

Enhancing Sport Performance

12 Simple Lessons To Support Your Mental Game





Introduction

Welcome to the workbook designed to assist in getting your mind to do its share of the work! I have personally celebrated over 40 years in sport and have now worked with more than 10,000 athletes teaching them how to control their minds to produce higher levels of performance and enjoyment in sport.

The tools in this book represent the essential building blocks for sport performance. There is much more to learn, but these simple lessons, when practiced regularly in training, will provide the mechanisms to be consistent in competition.

The lessons are general and I provide space for them to become specific to your personality, sport and individual needs. Read, fill in the blanks and practice. Sport is such a great thing for learning life's important lessons, and I hope this book helps you build upon the greatness you already have. After all "better is always possible".

All the best,
Dave Freeze

Enhancing Sport Performance

12 Simple Lessons To Support Your Mental Game

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1. Goal Setting

Look to the Future and Decide What You Want

*"If you don't know where you are going,
any road will get you there."*

Goal setting is like looking into the future and deciding what you want and then coming back to today and doing the work. While there are no guarantees that you will get what you envision, it has been proven over time that those athletes who create a **clear vision** of their future performances are more likely to have greater success and often have a better experience of sport. It is like achieving your goal twice, first in your mind looking into the future, and then a second time in reality. The more **vivid** the image in your mind, the more likely it will come true.

Goal setting will help you by:

- Knowing what you desire.
- Knowing when you are on the right path.
- Keeping you motivated and producing the necessary drive.
- Keeping you focused.
- Allowing for celebration of milestone events and the end accomplishment.
- Keeping you positive, focused, and action oriented.

Some of the tricks to goal setting are:

- Be able to clearly visualize your desired long-term goal.
- Write your goals down and review them regularly.
- Create support from your coach, other athletes, and your family to gently help you in achieving your goal.
- Have short-term and weekly goals to break down the larger goal into manageable chunks
- Celebrate each milestone on the way to the larger long-term goal.
- Make sure you emphasize process and performance based goals that keep you focused on what it will eventually take to reach your long-term goal.
- Use the SMART system when setting your goals.

Setting Goals

Process Attributes	Key Performance Indicators	Outcome Goals
<p>This begins to describe me in my optimal performance state. This is the athlete I need to be in order to do my best work. It is different for all of us, and in some instances is sport specific.</p>	<p>Key performance indicators are different for every sport; they describe the sport being played well.</p>	<p>Long-term goals or short term outcomes. They are realized after training, competition, or the season is completed. This is what you want in the end.</p>
<p>Examples</p> <p>Calm, relaxed, grounded, centred, positive, prepared, focused, agile, patient, activated, in the moment, smooth, powerful, aggressive, brave, carefree.</p>	<p>Examples</p> <p>For a paddler they would be – smoothness, eyes forward, tall body, back rotation, forearm extension, top hand drive, catch, acceleration of the blade, power, exit at the hip, quick recovery.</p>	<p>Examples</p> <p>Placing, achievement, score, standard attainment, self-comparison, personal best, winning, top 5 finish, making the podium, making the team, attending five competitions, going to Nationals, making the Olympic team.</p>
<p>Examples</p>	<p>Examples</p>	<p>Examples</p>

2. The Big 8

The Answer to, "Who do I need to be?"

The Big 8 are essential when it comes to getting ourselves into high performance states and managing the process of being at the top of our game.

8

Calm
Relaxed
Grounded
Centered

Positive
Patient
Focused
Effort

Calm is a mind state.

It is when I know:

- I will be fine no matter what happens
- I am willing to do what ever it takes to get the job done
- I do not care about anything in such a way that it can create negative emotions
- I like who I am, what I do, and how I do it.

Another word that is interchangeable with calm is **carefree**.

Relaxed is a body state.

It refers to carrying the **right amount of tension** in the physical structure of muscle and bone to hold form and produce power, acceleration, accuracy, twisting, smoothness etc.

Too much relaxation (not enough tension), or too little relaxation (too much tension) will cause under performing. Breath work and drive are the adjusting tools. Breathe to relax and lessen the tension (this is the more common situation) or drive yourself (demand and motivate, push, work harder) to get more tension.

Grounded means I have a plan I like and am following it.

I feel good about what I am doing and happy with myself. I produce action, am aware of it, and use feedback mechanisms to stay connected to the body's senses. I assess performance and I determine what I need and want next and get to work on incorporating them. It is a place often described as "things are **manageable** and feel **simple**".

Centered is my ability to change my mind freely.

When the plan is not working, or something needs to change, being centered helps me find the right solution and helps me make decisions quickly. Staying centered helps **avoid choking**, (not staying connected to the skill sets and becoming beginner like) and **panicking**, (becoming overwhelmed with what is needed and freezing or becoming emotionally flooded as a result).

Positive really should need no description.

It is essential to how the mind works most effectively and brings about great **joy and fulfillment** in sport. Positive also attracts positive, which can have a very important **synergistic** effect on teams.



Patience is necessary to hold onto the calm, relaxed, grounded, centered and positive states.

Losing patience will lower performance faster than losing any of the other 7 characteristics because of its **compounding** effect. Staying patient allows for mistake management, higher self-awareness, technique adjustments, strategy changes and clear thinking in stress-producing times. Patience is often a key anchor word used in describing the **ideal state** of an athlete's mind.

Focus and effort, the final two, are a magical **combination**.

Focus is the mental part, and effort is the physical part. Both must be present and both must be well balanced on the speedometer (see Activation). Too much or too little of either and ultimate performance cannot be achieved.

This rounds out the **Big 8**. We are already using all 8 so it is not like we starting from scratch. Rather it is about working to build more **skill and awareness** with each one.

 "It is not about how many hours you put in, but what you put into the hours that counts."
— Unknown 

3. The Bubble

Building the Invincible Athlete

If my job was to make you invincible, and there was only one lesson to teach, it would be the bubble. Athletes often tell me that this is the most important, or most powerful module I show them.

The concept is simple; separate your inner world from the outside world with a bubble that keeps the good things in and the bad things out. Good things are those things that help find a **high performance state** and keep it. Bad things are all the things that lower performance, make you frustrated, negative, angry, cause you to lose your focus, get in the way, and so on. Imagine a high performance party going on inside the bubble, and not letting anything get into the bubble to ruin it!

Every athlete and every sport are different so what is on the inside and what is on the outside of the bubble will be unique to all of us. However there are many characteristics and circumstances that are common to most.

Inside the bubble

Examples common to most athletes are to be calm, relaxed, grounded, centred, confident, positive, focused, prepared, alert, aware of self and surroundings and activated. Depending on your sport, you might also need to be powerful, smooth, accurate, agile, balanced, strong, patient, aggressive, fast, flexible, explosive, quick, determined, relentless, or have clear communication.

These are the characteristics of you at your best, and describe you playing your sport to the best of your ability.

The concept is simple – know exactly who you need to be and **transform** yourself into that person before you train or compete. Think of this process much like an actor or actress getting into **character** before a performance, going from their natural state and turning themselves into King Lear or Snow White before the play begins.

Outside the bubble

If sports were easy everyone would do them and everyone would be great. Sports are supposed to challenge you and make you work hard to overcome these challenges and help build skills and character. That's why there is the world outside of the bubble filled with challenges to test you and help you become a great athlete.

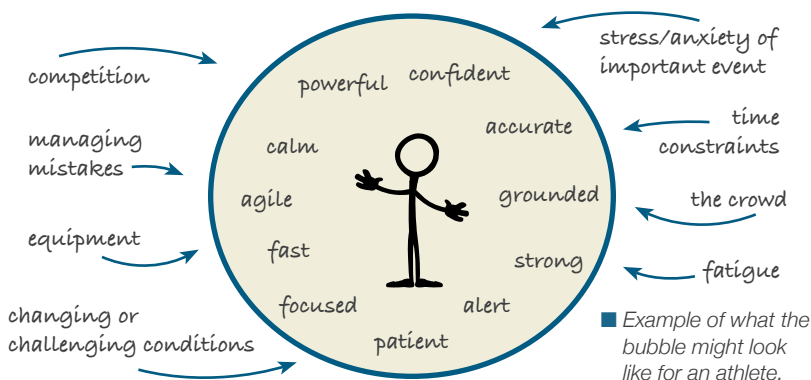
Again this world is made up of things that may be specific to you and your sport, but there are a few that challenge most athletes. This list includes the competition, managing mistakes, changing and challenging conditions, the stress and anxiety of important matches, races, or events, time constraints, poor performances and results, missed shots or bad plays, panicking, choking, the crowd, distractions, fatigue and so on.

Specific sports and certain athletes have unique challenges as well. These include things like shoot out pressure, weather,

field, ice and water conditions, changing conditions between heats, inconsistency in supplied equipment, bad calls from officials, and even bad luck like a fluke shot or lucky save. An athlete could also have to deal with a certain medical condition like asthma or injury, or deal with not being as tall, heavy, light or strong as their competitor. Remember this list simply characterizes what makes the sport challenging for you.

These are the things you have to **overcome** and keep out of the bubble in order to maintain your high performance state.

So putting the model together, you are inside the bubble, surrounded by the words describing you in your high performance state. Then there are all the arrows pointing at the bubble which are all the things that will lower your performance level if you let them in. So your job is simple, to transform yourself into a high performance state, and make yourself **invincible** to all the outside challenges.



Ideas On Keeping Things Out of the Bubble

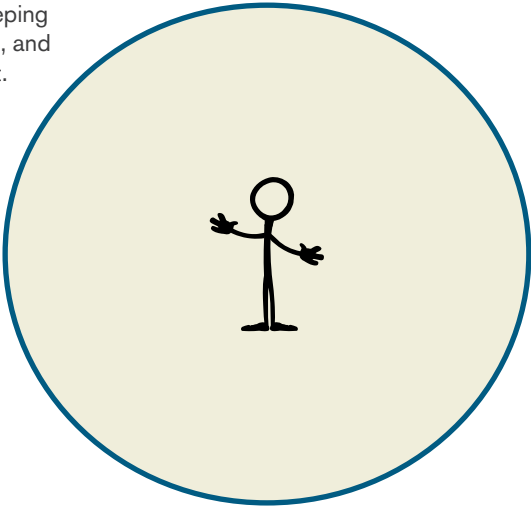
The saying goes, *“If it is predictable it is preventable”*.

The first step is to be aware of all the challenges, list them and increase your **awareness** of them. The next step is to create a strategy to ensure they cannot get in your bubble. As an example, an alpine skier who has to ski with terrible snow conditions today does not have or worry about it.

She simply accepts it, keeps it out of her bubble, and focuses on her needed tasks. She finds patience, aggressiveness and heightened awareness in her bubble to make the conditions work to her advantage. By doing this, she will gain **competitive advantage** over all the skiers who are worried about the snow or are hating to have to ski in such challenging conditions. Snow conditions are variable and you have to build **self-trust** to be able to find the tools you need to adapt to it. That is your job as an athlete.

Exercise

Create your own bubble, keeping the good in, and the bad out.



Key Concepts

- separate your inner world from the outside world with a bubble that keeps the good things in and the bad things out
- know exactly who you need to be and transform yourself into that character before you train or compete
- identify what is outside of your bubble
- be aware of challenges and create strategies to keep them out of the bubble

Notes:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slightly off-white or cream color. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

4. Not Borrowing from the Nasty List

While the bubble is designed to help keep certain circumstances from affecting us, this model is designed to help prevent negative (nasty) emotions.

Athletes often are in a reactive state. When you look at the list of nasty emotions, it is likely that some, or in fact many of them, may have surfaced in your last week of training or competition. It is important to recognize that all of the emotions on the list lower performance levels and make training and competing less enjoyable.

A good place to start is to understand why we borrow from the nasty list (page 13). When our **self-image box** does not align with the **results box** (page 14), we end up borrowing from the nasty list. In other words, when my **ideal self** says I should place in the top 5 and I place 12th, this can frustrate me, make me jealous of the winners, and cause me to develop some doubt or worry as I move into the next competition. All the borrowing from the **nasty list** occurs because the two boxes do not align. In contrast, when I believe I can place top 5 and come 4th, I have no need to borrow. When I see myself as someone who will make the team and I do, I do not borrow, instead I celebrate.

Borrowing from the nasty list can be prevented in two ways. We can change our **results box** by training hard, focusing during practice, and being competition ready thus achieving the best results possible, and the two boxes are more likely to align. This is a behavioral change, and is always welcomed in the high performance world.

{ "Your skills do not abandon you, what happens is you abandon your skills." }

— Unknown

"Nasty List"

***I borrow from the
Nasty List when my
Image and Results
boxes don't match up.***



Tick-off your
favourites!!

- ☐ frustrated
- ☐ nervous
- ☐ stressed
- ☐ anxious
- ☐ mad
- ☐ angry
- ☐ disappointed
- ☐ resentful
- ☐ scared
- ☐ fearful
- ☐ jealous
- ☐ envious
- ☐ doubt
- ☐ worry
- ☐ guilty
- ☐ sadness
- ☐ shame
- ☐ dread

The second way that borrowing from the nasty list can be prevented is to adjust my self-image to incorporate any possible result or outcome and thus eliminating the need to borrow. The **self-image** is made up of three levels: the **true self**, who is actually who I really am, the **ideal self**, who is the person I would like to be, and for perfectionists, the **perfect me**. Interesting perfectionists spend a great deal of time borrowing from the nasty list because they are very unlikely to get their desired result (perfect is very hard to achieve in sport), so usually end up frustrated or worse.

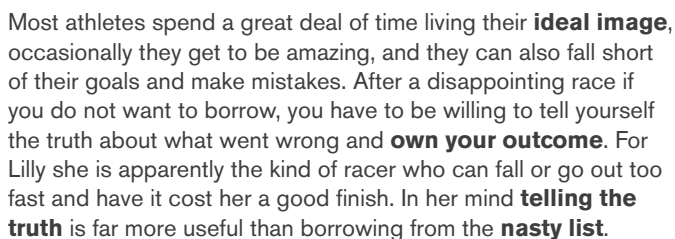
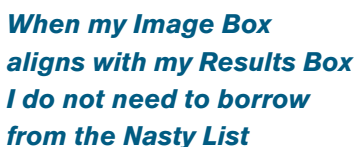
Getting the boxes to align is not about lowering your standard or setting lower goals. In fact, when we do the work correctly the standards and goals usually always rise. The trick is simply to set it up in a way that you do not have to borrow. If my **ideal self** has decided what a great result would look like and did not want to borrow from the list, they would focus on **process attributes** and **performance indicators**, and not on **outcomes**.

A cross-country skier, lets call her Lilly, comes to a competition and says she will focus on the Big 8 and be aggressive (process attribute goals). She wants to have excellent weight transfer, strong

double poling, and push on the uphill portions of the course to take advantage of her excellent conditioning (performance goals). She really wants a great result but does not create an outcome goal. Lilly instead will focus on her process and performance indicators knowing that these will help focus her in the challenging times of the race.

Lilly races well in a strong field in challenging weather and snow conditions and ends up placing 4th. While a podium finish is always preferable, Lilly's post race analysis includes looking at her pre-race goals and knows she gave it her best and followed her plan. She is happy with her outcome and does not borrow from the nasty list.

Lilly's **ideal self** oriented her and managed to produce a solid result. But what if she had fallen in a big corner, tried to stay with the lead group when they went out fast and was left with no gas in the tank for a good finish? How does she now not borrow from the nasty list with a disappointing result? The answer is hidden within how dedicated you are to never borrow from the **nasty list**. Here Lilly needs to include all the possibilities for results in her self-image if she does not want to borrow.



5. Focus Re-focus Control and Lifelines

A shortstop player, let's call him Bill, had a difficult time staying focused and letting go of mistakes. He was talented and a real asset to the baseball team's overall success but his challenge was he could be hard on himself and often had periods of low performance during games. Bill had excellent warm-ups and initially got very focused for the game; he just needed some techniques to stay positive and improve consistency.

Bill started by working on game focusing skills, (visualization and mind body connection) then looked at the razor sharp focus needed on every pitch, and finally considered the use of **lifelines** to get him out of trouble and keep him playing constantly. His game focusing skills were excellent; with good pregame mental preparation including visualization, juggling, and a great on field warm-up.

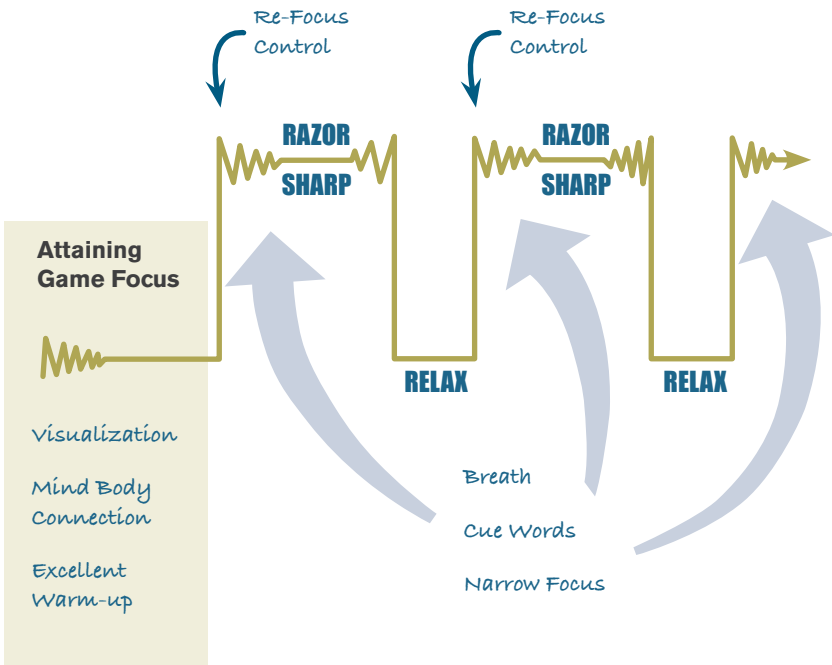
Bill's second step was to get razor sharp for each pitch. Focus demands in all sports are different but all athletes have times of higher and lower focus needs. A baseball game can easily go for 2 to 3 hours and razor sharp focus is not possible for that long. He needed the skills to **relax** between pitches and then **re-focus** to get razor sharp for the next pitch.

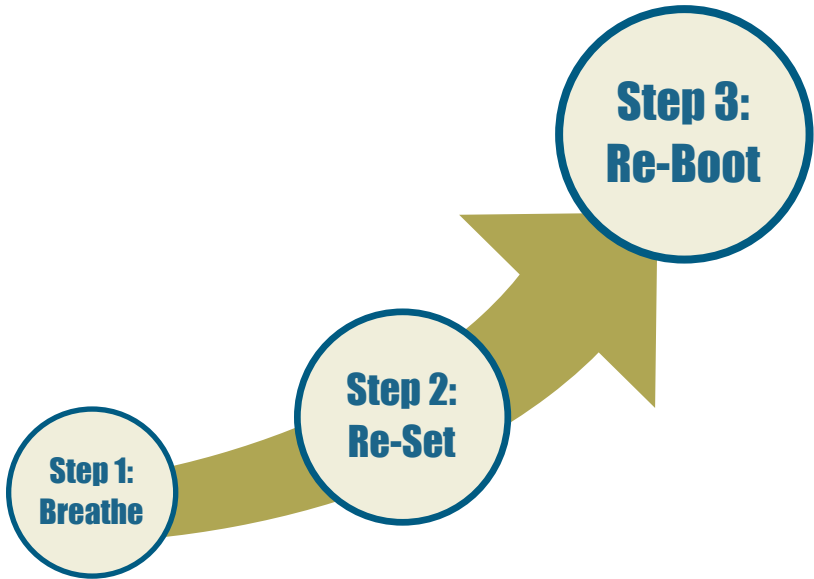
The initial challenge of razor sharp focusing (also called re-focus control) is getting ready for the moment the ball connects with the bat. To prepare for this Bill would start by watching the pitcher to get a sense of when he should begin to set himself for the next pitch. At this time he would take a breath and use 4 cue words: **calm, quick, agile, accurate**. Cue words are designed to reinforce being confident and grounded, and Bill's were also designed to take him through his job of catching the ball and initiating a quick and accurate throw.

{ "Success is sweet, but it usually has
the scent of sweat about it." }
— Unknown

To do this Bill would sense the pitchers' readiness for the throw and hone his re-focus by looking at 1st base, then 3rd base, then the catcher's glove. This brought his wide focus into a narrow focus and left his eyes where they needed to be. Bill would keep his feet gently moving in the dirt to keep the re-focus honed in.

If there was a delay in the pitch Bill would simply breathe, use his cue words again and go 1st, 3rd and back to the catcher's glove to re-focus again. Simple, quick and very effective.





Three Lifelines

While this kept Bill sharp and consistent, he still hated making mistakes and missing opportunities. In these moments he would get very frustrated, angry and negative.

We introduced a second process of reestablishing game focus designed to get Bill back to positive. These are referred to as **lifelines**. He worked on a three-step process of breathe, re-set and re-boot depending on how negative and reactive he had become.

Step One – Breathe

If a batter got a good hit and the ball got by Bill with no chance of a play he would simply step back onto the grass, take a series of 4 nice breaths, one for each of his cue words. **Calm Quick Agile Accurate**. He would then step back onto the dirt and go through his normal re-focus process.

Step Two – Re-set

Resetting would be necessary when Bill had a long shot of a play, one that was possible but he was unable to make. This would disappoint him and often he would become a bit hard on himself. Here Bill would return to game focus by reminding himself; **“it is not what I did, it is what I do next that matters”**. Here

he worked to release the past, cut the energy connection to the lost opportunity, and get back to game focus. It was important for Bill to realize and embrace that his only contribution can be made off of the next pitch and to get himself ready for it. To ensure that he was good to go on the next pitch, Bill would stay on the grass and not move back onto the dirt until he felt his game ready focus was back. Once back in the dirt he could go about his re-focus routine once the pitcher seemed ready.

Step Three – Re-boot

Sometimes you need to turn the computer off and re-boot it to make it work properly and this was the same situation for our shortstop. When Bill missed plays he knew he could have made, or erred, he needed a re-booting of his mental system. He would step back onto the grass, remind himself the

mistake was now in the past and there was real work to do to get razor sharp for the next pitch. Bill would reboot by reviewing the **Big 8** – calm, relaxed, grounded, centered, positive, patient, focused, and effort. With each word he would karate chop his hand into his glove helping to cut the residual energy from the last play and see himself as the words described. Once he had completed the **Big 8** review Bill would breath, ask himself **“What is next and how do I do it with excellence?”** He would then move back onto the dirt and get back to work attaining his razor sharp focus.

Over a period of a month Bill used game focus, razor sharp refocusing, and the three lifelines both in practice and in games. He also regularly visualized the use of the techniques in game settings to assist him in becoming very proficient.

{ *"It is not what you do, it is what
you do next that matters."* }

— Earl Henderson

6. Differentiation

High Performance is Not Possible
if We Are Fused to Our Circumstances

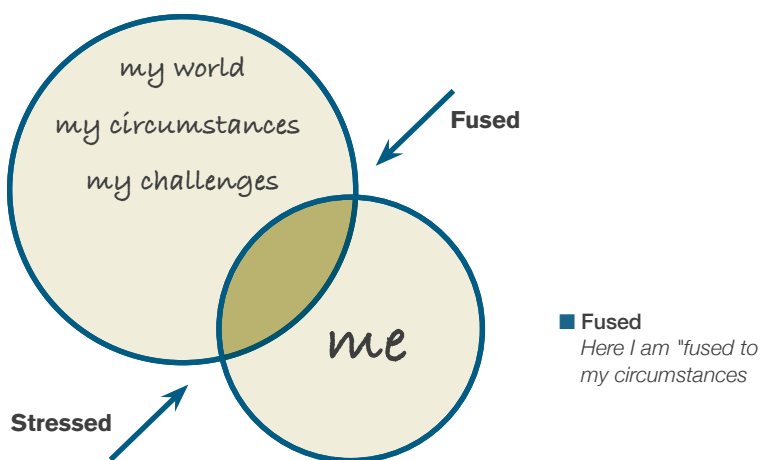
Sport is designed to be difficult, challenging, and involve lots of pain, suffering and failure on the way to success. Controlling emotions to build and maintain optimal performance states requires that I am able to manage my emotions and reactivity through these challenging times.

Athletes who become reactive, show lots of negative emotions, and have trouble managing themselves through difficult times. As a result they almost always see their performance levels decline. They are referred to as “fused to their circumstances”. In other words they are connected to the situation in such a way that they are negatively affected by it.

This often shows up as frustration with the athlete becoming mad, angry, disappointed, resentful, stresses, anxious, short tempered, etc. Usually their focus narrows, they try harder and harder becoming tenser with their performance declining further. The result is a downward spiral.

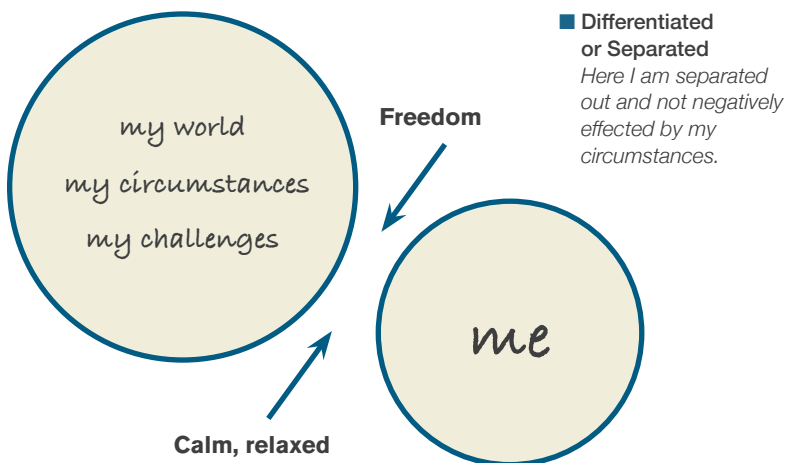
To maintain high levels of performance during the most difficult times requires that we separate ourselves out from the circumstances and stay connected to the **Big 8**. This is known as differentiation or separation. Ideally I want to be prepared for the worst and be able to imagine myself separated out from the circumstances. That way I can look at the situation **objectively**, and stay calm and relaxed as I train or compete.

The first step in differentiation is to **visualize** myself in difficult times seeing my positive mindset deal with the circumstances. I need to see my patience helping to maintain control and my calm mind working through the challenges. As I look for good solutions, I observe my breathing relax my body, watch myself fight off the desire to try harder, and watch my hard work maintain **control**.



The next step is to prepare for mistakes, failures and low performance moments by setting up my bubble (see The Bubble, page 8) so that I can hold them off and not let them affect me negatively. These circumstances are almost always **predictable** and are therefore **preventable**. This takes lots of practice.

The final step is to become **self-aware** so that I notice when I successfully manage the differentiation. I need to celebrate the good work, keep learning, and stay positive as I move forward.



7. Control

When it Doesn't Go Your Way

Control is what athletes seek in sport to assist them in attaining high performance. Depending on your sport, you likely have little or no control over most of what you will encounter!

Imagine a competitive synchronized swimmer who arrives at a new venue to find the water very cold, chlorine levels high, very little deck area for warm up or personal space, and the features in the pool and on the ceiling (which she needs to orient herself) completely different from her training pool. There is a huge and noisy home town crowd, a terrible music system, disorganized officials, the sport's toughest judges, and the top girls from the National team are all there to compete against her. She **prepares** well, **focuses** only on sleep, nutrition, hydration, and her positive can do attitude. She mentally prepares her routine, has a great warm up, adapts to the circumstances, **manages** her small mistakes well, and swims to a personal best. How is this possible? She simply kept all her energy on the things she had control over, and got her energy off everything else.

Control is what athletes seek in sport to assist them in attaining high performance. Depending on your sport, you likely have little or no control over most of what you will encounter!

So the first question is what does control mean?

Just like our synchronized swimmer demonstrated, control is your ability to react appropriately to

the circumstances you face by managing, to the best of your ability, all the things you do have control over.

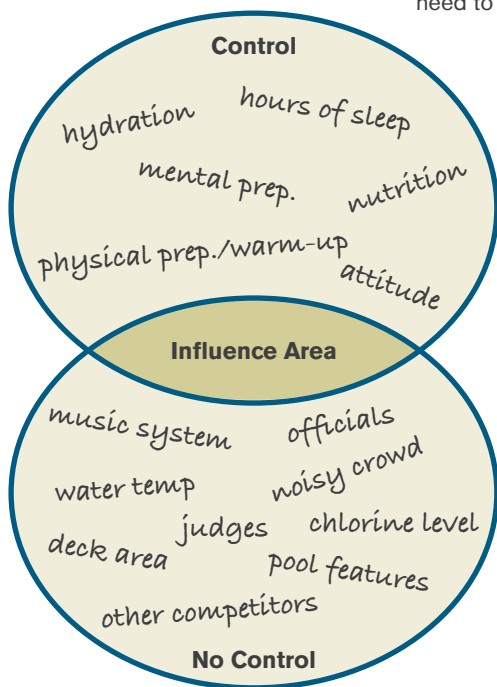
Issues around control can be broken into three areas, those that you have **total control** over (like your equipment or your warm-up routine), those that you have **no control** over (like the judges, or weather) and those that we might be able to **influence** but do not

have **full control** over (like your horse if you are an equestrian, or a teammate or coach if you are a soccer player).

So let's begin with examples of the **no control** area. In most cases you really have no control over the weather, event schedule, start times, run order, shooting position, lane number, environment (temperature, lighting, or music quality for skaters and gymnasts). You also do not have control over judges, officials, the crowd, supplied equipment, the course, field, snow or ice conditions, water temperatures, etc... The list goes on and on and is different for every sport.

So what do you have control over?

The list of what belongs in this area is much smaller if you consider only the things that you have **total control** over. For the most part the list would include things like; hours of sleep, rest, your nutrition, hydration, personal and team equipment, your attitude (staying positive), how you react to circumstances or events that occur, your warm-up routine, how focused you are, how much effort you put in, and your mental preparation process. In some circumstances you do not have full control over even some of these things, but they are the ones you need to consider.



■ Example of how our synchronized swimmer might map her areas of control, influence and no control.

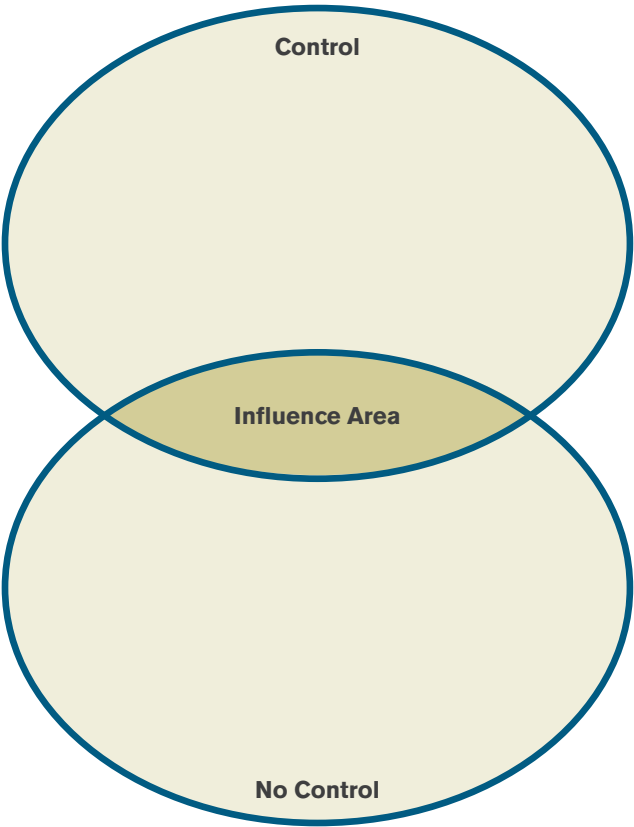
So what about influence?

Here it gets a bit tricky. Equestrians would love to believe they have total control over their horses, and hockey players would love to believe that they can depend on a teammate to do the right thing. But when dealing with these challenges, athletes often can be **surprised** and become **disappointed**. Certainly they do have influence over their horse, teammates, fans, and it could be argued athletes can influence the competition, but athletes can get

into dangerous waters if they think they do have control. The best strategy is to take everything in the influence area and put it in the area of no control, especially the competition, and have no energy on it! That is not to say don't bother working hard to get your horse into its best performance state or encourage your line mates to stay positive and give it 100%. But rather to remember that you do not have 100% control and so don't be surprised or disappointed when things turn out differently than expected.

Exercise

Fill in the sections of No Control, Influence and Control for you and your sport.



So now let's consider **energy**. Where should your energy be in training and during competitions? It makes sense to keep it all in only one area, the area where you have the **greatest control**. This is easy to do with practice and focus, but we can easily get misled. Athletes often worry about course or snow conditions, distractions from the crowd, and have a bunch of energy on the competition and how their horse or teammate will behave today! So while its easy to master, it does take **constant awareness, reminding and practice**.

A good question... Do you have control over your results?

You know that you have control over your equipment, effort, focus, warm up, and how well you mentally prepare so you could, as a result, have the race or game of your life and produce a personal best. However, it does not guarantee anything in the **results** column as other competitors performances are most often **not within your control**. You can have the performance of your life and a competitor can still beat you.

Lessons Learned

Keep your focus on the things you have total control over and do not compare yourself and your performances to your competitors!

Notes:

{ "In order to achieve all that is demanded of us we must regard ourselves as greater than we are." }

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

8. The Two Selves

A Willingness to Fail is Important to Progress

Why do some athletes learn faster or manage fear and pressure better?

The answer is that they are connected to more of the achievement side of their personality.

Imagine that there are two athletes inside of you. I call them **athlete A and B**.

Athlete B prefers to stay safe, be comfortable, not become stressed, anxious, fearful, or disappointed. Athlete B at times can be self-conscious so avoids moments where circumstances could lead to failure or embarrassment. We all have athlete B inside of us, and there are lots of times in life athlete B is good to have around. The problem with athlete B in sport is that these characteristics do not allow us to take risks, learn faster, or quickly overcome a challenge to make progress. B's progress is often very **slow and frustrating** as a result.

The **athlete A** inside of you is very different. Athlete A desires to be great and wants to get there fast. Athlete A knows that the **fastest improvements** will come when we challenge ourselves the most. This means pushing

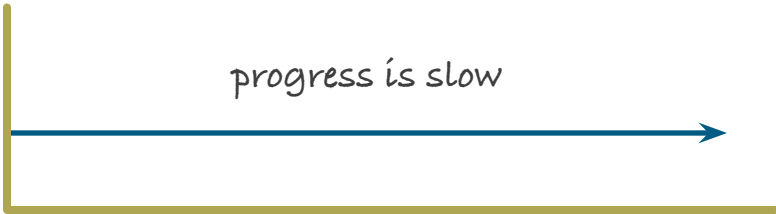
through hesitation, struggling, and a willingness to fail are important factors in progress. Athlete A knows that the work of getting better faster feels risky and difficult.

In many sports like figure skating, gymnastics and alpine ski racing, crashing and injuries are common so athlete A is needed on a daily basis to get the job done. In sports where injury or having to push through pain is common like triathlon, long distance running, football, or cross-country ski racing, the ultimate goal is finding comfort in being uncomfortable. These athletes need athlete A to tell them it is OK, that this moment is **temporary**, and will get better as they keep pushing through, or make another attempt.

Athlete A makes better and faster progress, appreciates the complexity of the sport they are involved in, and likes who they are becoming as they handle the challenges they face daily.

Athlete B

- Wants to feel:
 - comfortable
 - safe
- Unwilling to take risks for fear of failure or embarrassment.



Athlete A

- Getting better requires taking risks, failing, struggling
- Has to get comfortable being uncomfortable
- Pushes through the hesitation



{ "Whether you believe you can or you can't, either way you will be right." }

— Henry Ford

9. Positive Self-Talk

The Inner Voice

For almost all athletes there is some sort of conversation going on inside their heads almost all the time.

There are as many types of conversations as there are athletes, but they can be broken down into a few different groups.

- Positive, neutral, or negative
- Past, present or future
- Supportive (helpful), neutral or destructive (harmful)
- Specific or general
- Outcome, performance or process oriented
- Physical, technical, tactical (strategic) or mental
- Within our control or outside our control

As an example I had a 14 year old male tennis player who was struggling to stay **positive** with his inner voice. When we analyzed the typical things he was saying during a practice against a strong opponent we determined that he:

- was often in the **past** hating himself for mistakes he had made (that was a stupid volley, giving away the game)
- was often focusing his energy on his **opponent**, noting how good his shots were and feeling like he was being

outplayed (his serve is so hard, that drop shot is a killer)

- was often **generalizing** things, almost always in an effort to try to help himself do better, but often making things even **worse** (just try harder and I'll get it, I'm going to have to get angry to beat him)

Negative thoughts are nothing new to an athlete, and if they seldom occur there is not much to worry about. But when the thought process becomes mostly negative and the athlete is **constantly** hard

on themselves, a change in inner voice patterns usually results in **higher levels of performance** almost immediately.

Athlete's inner voice patterns should:

- Be positive
- Staying in the present moment
- Be self supporting and suggest ways for improvement
- Stay connected to process and performance attributes to create better outcomes
- Suggest better techniques or strategies that can help solve present challenges
- Keeping thoughts on things they have control over
- Use short and specific statements

Basically **energy** statements like “keep going”, “that’s the way”, “excellent effort”, “you can do this”, “just keep pushing through” will help with motivation.

Technical suggestions like, “stay light on your feet”, “lengthen the stride”, “find the open ice”, “breath and relax” all give the mind something to work on and can have a dramatic effect on keeping performance levels high.

And **supportive** statements like “half way there keep it going”, “stay calm and relaxed”, “we are going to make it”, “that’s OK just refocus and take control”, “get a fresh start and re-establish technique” will all assist in challenging times.

The two key things to remember are that positive in the mind gets positive out to performance, and your body does respond to what you ask it to do, so be very clear about what you want.

Exercise

Good things to say to myself are...

10. The Task at Hand

Your Personal Symphony

Once an athlete or performing artist realizes that staying focused on the next task and doing it to the best of their ability guarantees the best results, the future worries and past disappointments usually get far less attention.

I worked with an Oboe player from the Victoria Symphony many years ago. He got in touch with me because he became really **nervous** prior to and while playing in front of big crowds. We spent a bit of time sorting out what caused the nervousness and it turned out to be a variety of things including **fear** of making mistakes, **worry** about letting the conductor and other musicians down, but mostly just a fear of **embarrassing** himself in front of the crowd. All pretty normal stuff for any competitor or performing artist.

{ “The mind leads the body.” }

— Koichi Tohei

As it turned out he often jumped to the **future** and thought about the past when playing and he would lose the concentration he needed to play well. His nervousness would often begin hours before, or even the day before a performance. His thinking would often be very **negative** and he would worry that he would make mistakes, see himself making mistakes, and sense the nervousness that he would have to endure. When he performed, his nervousness and negative thinking actually **lowered** his performance level creating even

more self doubt and adding fuel to his downward spirals.

We sorted through a few different solutions, but the one that helped the most was keeping the **task at hand**, focusing on what needed to be played next, and **letting go** of everything else. We got him to narrow his focus to only what was **essential**, which for him was the next couple of notes in the sequence. It seems simple, but laser sharp focus is not any easy skill to master.

The final solution included three skills that he had to build and practice regularly.

#1 In order to deal with pre-concert nervousness he needed to be able to build a movie in his mind that he watched prior to practices, rehearsals and performances. This movie showed him organized, prepared, calm and relaxed prior to playing, with high confidence levels and a feeling that no matter what happened he would be fine and able to manage himself. The movie would have him experiencing the entire symphony playing well, and with great synergy, the conductor happy with the overall performance level of the group, and he (the Oboist) making a positive and professional contribution to this overall effort.

Initially, in the process of building and reviewing the movie he would see himself not playing well, making mistakes and disappointing himself. This is a very normal part of the skill development in visualization and just meant that he needed to keep **practicing**. By sticking to it, rewinding the movie and playing it over and over again, working through the mistakes and managing his emotions, he was eventually able to play the movie from start to finish with no

interruptions and no incidents. He saw himself focused on the notes needing his attention and letting go of his small mistakes and moving onto the next notes.

This process eventually evolved into him wanting to see himself playing very well and surpassing his expectations, and helped him develop bigger goals for his playing. The more he played the movie, the better the movie highlighted his skills and abilities, and the more his **confidence grew**. He played the movie regularly in order to help with pre-concert nervousness as soon as doubt started entering his mind. This became the solution to his initial problem of becoming very nervous or doubtful prior to concerts.


#2 Staying focused in the moment of playing was our next challenge. The subconscious part of the mind is key to playing well. This part of the mind is able to see the notes and work his fingers and breath to create the desired outcomes without really having to think about it. If he can keep his mind positive and self-trust levels high, the best results will be reached. This is not easy if you are driven by perfection or hard on yourself for the mistakes that are inevitable.

So without lowering your standards or expectations, you need a way to navigate through your performances which suggests that mistakes will always be made!! The trick here is to **commit** to excellence by managing mistakes to the best of your ability, and move forward to whatever is next. Looking back and being disappointed about what occurred, or dwelling on the past, guarantees the lowering of performance levels. Instead moving **forward** with an expectation of giving the next task 100% focus and effort to ensure the best possible outcome, is staying **committed** to excellence.

Once an athlete or performing artist realizes that staying focused on the next task and doing it to the best of their ability **guarantees** the best results, the future worries and

past disappointments usually get far less attention.

So with the Oboe player, the objective of staying in the present moment became very clear. Once he drew a line of musical notes and described the loss of focus associated with being in the past or being in the future, both places he would regularly visit, he had to work on letting go of his mistakes for awhile, as the disappointment was very ingrained in him. With **heightened awareness** around better performance practices and his commitment to making the change, his focus improved dramatically and so did his playing enjoyment. Initially he saw the benefits of the system and it just took time for the change process to occur.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13

■ Example of the beginning notes of a symphony.

1. Rest and proper nutrition in the days preceding the event

2. Organize and check gear preceding day of event

3. Wake up early day of event

4. Eat the planned breakfast

5. Leave for the venue with extra time

6. Venue walk-through
7. Quiet time for focus/ visualization

8. Warm-up

9. Attach race number to competition gear

10. Last nutrition/drink

11. Last word from coach

12. Move to start position

13. Deep inhale/exhale. Begin.

#3 The third and final thing he needed to do was to find a simple way to remind him to stay in the moment, stay positive and keep moving forward. We did this by attaching a reminder to every time he turned the pages of his music. This meant every couple minutes he would refresh his attitude with the simple turn of the page, letting go of the past, staying positive, and move forward into the new notes ahead.

Exercise

Build your own plan like the individual notes of a symphony.

11. Activation

Careless, Careful or Carefree

Being Carefree is not being free of all caring, it is instead thinking about what is essential, focusing on what the athlete does have control over, staying in the moment and being process oriented.

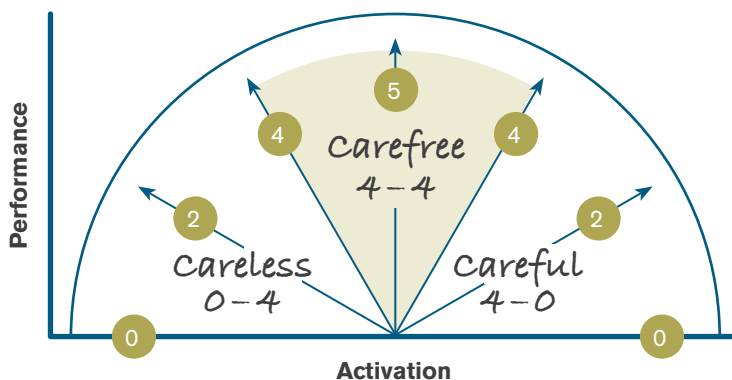
I am often assisting athletes with adjusting how hard they try, which is another word for activation. It seems like a player should try their hardest all the time in order to get the best results, but too often I find athletes actually try too hard and are thinking too much, which in both cases lowers performance levels. We would say this athlete is over activated, or is trying too hard. Occasionally I get athletes who actually do not try hard enough (under activated) and do not think enough to get good results though this is far less common. Every athlete is different and each circumstance is different so it is a bit of a moving target.

{ “The less effort, the faster and more powerful you will be.” }

— Bruce Lee

I created a model with the help of a goaltender years ago to try to make activation levels even more clear. We made an activation meter much like a speedometer on a car, except this one goes from zero to zero, with five being the highest level of performance possible. The athlete needs to get the needle up to the top of the meter (five) without it going too far because if it goes past five performance drops.

Then we named the zones. Zone 0–4 is being **Careless** – not trying hard enough. Zone 4–0 is trying too hard and thinking too much, which causes a decrease in performance. Performing in zone 4–0 is called being **Careful**. The final zone is from 4–4, where the highest level of performance occurs, and is called **Carefree**.



Being Careless (0 – 4) is not really all that common with athletes. More often there are athletes who do not really want to participate, or athletes who have given up, feel there is no hope, or have had devastating experiences or results they cannot get past.

Being Careful (4 – 0) is very common. Here athletes really want great results and their focus becomes more outcome oriented rather than process oriented. They become too aggressive for the circumstances, put in too much effort and have a tendency to over think things. In zone 4 – 0 athletes are likely to become panicked, or choke, seeing drops in performance which causes them to try even harder which makes it even worse.

Being Carefree (4 – 4) is not being free of all caring, it is instead thinking about what is **essential**, focusing on what the athlete does have **control over**, staying in the **moment** and being **process** oriented. In being Carefree athletes

have just the right amount of awareness and attention, apply the right amount of focus and effort, and are **enjoying** the moment.

For my goaltender this meant letting go of details like goals against averages, save percentages, shut out records, whose building we were playing in, the opposition's players, that team's win/loss record, how much offence his team had that night, his team's defence and everything else not essential or within his control.

What he did focus on was excellent pre-game sleep, nutrition, hydration, and mental preparation. He put lots of effort into looking after his equipment, having an excellent warm up, staying in the moment and keeping the task at hand. In the game he focuses solely on position, working hard to see things, excellent communication with his teammates and rebound control. It made things simpler and the game became more **enjoyable** to play.

12. Relaxation

Breath-Work for Enhanced Performance

Mastering the art of relaxation takes time and practice. Spend a few minutes each day working on this skill and you will see the benefits in your performance.

Stress, nervousness, anxiety, fear and worry will all lower performance levels in most athletes. They do that by creating **tension** in the body and so, as athletes, we need to deal with the causes of these various mental states to prevent reoccurrences. Generally the things that create these states are found outside the bubble and so can be easily **controlled**.

{ "Your ability to relax reflects your willingness to trust." }

— Unknown

In the mean time we still have to perform, so how do we deal with these states and the tension they create in the moment of training or competition? The answer is by **staying positive and relaxing**.

Relaxation is a combination of two things. The first is sending very **positive** reassuring messages to the subconscious mind in hopes that it will let go of some of the worry or fear. This in itself will begin to ease off the tension it is

creating. The second is to take **control** of the body by using your breath to systematically **"soften"** the muscles and let go of the tension.

Breath work begins by finding a **comfortable** place, sitting or lying down, closing our eyes, and becoming **conscious** of our breathing. Feel the air move into the body and move out again. Slowly increase the length of the inhalation and exhalation and tell

yourself to **relax** on the inward movement, and **release** on the outward movement. Now continue to do this and scan the body for areas of tension, tightness, stress, or soreness and breath directly into those places and slowly release the breath feeling the tension subside. Repeat over and over until you can feel the tension fade away and calmness and relaxation take its place.

The breath is a **powerful** thing, and like the muscles in your body, needs to be **worked** to be of more use to you. Practice is key here. Lie down and do **progressive relaxation**

just like you do at the end of a yoga class. Starting at your toes and slowly moving right through your entire body **systematically** breath and soften until you have relaxed every muscle group.

Relaxation can be done **spontaneously** as well. If you are stilling on your horse about to start a round, or on the starting block waiting for the gun to go, it can be done there too. Just stand tall, bring in one big breath and slowly release it and feel the excess tension flow down the body and out your toes. Powerful stuff but again it takes practice.

Exercise

Note a few reliable times when you can practice relaxation.

Winning the Workout

Volleyball Example

1. Come well rested
2. Come well fed
3. Come well hydrated
4. Arrive early and turn the outside world off
5. Turn the volleyball world on
6. Set some simple but specific goals (physical, mental, technical, tactical)
7. Get your gear on but do not tie your shoes
8. Find a space to lie or sit and do 10 minutes of visualization work alone
 - See yourself well warmed up and mentally ready to do your best work
 - See yourself working hard, hustling, diving, fast physical reactions
 - See yourself playing great offense, well positioned, anticipating well, setting, hitting, keeping things positive, keeping the energy high
 - See yourself playing great defence, well positioned, digging, blocking, anticipating well, appreciating others
 - See yourself serving well
 - See yourself staying positive, staying energized, keeping the task at hand
9. Set up your bubble and prepare to create your optimal performance state that you will never give away no matter what happens
10. Know that all you have to do is
 - Give it your best shot
 - Manage your mistakes well
 - Learn
11. Tie your shoes with excellence and gather with the team, create a positive and enjoyable team dynamic
12. Have an excellent warm up
13. Deal only with what is directly in front of you
14. Stay focused on the task at hand
15. Appreciate others, their efforts, great plays, and help them manage their mistakes by keeping things positive and moving forward

Winning the Workout

My Example

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

"Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off the goal."
— Hanah More

Power, Cue and Focus Words

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Able | <input type="checkbox"/> Choice | <input type="checkbox"/> Embrace |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abound | <input type="checkbox"/> Clarity | <input type="checkbox"/> Endurance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abundance | <input type="checkbox"/> Clear | <input type="checkbox"/> Engage |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accurate | <input type="checkbox"/> Clever | <input type="checkbox"/> Enthusiastic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Activated | <input type="checkbox"/> Cohesive | <input type="checkbox"/> Exact |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptable | <input type="checkbox"/> Communication | <input type="checkbox"/> Expectant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adventurous | <input type="checkbox"/> Compassion | <input type="checkbox"/> Explore |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aggressive | <input type="checkbox"/> Competent | <input type="checkbox"/> Explosive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agile | <input type="checkbox"/> Conservative | <input type="checkbox"/> Faith |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alert | <input type="checkbox"/> Consistent | <input type="checkbox"/> Fervent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aspire | <input type="checkbox"/> Controlling | <input type="checkbox"/> Fire |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assertive | <input type="checkbox"/> Conviction | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attentive | <input type="checkbox"/> Courageous | <input type="checkbox"/> Flow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Authentic | <input type="checkbox"/> Creative | <input type="checkbox"/> Focused |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Awesome | <input type="checkbox"/> Curious | <input type="checkbox"/> Force |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Balanced | <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinated | <input type="checkbox"/> Forgiving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beautiful | <input type="checkbox"/> Dedicated | <input type="checkbox"/> Free |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Believe | <input type="checkbox"/> Decisive | <input type="checkbox"/> Freedom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Best | <input type="checkbox"/> Dependable | <input type="checkbox"/> Fun |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bold | <input type="checkbox"/> Determined | <input type="checkbox"/> Gentle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brute | <input type="checkbox"/> Drive | <input type="checkbox"/> Grateful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calm | <input type="checkbox"/> Duty | <input type="checkbox"/> Grounded |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Capable | <input type="checkbox"/> Dynamic | <input type="checkbox"/> Gusto |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cautious | <input type="checkbox"/> Eager | <input type="checkbox"/> Harmony |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Centred | <input type="checkbox"/> Effective | <input type="checkbox"/> Humble |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Charged | <input type="checkbox"/> Efficient | <input type="checkbox"/> Humour |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge | <input type="checkbox"/> Electric | <input type="checkbox"/> Hungry |

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Imaginative | <input type="checkbox"/> Prepared | <input type="checkbox"/> Spirit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Impact | <input type="checkbox"/> Piercing | <input type="checkbox"/> Spontaneous |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Influential | <input type="checkbox"/> Poised | <input type="checkbox"/> Storm |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inspired | <input type="checkbox"/> Potent | <input type="checkbox"/> Strength |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Integrity | <input type="checkbox"/> Power | <input type="checkbox"/> Strict |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intense | <input type="checkbox"/> Powerful | <input type="checkbox"/> Strong |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intent | <input type="checkbox"/> Precise | <input type="checkbox"/> Stable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jazzed | <input type="checkbox"/> Precision | <input type="checkbox"/> Successful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Joyful | <input type="checkbox"/> Proud | <input type="checkbox"/> Supply |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Keen | <input type="checkbox"/> Productive | <input type="checkbox"/> Synergy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Killer | <input type="checkbox"/> Protective | <input type="checkbox"/> Task-oriented |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lead | <input type="checkbox"/> Purposeful | <input type="checkbox"/> Teamwork |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> Quick | <input type="checkbox"/> Tenacity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lightness | <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet | <input type="checkbox"/> Tough |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Light-hearted | <input type="checkbox"/> Reactive | <input type="checkbox"/> Trusting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loyal | <input type="checkbox"/> Relaxed | <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mastery | <input type="checkbox"/> Relentless | <input type="checkbox"/> Unstoppable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mighty | <input type="checkbox"/> Release | <input type="checkbox"/> Victory |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Motivated | <input type="checkbox"/> Respectful | <input type="checkbox"/> Vigour |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Openness | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsible | <input type="checkbox"/> Vital |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Open-minded | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsive | <input type="checkbox"/> Will |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Optimal | <input type="checkbox"/> Safe | <input type="checkbox"/> Willingness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Passion | <input type="checkbox"/> Secure | <input type="checkbox"/> Whole |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patient | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-confident | <input type="checkbox"/> Zeal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Peaceful | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-sufficient | <input type="checkbox"/> Zest |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Performance | <input type="checkbox"/> Seize | <input type="checkbox"/> Zoned |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Performing | <input type="checkbox"/> Simplicity | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Persistent | <input type="checkbox"/> Source | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Perseverance | <input type="checkbox"/> Spark | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physical | <input type="checkbox"/> Spectacular | |

Action Plan

If you could borrow a magic wand and in two years have whatever you wanted, what would that fairy-tale ending look like?

In order to fulfill my 2 year goal, by the end of this season I will need to be...

During the next 7 days my focus will be on...

Tomorrow I need to be...

On a scale of one to ten, how committed am I?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Training Worksheet

For the Week of _____

My overall objective for the week is...

My three technique focuses are...

My strategy focus is: _____

My physical focus is: _____

My mental focus is: _____

My nutrition focus is: _____

My fitness focus is: _____

My power words are: _____

I will get _____ hours of sleep every night

I know this will be a great week because I will see myself...

The challenges I am likely to need to overcome are...

My commitment level to make this a great week is (10 being high)...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Training Journal

For the week of _____

My satisfaction level rating for this week is (10 being high)...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

What worked well this week was...

What I need to improve on for next week is (physical, technique, strategy, mental, nutrition etc.)...

My biggest successes for the past week are...

Average hours of sleep per night was: _____

In order to make next week more productive I need my focus to specifically be on...

Other thoughts or feelings are...

Notes:

"Pain is temporary,
quitting lasts forever."
— Unknown

— *Unknown*

Notes:

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Notes:

[illegible]

“The only competition you will ever have is the competition between your disciplined and undisciplined mind.”

— James A. Ray

[illegible]

What are you waiting for?



***"The applause soon dies away, the prize
is left behind, but the character you build
is yours forever."***

– Calvin Coolidge

This workbook belongs to:



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