

PEAK PERFORMANCE PLAYBOOKS

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

PLAYBOOK II

*PEAK PERFORMANCE
PRACTICE WITH
COACHES AND
PLAYERS*

NeuroMentor[®]
Institute for Peak Performance

PLAY TO WIN

David Krueger MD

PEAK PERFORMANCE PLAYBOOK II

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

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For information, contact:

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

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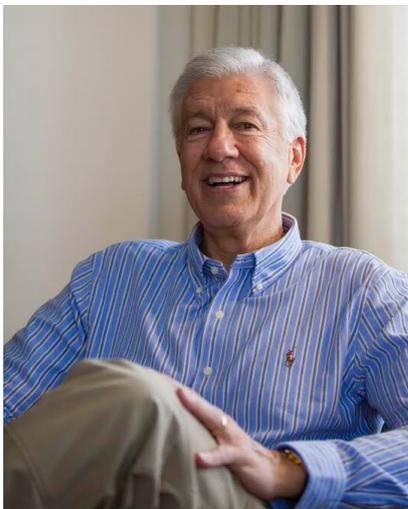
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NeuroMentor® Institute for Peak Performance



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.

PEAK PERFORMANCE PLAYBOOKS

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

PLAYBOOK II. PEAK PERFORMANCE PRACTICE WITH COACHES AND PLAYERS

Table of Contents

A. Learning Strategies to Develop Peak Performance

- *Steps of Transformative Learning*.....2
- *Team Interaction Factors Positively Impacting Optimal Learning*.....3
- *The Output Channel*.....4
- *A 5 Phase Performance Outline*.....6
- *Setting and Revising Performance Goals*.....7
- *A Systematic Method for Reviewing and Solving Problems*.....8
- *Learning Zone and Performance Zone*.....9
- *Avoiding Pitfalls to Peak Practice and Performance*.....16

B. Peak Performance Practice Strategies

- *Deliberate Practice: An Overview*.....28
- *Deliberate Practice: The System*.....30
- *Deliberate Practice: The Structure*.....33
- *Deliberate Practice: The Applications*.....35
- *Performance Cues*.....37
- *Performance Flow*.....43
- *Peak Performance Practice Summary*.....45

Table of Contents Cont.

C. Neuroassociative Conditioning for Optimal Performance

- *Neural Conditioning Program*.....49
- *Unlearning and New Performance Learning*.....52
- *Performance Preparation and Assessment*.....55
- *7 Techniques to Edit Your Performance Story*.....56
- *Compromises Inventory*.....58
- *Your Mind's Eye: Visualizations and Affirmations*.....61
- *The 4 R's: Repeat and Rationalize vs. Recognize and Reorganize*.....66
- *Personal Feedback Questionnaire*.....68
- *5 Steps to Revise a Performance Story*.....69
- *Performance Inhibitions and Success Insurance*.....77

D. Peak Performance Mindset

- *Mindset Mastery*.....79
- *Pressure Performance Strategies*.....83
- *Pressure Management Tools*.....85
- *ROADMAP States of Mind*.....86
- *ROADMAP System for Performing Under Pressure*.....89

E. Wellness Practices

- *The Wealth of Wellness*.....92
- *The Wellness System of Energy*.....93
- *Wellness Initiatives*.....93
- *Brain Programming for Wellness*.....94
- *Special Issues of Success: For Women Only*.....94
- *Special Issues of Success: For Men Only*.....96

PEAK PERFORMANCE PRACTICE FOR COACHES AND PLAYERS

When I was in the singles ski lift line at Steamboat Springs about to advance to the chairlift, an instructor behind me who had five kids all about age six asked me if I would mind if two of them rode the chairlift with me. Of course, I welcomed the opportunity.

As we got on the lift, the little girl next to me had a somewhat awkward seating and seemed to slump a little bit as we were riding and talking.

As we got close to the end of the lift, she said in a very timid voice, "I'm scared to get off."

"I understand," I said. "Do you know who Laurie Hernandez is?" It was just after the 2016 Summer Olympics, when Laurie had won a gold in the team event and a silver on the balance beam. The little girl looked at me and said, "Yes." I asked her if she would like to know what Laurie did when she was scared about performing her gymnastics routine. She immediately said, "Yeah!" I told her that Laurie did three things. She pictured herself doing a perfect routine, a vision of exactly how she would perform. Then, the instant before she began, she took a deep breath to breathe in relaxation and breathe out any tension, and said to herself, "I got this."

My new little buddy seemed interested in this and sat just a bit more upright. As we were a few seconds from getting off the lift, I asked her what she would say to herself as she got off.

"I got this," she said in a timid, hesitant voice.

I nudged her. "Say it like you really mean it."

Then, in a voice that seemed to channel all of her six years into someone I wouldn't want to meet in a dark alley, she said very confidently, "*I got this.*"

As she skied out of the chair perfectly, she stopped and turned to look at me from about ten feet away. At the same instant, we both did a one-inch air fist bump. We both smiled, and then she skied off with her instructor.

Breakthroughs in neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and behavioral sciences have created radically new ways to guide both practice and performance. Mind- and brain-based strategies integrated with performance science can have dramatic effects on the way we interact, lead, and perform. Performance enhancement principles and systems form the template of deliberate practice for peak performance.

The brain has a unique way of writing into code and creating complex algorithms that may be consciously inaccessible but can generate intricately developed patterns of behavior and performance. Understanding and rewriting these patterns leads to significant enhancement.

Information has never been sufficient to generate change. The process must be addressed in a stepwise systematic manner to result in transformation of each player's operating system, performance, and core identity to make the change permanent. This section, designed for both coach and player, will apply evidence-based learning and deliberate practice strategies for developing peak performance systems. Coaches and players can integrate these proven performance systems and tools into existing practices.

We'll examine how to create new mind software and write new code for the brain—a systematic approach to creating changes of mind, brain, and behavior for peak performance.

Understanding and mastering the common performance inhibitions of choking, sandbagging, self-handicapping, and burnout are addressed along with their remedies.

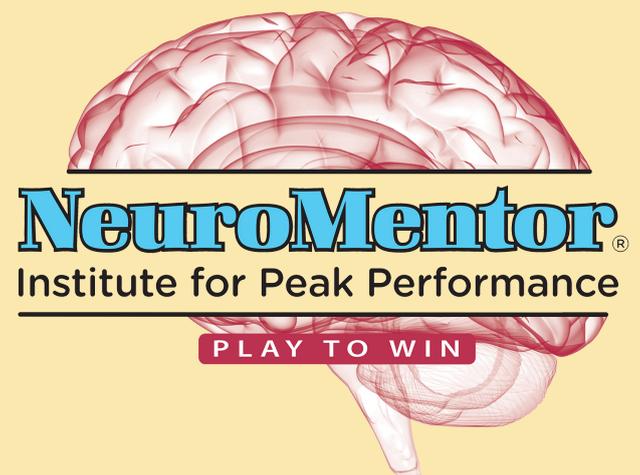
Science is about understanding patterns, the fundamental laws and principles that form the foundation of our lives and world. The brain is a pattern-seeking organ, yet many of the methods of facilitating change are contrary to the way the mind and brain work. It's not about having all the answers, since most of our operating system is unconscious and not directly accessible anyhow, but about having an informed framework for *asking the right questions* and an *evidence-based system for optimum performance*. This section presents systematic ways to reprogram mind software and rewire brain hardware for peak performance.

We'll apply three proven systems to address optimum performance:

The Neural Conditioning Program is a *performance microsystem* for managing emotional triggers and rewiring planned, ideal responses for peak performance. The Neural Conditioning Program addresses an evidence-based sequence to generate optimum responses at a behavioral and brain level. The simple proven mastery tactics will help you effectively manage states of mind and strategically plan optimum performance. This systematic architecture of state of mind regulation can rewire your brain for new behaviors and optimum performance habits.

Deliberate practice principles are a proven performance science macrosystem of establishing and maintaining elite performance. When deliberate practice principles are addressed in systematic way, and integrated with skill development, performance execution becomes unsurpassed.

The ROADMAP System® is a *performance macrosystem* for deconstructing and understanding personal performance and systematically writing new code for mind, brain, and behavior to rewire for optimum performance, including performance under pressure. *ROADMAP* is an acronym for the seven steps of a scientific and systematic way to deconstruct and understand personally created stories and to strategically create new behavior. Understanding behavior and performance algorithms couples with a methodology to create a new, enhanced performance story. The development of corresponding new identity becomes the bedrock that allows this transformation to become permanent. The ROADMAP System® becomes the blueprint of performance story construction to understand and address the mind and brain creation of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors organized into an accomplished performance story.



A. Learning Strategies to Develop Peak Performance

Steps of Transformative Learning

Performance-related practices for both coaches and players include these steps:

1. Begin with a positive mindset.

How you think and believe about your learning dramatically impacts its effectiveness and application. Changing how you think changes how much you can learn. Whatever you attempt to learn, a positive approach of optimistic engagement anchors the remaining process. The belief that you will not be able to do it results in not being able to do it.

The most effective learners take charge of their own learning and do not let obstacles be sufficient reason not to proceed. A growth mindset looks at any specific challenge to determine optimum possibility, process, and outcome.

2. Establish strategic deliberate practice and learning.

- Set specific goals, limited to two to three at a time.
- Create goals that are challenging.
- Set achievable stepwise goals, as each achievement further motivates the process.
- Determine a target date for each goal.
- Identify specific needs in the learning process and set about addressing them.
- Identify holes in what you need to learn rather than working on what you are already good at.
- Challenge yourself with tasks just outside your ability.
- Interweave different tasks in the same learning segment.

3. Actively engage in processing information vs. passive acquisition.

Ask questions and find other ways of engaging material to process and respond with the new learning as part of its acquisition process. Testing yourself is one of the best ways to learn new material or new skills. Testing yourself offers better learning probability than rereading or redoing, because testing yourself requires retrieval and use of the output channel for new material or skill. Test, practice, consolidate, learn.

4. Identify optimum information sources that will challenge you—this includes you, too, Coach.

Seek out different points of view and alternate perspectives. Engagement with additional informed points of view can stretch and challenge your default assumptions and behaviors.

5. Address physical activity, nutrition, and sleep as important learning and performance components. Brain and body both need to be optimally functioning. Learning always includes optimum sleep because the hippocampus transfers information that is deemed worthy of retaining to long-term memory during sleep.

Team Interaction Factors Positively Impacting Optimal Learning

Social cognitive and neural sciences have demonstrated some fundamental components of various social interactions that most positively affect learning and achievement. The fundamental human needs of certainty, effectiveness, significance, connection, growth, and contribution are important to understand. Each contributes to psychological safety and belonging. Addressing these fundamental human needs is necessary to catalyzing peak performance in yourself and others. Peak performance occurs when these fundamental needs are met in fulfilling, optimum ways.

1. Effectiveness

How does a player feel after each interactive and practice experience: validated, valued, appreciated, important? Or do they feel invalidated, unimportant, unappreciated? This experience addresses the basic desire of effectiveness in interaction. Significance, the need to feel important, special, and unique, can be incorporated into an ideal of achievement and peak performance.

2. Certainty

Our brains consistently attempt to predict the future, to anticipate what will happen next. We consistently scan, intuit, and engage predictable hypotheses of predictability. When a coach or mentor is transparent about what happens next, or about expectations, this engages the certainty of knowing exactly what to do in order to be more effective. This creates a sense of mastery, the experience of that most fundamental of human needs, effectiveness.

3. Autonomy

Effectiveness from an internal point of reference defines the experience of mastery. Rather than being an extension of someone else's point of view or directive, having an internal point of reference generates a sense of autonomy.

4. Connection

We experience connection in various kinds of relatedness: friendship, intimacy, prayer, or simply the desire to bond to another. This fundamental need of connection applies to important others in the group or the team.

5. Fairness

The experience of being treated fairly is a personal emotional response, enhanced by transparency. When we perceive fairness, the brain releases a pleasure chemical. When we perceive unfairness, we feel pain as unfairness which triggers the reptile, primitive part of our brain that mediates threats and survival. The perception of unfairness often results from some variation of being pushed out of a valued community, being left out or treated negatively in an important relationship or situation.

As human beings, we all have the same needs. Our differences become the vehicles we use to fulfill those needs. People will violate their ideals, their values, in order to meet their needs. When fundamental needs and ideals align with strategies and goals, optimum learning evolves.

Houston Rockets General Manager Daryl Morey, whose advanced statistics has made him the *Moneyball* of professional basketball, was asked what he would most like to know to forecast the potential of a professional basketball player to grow in skill and as a team member. He quickly responded. “Do they have the self-awareness of where they are not as good as they need to be, meaning do they understand there’s a gap between them and Chris Paul or James Harden or any of these great players in the league?” And he added, “What are their habits to improve that gap?”

Self-awareness combines the commitment to self-reflect, the discipline to systematically ask the hard questions to monitor performance, and make collaboration with coaches and team members an ongoing process. Alan Stein, Jr. summarized, “The most dangerous people in the world are the ones who don’t know what they don’t know.”

The Output Channel

What is the best way to teach and learn something new?

A study at the University of Waterloo found that retention is 40 percent greater simply as a result of reading out loud rather than reading silently.

Of the three types of learning strategies, which do you think yielded the best results:

- Review of the material
- Test yourself
- Create a concept map to write the main ideas and relationship in a diagram

Psychologists Jeffrey Karpicke and Janell Blunt found that the self-test of writing out the concepts outperformed every other kind of preparation.

This application of the output channel becomes an important component in all learning. A simple application is that a drill allows focus on a specific skill segment. A drill can isolate a segment of a performance in order to directly focus on improving basic execution.

Related research further clarifies that when it comes to recalling and performing better, actual practice at retrieval of the material and enacting the skill are far superior to other methods. This approach is fundamental in sports as well as in academic, intellectual, and even artistic learning and performance.

What kind of practice structure can lead to the best long-term learning?

Some of the answers from performance and sports science help address this question.

Long-term learning can be maximized using three proven methods:

1. Space out practice schedules rather than compressing them into a short period.

To train for a skill development, one training session each week for four weeks results in considerably greater skill acquisition than if all four hours are compressed into one time period. An example of several similar studies is of thirty-eight surgical residents who received four training sessions in a specific kind of microscopic surgery. Half received all the training in one day, the other half in one training session a week for four weeks. A month after training concluded, all the surgical residents were asked to perform surgery on a laboratory animal while experts who did not know about the experiment's two groups observed. The residents whose training had been spaced performed significantly better.

2. Deliberately challenge yourself.

Specify an area to work on, specific attainable goals, a specified time period. Systematic and deliberate practice are required to get better at any complex skill. Deliberate practice includes challenging yourself to stretch current abilities.

3. Focus on each component separately but not exclusively for a sustained time.
4. Studying or practicing one component of information or a skill set is referred to as block practice. Doing one block and alternating with another block or more in the process of deliberate practice shows greatest benefit.

What is the importance of providing context in explanations?

In a classic study of giving three groups of people detailed verbal information, they were studied for how many of the items they remembered after two minutes:

Group 1: given no context, remembered three items.

Group 2: given the simple context of “This information is about washing clothes,” remembered six items.

Group 3: after listing what they remembered, they were then given the context that the items and actions were about washing clothes: their recollection was no better than the group without a context.

Group 2 did the best because they were given the context before the list of items, and had a framework for organizing what they heard.

We construct a mental model that includes the information in the storylines of the experience, and when we remember, we remember our model, not the initial stimuli we created it from.

Coaches must remember to instruct using the context of stories—experience-near stories for the players to recognize, understand and remember in story form. As a coach, keep everything clear, brief, and simple. Attention and comprehension will benefit. A well-known track coach in Texas was asked by his star runner before a big race, “Coach, any final words?” the coach simply said, “Just stay to the left and get back here as soon as you can.”

A 5 Phase Performance Outline

These five steps create a map that specifies where you are, and where you want to go, and how to measure progress along the way. Having a map also allow to quickly know what is detour and distraction.

Phase 1. Assess your present performance

- Where are you now?
- What accomplishments that are consistent with your beliefs and ideals are you willing to commit to?
- What has worked? And what has not?
- What has been missing that if you added now would enhance your life?

Phase 2. Visualize and generate possibilities.

- Where are you going?
- What defines success? How will it look and feel?

Phase 3. Design a specific plan.

- Create a mission that is stronger than your fear.
- Design a plan that honors your uniqueness, needs, and values.
- Establish a strategy and a series of specific, compelling, and short-term goals to arrive at a big-picture goal.

Phase 4. Work through each initiative and next best action for each goal.

Phase 5. Consider the impact of change on your identity. Your vision may involve changes in such fundamental notions as how and who you see yourself to be.

Setting and Revising Performance Goals

1. Have I developed my own personal definition of success, and formulated my own goals?
2. In goal setting, is my motivation primarily internal or external?
3. Is the reward or esteem derived from one area, such as public spotlight, absorbing more of my energy and time so that I create pressure and vulnerability in practice and performance areas that are also vitally important?
4. Have I determined what I can and what I can't effectively address and create? Am I putting all of my energy into what I can effectively create? Am I letting go or avoiding those areas where I have no power or ability?
5. What is my vision for my athletic career in the next 12 months?
6. What are my top three goals?
7. What is my biggest challenge?

8. Do I have a specific strategy and plan to achieve my goals?
 9. Do I have a map of how I want to reach my goal
 10. Do I have specific and tangible ways of measuring progress, goal attainment, and time frame?
 11. After reaching a particular goal, do I wonder, "Is that all there is?" Or do I find that I am no longer sufficiently interested to sustain the passion and engagement?
 12. Am I able to relax completely?
 13. Am I holding back from making important commitments because they seem to close off other alternatives?
 14. Does it seem selfish to act on my own needs?
 15. Am I advancing in my athletic career in line with my true potential?
 16. Do I find it difficult to finish things without a deadline?
 17. How much do I rely on others for direction, affirmation, and self-esteem?
-

A Systematic Method for Reviewing and Solving Problems

A systematic method for reviewing and solving problems can be remembered by the acronym SOLVE:

- S** State the area of the problem as specifically as possible.
- O** Outline the problem in as much detail as possible: where, when, how, who.
- L** List alternatives. Write down the first ten solutions that come to mind without analyzing them. Then select the three best solutions that recognize your unique abilities, do not create limitations, and that specify a focus.
- V** Visualize the consequences. This visualization should incorporate a good bit of your interests, abilities, personality style, and values with your problem-solving approach. The alternative that feels best – the most comfortable – may be the best. Plan a strategy to achieve the specific goal. Gather information from experts if necessary, but develop your own plan.
- E** Evaluate the results after a full effort at problem solving. If there has been a failure, evaluate the most common causes of failure: A wrong fit between work and abilities, interests, and personality style; too scattered a focus; an absence of commitment; discomfort about being in unfamiliar territory; hidden barriers, such as a conscious goal in that opposes a need or ideal.

Learning Zone and Performance Zone

We have two performance-related mindsets: a learning zone and a performance zone.

In a learning zone, the goal is to improve, to concentrate on what you want to master, to expect to make mistakes, and to learn from them. The learning zone maximizes growth for future performance. Deliberate practice occurs in the learning zone rather than in the performance zone.

Learning zone characteristics include:

- The goal to improve
- Focusing on what you want to master
- Expecting to make mistakes and learn from them

In a performance zone, the goal is to do something as well as possible, to execute.

Performance zone goals include:

- Entering a performance zone mindset to access the skills of deliberate practice
- Maximizing immediate performance
- Executing in the best way possible while sustaining the mindset

For a practiced skill, while beginners can benefit from thinking more, experts can be distracted from flow by thinking more. An example of this phenomenon is a tennis match in which a lesser player compliments an opponent on a brilliant shot and then asks, “Wow! How did you do that? Did you shift your grip or adjust your elbow a bit in order to do it?” The player asking the question has made her opponent think consciously about a usually unconscious mechanism. This slight shift—even when the better player does not answer but nonetheless hears the question—is enough to disrupt a smooth, automatic flow pattern and generate slight change. The imperceptible shift from automatic, well-practiced unconscious flow from System 1 is disrupted by addressing System 2.

Thinking about the process in execution of a skill is part of a learning mindset, not a performance mindset. With developed skill, the entire performance zone process is a procedural memory, done without thinking or observation.

How can you enhance your experience in the learning zone?

The answer is the entire spectrum of deliberate practice principles and applications. The people who continue to engage in the learning zone continue to improve.

Framing a learning zone as such can enhance the experience.

1. Believe and understand that you can improve—a growth mindset.
2. Want to improve a particular skill, with a specific purpose of each practice session.
3. Have an idea/plan about how to improve, what to do to improve, and how to use deliberate practice.
4. Frame the learning zone as a low-stakes situation, and expect mistakes, with a purpose of improving.
5. Ask questions that are solution-based rather than problem-based:
 - What can I do to make this happen?
 - What can I create that will be exciting and engaging?
 - What can I do to successfully navigate this impasse?

If players think that a mistake will make others think less of them, they may feel stressed and not take the risks necessary for learning. On the contrary, if they believe that mistakes inform learning, curiosity and exploration result. Knowing that not everything is in a performance zone can create more space for growth.

1. Create low-stakes spaces where mistakes are accepted, are to be learned from, and can be addressed by a coach with feedback.
2. Reflect on execution and performance about what could be done better. Observation, reflection, and adjustment occur in a learning zone.
3. Create openness by sharing what you want to get better at; ask questions about what you don't know; solicit feedback from others. Explore, ask, and listen for what you are working to improve.

In deliberate practice, feedback is consistently necessary. Without regular feedback, both body and brain lose track of their own performance and cannot objectively assess results.

Cognitive science research repeatedly demonstrates that specific feedback is superior to general feedback and that feedback on the last action performed is superior to feedback on tasks performed earlier in the day. Feedback provides reference points for your brain and anchors for mind/body sequences.

Columbia psychologist Dr. Jennifer Mangels studied the brains of people with fixed mindsets and people with growth mindsets and found that when those with fixed mindsets received feedback, the brain dwelled on negative feedback, overshadowing accompanying corrective suggestions. Those with growth mindsets, meanwhile, took in the corrective information and performed much better on a second test. They believed they could improve and did.

The shift to a growth mindset, in which one takes in information and uses it for enhanced performance rather than self-critical shutdown, becomes a crucial component of the learning zone and its purposeful practice.

The foundation of the learning zone is an innate curiosity that leads one to curate advice and co-construct learning. These are the essential components of developing expertise and optimum performance.

Expertise – mastery – is not the result of talented individuals identified early and encouraged to blossom. What we know now is the prodigies were made rather than born. Exceptional conditions rather than exceptional kids under optimum deliberate practice conditions generate expertise. There are no “chosen few”, but those who create a proper environment, significant encouragement, and especially deliberate practice provide the foundation of expert performance.

The founder of deliberate practice is Florida State Psychologist Dr. Anders Ericsson who initiated a now famous study of expertise. He surveyed elite violinists at Berlin’s Academy of Music to find that while early environment was helpful, what actually distinguished excellent players from good and average players was hours of practice. By the time they were 20 years old, expert violinists had put in 10,000 hours of deliberate, well-structured practice. The others had not. It is not how hard someone works but how hard they work at deliberate practice that distinguishes the development of elite performers. Dr. Ericsson summarized these findings: “This type of practice is focused, programmatic, carried out over extended periods of time, guided by conscious performance monitoring, evaluated by analyses of level of expertise reached, identification of errors, and procedures directed at eliminating those errors. A performance system is not a good story, but an effective action plan.

How can you enhance the performance zone?

Chris Sajnog trains Navy SEALs, arguably the best-trained athletes and warriors in the world. He has written best sellers including *Navy SEAL Shooting*, on how to prepare SEAL teams for battle. His statement “Start by training the most effective weapon you have: your mind. Your mind controls your body” is a summary of brain performance training. He uses the SEAL acronym to summarize the initial four components:

Sit down, **E**yes closed, **A**nd **L**isten to your breath.

The purpose of this brief mindfulness exercise is to get you immediately grounded so you can focus on the task at hand. The immediate quieting of the mind before a performance—for a SEAL, this is pulling the trigger—becomes the essential foundation.

Sajnog offers a strategy known as “GPS” for this focused training:

Gather intelligence: accumulate information to form decisions

Plan your route: a game plan of informed decisions

Start training: make the process an automatic default mode of flow

Deliberate practice etches an informed default pattern by repetition, correction, and further repetition. Deliberate practice ingrains new motor as well as cognitive skills to bring about mastery and to make it automatic. Deliberate practice always involves having a coach or skilled observer who can offer feedback.

There are four simple steps to map performance behavior:

1. Identify the goals.
2. Determine the mindset and behaviors required to achieve them.
3. Develop an action plan.
4. Program a new identity to incorporate the changes.

With a team's performance mindset, collective goal, and action plan, the group flow produces enhanced performance. These group dynamics play a powerful role in high performance of the team, as well as the level of individual performance.

This enhanced performance zone has been described in other fields as well. Surgeons indicate that during a difficult operation when they have the sensation that the entire operating team is unified by the same purpose, they describe an enhanced performance and a feeling of power and harmony. When performance peaks in any group, it is because the group enters a unified state of awareness and action in a "group flow."

How can athletes sustain the flow state in both practice and performance?

The state of flow is characterized by eight core components, each of which are building blocks of optimum performance.

- **Clear goals:** Goals that are attainable yet challenging, not too easy, not too difficult
- **Concentration:** To limit the field of attention
- **Loss of self-consciousness:** Action and present awareness merge
- **Subjective experience:** Timelessness, absorption, and full involvement
- **Direct and immediate feedback:** Behavior is adjusted to enhance successes and change failures
- **Effectiveness:** Personal control over every aspect of the performance
- **Intrinsically rewarding:** The action is its own effortless reward
- **Absorption:** Sustained total focus on only the activity flow experience itself

These factors – this flow system – have been shown to consistently facilitate flow in practice and performance of elite athletes. Their absence can prevent or disrupt flow. This means that the most talented or resilient player doesn't always win, but the one who most consistently reengages and maintains a practice and performance flow.

Every athlete will experience a disruption of flow, and the one who most quickly and predictably returns to focus and enter the flow state has the advantage.

Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi described the zone in this simple way: "Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz." Understanding flow is at the core of the neuroscience of high performance.

To help athletes enter and sustain a flow state, consider these ways to facilitate.

- Help the player identify a personal best performance state, including specific thoughts, focus points, or cue words to enter that state.
- Encourage identification of the optimum state of arousal for a particular task and how to regulate that optimum state. Each performer will be different to enter and sustain that optimum flow state in their own unique way.
- Ask the athlete to describe the best social context, such as a supportive coach or team member to recreate that context.
- Review performance state of mind and address any distractions, interference with concentration, or negative self-talk that interferes.
- In the mobilization and organization of performance, energy, and flow, identify any unique positive or negative emotions or performance cues for each individual.
- Use a performance cue such as a vivid memory of a special outstanding play or game.

How does establishing a goal set up performance success?

A goal is not what distinguishes a winner from a loser or success from failure, as there is nothing magical about a goal. What distinguishes success from non-success is a system of small stepwise improvements that lead to a specific outcome. The *system and the goal* are both important.

While goals may set a direction, the system needs to be a specific, focused, stepwise strategy for success. When you want to change, focus on the system. A system of strategic and continuous stepwise improvements leads to a successful outcome. Problems are solved at the system level, not the goal level. The system refines, improves, and addresses a growth process that will determine progress and then ultimate goal achievement. A strategic stepwise system for achieving and sustaining that success is paramount.

Two challenges in changing any behavior:

- The mind is inclined to create certainty by repetition of the known outcome. This is a bias to want immediate closure and predictability—even if it's not the result you want, illogical, limiting, or detrimental.
- The brain has rewired repeated behavior and has an error detection mechanism that alerts to anything other than repetition of the familiar. For example, if you grew up in a chaotic environment, even though you desire stability and consistency, your brain feels at home in chaos because that is all it has known, anything else activates the self-protective sympathetic part of the nervous system to send a message to your brain that this is “not normal” and “you are not safe.”

Research on the deliberate practice mindset shows that anyone can improve with the right approach. If you're not improving, it does not mean that you lack basic talent, but it may be because you are not practicing in the best way, and you need to systematically frame and behave in new ways to rewire optimum performance basics.

What can we learn from the most successful performers about a structure for each practice?

Dutch psychologist Adriaan de Groot was one of the first to systematically study the difference between good and great. His initial findings of chess players have since been replicated in other performances. Simply put, we can increase our working memory and performance expertise by grouping things together: chunking. Chunking helps us store more information and make better decisions. This systematic mastery of small bits of information has informed later development of deliberate practice of doing things in a simple, specific, stepwise manner. Deep practice is simply a long-term learning process built of layers of small chunks of experience and skill development. These chunks accumulate and allow the performer to recognize patterns more quickly and effectively in various situations.

To progress, we have to have a systematic way to recognize small mistakes so we can revise rather than repeat and move upward on the mastery curve.

The art and science of deliberate practice has four components: chunking, repeating, correcting, and mentoring.

Those with world-class skills share fundamental components of proper practice. Deep practice is done in one chunk, one element at a time, that then builds on itself with effectiveness and mastery. See the whole. Deconstruct it to the elements. Work on each element. Put it together again as a whole. Repeat.

1. Chunk the specific task.

The chunk looks at a skill to develop as a whole task in order to understand the scope and breadth of the task, of what it will look and feel like, to see it clearly and fully illuminated. The chunk is the mega-circuit that will be developed. An example would be to chunk a practice segment on the first serve in tennis, not mixing in a number of other things.

Deconstruct the components.

2. Determine the smallest next step possible and proceed one step at a time.

Any skill is made up of its component pieces or circuits done one at a time, in a progressive synthesized way that leads to larger groupings of new interconnected circuits. The purpose of deconstructing is to understand the individual components, to see those that most apply, and to put them together in a planned sequential way that then becomes repeated. Components of the first serve practice chunk can be focused on in a specific, stepwise sequence: mindset, performance cue, stance, toss, eye contact, stroke, placement strategy.

3. Apply slow, focused development.

Football coach Tom Martinez puts this aspect most succinctly: "It's not how fast you can do it. It's how slow you can do it correctly."

Slow it down to learn the stepwise construction, the architecture, before speeding it up to a normal execution. Each mental and physical segment are repeated systematically in a flow state.

Deconstructing the basic components of any skill is based on first understanding the picture of the skills as a whole in order to imagine doing it.

To see yourself executing the skill is the ultimate in visualization. When repeated sufficiently, the visualization rewires the brain to create the experience that is being imagined. This big-picture vision is composed of individual stepwise segments: sensory input from each of the five senses; the picture of individual motor skills activated in coordinated fashion; and the mindset of successful achievement, including thoughts, feelings, and cognition associated with that success.

Understanding the individual distinct components, the small steps, allows you to focus on the specific, precise component of skill. Initially doing this slowly allows you to recognize errors quickly in order to correct them.

Avoiding Pitfalls to Peak Practice and Performance

The ABC'S of Practice Mistakes, Performance Fallacies, and Their Remedies

We seek the outcomes that best satisfy our pre-existing ideas and desires. We seek situations and data that fit preexisting beliefs. We have coded our radar to perceive certain things, and have inattention blindness to anything that does not fit pre-existing beliefs and expectations.

How do you overcome an unconscious bias when, by definition, you are not aware of it?

Two key strategies to more accurately self-assess include using a benchmark for objectivity, and feedback from others.

Benchmarks can be the feedback of coaches and mentors, as well as other objective assessments of performance. For students, a benchmark is taking practice exams and getting scores, such as on SATs to calibrate progress. Performance benchmarks include statistics, as well as the feedback from others as valuable tools.

Businesses have boards of directors, and individuals can build their own board of directors, such as an advisory group, or a mastermind group. For athletes, videotaping and review from coaching and others provided valuable feedback.

Some recurring psychologically based issues affect both peak practice and performance. These patterns of mental dynamics can be identified to help you avoid mistakes and generate more productive strategies as coach and player.

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The following most common practice mistakes and performance fallacies are based on unconscious biases that can be recognized, understood, and remedied.

The **ABC'S**: **A**ffect, **B**ehavior, **C**ognition, and **S**ocial

Affect (Emotional) Biases

Nostalgia Bias

Nostalgia looks backward with rose-colored glasses. Nostalgia remembers things not as they were, but as we wished them to be, better than they were at the time – air-brushed memories backlit by idealization. Nostalgia recalls the ideal rather than the real.

By air-brushing memories, players overestimate their own ability; this can create a tendency toward bad decisions. This tendency inflates present expectation. The star athlete of college has difficulty adjusting to equal abilities in other players at the professional level and may tend to rely on beliefs and systems that worked in high school and college.

Rx

Review the negative warning signs that you overlooked in previous compromised decisions.

Be sure you understand any tendency to dismiss what you don't want to see, to minimize or excuse mistake patterns, and disregard what you hope won't happen. There is a place for positive expectation, but it needs to be informed by current deliberate practice and performance. An evolving athlete can never rely on past glories.

Invincibility Bias

This natural tendency estimates risk poorly and exaggerates anticipations:

- 94% of people place themselves at the top half of their profession
- 70% of both men and women feel they are better looking than average
- 19% of people believe they're in the top 1% of income
- 70% of drivers believe they are better than average
- 75% of people consider themselves healthier than average

Rx

Research variations of outcome. List them to focus on real possibilities.

Work with a coach to consistently assess practice plans and progress as well as performance outcome. Always remain open to feedback and accurate assessment rather than hoped for outcome and avoiding assignment of blame.

Frame invincibility expectations as possibility to inform deliberate practice approached in a systematic stepwise fashion. Be aware of taking unnecessary risks based on a belief of invincibility.

Optimism Bias

Optimism bias inflates expectations and minimizes potential warning signs going forward. It can even create blind spots to a potential negative outcome. Excess optimism idealizes the future just as nostalgia idealizes the past.

Optimism bias also minimizes fearful possibilities. People indulge in risky behavior despite being aware of the danger involved. Gamblers, for example, underestimate the risk and inflate their chances despite knowing the odds against them.

Rx

Examine those areas in which you may be “probability blind” and maintain hope despite recurring evidence that the practice system needs to change.

Don't listen for what you want to hear.

Look for the shadow side of every story to anticipate positive and negative possibilities. Every practice and game plan need flexibility of application.

Overconfidence Bias

The tendency to overestimate skills and abilities can simply extend natural confidence and optimism to become a misleading assessment and belief. A consequence can be to abandon reflection and caution, to take unwise chances and generate risk. Overconfidence may lead to inadequate preparation, as well as venturing into dangerous situations by not examining ability and risk.

Overconfidence can affect assessment and performance.

- 95% of professors report they are above-average teachers.
- Executives asked questions about their industry and performance felt they were 90% correct. But in fact, were 60% wrong.

Rx

Think it through all the way to the end—to the consequences of a decision.

Challenge yourself to look at other possibilities.

Reflect on similar situation mistakes.

Keep an open mind and solicit as well as listen to all aspects of performance feedback. Reflect objectively and with your coach/colleague on your performance plan and its execution each day.

Tilt

Poker experts indicate that the difference between winning and losing is most often the ability to stay off “tilt.” In poker terms, tilt is the emotional reaction to winning big or losing big, which alters a state of mind and carries over to the next hand. The same thing occurs in sports after an exceptionally good or exceptionally bad play that it can alter the player’s state of mind and carry over to compromise the next play.

Increased tension produces emotional regression, and lowers the threshold to the possibility of an emotional trigger.

Rx

When you’re in a state of upset (bad play) or exhilaration (really good play), the first order of business is to regulate feelings and restore a grounded, centered state to return to your optimum performance zone.

A performance cue such as a verbal “reset” or a simple gesture can reintroduce a performance zone.

Emotional Valuation

Regardless of how logical you think you are, your first register of a new stimulus is emotional. Any new input goes directly to the amygdala (in the midbrain), then the hippocampus (still in the midbrain) attaches meaning, then the forebrain consciously processes.

At times, this emotional coupling can trigger an emotional response and derail maintenance of a performance zone.

Rx

Question your ideas. Probe your reasoning. Monitor your choices. Determine how much each choice costs.

Recognize and understand emotional triggers that can derail logic. Reset after every play. Consider specific counters to each emotional trigger that you experience to have a preplanned strategy rather than a reactive response strategy. Dr. Maria Konnikova described her strategy as an elite professional poker player of using Bose noise-cancelling headphones at the poker table to selectively drown out conversation, especially the remarks that were degrading of her as a woman poker player. She could hear the same condescending remarks and emotionally challenging jabs, but putting on the headphones “... reclaims some of that space for me” where she reminds herself she is not forced to react.

Loss Aversion

The average person experiences negative feelings and losses more acutely than pleasurable experiences from gains. Studies show that there is about twice the pain from a \$100 loss than the pleasure from a \$100 gain. Even the expectation of loss can create a sensitivity to overact, such as to abandon a game plan too quickly with a bad initial result.

This bias of loss aversion can create a mindset of playing not to lose rather than playing to win.

Rx

Review PlayBook III on “Playing to Win vs. Playing Not to Lose.”

Assess the compromising position of inertia – staying in a comfort zone – that can blind you from making an objective assessment of present value due to a fear of loss.

Predetermine criteria to balance emotional reactivity. Move the choice from an emotional position to a logical, objective assessment of present value.

Probability Blindness

The tendency to inaccurately judge risks based on wish or habit can result in probability blindness. If someone sees a roulette wheel stop on red six times in a row, a faulty belief exists that the chances are higher than 50/50 that it will stop on black the next spin. When as few as two things happen in a row, the brain expects a third to occur. Unlike your brain, the roulette wheel has no memory and maintains the possibility of a 50/50 red-black on each spin.

Rx

Specifically consider alternatives regardless of biases, emotional valuation, and probability blindness.

Seek dissenting opinions. Although emotionally and intellectually challenging, it is a useful strategy to seek opposing views and illuminate alternatives.

Track prior decisions. Once you make a decision, or an event has passed, we tend to believe that we did better and knew more about the outcome beforehand than we actually did. This hindsight bias can affect accurate assessment.

Avoid decision-making at emotional or stressful times. Understand alternatives and incentives. Set limits prior to an activity. Savvy gamblers set a pre-determined daily amount of maximum money exposure.

Behavior Biases

Transference Fallacy

Transference is the carrying over of perceptions and responses from a past context to a current one. This compromise of current situation by using an old model or game plan can compromise necessary current assessment. Transference is the result of existing mind and brain software, the organizing effect based on how we seek, perceive, and process. The transference direction can also go forward to project the present onto the future. (See Extrapolation Errors)

Rx

Ground your decisions in present time. Independently assess the assumptions of similarity and dissimilarity based on past experience. Recognize what will require a new model.

Justification and Rationalization

Both justification and rationalization give a legitimate support and just cause to an endeavor as self-deception, and even make a decision seem like a rational choice.

Rx

If you have to justify a decision, it needs to be examined, under bright lights, and with at least one witness. Review in the context of your overall plan.

Sunk Cost Fallacy

We sometimes make continued spending decisions based on how much time, energy, or money has already been spent on a project. Or continue with a game plan strategy despite evidence that it's not working. It's hard to let go of a loser, or not complete an expensive project, though the cost far exceeds reason.

Rx

Research worst, likely, and best-case scenarios on the front end as part of a strategic decision.

Have internal and external (contractual) agreements in place from the beginning. Be certain you don't register only what you want to hear, such as logging in the lower figure of a range of cost possibility.

Each decision you make is a present choice, regardless of your previous decisions.

Pattern Bias

The brain naturally seeks patterns. Studies by Kahneman and Tversky have demonstrated that people often see patterns too quickly in data that are actually random.

The brain links patterns to rewards. The limbic system tells us that if we see a stock go up several days in a row, or as few as two quarters in a row, it will continue to go up, and we had better buy. The limbic system does not know that the stock has no memory, and that past performance is no guarantee of future results. The brain is wired to predict a third repetition after an initial two. When the tight end goes “fake left, go right” two times in a row, you lose a quarter step by unconsciously expecting the third repetition.

Rx

Recognize what psychological tendencies have worked and which have sabotaged performance results. Predict and mentally rehearse everything that could go wrong with a plan, the worst and best case scenarios. Understand your reactions to emotional events and vulnerability to external influences.

Review game plans and basic decisions periodically. Base this systematic review in a planned structure, rather than as precipitated by an emotional event.

Status Quo Bias

The status quo bias is another name for inertia—the resistance to leave a comfort zone. The power of inertia accounts for why we do things the way we’ve always done them, rather than looking at decisions in a present context with fresh eyes and objective evidence.

People stick with default choices, even when the choices are costly or compromised. Marketers know that when they set up a continuity program, e.g., a free three-month trial with automatic continuation unless cancelled, the inclination is to stay with the familiar and not cancel. This keeps 75-80% of initial free subscribers on for the long haul of paid subscription, while 64% of that do not read what they continue to pay for.

Rx

For any situation, look at the data, and also the hypothesis – the default assumption that appears as a “given.”

Examine what works and what doesn’t work.

Challenge your thinking and assumptions. Interact with diverse people and keep an open “beginner’s mind” rather than a quick foreclosure to a new idea.

Decide what you want to keep, avoid, let go, and enhance. Convert good decisions into a commitment device.

Ask, “If I had not always done it this way, knowing what I know now, what would I do?”

Cognitive Biases

Diagnosis Bias

Once we label a person or situation, we’re prone to then seek data to confirm that notion more vigorously, coupled with blindness to evidence that contradicts. We then use the “diagnosis” as a paradigm or mental map for subsequent categorical decisions.

Rx

Remain flexible and examine a situation from different angles.

Take your time and consider options available before deciding.

Impose a waiting period before reaching a judgment.

Consider objectively. “Is this an emotional issue or an optimum performance decision?”

Seek alternate—especially dissenting—opinions.

Confirmation Bias

We cherry-pick data to fit our beliefs. We decide about everything from the likeability of a person to the value of an idea, then consciously and unconsciously seek validation. Confirmation bias is a distortion based on the search for information to validate beliefs and impressions. More insidiously, this bias precludes someone from questioning and examining the premise. First impressions have powerful impact because of the ensuing process to seek supportive data.

Rx

Monitor your choices. Be aware of the tendency to find the story you want to hear.

Question your ideas. Objectify your assumptions as much as possible.

Probe your reasoning. Beware of a tendency to see only what you already believe.

Ask clearly and honestly, “Does it work?” Ask for feedback whenever possible, and be open to what you hear.

Anchoring

Anchoring offers a point of reference to place value in ambiguous situations. If an evaluation and objective appraisal are done, an arbitrary figure sets the starting point. Adjustments move from that point.

People can also “anchor” their predictions in the present, and resist believing the future will be much different. How we frame an issue determines how we think about it. Correct, current framing can help to respond more effectively to what is encountered.

Rx

Rather than accepting a current assumption about any aspect of performance, be objective in your assessment of the results.

Consider each decision objectively as an independent choice, regardless of the source or previous context. Is this a choice I will be proud of tomorrow? And have no regrets about one year from now?

Extrapolation Errors

When we predict the future based on the past, we forget that anything can happen. We do not and cannot know the future.

The brain automatically imposes patterns and predictions on repeated events, making it difficult to override both emotion and brain patterns in order to make wise and balanced decisions.

Rx

Do not assume that the future will be a replica of the past. To balance extrapolation mistakes, consider whether you can take a risk based on the probability that you are right, and also on the consequences if you happen to be wrong.

Use objective feedback from others, as well as consider a range of good to bad scenarios going forward.

Internal Bargaining

Internal bargaining involves the self-deception of equating plan with action. The internal bargaining of “I’ll make my conditioning plan now, and now and start working it next week” creates the illusion of commitment. The idea of a future plan, even a promise to oneself, can be used to postpone action.

Rx

A commitment is a decision you only have to make once.

The truly challenging, courageous part of change is not the initial decision. Nor is it the initiation of a new order of things. It's the willingness to stay the course. Success is never final. Don't get complacent. Testing is as important as postulating.

Social Biases

Affinity Bias

We underestimate the risk of things we like, such as alcohol, tobacco, or favorite stocks. We overestimate the risk of the things that we do not like, such as foreign enemies, or an out-of-favor investment. We underestimate the value and impact of what we don't like, such as an opposing team or political party. We overestimate the value of what we most like, such as prized possessions, a favorite stock, or a previously winning game plan.

Rx

Be aware of explicit affinity biases like betting on your alma mater to win the game when they're last in their division.

Reflect on hidden influences that elevate regard of the familiar and favorite while marginalizing both risk and value of the unfamiliar and disliked.

Value Attribution

We tend to imbue a person or thing with certain qualities based on our initial perceived value. Value attribution is our own shortcut to determine how we judge what we see, even what is worthy of our attention. Then, the assigned value shapes subsequent perception.

Value attribution incorporates the endowment effect, a related bias in which someone assigns a greater value to what they own than to what they don't own, whether or not that value is warranted.

Rx

Be mindful to observe what is rather than what you wish or how things appear.

Recognize that you make judgments based on your assumptions or personal value.

Accept that your initial perceptions can be wrong.

Ask yourself, "If I were just now exposed to this situation for the first time, what would my decision be?"

Availability Bias

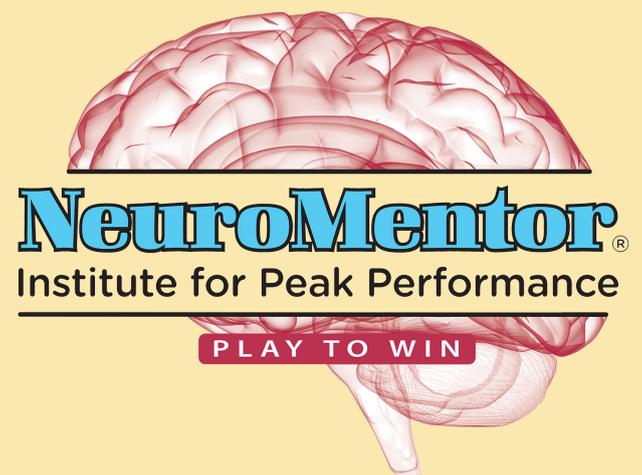
When we try to figure out how likely something is to happen, we scan through our memory of similar events, pulling up data for comparison. What we may not realize is that our access to similar events is highly skewed toward recent experiences. More recent events, and especially more salient and emotionally charged events, are always more memorable. So if you recently had a car accident, you will have “kindling” and be more skittish about driving. Or, if you had a close friend who was robbed, you are more likely to conclude that your neighborhood is dangerous.

Rx

My favorite coach consistently said, “Keep your eye on the ball and your head in the game.” Keep your eye on the ball: Focus on the immediate, the present moment without distraction. And your head in the game: See the big picture, the purpose and game plan so that everything you do moves you forward.

Recognize the distinction between avoidance and contemplation. “I’ll think about it” is a decision. “I’ll get back to you” is a response.

Note that each of the biases and fallacy prescriptions contain this caveat: Create a long-term plan that reflects your values and priorities. Then focus on systematic deliberate practice.



B. Peak Performance Practice Strategies

“Practice does not make perfect, only perfect practice makes perfect.”

Vince Lombardi

Deliberate Practice: An Overview

Are you getting better at the things you most care about?

Or are you not improving enough at things that matter to you despite spending a lot of time working hard at them?

Consulting with Professor Anders Ericsson, Angela Duckworth indicated that she had been jogging an hour a day, several days a week, since she was eighteen years old but had not gotten faster in all that time. For thousands of hours, she was doing the same thing repeatedly.

Dr. Ericsson, who has spent his professional lifetime studying the elements of experts as they become experts and researching the art and science of how someone practices to become expert and what they do to perform exceptionally, asked Duckworth the following questions:

1. Do you have a specific goal for your training?
2. Before you go for a run, do you have a target in terms of the pace you would like to keep?
3. Do you have a distance goal for each run?
4. Is there a specific aspect of your running you try to improve each time?
5. Do you have a coach?

After she answered each question with a “no,” he concluded, “I think I understand. You aren’t improving because you’re not practicing right.”

Dr. Anders Ericsson became curious in the 1990’s how people became experts at what they did. The prevailing wisdom at that time is that the right DNA and an accumulation of experience resulted in expertise.

He found research from a number of fields that had a common theme:

- Physics professors at University of California Berkeley failed to outperform students on introductory problem sets, even though the professors had been researching and teaching physics for decades.
- The number of years clinical psychologists had practiced had no correlation with success at treating patients.
- Many physicians actually got worse at making diagnoses as they gained more experience.
- Experienced winetasters did not do as well as rookies.

Erickson then went with his team of researchers to Berlin to study violinists at the famous Global Music Academy, where many of the world's best violinists had been trained. All the candidates were preselected as best in the world. Nearly everyone practiced the same amount of time each week.

After a comprehensive study of factors in the daily practice of those judged outstanding enough to have careers as international soloists, the single distinguishing feature was that they practiced differently than the others. They spent significantly more time intensely focused on a specific goal, and remained totally present while practicing. They eliminated all distractions and focused on one aspect until they mastered that specific goal. This focused, engaged, systematic practice was *deliberate*.

Erickson and his team then studied experts in other areas including athletes, intellectuals, and artists. The findings all had in common the specific way the top performers practiced that was different. Erickson defined this as *deliberate practice*.

With artists, intellectuals, and athletes, neither experience nor practice is the crucial variable. The primary determinant of superior performance is deliberate practice. Expertise comes not from the total number of hours of practice, as in the ten thousand-hour rule, but from the *type of practice* that fills those hours. Ericsson demonstrated that deliberate practice can take many forms of cumulative experience, including "formal education, private instruction, coaching or mentoring, exposure to domain-specific role models, and various forms of self-education."

In fact, practice itself can make you worse. Every shot that misses its mark is making your aim worse. This is the neuroscience of deliberate practice. The creation of muscle memory is a process of myelination and of rewiring brain neuropathways. Repetition of specific intended motor skills rewires so that each time, over and over, it becomes faster, easier, and smoother. The drawback is that a skill performed in the wrong way can become hardwired. Deliberate practice confronts the myth that it only takes effort to improve, that trying hard enough will result in getting better. If you are not improving, it does not mean that you lack basic talent but that you may not be practicing in the best way.

The solution is not to try harder but to try differently. For example, to approach a barrier from a different direction, such as by working with a coach—someone who's familiar with the obstacles and can suggest ways to overcome them. Ericsson emphasized how deliberate practice is much a more significant factor of success than are physical attributes. Further research by his team and those he inspired, including me, have resulted in a more developed system, structure, and application of his groundbreaking work in deliberate practice.

Deliberate Practice: The System

Deliberate practice is a prototype for a habit-forming technology of behavior. Performance behavior needs continuous evaluation of the results so that it can be revised as needed for improvement.

Practice deliberately. Evaluate results. Modify continuously. Develop a performance habit.

The science of deliberate practice sets it apart from repetition. These nine components generate elite performance in business, sports, and arts:

1. Engaging the optimum state of mind for a specific practice segment.

The characteristics of elite performers in business, sports, and various individual achievements are all similar, and all start with mindset. Belief in potential, capacity, and improved performance consistently becomes the mindset to overcome prevailing myths of limitation, plateaued performance, or fixed ability and talent. It involves, as well, transcending the belief that you're designed to get better at something if you do it consistently.

This involves full concentration and effort in a practice zone while focusing on each practice segment. Ericsson and his team found the necessary component to be “engaging with full concentration in a special activity to improve performance.” Deliberate practice involves structure and focus with clear goals and feedback. It requires attention specifically to engaging the performance state of mind directed to each specific practice task, and each segment in the overall skill development.

2. Establishing a well-defined, specific goal to improve on—not just “getting better.”

Purposeful practice relies on the fact that the human brain and body respond to challenges by developing new abilities and new neural pathways to neuronal networks.

Five questions to ask for each performance goal a player sets:

- Is your goal specific?
- Is your goal measurable?
- Is your goal positive?
- Is your goal inspiring to you?
- Is your goal displayed?

In performance psychology, three types of goals are important: *outcome* (to define the specific end result), *performance* (goals that focus on performance relative to how you have done before), and *process* (how you perform a specific skill set). The right kind of practice carried out over a sufficient period of time leads to improvement and expertise.

3. Determining your purpose: “What is your *why*?”

Deliberate practice also requires a reason to keep at it, a purpose. Deliberate practice is not immediately or inherently pleasurable, so a strong sense of purpose is necessary to sustain efforts. A sense of purpose can fuel the brain and body to respond to challenges and develop new abilities with new neural pathways and networks.

A consistent pattern emerges: regular training results in changes to those parts of the brain that mediate the functions required and are challenged by the training. Only the right kind of practice, carried out over a sufficient period of time, leads to improvement. Deliberate practice is significantly more important for peak performance than predefined ability or talent.

People who have become experts acknowledge that the thousands of hours that they put into intense deliberate practice with full concentration is not always fun but is a means to the end of improving their performance. While the innate pleasure is of effectiveness, they are willing to pay the price even when they don't feel like it. Some players rebound from defeat by briefly reviewing mistakes and what can be learned, then focusing on the specific steps to the next success.

4. Determining a challenge beyond your comfort zone.

Doing the same thing over and over without a focused stepwise plan for improvement may not result in getting any better. The basic principle of any kind of practice: if you don't push yourself beyond your comfort zone, you will not improve. Ten thousand hours of practice can be doing the same thing ten thousand times, or systematically extending each practice segment just beyond a comfort zone.

5. Establishing a time structure.

Deliberate practice requires optimum structure and use of time, as it can be sustained only for a limited time each day. More frequent, shorter sessions, each lasting eighty to ninety minutes with half hour breaks in between, seem to be more productive than longer practices.

Up to four hours a day makes optimum use of available mental and physical resources for effortful practice. Sustaining concentration for deliberate practice limits the number of hours but optimizes their productivity.

6. Visualization of successful completion of specific goals.

Jack Nicklaus stated the essence of deliberate practice in his own model of visualization: “I never hit a shot, even in practice, without having a very sharp, in-focus picture of it in my head. It’s like a color movie. First, I ‘see’ the ball where I want it to finish, nice and white and sitting up high on the bright green grass. Then the scene quickly changes, and I ‘see’ the ball going there; its path, trajectory, and shape, even its behavior on landing.”

7. Reviewing what works and what does not, with a central goal of consistent improvement.

The ten thousand-hour rule applies to a complex task, characterized by development of pattern recognition and sophisticated motor responses. However, other aspects of expert decision-making are not automatic and intuitive even after expertise is hardwired. Certain situations require cognitive reflection and logical thinking about choice and action, situations such as those faced by first responders, military commanders, and elite athletes.

One of my friends and favorite writers, Geneen Roth, a multiple *New York Times* bestselling author, was an expert content contributor in one of my MasterMind groups. In response to question from one of my coaches about writing her books, she revealed that she never lets any writing be seen until she’s done at least thirty edits. Each edit improves, refines, focuses the writing, and incorporates expert feedback.

8. Using feedback from a coach to gauge when you are doing something right and how to specifically improve.

To explore talent and its myth, a number of depth studies of child prodigies were conducted and found that those who seemed to be an exception were instead testaments to deliberate practice. For example, in *Genius Explained*, Michael Howe found that Mozart had accumulated, with mentoring and intensive training by his father, at least thirty-five hundred hours of practice by the time he was five years old. Gifted performers with similar stories about intense early exposure include Tiger Woods, the Williams sisters, David Beckham, and the chess-playing Polgár sisters.

As a six-year-old chess prodigy, Josh Waitzkin, author of *The Art of Learning*, articulated the principle of focus: “I learned quickly that when I thought about the people watching, I played badly.” Josh’s chess mentor would ask him when he made an important decision to explain his thought process. They then collaboratively explored other ways of thinking, playing, understanding an opponent, considering different operations. This description of an elite coaching process began with a six-year-old boy as protégé. Waitzkin describes this process succinctly: “A heartfelt, empathetically present, incrementally inspiring mom or dad or coach can liberate an ambitious child to take the world by the horns.” And then later we take over that function and responsibility ourselves to create an internally motivated and balanced experience.

Feedback from an expert coach needs to be immediate and on a specific aspect of performance. In-the-moment advice on how to progress should lead to concrete improvement in performance.

9. Developing self-correcting mental representations of the evolving skill in deliberate practice to permanently etch its operation and to incorporate it as identity.

A component of deliberate practice is developing a corresponding mental representation of the specific process and structure of the evolving expert performance. Mental representations allow you to see meaningful patterns and live into them. The process then becomes a self-identity. Deliberate practice continually develops specific mental representations to enhance and perfect performance. The coach must keep in mind the role of mental representations in development of skill to enhance performance. These mental representations can become self-functioning to monitor and evaluate performance in order to make it even more effective. The more effective the mental representation and its evolution, the better the performance becomes.

Recognition of each practice success step validates the achievement to incorporate into a performance identity.

Erickson emphasizes that the central purpose of deliberate practice is to develop mental representations that organize the execution of skills. Deliberate practice is designed to improve and hardwire those representations over time. The characteristics of elite performers in business, sports, and other endeavors are all similar and involves this fundamental process.

Deliberate Practice: The Structure

In addition to the principles of deliberate practice already described, there are certain practice structures that have been shown to be more effective in enhancing skill development:

1. Research all related information and best practices.
 2. Determine specific practice activities, including mental and physical components.
 3. Schedule a time and structure for specific components.
 4. Practice deliberately, beginning with an optimum mindset, focused attention, and sustained energy devoted to the specific task for a practice time segment.
 5. Complete a drill of focusing on specific—often the weakest—points of performance.
 6. Identify strengths to highlight them to overfocus on what is not working.
 7. Spend a portion of time on retrieval and the output channel, putting into practice the specific skills addressed.
 8. Review and reflect on the arousal state and intensity of the practice session to see if any adjustments need to be made.
 9. Get feedback from an expert coach to immediately use in practice revision.
 10. Create a structure or procedure to immediately retain both practice and feedback information.
 11. Integrate the new stretch practice immediately to push the edge of a comfort zone. Revise of the concept to relate it to what you already know.
 12. Ask: Did I try something new and extend beyond my previous practice and experience?
 13. Review your results and, after a brief pause, integrate the new practice you learned with what you already knew.
 14. Decide what needs focus for the next deliberate practice session.
 15. Decide what aspects of the new practice need to be further addressed systematically in order for you to extend the skill.
 16. Determine what additional information is needed to plan and structure future segments of deliberate practice.
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Deliberate Practice: The Applications

Deliberate practice has specific, well-defined goals, a conscious knowledge of exactly what you want to accomplish with every repetition. The repetitions are informed by expert information and mentoring. Practice does not make perfect; practice makes permanent. Only perfect practice creates perfect performance. Practice of a slightly incorrect skill sequence will result in permanent etching of that incorrect sequence. Only purposeful and deliberate practice will result in enhanced expertise and skill development. Brain imaging techniques demonstrate how these particular skills differ from those without the skill. With training, the brain adapts and grows in response to the specific informed repetitions of skill development. Deliberate practice modifies the structure and function of the brain, increasing the ability to perform skillfully.

Deliberate practice is difficult, relentless, repetitive work over a long period of time. The “child prodigy” musicians I worked with took fourteen and seventeen years, respectively, to gain international recognition in their fields. The Olympic gymnast performers I have worked with took a similar period of time, also with near-exclusive dedication to their skill. Their practice was very specific to the skill they excelled in. A somewhat longer period of dedicated practice may be necessary for writers and professional athletes. Common to each of those I have worked with was relentless dedication combined with a growth mindset and the use of a series of coaches as their skills evolved.

Also common to each were countless hours of repetitive practice, exclusive focus on specific performance skills, and relentless dedication despite occasional boredom and lack of fun. Instruction by a series of coaches and exposure to and often collaboration with role models combined with a growth mindset practice and continuing education.

The same framework, although in a different context and with different application, applies to successful executives and practicing professionals. Each is an artist, whether business or professional. Each learns the best things to do, consistently enhances skills by learning to do them right, and always practices and grows with a mindset of being “the best.” For each, it is a passion as well as a purpose and commitment.

Deliberate Practice and Competitive Arousal

Depending on context and circumstances at a given time, we act like different people. This is simply a phenomenon of different states of mind. One study of this, by Dan Ariely and George Lowenstein, pioneers in studying behavioral economics, found that physiological arousal created a different and enhanced performance. The brain works differently depending on the state of arousal, and the “hot state” can create a unique mindset and software system that can elicit quite different responses in performance depending on the state of arousal.

One takeaway from this study is that deliberate practice must include practicing in various arousal states—a continuum within a given performance range. Competitive arousal is itself a continuum that has various degrees and levels of active engagement. Competitive arousal leads to increased blood flow in the anterior cingulate cortex and the anterior temporal cortex, regions of the brain involved in emotionally related processes. When the blood flow to these areas is increased, there is *decreased* blood flow to the regions of the brain that receive and integrate sensory and motor signals related to higher level *thought, judgment, and expression*.

The arousal fueled by competition must be considered and practiced as surely as any individual skill. The brain has a number of pathways, and the degree of arousal will lead to the automatic, unconscious choices of pathway, so this specific deliberate practice must include the ones that work best for different situations, circumstances, and skills. Unless practiced, arousal can short-circuit a usual pathway and lead to diversions, underperformance, and chokes. Arousal can also make us take unnecessary risk unless this arousal is also practiced and developed in performance situations.

One example of deliberate practice with specific stressful application is our penchant for action bias. Faced with uncertainty or ambiguity, especially when in the context of stress, we naturally tend to do something rather than nothing, even if it is counterproductive. We want to act in order to feel effective rather than experience the ineffectiveness of “passivity.” This is a common phenomenon in investing when the market goes remarkably up or down; the tendency is to do something in response rather than nothing. In sports, it may be to rush the pass or the shot rather than to engage a contemplative pause that may introduce a better choice. A physician who is unsure of a diagnosis may prescribe something or call it a virus to bring closure and some related prescription.

Is there a brain-friendly way to give more effective feedback to a player?

A recent Gallup survey found that 26 percent of employees agreed that the feedback they get actually improves their work. That’s pretty low.

The amygdala in the midbrain scans at all times to determine if a message has a social threat component. If it perceives threat, it instantly and unconsciously moves someone to a defensive, protective position and derails the impact of the actual suggestion.

Great feedback usually does two things. First, by *asking a question*, it lets the player’s brain know that feedback is coming. It also engages the player to *collaboratively explore a possibility* and engage a buy-in by also looking at the question. This buy-in is the essence of autonomy, the choice of being effective in exploration rather than simply being a recipient of information or criticism.

The feedback formula continues when the feedback message is wrapped in with another question: “How do you see it?” Or, “What are your thoughts about this?” This makes for a collaborative conversation and joint problem-solving rather than feedback that can too easily be perceived as critical, pejorative, and unilateral.

Feedback can be a regular component of every conversation; you don’t have to wait for it.

In deliberate practice, feedback is best when it is immediate, before repetition grooves a bad habit. Instructive, informed, and observed practice is essential in honing elite performance. The development of a working alliance is the most valuable framework in any kind of conveyance of skill development and learning.

Practice with immediate feedback and correction improves performance, while more experience without it can make you worse. Openness and the flexibility of using feedback constructively leads to improvement.

Are there specific qualities of an ideal coach and player?

Gerard Roche surveyed 1,250 successful executives to find that two-thirds had a coach; those who had mentors or coaches made more money and were happier in their careers than their peers. He found that on average these executives made 28.8 percent more in income and received 65.9 more in bonuses. Research by Shane Snow finds that entrepreneurs with mentors raise on average seven times as much money for their businesses and experience three and a half times as much growth. Coaches also shrink the time it takes for someone to reach expert level, along with enhancing their performance.

Many accomplished performers have no idea how to pass their skill and expertise on by teaching. It is important for the coach to have skill and experience in teaching, not only in performing.

A related aspect for the player is being coachable, being open to input, lessons, and especially self-reflection based on that input. Input and ideas can potentially come from anyone at any level, not just experts and seasoned coaches. The key is a player’s readiness to receive and use instruction and feedback. Growth evolves from how we handle change. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the coach’s belief in the player was instrumental in enhancing performance. Zig Ziglar said it succinctly, ““A lot of people have gone further than they thought they could because someone else thought they could.”

Performance Cues

Pete Maravich, the elite all-pro basketball player, continued to wear the same outer pair of socks from high school throughout his entire pro career, without daring to wash them. He believed these socks were linked with excellent performance, a performance cue and superstition combined.

The result of a trained behavior is an engram that becomes a default operation. A practiced habit. This motor chunking is often coupled with a physical cue such as a quick head turn a la Jack Nicklaus, a tongue click a la Daniel Wolpert, or Laurie Hernandez's "I got this."

A cue can boot up a particular mindset of success, from Maravich's socks for each game to a gesture for a wedding toast or keynote, or a particular image for an actor about to go on stage. Indexing an entire set of skills and information with a simple gesture can cue an entire mindset with all its deliberate practice skills embodied. A brief ritual, gesture, or phrase serves this purpose. For some, listening to a song creates this ideal state within a few notes. A cue can help regulate states of mind, or initiate a specific mindset.

A performance cue activates a sequence of behavior that, when repeated, becomes hardwired and automatic. This embedded call to action becomes an effective performance trigger when it is a simple, quick physical gesture or word. Repetition of the word or gesture as performance cue can strategically encode it to initiate a performance mindset and sequence.

A habit is initiated by a specific cue, even when we do not recognize it. The habit becomes associated not just with that specific trigger but with the entire context surrounding the behavior.

A performance cue activates a ritual grounded in repetition and a fixed action sequence. Researchers have found that performance cues generate certainty as well as attenuate anxiety through the predictability of an optimum response.

Another example of a superstitious cue is when Michael Jordan wore extremely long Chicago Bulls uniforms in order to hide his lucky University of North Carolina Blues underneath for each game. This superstitious ritual ushered in an entire fashion statement for the long, baggy basketball shorts that have remained standard for all players.

Professional and college athletes are under tremendous pressure to perform, and many develop a superstitious behavior or ritual as their own attempt at predictability and effectiveness. These superstitions can become their own performance cues as long as they are associated with inducing a performance mindset rather than magical thinking. Maravich's lucky socks perform the same function as placebos generating the effect of the actual medication. The placebo actually induces the internal physiological response of the medication itself, not just an actual "belief" that cues a response.

A ritual like a performance cue can create order and predictability to calm anxiety and activate an optimum performance mindset. We earlier discussed a cue to initiate a mantra including focus and physiology to get grounded and centered to enter a specific state of mind. This coupling of a defined cue with a specific performance-related mindset can instantly activate the ideal state for engaging in that activity. The cue can be a word, a phrase, a gesture, or an object that you couple with an instantly evoked state of mind that serves as a threshold for the activity you want to engage in.

A London woman I worked with in coaching recognized that she spent a significant portion of her day in disconnected states prompted by her responses to other people, both personally and professionally. She used the Neural Conditioning Program to be aware of the emotional triggers that prompted the disconnections so that she could quickly recognize the process. She developed a mantra of touching a necklace medallion she'd bought for this purpose; it was always ready as a cue to prompt a focus phrase ("Now") and physiology (two deep breaths) to get grounded and centered so that she could move into an ideal state and behavior. Ultimately, simply touching the medallion instantly booted up her ideal state.

A gateway habit serves as a cue for an entire sequence of behavior that is designed to enhance both mindset and skill. The bedrock of any deliberate practice is the skill that is developed along with the corresponding new identity. You take informed action in small steps to confirm and solidify the person you want to be, the bedrock of your sense of self. This focus on the process, the system rather than the goal, emphasizes how the output channel of actions systematically shapes habits. Predetermined decisive moments systematically create the building of new habits. If you have a schedule of going to the gym six days a week at 2 p.m. and do that no matter what, it becomes a habit that takes no energy or debate about whether you will or won't, do or don't engage it. Like work, it's there; something seems missing if it isn't. You show up. Nothing interferes except perhaps family emergencies. In this way it becomes your identity. You have created a system to fill in various goals over time. The system is always there, no matter what, and makes good habits easy and bad habits hard.

A body in motion tends to stay in motion, and a body at rest tends to stay at rest. When a habit is established, it takes more effort to stop the habit than to continue it. Cognitive processing, decision-making, or any form of thinking about it presents an opportunity cost. Energy has to be diverted to a different, cognitive part of the brain. Self-control and willpower become opportunity costs for the execution energy of a habit.

Do different types of performance cues work better for some people?

For performers whose primary representational style is *auditory*, a single word or phrase can immediately induce an optimum performance zone. I mentioned the all-pro cornerback who, after each play, would say to himself, "Reset." He knew that after every play, whether exceptionally good, bad, or even one that did not involve him, he needed to be grounded and centered in his performance zone for the next play. This works well for episodic sports such as football and gymnastics rather than for the sustained performance flow of sports like basketball or for executive functioning.

For *kinesthetic* organizers, a physical cue or gesture such as pressing the center of your palm and imagining that a signal travels to your brain to create calmness and quietness of your entire nervous system can be very effective. George Kittle, the all-pro tight end for the San Francisco 49ers, slaps the tattoo of the Joker on his forearm before each play as a performance cue.

For *visual* organizers, picturing a specific scene that is meaningful for both groundedness and peak performance becomes optimum.

What is a blueprint for forming an optimum performance habit?

Habits are automatic behaviors triggered by specific cues. Actions and ultimately habits can be systematically engineered. A behavior begins with a cue—a trigger that activates a sequence of behavior that, when repeated, becomes hardwired and automatic.

First is the cue, the internal or external spark for entering an optimum state of mind containing a practiced behavior, word, or gesture. After the cue comes the action, the preprogrammed behavior that is automatic response without deliberation and is synonymous with the ideal state of mind containing deliberate practice. Once entered, the state of flow becomes automatic to engage that state and the practiced behavior for optimum performance.

To sustain the performance flow, the cue may need to be repeated, either when distracted or regularly to sustain focus throughout the task. Or both.

At times for some individuals, focus on a single key word related to the outcome of the performance provides the necessary focus to sustain immersion in the performance flow state. One-word cues focus on the end result, such as saying “smooth” while executing a golf putt. The basketball player may simply use the word *net* when shooting a free throw. The single word not only boots up the entire performance mindset but also activates the visual image of the successful result.

When the cue is an action or gesture, you may be better able to remember, as memory is grounded in the body. Each time you practice any sequence, such as a mantra, begin with the physical cue to initiate the sequence. This sequence is a complete circuit in your brain when it goes through the output channel activated by the action step of performing the cue. For example, dribbling the basketball twice while saying a focus phrase and taking a deep breath in for relaxation and breathing out to release any tension; practicing a wedding toast by picking up a wine glass. A simple gesture initiates an entire performance mindset and behavior.

What other factors can serve as performance cues to frame mindsets?

We’ve learned a great deal about what influences the learning brain to enhance both optimum learning and performance, whether academic, intellectual, or artistic. A composite of research (Thad Polk’s *The Learning Brain*) has found four factors that play a crucial role in performance:

1. Self-Efficacy

Jane Elliott, the originator of Workplace Diversity Training and one of the thirty most notable educators of all time according to WHO (along with Confucius, Plato, and Booker T. Washington), once served as an expert content contributor for my MasterMind group and presented the results of her famous “Blue eyes—Brown eyes” exercise for her class the day after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. Her exercise illustrated how people will live into the expectations others have of them. The exercise, conducted with her third-grade school class of eight-year-olds, designated the blue-eyed children as the superior group, giving them extra privileges and access to playground equipment, including extra recess time. She would not allow the brown-eyed and blue-eyed children to drink from the same water fountain and emphasized differences between the two groups by singling out students, using negative aspects of the brown-eyed children to emphasize a point. The next week she reversed the exercise, making the brown-eyed children superior. The compositions that the children then wrote about their experience created a resurgence of awareness of the effects of racist behaviors on performance and regard. Her work was the forerunner of diversity training and the need for enhanced awareness for optimum performance in various arenas.

Self-efficacy has a tremendous impact on learning, first by determining what people will attempt to learn. When you believe you are capable of learning something, you try; when you don’t believe you are capable, you may not try. For example, a bad experience in math or negative feedback can contribute to a lowered sense of efficacy in math, resulting in perhaps not trying to learn. If someone believes they will not learn well, this often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy determined by their effort and commitment.

They may either not try or choose a less risky alternative that produces a compromise. The degree of self-efficacy often determines the amount of persistence at a task.

An application of this process has been demonstrated in gender and racial bias in learning when the expectations by a mentor or teacher lower expectations and, therefore, the student’s performance. The tyranny of low expectations is well-known from studies of white racial framing.

2. Perceived Control

When people visit a physician and the physician prescribes a medication, just over 50 percent of people do not fill the prescription. Of those who do fill it, just over 50 percent fail to take the medication as prescribed. So of those who are perhaps worried, go to the trouble of making an appointment, driving to the physician’s office, and going through an examination or questioning or both, less than 25 percent actually follow through and take this expert’s advice. They were instructed, given a directive and an order, but it did not become their story. The antithesis of this model of “compliance” is collaboratively co-creating a new story together with the patient/client/colleague/protégé as point of reference to incorporate autonomy, competence, and connectedness to self and others.

When you develop your own story, it minimizes the need to comply or perform in a dictated way. When you own your story, you own your performance. We most engage what we help create.

Perceived control is the perception of how much you believe you determine what you do, as opposed to perceiving that external forces outside your control determine what you do—the exam was unfair, the referees were biased, the unlevel playing field is sloped against you. If you don't believe that how you practice and how much you work will significantly affect your outcome, why bother?

Those who believe they can do better engage a growth mindset of deliberate practice to improve, which determines a far different outcome. Perceived control is related to a number of growth mindset variables, including motivation, sustained effort, degree of engagement, and less boredom. Those with higher perceived efficacy perform better in several dimensions measured from physical to academic.

3. Effectiveness and Mastery

Two factors determine successful completion of a goal more than any others: challenge and attainability. A goal should be sufficiently challenging to engage full effort, combined with knowing that attainability is possible in order to feel effective and experience mastery. Setting goals, either for one's self or collaboratively with a mentor, can be most effective when they are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound: SMART goals.

Some studies have shown that when goals are set at a high-low range rather than a fixed number, that participants more likely attain the goal within that range. An example would be to lose between one to two pounds per week for 20 weeks, rather than setting a goal of losing 1.5 pounds per week, and definitely more effective than setting a goal of a 20-pound loss.

4. Perceived Value/Purpose

Meb Keflezighi in 2014 became the first American to win the Boston Marathon in over thirty years. His win occurred one year after the terrorist bombing at the 2013 race. Keflezighi credits his performance to inspiration he felt for those who died in the terrorist attack the year before. He wrote their names on his race bib so that he would run with greater purpose and motivation. "Toward the end I was remembering the victims who passed away," he said, "They helped carry me through."

The value placed on what is being learned contributes significantly to learning. We have to care about what we learn as well as have it fit with our own ideals of meaning and purpose. The highest perceived value is that which aligns with our own identity.

Purpose can become an orienting perspective to serve as a magnetic pull registered by an internal compass. When your purpose is for something greater for yourself or for others, this enhances the likelihood of pushing on.

When we have a greater purpose for why we do what we do, such as to enhance the lives of others, to be a catalyst for achievement and fulfillment, it makes putting up with daily annoyances not only tolerable but not to even be engaged.

In her book *Grit*, Angela Duckworth emphasizes that grit is a hallmark of high achievers in every domain. Gritty people hang in and persevere when others quit. Dr. Duckworth found that grit is not innate. Rather, it can be cultivated over time. While there is no single way to develop grit, the trait is often accompanied by a strong sense of purpose. Especially when the going gets tough, gritty people draw upon a greater cause for inspiration and stick-to-itiveness. As Duckworth and her colleagues wrote in a 2014 paper, “Highly aversive experiences may become more bearable when they are viewed as having positive consequences that transcend the self.”

Performance Flow

“When the risks are big, it’s where I feel most alive. In a weird way, it’s almost a meditative thing. When there’s a lot on the line, whether it’s a big business deal or surfing a scary wave, I get so focused. Things slow down. The tiniest of details become alive, the feeling of a pebble beneath your shoe on a rock wall or the real meaning of a sentence in a business deal.”

John Winsor, quoted by Jonathan Fields

How can you best sustain the performance flow?

Tim Grover described the total focus of his client Michael Jordan: “If one thing separated Michael from every other player, it was his stunning ability to block out everything and everyone else. Nothing got to him; he was ice. No matter what else was going on—the crowds, the media, the death of his father—when he stepped onto that basketball court, he was able to shut out everything except his mission to attack and conquer.”

Psychologists Mike Anderson and Kristin Flegal asked both highly skilled and beginning golfers to take short putts on a flat green. One group then spent several minutes describing the putts they had taken, while the other group worked on an unrelated task. Then the golfers were asked to again perform the putts. The skilled golfers who described the past putts did significantly worse in completing their subsequent putts than those who had not tried to describe it and did something else instead. For beginning golfers, performance did not vary significantly between the two groups.

This illustrates how for well-practiced activities, thinking too much or focusing on the stepwise process of the performance can be detrimental. A focus on sustaining the focused flow toward an outcome rather than the mechanics can avert mistakes.

The primary characteristic of getting into the flow of a performance zone is by immersion in the process of the performance itself, not thinking about it. The process of sustaining flow may be enhanced by:

- Not slowing down and not thinking about or attempting to control performance
- Practicing under pressure to simulate the entire experience, including mindset of the actual performance
- Focusing on the goal, not the mechanics
- Using a key word, gesture, or internal snapshot to create and sustain focus throughout the process of performance
- Framing a positive focus for both the performance and the outcome

Focusing on anything other than the performance execution can result in compromise or even a choke. Self-doubt, negative self-talk or worrying about a situation and its consequences can derail the flow state and its performance. If you think about what may go wrong, you are likely to ensure it.

Activities best performed outside conscious awareness need to be framed in ways to create and sustain this flow state and performance.

Exercise: Managing Distractions and Disruptions to Sustain Flow

The Rule of Three: The human mind can consume essentially three chunks of information in short-term working memory. When more items are added, attention and retention decrease.

Distraction: Something that interferes with or diverts full attention and focus.

Distractions can be filtered by focus and flow. Disruptions need an active filter and a plan for how to respond. Distractions can be inhibited or redirected from irrelevant information to allow greater focus and synchrony of brain function.

A specific part of the brain, the middle frontal gyrus, filters distractions when trained. Dr. Srin Pillay distinguishes between proactive filtering of distractions and reactive filtering”

- Proactive filtering: Predicting distractions and knowing how to handle them when they occur.
- Reactive responses: Flexibly dealing with unexpected distractions in order to continue the flow of a task.

Disruption: An interruption of focus to cause diversion, with an accompanying mindset shift with the derailed flow.

A priority: determine a time and place where you will have no interruptions. In my home office, a service person knocking on the door is an interruption, so I do not schedule any service people or external appointments during my teleconference work time with clients or training sessions. I even have the front doorbell disconnected and no call interruption on the telephone. During videoconferencing, landline and cell phone ringers are silenced.

Peak Performance Practice Summary

1. Define a purpose and objectives for a task and for each practice.
 - Begin each practice with a focus on the purpose and the objectives for that segment of time.
 - Focus and sustain engagement in the state of mind in which that particular skill was practiced.
 - Remove any distractions in order to focus only on the task at hand.
 - Do only one thing at a time, the specific focused practice task.
2. Manage States of Mind
 - Develop a self-awareness to enter a state of mind specific to a practice and performance task.
 - Develop a method to instantly engage that state, such as a mantra of cue, focus, and physiology.
 - Manage this state to sustain the engagement of a flow experience in order to access and sustain peak experience.
3. Establish systematic goals and a stepwise process of reaching them.
 - Establish a goal for each practice task that is a just-manageable challenge, one that barely exceeds your current developed skill.
 - Keep the next challenge just a bit out of reach but attainable.
 - Remember to stay totally focused and regulate states of mind within each segment of deliberate practice.

4. Establish blocks of practice of fifty to ninety minutes, with rest and recovery in between.
 - If a task is new, start with a smaller amount of time, even as little as fifteen to twenty minutes.
 - For all deliberate practice, the maximum limit for each segment should be a two-hour working block.
5. Revisit and review the framework of a growth mindset throughout each practice.
 - Reframe any anxiety as excitement and opportunity.
 - Practice gratitude for the stress and challenge that are steppingstones to improvement.
 - Reframe stress as a natural physical way your body prepares for a challenge.
6. Build in segments of rest and recovery framed as part of practice and preparation.
 - Practice mindfulness meditation as a method of mental and physical restoration
 - Recognize positive self-talk and the benefit of positive, brief, focused conversations with yourself.
7. During the breaks between practice, step away from the task and engage a relaxing focus, such as a walk in nature or meditation.
 - Learn to listen to physical and mental needs.
 - Recognize moments of insight and allow your unconscious the opportunity to un-focus periodically.
8. Remember that good and adequate sleep is a part of both practice and performance.
9. In deliberate practice routine, develop a method of instantly entering a performance state and sustaining that state. These may be two related though different internal methods.
 - Incorporate in a warm-up routine, for whatever type of performance it is, a mantra for immediately engaging an optimum state of mind.
 - Have a specific cue or routine linked to optimum performance behavior.
 - Practice the cue and routine as deliberately as the skill itself.
 - Be sure the cue and/or routine can be done anywhere anytime, instantly, effectively, and consistently.
 - Determine what you devote energy and brain power to in making the positive and beneficial aspects automatic.
 - Match practice and activity with energy levels.
 - Consistently structure and schedule every part of your day to become automatic.
 - Recognize your biorhythms, the time of the day you have the most and least energy, and plan tasks accordingly.

10. Recognize the importance of social context.

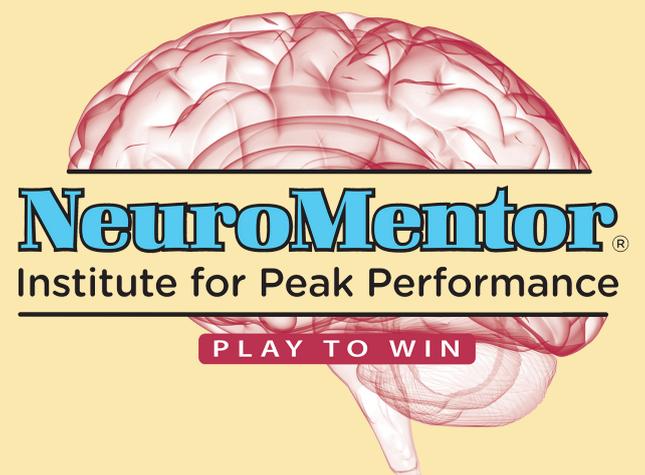
- Surround yourself with positive people and consistent support.
- Establish a culture of performance, with everything and everyone supporting that purpose.
- Recognize what to keep, let go, avoid, and enhance.

11. Beliefs drive behavior. Behavior drives performance.

- Remember to show up consistently and predictably.
- Surround yourself with only those who do likewise.
- Act. Evaluate. Adjust. Proceed.

12. Develop and sustain a focus on a purpose greater than yourself, the reason for doing and being.

- Recognize and integrate activities consistent with that purpose.
- Align needs and ideals with strategy and goals.
- To sustain motivation, create a map that specifies where you are and where you want to go and that can measure progress along the way.
- Giving back and doing for others prevents burnout and enhances internal reward.



C. Neuroassociative Conditioning for Optimal Performance

Neural Conditioning Program

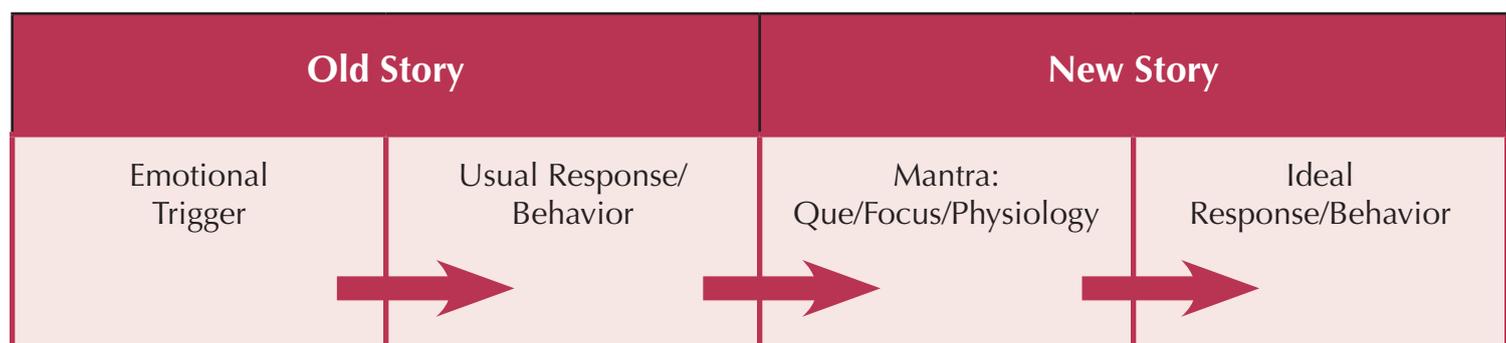
When Southern Utah University's new basketball coach Roger Reid arrived, his team ranked 217th in free-throw percentage, lowest in their division nationwide. During practice, Reid had his players develop a mantra before each free shot, a three- or four-word phrase coupled with a deep breath for relaxation. He gave the example of "relaxed and smooth" when stepping up to the free-throw line but emphasized that each player needed to determine his own mantra.

Additionally, he simulated game conditions by abruptly stopping a player in practice and asking him to shoot two free throws. Reid simulated the mindset of pressure in a game situation by suddenly stopping to shoot a free throw. If the player made the shot, he got to take a breather. If he missed, he had to sprint around the court.

In two years, the team was ranked number one in their division nationally.

The Neural Conditioning Program offers a systematic way to rewire optimal performance behavior. What you associate with a stimulus determines your behavior. To change your behavior, change your neural association. Thinking positively is not enough. You can think positively for a moment, but then you go back to what has already been established in the neuronal networks and connections of your brain. The effect would be the same as if you tried to change a software program by booting it up and talking positively to your computer.

Neural Conditioning to Make Changes That Last



Column 1: Emotional Triggers

An emotional trigger can be simply a word, gesture, object, or thought that cues an immediate state change that is then experienced as automatic and intrusive. Each state of mind consists of a pattern of neural firing of certain behaviors, feelings, and memories characteristic of that state. Each state is much like a software program on a computer and can be instantly activated by an emotional trigger.

Column 2: Usual Behavior (Altered-State Time Capsule)

Certain emotional triggers have the impact of creating an instantaneous reactive state change in which you immediately reenter the time capsule of an earlier state. Immediately upon entry, everything is the same as when that time capsule was first experienced—all the feelings, associations, ways of looking at things, anxieties, dangers, frustration, hopelessness and negative self-talk. The state change takes only a nanosecond.

When this occurs, the usual response is to try to figure out how to deal with a situation; to get someone to respond in a different way; to believe that expressing feelings will detoxify the experience; to think that creating a better solution this time around will be the answer. Of course, none of these works.

This process of instant response to an emotional trigger can result in a disruption of performance flow—a choke.

Column 3: Mantra: Cue, Focus, Physiology

The three parts of a mantra:

- Cue: a personal gesture or word
- Focus phrase: such as “Relaxed and powerful.”
- Physiology: breathe in relaxation, breathe out tension

Mantras can be used in various situations to regulate states of mind, especially with regard to emotional triggers that can instantly change a state of mind. Professional athletes and actors use it to get grounded and centered for their performance.

A summary of practice including a mantra:

1. Develop a mantra: cue, focus, and physiology. Mantras can calm and keep you from overthinking in a high-pressure situation. A mantra is designed to interrupt an automatic response to an emotional trigger and reroute it to the optimum behavior.
2. Use a key word to create and sustain focus throughout the performance. Develop a focus phrase that represents the successful mindset and the performance itself combined.
3. Focus on the target, not your mechanics. When you bowl, think about aiming for an arrow on the lane rather than your approach.
4. Don't slow down. Slowing down allows you time to think about it, which will derail procedural memory flow.
5. Practice under pressure. When you practice under the same conditions you'll face when you have to perform, you establish the mindset that you will enter in the actual practice.

Column 4: Ideal Response

What is the ideal current behavior in the context of the emotional trigger?

Recognize the emotional trigger so that you can use a mantra to instantly get grounded and move to the preplanned ideal response (Column 4).

Each of these changes can be immediate mindset transitions with a strategy to recognize the emotional trigger in order to reboot a state of mind to engage a planned ideal response.

The lateral movement across these four steps systematically rewires emotionally altered states of mind and their triggers. The altered state is simply not activated when focus is on the mantra to get grounded and centered. It is much like when you get up to move and your lap is no longer there—it's just a memory.

The Four-Column Process Overview

In summary, focus on the emotional trigger and usual response (Columns 1 and 2) allow you to immediately recognize an emotionally based cue and the resultant state change. Cuing your radar to recognize both trigger and response as quickly as possible allows you to see the *process* of the state change rather than staying stuck in the *content* of the altered state. Like a time capsule, that content will never change. You can't think, reason, feel, figure, or therapize your way out of a state of mind. That content will always remain intact, yet you do not have to inhabit that state. You recognize it as quickly as possible in order to get grounded and centered and then move into an ideal state (Column 3) and engage the preplanned behavior (Column 4).

Moving horizontally across all four columns requires focus and systematic attention. As you do this repeatedly, you will notice that repetition of the mantra will automatically induce a grounded and centered state. You ultimately won't have to do the focus phrase and physiology each time. This neural conditioning ultimately rewires your brain using an automatic cue to induce a grounded state.

Then, as you repeatedly move through all four steps to the ideal response, this will rewire your brain to couple the original emotional trigger with a now-ideal response. With consistent repetition of the new sequence, the emotional trigger that previously resulted in an instantaneous state change rewires the brain for an automatic ideal response.

Unlearning and New Performance Learning

“Pain brought me to mindfulness, not any desire to reach nirvana or pop out of any chrysalis. It was “unlearning” certain habits and thought patterns hardwired in my brain and walking through my pain, rather than avoiding it, that ultimately put me on a joyful journey of self-discovery.”

George Mumford

Ben Fletcher of the University of Hertfordshire, in the United Kingdom, devised a study to get people to break their usual habits. Each day the subjects picked a different option from poles of contrasting behaviors—lively/quiet, introvert/extrovert, reactive/proactive—and behaved according to this assignment. So an introverted person, for example, would act as an extrovert for an entire day. Additionally, twice weekly they had to stretch to behave in a way outside their usual life pattern—eating or reading something they otherwise wouldn’t.

The remarkable finding was that after four months, the subjects had lost an average of eleven pounds. Six months later, almost all had kept the weight off.

The rationale for the impact of the changes is that requiring people to change routine behavior makes them actually think about decisions rather than habitually choosing a default mode without consideration. This is story-busting in an indirect way. In having to process decisions actively, they exercised their choice- and decision-making abilities, extending to other choices such as what and what not to eat. Once you become aware that you are actively making choices, you can decide what’s in your best interest, what furthers your story, and what doesn’t.

Why is it much easier for a child to learn a foreign language than for an adult? The beginner’s mind is the essence of this process of not having to forget or unlearn something and to replace it with the newly acquired but rather to simply learn something new. For adults, however, much must be unlearned in order to replace it with the new, like forming a new habit to replace one that already exists. Learning is not the simple acquisition of information but a practiced behavior that replaces behavior already in place. Executing a slightly different forehand, a slightly different stance in tennis, is not as easy as seeing it instructed and adopting the moves. The old ways of doing things—such as an ingrained attachment pattern played out in a business relationship—are already there, well-grooved as an anatomical reality in the brain.

Patterns are developed in the brain by repetitions that create grooves, and every time an action is performed, microscopic rewiring of the brain occurs, making it slightly more grooved each time. After many repetitions, the groove becomes deeper, more recognizable, and more automatic.

The more deeply etched the pattern—the deeper the groove—the more challenging it is to change a habit. It takes the same repetition as it did initially, only this time to undo the old pattern and to etch the new pattern simultaneously.

The notion of the beginner's mind entails a return to the paradigm of a child who doesn't work at rewiring the brain but simply starts new behaviors. The groove is still there in the brain—it's the same anatomical reality as it was—but a new parallel behavior exists, activating new neurons and connections. It's like your lap when you get up to walk. You can always re-create your lap, but it impedes forward progress.

A habit engages software created for a past experience. If it is useful, it can tremendously expedite a default and effortless execution. If it is no longer useful and outdated, a new behavior pattern needs to be created. A simple strategy then is to not fight old habits but simply to start new ones. All the associations of the past habit are then instantly replaced by an immersion in the current, new experience.

This approach also engages a positive focus. When you pick a particular skill you want to develop such as a tennis backhand stroke, rather than engaging a negative focus, of what is wrong with your current backhand stroke, focus on the ideal stroke you create at this moment. A first step then may be to picture the ideal backhand stroke in full detail, including your experience of it and all the sensory detail that you can. When this visualization in its full experience is revisited over and over, it rewires the brain. Then as you execute the backhand in real time, experience the full feelings in all senses with full somatic register of the backhand and align that with the vision that is already wired in your brain. You have created a future memory to live into, to then actualize with the practice experience. A learning process then shifts from critical judgment from the perspective of an observer of a skill execution to an internal anchoring and execution. Visualizing optimum outcomes combines with being in an optimum performance state to engage the skill behavior. This all occurs at the level of experience, not the level of intellect and conscious judgment. The true transformation occurs when the new experience is incorporated as part of an identity, an alignment with the essence of a performance without observation or judgment. Enjoyment and relaxation into the experience follow.

In his classic *The Inner Game of Tennis*, W. Timothy Gallwey describes how optimum performance results from letting go of almost all conscious effort in a state of relaxed, focused concentration.

The Neurochemistry of Unlearning

When we unlearn connections and associations, another chemical process occurs to weaken connections among neurons—a form of neuroplasticity, just in the opposite direction of forward learning. This unlearning is necessary in our neuronal networks to create room for new connections. The combination and strengthening of some connections while weakening others (unlearning) keep our neural networks from becoming overloaded.

Learning research informs us about optimal approaches to combining learning and unlearning:

- Begin with a question or a story to activate attention and stimulate the player's wanting to know what's next.
- Whatever is new, different, or even surprising energizes and captures attention.
- When required to address an uninspiring old topic, change something about it, even if it's the setting or the application—anything to notify the player's brain of something new and different that will enhance both attention and productivity.
- Don't start with a review or summary of what has happened before. Our brains minimize or even ignore information that is old news.
- Frame the new learning as possibility rather than problem, keeping in mind that it is the problem that has to be unlearned.
- Engage collaborative discussion and involvement. We learn and recall more when challenged.
- Shrink the change to a next small step for each aspect of new behavior.
- Use multiple modalities in learning to involve more parts of the brain and enhance both learning and memory.
- If reversion to an old habit recurs, interrupt immediately and reestablish the new focus or behavior.
- Remember that an immensely effective means of creating an emotional connection, as well as establishing a memory, is through stories.
- All learning is an emotional process and will become optimized with emotional integration.

Summary Principles of Changing Mind, Brain, and Behavior to Enhance Player Performance

- Begin where the player is to learn more about what she already knows.
- Highlight positive attributes—existing neuronal networks (natural talents, behaviors, and patterns) to encourage their practice.
- Don't focus on mistakes. Focus will enhance neuronal etching, so it should be on useful habits.
- Correct mistaken couplings. Understand and build on existing networks.
- Let sleeping dogs and old unuseful networks lie.
- Help the player immediately recognize self-talk scripts—they are the maps for navigating performance.
- Help the player recognize and own experiences.
- Determine what to keep, let go, enhance, and avoid.
- Repetition changes your mind and your brain.
- The brain has an intrinsic desire to create novel connections.
- Give attention to a new experience or a new way of doing things consistently and repetitively for it to become hardwired as a habit.

Performance Preparation and Assessment

Preparation

1. What do you need to change?

If there is a problem, barrier, or obstacle, it is not a simple matter of getting over it, countering, or adapting to it: It is not there until you create it. Consider creating something else instead. For example, convert a performance weak spot into an intention with a specific commitment.

2. What do you need to let go?

The bottom line, no matter how entrenched the process or how strong the hope, is “Does it work?” Emotionally, it is not so easy to let go of a hope without it being fulfilled—such as trying to get someone to respond in just the right way.

3. What do you need to avoid?

There is always the pull of the old and the fear of the new. Yet there is no future in repetition. For example, avoiding engagement with someone who is draining protects your energy for a more productive choice.

4. What do you want to keep and enhance?

Your behavior is the manifestation of your beliefs.
Choose carefully what you engage.

Assessment

When you practice and when you perform, each time you are in a state of mind with a mindset that will either facilitate or compromise your optimum performance. How you mobilize that optimum state and mindset and sustain it will hinder or enhance each performance.

To take stock at the end of every performance, no matter what it is, must include this retrospective evaluation:

- How well did you stick to your game plan?
- What, if anything, caused you to deviate?
- How well were you able to make necessary adjustments?
- Was your preparation sufficient?
- Evaluate your progress and every aspect of your performance
- What are you doing to improve your performance next time?

7 Techniques to Edit Your Performance Story

1. Focus on your performance purpose and goals.

Beliefs drive behaviors; behaviors drive performance. Assessment begins with recognizing that you are the author of your performance story. Take ownership of your experience. It does not just happen, even though it may seem that way.

Your experiences are always consistent with your theories. You loyally aligns with your purpose. Any departure, even temporary, creates uncertainty. Transforming skills through deliberate practice generates anxiety of the unfamiliar. The easiest and fastest way to end this uncertainty is to go back to comfortable, but limiting, familiar behavior.

2. Assess the behaviors that work and those that do not.

Regardless of intent or motivation, promise or possibility, the bottom line is always, “Does it work now?”

After awareness, acceptance. After acceptance, action.

Define performance and not behavior. Intentions are worthless—usually an excuse masquerading as an explanation.

Do your recurring obstacles share a common theme, such as goals not aligned with needs and values?
Or hearing the story you want to believe?

What patterns do you see in your practice and performance?

3. Recognize passive versus active positions.

Words reveal an internal model. Listen for explicit language reflecting a passive or active position, and for an internal or external point of reference.

Active language reflects an active position and ownership of initiative. Rather than “I’ll try,” it’s “I will.”

Passive language results from beliefs about fate, luck, destiny, victim hood, entitlement, or hope. The language of this position makes the creator both subject and victim: “My fear took over.” “The market beat me up this week.”

Pressure words indicate an external point of reference rather than authority being internal: should, have to, ought to, need to, or must.

Limitation words reveal the assumption of constraint: impossible, can’t, shouldn’t.

Nonspecific actions and nouns generalize and universalize experiences rather than create a specific focus and action potential. “I came to an impasse.” “My mind played tricks on me.”

Abstract goals impede precise strategy. Wanting to be happy, to change, or to be comfortable with money require conversion into specific, measurable goals and strategies.

Your language will both reflect and facilitate ownership of your practice and performance behavior.

4. Assess what you want to change.

Change begins when you recognize that you author your own story. If a problem recurs, rather than simply getting over it, countering it, or adapting to it: It is not there until you create it.

5. Determine what you want to let go.

In order to change, you first have to know what you want to let go. The bottom line, no matter how entrenched the process or strong the hope, is “Does it work?” Unfilled hoped – what might have been – becomes the most difficult goodbye.

6. Know what you want to avoid.

The pull of the old and the fear of the new exist side by side. Yet there is no future in repetition.

Recognize what you can and can't determine. Disengage the impossible, especially trying to change another person. Avoid involvement in nonproductive, energy-draining struggles, such as arguments: What is the sound of one hand clapping?

7. Clarify what you want to enhance.

Your behavior, like your performance, manifests your beliefs.

Changing your mind changes your life, as beliefs, goals and visions drive action. Choose carefully what you engage.

Compromises Inventory

Compromise: Something you tolerate that takes time, energy, peacefulness, or money from you in a recurring, unsatisfying way. Compromises seemingly avoid conflict and strive to create a certain appearance.

Compromises at home include such things as household repair needs, cleaning needs, messiness, or noise boundary violations. Compromises in work life can be inadequate space, wrong field of work, poor communication, lack of mission, improper technology, or dysfunctional hierarchies. Compromises regarding family, friends, and colleagues include imbalance of support or friendship, blurred boundaries, misunderstandings, and the need to change fundamental agreements.

Compromises can be systematically approached in these four major arenas:

- Physical
- Emotional
- Relationship
- Financial

Compromises usually result from disregarding a personal need or being disloyal to a personal ideal. Toleration of the compromise seemingly avoids conflict and strives to create a certain appearance.

After each of the four compromises write the need or value you will honor as you resolve the compromises.

In the exercise that follows, list a significant current compromise in each of the four major areas.

- Design a time goal by which you will resolve, reframe, or accept each compromise to reclaim the engagement and energy given to it.
- Choose to resolve it by a certain date, for example, cleaning up a messy office within seven days.
- Reframe the toleration by moving resolution to a certain future date to avoid its being a daily energy drain.
- Distinguish the internal bargaining of procrastination— putting off a commitment with a vow that you'll start next Tuesday.
- Or accept a concession that you have no control over and cannot determine, such as a spouse's driving habits; move it to the acceptance list to disengage from it.

COMPROMISES RESOLUTION SCHEDULE

Physical Compromise: _____

I choose to: ___ Eliminate by (give date):

___ Move to: Year 20___ list__

___ Accept and assign it to my:

___ Gratitude List

___ Worry List

___ Forever List

Strategy: _____

The need or value I will honor to resolve the compromise: _____

Emotional Compromise: _____

I choose to: Eliminate by (give date):

Move to: Year 20__ list__

Accept and assign it to my:

Gratitude List

Worry List

Forever List

Strategy: _____

The need or value I will honor to resolve the compromise: _____

Relationship Compromise: _____

I choose to: Eliminate by (give date):

Move to: Year 20__ list__

Accept and assign it to my:

Gratitude List

Worry List

Forever List

Strategy: _____

The need or value I will honor to resolve the compromise: _____

Financial Compromise: _____

I choose to: Eliminate by (give date):

Move to: Year 20__ list__

Accept and assign it to my:

Gratitude List

Worry List

Forever List

Strategy: _____

The need or value I will honor to resolve the compromise: _____

Your Mind's Eye: Visualizations and Affirmations

Major James Nesmeth spent seven years as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam. During that time, he was essentially isolated and had no physical activity. Before the war, Nesmeth was an average weekend golfer, breaking 100 by one stroke on two occasions. To preserve his sanity, he learned to visualize golf, which he did every day. He selected his favorite country club. He saw himself dressed in golfing clothes. He experienced everything in great detail. He smelled the fragrance of the trees and the grass and made each stroke with his entire body. After he was released from captivity, he shot a 74 on his first golf outing.

A group of executives asked me to present a seminar on writing a first book. My first question to them was, "How many of you have envisioned your first completed book—exactly what it will look like, the title, how it feels to hold it, seeing it at the bookstore?"

No hands were raised.

My next question: "Have any of you seen a yellow Jeep in the last month?" Of the twenty-four people present, one raised his hand.

I went through a visualization exercise with them:

- Close your eyes and picture a yellow Jeep—the specific detail of how it looks.
- Walk toward it. Walk all around it. Notice the tires, the body, the trim.
- Open the passenger door; feel the cold metal as you grasp the handle.
- Look at the steering wheel, the dash.
- As you sit, notice the secure, firm seat holding your body.
- Smell the interior.
- Look at the dashboard and through the windshield to imagine driving.
- Start it; hear the motor run; feel the vibration.
- Grasp the steering wheel and imagine driving.
- As you turn it off and get out, hear how securely the door closes.
- As you walk away, look back one more time and take in the entire picture of the yellow Jeep.

I asked them to contact me by e-mail or telephone in the next week if any of them happened to see a yellow Jeep.

In the first three days, twenty-two of the twenty-four executives contacted me to say they had spotted a yellow Jeep. What someone sees—what appears on the radar screen—is determined by belief and assumption. In that particular situation, a yellow Jeep was preprogrammed as possibility. Our possibilities are limited to the ones we allow ourselves to see. They were now seeing a bunch of Yellow jeeps as well as their first completed book.

The Art of Visualization

Novak Djokovic defeated Roger Federer (7-6, 1-6, 7-6, 4-6, 13-12) to win his second straight Wimbledon men's singles title, his fifth overall. The tennis match lasted just under five hours and ended in the first-ever Wimbledon Gentlemen's Final Tiebreaker. Djokovic, ranked number one in the world, said on the court after receiving his trophy, "This has always been the tournament for me. I used to make the trophies out of different materials in my room as a kid just imagining I would be standing here."

Jack Nicklaus said that 90 percent of a tough shot is the mental picture he creates of how to make it and 10 percent is the physical swing itself.

Navy SEAL trainer Brandon Webb calls this visualization process "superior mental rehearsal."

A vision crystallizes possibility into a fundamental articulated idea. A vision gives hope possibility—a shape and form—to program your future while rehearsing it. You inhabit the experience of your vision to guide its creation.

A vision serves as inspiration to design ways to realize it. The most successful businesses have a universal vision, one that resonates with each person in the organization. Proven guidelines include the following elements:

- You must construct your own vision.
- The criteria to measure success must be clearly defined.

The combination of physical practice and imagery consistently yields performance superior to physical practice alone.

It is important when using visualization and imagery to avoid negative language or directives, such as what not to do or what to avoid. The unconscious processing part of our midbrain does not know the difference between positive and negative, only focus. The alignment of the energy field of the brain is on the focus, so a focus on “don’t turn the ball over” or “don’t throw an interception” aligns the energy field with that very issue. Focus on specifically what you want to do. And only that.

Research has repeatedly shown that negative imagery results in performance deterioration. So direct your imagery and visualization to only positive intention.

The Science of a Vision

Visualization, when repeated, can literally reprogram the neural circuitry of the brain, directly improving performance. Recent positron-emission tomography (PET) scans of the brain have confirmed several things about visualization:

Visualization brings about actual physical changes in the brain.

The brain assimilates a mental picture whether the stimulus is actual from the optic nerve or imagined; the brain activates in the same way with a mental image as with an actual image.

When you repeat a vision of successfully attaining a goal, the act programs neural networks and neuronal pathways to etch the experience more strongly.

Mental visualization of a complex movement can actually improve performance.

When you program your unconscious, you actually create a “future memory” to live into. The brain can’t tell who conjured it—you or reality. The more detailed your visual image, the more specifically etched your brain will be. We know that by simply picturing a danger, we can trigger the entire body’s responses of fight or flight.

You do not make the brain changes permanent unless you incorporate them into your story. Doing so makes it part of who you are—your identity. Otherwise, the change either doesn’t register or gets extruded as noise. For example, a phrase that became incorporated as part of an identity was Muhammad Ali’s “I am the greatest,” introduced in a speech to reporters before his 1964 world title bout with Sonny Liston.

While your unconscious mind cannot tell the difference between something you physically see and something you mentally picture, your conscious mind can. You must incorporate an evolving story to include the successful performance. Otherwise, unconscious messages will delete access to or believability of the imagery.

There are three key elements of effective visualization:

- Specificity about the full experience of achieving the goal: thoughts, feelings, behaviors, sensations.
- Repetition of the success imagery so the neural networks dedicated to that vision become hardwired.
- Conscious incorporation of this new vision into an ongoing story to be ultimately metabolized as part of the self. Otherwise, you will “lose” this vision.

Visualization Exercise

Engage imagery/visualization with a specific goal. This focus on a specific end point and purpose guides intent and personal meaning of the imagery. The visualization/imagery includes the entire scenario of the successful completion scene: visualization, the emotions you will feel, and the conversation that will result.

Envision goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART goals)

- Create positive terms for success.
Establish your criteria with positive terms that address what you want and what you will do.
- Be specific, simple, concrete.
- Vague and theoretical criteria are not useful, because there is no way to live a theory.
- Be entirely present to your experience of the vision: what you feel, what you think.
 - *Picture yourself having just succeeded at your goal at a specific time in the future, such as one year from now.*
 - *Create this success experience specific to time, place, and how you would experience yourself and your body through all five senses.*
 - *Hold the energy of the precise outcome you’ve just achieved, the goals met, and the feelings it brings. Imagine the details of the scene of your success inside and outside, engaging all senses, thoughts, feelings, and bodily experience along with details of the scene. For example, for a successful transaction, include the values and needs fulfilled, the money you have made from it, and the details of what you are doing, such as shaking hands and ushering someone out of your office.*
 - *Carve out a few moments at the beginning and end of each day to “read” this vision.*

Before you can be successful in any endeavor or performance, you must be able to imagine it in your mind's eye. When you can envision creating positive performance, then you can also imagine your victory celebration.

Affirmations Exercise

Affirmations: The Story to Support Visualizations

According to a recent paper in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, self-affirmations that incorporate what one values and sees as relevant activate the pleasure chemical dopamine to alter the brain's response to messages, leading to behavior change. Self-affirmations that incorporate core identity of the individual (success, contribution, freedom, etc.) generate significant responsiveness.

Affirmations make visualization a complete story. To achieve a goal, reprogram your automatic pilot with affirmations. Affirmations are positive statements that state the goal as if it has already been achieved. For affirmations to be optimally effective, the following characteristics need to be incorporated.

- **Present tense**
Begin with "I am ...". State the goal as if you have already achieved it. "I am skiing every March in Steamboat."
- **Positivity**
Your brain will strive to achieve the image you focus on. A positive image is more powerful than ideas
- **Personal**
Make your affirmations about your experience and accomplishment. Do not try to change other people's behavior. "I am watching my daughter clean her room" won't work
- **Use of all five senses**
Use all five senses in imagining successful completion. For visual, use several lenses, such as wide-angle and close-up; make a complete experience of the successful completion of your goal.
- **Emotion**
Include a feeling word ("happily interacting," "peacefully experiencing"). A primary reason we do things is how we imagine we'll feel when we do it.
- **Brevity**
Brevity is the soul of wit—and affirmations.
- **Specificity**
Clearly focused, specific detail makes it real. No abstractions.

- **Action words**
“I am slaloming ... driving ... acting ... living ...”
If you say “I am going to ...” you will always be on the way.
- **Consistency**
As soon as you let up on the disciplined, focused pursuit of a goal, your automatic pilot will revert to the familiar. This is the frustration of not continuing to follow a weight-loss plan and having the weight come back.
- **Adding “Or something better”**
“I am enjoying my month spring skiing in Steamboat Springs, or something better.”
Write each goal and affirmation on a 3x5 card. Read each one at the beginning and the end of each day. Remember to visualize yourself as having already achieved the goal.

How long do you do this?

Until you reach the goal.

How many performance-related goals should you generate affirmations for?

A reasonable number—at least three, maybe more—that you’re working on daily.

In this way, you create the complete experience of internal success. You inhabit the experience. An affirmation will initially make you feel uncomfortable, even anxious. With an affirmation that is positive and not yet achieved, you challenge the core belief of your identity and systematically create the template for a new performance story.

The 4 R’s: Repeat and Rationalize vs. Recognize and Reorganize

Repeat: Are you repeating an old habit hoping for a better outcome?

The brain operates efficiently, to expend the least amount of energy to do a task. This efficiency means that the brain takes shortcuts based on what it already knows—the tracks already laid with neurons tailored to certain tasks. The shortcuts save energy. The software developed for past experiences shape current perception and processing. Psychoanalysts call this transference. Neuroscientists call it the efficiency principle. Behavioral economists call it diagnosis bias. For all of us, the brain perceives things in ways it has been trained to do. How we categorize something determines *what* we see. The challenge is that imagination, which comes from perception, can be limited to what we already know.

Rationalize: Do you dismiss or compromise any aspect of your performance story?

A repeating storyline may be as bold as always looking for the next big deal, or as quiet as habitually comparing yourself and your money to others. Or as pernicious as not being able to convert your talent into corresponding income. The internal origin of a process is elusive because an external drama always accompanies it and provides a focus. Some warning signs of this struggle include personal compromise, conflict with other people, limited success, unhappiness, or not living up to a full potential.

Recognize: Are your needs, ideals, passion, and talents all going in the same direction?

If your performance story is not satisfying, or if you haven't attained your objectives, look more closely: *You are always reaching your goals*, whether they are conscious or unconscious. It is helpful to know consciously and specifically what those goals are. You might be undermining your success by being imprecise in your objectives. Do you fear specifically, yet dream vaguely?

Reorganize: Do all the storylines fit and advance the plot of your performance story?

Once becoming aware of actively making choices, you can decide what's in your best interest, what furthers your story. And what doesn't. Neuroscientist Gregory Berns examines the science of thinking differently—*iconoclasts* in particular—to emphasize how we need to put ourselves in new situations to see things differently and boost creativity.

When the brain encounters the unaccustomed or unexpected, perturbation occurs. The brain has to reorganize perception, which influences how we see things. We are pushed to see things in a different way—to be creative. Prompts include a novel stimulus, new information, or an unaccustomed context.

Some suggestions for creative stimulation:

- Be aware of the categories that you use for a person or idea—in order to go beyond or outside them.
- Seek out environments in which you have no experience.
- Bring together ideas from different disciplines and different perspectives to the same subject.
- Use specific coaching input to introduce or challenge new ways of looking at things.
- Follow intuition and gut feelings: write them down.
- Brainstorm and free associate: allow a stream of consciousness not bound by usual categories

Personal Feedback Questionnaire

Determine who knows you best and who will give straightforward feedback: after your coach, consider other players and family. Ask each one to jot down their impressions, opinions, and suggestions about you.

Ask these people what each of them sees as your:

- Strengths
- Potential
- Special skills
- Personal and career possibilities
- Blind spots
- Unrealized potential
- Winning strategy (personality style that you most rely on, even when it doesn't work)
- Next step to take
- Distractions/derailers
- Work environment in which you would work best
- Work environment you should avoid

What did you learn from the feedback you received? How will you use their feedback to create a strategy for proceeding in each area of your life?

Knowing what you want to achieve is crucial, with a game plan, specific steps, and measurable results. Review your responses in these four areas.

1. What do you want to achieve?
2. What do you want to maintain without change?
3. What do you want to change?
4. What do you want to eliminate or avoid?

Prioritizing Goals

1. Which of the issues will resolve itself without your doing anything?
2. What is the one thing that bothers you the most?
3. Choose the issue to resolve that would make the biggest difference in reducing your stress level.
4. Is there anything blocking your ability to get this done?
5. What have you learned that would be useful to you in this focus?
6. Imagine what would happen if you viewed a fear of making a mistake as an indication that a problem needs to be solved rather than as a sign of danger?

5 Steps to Revise a Performance Story

1. Align needs and ideals with your goals.
 - In your performance, is all of yourself going in the same direction, or do you seem to undermine yourself in certain areas of your life?
 - Do all the aspects of your practice advance your skills?
2. Address resistance to change and repetition of the old story.
 - What are the repetitions in your performance that are dead-end and dissatisfying?
 - What are the things you'd like to change in your performance in the next 90 days?
 - Are you willing to do it?
3. Create your own experiences and your own performance behavior.
 - If you could add three things of vital importance to your life beginning this month, what would these be?
 - Develop an internal point of reference; change occurs from the inside out.
4. Change what doesn't work.
 - What in yourself would you like to enhance?
 - What do you do uniquely well, better than almost anyone in the world?
 - Are you devoting enough time and energy to developing your skills and interests that distinguish you?
5. Decide what you want to change.
 - What is the one thing you most want to change about your performance now?
 - What is the one thing you most need to change about your deliberate practice to achieve this enhancement?

Performance Inhibitions and Success Insurance

“You can't think and hit at the same time.”

Yogi Berra

How can you learn to optimize your performance, especially when stakes are high? And what can we learn from those who succumb to significant pressure in academic, athletic, and business situations?

Cognitive neuroscientists as well as sports psychologists have focused research on why some people will do their best and others their worst when it matters the most. The four most common performance inhibitions are *choking*, *sandbagging*, *self-handicapping*, and *burnout*. Each deserves its own specific consideration and unique prevention strategy.

Choking

When Jackie Robinson grabbed his throat after umpire Bill Stewart badly missed a call in a game between the Cardinals and the Dodgers, Stewart threw him out of the game. *Choking* became a common term for blowing it. *Choking* usually refers to not executing a specific skill under pressure that you would most likely execute under normal situations.

Some common choking scenarios:

- Botching a routine behavior, such as catching a pass in a big game
- Flubbing a well-practiced presentation
- Forgetting lines that an actor has said hundreds of times
- Blanking on the name of someone the person knows quite well

When any performer instantly shifts from the bottom-up to the top-down system—thinking even for a second about technique or stepwise execution or wanting to be sure not to make a mistake—it dramatically alters the outcome of flow and performance, athletic and intellectual.

Two particular behaviors increase pressure:

1. Framing a situation as a unique experience
 - This is my biggest game.
 - There will never be another opportunity like this.
 - Today I make history.

Thinking of a pressure moment as a single shot heightens the sense of risk and loss. With athletes, for example, loss aversion creates a behavior of playing not to lose instead of playing to win.

In the 2017 American League baseball championships, the starting Astros pitcher in Game 3 against the Yankees was Charlie Morton. When he was interviewed before the game, he said, “This is the biggest game of my life.” My response, as an Astros fan, was “Uh-oh.”

The Yankees got six runs in the first two innings.

2. Exaggerating a situation

- Become too attached to the outcome.
- Intensify thoughts of fear and anxiety, especially focusing on failure versus success.
- Shift of state due to anxiety, so the performer loses focus and moves away from working memory.

Why do some people perform at their best when stakes are highest? And others their worst?

Since the meaning we ascribe to an event dictates our response, changing the way we view anxiety and pressure can change their negative impact on performance. Regulating a state of mind is the most important performance framework. In fact, our greatest challenge is to regulate states of mind through various emotional triggers and charged situations, including extreme success, perhaps the greatest challenge.

In situations requiring high performance, how you frame the reading of your body's stress can significantly affect performance. If you read it as a readiness to respond and excitement about performance, it has a vastly different result from reading it as anxiety and a fear of poor performance.

Performance pressure understandably increases anxiety about performing well. The response of paying too much attention to the stepwise control of execution interferes with a fluid procedural memory performance of an automatic skill. Intentional, purposeful thinking can disrupt the flow state. Monitoring a step-by-step execution disrupts performance and can create a choke.

In a predisposing way, worry requires mental energy and can siphon that energy from optimum performance. The more you worry about performance, the more you take away from cognitive capacity to execute that performance. The amount of brainpower left over for performance decreases. Stress has different effects on different people in terms of their abilities, as well as how they interpret a stressful situation.

For example, thinking about how someone else will react, or expecting to be criticized, can lead to inability to access crucial information that you know quite well. Choking happens here when the perspective shifts from focus on the task and the flow of information to how you may be observed or regarded. At times this shift is not even in conscious awareness, with only a later recognition such as "I should have said ..." or "If I had thought of ..."

The preoccupation with worry or anxiety about performance can immediately induce a choke. Stereotypical threats can also affect performance. For example, when reminded of their gender before a math test, women perform less well than when not reminded. Race, ethnicity, and sex can also frame an unconscious bias of advantage or disadvantage unrelated to ability but entirely related to mindset of performance.

In high-pressure situations, the ability to remain focused and regulate a state of mind affects both mindset and behavior. For example, in research examining 185 venture capital pitches, variables such as calmness, passion, eye contact, and confidence were greater predictors of outcome than content, experience, and expertise. Responding to pressure by sustaining a balanced state of mind and a specific mindset of confidence ensured the most favorable outcomes.

Choking is not simply poor performance but is specific to not coming close to what you have done in the past, to what you are capable of. Trying to disregard, counter, or ignore a negative thought uses valuable cognitive resources. Focusing on a specific designated next task simplifies use of resources wisely and effectively. For example, identifying and letting go of negative self-talk means that you do not have to attach attention and energy to it in an ongoing way.

Tennis great Jana Novotna was a single point away from the Wimbledon championship victory over Steffi Graf. Under the pressure of competition, as she later acknowledged, Jana began thinking about her next shot. This loss of flow resulted in double faulting on her serves and missed overhead shots played with more thoughtful caution. She then lost the championship.

A remedy for choking: remain in a flow state and don't shift to an observer state. To remain specifically focused in the performance zone, despite pressure, maintains the optimal state of mind for the task. Regulating state of mind becomes the most important task for everyone, from athletes to executives to parents.

Advice drawn from research on sustaining peak performance, an essential aspect of combating chokes, includes the following:

- Don't slow down. Any reflection to think about the process of attempting to control it can compromise the flow zone.
- Practice under pressure. Simulate as best as possible the exact conditions of performance and what can sustain that performance mindset and execution. Practice under pressure creates a hardwiring that can sustain performance flow.
- Don't distract or dwell on past performance or failure. Every misstep needs refocus to frame as learning for more optimum performance.
- Use a key word to create and sustain focus throughout the performance. Develop a one-word focus phrase that represents the successful mindset and the performance itself combined.
- Focus on the positive outcome, not the specifics or mechanics.
- Focus on what to do (the process) rather than how to do it (the technique for sustaining flow).

A Specific Choke: the 'Yips'

Originally coined by professional golfers, every performance arena from athletes to surgeons to executives is subject to a familiar type of choke called the “yips”. In shooting sports and archery, target panic. In gymnastics and diving, balking. In competitive darts, dartitis. For baseball pitchers, Steve Blass disease.

The yips are the sudden inability to do a basic, well-practiced skill. It was first described in golfers as the involuntary tremors or motor jerks disrupting the execution of a putt. It has come to represent a specific choke of motor function. New York Yankees second baseman Chuck Knoblauch suddenly developed an incapacity to throw to first base. Steve Blass suddenly lost his ability to accurately pitch. The common denominator of each performer was the derailed execution of a well-developed skill in the performance zone. The shift of performance zone—the state change—is the cause. Across the board in numerous sports areas and athletic performers, relaxation techniques, mental imagery, focus concentration, and pressure management have not been useful in resolving performance blockages.

The content focus, whether it is the performance compromise, negative self-talk, or thinking about a component of the performance, instantly follows the shift from the state of mind housing the peak performance skill. Analysis of any of the components will only sustain the altered state, disrupting the performance mindset and process.

Often these performance inhibitions are due to some sports-related traumatic stress that could be identified in terms of origin but not circumvented in terms of practice. At times, the trauma was emotional and the result of an abusive coach, at other times the result of witnessing a serious injury to another athlete or experiencing one directly. These experiences become encapsulated in a particular state of mind—a time capsule that contains the fused trauma and inhibition. An emotional trigger or a specific performance cue/gesture can trigger an instantaneous entry into this time capsule and the immediate performance inhibition. Usual approaches combine some aspect of conscious focus and logical approaches to the issue, but the contents of that time capsule are not amenable to logic, reason, intellect, therapy, or reframing approaches. The time capsule houses the state of mind that originally experienced the trauma, a mind/brain/body combined experience.

Ken, a rising star and a major AAA League catcher, was about to be called up any day to his major league baseball team roster. But he suddenly developed throwing difficulties. He had no trouble with the instant, automatic throws for a stealing base runner or any rapid-fire play sequences. His difficulty was in the simple throwback to the pitcher after each pitched ball. It was as if he had forgotten how to do this basic move that he had been doing since he was four years old.

This sudden onset of dysfunction occurred just after he was hit on his forearm with a foul tip. While hurting for a moment, he thought nothing of it, as that kind of thing is fairly routine in baseball. Yet, somehow, it caused him to think about his throwing arm just after that inning. He noticed that he had errant throws that were high, low, and wide until he was replaced before the end of the inning.

When the foul tip hit his forearm, it triggered instant memories of other physical injuries he had experienced in sports. A broken ankle in football, several jammed fingers, a broken index finger in baseball, and a hip bruise from a fastball. The specific emotional and physical trigger of the foul tip off his right forearm instantly booted up this mindset—the time capsule that contained previous sports-related traumas.

We explored the frame-by-frame experience in his mind and found that the difficulty occurred when his routine throwing allowed him an instant to think about what he was doing. Yogi Berra's admonition "You can't think and hit at the same time" certainly applied to Ken. He couldn't think and throw at the same time.

Assuming it was an injury, he was placed on injured reserve status, but Ken knew somehow it was not in his arm but in his mind. He just couldn't figure out how to overcome it.

Although he had previously played through every injury and pain, he had done so by encapsulating the traumatic aspect into a particular state that was well-preserved and intact as a time capsule, much as the body walls off an abscess to allow healing to occur. This had worked for his amateur and professional lifetime until a specific trauma resonated with and activated this entire mindset. Each time he began a routine throwback to the pitcher, an instantaneous—though, until now, largely unconscious—association occurred that moved him away from the automatic skill developed by deliberate practice over two decades.

Rather than reenter this time capsule containing the traumas, Ken needed to sustain immersion in the optimum performance state that he had developed very well.

He developed a mantra of a cue, a focus word, and a deep breath to sustain the performance state that he knew quite well. He repeatedly coupled the image of gripping the ball with his focus word of *powerful* and took a deep breath to breathe in relaxation and breathe out any tension. Doing this scores of times during the day for many days, he anchored simply gripping the ball with this automatic performance state so that he consistently sustained his deliberate practice skills.

Within ten days, he was throwing consistently and effortlessly.

When an inhibition occurs, it is activated by a specific emotional/physical trigger that instantaneously activates the pathway in the time capsule that generates the re-experiencing of the inhibition.

Negative self-talk, focusing on problems, and fear of performance are all the result of the emotional trigger—the contents of the time capsule. It is not reentering the time capsule and fixing each of the components but creating an alternate pathway for moving from current stimulus to ideal behavior that constitutes the remedy. The Neural Conditioning Program is a map for effectively addressing these performance issues.

Trying harder or practicing more may only further etch this existing pathway unless the effective remedy of creating an alternate optimum performance pathway becomes the focus and is addressed in a systematic way.

A performance problem or failure often initiates a cycle of frustration consisting of a conscious attempt to fix the problem, overthinking, conscious preoccupation with the problem, increased physical and mental tension, and disrupted concentration.

Anticipatory anxiety can initiate a fear of recurrence of performance inhibition. Avoidance behavior becomes a part of the content of the time capsule of the cycle of inhibition. Classically, this state change is a dissociation that occurs instantly as cued by an emotional or physical trigger. This entire process depletes energy while it creates a stuckness in the time capsule of trauma and compromise.

Self-Handicaps

Sports psychologist Dr. Eddie O'Connor reports the recognition of his process of self-handicapping as a runner. He recognized that in not reaching his goal of doing the half mile in 2:10, he was holding back to have something left at the end of each race, coupled with the hope that he could get there the next time by trying harder. He recognized that preserving the hope of doing better was actually interfering with doing better.

Self-handicaps are performance barriers or inhibitions created to protect someone's sense of self-esteem and confidence. If there is failure, the self-talk then can become that it isn't because of poor ability but because of some outside circumstance having to do with preserving hope: I can always try harder.

A remedy for self-handicaps: self-reflection and awareness of this process so that the deliberate practice system of performance can be reinitiated.

Sandbagging

Sandbagging attempts to demonstrate in some way a limitation or negative aspect to diminish others' expectations of you. Sandbagging is designed to diminish the pressure of performance anxiety.

In one study, sandbaggers who predicted lesser performance actually made it a self-fulfilling prophecy.

"I may have lost, but it really doesn't count, because I didn't try."

A slight variation of this may involve self-deception about how you are performing and being absorbed in achieving growth and excellence in itself. Playing for the sake of excellence is not all there is in sports or business. Competition in the worlds of sports and business are not dissimilar or unrelated. The more challenging a situation, the greater the opportunity to extend potential and succeed.

Both self-handicapping and sandbagging are designed to preserve integrity and to avert pain, yet both produce the results they most attempt to avert. Honest self-reflection about both experience and performance can illuminate either of these processes and allow for a more successful resolution. Self-reflection is a key component of recognizing, owning, assessing, and deciding what to change about any aspect of performance.

A remedy for sandbagging: self-reflection + change self-talk.

Burnout

Burnout is a syndrome comprising aspects such as diminished emotional drive, concentration, motivation and enthusiasm for the endeavor. Often the result of a chronically stressful performance, it causes tension, fatigue, and lethargy along with lessened passion and consistency.

In various studies, greater mindfulness is associated with reducing stress, exhaustion, and negative affect as well as developing more positive engagement in the endeavor. Objective measurements of effectiveness are an important component of self-monitoring and performance assessment to avoid burnout.

Burnout may be the antithesis of resilience. A recent study of pediatrics residents at Seattle Children's Hospital by Dr. Maneesh Barta found a burnout rate ranging from 41 percent to 77 percent, depending on the year of residency. Similar studies show analogous burnout rates in other specialties. Higher burnout rates are associated with a higher incidence of medical errors.

A resilience training program was developed by the Mattel Children's Hospital Pediatric Residency at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. The findings show some successful coping strategies:

- In an emotionally challenging situation, focus on possibilities rather than problems.
- With distraught individuals or overwhelming personal emotional response, call a time-out to regulate state of mind and restore balance.
- Plan optimum responses for situations for which there are no precedents or templates for how to handle them.
- Inhale deeply for relaxation and exhale tension

Regulation and self-care of the caregiving person is a cornerstone of personal health and balance, along with optimally taking care of others. Secondary trauma in the caregiver has been shown to have significant impact, as powerful as a trauma to the original victim.

This is another application of the Neural Conditioning Program. In the Column 1, "Emotional Triggers," list all the situations that may instantly induce an emotional reaction. In Column 2, "Usual Response," write the usual response for each situation. The purpose is to cue your radar to be aware instantly when a situation arises. Column 3 is the "Mantra" to get grounded and centered. Column 4, "Ideal Response," is the planned action. This systematic strategy of early recognition, grounding, and planning can restore balance and regulate the state of mind.

The remedy for burnout: mindfulness with reappraisal + reframing + reengagement.

Performance Anxiety and Inhibitions: An Overview

Since 90 to 95 percent of our operating system, including all the beliefs and behavioral and operating patterns, is unconscious, any remedy that relies on conscious verbal reporting is problematic because this can address only 5 to 10 percent of the spectrum of possibilities. Most of the performance inhibitions and compromises have nothing to do with conscious processes.

An altered state of mind—the time capsule, in this instance—is an entirely consistent and autonomous software program that is a psychophysiological state: a mind/brain/body combination. It is this process that holds the information and process to resolve any specific performance problem.

A technique related to the same assumptions on which the Neural Conditioning Program is based but that approaches the issue in a distinctly different systematic approach is *Brainspotting*, which uses eye position to locate where the brain is holding the problem and facilitates processing and releasing of the trauma.

An emotional trigger can be tripped by a symbolic event or a related emotional cue. Two aspects are important to remember:

- The player's experience determines whether an event is significant and especially if it is traumatic.
- Just because an event has been forgotten doesn't mean that it does not still exist in that time capsule in the brain.

Whenever there is a trauma-induced time capsule that contains the entire experience of an original trauma, an emotional or physical cue can trigger that entire altered state of mind to create an instantaneous, unconscious reentry into that capsule. Anticipatory anxiety lowers the threshold to make it more possible to perceive an emotional trigger and respond to it.

For the Neural Conditioning Program, recognizing the emotional trigger initiates an awareness of the altered state content, including negative self-talk, overwhelming feeling, and compromised behavior that result. The recognition is important only of column one and column two—the emotional trigger and resulting response—in order to cue the player's radar to know sooner and more consciously each time to use a mantra to get grounded and centered to enter an ideal response pattern.

In addition to an emotional trigger, a physical cue, and a symbolic trigger, a micro-movement can trigger the instantaneous state change. A golfer with the yips—a form of this inhibition—can simply move the putter back a few inches to trigger the inhibition response. This micro-movement simply triggers entry into that time capsule and all the components of that altered state. Any movement of the body automatically activates the brain in tandem fashion. Similarly, any remedy must take into account mind, brain, and body in order to create a more effective alternate brain pathway and performance behavior.

Working harder and trying harder have antithetical results, making skill execution harder if not impossible.



D. Peak Performance Mindset

Mindset Mastery

LeBron James was sitting courtside during the NBA playoffs in 2013 with his eyes closed. Despite immense commotion and individual and collective energy and chaos around him, James was in an obvious space of internal focus to create a conscious flow and sustain it when he returned to the game.

Here's what we now know. A gap in performance has more to do with mindset than with motivation, intelligence, and skill. When a performer in any endeavor (athlete, surgeon, executive) has practiced essentially the same thousands of hours as the next person, optimum outcome is determined more by specific mental state for optimum performance. The most important variable for determining success is the mastery of regulating states of mind.

Nowhere is there a greater challenge of instant reactivity to personal foul, physical assault, and rule-breaking contact than in sports. If ever there were a time when one's ability to create that space between stimulus and instantaneous reactive response is tested, it is just after being painfully and illegally hit, fouled, or trash-talked.

The essence of self-regulation is creation of the potential space between stimulus and response. Pausing and taking a breath to get centered establishes the potential space between urge and action. A time out. It is in this potential space where judgment resides. Entry into and sustaining of an optimum performance mindset becomes a conscious choice.

For an athlete, being in the zone means no distraction by any particular player, noise, mistake, or success. You can't focus on the past play or the future one but only this moment. And internal distractions are among the most challenging ones, when the voice that says, "You messed up. "You can't do it." "You may not have what it takes."

A mindset is a software program that determines perception, processing, and decision, often without conscious awareness. When someone feels happy or enthusiastic, they tend to take more risks, even including financial ones. Feeling sad, by contrast, leads someone to make safer bets. Disappointment or sadness makes someone more likely to focus on negative information. A low mood will shift toward more analytic thinking, away from intuitive creative thinking.

Beliefs → Behavior → Performance

Take Nothing Personally

Elite sports performance involves the self-awareness of regulating a state of mind no matter what the stimulus may be. The grounded and centered coach and athlete take nothing personally, and remain centered no matter what the stimulus or provocation. The competitor who trash talks and attempts to provoke an emotional reaction is the most common. The referee who makes a bad call and you're charged with a foul. The fans who stimulate you with their cheering, or offend you with their booing. A teammate who inappropriately challenges you.

To stay grounded and centered, focused in your performance flow and zone regardless of intended or unintended derailments, put your ego in a blind trust. Insult, slight, or criticism: Stay focused in your performance zone. Do not become emotionally involved or react to any content focus that distracts from performance flow.

In athletics, it may be trash talking. In poker, it is may be insults masquerading as humor. In Olympics, it may be the nanosecond of distraction by your chief competitor.

Any emotional reaction will instantly take you away from performance focus and flow. *Everyone* becomes less effective in an emotionally reactive state.

For both coach and player, any response in any way other than remaining immersed in the performance flow will be used against you.

For any situation, there are three components of experience and response:

- State
- Story
- Strategy

State management is the most important aspect: choosing the mindset that matches the successful outcome.

Story is the organizer of what you do—the theme and story lines of what you are pursuing.

Strategy is to move beliefs to behavior for successful performance.

How you view something changes your body's response to it. Elite performers channel heightened arousal to frame it to energize optimum performance.

Both individuals and teams from business organizations to sports like to think they do their best when the stakes are highest, when the future rests on the immediate outcome, but that's not how it happens. In extensive studies of teams, Professor Heidi Gardner at Harvard saw patterns repeat themselves:

- Teams become caught up in the risks of failure rather than the pursuit of excellence. As a result, they revert to standard and safe practices instead of seeking original solutions.

- When teams face significant performance pressure, they tend to use high-status members rather than expert members.
- An athlete or team either fails to win a game when strongly favored or squanders a big lead in an important event due to excessive pressure.

Vast amounts of research on performing under pressure consistently show that most people perform below their capacity when under pressure. Pressure erodes behavioral skills unless it is managed in an informed, systematic way. This occurs in instances ranging from parallel parking in a driving test to important athletic events. Unless pressure is strategically planned and regulated:

- Attention, judgment, and decision-making are affected adversely.
- Performance incentives and motivational enhancement can camouflage pressure.
- Teams become increasingly focused on the risks of failure rather than the pursuit of excellence.

Stress is any situation with too many demands and too few resources—energy, time, or money—to meet them.

Pressure is a situation where something of importance is at stake in the outcome of a performance.

Success is often determined by internal state regulation under pressure. Regulating states of mind and managing emotions in order to enter and sustain an optimum state for a specific endeavor are often the most important success strategy you can employ. Matching the state of mind to the task frames and initiates a successful engagement.

Deliberate practice forms the necessary foundation for optimum performance. To enter the performance zone and execute the specific skills require entering the same state of mind as in deliberate practice. *While the learning zone and the performance zone are distinct, the practicing and performing state of mind are the same.* Remember how in college if you pulled an all-nighter on coffee in preparation for an exam and if you happened not to be in the same state of mind in taking the exam as you were while studying for it, some of the essential information encoded could not be accessed.

Success most often has to do with how someone manages an internal state under pressure-inducing circumstances. Those who can develop systematic pressure management strategies create optimal performance. In situations involving pressure, those lacking such strategies tend to become more physiologically aroused, mentally rigid, and impulsive.

Pressure situations cannot be avoided. A simple approach to performing at optimal capacity in a pressure moment is to minimize the negative effects of the pressure. While we can't eliminate pressure in every situation, we can choose to negotiate our reactions to those situations and learn pressure management techniques.

In a pressure moment, it's common to experience uncertainty, an exaggerated sense of importance, a sense of being scrutinized, and a state shift to a reactive mode. Unless skillfully managed, these effects can stimulate feelings of fear and anxiety, leading to stress with less than optimal performance.

Reframing of the pressure focuses on self-regulation and staying in the mindset of optimal performance. Any time we move outside this zone to become an observer, second-guessing ourselves, we lose the flow of performance.

Robert Epstein was compelled by the research question of what the most effective method for reducing stress would be. He surveyed thirty thousand people in thirty countries. The answer: having a plan. What he found was that as we think about challenges and obstacles, the most effective approach is to have a specific plan that makes each next step simple, specific, and tangible.

How can you reframe stress to enhance performance?

Avoiding stress engages it. Perceiving stress as a threat increases its negative physical and on the right thing mental effects on the mind and body. Framing it instead as an opportunity to enhance performance generates effectiveness and fuels performance.

Initially, rather than trying to block or counter stress, redirect it to a positive focus of seeking possibilities. Consider it the initial step of engagement in positive performance preparation. Since the brain registers anxiety and excitement in the same way, to frame it as opportunity initiates a mindset of positive performance.

Reframing stress as a source of energy and motivation redirects the meaning to a performance mindset. We now know how our mindset predicts our potential, especially regarding success and failure. Stanford researcher Carol Dweck's work on growth mindsets shows how a mindset determines resilience, endurance, and ultimately success significantly more than inherent intelligence or talent. More recent research shows that both growth and fixed mindsets become contagious.

How can you develop resilience in performance?

Theo Epstein guided the Boston Red Sox to their first World Series victory in 86 years. Then he agreed in 2011 to lead the Chicago Cubs, whose last World Series Championship was in 1908. The Cubs then won in 2016. Widely touted as having an innate and rare intelligence to deconstruct a situation to its simplest form and generate strategic possibilities, he was asked how he decides what he looks for. Epstein said that the first thing he wants to know about any potential player is how he has handled adversity.

Resilience is the ability to regulate stress, and sustain optimum performance. Management of setbacks to productively progress is an essential process of peak performance. From athletes to executives, persistence toward a goal in the face of challenges characterizes success. A resilient individual is not someone who avoids stress, but someone who learns how to effectively master it, and optimize performance while doing so.

Studies show someone can boost resilience by these four strategies:

- Reinterpreting negative events by reframing for possibility
- Enhancing positive emotions
- Becoming physically fit
- Maintaining a supportive social network for resilience role models

Two approaches demonstrated in recent research to regulate states of mind and enhance resilience are cognitive reappraisal and mindfulness meditation.

1. Cognitive reappraisal reframes from a negative to a positive, from problem to possibility in order to reinterpret the meaning of an adverse event to see it as a challenge and opportunity. A Mount Sinai School of Medicine study of Vietnam prisoners of war found that those who had actively reappraised their imprisonment to find meaningful ways in which to grow stronger and more resilient showed the most adaptive responses.
2. Mindfulness meditation focuses on how to get grounded and centered in the present moment, and is associated with improved ability to focus, increased flexibility of thinking, and greater psychological wellbeing.

Both cognitive reappraisal and mindfulness meditation have been shown to increase activation of the left prefrontal cortex, a brain pattern associated with greater emotional control, a boost of positive emotions, and faster recovery from uncomfortable feelings.

Deliberate practice is simply training in the right way. Significant effort, not inherently enjoyable, involves a hard work feedback loop of knowledge, practice, and adjustment.

Pressure Performance Strategies

“Anyone can hold the helm when the sea is calm.”

Publilius Syrus

Bill Russell vomited before every NBA game and won eleven championships. He reframed this as part of his preparation as a ritual steppingstone to playing great basketball.

Everyone experiences “nerves” and the accompanying physical aspects such as rapid heartbeat, perhaps trembling and wet hands, a sinking feeling in the gut, and at times even difficulty with breathing. These physical changes that precede performance are common. Every person experiences some aspect of this no matter how accomplished and accustomed they are to performing.

This reframing of stress as a challenge seeks possibilities and enhances performance. In one study, the mindsets toward stress for performers differed significantly. Elite performers viewed it as a challenge, as an index of engagement to optimize performance. Less successful athletes viewed stress as something to circumvent, overcome, or simply tolerate in order to proceed. The view of stress as a challenge enhanced the performance of the elite athletes. This simple reframing can become an important lesson for everyday activities and for optimum performance. A challenge response can help regulate a state of mind as well as channel physiology into a better performance.

Trying to prevent stress frames it as an indication that something is wrong. To frame it instead as an indication of activation of channeled energy can be enhancing. It takes emotional and physical energy to fight off the feeling of anxiety, energy that can be better spent on the task at hand. Simply telling yourself, “I am excited,” shifts you from perceiving a threat or stress to an opportunity mindset. Those who reframe anxiety as excitement perform better. Elite performers welcome and channel stress to drive the performance at hand rather than try to chase it away. Framing physiological and emotional experiences as excitement rather than anxiety or fear moves us into the next action phase of performance.

If an athlete or other performer adds a factor in anticipatory preparation, such as focusing on significant money or fame that will result from the performance, it can distract or derail the process. I have worked with professionals from athletes to writers who, after landing multimillion-dollar contracts, reengaged and sustained creative immersion so that they were not distracted from the simplicity of entering the state of mind containing the deliberate practice and skill for flow and execution.

Accessing the zone of deliberate practice and focusing only on the next step turns off the conscious brain, disengages any judgment or observation of the action, and allows us to enter the zone of flow instinctively.

Any disruption of this flow by negative self-talk, fear of making a mistake, or looking at the consequences of the next action alters a state of mind, indicating a need to immediately become grounded and centered and reenter that zone of flow for execution.

A performance process can enable each person to focus and persist despite possible interferences, regardless of the importance and the magnitude of potential distraction. This performance process that enables optimum execution of a skill, whether mental or physical, is uniquely specific to each individual. The system may be the same, but the application looks as specific as each person’s fingerprint. Common to each systematic approach is turning off your conscious brain and entering that deliberately practiced zone of optimum performance.

Greg Searle, winner of an Olympic gold medal in rowing, was asked if success was worth the price he had to pay. “I never made any sacrifices,” he said. “I made choices.”

This framing of performance pressure illustrates how those who are receptive to novelty and innovation can best develop flexibility in pressured performance, seeing choice opportunity rather than crisis.

Optimum development integrates the performance triad of body, mind, and emotion. The balance of risk and security activates the brain and enhances capacities for both reason and imagination; security begins with a matrix of trust and acceptance

Scientific research has evolved that can distinguish those who can grow from failure and succeed under pressure from those who cannot. This research also provides us with systematic knowledge of how to acquire the skills of those who grow, who have a growth mindset, and who become more resilient from both success and failure. Resilience can be trained, cognitive fitness developed, deliberate practice collaboratively developed, and performance systematically enhanced. Optimism can be taught, and confidence can become a state of mind entered at will.

Pressure Management Tools

A strategy or method for regulating a state of mind and reframing the pressure of the moment can avert distraction and allow focus on what helps to guide behavior. Some considerations for regulating and redirecting focus and flow at a moment of pressure:

- Get grounded and centered to access the state of mind that is optimal for the task and stay internally focused in this state
- Recall previous successes. Since confidence is a state of mind that establishes a frame for engaging in a task, reflecting on past successes and similar instances ignites confidence and a mindset to initiate best practices.
- Reframe the pressure moment as a challenge for opportunity. This focus reframes to a positive challenge rather than a negative stress.
- Create positive images of the outcome. The visualization of a successful outcome activates new neuropathways and networks in the brain and helps maintain a positive state of mind.
- Consider each situation as one of many opportunities to develop and improve rather than a chance of a lifetime, which would evoke pressure. No matter how rare an opportunity seems, life continues to give us many more chances.
- Reduce the importance of a pressure moment by keeping the larger purpose in mind. The more importance we attribute to an event to be, the more pressure we experience, which distorts both thinking and performance. Although it may seem counterintuitive to shrink the importance of a pressure moment, it can sustain optimum performance.

- Confidence is a state of mind, so keep ideals and positive attributes in focus. Validating self-worth is a vital tool for sustaining a state of mind and not becoming derailed by pressure.
- Sustain focus on what you can control. Acknowledge but do not give energy to what you can't determine, and refocus on what you can be effective in doing.
- Use a mantra to stay grounded and centered as frequently as necessary: a cue to anchor focus and physiology.
- Train or practice under pressure conditions as much as possible. And anticipate unexpected situations, challenges, and problems.
- Recognize the myth that in order to be successful under pressure, you have to perform better than your best. Believing that the only way to be successful in a pressure situation is to perform better than ever is likely to undermine the strategies and mindsets that supported any earlier success.
- Use the ROADMAP System® for Performing Under Pressure.

A variation of the mantra in a pressure situation or competitive moment is simultaneously squeezing a ball with your left hand while repeating the mantra. When right-handed athletes squeeze the ball in their left hand before competing, it primes the right hemisphere of the brain, associated with automatic, fluid, unconscious neural pathways for automatic skills. Activation of the right hemisphere also tones down the left hemisphere thoughts about success and failure.

ROADMAP States of Mind

With Integration of the Neural Conditioning Program

The ROADMAP System informs active listening and understanding of performance story components and provides specific structure and strategy for guiding the evolution of a new performance story in each player's unique voice. The ROADMAP System is a process of recognizing and understanding experiences to strategically assess and plan improved performance.

The seven steps represented by the acronym *ROADMAP* introduce a systematic way for both coach and player to recognize, own, assess, decide what to change, map changes, author new story lines, and then program new player identity based on the changes.

To change performance, focus on the system. Doing anything new or different—achieving change in any manner—is a venture into the unknown. New experiences with as-yet-undetermined outcomes are inherently coupled with uncertainty, trepidation, and anxiety.

You can use the ROADMAP System to develop awareness of feelings and their connection to thoughts and how both relate to the choices you make. The ROADMAP System is simply a means of editing stories to redirect narratives for changes in behavior.

Any emotional trigger can create an instantaneous state change. An awareness of the process creates the ability to regulate and choose your response to any triggering event, internal or external. The key is an awareness of the specific trigger of the instantaneous state change (Column 1 of the Neural Conditioning Program) and the content of the altered state (Column 2 of the Neural Conditioning Program).

A feeling triggers a state change, although it may be initiated by an external event. Other people and events may trigger unwanted thoughts and unpleasant feelings, but they do not cause them. The mechanics of how you respond are largely unconscious, stemming from the beliefs and automatic couplings in your mind and brain.

But you can become consciously aware; you can direct your choices. Self-awareness is the first step in transforming your thoughts and feelings and thereby your state of mind—the specific choice of software program you operate on.

Return to the Neural Conditioning Program. Work with the first emotional trigger you wrote. Go through these seven steps to demonstrate how to ROADMAP a state of mind for performing under pressure.

Recognize the emotional trigger that cues a particular feeling or automatic behavior.

Recognize each emotional trigger that prompts a state-of-mind change (Column 1 of Neural Conditioning Program) to boot up a specific mindset. Cuing your radar to recognize an emotional trigger and the subsequent instantaneous state change allows you to objectively and quickly recognize the process and to become grounded and centered and move into an ideal response.

Observe and own your present awareness.

Ownership and accountability are prerequisites of change. Recognize the state contents of any altered state (the beliefs, doubts, anxiety, negative thoughts, and self-talk of Column 2). Mindfulness of your story is necessary to change.

In the instantaneous imperceptible shift to an altered state, focus becomes directed to the content of that state, including beliefs, doubts, anxiety, negative self-talk, and recurring negative thoughts.

To own present awareness is to recognize the instantaneous and perceptible shift to an altered state in order to refocus on the process itself and use a mantra to become grounded and centered, rather than becoming stuck in the contents of that altered state—the time capsule.

Assess your emotions and feelings.

The automatic behavior results from the emotional trigger. Be aware of all feelings and sensations in your body. Be aware of what you are experiencing at this moment, and what you were feeling, even in a brief, signal way, that served as a trigger to change your state of mind.

If the feeling is anger, look at the assumption that caused the anger. Did you assume that someone needed to respond exactly as you wanted, as an extension of your desire, in order for you to feel happy? If so, the result would be ineffectiveness, and anger would be the counter to feeling helpless. Rather than management of anger, the assumption itself needs addressing.

Decide to engage in a predetermined strategy.

Establish a fully present, grounded state using a mantra—the three-part sequence of cue, focus, and physiology (Column 3 of the Neural Conditioning Chart).

Map an ideal response.

Plan an optimum response and behavior (Column 4 of the Neural Conditioning Chart). Instead of the emotional trigger coupled with the usual automatic response, create an ideal response for that trigger, a response to employ after regulating your state of mind.

Author new experiences.

Complete the behavior that is ideal, with the thoughts and feelings that match this new response. Recognize the feelings and internal conversation that become part of the ideal response.

Program a new identity.

Recognize that you have choices, that past behaviors do not define an identity. Incorporate this new model into your present identity. The mastery and confidence of effectively making informed choices evolve an identity of a growth mindset.

For each trigger and usual reaction (Columns 1 and 2), plan the ideal behavior in Column 4. The idea is to recognize the triggers and the reactive behavior as early as possible, rather than well into the unfolding of its cycle from inside the altered state. Plan the ideal behavior or response so that you can consciously substitute it. With repetition of this new behavior pattern, you ultimately groove it as a default mode without having to think about it. With repetition, the original cue is rewired to the ideal behavior. This hard-work miracle rewires your brain to a new default pattern.

Applying the ROADMAP System for Performing Under Pressure

Recognize your state of mind to effectively enter the mindset of optimum performance for each specific task.

You create your performance story, including the internal conversation before and during a pressure moment. Each moment, you create what you think, feel, and experience.

With excess pressure and emotional charge, a pause between urge and action creates a contemplative space in which judgment resides. This place of recognition requires being grounded and centered in order to become a choice point.

Awareness of emotional triggers and the subsequent state change moves what “just seems to happen” to conscious self-reflective choice.

Recognizing authorship of your state of mind and subsequent action also acknowledges how emotion and behavior are directly connected to your performance. Thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are all creations of each moment.

Observe and own your performance story.

Observe and own any pressure distortions that generate anxiety or distraction. By recognizing and owning a pressure moment, you can quickly reset to a centered, grounded state. This step of observing and owning includes labeling of thoughts, feelings, and actions as this moment’s creation. Labeling allows you to see the simple straightforward objectivity and ownership of thoughts, feelings, and actions rather than experiencing them as “just happening.” This mindfulness practice moves from a passive to an active position internally, with ownership bestowing both acceptance and effectiveness of the created experience.

What remains unconscious will probably be attributed to fate. If you emphasize that you really want something but seem stuck and unable to attain it, ask yourself these questions:

What would I observe to know that I really want this?

What behavior would demonstrate that I am acting to do that?

Is there a component that I can begin right now?

How would I feel when I do what I want to do?

What is the greater pain if I don’t do it?

What is the greater pleasure if I do it?

Access and assess the ideal state of mind for the performance task.

Juxtapose this awareness with assessment of whether your thinking is affected by distortion due to pressure, losing the flow, or moving to an observer position.

Assess the specific performance behaviors and self-talk. Are there limiting beliefs as part of a shadow story? How can you convert them to empowering beliefs?

Decide specifically what to keep, let go, change, and enhance.

Plan a strategy to use to reboot the performance mindset and zone to optimize performance.

Map the next best action for performance excellence.

To simply map the next best action, shrink the change to the next step, with the continued question, “What is the next best action?”

Author the ideal response to execute optimum performance.

A strategy needs to be aligned with ideals and purpose. You do not have to be motivated; you only need to have a plan and stick to it. Execute the optimum performance.

- **Ideals:** core values that motivate and guide
- **Purpose:** what to accomplish and contribute
- **Strategy:** the art and science of a plan of action
- **Goals:** Enter and sustain the specific performance zone.

Program your peak performance identity.

One of the most powerful forces of the human psyche is our persistent return to our core identity, the model of how and who we see ourselves as being. It is necessary to transform this operating model—the bedrock of identity—to correspond with behavioral changes in order to make change permanent, to transform how you see yourself—doing and being in the performance zone. Incorporating the new behavior as part of your core self—continually assessing evolving skill development and performance results—becomes an ongoing process of self-reflection and recognition. New behavior is incorporated into core identity to become permanent. Change that lasts rewires the brain to a default mode. This automatic sequence becomes a procedural memory to operate automatically as peak performance.

Many approaches to effecting change attempt to do so without considering what change does to a personal narrative, leaving out core identity. As a result, many methods of change are contrary to how the mind and brain work. When you change behavior, a corresponding transformation in your bedrock identity needs to change as well in order for change to be permanent.

Since much of the performance story operating system is not conscious, its powerful process constructs the story of the performance, of your performance identity, expectations, and ultimately behavior.



E. Wellness Practices

The Wealth of Wellness

Wellness integrates mind, body and spirit with a balanced flow of energy. It is an ongoing process of choices that become the stories of our lives. Attention to wellness integrates mind, body, and spirit approach to abundance and to wealth.

The mindset and practice of wellness provides the foundation of health and longevity, as well as optimum performance.

Warren Buffet used the analogy of buying a car. If you knew you were going to get a new car every few years, the approach would be different than if you knew you were going to choose one car and have it for the rest of your life. You would do research to know the best care for that car, probably change the oil more frequently, and do everything possible for maintenance. Knowing that it would be the only car for the rest of your life, you would take meticulous care of it.

Your body is the only one you will have for the rest of your life. Knowing that it is irreplaceable, everything about the care and maintenance of your body matters. It reflects the cumulative care you take of it.

Wellness Defined

Wellness integrates mind, body, and spirit with a balanced flow of energy. It is an ongoing process of choices that become the stories of our lives.

Wellness is never static—we never stay at the same place. So it must consistently be assessed. The core assessment involves an evaluation of what is working and not working in your life right now.

Wellness requires:

- Self-awareness
- Informed physical, mental, and emotional care
- Meaningful connection with important others
- Balancing mind, body, and spiritual needs

The pursuit of wellness has immediate rewards. You can:

- Feel better
- Increase energy
- Achieve and sustain peak performance
- Enhance physical and emotional well-being

The Wellness System of Energy

Each person is an open system: We take in energy from sources around us, transform and organize it, and return it to the environment.

Ilya Prigogine won a Nobel Prize for his theory of dissipative structures. A dissipative structure is an open system in which energy is taken in, modified, and then returned (dissipated) to the environment.

Wellness requires an efficient flow of energy. Disease is when that flow of energy is disrupted, blocked, or derailed in some manner.

Consider these examples of disrupted energy flow:

- Taking in more energy in the form of food than is required, resulting in obesity
- Blockage of energy, such as suppressed communication or repressed feelings
- An insufficient intake of energy, such as vitamins and nutrients, or denying compliments from others
- Crossover or inappropriate substitution of one form of energy for another, such as using sex to satisfy a spiritual need, or money to satisfy an emotional need
- Rechannel energy in an indirect way, such as passive-aggressive behavior or psychosomatic symptoms
- Weak interface or unfocused assertiveness with others, producing diminished emotional impact
- Excessive withdrawals from your emotional or physical bank account without replenishing
- Poor interface with the environment such as impulsive, explosive, or addictive behavior

Wellness Initiatives

1. List three things that you know you can do to increase your wellness.
2. What is one initiative you can take this week for each of the three wellness steps?
3. Specifically plan the next best action for each initiative—one thing that you can begin today that will give you a start in the process of change.
4. Will you commit to this next best action today?

Brain Programming for Wellness

Neuroscience now teaches us that we can either program wellness or program illness by our focus. We bring about not what we want but what we focus on. Focusing on illness and worry not only drains energy but adumbrates illness.

A negative thought loop is mentally replaying the same thoughts and reviewing the same scenarios again and again. You can't find an exit—you can't think or use logic to get out of it. While it looks like focusing, it's really obsessing. Thought loops are being marooned in your left brain.

Negative thought loops of worry will drain emotional and physical energy as well as create negative mental pictures that program your mind to their fulfillment. Since mind and body are connected, depletion of energy wears down the body's defenses.

To program wellness and deprogram illness:

- Recognize negative thought loops such as worry.
- Write down the list of negative thoughts so that you can cue your radar for awareness.
- Write a list of positive, proactive thoughts/plans/affirmations.
- As soon as you recognize you're entering a negative thought loop, immediately move to a positive thought and action.
- For intrusive negative thoughts, schedule a time to engage them.
- Respect the boundary of engaging the negative concern only during the time that you have scheduled (e.g., 20 minutes each week at 3:30 PM Tuesdays).
- Mourn what cannot be changed. Place energy on what you can determine.
- Focus on and express gratitude for wellness.

Special Issues of Success: For Women Only

Sex-role stereotypes are gradually fading. But their residue remains. For many generations, the traditional woman had to restrict her ambitions and interests to the accepted feminine role, which entailed marriage, children, and domestic activities. Only after the children had left home (if then) could she expand her interests and work outside of the home.

Both parents encourage their sons more than their daughters to control the expression of feelings, to be independent, and to assume increasing amounts of personal responsibility. With their daughters, fathers show greater warmth and physical closeness; they expect gentle, ladylike behavior and hesitate to use physical punishment. Mothers tend to restrict and supervise their daughters more closely than they do their sons. Girls are pressured to be obedient, responsible, and nurturing, whereas boys are urged toward achievement, self-reliance, and exploratory behavior.

Through the centuries, only especially clever women or those in unusual circumstances have been able to circumvent the presumed order of male dominance and female domesticity. The family, and social systems traditionally focused on containing, rather than expanding, expectations for females.

Success Self-Inquiry for Women

Make an appointment with yourself to reflect on and write your answers to the following questions

1. What is your own personal definition of success?

“I thought of myself as like the jazz musician – someone who practices and practices and practices in order to be able to invent and to make art look effortless and graceful.”

Toni Morrison

2. What does peak performance represent to you?

“The trick is to train your brain to move past that point of immediate reward, to find the uncertainty of the future rewarding in itself.”

Dr. Maria Konnikova

3. How much do you rely on others for direction, affirmation, and self-esteem?

It is the process of looking to someone or something else for what is missing that creates something missing.

4. Do you believe that if you're competent and work hard, you will be recognized or promoted without your having to ask for it or promote yourself?

“The doors we open and close each day decides the lives we live.”

Flora Whittlemore

5. Do you believe that asserting yourself is being too pushy?

“Live life as though everything is rigged in your favor.”

Arianna Huffington

6. Do you have specific long-term goals and a step-by-step process for reaching them?

“Alice came to a fork in the road. “Which road do I take?” she asked.

“Where do you want to go?” responded the Cheshire cat.

“I don’t know,” Alice answered.

“Then,” said the cat, “it doesn’t matter.”

Lewis Carroll

7. Once you have a game plan for success, are you afraid to take risks and make mistakes?

“Some people try to softly tiptoe through life so that they can arrive at death safely.”

Robert Anthony

8. Do you believe that to make it in the business world you have to behave like a man?

“I refuse the compliment that I think like a man, thought has no sex, one either thinks or one does not.”

Clare Boothe Luce

9. Do you feel you have to be driven, a type-A personality, to be a real success?

“The seeds of success in every nation on Earth are best planted in women and children.”

Joyce Banda

Women achieve because they combine ambition, ideals, commitment, and a plan to achieve it. There are many personality styles and types among achievers. Rather than trying to be more like someone who is an achiever, be more like yourself. Listen for how and what you want to do.

Special Issues of Success: For Men Only

Traditionally, boys and girls are raised differently. Many studies of conventional families have revealed gender-related tendencies. These studies show that both mothers and fathers emphasize achievement and competitiveness more for sons than for daughters. Sons are punished more often and more severely than daughters. With their sons, fathers tend to be stricter, firm, and authoritarian. They use more physical punishment with boys, and are intolerant of behaviors violating the traditional masculine stereotype.

Men suffer as much as women from gender-bound personality traits. If women have been limited in expressing their ambitions, men have been equally limited in expressing their sensitivity and emotions.

Success Self-Inquiry for Men

Make an appointment with yourself to reflect on and write your answers to the following questions

1. What is success for you?

“Nothing is enough to the man for whom enough is too little.”

Epicurus

2. Do you have a clear definition of external success?

“Tell me what you pay attention to and I will tell you who you are.”

Jose Ortega y Gasset

3. Do you have a clear definition of internal success?

“Those who do not have power over the story that dominates their lives, the power to retell it, rethink it, deconstruct it. . .and change it as times change, truly are powerless because they cannot think new thoughts.”

Salman Rushdie

4. Do you have specific long-term goals and a step-by-step process for reaching them?

“Life isn't about finding yourself. It's about creating yourself.”

George Bernard Shaw

5. Once you have a plan for success, are you afraid to take risks and make mistakes?

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent. It is the one that is most adaptable to change.”

Leon Megginson

6. Is anything internal keeping you from proceeding with your plan for success?

“Nothing prevents our being natural so much as the desire to appear so.”

Francois La Rochefoucauld