



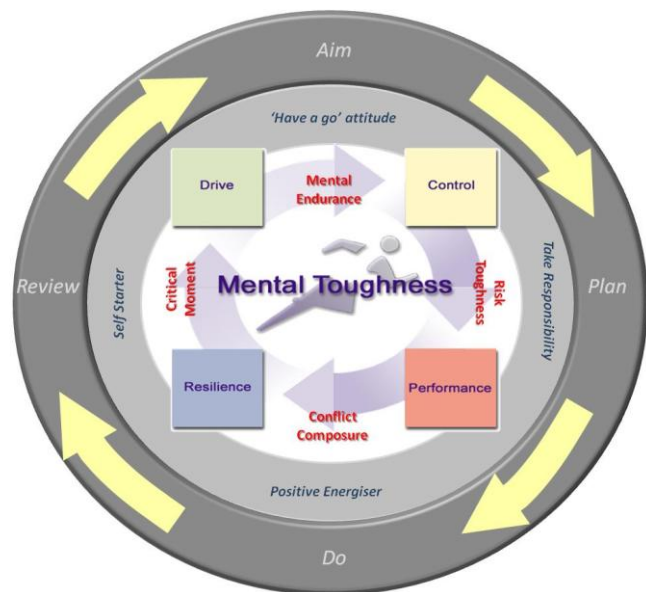
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## DEVELOPING MENTAL TOUGHNESS: THE CUTTING EDGE IN HIGH PERFORMANCE

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. Level 3 relates to the psychological skills we need to be aware of to enable us to perform. At the core of the model is our ability to adapt and respond to different situations.



### LEVEL 1: AIM PLAN DO REVIEW

The key to developing mental toughness is to ensure that at all levels you are able to learn and move on quickly, using past mistakes as a vehicle for success. The best performers always have an understanding of where they want to get to and

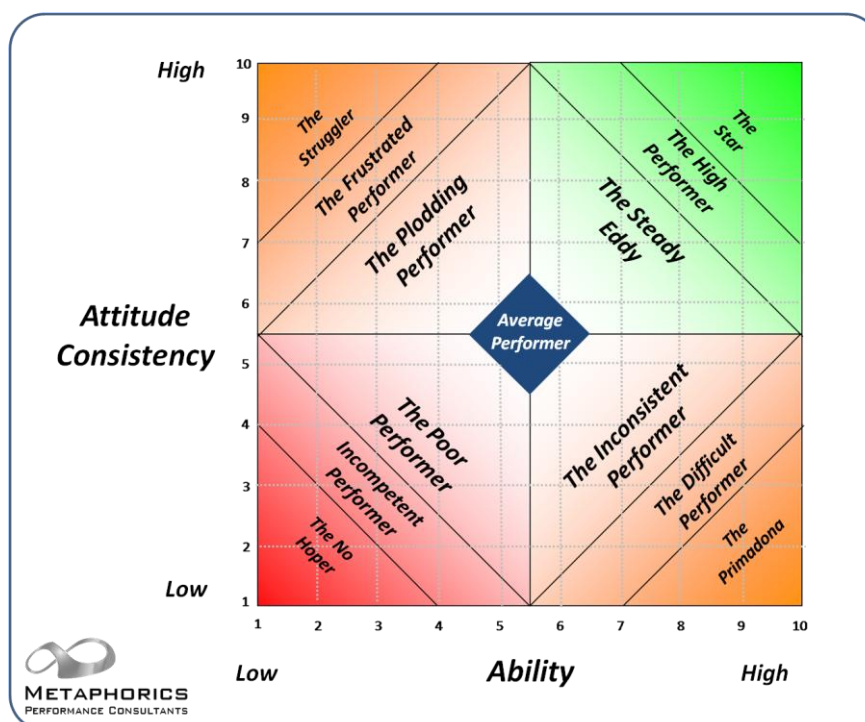


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specifically what they want to get from a particular activity. They will meticulously plan what is required to make success happen. The doing part provides them with vital 'in the moment' information which they can then use to learn and move on with. The review is absolutely key to ensuring performance improves from session to session. Elite performers do not dwell on failure. They are able to take a helicopter view of everything that has happened, removing the emotion from the outcome, and looking at things logically and rationally to enable them to make the best decisions on how they can effectively move forward the next time out.

## LEVEL 2: WINNING ATTITUDES

*Attitude Consistency x Ability = Consistency of Performance.*



Ability is something which is relatively stable and difficult to improve. That is not to say that it cannot be improved, however it requires a sustained period of focus whereby appropriate coaching and training need to be provided. Over a period of time gradual improvements in the individual's competency will occur. However, it is the consistency of the individual's attitude which has the biggest effects on performance. You want to be developing an attitude which is consistent from the moment you wake up to the moment you go to bed. Any flaw in your attitude is likely to have an impact on your performance.



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Ultimately, attitude is a choice. World class performers choose to focus on their beliefs, their behaviours and what they are doing in the here and now. Elite performers have the belief that hunger and hard work will result in success. They are not swayed by short term obstacles that get in the way of long term success. Furthermore, they use the environment to their advantage and see it as something which can be influenced through their behaviours.

### LEVEL 3: WINNING SKILLS

Mental toughness can be considered as an energy flow. When there is a block in the flow of energy, performance will suffer. There are four components to this and it is vital that each one is functioning. Often when a performer is suffering a decrease in performance it will be due to the fact they are not using their 'winning skills' effectively and it is a case of re-affirming the fundamentals to success.

#### *Drive:*

Are you motivated by the fear of failure or the need to achieve success? It is vital you understand where your motivation pre-dominantly lies as both orientations are extremely strong motivators if they are understood and used effectively.

If you are someone motivated by the fear of failure, think about the outcome you want to achieve. Now, think about what it would be like to mess this goal up! Do you



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really want to be in that situation? Of course not! But if this is your predominant motivation it is vital that you understand that this is where your motivation comes from. Put a note up on your door which taps into the source, which reminds you of this.

Likewise, if you are someone who is motivated by the need to achieve, think about all of the positive benefits of achieving your goal. Paint the picture of what it looks like. What are the benefits that this will bring?

*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.

*Performance:*

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 however, it can become crippling. Getting in control of performance pressure is vital. There are two important tips which will allow you to perform.

1. Interpret the physiological changes you experience (i.e., increase in heart rate, sweaty palms) as a sign you are ready rather than a sign you are about to choke. These feelings will soon turn to feelings of exhilaration rather than feelings of dread.



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2. Stay focused on the process and not the outcome. Often we become so focused on the expectations of self and others or the outcome itself, that anxiety increases causing you to forget the things which help you to perform. The key is to remember the acronym TCUP (Think Clearly under Pressure) and to stay focused on the processes to performance. This might be to remember your pre performance routine, or important trigger words which keep you in the here and now. Whatever your processes are, write them down and memorise them. This will act as an important reminder of the things you should be doing when under pressure.

#### *Resilience:*

Resilience is all about how well you can bounce back from set backs. 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?

#### **LEVEL 4: ADAPTABILITY**

There are four key areas that you will ultimately face on a day to day basis which will take up your time.

1. Mental Endurance.  
This is your ability to perform on a consistent basis over a sustained period of time. One of fundamental principles here is to ensure that you are getting enough rest particularly after the big performances.



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2. Risk Toughness

This is your ability to decide upon and execute the right risks at the right time. The most effective way to make decisions is to keep anxiety at bay and take the helicopter view. Always think logically about decisions and not emotionally.

3. Conflict Composure

This is your ability to stay in control of your emotions in the face of difficult people or situations. Develop a relaxation strategy that keeps you cool. This may be focusing on your breathing. In addition, think about the people that cause your emotions to bubble, and devise a strategy for how you would like to deal with these people in future.

4. Critical Moment

This is about performing when it matters most. It is vital that you keep your cool and remember your game plan. One of the best ways to perform under pressure is to practice under pressure. This way you can learn what worked and what doesn't within your performance plan. You will also get used to the feelings of pressure and how best to overcome them.

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