Performance Enhancement

Performance Enhancement, 22 Letters, What a Mouthful!

Over the years, I've tried to come up with a shorter, better name. A name that says it all in a more concise way, but it just hasn't happened. I've tried switching it around to “Enhancing Your Performance,” but that is even worse! It’s like trying to make short work of a mouthful of saltwater taffy. Okay, then I tried “Mental Training” – shorter but that led to questions like, “How’s Mike’s mental health presentation coming?” from my mother-in-law. So, I gave up on finding a catchy name and decided on an even longer description that leaves less room for erroneous interpretation. Here it is: “Performance Enhancement: Learning to Train Your Mind to Work Along With Your Body to Increase Real Performance.”

Your Belief System Drives Your Performance

It seems like the mind should be doing this naturally, but unfortunately, it doesn't. Your mind often works against what you want to accomplish. Even though it defies logic, your mind can sometimes be your own worst enemy. What is in your mind that holds you back? What is your greatest enemy? What is your greatest roadblock to success? Is it money? Circumstances? Saboteurs? No, it is simply the truth. Not the ultimate truth, but the truth as you perceive it to be. Perceived truths, or beliefs about yourself, drive your performance everyday, but you don’t always know you have them because they are tucked away in your sub-conscious mind.

For example, I had an 800-meter runner from women’s indoor track come to me for help. A college junior, she told me that the fastest she had ever run the 800 was 2"20 and that was in high school. She ran the 800 in 2:23 for her college team the previous weekend and was “happy with that.” I asked her a series of questions:

- Aren’t you stronger than you were in high school? Yes
- Aren’t you better trained, more fit? Yes
- Aren’t you a savvier runner? Yes
- How about more experienced, better coached? Sure
- Then why don’t you go faster? No Response

I knew at that point what her truth or belief was with respect to running the 800-meter. She believed the fastest she would ever go in the 800 was 2:20 and that was in high school. This belief, stored somewhere in her subconscious mind, drove her sub-par performance even though her trained physical body was capable of more.
I asked her if she thought she was capable of running faster than 2:20 if she truly was stronger, fitter, savvier, more experienced and better coached. She said it was “possible.” That is all I needed to hear. What she said told me that she was at least somewhat open to explore the possibilities of running her event faster than she ever ran in college or high school. We now had something to work with! So we put some goals on paper and implemented some basic mental training techniques in her daily training regime. Eight days later, she repeated her previous personal best of 2:20 and in two weeks ran the 800 in 2:17.0 – a full three seconds faster than her previous personal best and six seconds faster than her college best! The interesting thing was that I really didn't do anything for her running but give her the keys to unlock her true potential. She was already physically capable of running faster, but she didn't believe it and that was what kept her performing beneath her current potential and far away from reaching her ultimate potential.

And that is an extremely important question to ask yourself. Where are you letting your beliefs about yourself hold you back? And what can you do to open your minds to help accomplish your goals more quickly, efficiently and fully?

**Programming Your Mind**

The question is how do these beliefs get into your mind to drive your performance? First and foremost, they come from your own self talk and thoughts. The things you say and think about yourself. These bits of self input help build the belief systems that drive your performance. If you tell yourself enough times that you just cannot hit the curveball or break that magic split on the erg, it will affect your ability to perform that task at your real potential. The formula looks like this:

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\text{Ability + belief} = \text{actual performance}
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The closer your belief is to your actual ability, the greater your chances of performing closer to your real potential.

Conversely, if your belief about your ability is far below your actual ability, you will function somewhere between belief and actual ability and nowhere near full potential. It is essential to limit negative talk and thought whether or not it seems to be true. But, how do you do it after a lifetime of practice? Here are some important techniques you can use to reinforce the positive.

**#1 – Notice when you are negative and stop.** This is easier said than done since you have had a lifetime of practice beating yourself up, but do
your best to minimize it.

#2 – If you make a mistake or fall short of a goal, say these words to yourself, “That’s not like me. Next time, I will ... (state the way you would like things to be).” For example, if you miss catching a fly ball, instead of calling yourself an idiot, say: “That’s not like me – next time I will catch the ball.”

#3 – Remember to reinforce positive behavior, words, thoughts, by taking a moment to reflect saying, “That’s like me” It reinforces the belief that it is like you to do things correctly.

Another way beliefs are reinforced in your mind is by what people say to you. Not just anyone off the street but someone whose opinion you value. Often people who love you very much and really mean well will encourage you to lower your expectations for achievement because they are concerned that you may be disappointed if you fail to make the goal. You have to be careful not to buy into it or you may lower a goal unnecessarily! Their intentions are well founded, but damaging. Be selective about what you buy into.

**Affirmations – The Foundation of Your Mental Training Regime**

So, how do you program into your sub-conscious the beliefs you want driving your performance? One of the most effective ways is by writing your goals down as action goals or affirmations. Affirmations reinforce beliefs that drive your performance in the direction you desire. But how is this accomplished? These are the basic steps to building an affirmation.

#1 - **Picture the End Result** – Don’t get caught up in the “how to”. Research shows that people who focus primarily on the end result and not where they are at the present, or how they are going to get there, have a greater chance of achieving their goals. The “how to” seems to create itself when the focus is on the end result.

#2 – **Write down your goals.** On paper -- write them all down and look at them every day.

#3 – **Re-write your goals in a form that can paint a clear picture of that end result in your mind.** Make sure that it is positive, present tense, first person, specific and emotional. And, viola! You have written your affirmations!

Here is an affirmation for someone whose goal is to row faster than seven
minutes on a 2,000 meter erg.

I feel pleased and accomplished for rowing my 2,000 meter erg in less than seven minutes.

Although the process for implementing these affirmations is not very time consuming, it does require concentration. Find a quiet place, close your eyes and say the affirmation to yourself, picture what it will look like when the goal is complete, visualize it in your mind’s eye and feel the emotion of that achievement. Take at least 30 seconds for each goal and do the exercise at least two times a day. Some people see results in the first few days. Others may take weeks, but by four to six weeks, significant positive changes will be realized.

Summing It All Up

Understanding how your mind affects your performance and implementing mental training into your daily training regime is critical to your success. Not only will you achieve goals more quickly, efficiently, and more fully, but you will perform more consistently closer to maximum potential more often. In other words, you will be training your mind to work along with your body to increase real performance.

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