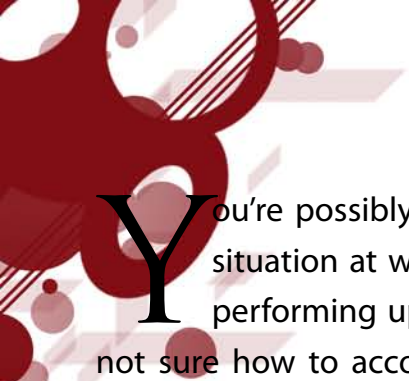


Mental Toughness Tips to Perform Under Pressure



Zone Performance Psychology

By John Stevenson

A decorative graphic in the top left corner consisting of several overlapping red circles of various sizes and thin red lines radiating from them.

You're possibly reading this article right now because you are frustrated with your current situation at work or you're not having fun with your game. Maybe it's because you're not performing up to your potential. You want to take your game to the next level but you're not sure how to accomplish this task. Or you might just be having a difficult time keeping cool and calm when the game is on the line. Do you let your nerves get the best of you before your big business presentation, audition, tryout or interview? Possibly you have to deal with a difficult boss, coach, co-worker, teammate or situation and you feel stuck? Are you in the midst of a performance slump? Are you having a difficult time "letting go" and rebounding after a bad performance, a mistake, or set-back? Does your confidence go up and down like a yo-yo? Do you want to finally take control of your performance?

Zone Performance has helped many people just like you. If you are like many of our clients, you are probably looking for quick and effective solutions to conquer these everyday mental challenges. Our mission is to support you in this process.

This brief article is designed to do one thing: Maximize Your Performance. The best performers in the world whether it's in the Sports, Arts, or Business arena recognize and understand that achieving Peak Performance on a consistent basis requires them to constantly work on and master five key ingredients, namely their:

1. Physical Training
2. Technical Training
3. Tactical Training
4. Lifestyle Balance
5. Mental Training

Top performers realize that competitions are not won on the day they compete, but rather in the days, weeks, and months before their competitions. They take responsibility for everything that can impact their performance and they keep an open mind to new ideas and technologies that could potentially give them an advantage over their competition and take their game to another level.

At Zone Performance Psychology, we teach our clients that getting into the Zone or your Ideal Performance State on a consistent basis often comes down to being aware of doing three simple things:

1) Creating the Right Focus; 2) Creating the Right Feeling; and 3) Creating the Right Attitude.

CREATING THE RIGHT FOCUS

TIP ONE: FOCUS ON THE RIGHT THING AT THE RIGHT TIME



I often remind my clients that great performances and bad performances often come down to one's ability to focus. Usually when one is performing well they are focusing on the right thing at the right time. Most people often think that poor performances are often caused because of poor focus. More often than not, however, this is not the case. In fact, their focus is very good! This might come as a surprise but it usually because they focusing on the wrong thing at the wrong time!

Consequently, the first tip I can offer you to improve your performance is to quickly recognize the difference between concerns beyond your control and the things you can control. Whether it's in the boardroom, dressing room or the stage top performers "Control the Controllables". That is, they keep their focus on the things they have control over. There is nothing more disheartening than to put all your time, effort and energy into or onto something that will not change no matter what you do! I cannot tell you how often I have seen clients who are depressed, anxious, discouraged, frustrated and angry because they have not recognized they have allowed their focus to drift onto a UC (i.e. an Uncontrollable). The first step that I teach them is to be Response-Able.

Specifically, I have them identify and list everything they cannot control (uncontrollable) and can control (controllables) when they are in their performance environment. Second, I encourage them to think of how they can take charge of things that they can control? Third, I ask them to think and come up with an action plan as to how they will respond to concerns outside of their control?

Finally, as New England Patriots Head Coach Bill Belichick often reminds his players I also encourage my clients “To Concentrate on their Job”. It is critically important to “know and to stick” your role and your strengths. Trying to do your job and someone else’s at the same time just does not work! Take a moment right now to identify what is “the essence of your craft?” The sooner you can recognize “what your job is and what’s beyond your control” the quicker you will take your game to another level and consistently remain there!

CREATING THE RIGHT FEELING

TIP TWO: ACT AS IF

“*If you want a quality, act as if you already had it*”
 William James, pioneering American Psychologist (1842-1910)



Top performers realize that emotional control is critical when performing under pressure. Gaining self-control over one’s thoughts, feelings and behaviors begins with this simple phrase: “Emotion is created by Motion”. World-class performers “walk the walk”. That is, they carry themselves in a certain way. They deliberately move their bodies in such a manner so that they can consistently achieve success. They realize that how you carry yourself, move, and walk affects what you think and how you feel. Great performers get into the habit of carry themselves like a winner prior to, during and after their competitions. They use this fall-back strategy especially when things are not going well and when they need to remain in control (e.g., when a referee makes a bad call, when you are making a presentation, or about to do an audition, etc.). If you look at the best actors in the world what makes them stand apart is their ability “to play the part”.

They convince us that they are really the person they are portraying by the way they move, talk, gesture, etc. I often remind my business and athletic clients that the best actors in the world don’t always arrive each day at the movie studio in a great mood. Their job requires them to work long hours; they are away from their families for extended periods of time, and they are often required to do countless rehearsals.

Despite these demands the best performing artists in the world create characters that are believable by their behaviors and speech. They have learned and mastered tip number two: ACT AS IF-Top Performers understand this fundamental mental toughness skill: IF YOU ACT THE WAY YOU WANT TO BECOME YOU'LL BECOME THE WAY THAT YOU ACT! Showing your frustration, letting your emotions control your behavior, or acting out your anger, nervousness will knock you off centre and give your opponent an unfair advantage over you!

Remember this- it's hard to think clearly or make a wise decision when you are emotionally upset! You must be in control of yourself before you can control your performance. It's hard if not impossible to feel down when your body is up. Acting as if involves moving with your head high, chin up, eyes forward, shoulders back, arms swinging, and a bounce in your step. You look and move like a winner! Consequently, when the going gets rough (trust me it will) ACT AS IF YOU'RE IN CONTROL (USE THE APPROPRIATE TONE OF VOICE, PACE, FACIAL EXPRESSIONS, GESTURES, ETC).

This vital mental toughness skill takes time and lots of practice but the benefits are enormous.

Some experiences you can have with is fabulous mind exercise are:

- Before you try something new: ACT AS IF you have amazing abilities to achieve incredible successes in your life's journey.
- When you have a challenge: ACT AS IF you know that one insightful thought that will unleash amazing and endless possibilities.
- When you are feeling "less than," ACT AS IF you possess the power to alter your world in every moment.

CREATING THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

TIP THREE: ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING

**The Parachute Principle - Your Mind is like a Parachute -
it only works when it's open.**



Fortunately, I have had the privilege and honour to work with some of the best performers in the world over the past decade from many different fields and occupations. I am often asked in my mental toughness seminars the question “what makes them stand apart from the rest?” In my opinion, it is without question their attitude towards life and their job. Attitude is like a pair of eyeglasses. It is the lens through which we view the world. Top Performers are positive –minded people and see life through rose-tinted or clear glasses.

Unfortunately, those who struggle often squint through glasses that are dark and gloomy. The best performers truly understand that their attitudes, belief systems and thoughts create their reality. It's been my experience that the best athletes, business people and performers are those that have an open mind. They are open to new ideas, technologies and strategies that might initially seem “odd or out of the ordinary”. Great athletes and top business executives are always looking for ways to take their “game per se” to the next level.

Top performers are willing to break out of their comfort zone and take risks even when they are performing well. Those who are truly the best at what they do have adopted the "CANI" OR "KAIZEN" PRINCIPLE THAT ADVOCATES CONSTANT AND NEVER-ENDING IMPROVEMENT. At Zone Performance, we can quickly and efficiently take your performance to another level because we can now offer the latest sports science technology available today that was previously only offered to Professionals and Olympic teams or those who had deep pockets. At Zone Performance, we encourage you to check out this innovative sports science approach currently used by peak performing organizations such as the Navy Seals, NASA, Vancouver Canucks, New England Patriots, Manchester United, AC Milan, Chelsea FC and Canadian Olympic Teams. Cutting edge sports science tools like biofeedback and neurofeedback, Cognisens neurotracker, and the D2 Dynavision will provide rapid and long-lasting effects that will give you a definitive edge over your competitor.

Check out our informational videos on these dynamic tools at www.zoneperformance.ca and email or call our centre to book your free 1hr session. Peak performance and Poor Performance does not happen by accident. Decide today what direction you want to take your future performances. Utilize the aforementioned Mental Toughness Tips and watch your performance grow to a level your beyond your wildest imagination.



Best wishes for a great future,

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