

## Organize Tomorrow Today: 8 Ways to Retrain Your Mind to Optimize Performance at Work and in Life

From the top down, they established an “obsession for improvement” as a key part of their culture. No matter how successful they got, they were always on the lookout for new information that could help them improve—and a better program for incorporating that information in an organized, efficient way.

Most people still seem to believe that being busy is the equivalent of being important, but the highly successful have learned that being busy is a waste of time: being productive is the goal.

Jason has written two other groundbreaking mental performance books—10-Minute Toughness and Executive Toughness.

Coaches and players at Alabama don’t talk about winning and losing. They talk about consistency of preparation and effort, and about consistently excelling at the few core priority tasks they have each day.

He knows that if players are trying to focus on “everything,” in essence they are focused on nothing.

He teaches the fundamentals, and he helps them establish their priorities for the next day—and the next week, and the next season. These priorities become known as “the process.”

“The noise of the urgent creates the illusion of importance.”

In our experience, those who enjoy the most success are the ones who do the best job prioritizing the day’s activities and accomplishing the most important tasks—not the greatest number of tasks. It’s a skill even the most successful people can lose track of along the way.

Researchers Pam Mueller and Dan Oppenheimer from Princeton University and UCLA found that students who wrote out notes longhand retained more and had a better conceptual understanding of the material than students who typed notes on a keyboard.<sup>2</sup>

The key to success has become prioritization. Prioritization may very well be the most underrated skill of the highly successful. It is what will make the single biggest difference between being busy and being productive. Highly successful people never get it all done in any one given day—but they always get the most important things done each day.

The Organizing Tomorrow Today strategy will help you do this. It starts with getting into the habit of taking about five minutes the day before to identify your priorities for the upcoming day. But instead of creating that laundry list we talked about before, you produce a simple, curated, prioritized list.

The first part of the list is called the “3 Most Important.” It’s just as it sounds—the three most important tasks you need to complete the next day. Your goal is to build out your list of three tasks, along with the time of day you’ll have each one completed.

The key is to list important, ambitious, but realistic tasks that can reasonably be completed during the day. Small, day-to-day successes are the building blocks of achievement.

The second part of the list is called the “1 Must.” Once you’ve determined your “3 Most Important,” you choose the “1 Must” from these three items. It is the single most important task or conversation you need to have that day.

The best way to promote action is to identify just one thing, and then attack. Picking that most important to-do item creates the momentum.<sup>4</sup>

To set yourself on the right track, ask yourself those two critical questions: (1) What are the three most important things I need to get done tomorrow? and (2) What is the single most important task I must get done?

The “3 Most Important / 1 Must” list is simply the priority filter that goes on top of the master list—the day-to-day action plan that puts things in motion.

But we believe—and strongly recommend—that you reemphasize the personal element of your “3 Most Important / 1 Must” and make those connections directly, either face to face or over the phone.

There’s often a direct correlation between in-person communication and your level of success.

Our clients have recognized that being organized and prepared for adversity significantly increases confidence.

She committed to spending a few minutes at the end of every day writing down the three most important tasks she would undertake the next day.

Identifying daily priorities might seem like an obvious or insignificant step to take, but writing your most important tasks down the previous night turns your subconscious mind loose while you sleep and frees you from worrying about being unprepared. You’ll probably find that you wake up with great ideas related to the tasks or conversations that you hadn’t even considered!

To start, don’t wait until the very end of the day to make your list.

whether that’s the time you leave your office or before you switch over to family mode at home—the less likely you are to set aside the time to actually do it.

The next big mistake to avoid is drilling too deeply. This tool is designed for you to pick the big, important priorities for the next day.

It will be difficult at first, but you need to train yourself to understand that checking off everything on your big to-do list isn’t the goal. Highly successful people get the most important things done every day—“3

Most Important,” and “1 Must”—and do their best to get everything else done in the time that’s left.

Use your smartphone to create a holding area for those urgent-but-not-overly-important tasks, and resolve to work your way down that list only after you’ve completed the items from your OTT list.

Emergencies typically don’t start happening until mid to late morning, and that is precisely why successful people get their “3 Most Important / 1 Must” tasks completed early in the day. The majority of our clients have learned the value of completing the most important activities before 9:30 or 10:00 a.m.

Don’t take a zero. If nothing else, commit to spending one minute on the important task. It will help reinforce the prioritization skills you’re developing.

When you go to the effort to make a prioritized list of what you need to do the next day, you’re essentially opening a loop in your mind. As you sleep, your brain will automatically start preparing for the successful closing of those loops. It’s known as the “Zeigarnik Effect.”

Lewin came up with the concept of “task-specific tension,” which persists in both the conscious and subconscious mind until the task is completed.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the mind doesn’t like unfinished business! High-level mathematicians and successful writers have been using this technique for years as a tool for pushing their work forward.

Organizing Tomorrow Today hones your prioritizing skill—and prioritizing is what will make the single biggest difference between being productive and being busy.

Spend three to five minutes preparing your own “3 Most Important” tasks or conversations for tomorrow, and the “1 Must”—or main priority—out of the three. Remember, the goal is to schedule completion of these tasks as early as possible in your day. Some examples from our clients:

The step beyond genius? To be able to see beyond the chaos and complications of everyday life and identify the most important solutions to the most important problems. Simplicity.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the nearly overwhelming urge to follow his teammate over to the bell and ring out, Bobby decided he would narrow his mind to a single focus point. He would concentrate on just one thing—the very next step—because the thought of what was coming the next day and the day after that was just too overwhelming to consider.

People have a tendency to overcommit to others and to themselves. Doing so not only causes underperformance but also has a tremendously negative impact on confidence. When you commit to doing too much, you inevitably let other people down and unfortunately begin to send a message that you cannot be trusted.

It happens the same way in the sports world. “Winning” is the same kind of top-level goal as “profit,” but all of the additional responsibilities can get an athlete spinning his or her wheels.

Choosing wisely is difficult because it is counterintuitive. It is much easier to put a laundry list together of all the possible things you need to get done each day than it is to actually choose your one most important task and then master it.

Saturating people with information actually paralyzes action. Think about it: when people are overwhelmed, they typically freeze. Self-doubt slows action.

Step by step, we intersperse very controlled amounts of information relevant to the business with direct, hands-on practice in implementing that information.

To him, that meant not over-committing. Gable learned the importance of identifying the right “critical factor” and directing his energy toward moving it.

focusing on one primary task makes action much more realistic—one simple, positive change builds momentum and primes you for the next success.

What does “nailing it” mean? If you’ve truly mastered one positive change, we call it “nailing it.” It’s become a popular shorthand catchphrase with many of our students. For you to have fully integrated the improvement and the changes it requires, it means that for three consecutive months, you’ve been able to complete the change on a daily basis 90 percent of the time or better.

Get started by proving to yourself that you can nail it, even if it’s a smaller commitment. You can always increase later on. An essential element of performance is for people to learn to trust themselves. When you prove 90 percent of the time that you can nail it, you can’t help but grow your confidence and self-trust.

Why does it work? Because simplicity, accuracy, and direction are a powerful combination. They provide the key to action that everybody needs—whether you’re a financial advisor, an NFL wide receiver, or a road paver for the state highway department.

In reality, allowing your attention to be diverted from the step-by-step completion of your most important task triggers overload.

The Inversion Test: Put choosing wisely to the Charlie Munger inversion test and you get a simple output. What happens if you don’t choose wisely, and you try to do too much?

Act Now: Identify your “first step,” in the form of one simple fundamental improvement you want to commit to for tomorrow. It doesn’t have to be earth-shattering or complicated. Just something you can specifically identify and “nail.” Choose wisely.

By maximizing time and attacking the “open space,” instead of allowing himself to waste the time, Randy was essentially creating nine extra minutes per day, five days a week. That translates into forty additional hours per year.

He resolved that whenever three minutes of time came free—and he found that this kind of pause occurred, on average, three times during the course of the day—he would ask himself a simple question. “What can I get done in the next three minutes?” And he’d consult the to-do list and knock out at least one important item from that list.

Time maximization teaches you to create more time.

But if you want to be one of the top producers in your firm, you need to do some things that are not “normal.” You need to fill those gaps with something productive.

Take conscious control of those small gaps in your schedule by deciding what unit of time you’re going to think in, and resolving that if you have a unit of time that size or larger, you’re going to apply it to another one of the items on your to-do list.

If two minutes or longer of open space show up in his day, he goes back to his expanded to-do list and asks himself what is one thing he can get done before he has to head on to his next commitment. If after completing his one thing there are still more than two minutes of unaccounted-for time available, he goes at it again, attacking his next one thing. And so on until the open space is smaller than his two-minute expectation or the open time is used up completely.

If you are new to this kind of strategy, it wouldn’t make sense to set your number at five minutes or less. Build some success in from the start and pick a fifteen-minute increment. If you nail that fifteen-minute increment 90 percent of the time for three months, then you can think about reducing it to something like twelve minutes.

When the open space shows up, avoid working on those less important tasks and instead attack the absolute most important item you can get moving on within the time available.

We believe there are two categories of productive behavior—short-term revenue collection (those activities that produce immediate financial results) and long-term revenue cultivation (the lead activities

that eventually bring about a consistent supply of revenue-generating opportunities).

Highly successful people have learned that short-term revenue collection and long-term revenue cultivation need to be emphasized daily.

The micro-scale activities are the individual activities within the categories themselves.

No matter what category of activity you are operating in, always begin with the most important thing you can do.

First, it is essential to set your “game clock.” You must predetermine how long you will commit to a certain activity ahead of time.

When the time expires, the game is over, and you need to move on to the next thing on the schedule.

Your goal with every individual meeting should be to leave the other person motivated to take action on something that will improve his or her life.

If it’s a client, start the conversation by complimenting two things the client is doing well. Follow that up by teaching the client one thing (within your scope of expertise) that will cause him or her to improve. Lastly, coach the client on a single, actionable element.

The best way to deepen relationships is to actually do your job with the client.

As a professional, you have a responsibility to coach your clients to improve on one thing in every single meeting, or you have more than likely just wasted your time and theirs.

Start every meeting on time. No matter who is meandering in late, reward those who showed up early by beginning on time.

One of our favorite ways to attack procrastination is to break those dreaded activities into much more manageable pieces. It's called "ask and chop." You ask yourself, "What is the most important thing I can get done next?" and then you "chop" that activity down into the first step of action.

Instead of allowing your mind to become overwhelmed with the activity in its entirety, emphasize only the first step.

The factors that impacted how long the habit formation took? According to the study, it depended on how much time someone spent working at the new habit, what the habit was, and how different it was from the person's regular routine. In other words, there is no magic twenty-one-day "cleanser" that will spit you out the other side stronger, thinner, or with more oxygen in your lungs.

Either way, a "triggering incident" produced plenty of fuel to kick off the habit drive.

This is the point where "I can do this" turns into "This is harder than I thought," or, "Is it really going to matter if I miss a day?"

Here are the four techniques you will need to do just that.

### 1. Ritualize

Ritualize the new habit by scheduling it on purpose at the same time every day. If the habit is getting a thirty-minute run in every day, block it out on the calendar for the same time and make it nonnegotiable.

Doing it this way takes most of the thinking out of doing it. You're almost automating the process.

### 2. Recognize

As we mentioned above, just the act of recognizing the barrier in front of you is a huge step toward getting over it.

Learn to simply say to yourself, “I’ve entered a fight-thru.” Recognizing that you are in a “fight-thru” is like taking the blindfold off before the fight begins.

Remind yourself that “It’s important to win this one, today.” Why? Because each fight-thru win makes the next fight-thru easier to beat, thanks to momentum. Momentum works the other way, too. Each fight you lose makes it easier to quit the next time.

### 3. Ask Two Questions

Ask yourself how you will feel if you win the fight-thru, and, conversely, ask yourself how you will feel if you lose it. You’re taking the next step past recognizing the facts of the situation and bringing emotion into the equation—which is the most valuable kind of fuel. Emotion promotes action.

### 4. Life Projection

Take thirty seconds and think, in great detail, about where you think your life will be in five years if you’re able to make this change and consistently win your fight-thrus. This is the time to be totally honest with yourself, and really let yourself feel the positives of doing that different thing.

Greatness is predicated on consistently doing things others can’t or won’t do. Simply put, success is not about being brilliant. It is about being consistent.

Recognizing seduction is such an important part of avoiding it. Anytime you catch yourself saying, “I can’t do my most important tasks today because . . .,” or, “I don’t need to do my most important activities today because . . .,” you know you are entering the seduction zone.

The first step toward beating the enemy—and avoiding going back to the fight-thru phase—is to know the enemy. Our client learned to recognize the discouragement monster when it came—as well as the seduction of success. She learned to recognize the beginnings of

“seduction” as one of two conversations she found herself having with herself: “I can’t get the marketing work done today because . . . ” was one of them. The other was “It’ll be okay if I don’t do it today because. . . .”

Whether it’s vacations, illnesses, or holidays, any break in the routine is a potential disruption. And any of those disruptions can put a major dent in your positive habits.

**The Discouragement Monster** One of the unfortunate realities of the world is that just because you work hard and do the right things, good things don’t automatically flow to you. Life can happen in streaks and slumps, and it can be incredibly discouraging if you put in the work to change an important habit and it does not immediately produce the benefits you expect.

Anytime you recognize that you’re backsliding, choose to do “a little bit more, for a little while.” If you are becoming seduced, choose that day to do up to 10 percent more on your “1 Must.” Doing just a bit more even for that one day will bookmark in your mind the fact that you have the ability to win fight-thrus.

For example, when our client started feeling pretty good about her marketing work, to a point of thinking she might take the day off on the blog posts, she committed to three extra minutes writing that day. It isn’t that writing for three extra minutes (or doing any other habit-related task for a few minutes) will have a huge impact on your results. That isn’t the point of doing it. You’re reminding yourself during that extra time that you’re willing to put in the extra work, and that you’re mentally strong. That you’re different from other people. When “normal” people experience success, they have a tendency to respond by doing a little less.

The overall win is the commitment to pushing past the fight-thru phase no matter how many times you have to go back to it. Remember, every time you win a fight-thru, the next one gets easier to win.

But just like physical training makes your body strong, perseverance and willingness to relentlessly fight thru the obstacles make you mentally strong.

In those extra, intense workouts, the player was bookmarking in his mind that he was different. While other players were worn down, or were taking it easy at the end of the season, he was staying committed and even doing more.

In one of the most influential educational studies ever published, French researcher Jean-Pol Martin established that students who taught their peers the French language gained much more command of the material than students who learned conventionally from professional teachers or strictly studied on their own.

When it came time to practice at the start of the season, the players were in the best shape of their lives.

Asking yourself what you're doing well and what you want to improve is the first step of positive growth.

If you aren't evaluating yourself in a productive way, the losses and "failures" erode your self-confidence. When you aren't as confident, you can't perform as well. This causes you to fail more often—starting a vicious cycle. Let's be clear: this isn't the "everybody should get a medal" mentality. Quite the contrary, we are not asking you to feel good about things you haven't done or achieved. Rather, we want you to learn to simply give credit where it's due. Most people spend great time and energy focusing on the things they didn't accomplish while totally overlooking all the things they did accomplish.

Instead of burying yourself in negative thoughts and emotions, you will learn how to make effort and improvement (not perfection) your main priority, which in turn gives you the greatest possible potential for impacting results.

He started evaluating himself solely on his effort in that day's practice or game.

Success requires strong and consistent effort, and the act of evaluating yourself on that effort.

Highly successful people give tremendous attention to the most important activities daily and then do fairly well with the rest.

That may sound simple, but it's really very profound. When you define success by your effort, anything is truly achievable. And when you consistently work toward your goals—and honestly evaluate that effort—you will begin to deserve the success that comes.

In other words, focusing on results—or the end product—actually makes it harder to produce those results, and makes any results you do produce take longer to achieve.

Reformatting your thinking to emphasize the process is the only way to effectively set goals that will actually produce the results you want to see.

Product or results goals are the ones that can be measured on an income statement or seen in your job title. If you want to earn \$1 million in commissions next year, that's a product or results goal.

Process goals, on the other hand, are the daily activities that cause the desired results or product goal. These will typically be your “3 Most Important / 1 Must” commitments daily.

First, both kinds of goals need to be completely measurable. What does that mean? In the literal sense, they have to be something you can track, not some gauzy judgment call. Whether you made a call or not is concrete. Whether you were happy or not in a given day? Not concrete, and not measurable—at least for the purpose of this tool.

A measurable process-oriented goal would be, for example, an athlete choosing to spend fifteen minutes per day on film study or a successful CEO spending thirty minutes researching development opportunities in emerging markets.

Product goals need to be realistically high—not so out of sight that you can miss and have a viable excuse for failing (“It was impossible anyway . . .”). And process goals need to be completely within your control—something you have the ability to do every day.

Set your process goals to a point where you can hit them daily, and you build confidence and your ability to “win” mental commitments in the future. It’s not about what you will do on your best days but, rather, what you will be sure to do even on your worst day.

it is the process goals that need to be on the forefront of your mind and at the top of your priority list each day. You need to be tracking process goals at least weekly, and preferably daily.

The highest performers learn to devote much more focus—85 percent, at least—to process goals, and they evaluate themselves on how they do on that scale.

I basically had to say “screw it” when it comes to results. I made a point to judge myself on the process. Every day, I followed my routine. and I held myself accountable for doing the work.

And it all begins with effective evaluation. We have combined a series of evaluation questions into what we call Success Logs to help jump-start consistent improvement.

The Success Log provided below will literally train your brain to focus more on your strengths, your effort, and your process. It prompts you to think about your process each day and to set goals for the next day accordingly. Take a look at the log on page 99, and then read on to learn how to use it.

**SUCCESS LOG** Knowing something does nothing . . . doing something does. . . Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ What did I do well in the past 24 hours? What is one thing I want to improve in the next 24 hours? What is one thing I can do differently to help make the above-mentioned improvement? How did I do today with my “3 Most Important / 1 Must”? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

One of the biggest problems successful people have when they evaluate themselves is that they focus only on the negative. It's something known as "problem-centric thinking." People have an innate tendency to obsess over the things they aren't doing well instead of giving themselves credit for the things they are doing well.

In essence, it is totally normal to focus on how you are screwing up; unfortunately, by doing so, you make it more likely that you will screw up even more in the future.

This is where the Success Log comes in: it forces you to focus on what you have done well,

asks you to identify one thing you want to improve, and prompts you to pick one thing you can do to improve in that one area.

In addition, it trains you to form the habit of evaluating your effort (on a 1–10 scale) on your most important tasks daily rather than your results. Evaluating yourself through the positive lens builds self-confidence and promotes action. Remember, whatever you focus on expands.

The whole process should take you no more than three minutes.

Do it during the day—preferably at the same time each day—and it will put you in the best frame of mind to attack the upcoming twenty-four hours. You're building what we call a "performance mentality."

Evaluating what you have done well sets a foundation of mental strength that you will eventually be able to build on. You're setting the building blocks for mental toughness.

Once you've identified three "done-wells," it's time to pick the one thing you want to improve. Again, you're going to write this down with that second-level detail. The sentence you write shouldn't be designed to bring you down, or be overcritical; it should be an affirmative statement of what you want to do.

This isn't about focusing on your screw-ups, but about identifying what you want to do better.

Active and positive statements are much more productive than passive and negative ones.

The ability to make the disciplined and correct cut time after time is purely a question of effort.

By evaluating with a performance focus, Tom was forcing his mind to emphasize what he could control—his process and effort—and he was doing it through a positive lens rather than allowing his mind to emphasize mistakes. When done correctly like this, the evaluation process forces growth. The mere act of effective evaluation causes improvement. The evaluation element blends directly into the action phase, so that the two work as alternate footsteps in the same walking pattern. You're evaluating, adjusting, and taking action in real time—when you can actually use the information you're gathering—and you can get back on track quickly if you're off course.

That's something that a vast majority of people—even successful people—never accomplish. They're measuring the wrong output—results instead of effort—or hammering away at the negative instead of reinforcing the positive. That's not evaluation. It's punishment.

**CELEBRATE . . . AND FORGET** When you do successfully evaluate yourself, you will inevitably start to see positive results—and you have to make sure to celebrate those wins.

In Norman Doidge's book *The Brain That Changes Itself*, he describes the chemical reactions that take place in the brain when you receive a reward for a solid effort. The brain releases acetylcholine and norepinephrine, neurotransmitters that sharpen the mental map for performance and significantly increase motivation.<sup>1</sup> Rewarding yourself for great

The accomplishment needs to be meaningful, and the celebration should be relative to the size of the win. When you do get that win, recognize it and celebrate.

Remember, the equation for lasting success is achieve, celebrate, forget .

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So she defaulted back to her identity statement: Today I am strong. Today I am healthy. Today I am a beast.

Maltz's theory about self-image is a simple one.

He said that a person will not be able to consistently overperform or underperform the self-image he or she has. In other words, if you fundamentally believe you're an average performer (or a terrific one, or a terrible one), you won't consistently be able to do a lot better or a lot worse than that baseline self-assessment.

To do it, you need to master two tasks. First, you have to become aware of what you're saying to yourself. Then, you have to commit to stop giving yourself permission to use negative self-talk. Berating yourself—even in a joking manner—doesn't help in any way. It damages your self-image, and we want you to stop doing it, right now and from now on.

But if you think like most people, you will be like most people—average. Mentally tough people know nothing could be further from the truth. If you work on controlling your thoughts, you'll get better at it.

The problem with focusing on the problem, though—which is called “problem-centric thought,” or PCT—is that most people do it at the expense of considering a solution or personal strengths. In fact, lots of people are being trained into problem-centric thought by mental health professionals or “self-help” guides because of the misguided (but well-meaning) idea that talking about a problem is akin to making your problems go away. Unfortunately, there's no empirical evidence to show that idea actually works. Just talking about a problem—and moving your problem-centric thinking to the forefront—doesn't do anything to solve that problem. Actually, it usually just makes

the problem grow in size, thanks to something called “expectancy theory.”

It goes like this: When you focus on something, it literally occupies the forefront of your mind. Other thoughts and ideas are pushed to the side. As that thought goes, so do the feelings and behaviors that follow. That which you focus on expands. Focusing on the negative is essentially like fertilizing the weeds in your yard. That which you focus on expands.

So, if you think mostly about your problems, and place all of your mental focus on them, you’re growing them larger in mental terms. They soon are occupying much more mental and emotional space than they normally would or should. That’s when you start to lose perspective and run the risk of making decisions out of fear or even panic. It’s the equivalent of trying to win a football game without ever putting your offense on the field.

What does enhance self-image? Learning to talk to yourself about what you do well and how you want to improve.

The act of visualizing the action before it happens gets the mind and body prepared to actually do it in real life when the time comes. It is priming the mental and physical pump. Players who visualize their game are calmer, better prepared, and much more likely to succeed in high-pressure situations.

which means that if you have time to brush your teeth, you have time to strengthen your mind. It has five basic steps: 1. Centering breath (breathe in for six seconds, hold for two, exhale for seven) 2. Identity statement (personally tailored positive self-talk) 3. Personal highlight reel (visualization of past and future success) 4. Identity statement (personally tailored positive self-talk) 5. Centering breath (breathe in for six seconds, hold for two, exhale for seven)

If you want to become mentally tough, you must complete mental workouts consistently.

Muscle deterioration begins within seventy-two hours of your last workout. Just as this is the case with your bicep, it also holds true for

your brain. The goal should be to never let two days go by without some type of physical activity, nor should you go two days without completing a mental workout.

The biological response to pressure is an elevated heart rate. Unfortunately, when your heart rate increases, your ability to think effectively decreases. A very powerful way to control heart rate is to do a centering breath. Breathing in for six seconds, holding for two seconds, and then exhaling for seven seconds gets air into your diaphragm and slows your heart rate, thus allowing your brain to operate optimally.

**Identity Statement** Once you complete the breathing, recite your personal identity statement to yourself. Marathon runner Katie's is an awesome example: Today I am strong. Today I am healthy. Today I am a beast.

It needs to emphasize one of your positive qualities, and it has to pinpoint something you want to become.

The identity statement is a personal mantra that, when repeated over and over, will manifest itself into reality. Written in the present tense, an identity statement includes positive adjectives that describe the characteristics of the person you want to be and the level of success you want to achieve.

Don't worry as much about your current reality but, rather, focus on who you want to become. As the research on identity statements makes clear: the further from the truth, the more impactful.

### Personal Highlight Reel

Next, quietly visualize your own personal highlight reel for sixty seconds. See in your mind's eye three things you did well the previous day, and mentally rehearse the three most important things you need to do to in the upcoming twenty-four hours.

The more specific you are in your visualization, the better. Just like the athlete, you are preparing yourself for success.

PM

Visualizing is one of the most powerful tools in the field of performance psychology. It is safe to say that a person cannot perform at his or her potential without consistently using visualization as a pre-performance technique. To get the most out of visualizing, pay attention to the following three guidelines.

Guideline 1: Use the first-person vantage point. Visualizing from the first-person point of view means looking at the video through your own eyes, so you see the things you would actually see while performing the task or skill.

Guideline 2: Emotionally feel the way you want to feel. The video you play in your head needs to capture the emotional experience you want to have. Why? Because through visualization, you create your reality, and reality involves emotions. When you allow negative emotions, such as anger, embarrassment, or doubt, to creep into your performances, you will not deliver the performance you need to succeed.

One way to banish these emotions is to consciously replace them with productive, positive emotions during visualization. The goal should be to feel and experience confidence in your visualizations.

Guideline 3: Visualize at the desired speed. Make sure to watch your mental clip in real speed—the speed you want your performance to be.

The key is to visualize specific moments of success. Doing so allows for the success to actually generalize out to other areas that may not have been visualized

The rest of the Mental Workout is simple. After the highlight reel, once again repeat your identity statement. Then, bring yourself out of your focus-building concentration by completing another round of centered breathing—in for six seconds, hold for two, and out for seven.

After all, you wouldn't expect to build a lot of physical strength or endurance without training your body. Why would you expect to improve your mind without some kind of workout for it? Completing Mental Workouts develops the mental toughness necessary to control your self-talk. Having the strength between the ears allows you to replace negative thinking with thoughts that emphasize the positive.

Studies have repeatedly shown that a vast majority of the impact from a presentation comes from the style of delivery—not just the words themselves. If you can learn to project self-confidence, you can become a terrific speaker. You don't have to be “supernatural” to connect with a client or move a team of five (or fifty, or five hundred) into action. You merely need to learn how to be confident when you communicate.

Preparation comes in three easy steps: 1. Write it. 2. Slow it. 3. Triangle it. What does that mean? We'll explain.

#### STEP 1. WRITE IT

Unfortunately, the more you say, the less believable you often become.

Think about it: the longer you speak, the more you must begin commenting on the less important points of your presentation. Unfortunately, people have a tendency to remember what you say last.

It's worth repeating—the more you say, the less believable you often become.

The best presenters are literally ruthless in organizing what they will say. They identify only the most important information that needs to be communicated, and they get rid of everything else. How does that work? They write a script.

By scripting your presentation, you are preparing, and by preparing, you will be banishing the fears you have about presenting. By preparing your message, you are also ensuring that you are saying only the most

pertinent things—the things you want the client to really focus on and hear.

Don't think for a second it won't be hard. It's really tough, but deleting is one of the most important parts of communicating effectively. You need to follow the simple rule that each presentation should have only one main point and a maximum of three subpoints. Loading more information in than that is asking for trouble. By making this part of your presentation razor-sharp, you're getting your message across in the cleanest, most efficient way.

Once you've finished the first five minutes, transition to the closing five minutes. By finalizing your talk, you're providing the destination for the rest of the presentation. Everything you say will be designed as a lead-in to bringing it home this way. Again, be very liberal with your "delete" button.

There is no quicker way to get people to check out than to start droning on in a presentation that doesn't seem to be building to a main point or conclusion.

To drill this home, start thinking to yourself, What if I only had five minutes total to speak? What would I say? What about three minutes? One minute?

Once you figure out what content you want to include, it's time to bring the presentation to life with stories. Anecdotes and stories are what the audience will most remember. Be sure your stories have details that connect the audience to your topic and also build your credibility. We try to follow the rule that there should be one story for each point or subpoint. When your stories are in, you are ready to move to the next step.

## STEP 2. SLOW IT

By far the most common mistake people make is to deliver presentations too fast. It is important to remember that you've been thinking about what you plan to say for a long time—and, presumably, you're an expert on it. But everyone else isn't as far down the road as

you are. This will likely be the first time they hear a lot of what you are trying to tell them, and they need time to digest it as you proceed.

Pace is the biggest indicator of confidence, and the best way to slow your pace is to purposefully use pauses. Every pause serves as an inverse catalyst. Your pace will be slower after each pause you use. Hearing your pace quicken should be your mental cue to take another pause. Don't be afraid to take three-second, five-second, and even seven-second pauses in between bits of information. If you don't slow down and simply pause between your thoughts, much of what you are saying is going to be lost. And the more information you cram into the intermittent thirty-second bursts of attention that the average listener can offer, the bigger the chance the person won't retain any of what you're saying.

You can do much more to show strength and confidence—and attract your audience's attention—by pausing than you can by actually speaking. And when you project that confidence outward, it's actually absorbed by the people receiving the message.

### STEP 3. TRIANGLE IT

A very effective method for practicing communication is something called the "success triangle": for the three days before your big presentation or meeting, spend three separate three-minute segments per day mentally rehearsing what you want to say and how you want to say it. We advise people to ritualize the triangle training by spending the three minutes each day just prior to each meal—breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Anybody can hit it long and straight on the practice tee, when you have an unlimited bucket of balls next to you and there's no penalty for missing. Mentally rehearsing with the success triangle is different: it puts you right there, in the situation. You're "pre-creating" the pressure of game day, so you can feel it, experience it, and be prepared for it.

To ease the tension, Jason explained that what the player was experiencing was very common. He had fallen into the "Trap of the Viable Excuse." Viable excuses are so hard to overcome because they

sound so reasonable. They're disguised to the point that the person doesn't even realize they're using an excuse.

Here's the most dangerous part. The more "reasonable" the excuse is, the more you're willing to accept the failure and make it your new normal.

But the only right answer—if you're truly committed to improvement—is to learn how to be completely accountable for what you do, even in the face of adversity.

When a person makes an excuse, it serves as a pacifier to the mind. The excuse itself gets the attention, rather than the reality that a commitment was not honored.

When you accept accountability, you're creating a powerful internal dynamic. Instead of being externally motivated by what is happening around you, you're becoming internally motivated.

People spend so much time thinking about things on the "Can't Control" side because, frankly, it's easier.

Luckily, awareness is the best defense against it. The key is to learn to recognize when you are allowing yourself to focus on things you cannot control.

Your strategy should be the same one Tom used at the meetings during his world tour. Make a simple two-column chart on a piece of paper and write down a list of a few things you can control. Then move over to the other side and make the same kind of list of things you can't. Common examples of things you cannot control: • Competing in a hostile environment • Bad officials • The media • Other people • The weather  
Common examples of things you can control: • Activity • Preparation • Organization • Attitude • Effort  
Then ask yourself, "Which side have I been spending most of my time on?"

If you're confronted with a problem—anything from a simple flat tire to a complex medical issue—your first reaction is probably going to be to obsess about the problem itself. But if you occupy all of your time and energy thinking about the problem itself, it will cause that problem to grow larger in your mind. Remember what we established in Chapter 6—the concept that what you focus on expands.

Strong, resilient people have what we call a “Relentless Solution Focus,” or RSF. If a person with great RSF was in the same situation and lost that big client, he or she wouldn't be some kind of emotionless robot—the loss would sting. But the immediate, laser-sharp focus would be on finding the solution path, and doing it in less than sixty seconds.

A solution is a process, and there are steps to that process. In RSF, your goal when presented with a problem is to identify one step within sixty seconds that you can take that will make the situation better—even if only by a small increment of improvement. RSF is not about finding the “perfect” solution but, rather, about just identifying some kind of improvement.

When we focus on small, incremental improvements instead of perfection, the human spirit takes over, and all things become much more possible.

By immediately framing a problem in the solution framework and asking yourself to come up with one step you can take that can make things better—and doing it within sixty seconds—you're aligning your mind with powerful beneficial forces. And you will be taking useful actions before negative emotions can start to cycle you into a bigger and bigger hole.