

Prepare for Victory: Mental Exercise is the Key to Success

Drop and give me 30! Are you ready for the challenge? Chances are that if you regularly enjoy physical activity, you're ready. After all, 30 push-ups are no big deal, if you're prepared.

The same idea holds true for mental fitness—preparation is the foundation of success. And while busy chemical industry execs, entrepreneurs, and professional athletes are a diverse lot, those who consistently excel have the following characteristics in common:

1. They maintain exceptional concentration. Peak performers focus on what they want to happen, not what they are afraid will happen.
2. They remain relaxed despite outside factors. High achievers quickly recover their balance in the face of stressful circumstances.
3. They like to learn and do it quickly. Top performers welcome feedback and integrate it (unlike lower achievers, who tend to get defensive about feedback).

Achieving peak performance means becoming mentally fit—understanding the nature of your responses, maintaining your concentration, and setting mean-



Patrick B. Ropella
Chairman & CEO, Ropella
Tel: (850) 983-4777
Web: www.Ropella.com

Patrick Ropella is Chairman & CEO of the Ropella Group an international Executive Search, Leadership Transformation, and Corporate Consulting firm. He authored the book and web-based training program, *The Right Hire – Mastering the Art of SMART Talent Management*, and has seen his content featured in many trade magazines, business publications, and industry journals. Patrick regularly speaks at webinars, career fairs, and conferences.



ingful goals. Just as important, you must recognize and control those instinctive responses to stress or adversity that derail your quest for high achievement. Take Lance Armstrong for example, a man who single-handedly battled cancer, then came back to win the Tour de France seven times. Now that's someone that we could all emulate!

Response Types While you can be motivated for any number of reasons, you respond to situations in one of two ways:

1. Fight or Flight Response

First discovered by Harvard psychologist Walter Cannon, this response has been “hard-wired” into our brains through years of evolution. It's designed to protect you from bodily harm. When you become frustrated, angry, or upset, you are exhibiting this response.

2. Relaxation Response

This response, discovered by cardiologist Herbert Benson (another Harvard graduate), is your antidote to the fight or flight response. Eliciting the relaxation response breeds calmness and a sense of control, so you can perform at your best—but it takes practice.

Maintaining Concentration

On a golf course, high achievers concentrate on the green. While they take into account all the elements of the hole

(e.g., distance, pin placement, obstacles, wind), they lock onto their target. Then they execute. Chances are, the ball travels in the direction of the hole. In contrast, high handicappers focus on obstacles. When facing a water hazard, they use a beat up ball. They always look toward the sand trap or the rough.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the ball often ends up precisely where they were afraid it would go! Likewise in business, success depends on your ability to concentrate on desired outcomes. When you have a clear focus, your attention is directed. Conversely, when you're not clear about where you want to go, external factors can frustrate you easily. To improve your concentration, try mentally visualizing yourself reaching your goal and performing at your best. Throughout your day, take a few seconds to concentrate on your mental picture of success. If you have some extra time, use it to perfect your visualization technique. Such practice makes your goal (and the necessary steps to reach it) clearer.

Setting Goals

Concentration is necessary, but what to focus on is equally important. People naturally set goals, believing achievement will bring fulfillment. Often, however, they experience less fulfillment than they expect. The problem is the kind of goals they set. Many times, goals that focus exclusively on outcomes are missing a key ingredient—personal value. By choosing a clear, inspiring, and personally meaningful objective, you experience more fulfillment on your way to reaching your goal. For example, vowing to make \$200,000 a year by the time you're 30 is probably not as meaningful as striving to be professionally successful and personally happy. As an added bonus, the desired \$200,000 a year is more likely to follow! By setting personally meaningful goals, you can better enjoy your tasks, experience fulfillment, and achieve at higher levels. Responding to Threats Is

peak performance really as easy as concentrating on meaningful goals? Yes and no. Concentration and thoughtful goal setting are critical keys to outstanding achievement. But there are many circumstances that can trigger your fight or flight response, which can then prohibit extraordinary performance. This fight or flight response is usually immediate and unconscious. When you “become triggered,” a situation is reminding you of something that has been historically painful or fearful. Different people have different psychological triggers. One person is triggered by a loss of control, another by a lack of knowledge, and still another by a disregard for detail. Whatever the specific occurrence, people respond in this manner when they perceive a threat to their most core values. For this reason, the fight or flight response is extremely powerful. This response provokes automatic thoughts, feelings and mannerisms used for self-protection. Common reactions include rationalizing, complaining, attacking, sleeping, drinking, or even eating.

Recovering Focus

It's almost impossible to concentrate on your goals while you are stuck in this survival mode. As long as you are focused on protection, you cannot access your creative ability. The five steps below can help you get out of this state and regain a focused, relaxed, positive attitude:

1. Acknowledge that you are in survival mode. When you become conscious of the state you are in, you have an easier time getting out of it.
2. Identify your survival mode symptoms. Your ways of coping while in survival mode take you in the opposite direction of your goals.
3. Actively elicit the relaxation response. There are several ways to bring about this response, since it is physically triggered. Exercise, deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and yoga are common methods you can use to calm yourself.
4. Find a new perspective. Ask yourself the following questions:
 - What is my best outcome?
 - What action steps can I take?
 - What helpful qualities can I bring to the situation?

5. Take positive action with the right attitude. By taking constructive steps toward your goal, you are again capable of peak performance.

Practice Makes Permanent

The pharmaceutical and biopharmaceutical industries are staunchly competitive markets. In order to excel above the competition, you need to be in command of the course you set and the attitude you bring to the pursuit. Through practice, you can maintain your concentration, define meaningful goals, and recognize and diffuse your fight or flight responses. When the time comes to put yourself to the test, you'll be flying across that finish line in first place!