



PERFORMANCE
IN MOTION

By Dan DeMuth

PERFORMANCE IN MOTION:

MASTERING THE MIND AND BODY

TRAINING FOR BUSINESS, GOLF, SPORTS AND LIFE IN GENERAL



When learning a new skill or trying to master an existing one, we can learn from our past. As children we were often present in the moment. Free of fear and anxiety, our bodies were relaxed, aware, sensitive to feel, and aligned with our balance and gravity. Our emotions were spontaneous and uninhibited. This is the relaxed, mindful state that makes us extraordinary at learning and growth. Imagine if we were entrenched with anxiety and self-doubt when we first learned how to walk, or if someone was always telling us how to walk rather than allowing us to learn through a trial and self-correction process.

When we learn by trial and error, with very little self-criticism, we seem to pick up the skills very quickly and more importantly, the learning lasts longer. However, this seems to change when we become adults, and when we learn new skills, self-criticism takes over. Trial with simple correction becomes very complex as it often comes with words of advice that are hard to comprehend. This is because the learning never becomes part of our own experience. The target, or goal, becomes overwhelmed by the “how to” and the perception of needing to do it the “right way.” Then when we don’t achieve, we become stuck, and the break down ensues. One of the keys to improving performance in all areas of life is to treat yourself the way you would treat a loved one. Maintain respect, patience, and gentleness to yourself as you do to others. Being your own best friend is a key component to achieving peak performance. The words that we provide to ourselves are crucial to achieving our goals.

Use failure as an opportunity to learn and grow. Most of us were taught in our younger years to fear and avoid failure, so much so that it deters us from trying new things. Such fears will trigger a domino effect of physiological problems that undermines performance. Fear of failure produces tension, which restricts blood flow and slows the reflexes. This results in shallow breathing and the contraction of opposing muscle groups, hindering coordination. Ultimately, the fear of failure generates a vicious cycle that, in reality, contributes to actual failure. These types of physiological effects not only affect our bodies in motion. Research shows that it also causes havoc on our mental state and emotional well being. When the breathing gets shallow and our muscles contract, our perspectives narrow and we are less able to see the bigger picture. We often lose sight of our peak performance and have trouble making connections and solving problems. However, when we are in the relaxed state and our breathing is normal, our view broadens and we can take in more information and assimilate it effectively.

Focusing on a specific part of the target, such as the orange ball in this picture, helps people maximize their focus.

So how can we look at failure in a way that will help us improve performance? We can view failure as a key component to learning and growth. When we use failures as opportunities for growth, learning, and information about what is working and what isn’t, we get important feedback that we can use when taking on new possibilities.

The greatest CEOs, executives, golfers, and athletes have all failed numerous times. It is what you choose to do with the breakdown that is of key importance.

The Journey to Emotional Mastery

What we feel is what we feel. Often our emotions run counter to our best intentions. Every day we see examples of allowing our emotions to take over. We get too scared to try something new, we worry about other players’ judgments on the course, or we are too nervous about the next day to fall asleep at night, etc. But there are a number of techniques for handling our emotions to move more quickly and effectively through the difficult and anxious feelings that may pop up. The best performers do not look away from their feelings, but learn to stay physically and mentally engaged even when under stressful situations.

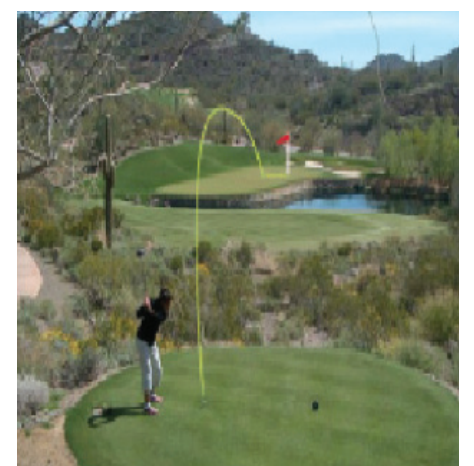
Even when you feel angry, fearful, and hopeless, breathing evenly and fully will keep your body relaxed. We have much more control over our behavior than our thoughts or emotions,

so the paradox is to let your emotions be. Remain relaxed and focused on your desired outcome, and unattached to the things you cannot control. No matter what you are trying to achieve, the practice of consciously slowing down to acknowledge and accept your emotions allows you to more easily reconnect with your focus and drive.

Being In The Moment

Take a moment to observe yourself in the action. First you will need a ball, any ball. Throw the ball up in the air; see if you can follow something about the ball that stands out. A logo, lines on the ball, etc.... and go ahead and catch the ball. Do this a few times. What did you observe? For most of us, the moment the ball is in the air we are totally focused. We are not thinking about anything except the ball, we are in the moment.

It is truly the present moment that allows for peak performance. Staying focused can be challenging for many reasons, both internal and external. Interference can take over when we allow our mind to drift away from the present intention. Whether you choose to be a golfer or take up some other skill, staying in the moment applies to so many things in our life. While being a PGA Golf Professional, I realized that it is not only about seeing the target before I hit the ball, but remaining focused on the target throughout the impact that is the greatest challenge, but also the greatest reward.



The picture on the left represents the golfer, fearful of water and sand traps, and unclear of her target and goals. The pictures on the right is the golfer focused and clear on a target and goals, as she remains 100% true to her intention. Thus, she is the fearless golfer.

Being able to achieve extraordinary results requires us to look outside of our current situation. Challenge yourself by participating in an activity such as golf or another activity such as yoga. Try to remain focused on your clear intention, target, or goal (What do you want out of this activity?), while detaching yourself from the outcome. The activity itself can provide a tremendous amount of learning, which will provide opportunities for awareness and reflection.