

The Triangle of Excellence

Mental Preparation for Excellence

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Introduction

There are numerous parallels between the challenges faced in sport, business and leadership. Like their Olympic counterparts, peak performers in almost any field understand, sometimes intuitively, that they perform best in a certain state of mind commonly known as The Zone or the Ideal Performance State.

This book is intended for success-oriented individuals who want to achieve results faster with less stress and effort by learning how to work in The Zone on a consistent basis. Although some of the terms in this book are sports related, do not be bothered if you do not understand them-just skip them.

Having been involved in competitive sports since I was a schoolboy, it was only natural for me to research on different training methods that would help me perform at my best. Most of my earlier training was focused primarily on the physical and it was only in my early twenties after suffering many setbacks and losses that I began to realize the importance of mental training. Prior to that, my mental preparations were at best ad hoc or even non-existent!

The turning point came in 2002. I was the first Singaporean to compete in Muay Thai or Thai Boxing professionally in Phuket, Thailand. I lasted only two of the five rounds contest. What was embarrassing about the fight was that I did not lose because I was knocked out or by points. I lost from sheer exhaustion, I simply could not continue after the second round. My legs were weak like jelly, I could barely stand up and my breath was so shallow that I felt like I was hyperventilating.

What happened? Was I unfit? Absolutely not! Physically, I was in the best shape ever. I trained full time for more than a month and lasting five rounds was not a problem at all, at least not under normal circumstances. The problem was that my mind was working against me, instead of *for* me. I was simply overwhelmed by the occasion, could not stay calm and adrenalin took over, causing me to panic and my body to fatigue rapidly.

If only I could control my anxiety better, the results could have been different. It was not as if I had no knowledge whatsoever about mental training. In fact, I studied Sports Psychology during my degree in Physical Education but it was not until then did I fully comprehend the importance of mental preparation. This experience literally 'jolted' me into learning, practicing and understanding the link between mental preparation and sustainable peak performance, not only in sports but later in business and leadership as well.

Over the past nine years, I have worked with numerous athletes and a wide variety of success oriented people such as real estate agents, financial planners, entrepreneurs and equity traders. It was evident to me that these professionals could only do their jobs well when they were in a particular state of mind and for some of them, the inability to do so could literally cost them a fortune. For example, when futures traders are feeling stressed or

driven by fear, they often start to take unnecessary risks or make slower decisions resulting in lost opportunities and money. The best traders are those who have the ability to be in a quiet and focused state of mind. They are the ones who seem to make the most logical decisions seemingly effortlessly.

In general, I either conduct group workshops or work one-on-one with clients to help them be aware of how their thoughts can either work for or against them (i.e. The Mind-Body Connection) and show them how to consistently perform in a focused state known commonly in sports as “The Zone”, so they can get things done faster with less stress and effort.

It is not only my clients who have benefitted from these methods, my own life is made easier as I became more mindful of my thoughts and by practicing some simple DIY mental skills daily to make sure that my thoughts are in line with my goals. I am able to manage two other businesses effectively and still find time to stay fit and have fun. Looking back, I also realize how my limiting beliefs and thoughts have often resulted in anxiety which has limited my success in sports.

In short, this book is about finding out what is REALLY stopping us from having access to our full potential, how we can overcome our limiting beliefs, and more importantly, how we can access The Zone consistently. I will begin by helping you understand how our mind affects our ability to perform at our best, followed by how we can make use of extremely simple mental skills to direct our minds to work for, instead of against us.

Chapter 1

Mind Matters

Enter The Zone

The Zone is described as the ultimate mental state for any athlete. When athletes experience “being in the zone”, they are actually in a state of meditation where they are completely focused on the “Now”. The zone is typified with low levels of thought and effort. It has also been described as being in a state of Flow, where the athlete will typically feel that time flies and effort is low. The only thoughts they are having are thoughts of pleasure. Everything seems to be happening in slow motion, they can read their opponents with ease and it is easy to make decisions because they know what their opponents are going to do. Typically you will describe an athlete in this state as being composed, focused and confident.

In the business context, being in The Zone not only helps to sustain our energy levels, it also helps us be more effective. If you can recall a time when you were performing at your best, it was probable that you were not thinking about anything else except of your task at hand. You were relaxed and just dealt with that had to be done without being upset or sidetracked by ‘unreasonable people’ or other distractions. When in this state, some executives can even ‘thin slice’ chunks of information and quickly come up with the most appropriate solution to a problem. It is common for them to make use of their experience and intuition to make decisions that would typically require careful thought and deliberation.

We move in and out of The Zone numerous times throughout the day. Unfortunately, when we are in The Zone, we usually do not know how it happened or what was it we did to enter it. So how can we enter The Zone more often? How we can maneuver towards the states that are most often associated with The Zone? This ability would obviously give us an edge be it in sports or business, wouldn't it?

I would like you to think back to a time when you were in The Zone, it could be when solutions to a problem or fresh insights suddenly popped into your mind. What were you doing then? How did you feel? Or, when you were performing at your best in sports- you were confident and knew exactly what to do and when to do it, you did not have to think too hard or to come up with a strategy, you simply reacted best to the given situation. What were your thoughts then? How did you feel? Pause for a moment now, recall and list them down.

When I ask my clients who are in business about this, many of them tell me that the moment of inspiration often happens during instances such as when they are showering, exercising, driving or even when they are on the toilet! I hardly ever hear someone say that it happened while they were busy at work or when they were ‘on the job’. For sports people, what I always hear would be something along the lines of “When I just let my body do what came naturally, do what it already knew how, instead of thinking about it. ”

Now ask yourself, does your list have anything in common with what you have just read? It should be obvious to you by now that it was during situations when you felt relaxed and centred that you performed at your best and when insights would just come to you. It was during those times when your mind had naturally calmed down that you were able to find the 'space' in your mind, the 'space' free from distracting thoughts, the 'space' where you were focused, present and in The Zone. You would also have noticed that during these times, there was minimal conscious, concentrated or analytical thinking.

Some experienced managers would make use of this 'space' when they notice that a meeting feels really bogged down and heavy due to too much intellectual thinking and analysis. They would often ask everyone to take a break and it is often after these breaks that an answer or solution almost always turns up!

The Quiet Mind

Deliberate practice to 'quieten' the mind in order to free yourself from distraction and experience this 'space' is the first step towards performing in The Zone consistently. Almost all top athletes practice quietening techniques designed to shift themselves from an active mind and body state to a state of inner calm, where they are in touch with their personal power. The notion of creating the experience of inner calm is a fundamental concept not just in sports but in religions and martial arts as well. Such practices could be referred to as meditation, which is often defined as "a state of relaxed concentration on the reality of the present moment". Here is a simple quietening exercise that you can perform daily.

1. Find a place that is quiet and distraction free.
2. Begin with some light stretching. Lightly stretch each muscle group and then exhale as you relax the muscles.
3. Sit in a comfortable chair and adopt a symmetrical position. Avoid slouching or leaning forward.
4. Close your eyes and slowly picture your body from your head down to your toes. Instruct yourself to relax each area as your mind lingers on it. For example, tell yourself, "My scalp is relaxed" as you picture and feel your own scalp being relaxed before moving down to your forehead. Finish off with a silent instruction to "relax the whole body".
5. Breath in slowly, smoothly and quietly. Let the air push out your lower stomach and abdomen. Breath out even more slowly as you imagine the tension leaving your body. When you have exhaled, focus on the stillness between one breath and another. Repeat this over and over.
6. Whenever a distracting thoughts come to mind, instead of allowing these thoughts to build up within, see them floating outside and away as you shift your focus back to your breathing.

Note: Start from 10 minutes and work your way up to 20 minutes. At the beginning, your mind will be actively opposed to the process.

There are numerous advantages from practicing this exercise daily. By detaching from the clutter in your mind, you not only reclaim your mind, but also enter a state associated with Alpha brain waves—a level of deep relaxation that most people experience while meditating or in light sleep. In this state, your emotional stability will improve, you will feel less restless and less affected by negative thinking, have improved focus and clarity; and bring your mind, body and spirit into harmony. As a result, we are better equipped to deal with the stresses of everyday life, allowing ourselves to consistently perform to our full potential. Other reported benefits of centring exercises include stress relief, enhanced creativity, intuition and even physical and emotional healing. For those of you who would like to find out more about getting into the Alpha level and its benefits, I would strongly recommend reading up more about The Silva Method, a mind training program that has been taught to more than six million people since 1966. It will greatly enhance your ability to work at the Alpha level consistently.

Secondly, it will greatly improve your ability to focus and concentrate. When you are shifting your focus back to your breathing every time you are distracted by thoughts, this is not unlike the times when you had to focus in order to complete a task quickly at work or when you need to concentrate on a target or opponent while competing in sports. We often hear coaches screaming at athletes to “focus better” or “pay more attention” when the fact is that focus is a natural state of mind. You cannot increase focus or concentration. What we can do to bring ourselves back to this natural state is to control distractions, which is exactly what you are practicing while you are performing this exercise.

Focus is a natural state, free from distractions. You cannot focus ‘more’ but you can control distractions and bring yourself back to this natural state.

Thirdly, this exercise help to cultivate what Buddhism refers to as mindfulness. With mindfulness, whenever we have negative thoughts, we can rephrase them into positive ones. This will not be possible if we cannot find this ‘space’ in our minds to pause and decide if the thoughts in our head are in line with our objectives or what we want. For example, while at work, I may get irritated with a colleague who has passed a sarcastic remark at me. Do I want to get into an argument with him or do I simply ignore him, reminding myself that what I want is to complete my tasks at hand as quickly and to the best that I can. Only when I have access to this ‘space’ in my mind would I be able to pause and reflect, otherwise, if I continue to dwell on my irritation, my thoughts may become exaggerated and spiral from a mere sense of irritation into “Why does he always have something against me?” → “Why do I have such terrible colleagues” → “I really hate working here!”. Notice how reality can be distorted here when we allow ourselves to get carried away by negative thoughts when the reality could be far from it i.e. this colleague simply speaks in this manner to everyone! He may not even know that he sounds sarcastic and most of my colleagues are in fact wonderful people. This ability will allow you to choose thoughts and actions that are in line

with your goals and what you want instead of wasting your time and energy on the irrelevant.

It is you who is doing the thinking so it is you who is responsible for changing your thinking.

Lastly, this exercise will be a great way to calm the mind before we begin to practice imaging and positive self-talk or affirmations, which would be covered in greater detail in the chapter 2.

Centring

In the midst of a busy day where you are juggling meetings, phones calls, negotiations and emails, centring is an awesome tool to have in order to sustain your energy levels and to maintain your composure. This simple and well-known technique is widely practiced in martial arts and in sports such as golf, shooting and when a player is attempting a penalty kick or free throw.

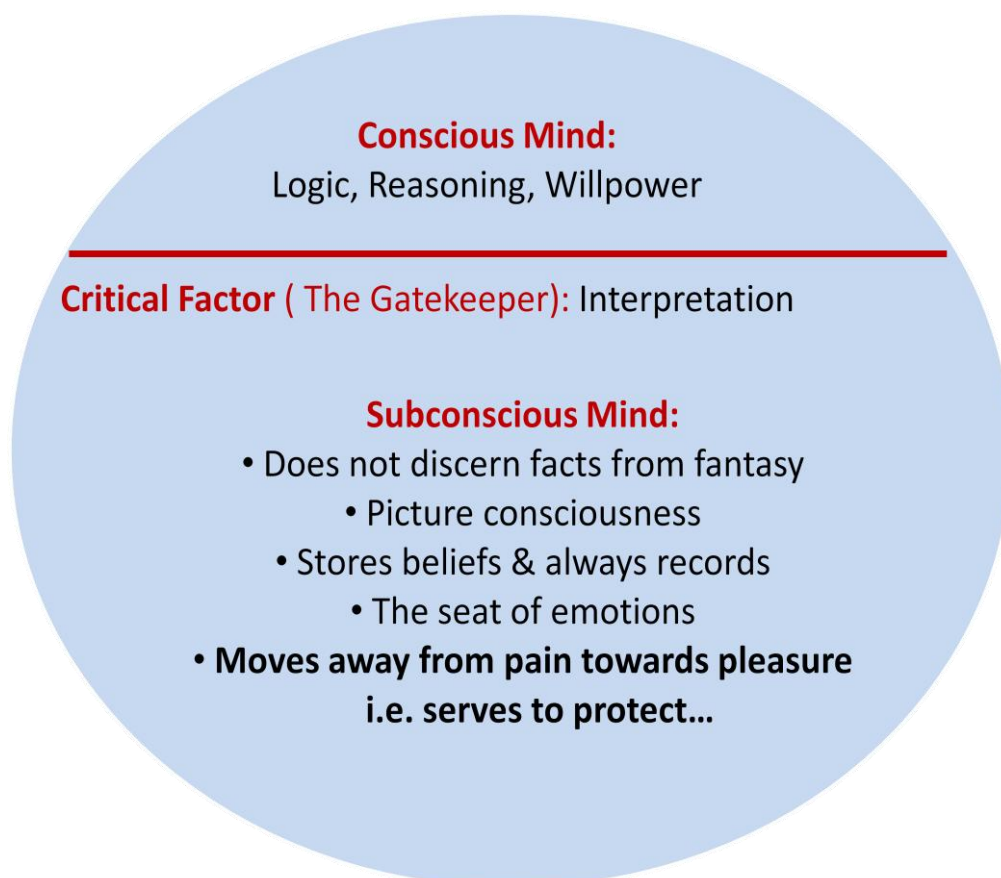
Centring is an extension from the quietening exercise. It simply requires you to breathe in the same way except that it is done at the beginning or in some cases during an activity to create a sense of calmness. For example, you could compose yourself while rushing to an important meeting or to help yourself make better decisions in the midst of a difficult negotiation. When the projector breaks down before an important presentation, instead of panicking, you can centre yourself and focus on coming up with a solution instead.

The Triune Mind

A friend of mine who is familiar with my work with athletes once asked me how it was possible for me to work with other non-sports related issues since my academic background is mainly related to sports? It may seem impractical to be able to help different clients with varied issues such as smoking cessation, weight-loss, business-motivation and anxiety-related matters. The truth is that I do not need to understand all these issues in detail because whatever the issues may be, my primary role is to help my clients overcome their limiting beliefs (i.e. what's stopping them) and to enhance their minds so that they become more effective and therefore achieve their goals (i.e. overcoming an addiction, financial aspirations) quickly.

Regardless of our ambitions and goals, we all want to achieve them faster. By adopting the correct mental strategies, we can achieve what took our peers or parents to achieve in ten years, in only a few years. But before we learn how to do so, we need to have a basic understanding of how our mind works.

For explanation sake, I have divided the mind into just three parts-the Conscious Mind, Critical Factor, Subconscious Mind.



The Conscious Mind

Close your eyes and time yourself for an entire minute-a full sixty seconds- in complete silence. Be aware of your breathing as you breathe in and out. Go ahead and do that now.

What was going on in your mind when your eyes were closed? What were the thoughts floating around in your head? What were you saying to yourself? All of us are engaged in some self-dialogue all the time, whether they are deliberate thoughts or impressions and responses that result from what you say to yourself. When we talk about the conscious mind, this is the part of the mind that we are referring to. The part that you use for analytical thinking, reasoning and the part of the mind that we related to will power, which we often use to encourage and spur ourselves towards achieving our goals.

The Subconscious Mind

You may think of your subconscious mind as a storage of everything that is currently not in your conscious mind. The subconscious mind stores all your beliefs, memories and experiences, such as your skills and interpretation of situations you have been through.

The best way to understand the subconscious mind is through the example of someone who has just started to learn how to sail. He would have to first learn the basic techniques that is required for different wind conditions. At the beginning, his actions would be awkward and deliberate as he consciously attempts to read the elements in order to react accordingly. With experience, he will begin to use his subconscious mind more often as his actions begin to become more automated, changing according to the wind and sea conditions. This is not unlike an experienced driver who is able to hold a conversation with anyone while driving as compared to a beginner who would need to focus on the different moves involved because he is still using his conscious mind to drive.

Our subconscious minds also store our beliefs relating to our likes and dislikes and what we are good or not so good at. For example, if you are conditioned at a young age to believe that sports is dangerous and risky, you would probably grow up having very little inclinations towards sporting activities.

The Critical Factor

This part of the mind acts as a filter or gatekeeper for the beliefs and past experiences stored in the subconscious mind. When we deliberately say something to ourselves, this dialogue is picked up by the critical factor and matched with the beliefs and past experiences stored in the subconscious mind. If these thoughts are in line with your beliefs, the critical factor will let be and leave you alone. However, if these thoughts go against your past experiences and beliefs, the critical factor will do all it can to stop you from acting on your thoughts.

We know what to do but do not do what we know!

This is the reason why change is never easy and why humans procrastinate and not take action. We know what to do but do not do what we know! In fact, if you could hear the incessant ‘protests’ by the critical factor throughout the day, you would wonder how anyone got anything done! This is precisely why it has been said that eighty percent of our barriers are between our ears while only twenty percent or less are real. The critical factor will conjure up multiple impressions of dreadful consequences should you do anything differently. Basically, it will talk you out of taking any action.

Eighty percent of our barriers are between our ears!

Unity in the Trinity

Some of you would have pieced together by now that our beliefs control our thoughts, our thoughts direct our actions which in turn affects our results. In order for us to act on our tasks and achieve our goals quickly, there must be minimal discord between the beliefs stored in the subconscious mind and what we are consciously thinking and attempting to do. In order for you to experience The Zone, all three parts of the mind need to be in harmony and work for instead of each other. Thus, for any permanent changes to take place and in order to make the breakthrough, we must first change our beliefs.

Beliefs->Thoughts ->Actions->Results

I will use a real case to help us understand how these three parts interact and how it affects our actions and outcomes. Of course, I will not be using his real name so let’s just call him Wilfred.

Case Study:

Wilfred’s a real estate agent, relatively successful and is pretty good at what he does from designing great advertising brochures, having the discipline to making sales calls, doing his networking to researching thoroughly on the properties that he is selling or buying. But (There is always a BUT when we have some form of limiting beliefs, which you will soon discover in Chapter 2), when push comes to shove, when he is face to face with potential clients, instead of focusing on serving his clients and selling the apartment features according to the needs of the clients, he is constantly distracted by thought and fears such as “You are unlikely to close this deal. You can’t do it. Who do you think you are?” These thoughts causes his palms to sweat, tummy to churn and sometime his mind even goes blank! Not surprisingly, His potential clients get the impression that he does not really know his trade or that he is not paying attention to their needs.

As you can see, these destructive thoughts that are running in his head are limiting his sales and success. During our one-to-one coaching sessions, we discovered that the same thought

patterns had also limited him in other areas of his life. For example, during his school days, he usually studies really hard but just cannot seem get the academic results he deserves as he often experiences bouts of 'my mind went blank!' due to nervousness during exams.

Let's pause for a moment here to examine what is going on in the mind when all this internal dialogue is happening in Willy's head and how it is affecting his confidence and limiting his success. When Willy says 'I want to be confident and increase sales', he is only doing so at a conscious level and relying only on will power. All the BUTs or negative self talk such as "BUT are you sure you can close the deal? BUT they may have a better offer, BUT they may not even like you!" come from the critical factor because there is a conflict between what he is consciously doing with his beliefs stored in the subconscious mind.

All three parts of the minds must be in agreement for change to be effective

Most of us are familiar with the old cliché, "Whether you think that you can or that you can't, you are right". This cliché is only partly correct. If you simply think that 'You can...' on a conscious level, you probably are not going to get far unless you KNOW that 'You can...' at the subconscious level too. When you try to convince yourself at a conscious level or rely simply on willpower, you are actually only making use of about 10% of the mind's potential. We do not want to rely solely on willpower, that is time consuming and tiring. In order for fully utilize the mind's potential and to succeed on a consistent basis, you need to bypass the critical factor to re-programme the beliefs stored in your subconscious mind so that your thoughts work FOR you instead of against you. This is key to achieving your goals FAST! So, how do we do that? The answer lies in Chapter 2, The Triangle of Excellence...

You are only making use of 10% of the mind's potential, if you relying solely on willpower

Chapter 2

The Triangle of Excellence



Win before You Begin is a mental skills workshop that I conduct for athletes. The name aptly sums up the main objective of the workshop-To equip participants with the essential mental skills required to condition their minds with the belief that they “have already won” even before the race has begun. They must know both consciously and subconsciously that they can win and have already won.

How does this work? How can one believe that he has won even before the competition starts? And how does such a mindset help an athlete win? This may sound silly but think about it, If you walk into a competition knowing that you have already won, you probably would have little to worry about, you will have little reason to be distracted by fear or anxiety since the outcome has already been decided, and you are likely to be competing in The Zone, where you are focused, confident and composed! Having such a mindset may not guarantee victory but it will definitely help an athlete compete at his current potential and increases his chances of winning.

You must first win in the mind, before you can win in the physical

Most of us are not competitive athletes but I am sure you will have noticed by now, the mindset that we want to establish is not unlike that of your Olympic counterpart. We want to develop a mindset where **thoughts that work for us becomes automated**. Whatever it is that we need to do, whatever it is we need to change, we just do it and we just change it! Even if we happen to screw up, we quickly learn our lesson and do things differently and better again! We do not want to waste time procrastinating, getting upset or worrying. We want to train our mind in such a way that it will fire up our instincts to make the right decisions that will drive us towards what we want.

Although many mind-training programmes claim that the ‘secret’ to success lies in some complicated process, it is my belief that there is no secret. **It is a really simple but not necessarily easy process**. All you need to do is to learn the three basic mental skills to condition your mind for success. The good news is that you are already making use of these skills, the key now is to be consciously aware of them in order to bring about the results you desire. The basic three are Goal-setting, Imaging and Thought Awareness, which together forms the Triangle of Excellence.

Goal-Setting

Goal-setting is perhaps the most important of the basic three. Goals are the starting point of all achievements and it is your goal that directs the thoughts (thought awareness) and pictures (Imaging) that go on in your head. A great example to illustrate this would be when you decide to go home after work, your subconscious mind will automatically direct you

with the pictures and thoughts on how to get there even though you may not be consciously aware of it. Even if your destination is unfamiliar or new, pictures and thoughts pointing you to ask someone or to look into a street directory will help get you to your destination. Remember this, **when you have a certain desire or goal, the ‘how to’ is not as important as the goal itself.** You must first be clear of your intention or goal, once that is established, your mind will show you what to do to get yourself there. You will be able to establish a sense of direction. If you do not know what you want, your mind will lead you nowhere.

Also, when we have a new goal, something strange and powerful happens- **old habits that are no longer aligned with this new goal will be replaced by new habits that are aligned with it.** What was considered important previously may not be so anymore. For example, an athlete who has renewed his commitment to achieve his goal will find that he now no longer has the urge party till late. His body seems to want and need to sleep earlier, allowing himself more recovery time so as to be more effective at training the next day. I have also seen how some of my friends give up smoking almost overnight with the birth of their newborn, since smoking is obviously not in line with their new desire to be a great parent.

“With a change of goal, your mental habits and attitudes will also change. You will no longer need the old habits and attitudes and new ones fitted to the new goal will soon replace them” Alfred Adler

Is it really that simple? All I have to do is simply think about my new goal and things will happen for me? Of course not! **Thinking about your goals or fantasizing about something once in a while is daydreaming.** For change to be effective, we need to be thinking about our goals all the time!

“We become what we think about most of the time” Earl Nightingale

The clearer your goal or intention and the more often you pay attention to it, the faster you will achieve what you want. One of the simplest and perhaps the best strategy to do so is to write down your goals and look at them daily. We will discuss this further in Chapter 3.

Everything is Created Twice

Everything in this world is created twice, first in our minds then out in the world. An architect need to have the design in his head before he can put down the blueprint on paper to serve as a guide for the building to be constructed. Likewise, For our goals to materialize, we first need to write them down. Writing down your goals is a symbolic act, simply having a goal in your head is as good as having no goal. **Writing your goals down on paper or typing it down in excel or word is the first step for your goal to be created in the physical world. You MUST write your goals down.**

Write down your goals in a training diary like what top athletes do. State your goal and organize your plan by breaking down the goal into bite sizes that you can tackle one at a time. Although the process of planning, organizing and reviewing your plan everyday may seem troublesome and time-consuming, it is absolutely essential. To highlight the importance of this process, I would like you to deliberate on the following question, “What is the difference between music and noise?” **The main difference between music and noise is that music is organized and noise is random.** Your desires, thoughts and ideas are but noise amounting to nothing, unless you can transform them into music by breaking down your goals into bite sizes and designing the appropriate action plan for its fulfillment. **Music is simply organized noise!** And you if look at it, work at it and refine it everyday, the music will not stop, the melody will keep ringing in your ears until you finally arrive at your destination, until you have finally achieved your goal! **Write down your goals and review your plans to achieve them every day!** For a sample action plan, refer to Worksheet 1: Plan to Succeed on page 28. We will also discuss more about this practice of reviewing your goals daily in Chapter 3.

Thought Awareness

You all have heard the saying “You are your own worst enemy”. In fact, 80% of our barriers are between our ears. These barriers appear in the form of thoughts, or what we say to ourselves. We talk to ourselves all the time. Whenever you are thinking, you are in a sense talking to yourself. Since actions are initiated from thoughts, the more aware you are of your thoughts, the better you will be at choosing thoughts that result in actions that work for instead of against you. For example, if your goal is to increase sales, you will consciously choose thoughts that put you in contact with more prospects instead of thoughts that result in worry and procrastination. The latter is commonly known as negative self-talk and the first step towards thought awareness is to be able to remind yourselves of your goals by rephrasing these negative self-talk.

So how do we do that? How do we rephrase negative self-talk to thoughts that drive us towards our goals?

BUT Cancels Everything...

Think back to a time when you wanted to make a change for the better, you could be trying to convince yourself to get out of the door for some exercise and told yourself, “ I want to get healthy and fit so I will be more energized.” However, before you could even complete your sentence, you are interrupted by another thought “BUT why don’t you just rest at home and watch the television instead?” and/or “BUT the weather is too hot!”

I would like you to pause for a moment right now and spend some time thinking about what were the BUTs in your head that were stopping you from taking action towards your goal and write them down. List down your thoughts on Worksheet 2 on page 29 for this.

Next, **think about where these BUTs stem from.** Were they due to fear? i.e. I will look silly when I exercise. or limiting beliefs? i.e. I am not the athletic type.

Are these fears or beliefs valid and where did they originate from? i.e. were you ridiculed by your classmates in school during PE class?

How are these beliefs or fears limiting your achievements? i.e. due to the lack of exercise, I have put on a lot of weight and feel tired easily, preventing me from giving my best at work. I could have got promoted faster and made more money if I had more energy.

Once you have identified the beliefs and thought patterns that have stopped you from achieving what you want, the next step will be to **establish new beliefs that will help you to change for the better** i.e. I can achieve whatever goals that I set for myself.

Are there any available evidence that you can tap on to support your new beliefs? i.e. Nobody believed that I could pass my driving test after being unsuccessful twice but I persevered got my license on the third attempt! All I need to do now is to remain focused in order to get fitter!

Next step is to concise this new belief into an affirmation or positive self-talk. An affirmation is a short but specific statement or command from your conscious mind to your subconscious mind. When done correctly and consistently, it will invoke the same emotions and confidence as your new belief, such that whenever you need to remind yourself to be focused and determined, all you need to do is to repeat the affirmation to yourself. For affirmations to be effective, you need to follow the 3 Ps and also the R.E.P principle.

The 3 Ps for Effective Affirmations

For an affirmation to be effective, it should follow the 3Ps- Personal, Positive and in the Present Tense. For example, if you are trying to improve your health and fitness, then an affirmation such as “I am getting stronger and fitter everyday!” or “I am focused and determined!”

Affirmations should be Personal, Positive and in the Present Tense.

You can put this theory into action by using affirmations or positive self talk on important occasions such as during the days leading up to a job interview, for example, tell yourself aloud or in your head, whenever you get the chance: 'During my interview I will be calm, confident and in control!' Don't forget: what you 'see' is what you get; what you 'feel' is what you are.

Be careful not to choose a negative affirmation such as “I am not fat”, because your mind will automatically focus on the word fat and all its associations instead. This is similar to the coaches who is trying to calm an anxious athlete but unknowingly causes the latter to be more nervous instead by shouting, “Don't Panic!” When an athlete hears this, he is going to

panic even more as his mind is focused on the word Panic. The coach should have said something like “Stay Calm” or “Relax” instead. Likewise, your inner coach should focus on the positive and what you want. An affirmation such as “ I am lean and healthy” would be more appropriate than “I am not fat.”

Further examples of positive and negative self talk can be found in the following table.

Negative Self Talk (To Avoid)	Positive Self Talk
I better not be nervous!	I am calm and I feel at ease.
I cannot afford to lose another deal.	I am well prepared.
I must finish this or I will be in trouble.	Just do it!
This had better work!	I am focused on doing a great job!

The Mechanics to Powerful Affirmations lies in R.E.P.

- **Repetition**
Repetition imprints the affirmations in your subconscious
- **Emotions & Belief**
You need to be emotionally involved and be passionate as you repeat your affirmations. Every time a need is met, a certain “feeling” is produced in you. Evoke the same feeling when you state the affirmation. Feel that what you desire has already happened!
- **Practice and persistence**
Training the mental is just as important as training the physical. Practicing affirmations everyday with persistence instead of periodically.

“It's the repetition of affirmations that leads to belief. And once that belief becomes a deep conviction, things begin to happen.” -Muhammad Ali

Begin and end each day verbalising your affirmations. You'll be amazed how more confidently you will behave and feel when you're feeding yourself the right messages.

Imaging

Visualization or mental imagery is practiced regularly in sport to enhance athletic performance. Top athletes practice this daily to “pre-experience” what will happen during training and competition. With practice, they will develop the ability to feel and see in their minds exactly how they will perform at their best and how they will cope with challenges. They will begin to develop the beliefs required to win even before the race begins.

“if in your mind you can see yourself, hear yourself and feel yourself respond the way you would prefer to respond, you will be better prepared to respond accordingly in the real world.” Terry Orlick

A great way to use imaging is to programme your day by seeing the mental pictures of yourself completing the required tasks for the day. See yourself making that important phone call or presentation, see yourself closing that deal or responding with a back-up plan of Plan A fails.

It is important to note that it is not simply about seeing yourself achieving the end goal, the process is equally important simply because it is the completion of these daily tasks that will eventually add up to your eventual big goal. Besides, many of us may not exactly have a mental picture of how our end achievement will look like, but that does not mean that we cannot practice visualization. The picture could still be fuzzy but a strange thing happens when we continue to visualize, when the pictures become clear, that’s usually when we achieve our goals!

Here are some frequently asked questions with regards to imaging.

How often? As often as possible so it will be accepted by your subconscious mind.

How long? More important than the duration is the state that you are in when u are visualizing. You need to first be in a relaxed state. The practice on page ___ will help you achieve this before you start visualizing.

How clearly? As clearly as possible.

How intensely? Emotions matter! This is the most important component for effective visualization. If you are going to feel a little anxious when you are coping with some challenges or doing a presentation, make sure you feel anxious too, and overcome it during your mental rehearsal as well.

Chapter 3

Theory in Action

Any successful athlete will walk into an arena with the end goal in mind (Goal-Setting). He would have already seen himself achieving this goal (Imagery). His thoughts will be of those that will support him towards achievement and whenever fear or negativity creeps into his head, his mind will automatically rephrase them with positive self-talk (Thought awareness). The Triangle of Excellence is not only relevant during competition and training, in fact it becomes the guiding beliefs of an athlete and will influence even his chosen lifestyle. It guides the athlete, keeping him focused by controlling distractions that may lead him off-course.

The Triangle of Excellence becomes your guiding beliefs when you impress it into your subconscious mind.

Like the athlete, when you have impressed your own Triangle of Excellence into your subconscious mind, it will give meaning to everything that you do. **It will illuminate your everyday and give you a sense of purpose and direction.** You will know why you are doing what you are doing instead of just following the crowd or to simply do as you are told.

Review Your Goals Daily

Just like any successful athlete who keeps a training diary which he reviews before and after every training session on a daily basis; When you review your goals twice a day, once before you start your day and once more before you go to bed, you are going to speed up the process of attaining your goals. It really is that simple and guaranteed to work- if you will just do it! So if you have not already written down your goals and put an action plan in place, please make use of worksheet 1 on page28 now!

You Cannot Manage What You Cannot Measure...

When you look at your goals and measure your progress daily, you will quickly identify where you are falling short and take the appropriate measures to tighten and target your goals. For example, you will replace a strategy that does not work with a different one and at times, you might also realise that the time line that you have given yourself may not be realistic and you need to extend the deadline for its attainment.

Programme Your Subconscious Mind

Your subconscious mind operates 24 hours a day and when you review and rewrite your goals before going to bed, you are actually impressing your own Triangle of Excellence into your subconscious mind, allowing it to work on your goals as you sleep. You will wake up with renewed enthusiasm and even great ideas on what to do or who to call to help you achieve your goals even faster!

Work on your goals even in your sleep!

When you review your goals in the morning and create a task list (I would also usually key in this list into my mobile phone and arrange it in order of importance i.e. the more important

things to do at the top), you are programming your mind to follow through on what you have set out to do **as your thoughts and pictures will immediately be in line with what you want to achieve for the day**. Throughout the day you will less likely be affected by distracters such as annoying people and idle chats because these are simply not in line with what you want! Coping with setbacks becomes second nature- you will have the ability to quickly snap out of any disappointments such as losing a deal to a competitor for you know that wasting time being depressed is definitely a waste of life!

Lastly, something remarkable happens when you practice this every day- **your goals will be so deeply entrenched into your subconscious mind that the new habits that are in line with your goals begin to form without you even consciously realising it!** I have clients telling me that they gradually stopped bad habits such as overeating and spending time complaining without even consciously realising it at first! Besides, you will also develop an unwavering knowing that it will only be a matter of time before you are going to achieve your goals, and you will be right!

Maximizing In-The-Zone-Time

We all want to perform in The Zone as often as possible. As discussed in Chapter 1, being in the zone means better concentration, more control over our emotions and confidence. In fact, that is the main objective of this book- to help you perform at or close to your peak consistently so that you can achieve your goals faster. Other than practicing the strategies highlighted earlier, you can max your zone time by creating a structure and by cultivating certain habits that will help put you in the zone.

Get to Know Your Zone

While it can be useful to model the behaviours of successful people, it is important to realise that all of us are unique and what works for one may not work for another. In order to find your own unique zone, spend the next week reviewing how your actions and mindset influences your zone by reflecting on the following questions and suggestions. Once you have identified what puts you IN or OUT of your zone, list them down in the corresponding table.

To get started, centre yourself and try to recall on some of your in-the-zone experiences. It could be a particular presentation that just flowed, a time when ideas and solutions to problems simply came to you or even a day when you were able to be objective and steered away from potential arguments with your least favourite colleagues. What about your out-of-the-zone experiences? The times where you felt lethargic and burnt out, the days when you got irritated with someone or something without even realising why!

Here are some additional tips and questions that will help you maximize your in-the-zone-time:

- Do you want to spend time working on your sales target or engage in an unnecessary argument? Be clear of your intention, know what you want!
- Limit checking emails to twice a day and avoid doing it in the morning. Emails can be a big source of distraction.
- Reduce intake of sugar, caffeine and spicy food. These stimulants usually causes inconsistent energy levels.
- Do you try to do too much with too little time? Know your capabilities and pace yourself-tasks that are too challenging or too easy will cause worry and boredom respectively.
- When do you work best? Perhaps in the morning or after some exercise? You may want to do your most important tasks during this time.
- Where do you work best? Can you focus better in the comfort of your own home with the radio on, or should you take your work somewhere 'less comfy'?
- What's your current fitness like? The business world can be both physically and emotionally demanding, so make sure you make time for exercise and relaxation to renew your energy.
- Do you make time for buffer activities during your working hours? Buffer activities such as taking a short walk, deep breathing or closing your eyes while listening to some relaxing music helps to sustain your energy levels.

In The Zone	Out of The Zone
-When I have a good night's rest.	-When I get distracted by the numerous text messages received during work.

Once you have completed this table, make plans to create your own zone environment by increasing whatever it is in the left column and eliminate or reduce the list on the right column.

Worksheets

Worksheet 1: Plan to Succeed!

“Proper Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance”

What do you really want?	
Where are you now?	Where do you want to be?

Break it down...
<i>My medium-term goal/s (3 to 7 years):</i>
 <i>My goal/s for the year:</i>

Schedule it	
January	Tasks
Week 1	
Week 2	

Tips:

- Organize your goals by priority. Try not to set more than
- Measure your progress and set deadlines.
- Identify key obstacles.
- Identify key knowledge, skills and people you need to reach your goals.
- Stay focused on what you need to do **Right Now**.
- Review your goals daily and make appropriate changes.
- Never give up

“Begin with the end in mind” – Stephen Covey

Worksheet 2: Rephrasing Negative Self-Talk

List down your negative self-talk on the left column and rephrase them with affirmations. You should personalize your affirmations.

Affirmations have to be **positive, personal** and in the **present tense**

Instead of saying...	Affirmations

“I am the greatest, I said that even before I knew I was.” -Muhammad Ali

The mechanics to powerful affirmations lies in **R.E.P.:**

- **Repetition**
Repetition imprints the affirmations in your subconscious
- **Emotions & Belief**
You need to be emotionally involved and be passionate as you repeat your affirmations. Every time a need is met, a certain “feeling” is produced in you. Evoke the same feeling when you state the affirmation. Feel that what you desire has already happened!
- **Practice and persistence**
Training the mental is just as important as training the physical. Practicing affirmations everyday with persistence instead of periodically.

“It's the repetition of affirmations that leads to belief. And once that belief becomes a deep conviction, things begin to happen.” -Muhammad Ali