

How to Achieve Peak Performance

Peak performance is a phase, which consists of many elements coming together all at once. It provides the most exhilarating experience one might have. The various components involving this eclipse consists of three major states. The first one addresses the mental focus and emotions. The second one analyzes anxiety and arousal periods, and the last one involves the active visualization process. (Published in last issue).

To analyze the many entities of peak performance one must dwell into the mental focus first. The mental state of the individual completely involves itself in the task at hand. This allows for the proper internal attention focus and the necessary preoccupation of mental and physical preparedness. The performer's experience heightens, clear focus arises and acuity prevails. The actions are executed in a skillful and controlled manner.

Mental and physical state influences the emotions of every performer. The existence of a mental focus, or the lack thereof, can result in the determining notion over success or failure. If the mental and physical components peak then the performance may exceed every one's expectations. This creates "a feeling of physiological harmony" deep within the performers' psyche. The emotions reflect the outstanding performance and exhilarate the reality of the forthcoming peak, which in fact is very short-lived.

The physiological mechanism of the mind-body connection is defined even further, when one gets familiar with the anxiety and arousal levels. Those two components disassemble the emotional state. Anxiety is more of a psychological phenomena and manifests in the mind but resides over a portion of the physiological element as well. The arousal level, however, affects only the physiological entity.

To recognize the difference of the individual's anxieties and their association, one would pay attention to sentences such as the body feels tense, the knees shake and the stomach hurts. These feelings express the physiological state. However, if he has difficulties controlling his moods, then one would hear phrases such as "I am a lousy player, I always choke during competition, the audience will not like my performance" and "I am a zero." This believes is categorized as a psychological difficulty. Critical psycho-physiological fears undermine the performer completely and his confidence brings out a huge conflict of negative and inappropriate behaviors during competition. Slightest doubts arising during the onslaught of a peak renders the occasion as completely infertile.

On the other hand the arousal level measures its components via physiological properties. By interrogating the subject one can easily conclude if he is feeling "up" or "up-tight". How does the performer express his intensity of an upcoming event? What is the level of arousal when associating to the intentions, expectations, readiness or excitation of the upcoming event? Identifying these emotions and the physiological responses render an understanding of the subject's state and his level of commitment. A positive affective arousal level includes joy, elation, ecstasy, interest, happiness and love. Negative arousal levels would conclude anger, jealousy, embarrassment, boredom and rage. The appropriate level of arousal consists of a moderate level.

An analyst may use the following techniques to eliminate negative behaviors. Behaviors may comprise of negative self-talk, abusive reactions to self and destructive composure. Methods to reframe such negative aspects are a) progressive relaxation b) neuro-linguistic programming, c) holotropic breathing and d) music therapy. All steps involve elaborate elements in improving one's lack of confidence.

a) Progressive relaxation means letting go of tensions and calming anxieties by developing muscular awareness. Essentially, it pertains to focusing separately on all the muscle groups in the body and becoming aware of tension stored in each muscle and then releasing that tension. Muscle relaxation exercises teach the performer to let go of any physiological tensions. One's awareness of the body and an integrated mind with positive emotions exude complete confidence. The player uses cues and muscle techniques that are easily accessible during any performance. He taps into his memory bank skillfully and changes a negative state very quickly. The harmony of the psycho-physiological balance becomes essentially the most important foundation for any performer.

b) The neurolinguistic programming approach is used to help the subject reframe negative thought patterns and bring clarity to cluttered mind. Subconsciously, the player visualizes a positive timeline and therefore, exceeds his expectations on the spot. Positive suggestions instill more confidence and let the brain change directions.

c) Holotropic therapy consists of deep breathing and internal stillness. Stanislav Grof, a renowned psychiatrist and founder of the holotropic therapeutic methods refers to studies showing that breathing techniques lower the heart beat and pulse rate but also heightens one's awareness. Tests have proven that diverting anxiety states allow the individual to gain control over the situation and a clear thought process follows.

d) Music, chosen very carefully has multiple purposes and in fact proves to be therapeutic in many instances. A slow rhythmic beat adds to all other therapeutic methods and helps in modifying specific behaviors. It integrates the different dimensions of the right and left hemisphere on a subliminal level. Music often restores proper harmony with ease and relaxes the subject even further.

For information on visual memory please refer to the article published in last issue.

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