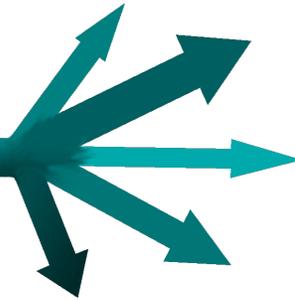


Pressure Points



For those who perform under pressure

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Welcome!

It's been a busy year and this issue of *Pressure Points* is long overdue. I've just returned from working with the US National Team at the Canoe and Kayak Slalom World Championships in Brazil, where the US earned slots for men and women's kayaks at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. Focus and attention was a key theme in Brazil, and subsequently is the topic of this issue. I hope you find it worth the wait.

Let us know what you think about *Pressure Points*, topics you would like to have us address and how we can better meet your needs.

- Charlie Brown PhD

Pay Attention to Where You Pay Attention

Four keys for improving focus and concentration.

In the Russian language, "focus" translates to "magic." In the performance arena, the same is true: the ability to focus often translates to magical levels of performance. But just telling a person, "Focus!!" doesn't necessarily make the magic.

In the 1970's sport psychologist Bob Nideffer identified this simple formula for success in *any* endeavor:

The "Secret" of Success

1. Identify the critical elements of a task
2. Keep attention of the critical elements
3. Ignore non-essential distractions

For example, the 100-Meter dash has three critical elements: 1) initial reaction time and acceleration at the start; 2) distance per step (stride length); and 3) rate at which a person takes those steps (cadence). The individual with the best combination of these three elements will win any given race;

all physical and mental training are essentially strategies to impact these elements.

Now look at the *non-essential distractions*: the person in the lane beside you; what you did last race; what happens if you win this race; what happens if you lose.

Your personal endeavor may be more complicated than the 100-Meter dash, but the principles for success are the same: identify what is essential, keep your attention on those critical elements and ignore the distractions. Here are some tips to help achieve peak performance in any situation:



1. Know your "target." Begin by clarifying your target. In addition to actions, think of your ideal emotional state as part of your target. What do you want to do and how do you want to feel? Don't fall into the trap of thinking of what *not* to do. When you imagine the things you want to avoid, you actually mentally *rehearse* performing those disastrous actions. It is far more efficient to focus on what you want to be doing.

2. Keep the coach off the playing field. The brain has two parts: the Logical Left, which is the center of analysis and logic; and the Reactive Right, from which fluid motions and reactions originate. The left part of your brain knows all about the theory of performance, but actually can interfere when it comes time for the Reactive Right to take action. Think of the left as your internal “coach” and the right as the athlete. Listen to your coach prior to the event and during time outs, but *the coach is not allowed on the playing field*. Instead, trust your training and your reactions.

This principle is true for business as well as athletic performance. Peak performance in business interactions typically involves automated responses to recognized patterns, interspersed with “time outs” in which the process is analyzed. If the internal

coach starts chattering while you are engaged with another person, you are liable to miss key information.

3. Talk less and focus more. Contrary to popular belief, even positive self-talk can be detrimental to performance if it occurs when the Reactive Right brain needs to be leading. Save your positive self-talk for those times when the coach is needed: before the event, and during breaks in the action. When the time comes to actually perform, self-talk can be a distraction; shift to total focus on the event at hand without any “chatter” from the Logical Left.

4. Practice, practice, practice. Focusing is a skill just like running, swimming, singing or performing arithmetic; and like other skills, it can improve with practice. Integrate some of the focusing exercises from the Quick Tips section below into your regular training program.

Quick Tips...

- **Hello-Goodbye Technique.**

If you find that your attention is “off-target” simply acknowledge it (Hello) and then immediately shift it back on-target (Goodbye).

- **Just how good are you?**

Test yourself by seeing how long you can hold your attention on the sweep second hand of a clock. Once you get your current level, see if you can increase the duration your focus. For a real challenge, add distractions by playing a TV or radio during the process.

- **The eyes have it.**

Your attention tends to follow where you focus your eyes. If you are thinking, your eyes are often unfocused or looking up and to the left. Experiment with “locking in” your gaze on some external target - the back of the runner in front of you, the seams of the baseball, or the pupils of the person talking to you. This is particularly helpful in maintaining focus when fatigued.

- **I just wanna sing!**

If you have down time when the action stops and you don’t want to get distracted by “the coach,” try singing. Music involves the Reactive Right portion of the brain and often provides a convenient place to park your attention while avoiding the chatter of the Logical Left.



Let **FPS Performance** be part of your next business, community or athletic organization event. We welcome the opportunity to share our message with others.
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The will to win is important, but the will to prepare is vital.

-Joe Paterno

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