

**The NeuroMentor Institute® for Peak Performance**



**RESOURCE GUIDE AND EXERCISES**

for

***STRESS MASTERY AND PEAK PERFORMANCE***

***The Neuroscience of Optimum Performance Under Pressure***

## **Mental Performance Preparation**

1. Confidence  
Establish a mindset of confidence and belief of being able to achieve what you decide.
2. Goal Setting  
Specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-specific (SMART)
3. Focus  
Focus on the next step in this moment.
4. Self-talk  
Specific, positive, powerful self-talk statements
5. Mental Imagery  
Visualize successful completion.
6. Mental Toughness  
Resilience to stay positive, not focus on the negative, and on the positive about to happen despite adversity
7. Mental Rehearsal  
Use mental imagery as part of deliberate practice to enhance skill development.
8. Focus  
Specific focus on the next step
9. State Management  
Regulate performance anxiety to enter an optimum performance state.
10. Affirmations  
Repeat power phrases with conviction.
11. Pre-performance Preparation  
A simple and dependable routine to enter the specific mindset for optimum performance of the task at hand.
12. Enjoy the Experience  
Remember my favorite grandmother's admonition, "*If you're not having fun, you're not doing it right.*"

## Mental Training Worksheet

Mental training techniques to consider and customize to meet your specific needs, goals, and individual style, whether athletic, intellectual or other performance. Write down specifically what works for you for each of these steps. Your specific response to each moves it to your brain output channel.

- Set specific goals. A map creates an awareness of where you are, where you're going, how to measure progress along the way, and what is detour and distraction.
- Use self-talk and affirmations. Include a key word or phrase from your mantra to continually re-establish grounding, centering, and flow. This also sustains focus despite distractions, pain, or negative interferences.
- Have a plan to manage emotions and regulate states of mind. The mantra of a cue, focus, and physiology may need to be repeated a number of times during any situation.
- Visualize a successful outcome. Guided imagery and visualization consistently practiced rewires the brain. Affirmations revise minds software. The combination becomes powerful.
- Mindfulness meditation and focus on breathing benefit both practice and execution. Focus on correct breathing becomes an integral part of this process.
- In any competitive or stressful context, focus on breathing as an antidote for stress and a way to stay focused. Then, pair an appropriate image with breathing in and out. Focus on a breath going in and out is the essence of mindfulness relaxation.
- Build in time to relax, recharge, and restore energy; unfocused breaks to intersperse with periods of engaged focus.
- Prepare for the wall. In a marathon, about 20 miles into it, an experience of physical and mental exhaustion occurs. An equivalent of "the wall" will occur in every athletic or intellectual performance endeavor. How you respond to it determines the winners from the rest of the pack. Have a plan for the wall, anticipate it, and put the plan in place when it inevitably occurs. Practice hitting the wall and overcoming it. Visualization may help in this process
- Regardless of the endeavor, mental practice can help attain peak performance.
- Visualize dealing with extremes, from extreme success to extreme distraction. Especially in preparation for competition, build in coping with extremes of feeling, weather, unexpected situations.
- Have a post-success plan. Some of the greatest challenges may be in dealing with the success anticlimax of a long-anticipated event or experience.

## **Brain Performance Training**

Chris Sajnog teaches Navy SEALs, the best-trained athletes and warriors in the world. He has written best sellers including *Navy SEAL Shooting* on how to prepare SEAL Teams for battle. His statement, “Start by training the most effective weapon you have: your mind. Your mind controls your body” is a summary of brain performance training. He uses the SEAL acronym to summarize the four components:

**S**it down,  
**E**yes closed,  
**A**nd  
**L**isten to your breath.

This brief, focused meditation is to clear your mind and get immediately grounded to focus on the task at hand. The attuned quieting of mind before a performance – for a SEAL this is pulling the trigger – becomes the essential foundation.

Focused training GPS:

**G**ather intelligence: accumulate information to base decisions  
**P**lan your strategy: informed decisions to create a game plan  
**S**tart training: practice making this process a default mode

These are simply ways to create outstanding performances as a default mode by consistency and awareness of supporting framework. Systematic practice grooves new and automatic neural pathways and networks. Specific cues can prompt a default mode of good habit.

## **Peak Performance Training Exercise**

Set aside a period of at least 30 minutes with no interruptions or distractions.

Step 1. Recall a time when you performed extremely well in a physical or intellectual endeavor, when you experienced happiness or exhilaration in doing what you did. Briefly describe this experience—write it and draw a line around it.

Step 2. In a comfortable position with eyes closed, relive this experience with as many details as possible. Include how you felt, where you were, who was there. Include the thoughts and feelings in your mind at the time. Draw a circle around each of the words describing how you thought and felt.

Step 3. Consider the things in your life associated with your peak experience, including books, friendships, films, mentors, sporting events. Jot each one down and circle them in this growing cluster.

Step 4. Focus on what you did directly and deliberately to accomplish this success. Write down any details about your preparation, education, practice, or history that were instrumental. Draw a circle around these experiences.

Step 5. Connect the various elements in this cluster with lines or arrows that link the components or associations.

As you are making these notes, do not disregard what may seem irrelevant or remotely connected to the success you are addressing.

This cluster can serve as a specific, individual record of the events fueling your volition, confidence, and performance. These are all components of your performance self.

## **Follow-Up Exercise**

Take this cluster, and highlight the experiences, particularly important or exciting, that have strengthened your choice and experience of success. This highlighted information allows you to plan training activities for optimum impact and performance. How you rate the experiences can inform you of the hierarchy of importance as you plan your success training for optimum performance.

## **Peak Performance Mastery**

Mastery involves self-awareness along with self-regulation – two key components in emotional intelligence. A significant aspect of mastery is being in an optimum brain state for a particular task.

Creativity is not just the emotional brain, but a whole brain, right and left, the top and bottom web of connections. To be centered and grounded means accessing the entire range of states of mind from an optimum position to synthesize and integrate information from those various sources located throughout the brain.

The basis of self-mastery is a combination of these

*Four Stages of Creative Mastery:*

- Define and frame the creativity challenge
- Focus to gather ideas and information to put together in new ways
- Relaxation and centeredness to immerse in the process
- Execution combining immersion, and timing of a creative engagement of deliberate practice

## The Science of Practice: Deliberate Practice

We have two distinct mindsets – states of mind or zones: a learning zone and a performance zone. In a *learning zone*, the goal is to improve, to concentrate on what to master, expect to make mistakes and learn from them.

In a *performance zone*, the goal is to do something as best as possible, to execute.

The performance zone maximizes our immediate performance; the learning zone maximizes growth and future performance. If you don't improve despite hard work, then we may spend more or almost all of time in the performance zone.

Dr. Anders Ericsson has researched deliberate practice activities in the learning zone that involved these components:

- Focus on a specific skill to improve
- Identify a challenge beyond your comfort zone
- Establish a fixed time for practice.
- Limit practice sessions to perhaps an hour at a time to maintain intense focus.
- Use feedback with repetition and adjustments
- Engaging the guidance of a skilled coach
- Establish concrete signs for improvement.
- Connect with likeminded people who believe in you and what you're doing.
- Align what you do and strive to excel with your core values.
- Sport research supports SMART goals – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time limited.

Deliberate practice is characterized by these traits in the learning zone:

- Develops skills that others have figured out how to do and which have effective training techniques
- Takes place outside a comfort zone by constantly doing things beyond current abilities
- Determining specific, defined goals
- Is deliberate in that it requires full attention and conscious actions
- Engages the guidance and feedback of a skilled coach or mentor
- Incorporates feedback with self-corrections in response to that feedback by an expert
- Evolves self-correcting mental representations along with physical performance
- Develops an evolving mental representation of the specific process and structure of outstanding performance

## **Practicing and Encoding**

Deliberate practice is a combination of input of information and mentoring for improvement, as well as putting the experience in a verbal and motor output channel. The action-language bridge is the link between the verbal and motor channel, and completes the neural circuit of learning and performance.

Imagery, especially watching the very best and imitating their performance can become a dynamic element in a learning process. Notably, athletes who imitate the actions of others download a picture of their activity and use it as a model for their performance.

Five questions to ask for each performance goal you set:

- Is your goal specific?
- Is your goal measurable?
- Is your goal positive?
- Is your goal inspiring?
- Is your goal displayed?

## **Mental Rehearsal**

Essentially all professionals in any realm of performance including athletic, art, academic, and business have their own forms and styles of mental rehearsal.

It is fairly well accepted that elite performers who are more successful do more mental practice in the final stages of preparation than their less-successful colleagues.

Well over 100 research studies document the benefits of mental practices with imagery on performance.

- Mentally rehearsing each performance sequence develops a neural blueprint for the skill.
- Mental practice produces the same sequence in the brain as actually performing a task.
- Visualization of a task generates corresponding electrical activity and small muscle contractions similar to those involved in the action.

Mental rehearsal strengthens and conditions muscle firing as well as developing neuromuscular pathways to become more automatic.



## Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness: a mental mode of engagement in the present moment without evaluating or emotionally reacting to the situation. Mindfulness training is a specific deliberate practice component for optimum performance.

### *STOP*

Stop

Take a breath

Observe what's going on

Proceed

### *Mindfulness Meditation Focus Exercise*

- Get is a comfortable seated, relaxed, upright position
- Attend to breathing—the flow of air
- Focus on one area of your body as you breathe
- When your mind wanders, refocus on your breath
- Feel your whole body move with your breath
- Anchor state with a cue and phrase
- Finally, release your focus on breathing and simply sit, being aware of your relaxed state, of your body, and the experience of *unfocus* with nothing in this moment to fix.

Physiological changes in the brain with these practices have been shown to generate faster learning, decrease stress, and enhance performance.

When you notice your mind wandering, immediately refocus on your breathing. The challenge here is that we are hardly aware immediately when our mind wanders off, but often into the process. So as soon as you have the awareness, refocus on breathing. Gradually over time you will notice it sooner and be able then to refocus more quickly. The default mode in the neural web is for the mind to automatically wander. To stay focused requires attention and effort.

Quiet time and disengagement restore energy and the capacity to focus more effectively. Downtime or *unfocus* is a mental break such as facilitated by a walk in nature.

## Neural Conditioning to Make Changes That Last

Old Story		New Story	
Emotional Trigger	Usual Response/ Behavior	Mantra: Cue/Focus/Physiology	Ideal Response/Behavior
	→	→	→

## **Neural Conditioning Program: Rewiring Emotional Triggers**

### *Column 1. Emotional Triggers*

Identify the emotional triggers that set a reactive state change into motion.

### *Column 2: The Usual Response: Altered State / Time Capsule*

Certain emotional triggers create an instantaneous state change, with the associated perceptions and feelings preserved in this time capsule.

### *Column 3: Mantra*

Three parts to a mantra:

- A cue: a personal gesture to initiate the focus and physiology
- A phrase: such as “Relaxed and powerful.”
- Physiology: a deep breath to breathe in relaxation, breathe out tension

### *Column 4: Ideal Responses*

For each emotional trigger, have a preplanned ideal response, including behavior.

The repetition of these four steps will result in neural conditioning – rewiring the brain.

## ROADMAP States of Mind

Any emotional trigger can create an instantaneous state change. An awareness of the process allows the ability to regulate and choose your response to any triggering event, internal or external. The key is an awareness of the specific trigger, of the instantaneous state change, as well as the content of the altered state. A feeling triggers a state change, although it may be initiated by an external event.

Other people and events may trigger unwanted thoughts and unpleasant feelings, *but they do not cause them*. Much of how you respond operates unconsciously, from the beliefs and automatic couplings in your mind and brain.

But you can become conscious; you can direct your choices. Self-awareness is the first step to transform your thoughts and feelings, and thereby your state of mind – the specific choice of software program that you operate on.

Pleasant emotions, such as happiness, joy, and confidence are coupled with a healthy body state. Unpleasant emotions cue stress hormones and neurochemicals.

It is vital to learn to empathically understand your full range of feelings and thoughts that cue behaviors as early as possible in the response cycle, so that you can determine if you continue, or if you change your choice of response.

You can use the 7 step ROADMAP System to develop awareness of feelings and their connection to thoughts, and how both relate to the choices you make.

**Recognize the emotional trigger that cues a particular feeling or automatic behavior**

**Own your present awareness.**

In the instantaneous imperceptible shift to an altered state, focus becomes directed to the content of that state, including beliefs, doubts, anxiety, negative self-talk, and recurring negative thoughts.

**Assess your emotions and feelings.**

The automatic behavior that results from the emotional trigger. Be aware of all feelings and sensations in your body. Be aware of what you are experiencing at this moment, and what you were feeling, even in a brief, signal way that served as a trigger to change your state of mind.

If the feeling is anger, look at the assumption that caused the anger. Did you assume that someone needed to respond exactly as you wanted, as an extension of your desire, in order for you to feel happy? If so, the result would be ineffectiveness, and anger would be the counter to feeling helpless. Rather than management of anger, the assumption itself needs addressing.

**Decide to engage in a pre-determined strategy.**

To re-establish a fully present, grounded state, use the 3-part mantra sequence of cue, focus, and physiology (Column 3).

**Map an ideal response.**

Instead of the emotional trigger coupled with the usual, automatic response, create an ideal response for that trigger, a response to choose after regulating your state of mind.

**Author new experiences.**

Complete the behavior that is ideal, with the thoughts and feelings that match this new response. Recognize the feelings and internal conversation that become part of the ideal response.

**Program a new identity.**

Recognize that you have choices, that the past behaviors do not define an identity. Incorporate this new model into your present identity. The mastery and confidence of effectively making informed choices evolve an identity of a growth mindset.

For each trigger and usual reaction (Columns 1 and 2) put the ideal behavior in Column 4. The idea is to recognize the triggers and the reactive behavior as early as possible, rather than well into the unfolding of its cycle from inside the altered state. Plan the ideal behavior or response beforehand to consciously substitute it. With repetition of this new behavior pattern, you ultimately groove it as a default mode without having to think about it. With repetition, the original cue is rewired to the ideal behavior. This hard-work miracle rewires your brain to a new default pattern.

## **ROADMAP System® Exercise for Performing Under Pressure.**

Return to your Neural Conditioning Program. Work with the first emotional or pressure trigger and your response to it. Apply these seven steps to revise your performance story.

**Recognize** the existing coding of your emotional trigger and the instantaneous reaction to the state change that it prompts. To quickly and objectively recognize this trigger and how instantaneously an automatic the state change occurs to the behavior of Column 2, allows an effective move to the mantra (Column 3) and the ideal behavior (Column 4).

**Observe and own** your performance story. Accountability is a prerequisite to change. Recognize the state contents of column two: beliefs, doubts, anxiety, negative self-talk. Mindfulness of your story is necessary before change.

**Assess** your current state of mind. Be aware of whether your thinking is affected by distortion due to pressure, causing a loss of flow in your performance mindset.

**Decide** which state of mind is optimum for the task. If needed, decide which Pressure Management Tool be used to reboot a balanced, grounded state of mind, a reset for optimum performance.

**Map** the next best action for peak performance.

**Author** the next best step and strategic goal pursuit, maintaining an optimum performance flow.

**Program** this repeated automatic sequence as part of your default mindset and identity of performance excellence.

### **Pressure-Management Tools**

- Get grounded and centered.
- Recall previous successes.
- Reframe the pressure moment as a challenge for opportunity.
- Focus on the purpose.
- Recall the previous successes.
- Create a positive vision of the outcome.
- Consider each situation as an opportunity to develop and improve.
- Reduce the importance of a pressure moment.
- Confidence is a state of mind.
- Sustain focus on what you can control.
- Use a brief mantra to stay grounded.
- Train or practice under pressure conditions.

## **Energy Regulation and Pressure Management**

To enhance energy for a specific performance:

- Take four to five forceful breaths
- Focus on a powerful image of strength and success – a specific image such as a powerful animal or successful completion
- Create a power gesture to evoke a specific state
- Repeat energizing thoughts such as, “I got this.” Or, “Yes, I will.”
- If possible and helpful, play an energizing song

To decrease intensity or pressure:

- Take four to five calming breaths
- Visualize a calm, serene scene
- Focus on your breath and the calm of breathing in relaxation and breathing out tension
- Think calming thoughts
- Play a relaxing song

Work on the personal affirmation of a power phrase to instantly induce an optimum performance state. Make the phrase short, clear, specific for the ideal state.

## **Performance Scorecard**

- 1) Goal setting: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound
- 2) Self-talk: specific, simple, positive
- 3) Confidence: a state of mind of belief in successful accomplishment
- 4) Self-regulation: breathing, regulation of state of mind to enter performance zone
- 5) Focus: the next specific step or target of this moment
- 6) Visualization: specific imagery of the successful completion involving thoughts, senses, and behavior
- 7) Breath control: breath in relaxation and breath out tension to enter the specific state optimum for the task
- 8) Body language: the specific power posture for the task
- 9) Intensity: entering the state of mind with intensity appropriate to the endeavor – not too much, not too little energy
- 10) Enjoyment: if you're not having fun, you're not doing it right
- 11) Focus: specifically on the task, on succeeding, not on avoiding loss

## **Addressing Stuckness**

Mindfulness of your story is necessary before change.

What remains unconscious will likely be attributed to fate. If you emphasize that you really want something, but seem stuck and unable to do it, ask yourself these questions:

- What would we observe to know what you really want?
- What behavior would demonstrate you acting to do that?
- Is there a component you can begin right now?
- Can you describe how it would feel when you do what you want to do?
- What is the greater pain if you don't?
- What is the greater pleasure if you do?



## 12 Basic Principles of Change and Transformation

### 1. Awareness of your plot and storylines.

The beginning of change is to recognize being the author of your story. If there is a personally created problem, barrier, or obstacle, the challenge is not to get over it, push through it, or adapt to it. It is not there until you create it. Consider the possibility of not creating it and creating something else instead.

### 2. Assess the storylines that work and those that do not work.

In order to change, you first have to know what you want to change, and what you want to create instead in each aspect of your life: career, ideals, personal life, functioning at full capacity, happiness, relationships, finances. The bottom line, no matter how entrenched the process or how strong the hope, is “Does it work?”

### 3. Recognize passive vs. active positions.

Active: You are the author, the casting agent, and the director of your story.

Passive: The cause is fate, luck, or destiny; assuming you’re the victim of the feeling (which you create), as “I got butterflies in my stomach,” or “My fear took over.”

### 4. Listen to your language—it speaks your assumptions.

Words reveal an internal model.

Pressure words (should, have to, ought to) reveal your perception that there’s some external point of reference and authority rather than an internal one.

Passive language (“The thought occurred to me,” “My anger got the best of me,” “It just happened”) indicates your perception of yourself as the subject rather than the initiator of action.

Limitation words (impossible, can’t, shouldn’t) reveal your perception of constraint and limitation.

### 5. Address resistance to change and repetition of the old story.

Repetition ensures predictability. We repeat behavior that doesn’t work because it offers familiarity. Doing the same thing produces a known outcome. We sometimes mistake predictability for effectiveness.

Yet there is no future in repetition. Any departure from the familiar, even a positive one, creates anxiety and uncertainty. You have to have a new story to be in before you can give up the old story.

### 6. Take ownership of your story to become your own authority.

Reinvention begins with taking ownership of what you do, and what you do about what happens next, rather than living out what just seems to happen, or feeling victimized by forces beyond your control.

### 7. Decide what you want to change.

Your life is the manifestation of your beliefs. Old beliefs do not generate new ideas.

Changing your mind changes your life, as beliefs, goals, and visions drive action.

Choose carefully what you engage.

8. Excitement and fear are the same feeling, just viewed and experienced differently.  
Excitement counters anxiety when your mission is stronger than your fear.
9. Construct a map to determine where you are.  
Without a map to determine where you are, it's difficult to proceed with an organized and successful story (life, career, relationship, investment, etc.). With a map, you can see where you are, how far you've come, and how far you need to go to reach your goals.
10. Decide where you want to go.  
Having a map allows you to filter distractions, determine the route, and discern what is tangent or detour. Distinguishing between what you want to achieve, preserve, and avoid is an ongoing process.
11. Figure out how to get there.  
Create a game plan of realistic, attainable goals with measurable results.
12. Stick to the plan.  
It is never too late to become what you might have been, or too soon to become who you want to be.

## Self-Talk for Resilience and Peak Performance

Self-Talk mechanisms of brain operation for inner dialogues to rebound from failure:

1. Fight negative feedback.  
*Self-reflection questions:* What can I learn from this? What are the possibilities here (rather than the problems)?
2. Obstacles are created.  
*Self-reflection question.* What would it be like to *not* create the obstacle, and instead, put the energy into what I want?
3. Use systematic forecasting.  
*Self-reflection question:* Is my usual pattern optimum for this current situation?
4. Assess the current model.  
*Self-reflection question:* Is this plan really working or not?
5. The output channel is essential.  
*Self-reflection question:* What do I next need to put into action?

### Assessment: Ask Yourself the Right Questions

The questions you ask immediately boot up a mindset that processes the remainder of the conversation and experience.

Have a predetermined set of two or three questions that are empowering, and create instantly an optimum state of mind for the particular endeavor.

- What will I do that will be exciting and beneficial?
- How can I succeed beyond what I have done before?
- What will help me sustain a powerful resilience?

### Your Performance Assessment

- What did I do that was good?
- What needs to get better?
- What changes can I make to become my best?
- How can I refocus faster after a mistake?
- How can I perfect my vision of successful completion?