

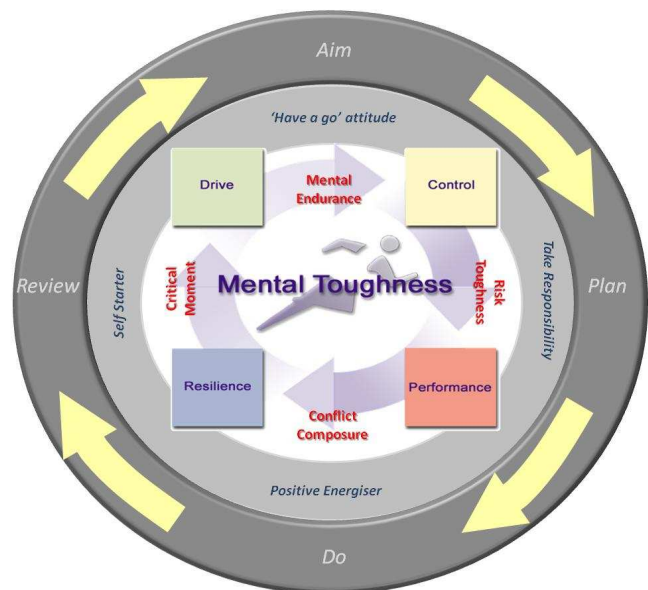


DEVELOPING MENTAL TOUGHNESS

Research shows us that those who have elevated levels of mental toughness are more likely to thrive in the face of difficult circumstances, and perform at higher levels than those who don't possess this attribute. In a world which is driven by ever changing global economic conditions, never has the need for enhanced personal resilience been more required. Whilst some individuals possess this quality naturally, for others they need to learn how to develop it. Over the past 10 years we have worked with the best performers in the world and as a result we have not only gained an explicit understanding of what mental toughness is, but how to go about developing it, and thus creating sustained levels of success.

THE MODEL

Our model works on 4 levels. At level 1, we believe that in order for mental toughness to be developed, you need to create an environment where aim, plan, do and review sit at the heart of everything you do. This will assist in creating a culture of learning. At level 2, it is vital that individuals display consistent positive behaviours. Some of these behaviours include being a positive energiser, a self starter, someone who takes responsibility for their performance and also is someone who has a 'have a go' attitude rather than an 'I can't' attitude. Attitudes are choices and the key is to get a consistency in the behaviours. The focus of this tips article however focuses on developing the core of mental toughness. The next section will provide you with practical tips for developing mental toughness.



...DEVELOPING HIGH PERFORMANCE



UNDERSTANDING AND DEVELOPING YOUR DRIVE

It is vital you understand where your motivation comes from. Are you motivated by the fear of failure or the need to achieve success?

Both orientations are powerful motivators and understanding which orientation primarily motivates you will provide you with the control and the knowledge to take control over your motivation.



FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

Every single moment of every day, we are bombarded with numerous external pressures such as emails, excessive requests, and telephone calls. The list is endless. Often these will cause distress as they are things we cannot control and they can affect our game plan for how we want the day to run. Elite performers understand the difference between what they can and cannot control and they have a plan in place to ensure they are only focused on the things they can control. The factors you can control include your daily routine, your reaction to uncontrollable factors, and most importantly your performance. If you focus on controlling these things, the uncontrollable issues will often take care of themselves.

Try writing yourself a list of the factors you can and cannot control in your performance environment. For the controllable factors, score yourself out of 10 (1 = no control, 10 = complete control) on the extent which you have this factor under control. For the uncontrollable factors score yourself out of 10 (1 = I don't focus on this at all, 10 = This worries me all of the time) to the extent which you focus on this factor. For the areas you scored low on for the controllables, design a strategy that will bring this more under your control. Likewise, for the areas that score high on the uncontrollable side, put in place a strategy that will limit your focus on these factors.



PERFORMING UNDER PRESSURE

Once you are focused on the things that matter it is then a case of performing, and that will often be in the presence of performance pressure. For some pressure it is the inevitable factor which arrives and helps them to perform. For others it can become crippling. Getting in control of performance pressure is vital. Here are four key tips that will enable you to get in control of performance pressure:

1. Accept that pressure is inevitable and look at it in a positive rather than negative way. In essence this is a chance to test and challenge yourself.
2. Focus on your strengths rather than your weaknesses as this will help you to retain your confidence
3. Manage your expectations and make sure they are realistic. Often the expectations we put ourselves under can create unwanted anxiety.
4. Focus on the process and not the outcome. By this, we mean recognise the key processes you need to tune into that will make the outcome inevitable. Often, individuals become so wrapped up in the outcome that they forget the processes.

SHOW RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF SETBACKS

Resilience is all about how well you can bounce back from setbacks. The ability to continually re-frame and move on from mistakes is what fuels your drive. Often when we experience a setback we will beat ourselves up about it and start to feel sorry for ourselves. However, it is your reaction to this that will ultimately make you stronger or break the mental toughness cycle and ultimately you as the performer.

There are a number of key factors to help you in this.

1. Show real time resilience. Make a conscious decision that this event will not affect your core belief.
2. Rationalise the situation. Is it really that bad? What did I learn about myself that will help me to move on?
3. Focus on your positives. What is it that gives you the edge over your competitors?
4. Get back to focusing on your strengths! Too often we focus on the areas we are weak. However, it is our strengths that fill us with confidence.
5. Go back to a time when you had to really dig deep! What were the key lessons from that event? How can you use those lessons to help you overcome this event?