are. And, of course, no one can question reality. We perceive things the way we are, hear what we want to hear, and see what our own system allows us to see, select, register, and process.

Although confronted daily with proof to the contrary, we at times assume that others think like we do, and believe essentially as we do. At times we wish that the other person could just know what we want and think without ever having to say.

4 Maxims of Communication

1. The person who makes a difference in your life is the one who listens as if he or she always knows who you are, and gives it all back to you.

Each relationship combines two individual stories to coauthor a new relationship story. The implicit contracts authored by each party in a relationship become unspoken assumptions that can facilitate or derail the relationship. Making explicit the hidden assumptions and implicit expectations becomes a crucial part of communication. To see the point of view of the other and to communicate that understanding, each must respect the other's point of view. Understanding and respect are not synonymous with agreement.

2. Ultimate freedom is not relying on someone else's response to determine how you feel about yourself.

Ineffectiveness of communication, simply feeling that what you said was not heard or registered by the other, may produce irritation or anger. Then the content of the discussion becomes more intense. The process that initiated the derailment—feeling invalidated—gets lost.

The simple step of repeating to the other what you heard him or her say prior to making your own point validates listening. You are then in a position to be heard more successfully. Your individual responsibility to co-author a mutually satisfying relationship includes the following:

- *Mutual commitment to respect the other's needs and wants without neglecting your own.*
- *Facilitation of communication.*
- *Mutual negotiation on different points of view.*
- *Explicit awareness of implicit assumptions.*
- *Acknowledgement and understanding of needs and wants made obvious by relationship symptoms.*

3. The greatest vulnerability is daring to risk your best feelings.
4. The greatest satisfaction is risking your best feelings.

4 Steps of Communication

A basic human desire is to connect with another. The power within a relationship begins with a commitment to understand the player's experience, and to then collaborate to co-create an enhanced performance.

1. Reflect back to the speaker what you heard him or her say.

This simple step assures the speaker of effectiveness - of being heard. If you're poised with a response rather than listening and reflecting, the first speaker may feel a need to repeat; both speakers are then vulnerable to escalation of emotional tone. Knowing and respecting each other's point of view is the initial phase of a satisfying mutual, equal collaboration.

2. Clarify by asking the next question.

Socrates taught us that really smart people ask questions rather than give answers. The detail may contain the feeling and the important aspects that otherwise would have to be assumed.

A large corporation's executive team huddled around a recording of the last presentation by the CEO of that company. They were playing it, rewinding it, playing it again. Each looked puzzled. The consultant asked them what they were trying to do. In his speech, the CEO had indicated that the organization should embrace more color. They each had a different idea about what color meant: Dress, race, decoration, language, stationery.

No one had considered simply picking up the phone and asking the next question, "What do you mean by color?"

3. Provide a context.

The context of any statement or meaning includes time, location, and system.

4. Listen between the lines.

For someone who listens for facts, that filter will mean that the person stops listening when the speaker stops giving facts. When a very intelligent person listens for information, the communicator, in order to hold the listener's attention, must interweave information with the newness of what is being said. The speaker's empathic attunement to the listener includes creating a listening environment while providing information without losing the listener's attention.

Listen literally and closely to what someone says, and you will pick up constant clues about what is wanted and needed. Truth as well as reality is perception.

General Norman Schwarzkopf said, "I have seen leaders who stood in front of a platoon and all they saw was a platoon. But great leaders see it as 44 individuals, each of whom has aspirations, each of whom wants to live, each of whom wants to do good."

- *Learn the stories of each of your players.*
- *Recognize the work and performance style of each player.*
- *Become aware of each player's optimum flow, the immersion that generates optimum performance from sustaining performance flow.*
- *Develop an awareness of each player's best learning, performance, and information processing styles.*
- *Celebrate small wins, and personalize recognition.*
- *Ask questions and involve other coaches and players in making decisions.*
- *Share credit for improvement.*

The bedrock of good communication is the foundation of a relationship with each player as well as the team.

Learning and Performance Styles

We all feel, process, and communicate differently, but there are fundamental styles that, when identified, can facilitate better communication. Optimum learning and performance occur when matched to the specific styles of each player. If your communication as a coach doesn't reflect the player's mode, it will be less than effective. Although not all-or-nothing, each of these styles are fairly consistent over time for each player.

Readers

Some people learn best by reading, and need to see a text or pictures in order to really comprehend material. President John Kennedy was a reader who assembled an outstanding group of writers on his staff. Part of Kennedy's brilliance was in using these people and what they wrote to inform his decisions.

Some players may do best when instructions and plays are printed and handed out.

Listeners

President Johnson had attained his reputation and success as a listener. When Johnson kept the same people on his staff after he succeeded Kennedy, they kept on writing.

Johnson derailed his presidency by not recognizing that he was a listener, not a reader. Players need to hear specific instruction even of well-written and diagrammed plays and strategies.

Writers

Some people learn best by writing. Beethoven kept copious notes and amassed an enormous number of sketchbooks, yet never looked at them when he composed. When asked about this practice, he said, “If I don’t write it down immediately, I forget it right away. If I put it into a sketchbook, I never forget it and I never have to look it up again.”

Encourage this output channel style of keeping a personal notebook to write reminders for certain players.

Talkers

Some people learn best by hearing themselves talk. This is a style I am quite familiar with. A significant portion of the material in my books comes from what I later jot down from teaching, presentations, and supervision of professionals— things that came to me in a different way from what I had previously thought or written out. “I don’t write because I have something to say, I write to see what I have to say.”

Verbally review strategies and responses with players in individual discussions and team skull sessions.

Collaborators

Some people work best in collaboration with others. Creative pairings and the dance of ideas are common for those who perform best in conjunction with others. Some collaborators work best as team members, succeeding in a system where ideas and implementation occur as part of a group. Encourage players to meet in pairs or small groups to discuss performance components. This may be most common for quarterbacks in football and point guards in basketball, but all players at all positions can benefit from this brainstorming.

These predominant styles of learning constitute an important piece of self-knowledge and a way to facilitate communication.

Information Processing Systems

You can communicate better by appreciating the predominant mode of your player. If you use primarily an auditory model and your player uses a predominantly visual mode of organizing, communication may suffer unless each of you appreciates the other's filter for perceiving and processing information and experiences.

A wife who is more kinesthetic asks her visually inclined husband how he feels. His response, "I can see what you're saying," seems elusive. She presses him to convert his model into hers, continuing to ask how he feels, what he senses. He repeats. They escalate. Rapport derails. She accuses him of being stubborn. Baffled, he retreats.

Developing empathy and establishing rapport with a player can be facilitated by awareness of the player's primary representational system.

At the beginning of a relationship, all three channels—kinesthetic, visual, and auditory—are active, both parties taking in a great deal of information, just as when traveling to a new country one is intensely taking in everything possible through all five senses. As a relationship progresses to developing and sustaining the connection, the intensity gives way to a default mode—the primary operating mode of auditory, kinesthetic, or visual. At this stage, communication issues become exaggerated.

Recognition of these distinct ways of processing information may be useful to consider in establishing and developing rapport and in fostering communication toward a common objective.

Auditory

Though not exclusive, an individual uses predominantly one representational mode. Those who take in information best through auditory presentation perceive experiences more in terms of sound and spoken word. They use phrases such as:

- I hear what you are saying.
- I really want you to listen.
- It sounds good.
- Tuned in.
- Within hearing.
- Loud and clear.

Visual

Those who primarily process in a visual way record and construct pictures or internal images of their experiences; they recall by snapping a picture into focus. Visual individuals will be inclined to say:

- Can you picture it?
- It appears to me. . .
- I'd like to look at it.
- I can see what you're saying.
- Mental image.
- Short-sided.
- Bring this into focus.
- It seems fuzzy to me.

Kinesthetic

Kinesthetic individuals experience in a bodily way, and index information by sensation and feeling. Those more kinesthetic use sensory and bodily terms, such as:

- I need to grasp that.
- To be more in touch with. . .
- Hand in hand.
- It slipped through my hands.
- Hold that thought.
- Able to get a handle on it.
- I'll walk you through this.
- Come to grips with.
- Start from scratch.
- Hold on.

Neuro-linguistic program researchers and practitioners have distilled some basic principles of recognizing the particular model and using it to facilitate communication

- *Recognize the predominant channel of processing information for yourself and the player: auditory, visual, or kinesthetic.*
- *Respect the other person's model of the world, of perceiving and processing information along one of the three representational systems. One is not better than the other, just different.*
- *The observational skills of the type and meaning of communication is a necessary component of emotional intelligence.*
- *The meaning of the communication may be best indicated by the response that you get.*
- *The representational system, as well as the words, is only a symbol of the event, not the event itself. A map is not the territory. The model of your mind is not your mind.*
- *At times, the most important information about an individual is behavior.*
- *If what you are doing is not working, rather than doing it harder, think about doing it differently.*
- *Understanding this method of coding and understanding successful behavior and communication along one of the three models replicates and builds further success and intimacy*

Patterns of New Learning: 4 Phases

Often people who are engaged in a new endeavor that requires change and growth hit a plateau several weeks after beginning. Their initial excitement, spawned from the exciting new and hopeful expectations, cools off. The leveling off registers as a lessening of the ever-increasing acquisition of mastery, pleasure, and rewards. Someone may experience disillusionment, and even question why there is not more satisfaction. It is important not to read this phase as an indication of a bad choice, or as validation that the choice is not a fit.

1. **Initial confusion** often launches change and new learning. Awareness of the unfamiliar and uncertain registers as curiosity, or even anxiety.
2. **Increasing confidence** both with the experience of effectiveness and with positive feedback constitutes the next phase.
3. **Mastery** is the consistent experience of effectiveness and movement to a new level of excitement and validation, into its own self-sustaining “flow.”
4. **Entropy** occurs when the excitement and invigoration of the learning curve’s newness and mastery level off or decline. This is the new equilibrium of acclimation to mastery and new skill development.

Fear, adventure, and change are all synonyms in new learning. Change may occur from the inside out, or change may be initiated on the outside, requiring adaptation to it. Change may simply be a different way of looking at something, a new way of thinking, or openness to feeling and reflection on what was previously unknown or closed off. Each of us must see and experience for ourselves the advantages of change. And we have to judge what needs to remain the same, as we may find it difficult to resist some changes, for example, an impulsive decision.

Attitudes that promote curiosity and openness introduce new learning. Learning is always a choice, a potential creation. There are many different levels of learning both internally and externally.

Focus on the Right Thing

Focus means energy concentrated on the next step in a practice or performance system. Focus is not on a goal, because that is abstract and distant, and doesn’t tell you specifically what to do next. We’ve come to see that whatever you focus on tends to enhance that behavior. Some examples of efforts that backfire by telling someone what to *not* focus on include:

- The Tide Pod Challenge – even an announcement by Tide involving Gronk admonishing people to not ingest Tide Pods doubled the ingestion rate.
- Instructing jurors to disregard inadmissible testimony encourages them to more heavily weigh it.
- College students drink more after alcohol prevention messages.
- Persuading people that smoking is bad for their health makes them more interested in smoking.
- Telling a teenager what not to do ensures that behavior.

The reason behind all of these behaviors is that focus aligns the energy field of the brain to bring about the behavior, whether the focus is positive or negative. Additionally, if you try to influence someone to do what you believe is best, it makes it about you, not about the players' wants, needs, and motivations. When anyone feels like they are being pushed or convinced to do something, the brain is wired to push back and resist. This natural response also preserves autonomy and a sense of effectiveness.

With focus, we learn what to engage and what to ignore. Learning to catch a ball requires ignoring the innumerable other things that could distract attention. For 1:1 coverage, 80,000 people in the stands and 21 other players on the field are ignored.

Focus is best achieved by being very interested in something specifically. Rather than forcing focus, thinking hard, or even staring hard, simply become interested and attune your energy field to specifically what interests you. Timothy Gallwey illustrates this by suggesting that in tennis, focus attention on the sight of the ball, perhaps noticing the exact pattern made by the seams as the ball spins. Listening to the ball can also assist with focus, such as the sound when it hits your racket. Focus simply aligns the energy field of the brain and can be a natural effective way to engage full attention.

Switching Costs of Changing Focus

Each time we switch from one focus to another, there is a cost of cognitive energy of that shift. Estimates now are that those who multitask lose not only the purity of focus, but also pay the cognitive cost and perform 40% less efficiently. Managing your focus is the necessary component of entering a performance flow and sustaining it.

The pattern of multitasking results in a compromise of filtering out distractions, less ability to recognize patterns, and compromise of long-term memory. The single, grooved pathway of a single focus and deliberate practice development of that pathway simply does not happen as effectively as when there is a purity of focus.

The stimulation of multitasking keeps alive the dopamine output of asking, “What’s next?” for each of the tasks engaged. Yet, we pay a price for that. While it may seem like we are getting a good deal more done, we are in effect getting barely over half as much done.

A Harvard study found that the average person’s mind wanders 47% of the time. So, almost half of the time while we supposedly are focusing on one thing, we’re thinking about something else. The cultivation and improvement of sustained focus becomes a central and fundamental aspect of performance. Attention and productivity go hand in hand.

Performance Improvement Conversations

When we try to change someone’s mind, we naturally lead with evidence, as well as facts and other information that would seem to logically convince anyone. Current data and better information *should* overwrite outdated or insufficient information to update both thinking and acting. Yet, this is not the way it works.

The solution: Ask the players for their perspective—what they think—a question that will cause them to focus on generating an answer rather than following your directive. As a catalyst, guide their path:

- Ask, don’t tell
- Provide options
- Highlight the gap between where they are and where they want to be

A foundation of collaboration begins with the position you take in regard to the player. “Let’s consider possibilities?” “What are your ideas?” “You and I can figure this out.” “We’ll work together for a better method.” The “we” positions yourself inside the experience of the player to create a common ground to proceed together. Rather than telling the player specifically what to do, this collaborative approach allows players to participate in mentored guidance and achieve their own goals.

When an instructive criticism is needed, first offer a positive statement, a compliment. The positive comment establishes a mindset of consideration of improvement rather than shutting down for protection.

Often the most difficult to have with a player, performance improvement conversations become essential to enhance peak performance.

The most effective performance improvement conversations share some of these qualities:

Immediacy

Address the feedback as critical support immediately following a specific need or the discovery of difficulties. This contingent response when the experience is fresh in the mind of both coach and player is most beneficial.

Start positive

This boots up an entire mindset for both coach and player to process the remainder of the conversation, as well as establishing a common ground to proceed.

Simplicity and honesty

When an issue is important, be candid, explicit, and specific. Include a collaborative review of options for improvement. Nothing should be left to guess work. Explain clearly the purpose of the conversation.

No assumptions

Rather than assuming that as coach you know the cause of poor performance, or speculate about its intentions, engage the player to explain. Gather all facts and information to base a collaborative new plan. Request the player's perspective as well as input.

One focus

Focus on one aspect of performance, behavior, and feedback in order to address it specifically. Multiple concerns, even if related, will dilute the impact of focus and resolution.

Expectations

Be clear about expectations, and reference expectations already communicated. Be sure that all expectations are clear and specific in order to hold the player accountable. Expectations can then become a springboard for conversation. Provide your feedback as a coach as your point of view and as potential guidance.

Support

Be sure you understand what the player needs in terms of support in order to be successful. Is it refining physical training, mental training, cognitive tools, decision-making, game strategy? Collaboratively address this issue.

Preparation

Consider collaboration with another coach or manager in planning a performance improvement conversation or feedback to a player. This discussion may help you become more objective, as well as prepare for the conversation as you get important feedback.

Improvement plan

Establish a plan for improvement initiated by the player's reflections and suggestions.

Mutual accountability

Accountability is a caring and responsive thing to do, which reinforces expectations and ensures successful performance. Accountability requires objectivity as well as empathy. Both are equally important, and enhance each other. Accountability fosters individual and team goals, progress, and results. It requires consistently articulating purpose and vision collaboratively engaged. This process and focus are the antithesis of a list of duties, tasks, and strategies. It is a coach's responsibility to promote accountability.

Recognition enhances performance individually and as a team. It is not optional. Every player, coach, and team need to be recognized as an integral part of feedback. Affirm when expectations are met or exceeded, and recognize achievements so the player will internalize this process to ultimately do it themselves. While we have conversations, the recipient is always unconsciously taking notes, and downloading the model of the process, especially one that works.

When facing roadblocks, each small step forward enhances success. Focus on the possibility rather than the problem, the next step rather than the goal, to give specificity to an ongoing process.

An application of these principles in action comes from an interview with Kyle Shanahan, Head Coach of the San Francisco 49ers discussing the successful comeback of wide receiver Dante Pettis. After an outstanding rookie year, Dante had struggles, and took coaching criticism personally. His playing time dwindled the following year, and he sat out Super Bowl LIV.

Shanahan commented on how he successfully individualizes coaching comments. "Our goal in everything is to get a guy better, and there's thousands of ways we can do that, and you better not do the same thing with each person. And I do see that as a two-way street. I love how Dante came back and accepted his part in it, but I also accept mine. I got to find a better way to get it out of him."

He was asked by a reporter, “What is your process like in terms of maybe just evaluating the way you coach different guys when you have this many people and personalities that you have to deal with? How do you go back and look at say what am I doing right or wrong with individual guys and how do you figure that out?”

Shanahan responded, “I take every angle possible. I usually am just my exact self, and just tell him whatever I see on film, and sometimes if a guy for some reason is not working, I try different approaches. You try to, sometimes you got to shock a guy to wake him up to really understand you, sometimes you got to really explain stuff to a guy and really tell him the why’s and stuff. And some guys really don’t care about the why’s. You just got to be aggressive with them, and that’s what they want. I think everyone is kind of their own person and also everyone’s a little bit a product of their environment.”



B. Coaching and the Process of Change

Developing a Performance Growth Mindset in Players

“Because I think I’m making progress.”

Legendary Cellist **Pablo Casals** when asked why he continued to practice at age 90

British rugby coach Tony Smith lost his first fifteen games.

He framed each of the losses as trials, as a learning opportunity for both himself and his team. In the midst of underperforming, he found a positive focus for each player as well as the group. He would identify one or two things for every person to work on after every practice and every game. This moved the mindset from problem and defeat to possibility and improvement. Additionally, each player recognized that Tony was watching everything they did while looking for ways to help them improve. A loss is only a loss when you don’t learn from it.

He came to be regarded as one of the most influential and successful coaches in British rugby league history.

For elite performers, learning requires focus on the learning experience, including the learning style of the performer. Sports science incorporates a plurality of theories and approaches for communicating and teaching most effectively, recognizing the importance of collaborative communication and individual learning styles.

In preparation, leave nothing to chance. Attention to detail is about controlling the controllable and letting go of what cannot be determined. Winners never lose focus on what they actually can determine. Accept the things that you can’t control in order to let go of them and devote energy to the things you can determine.

Embrace the uncomfortable. Anything new and important begins with discomfort, uncertainty, and trepidation. Uncertainty must be expected and tolerated.

The growth mindset of learning is based on a belief that basic qualities are cultivated and developed throughout life. You believe you can enhance and develop yourself. You become open to accurate information about talents and abilities. You use it to adjust and grow. Howard Gardner, in his book *Extraordinary Minds*, concluded that exceptional individuals with growth mindsets have a “special talent for identifying their own strengths and weaknesses.”

If a coach says to someone, “You have great talent,” it promotes a fixed mindset, as if talent is something you either do or don’t possess and can be quantified to correlate with success.

A coach who says, “Congratulations, you worked very hard to achieve that,” promotes a growth mindset to learn, improve, and achieve more. To believe that performance is related to innate talent or intrinsic ability will limit both effort and resilience. If talent or intellect are fixed commodities, then tenacious hard work will not sustain engagement.

How are beliefs incorporated into a growth mindset?

In 2018 an Italian gymnast began posting videos of himself in striking falls and crashes with the hashtag #GymnastsFallChallenge. Soon more than a thousand professional gymnasts posted their own experiences of mistakes in order to learn from them. The response was strikingly well-received, as ordinary people saw their everyday mistakes also made by these exceptional professionals. It also helped numerous people reframe failures as steps to their own personal success.

Beliefs are often unconscious, yet we can pay attention to the best indicators of beliefs: our behavior. We can nudge ourselves toward a growth mindset:

- Am I taking ownership of my mistakes?
- What can I learn from this?
- How can I improve?

In adulthood, whatever we experience we either create or accept.

How do you develop a performance growth mindset in players?

“Every defeat, every heartbreak, every loss, contains its own seed, its own lesson on how to improve your performance the next time.”

Og Mandino

1. Think of a challenging, stressful experience or setback in which a player demonstrated resilience and persevered to learn something important.

2. Create a story of that experience with the three components of story: challenge, development, and resolution.
3. Think about what the experience taught you and the player, and the model it provides for future reference.
 - What creative approaches and strengths were employed?
 - What information, input, advice, or support helped?
 - What did this challenge teach about how to deal with adversity?
 - How did this instance and scenario make the player stronger?

A growth mindset views setbacks as inevitable and failures as catalysts for improvement and growth. The question is not whether you will ever have a setback, a challenge, or a failure, but what you will do as a result of it.

A growth mindset can create resilience through a coping style described by Edith Chen, psychologist at Northwestern University, involving a process she describes as shifting. Shifting combines four components:

- Acknowledge of stress
- Learn about the source of stress
- Recognize what can be changed
- Determine what good can come from it

Persistence combined with positive framing can sustain optimism in the face of adversity: “I think that things will get better in the future”; “I have a big purpose here, and know that I will do better.”

How can you recognize a fixed mindset?

Those with a fixed mindset try to make sure they succeed. A consuming goal is to prove oneself: in the classroom, in a career, or in a relationship. Each situation calls for a confirmation of intelligence, personality, or skill. The repeated internal questions are:

- Will I succeed or fail?
- Will I look smart or dumb?
- Will I be rejected or accepted?
- Will I be a loser or a winner?
- Will I attempt it without knowing I’ll be great at it?

Yet with a fixed mindset, no amount of confirmation can dislodge the hypothesis of mediocrity or the need to prove.

A fixed mindset shares some of these beliefs:

- Intelligence and talent are basic and essentially unchangeable.
- You learn things but you cannot change how intelligent you are.
- You have fixed traits, so success is about proving that you are talented or smart.
- Problems indicate character flaws.
- Attempts to repair self-esteem include assigning blame or making excuses, which prevents learning from mistakes.

How can optimism be enhanced and pessimism diminished?

Michael Jordan said, “I’ve missed more than nine thousand game shots in my career. I’ve lost almost three hundred games. Twenty-six times, I’ve been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”

Our mindset defines how we overcome failure and whether we learn from it to grow stronger. A growth mindset of positive approach may include:

- Truly believe that your efforts can improve.
- Informed practice will improve the results.
- Failure does not define but informs.
- A setback is an opportunity to learn.
- A setback is temporary and solvable.
- Look for information that shows the setback or any accompanying negative beliefs are factually incorrect.
- Look for different ways to have the setback inform progress?

A setback or failure in performance can activate a player’s standard default explanation. The way the failure or setback is regarded rather than the event itself determines the next response. If the reaction is pessimistic, someone will not try as hard the next time because of narrowed perspective and focus on the problem. An optimistic response will renew effort and enhance learning and exploration to improve.

Engagement and Motivation Strategies for Optimum Learning

“He taught life.”

Bill Walton on the coaching style of John Wooden

Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, studied the value of positive feedback and its potential correlation with enthusiasm and winning. One person they followed in their study was NBA Hall of Famer Steve Nash, who was known for the energy and enthusiasm that were part of his leadership approach as well as his abilities as point guard. The number of times he touched a teammate as displays of enthusiasm or positive feedback per game averaged 239. This team-oriented enthusiasm and encouragement of teammates catalyzed a collective form of motivation.

Creating a collaborative alliance is always the first developmental phase of any working engagement whether individual, team, or group. This group energy alignment toward a collective goal enhances both the individual and the group. The initial step in building common ground with someone is an empathic resonance with their experience or challenge. State always comes first, then strategy and story. This empathic resonance enters and co-creates the shared experience of the individual or group, to align for the same unfolding experience and goal.

Collaborative engagement, tough conversations, and celebrations of success are all part of that shared experience. As with any focus on the system rather than just the goal, there are common elements of creating this shared experience:

1. Co-create a collaborative framework

Creating the necessary trust for unfolding conversations and collaboration to be productive requires a safe and accepting environment where an ultimate goal is to be able to say whatever you need to say in order to foster progress. Some aspects of “saying whatever you need to say” may not be easy, but this is why the developmental step of building this alliance is necessary to providing the framework of trust and safety building this foundation.

2. Focus on the objective

In situations that have emotional components and triggers, this sustained focus is especially important.

3. Regulation of state of mind

The individual management of emotions and states of mind becomes important in determining performance decisions. The antithesis is impulsive action. Requirements include recognizing, owning, and assessing your own individual story, even as part of a group, in order to engage in deciding, first for yourself and then for the group, what is the next best action.

4. Empathic resonance to create unified perspective and plans

Empathize, clarify, affirm, and validate each person's feelings and intention without judgment or criticism. This is a necessary first step in establishing common ground and collaborative plans.

5. Closure and gratitude

Appreciate and express gratitude for the engagement. Agreement is not necessary, but closure is. Closure may involve a summary of the process as well as a resolution and, ideally, commitment to moving ahead.

An important piece of closure is for each person to indicate the most important thing they are taking away from this process, as well as what they commit to doing going forward, within a specific time frame.

In a group, this closing process may include each person's expressing in a single sentence the following reflections:

- The most important takeaway from the experience
- Each fellow member's most important contribution
- His or her action commitment based on the discussion

Focusing feedback on positive contributions has a powerful effect on each individual. The clear articulation of both the individual goal and the larger goal creates a motivating environment and a focus on the process of successful performance.

The Gottman Ratio, named after the psychologist who conducted initial studies, states that a negative interaction has five times the impact of a positive interaction. This emphasis on the power of staying positive, of supporting, believing, and caring about someone, has essential impact on successful performance. Alternatively, studies show that at a minimum, you have to offer five positive comments or interactions to a person for every negative one (repair to rupture ratio). Then the person being coached can build resilience and put the adversity in a framework of growth.

6. Follow-up

Follow-up on the commitments expressed is the most neglected but most important aspect of accountability partnership with a player or group. It allows the process to continue. It establishes that the end is not the finish, that there will be follow-up accountability for reviewing both the process and the outcome.

As a result of this follow-up, there's much learning on both sides about what works, what doesn't, what may need to be revised, and how to create an ongoing process rather than a segmented event.

Negotiations are not about trying to convince the player but about trying to understand the player. Trying to convince someone applies pressure, just as do arguments and threats. Optimum conversation is about understanding what you can do to make it easy for the player to move in the direction you suggest to optimize performance. This works significantly better than applying pressure or giving directives.

Essentials of Engineering Effective Change in the Player

When Terry Fox ran the Marathon of Hope, the cross-Canada run of 3,339 miles, he ran with a shuffle and a hop because he had an artificial leg. Yet he managed to average twenty-four miles a day and complete the race in 143 days. Immediately on completion, he was asked in an interview, "How did you manage with your challenge when you were tired and still had thousands of miles to go?" His simple response: "I just kept going to the next telephone pole."

1. Specify the next step.

Avoid the abstract and the global. Some is not a number. Soon is not a time.
"Act healthier" is not a strategy.

2. Focus specifically on the next step.

3. Make changes tangible and concrete.

Construct a yardstick or a map to determine where you are and where you are going so that you can measure progress along the way and tell what is detour and distraction.

4. Make progress measurable.

Demystify the journey: Have a specific destination, with a tangible next best action.

5. Make progress visible.

Establish small, specific, attainable milestones that are visible, with celebration of each small victory.

An example of shrinking a task to a tangible next item is how Alcoholics Anonymous challenges its members to “one day at a time.” It shrinks the change to a manageable, foreseeable specific action. A small target leads to small victories, the cumulative experience of effectiveness and mastery.

All you ever have to do is the next right thing. This shrinks the change to immediate steps of effectiveness and the experience of momentum.

Strategies to Deal with Change in Players

Collaboration and questions have greater impact than directives and information. The relationship is the change agent. The player is expert of his or her life.

1. State your understanding of the player’s experience as best you can. Listen for responses.
2. State your understanding of the player’s intention as best you can. Listen for responses.
3. Find out from your challenging player what he or she has managed to do in a small way that he or she would want to do more of.
4. Find out what the player has not done yet that he or she would like to do in a future similar situation.
5. Highlight solutions that do not work, and consider, if applicable, expressing an understanding of the player’s frustration.
6. Find out whether the player is willing to try something different.
7. Ask how the player may want to redirect efforts toward the goal.
8. Find out whether the player is willing to redirect efforts and pursue a particular goal.
9. Invite the player to try something different, something simple and specific in the beginning that would actually be the easiest thing to do.
10. Co-create a specific strategy or system to address the task. SMART goals: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-specific.

Pattern interruption.

Any time you change one element of a system, you change the entire system, at least for a little while, until the forces of the system exert themselves to return to the previous state. Any pattern can be changed with a different interaction. Someone can change a pattern by changing the what, where, when, who, or how of the pattern.

Visualization.

Ask the player what he or she imagines it would be like to arrive at the stated goal. This visualization begins with the destination, so you can work backward to see the steps necessary to arrive there.

The assumption by a player that someone or something else must change in order to make the player happy ensures ineffectiveness and frustration. Refocus on one thing that the player could do in the next day or two that would create a change. The shift of focus from outside to inside, from others to oneself, parallels the Serenity Prayer familiar to many Twelve-Step groups: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.” In other words, focus your energy on what you can determine, and let go of what you can’t.

You are always free to change your mind.

Changing your mind changes your life. To become your authentic self involves taking risks to make change, experiencing but not giving in to fear, releasing judgment and criticism, letting go of assumptions forged at an earlier time, and embracing dreams that bring mastery and accomplishment.

Evaluate and Address Resistance to Change

What approaches are there for an oppositional player?

When a change does not occur, such as with a player and a new initiative or execution, the tendency is to push, encourage, give more information, and pressure change behavior. The natural assumption is that more reasons and arguments, or at least more force, will be all that is necessary. Most often this is exactly what doesn’t work, and entrenchment and pushback pressure is heightened. Resistance builds by telling someone what to do.

An alternative strategy is to identify what is preventing change from happening and to collaboratively remove that barrier. In this way the coach is a catalyst of change with less energy, no resistance, and toward a collaborative goal. The best way to persuade someone is to encourage them to persuade themselves. This is the coach as a catalyst.

Parents know that it does not work to tell a child what they have to do, such as what they must eat. Being given certain options, pre-chosen by parents, allows the child to choose whether to eat the broccoli or chicken first, whether to have the milk out of the yellow or blue cup. This bypasses pushback and opposition to co-create a choice along selected pathways to optimize results. Provide selective choices. Guide the player with selective options so they can experience agency—their own effectiveness—in choosing how they get to where you want them to go.

Guided options shift the focus to choice rather than agreement or capitulation and allow the player to retain a sense of control. People will commit to what they help create. The player becomes a stakeholder in both the action and the outcome. Catalysts start by asking questions. This approach establishes an open, growth mindset of possibility, gathers more information, and increases buy-in to the process of successful resolution. Having a player actively choose in the process helps them to feel they have more active input in the process. The menu is a limited set of options from which the player can choose, all of which focus on performance enhancement.

If the coach presents one directive and asks the player to buy in, the player likely pushes back to focus on flaws or drawbacks in that method. By presenting two or three options, players can focus on the sense of agency to make their choice become the successful one. Having too many choices—more than two or three—can result in decision paralysis and reversion to the default mode of the old way of doing things.

By providing a menu, questions shift the listener's role to collaboratively making decisions on potential answers rather than countering a mandate by the coach. This shift moves from reasons to oppose to a search for answers. When it becomes their own answer, it becomes their own success.

The first step is always to put yourself in the player's shoes rather than moving directly to a strategy or resolution. This is the beginning of trust and collaboration. State before strategy and story. Helping the player come to his own conclusions offers the best possibility of engagement and successful outcome. Rather than beginning with persuasion, begin with understanding.

Focusing on only one step shrinks the change to make that step reachable. When there is a sticking point and things seem hopelessly stuck, find a point where there is agreement and proceed from there. Finding common ground on which to build trust and understanding allows moving ahead together.

When there is disagreement, ask for less. Find that place of agreement—the un-sticking point. When the team is stuck or resistant, begin with an influencer, or a more flexible player already most closely aligned with your position as coach.

Types of Resistance to Change

The avoidance of change, despite a seeming need to change, could arise in any of the following ways. Each route is its own decision, and each deserves specific consideration to evaluate stuckness in a player. After identifying the type of resistance, we'll examine the strategies of dealing with them.

- 1. Motivated avoidance:** the active opposition to or refutation of change. This resistance to change was described by Freud in speaking in the psychoanalysis of patients this way: "... The resistance with which the patient clings to his disease and thus even fights against his own recovery ..."
- 2. Consistency of default mode (status quo):** the persistence of a basic and habitual way of responding. The positive aspects of this sameness include the strength and ease of habit. This persistence of the usual when it doesn't work constitutes resistance to change. Alternatively, positive behavior might be converted into a habitual response, an automatic and invisible decision
- 3. Passive-aggressive behavior:** the passive acceptance—seeming compliance with another or with an authority—but concealing implicit refusal to do what is expected or needed. The aggression is expressed indirectly to the person or system trying to induce the change; because it is expressed passively, it induces anger in the latter. The passivity is the refusal to change. For example, a spouse promises to do an important favor, and then conveniently forgets. The transfer of anger of the passive-aggressive person into the container of the one who expects collaboration and partnership can be quite defeating for a relationship.
- 4. Voluntary behaviors that are difficult to change:** ones that persist despite a conscious desire to change, because of both ambivalence and uncertainty as to what it would be like to leave the familiar behind. The pull of the old couples with the fear of the new. Another person or the system can add to the resistance.
- 5. Brain resistance:** When someone's brain is habituated, such as in smoking or drinking, the resistance has an additional physiological basis.

How to Mentor Change: 12 Principles

1. Each person's life story is created. You create whatever you think, feel, and experience at each moment. Every day is a blank page until you begin writing on it—even though it seems to “just be the way things are.” The first step is taking ownership of your story, including the assumptions that generate default behavior.
2. Understanding begins with examination of which storylines work and which do not. The next step is changing the ones that do not work, while keeping or even enhancing those that do work.
3. Knowing what not to do is at least as important as knowing what to do. You may not always know what the next right thing is, but you can almost always know what it isn't.
4. Questions are more powerful than advice. Questions can direct, clarify, illuminate, and even story-bust. Advice invites acquiescence or resistance; questions move the process from compliance to collaboration.
5. When people create their own answers, they have signed on to invest in the outcome. This investment elicits a sense of effectiveness and mastery.
6. Identify four things: What to change, accept, let go, and enhance. Doing this allows you to put your energy into what works, and allows you to accept and let go of what you can't change. Making this simple distinction both liberates and enhances effectiveness.
7. We don't see things as they are; we see things as we are. Learn to recognize your own assumptions and beliefs, and how they color what you perceive. Assumptions manifest as feelings and behaviors. By making assumptions explicit, you become able to perceive those that facilitate and those that interfere.
8. Change is constant and inevitable; resistance to change is what generates most problems. We are most successful when we learn from yesterday, anticipate tomorrow, and integrate the impact of new experience.
9. Small changes lead to big changes. Issues that seem overwhelmingly large and insurmountable can be approached by looking at the simplicity of the issue, specifying a small step to take for progress. For example, someone who feels overwhelmed at work by the number of tasks expected of him can identify one issue to deal with effectively within the next day. This focus on a specific action exercises effectiveness and initiates a model of mastery.

10. Solutions, causes, and problems are not always related or even inter-connected. Resolving a problem, even emotionally coming to the end of the past, does not create a blueprint for success. Strategic planning for specific goals is necessary. For the person with an eating disorder, there are no prepackaged answers awaiting discovery. She is moving into new developmental territory without a map
11. A collaboration keeps both individuals on the same side, looking at the same scene together. Empathic listening keeps the professional aligned with the player's point of view and builds common ground for work.
12. The benefit of doing more of what is working and less of what isn't working will become evident and self-perpetuating.

Fostering Psychological Safety and Trust

“It takes one person to authentically create a safe environment of connection to change the trajectory of another person's life.”

Shelley Bardon Till

How can the coach foster psychological safety, a foundation of trust, and sense of belonging with the player?

John Wooden offered a fundamental view about a coach's major responsibility: “He should remember he's there to teach. He should remember he's there to get a player to learn.” This emphasis on the coach's responsibility to teach goes beyond recruiting great players and guiding winning performances. The wise coach recognizes that the players are not simply outstanding performers but are fundamentally human with balanced emotional, family, social, and economic dimensions.

What is psychological safety?

“Psychological safety is the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, asking questions, sharing concerns or making mistakes.” (Amy Edmondson, Harvard)

Why does it matter?

Coaches have the opportunity to create the necessary structure for athletes to feel safe to perform. Providing a safe environment with a coach and a team creates a shared context and sense of belonging, which promotes each member's ability to thrive and reach their full potential. This co-regulation with goal-minded people actually helps athletes to learn new skills by enhancing creativity, calculated risk-taking, and innovative thinking.

What are some ways to promote a collaborative and psychologically safe environment?

Creating a psychologically safe team can happen in numerous ways. To keep it simple, any activity, spoken words or interaction that nurtures your athletes also fosters psychological safety.

- 1. Start by asking questions.** Get to know your athletes as individuals first. This does two things: it gathers information and creates a participant in the process to make it collaborative. Ask, don't tell. Guided options shift the focus to choice rather than agreement or capitulation. A menu redirects focus to help someone retain a sense of control. If a coach presents only one idea, the subsequent focus by the player probably will be to look at exceptions or reasons that it may not be the best way to proceed. Presenting two but no more than three options, all of which will enhance some aspect of performance, will increase buy-in by the player. Asking the right question has more power than giving people the right answers. Appreciative inquiry can get much better results than seeking out and solving problems.

Understand each athlete's unique history and experiences, including racial and social aspects.

Keep in mind that history + environment = behavior. While you cannot change their history, you can impact the current environment. Based on an athlete's past, the arena or field may be the safest place they know. If some athletes feel like they are walking on eggshells because they have been required to conform to a collective group way of thinking, being, dressing, and talking, then this environment only re-creates trauma and diminishes any chance of psychological safety.

- 2. Focus on possibilities.** We know from appreciative inquiry that establishing an optimum performance mindset of possibility begins with the power of positive framing and asking generative questions. Ask about possibilities rather than problems. The nature of the conversation with the player will have profound impact on expectations, the relationship, and subsequent accomplishments. The player moves toward the images and belief that the coach has in mind. When you look for problems, you will find problems. When you look for solutions and leadership, you will find possibilities. A positive framework and asking generative questions create a positive engagement and performance.

One application is watching game replays. When you focus on the mistakes that are made, this reinforces undesired behaviors and gives attention to what you do not want to repeat. Instead, when you focus on and highlight desired performances, you will reinforce positive behaviors for your athletes. The repetition and visual highlighting of desired behaviors, skill development, and play execution enhance the desired performance. When we repeat responses, the brain hard-wires those as the default mode.

3. **Be mindful of the first words you speak as a coach.** We know from the neuroscience of conversational intelligence that the first words spoken trigger a neurochemical reaction in the listener to boot up a specific mindset that then processes the remainder of the conversation to determine meaning and significance. A conversation that begins in this collaborative mode activates the brain's neurochemical system of oxytocin, the system of bonding and connection. This initial perception of a collaborative, trusting response induces listening without judgment and paying full attention to the speaker and frames the remainder of the conversation as a joint endeavor. The player then feels safe and understood and develops trust. On the other hand, a conversation that begins with what is perceived to be authoritative, critical, or adversarial activates the brain circuitry of fight and flight, bringing trust into question. The player experiences anxiety or distrust and closes down for self-protection. Keep in mind that this response is innate, based on the body's neuroception and is not a conscious choice.

Consider also as a coach how you can admit your mistakes and fallibility in an optimum way. Coaches who can admit when they make mistakes will earn the respect and trust of their athletes. A system of accountability among coaches and athletes is a sign of a psychologically safe culture.

How to do this in the heat of the moment? It starts with coaches practicing off the court or field. Mindfulness, breathing, and numerous other self-regulation tools, repeated consistently over time, will aid in your ability to "keep your cool" and make better decisions as well as facilitating your players with a model that responds in a balanced way in high intensity moments.

People will commit to what they help create. Be clear about what behaviors and practices you want more of to focus on that. When the coach connects with the player as a person as well as an athlete, this care about the players' needs and concerns becomes a foundation of a trusting relationship on which everything else is built, including performance. Communication by the coach is not about giving information, instructions, or directives but about a collaborative co-creative engagement for individual and team development and performance.

The most fundamental skill any coach can possess is knowing how to communicate with players. Not just to instruct deliberate practice and facilitate performance enhancement, but to allow the player to be able to open up about worries, insecurities, and fears at the right time. The lack of this co-regulated relationship inhibits the player from reaching his or her full potential.

Relationship Ruptures

Inevitable in every relationship will be an empathic failure resulting in a rupture. No matter how good or close the relationship, this disruption of connection will occur. Much more important than understanding cause or the result of the rupture, is the repair. Recovering from a disconnection can become a powerful catalyst to enhancing a trusting reciprocal relationship.

Acknowledge to yourself and out loud to the player that a rupture has occurred. No shame or blame, no sweeping it under the rug, but focus on repairing the connection.

- *Listen carefully to the experience and perception of the player and acknowledge the misunderstanding.*
- *Resonate with the experience of the player to give words to indicate your understanding. Not your experience, not your opinions, but your understanding of the player's feeling and experience.*
- *Take turns to address the changes you will use to repair the situation and relationship. No defensive justification, explaining rules, or information.*
- *Express understanding, mutual care, and concern throughout the discussion to reestablish connection and safety in the relationship.*
- *Refocus on the objectives and on moving forward for successful engagement and performance.*

Shame/Blame vs. Growth/Transformation

Perhaps a crucial question for any leader is the question Toni Morrison once asked parents about their children: "Do their eyes light up when they see you?"

Especially in the face of uncertainty, we are inclined to look for two things: the absolute and the closure. The finger pointing of a blame conversation can accomplish both, but in a negative way. In a culture of shame, someone or something in the organization needs to be blamed. This assignment of blame forecloses exploration of openness, learning, and positive growth. This reductionistic approach short-circuits exploration and new learning by assigning a cause and effect that becomes a black-and-white done deal.

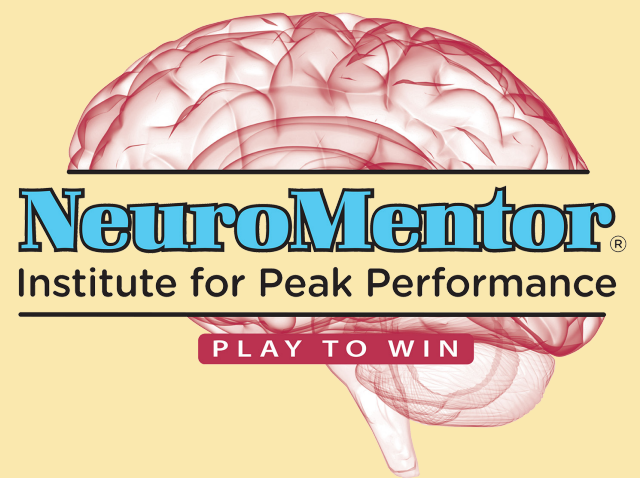
Blame assignment discharges discomfort in the initiator and generates shame in the recipient. Discomfort, hurt, or helplessness discharged immediately by blame forecloses mutual exploration and the pursuit of more productive processes.

Organizations and teams with a win-lose mentality are most likely to use a shame/blame approach. To see that hypothesis all the way to the end, evaluate whether it is working and ultimately assess the wins and losses. Assess also the seasonal growth and lifetime contributions of each person in the organization.

A method of motivation involving shame can work for a little while, but ultimately the recipient will disengage for self-protection. Shame and blame are rendered insignificant in organizations that value mutual respect and transformative interactions.

The brain's mirror neuron system tracks emotions, unspoken intentions, body language, and especially states of mind, including confidence. The most instantly contagious experience from one person to another is state of mind, which has both spoken and unspoken emotional components. The brain of each member of a team will instantly register and resonate with the spectrum of the experience of the leader via mirror neurons.

A survey by the American Psychology Association found that 91 percent of children indicate that their experience of stress is most determined by how stressed their parents are at any particular time. Their mirror neurons resonate with their parents' stress, spoken or unspoken, in an instantly transferable way. This contagion is faster than the fastest virus, going from mid-brain to mid-brain in a nanosecond. Same for coaches and players.



C. Enhancing Player Performance

Confidence Is a State of Mind

Olympic gold medalist Noureddine Morceli of Algeria said, “When I race, my mind is full of doubts—who will finish second, who will finish third?”

Confidence is a state of mind built on the foundation of experience, knowledge, and the cumulative experiences of mastery. Confidence does not mean unafraid, invincible, or unquestioning. It means that whatever challenges or obstacles occur, many of which cannot be predicted, you can create a belief system of knowing that you will create a successful outcome. Preparation and knowledge framed in that belief become self-fulfilling.

A lack of confidence, negative self-talk, doubt, or feeling like an impostor are all indications of an immediate need to get grounded in a focused, optimum mindset.

Accessing a Confidence Mindset

There are three ways to actively access the state of confidence:

1. Physiology

- Stand up
- Breathe strong
- Say “yes!!”
- Move deliberately with confidence. “I can do anything.”

2. Control your mental focus.

- What you focus on determines how you feel. If you focus on how things might not work out, you will lack confidence.
- We then experience whatever we sustain focus on. If you focus on how things won’t work out, you’ll experience the pain associated with that focus and will create doubt that will become self-fulfilling.

3. Change core beliefs.

- When I can imagine it, I can achieve it.
- When I am committed, there’s always a way to make it work.
- Success begins with beliefs. Beliefs become real, then reinforced.
- To change outcome, change belief.

Use of your physical body can effectively put you in a state of confidence no matter what you were feeling previously. Confidence is not something that you have or don't have but a state of mind entered by the way you speak, move, or gesture.

Success most often has to do with two things:

- The state of mind of confidence that you engage an endeavor
- How you maintain an optimum performance state under pressure-inducing circumstances

Creating an optimum performance involves these steps:

1. **State:** Your state will determine both your story (including confidence) and your strategy.
2. **Strategy:** a systematic way to practice and perform.
3. **Story:** Your story is your belief system that determines what you see and do.

Confidence Priming Blueprint

How can you prime your mind and brain to prepare for an anticipated situation and establish a mindset of confidence?

Here's how *not* to do it:

“By yelling at his point guard for missing that wide-open teammate in the corner, a coach has probably ensured that it will happen again.”

Alexander Wolff, *Sports Illustrated*

In the game Taboo, you have a target word on a card you have drawn that you want your partner to say given your single-word clues that aren't accompanied by gestures. Also on that card with the target word are a half dozen words you cannot use. The words that would make it too easy. Think about how hard it is, once you have seen those six words, not to say one of those words, to not focus on what is right in front of you. If you say one of those six taboo words, you lose the point. Often what you should not say can frame and dominate thinking to make it hard to get beyond the taboo words to offer reasonable clues.

A common perception is that the best way to get employees or players to perform is by pointing out mistakes, making threats, or being intense. While negative emotions grab attention, a positive focus works considerably better to develop confidence as a mindset and the associated aspects of loyalty, bonding, personal development, and commitment to a group.

Reframing mistakes as information to learn may help both learning as well as skillful coping and resilience. And it can help you relax into the self-acceptance that contributes to confidence. Mistakes, equanimity, keeping calm, carrying on, and experiencing effectiveness often initially precede confidence. And then to recognize that you have become more of who you truly are. Courage is not the absence of fear but the resolve to proceed despite it.

In high-pressure situations, the ability to remain focused and sustain a state of mind of confidence determines outcome to a significant degree. In research examining 185 venture capital pitches (like those seen on *Shark Tank*), confidence as manifested by calmness and eye contact combined with passion were the greatest predictors of outcome—greater than combined content, expertise, and experience. Sustaining a balanced and confident state of mind, the specific mindset of confidence, ensured the most favorable outcomes.

Is there a systematic way to establish a confident mindset?

Priming of mind and brain to prepare for an anticipated situation establishes the foundation of a mindset of confidence. Here are seven strategies for successful priming for confidence:

- Have a mantra for grounding and centering.
- Ask yourself positive, powerful questions to induce the calming neurochemical serotonin.
- Recall a time of similar accomplishment.
- Identify moments of significant confidence, a feeling of “I can do it” or “Whatever it takes.”
- Focus on connections with important others to activate oxytocin response—the neurochemical of connection and bonding.
- Create mental imagery of success to live into.
- Cultivate a circle of support people and mentors.

Is there a way to sustain and enhance confidence as a mindset?

Confidence is a state of mind that can be shaped by informed action. Here is a game plan to enhance both confidence and performance:

- Repeat attempts with adjustments for learning.
- Review and possibly recalibrate results.
- Adjust and move forward.
- Fail fast.
- Assess consistently.
- Adjust.
- Move forward.
- Leave your comfort zone.
- When in doubt, act.

An interesting aspect is that those who are overconfident do not alienate others or necessarily appear narcissistic if they genuinely believe their own confidence even though it may be overrated. On the other hand, fake confidence doesn't work well and appears as narcissistic, alienating others. Purity of action, wholeheartedness, and positive energy are also the attributes associated with confidence in Buddhist teachings.

Three components on the blacklist of confidence include dwelling in mistakes, inability to shut out the outside world (wanting to please people), and letting setbacks linger. Confidence can be compromised by overthinking, people-pleasing, and dwelling on defeat.

Consider the approaches that have been linked to diminished confidence:

- Being thin-skinned and preferring to be liked rather than respected
- Being afraid to say no and abandoning your own needs
- Being unwilling to make someone mad by asking for more money
- Ruminating about a criticism or negative comment rather than seeing it as a self-statement of the speaker or writer
- Taking the blame for things gone bad and crediting fate for successes
- Overpersonalizing a setback and undermining confidence

Guiding Mindfulness Meditation for Peak Practice

In a study in the *Journal of Cognitive Enhancement*, researchers at the University of Miami found that professional athletes who practiced mindfulness for twelve to fifteen minutes a day were more able to withstand emotional and mental demands of physical training and had greater resilience and more sustained focus.

To develop self-awareness, mindfulness training enhances the ability to focus on what you are feeling and doing. Mindfulness is simply a clarity, presence, and calmness that, rather than allowing you to stop thinking, allows you to notice what you are thinking. It is the antithesis of judgment.

You can meditate while walking, sitting, standing, lying down, or even in the midst of activities. A useful beginning might be a sitting posture to allow you to focus on various aspects of your internal experience. Choose a position that feels natural, supportive, and enjoyable and one where you stay alert. It may be easiest to diminish external distractions by closing your eyes when practicing. Choose a time of the day when you will be least distracted and most alert. What works best for you is what is most important.

Breathing can initiate a mindfulness practice. Mindfulness engages the present moment only, not attaching meaning or associations, not looking to the future. This moment-by-moment awareness of thoughts, feelings, and sensations involves acceptance without judgment, observation without attaching meaning.

Mindfulness breathing can initiate this focus:

- Inhale deeply through your nose for a count of four.
- Hold your breath for a count of four.
- Slowly exhale through your mouth for a count of four.

Mindfulness meditation begins with open, active attention in the present moment that allows you to both experience and observe thoughts and feelings without directing, judging, or guiding them. Shrink the change; start small, perhaps five minutes of meditation a day.

Identify a quiet and comfortable place, relax completely and focus on your breathing. Position yourself to allow room in your chest and abdomen for breathing.

- Become grounded and centered in a present state of mind.
- Put aside thoughts of past and future to center yourself in the present moment.
- Focus on your breath and the sensations of your body to relax and focus.

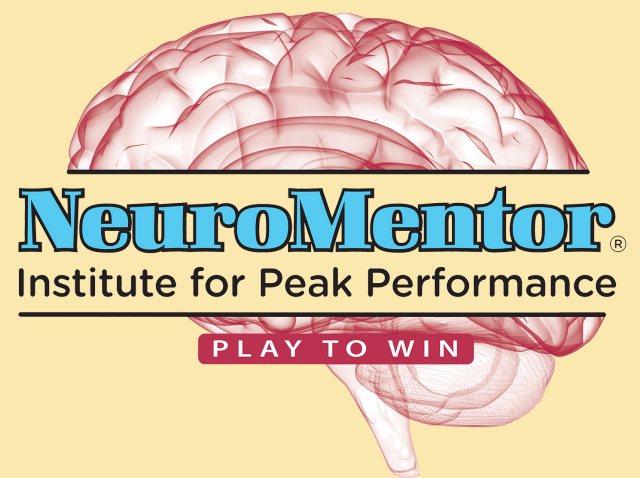
- Attend to your breath, following its movement throughout your body. Don't alter your breath; just turn your attention to it.
 - Select one area of your body affected by your breathing and focus your attention there.
 - Control the focus, not the breathing itself.
 - When you notice your mind wandering, bring your attention back to your breath.
 - Do this repeatedly, because your mind will continuously wander.
 - After five minutes, switch from focusing to monitoring: be aware of thoughts, feelings, and sensations.
 - Feel your whole body move with your breath.
 - Be receptive to your sensations.
 - Be attentive to the changing quality of experience in your body and in your thoughts.
 - Watch each thought come and go, simply noting them but not engaging.
 - Continue breathing as an anchor.
 - If you become carried away with a thought, observe where your mind went to, without judgment, and simply return to breathing. The most difficult challenge initially is to sustain the focus in the present moment and not engage thoughts as they enter your mind.
 - After the designated time, pause for a minute or two to gradually reenter usual awareness.
-

The Top 21 Things a Coach Needs to Know

1. Listen with the intensity most people have only while talking.
2. Change is constant and inevitable; it is the resistance to change that generates most problems.
3. It takes two real people for a co-created reciprocity and collaboration to occur.
4. The roles of storyteller and listener unfold in the shared safe space of the coaching relationship, co-creating a new story.
5. Players know what they need, though not perhaps in conscious, logical, or daytime language, and will show us in the safe, co-regulated relationship process what it is like to be them, and what needs to be addressed.

6. We need to see the self that the player hopes to become, the evolving new story that sometimes gets obscured from view.
7. At times, a thought, feeling, or behavior is an answer to a question its creator has not dared to ask.
8. We have to believe in the player until he or she teaches both of us why.
9. An authentic belief in someone activates their brain to create a state of mind that transcends usual thinking and performance. People will do more than they thought possible when someone believes in them.
10. The architecture of trust silently forms while you talk about other things; the co-created new story gives oxygen to hope, highlights the relief and release of new experience, and pushes creativity to full flight.
11. A fact or a belief is an anatomical reality in someone's brain; a new belief or strategy can't simply overwrite what's already there. Change is a process.
12. We need to recognize the silent intent embedded in the compromised result to see the possibility camouflaged in the frustrating process.
13. To make change permanent, the new experience needs to be incorporated into one's identity.
14. Regulating states of mind is the most important success strategy. Each state has its own story.
15. Your state of mind will have emotional contagion for your players, colleagues, and staff.
16. Confidence is a state of mind influenced by repeated practice and co-regulated experiences.
17. Knowing what *not* to do is at least as important as knowing what *to* do. You may not always know what the next right thing is, but you can almost always know what it *isn't*.
18. Knowing how to reverse a behavior pattern is evidence that we truly understand it.
19. The most common thing that gets in the way of understanding something is trying to fix it.
20. Old stories have to be mourned and the self left behind. No matter how ready someone is to change, to give up a long-practiced habit is like saying good-bye to an old friend.
21. You have to have a new performance story to be in before you can completely let go of the old one.

Your players are the shareholders of your career. You are the transitional character mentoring their lives and performance. They are not defined by their mistakes but by their learning and their deliberate practice. Working with you needs to be founded in a relationship and a conversation that are collaborative. No experience with you should be an away game; each experience should be like a home game. It may not be doing what comes naturally if that has been trying to convince players by applying pressure, threatening, or even promising. The key determinant is understanding what you can do to make it easy for players to move your way.



D. Team Development Practices

Fundamental Principles for Team Performance Enhancement

Connection with high-functioning people dramatically increase the likelihood of high-potential outcomes. Happiness and achievement are contagious. For example, when you become happier, any friend within a one-mile radius becomes 63% more likely to also become happier. Both moods and confidence are contagious.

Dr. Shawn Achor's research at Harvard has shown many aspects of how interconnected with others our achievement and success become. The following conclusions are derived from multiple sources of research showing that the essence of teamwork, rather than trying to become a higher achiever alone, is about achieving better together.

1. An individual perception of challenge and opportunity is transformed by including others in an achievement endeavor. (The hill looks 10-20% less steep than when facing it alone.)
2. Collaborative work on performance and success dissolves an invisible ceiling on individual success. Connecting with high-potential and high-achieving people dramatically increases the likelihood of high-potential and successful outcomes.
3. Creativity, inspiration, and successful performance are contagious among those in a group.
4. Each individual from coach to player must find their own personal meaning to apply and develop a collective purpose.
5. Attention and focus inform the brain what to repeat.
6. You can't change any aspect of a performance story until you take complete ownership of creating every aspect of it. The same with a team, where each member takes ownership of the joint performance.
7. Focused attention informs the brain what to repeat: Whatever behavior gets responded to enhances its frequency and meaning.
8. Making each practice component of a skill obvious, specific, and satisfying will enhance its repetition and development.
9. Whatever is rewarded is repeated. We know as parents and as coaches that whatever is responded to is sustained or enhanced. Good or bad.
10. The brain prioritizes immediate rewards over delayed rewards, so optimum practice needs to incorporate both.

11. Whether you frame an engagement or situation as anxiety or excitement, determines the mindset applied. Framing a stress as opportunity to learn new things and enhance potential impacts performance.
12. The initial thoughts of a day or a practice session establish a mindset that then processes the remainder of the experience. Those who watched three minutes of negative news in the morning were 27% more likely to experience their day as unhappy for the next six hours. A negative mood or a positive mood, established initially, becomes a framework for subsequent perception and experience.
13. The more energy a group channels in a positive direction, the more collective power is created to move forward.
14. Behavior and habit development need to align with and reinforce an identity. The ultimate default mode that we will always return to is our core identity. Deliberate practice must ultimately focus on a transformation of fundamental identity in order to become permanent, the default mode.
15. The anticipation of a reward – not its fulfillment – activates the reward system of the brain. The anticipation of an experience may feel better than its attainment. Which is why laddering success steps becomes a valuable strategy: To look to the next possibility will sustain motivation and anticipation of what happens next.
16. Remember to highlight and praise the system components that make exceptional performance possible. Nick Saban does not give out game balls to the MVP for this reason, as he believes that singling out anyone would go against his impetus of lifting the entire team's performance. He believes team wins should get collective praise.
17. A great leader not only praises other, but turns those other into praise providers.
18. Remember to praise not only an outcome, but movement toward an outcome to enhance its occurrence.
19. Praise and appreciation are renewable resources.
20. Celebrated strengths and successes result in more engagement and productivity across an entire organization.
21. The best way to sustain success is to reinforce and reward players' efforts to create change. The experience of effectiveness and the recognition of progress enhances motivation and engagement. The more you expand and share your power with others, the more powerful you become.
22. The ending of any behavior sequence or practice needs to be satisfying, because we tend to remember the ending more than any other aspect.

7 Elements of Coaching for Optimum Performance

1. Clear expectations

Clear expectations stated simply and specifically, provide focus and direction to guide and inspire. Clear expectations include achievement measurements.

Expectations need to be specific for each player, as well as for the team.

2. Monitoring

Monitoring includes observing, measuring, and reviewing performance of the specific measured expectations.

3. Feedback

Performance feedback for each player as well as the team provides a metric for self-monitoring. How feedback is provided becomes crucial to its reception and use. A positive, balanced framework for feedback generates a collaborative communication to co-create performance improvement. Review the components of deliberate practice in Playbook II to be sure that each are addressed and integrated with skill development and performance execution.

4. Support

Determining the specific support that each player needs requires constant monitoring as well as collaborative conversations. Support may include positive feedback, specific training, access to information, equipment and supplies, or even a referral to someone for specialized attention in a specific area. Consistently monitor and review to determine if training is developing skill and enhanced performance in an ongoing way. Application of training and practice need to be continuously assessed to see what support is needed for putting it all into performance action.

5. Recognition

Every player and every team need to know and to hear that their contributions are validated and appreciated. Highlighting excellent performance will enhance its repetition and guide improvement. You get more of what you respond to. This is why positive reinforcing comments on the things done right will have a greater impact than focusing on the negative, even though mistakes may need to be addressed clearly and simply.

A culture of appreciation begins with coaches. Recognition that is effective, timely, specific, and meaningful has significant impact. A light shined on each improvement enhances performance.

In a culture of appreciation, recognition needs to occur not just from the top down of coach to player, but player to player in a continuous process. In this culture, each participant becomes inspired to appreciate one another.

6. Accountability

A coach needs to hold accountable each aspect of engagement from meetings to practices to performances. Oriented by purpose, accountability supports thriving engagement to promote performance and progress. Accountability catalyzes progress, because each achievement is validated and highlighted. Immediate correction of mistake or deviation reorients to progressive achievement.

Supportive accountability manages and enhances performance. Support and guidance to meet performance expectations provide a continuous framework of peak practice and performance.

7. Performance Improvement Plan

Ideally initiated by the player's reflections and suggestions, the co-created plan may need to be developed in certain areas to specify expectations, goals, and needed improvement.

Player Alliance and Team Development

*“Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something
you want done because he wants to do it.”*

General George Patton

Perhaps the most important developmental process for team success is to build a working alliance for deliberate practice, learning, and performing together. This working alliance process evolves and deepens to form a cohesive effort of “no matter what.”

A mindset of team culture develops every aspect of performance. Ownership requires not taking credit for a team's success but to bestow honor and congratulations on fellow team members. Each individual may be inclined to attribute the success of others to luck or circumstance, to make excuses for personal and team failures. To blame poor performance on circumstance, bad luck, or disappointing performance by others fails to take responsibility and ownership for everything that you can determine about your performance. The absolute necessity of optimizing performance includes to learn, to grow, and to improve, as well as performing optimally.

Research into multiple dimensions of the elements of high performance teams reveals how the coach can catalyze and inspire a team's performance.

- Know the stories of each individual rather than just a person as part of a team.
- Define the purpose of the team – not just performance and victory, but purpose and meaning.
- Address changes in small, stepwise ways.
- Keep feedback and mentoring contingent on immediate behavior: consistent, regular, and predictable.
- Do consistent, regular little things to repeat and enhance purpose in various, even unpredictable ways.
- Keep each player focused.
- Learn and appreciate the flow of individual and team performance.
- Know, respect, and consistently honor the team culture.
- Focus on new ideas, growth mindset, and praise for both achievement and growth mindset.
- Recognize every small victory.
- The model the coach offers is downloaded by each player each moment. Openness, compassion, admitting mistakes, and co-creating individual and team performance stories become important building blocks of this process.
- Admit mistakes and analyze failures within the overarching purpose of learning in order to excel.
- Push each person to challenge and brainstorm both successes and mistakes.

Performance Frameworks

*“You might think that the world exists independently of how we understand it.
You would be mistaken.”*

Dr. George Lakoff

Mental Framing Can Determine Outcome

What do you think of when I say, “Don’t think of an elephant?” That statement, the title of a book by Dr. George Lakoff, ensures that you will think of an elephant. Whether the focus is negative or positive, it activates the imagery of an elephant. Neuroscience and quantum physics show us that we get what we focus on, not what we want. That focus can be determined in a number of ways to enhance performance.

Words activate a particular brain mindset. Our brains are structured in a cascade network that links brain circuits associated with a particular word, concept, or emotion. Specific language then triggers these cascades to boot up a mindset to then process the information.

Frames are the mental structures in our brains that shape the way we perceive and process information. Most of these brain algorithms are not consciously accessible, but we can readily see their consequences. The automatic, unconscious, instantaneous inferences we make, as well as the emotional and behavioral patterns that follow are all consistent with the frame of meaning. How you frame an experience determines how you engage and respond to it. How you frame a setback has a significant impact on the chance of successfully overcoming it. An obstacle initiates either a setback story or a resilience story to become a triumph of desire.

We have to pay careful attention to exactly how we frame a statement because emotional motivation can override both logic and intellect. For example, pro golfers putt more successfully when they regard the putt as avoiding a bogey rather than achieving a birdie. We are biased to avoid actions that create loss more so than we are motivated to pursue actions that result in gain.

Here’s an example of how a small framing effect can have an impact on mindset. Norbert Schwarz and his colleagues invited participants to his lab to respond to this question: “How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?” As the participants began the task, he first asked them to photocopy a piece of paper for him. Half of the respondents found a dime on the copying machine, put there by the experimenter. For those who found the dime, this positively influenced the subjects’ reported satisfaction with their life as a whole, compared with those whose experience was not framed by finding the money.

A positive engaging initiation of each practice can enhance players’ mindset. On the other hand, when you engage in an argument with another coach or player, you activate and strengthen the frames and beliefs which undermine the strength of your view. It is related to the boomerang effect, in which when you give someone information that contradicts a view they hold, they will argue more staunchly for their own position and end up more convinced of their original position.

Positive Framework-Based Initiatives for Players

- Notice what the player has done right. Acknowledge successes to open the possibility of acceptance of correcting mistakes.
- Use a positive, progressive, performance-based framework instead of entering into negative thinking or reacting to a player's objection. This is analogous to "Don't think of an elephant."
- Do not simply negate the player's point of view or claim, but reframe to fit an adaptive framework. It is a trap to respond directly to questions by reacting immediately and specifically. Change the frame to a positive, adaptive one.
- Words have the most powerful effect on our minds when they are simple and easy to process. Simple language can be immediately converted into action of specific behaviors.
- To convey basic and specific values, share a story about how you learned and used them. From your parents, a teacher, a coach. Create an experience-near specific story that does not have to be interpreted and is not abstract.
- Information and data alone will not generate peak performance or wins. Frame each in the perspective of effective performance.
- Collaborate proactively rather than reactively. Play offense, not defense. Actively frame each issue in a positive, progressive mode to guide performance.
- Collaboration initiates a process of mutual engagement.
- Align progress with the already existing identity of the player.

Create a Performance Story with Your Players

Stories organize information. Stories are how we make sense of things, understand, and remember.

Research also indicates that organizing information and facts into stories helps us derive more significant meaning and relationship, as well as providing a context of relationship. An otherwise unconnected group of facts and seemingly unrelated information integrated into a coherent story helps us organize and see things at a different level.

Stories reveal process. Stories help us understand motivations of others, and better assess behaviors and outcomes. Recent research has even shown that seeing the big picture can put us in a positive mood, and stories are the best way to create a bigger picture. As well, when we are in a positive mood, the brain tends to see more abstract things in a better way.

Stories enhance memory. We store our memories in story form. By serving as a framework to conceptualize and relate experiences, stories enhance memory. Our brains compartmentalize and remember. Studies have shown that by presenting factual information, such as a news broadcast as a narrative story, enhances viewer's memory for the information contained.

Stories initiate action. A good story will guide good action. An example is that story-based public service announcements in story form will result in greater donation of money. When people donate to a charitable cause, the best story moves from the abstract to the specific. "A famine in Ethiopia" was significantly enhanced (25%) when substituting a picture of Roika, a 7-year-old who faces a threat of severe hunger or even starvation.

When we see performance as an unfolding story, it infers not only meaning but personal authorship. Whatever we think, feel, and experience we create each moment.

Performance Experiences and Memories

Memories are what we keep of our experiences. Two very different brain-based functions are the experiencing self and the remembering self. The remembering self keeps score from experiences, and makes decisions. An example that Daniel Kahneman described was someone hearing a beautiful 40-minute symphony, and at the very end for about two seconds heard an unfortunate screech in the music. The listener then reported a horrible experience of the symphony. In fact, however, 40 minutes of a blissful experience was then retrospectively subjugated to a two-second bad experience at the end. This example of the end effect's importance emphasizes how an entire experience can be retrospectively reviewed in light of a specific ending.

Careful studies show that two aspects determine the significance and impact of an experience: the most emotionally compelling component (peak result), and the end of the entire time (end result). Both peak and ending experiences create the most impactful and meaningful moments, as well as the most vivid memories.

Coaches can make use of the peak and end experiences to optimize deliberate practice as well as make peak performance indelible. and end every practice experience on a high note. Highlight the most specific aspects of practice and performance focusing on the most emotionally salient aspect. The remembered moment strongly influences practice memory as well as self-concept as a performer. The coach who highlights the peak and the end from the player's perspective commits it to performance narrative and to a practice memory. We choose whether or not we will repeat an experience by the memory we have of it.

The remembering self composes stories to keep as template for future reference and story development.

Consider ending a group meeting with two questions:

- What's the most important thing that you are personally taking away from this meeting?
- What do you commit to do based on our discussion?

What can coaches learn from behavioral economics to enhance player engagement and performance?

1. We hate losses and pain twice as much as we enjoy wins and gains (**Loss Aversion**).

A loss feels more powerful, and the subjective sense of responsibility is greater, so a choice may be based on the anticipation of regret.

Since losses are emotionally weighted about twice as heavily as gains in most contexts, the coach will need to focus attention on framing progress and gains rather than succumbing to the emotional avoidance of loss. Coaches can diminish the painful experiences of extensive practice, grueling preparation, and delayed gratification by focusing on incremental gains of skill and knowledge.

2. We naturally discount benefits that come in the future to focus instead on current payoff (**Future Discounting**).

Preparation needs framing in terms of current, immediate, stepwise progress toward an ultimate goal.

3. We respond more to a story than to facts and information (**Balanced Learning**).

Stories engage both the emotional and intellectual sides of the brain. Preparation and practice can be conveyed in the narrative of a performance story. Each successful story has a beginning, middle, and end – a challenge, development, and resolution. A compelling story beats statistics every time.

4. Social networks – team – become enormously important (**Affinity + Conformity**).

The emotional contagion and affinity bond of team strongly influences each individual performance. Emphasize the benefit and purpose of individual contribution for team benefit.

5. How choices are framed and presented have significant impact of adoption and decision-making by players (**Choice Architecture**).

A nudge can alter behavior in a predictable way without reducing options or controlling choices. An example is how we are more likely to choose a particular option if it is the default option (the choice stands unless a player *opts out* of the default position). For example, organ donation is 18% when the choice is to *opt in* to donate, and 95% when it is the automatic default option (you have to initiate to *opt out*). Make the easy, default options the best choice.

6. We admire someone after learning something special about them (**Halo Effect**).

Point out a unique and special attribute of each fellow coach and player to enhance mutual regard and set a positive tone. When a special aspect of each individual is highlighted in a team context, it can negate envy and internal competition.

7. We engage and sustain effort when we experience effectiveness (**Reward and Punishment**).

A practice system of simple, specific next steps can result in repeated effectiveness. The experience of mastery has better results than external rewards or punishments.

Develop a simple, specific, step wise system for both practice and performance to generate engagement, with positive reinforcement to influence good decisions and behaviors.

Making behavior to practice a skill obvious, specific, and satisfying will enhance its repetition.

Whatever is rewarded is repeated. We know as parents and as coaches that whatever is responded to, good or bad, will be sustained or enhanced.

8. Our most powerful motivation, more than money or fame, is a sense of purpose (**Internal Ideal**).

Help the players believe in what they are doing, the benefits to the team, and a purpose larger than themselves. Discourage blaming and shaming in the service of each player owning a performance story and living into an individual and team ideal.

9. Engagement and endorsement need to align with identity (**Endowment Effect**).

Players consciously and unconsciously invest in what they identify with. Identity, values and ideals become essential to recognize for optimum performance. Begin a conversation that parallels the values of the player.

Behavior and habit development need to reinforce identity. We always return to the default mode of our core identity. This means that deliberate practice must ultimately include a transformation of fundamental individual and team identity in order to become permanent, the default mode.

10. Giving players facts and data will not change their minds, and strong persuasion efforts will likely backfire (**Boomerang Effect**).

When the player is presented with new data or new ideas, it is best received when it begins with what the player already knows or believes. Then, go someplace new together. People think in frames. A framework, like a mindset, determines what is seen, how it is processed, and the conclusions reached.

11. The perception of the probability and importance of an event becomes enhanced with greater emotional attachment, as well as being more recent and frequent (**Availability**).

The emphasis and repetition of positive instances and successful scenarios enhance both engagement and repetition.

The more a brain circuit is activated, the stronger it becomes, and the more likely it is to fire to become the default performance mode.

12. Communication is most effective when it is clear, brief, and simple (**Cognitive Ease**).

We have a limited bandwidth for decisions. The brain prioritizes immediate rewards over delayed rewards, so optimum practice needs to incorporate both combined. Every action incurs an immediate consequence, though sometimes those consequences are not visible or immediately evident. The greater the delay, the less specific, or less evident a consequence is, the less likely it will influence behavior.

Neuroscience shows that we attend to and remember up to ten words at a time. Beyond that, it takes mental energy to pay attention to complex statements to figure out what they mean and how to apply them.

13. Positive, encouraging focus on possibility and achievement heightens outcomes (**Growth Mindset**).

Focus on problems only to inform a framework of improvement. The more a brain circuit is activated, the stronger it becomes, and the more likely it is to become the default performance mode. Language can change the strength of these circuits: progressive, achievement-oriented language activates the circuitry for optimum performance.

Deliberate practice is satisfying for both coach and player to the extent that it is a productive system that generates optimum performance. It is immediately rewarding because the player feels effective, and ultimately satisfying when it optimizes performance.

14. The ending of any practice or discussion needs to be satisfying and successful, because we tend to remember the ending more than any other aspect (**Peak End Effect**).

When I began playing basketball with my son and daughter in the driveway, we would never end on a miss. They had to make the last basket they shot before we stopped. Later, when I coached their basketball teams, each player had to make the last basket he or she shot before we ended practice.

The experience at the end of a sequence or practice is most vividly remembered. Retrospective assessments are weighted by experiences at peak moments and at end moments. These two times create more vivid and lasting memories. More than anything, it is the experience of effectiveness and the resultant mastery that reinforces behavior. When the last communication is positive, it has the most powerful impact.

The most effective experience and subsequent memory is when both the peak and the end effect combine to be the same. Analogous to the cliffhanger, the end is emotionally the most significant component of the entire practice.

The memory of a practice session can be enhanced by combining the peak effect with the end effect. End every practice with an exhilarating peak experience, a cliffhanger to bridge to the next practice. A finale where the end is also the peak can be emphasized by a memorable surprise. When a particular performance is exceptional and memorable, cue it with a word or phrase to describe it, and anchor for future retrieval and recreation. Encoding a positive performance memory can be an important aspect of every practice sequence, and an anchor for future behavior. Memory is our brain's attempt to connect us to the past, and a performance memory becomes a bridge to current performance enhancement.

When you study for a test in a particular context and in a specific state of mind, your chances of remembering what you studied are better when you reenter that same context and state of mind. Deliberate practice works in the same way by reentering that performance zone not only for each practice, but also for the game. The simple version is, practice as you want to play.

An important component of performance memory is to make that memory consistent with identity, and incorporate enhanced performance with evolving identity. We are driven to maintain the idea of ourselves – our identity – as consistent. Performance that is transformative into a new identity becomes not only consistent, but a default mode.

15. When time, energy, and money are invested in a project, there is a tendency to stick with it even when it is not working because of the resources already invested, and to avoid loss and regret (Sunk Cost Fallacy).

A coach can stick with a game plan that is not working because of the preparation and investment already given the plan. “Well, we’ve come this far.” This self-justification maintains psychological inertia to keep doing the same thing. The sunk-cost fallacy keeps people in an unpromising plan or project when it would be better to drop it and start a new one.

The more heavily invested we are in a belief, the harder it is to let go, especially if we have no new belief to replace it. The sunk costs of our beliefs seduce us. When conditions clearly dictate to mountain climbers partway up Everest that they should turn around, they tend to continue because of how far they’ve come.

Look objectively at whether a plan is working, at whether it is the plan or the execution that is failing, and be ready to revise its execution or to walk away from the plan.

