



Mental DEDICATION

Unlock the Power of Your Mind

Chapter V - FOCUS – MENTAL DEDICATION

Focus, or selective attention, is your dedication to the task at hand to the exclusion of all else. In sports, focus requires screening out useless information (fog) to concentrate on the target, such as the bull's-eye in archery or the line in alpine ski racing. The preferred sequence is to lock on the immediate target, disregard distractions, and prevail.

Michael Phelps, history's most decorated Olympian with 22 total medals (including 18 golds.) put his headphones on when he went to the pool to get into his own little world. The only thing that mattered to him was swimming his best. Phelps was able to reach a level of focus and drive never seen before in his sport. He discussed the significance of focus in his book, "*No limits: The Will to Succeed.*"

When I'm focused, there is not one single thing person, anything that can stand in my way of my doing something. There is not. If I want something bad enough, I feel I'm gonna get there.

Let's change the perspective for a minute and equate focus to money. So, let's say for each moment an athlete has \$100 worth of focus, and he or she can spend it in any manner. A dollar spent on an internal and/or external distraction during performance is a dollar wasted because you are not getting the full value from your abilities. Do you want to waste your money? Think about it.

Answer these questions... be honest with yourself. Where is your focus when you compete? Are you caught up with distractions, i.e., do you miss start times, think about the girl/boy you just met, or fooling around with friends right before the race, or do you stay on target?

Spend all of your focus dollars efficiently – on the process of performance instead of any potential distractions. For instance, a goalie in soccer should fully focus on playing moment to moment by tracking the ball with her eyes instead of dwelling on having just allowed a goal and glancing at the bleachers or at the other team’s bench to gauge reaction. Use this example and find comparisons to ski racing... what are you doing right before your start? What are you thinking about on the lift?

Focus keeps distractions at bay. Distractions come in two forms: external and internal.

COMMON EXTERNAL DISTRACTIONS

- Crowd noise
- Photo flashes
- Public announcements
- Scoreboard (**even between runs**)
- Shadows
- Trash-talk by opponents
- Inclement weather (hot/cold/wind/rain)

COMMON INTERNAL DISTRACTIONS

- Hunger
- Thirst
- Fatigue
- Soreness
- Subversive thoughts
- Negative emotions
- Boredom



An important realization to accept is that something is a distraction only if you consider it a distraction. Simply look away. Ignore noises (even from your Big Bad Wolf.)

Trust your five senses to “feel the moment” and stay in it.

Focus on your breathing and your body. Be aware of your easing grip on the golf club, hockey stick, or ski poles. In sum, trust your five senses to “feel the now” and stay in the moment. That is, always strive to be in the moment.

Your thought process must be simplified and concerned only with what is happening right now to win or reach your peak performance in sports. Always stay fully focused in the moment on the field of play. Thoughts about the past and future are fog, and thoughts about the present – the here and now – are clear skies.

Being present in the moment empowers you to respond with alertness, curiosity, and skill to handle whatever comes your way. Nothing else matters: your focus is on putting your purpose into the crosshairs and taking your best shot. When you are clearly focused on the task at hand, then you free yourself to thoroughly enjoy the experience.

I have a private pilot's license. When I was first learning how to fly, my instructor said something that not only made sense but something that has stayed with me. He told me, no matter what else is happening, my job is to land the plane... period! When ski racing, my job – your job – is to get from the start to the finish as fast as possible... period!

Full presence produces seamless fusion – you become your performance. Otherwise, you are always one step behind what you are doing because you are judging what is happening and are not fully in the moment. A mind in the moment is not self-conscious or concerned about what opponents or spectators are thinking or doing.

Chris Sharma, one of the world's best rock climbers, says he gets so focused when he climbs hard routes that he *completely* loses himself. He channels all his energy directly into what he is doing in the moment of the climb. In the same way, get out of yourself and *into* your performance no matter what that performance may be.

Your mind will continually drift off or zone out as you decide to focus on the moment's challenges. Keep reminding yourself to "Be all here!" or shout, "Now!" or "Focus!" when you realize that your mind has wandered back to the past or forward to the future. Extraneous thoughts should not be given a lot of airtime.

Through increased self-awareness and mental discipline, you can train your mind to remain squarely in the present. The present is always the present, and it's all that ever is; the past and future exist only in your imagination.



**The Past and the Future exist
only in your imagination...**