

Performance Psychology Coaching for

YOUR PERFORMING EDGE

***Mental Training for Peak Performance
In Sports, Business and Life***

Winning is a State of Mind

Dr. JoAnn Dahlkoetter

<http://www.DrJoAnn.com>

**Performing Edge Coaching
International**

Table of Contents

Foreword by Jack Canfield, Chicken Soup for the Soul
Foreword by Olympic Gold Medalist Joan Benoit Samuelson
Acknowledgments and Preface

1. Journey to Excellence

Common Concerns for Peak Performers
Attributes of Top Performers
Integration of Mind, Body and Spirit

2. Your Performing Edge Principles

Your Performing Edge Profile
Athletes' Expressions for the Optimal Experience:
Key Characteristics of the Performing Edge State

3. Creating an Inner Desire

Profile of the Highly Motivated Athlete
Building Desire and Motivation

4. Olympic Thinking: For Peak Performance

How to Handle High Level Pressure

5. The Art of Focusing

The Right Focus
Exercise: Assess Your Focusing Ability
Exercise for Focusing

6. Tools for Focusing

Tools For Focusing On The Present
Exercise for a Present-Centered Focus

7. Your Performing Edge: Top 10 Tips

Appendix

About the Author
Resources Guide

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Mark Victor Hansen, Co-creator, #1 New York Times best selling series *Chicken Soup for the Soul*

“*Your Performing Edge* has all of the ingredients for psychological fine tuning - the ultimate book for optimal mind-body performance. It's a great addition for myself and the athletes I teach.”

Dave Scott, Six-time winner,
Hawaii Ironman Triathlon

“*Your Performing Edge* is a compelling book. I'm convinced that mental training is as important to long term achievement and enjoyment in sports as the training of the heart and muscles.”

Jeff Galloway, Olympian, 10,000 meters

“Working with Dr. JoAnn as my personal coach has made all the difference in my mental toughness and inner strength and helped me to become an Olympian.”

Jana Lindsey, U.S. Olympic Ski Team member, Aerial Skier

“This is a must read! I highly recommend this book to everyone who is pursuing excellence and deeper meaning in any area of their lives. She has shown me powerful visualization techniques to improve my confidence and performance.”

Misty Hyman, Olympic gold medalist,
200-Meter butterfly

“Dr. JoAnn and I have shared the same stage as keynote speakers at national conventions. Her book is right on target! No matter your level of ability, this writing will offer you the crucial keys to perform your best in the game of life.”

Derek Parra, Olympic Gold Medalist,
Speed Skating

“A positive mental attitude is critical for performing well in sports, business, and life. This book will teach you the essential mind-body skills for doing your absolute best in every aspect of life.”

Alberto Salazar, Three-time winner, New York City Marathon

“The mind and body have to work as one, the body following the mind. *Your Performing Edge* will help you sharpen your mind.”

Picaboo Street, Olympic Gold Medalist, Downhill Skiing

“A goldmine of information...filled with essential tools of excellence.”

Dan O'Brien, Olympic Gold Medalist, Decathlon

“Dr. Dahlkoetter’s writing draws on a wealth of good illustrations both for motivation and for discovering your personal and athletic potential.”
***Running Times Magazine*, Jonathan Beverly, Editor**

“Great athletes are made, not born. Dr. JoAnn’s book explains where the training is done...between the ears.”

Marty Liquori, world’s #1 miler, NBC Olympics sports commentator; producer of ESPN’s *Running and Racing*

“To make exercise a priority is an investment in your health, not an indulgence.”

Katherine Switzer, New York City marathon champion

“My work with Dr. Dahlkoetter was essential in helping me prepare for the Olympic kayaking team. Her book puts into words what I always strive toward when I train and compete. She knows what it takes to get the best out of ourselves and move ahead with our lives.”

Julia Sorzano, U.S. Olympic kayak team

“Dr. Dahlkoetter’s book provides an exceptionally thorough and well thought out approach to mental training for athletes of all ability levels.”

John K. Moore, D.C., C.C.N., - Chiropractor for U.S. Olympic swimmers; Chairman, International College of Applied Kinesiology Sports Council

“I compliment Dr. Dahlkoetter on her efforts in producing such a meaningful work for the betterment of others. Her excellent credentials, provide the foundation to write with confidence and experience.”

Payton Jordan, 1968 Olympic track and field coach; former world record holder, 100 yards

“Dr. Dahlkoetter’s advice was critical in helping me get ready for the Olympic Trials in single-handed sailing: *Your Performing Edge* will motivate you to move beyond your self-imposed limitations to achieve your best - A fantastic book!”

Krysia Pohl, 2000 U.S. Olympic trials qualifier, single-handed sailing

“Dr. Dahlkoetter’s program helped me become an Olympian”

Stacy Dragila, 2000 Olympic Gold Medalist, Pole vault

This book is for:

- My father for encouraging and nurturing the athlete in me. He knew it was a good thing for women to be strong and confident.

- My mother for bringing to life the psychologist and healer within me. She is my best friend and confidant who has given me all the wisdom, love and support I ever needed.

Foreword by

Jack Canfield

CEO, Chicken Soup for the Soul Enterprises

Co-author of The Success Principles™

For more than 30 years, I have been coaching motivated individuals, entrepreneurs, educators, and corporate leaders in how to accelerate the achievement of their personal and professional goals, live their dreams, and create more joy in their life on a daily basis.

Whatever your race in life may be, the Your Performing Edge program will elevate you to your personal best faster than you ever thought possible. As one of the earliest champions of peak-performance, I've found Dr. JoAnn Dahlkoetter's book contains one of the absolute best methods for creating high level performance and satisfaction in all that you do: it's filled with lessons you can apply to your own life right away.

I was drawn to the Your Performing Edge book because it offers a unique approach to complete mind-body fitness. Using this training system you'll have peak performance strategies for personal excellence in health, sports, business and life. You can develop a clear, personal plan of action to perform and feel your best in each important area of your life.

Dr. Dahlkoetter is a friend and colleague. We appear as keynote speakers on the same platform at national conferences. What she shares in this extraordinary book is an expression of her exceptional credentials in the athletic, scientific and clinical arenas, combined with her own personal experiences as a champion athlete and performance expert dedicated to helping individuals and businesses reach their true potential. I have found the Your Performing Edge principles particularly helpful in my professional and personal life, especially in my writing, coaching and speaking.

As the originator of the Chicken Soup for the Soul® series, I've personally taught millions of individuals unique formulas for success and peak performance strategies. And as a fellow colleague and educator in this area, I know, when you're dealing with the mind and body

connection you want innovative techniques that are research driven originating from an authority you can trust. Dr. Dahlkoetter has the expertise, state-of-the-art tools and practical experience to put you or your organization in the best position for high-level achievement.

She has successfully coached Olympic Gold Medalists, surgeons, business executives, and thousands of individuals who wish to aim higher for themselves.

I invite you to join top performance coach Dr. JoAnn Dahlkoetter, Winner of the San Francisco Marathon, Hawaii Ironman Triathlon champion athlete, top-selling author, and TV guest expert as she teaches you the “Your Performing Edge” method, for personal excellence. Through her book you can create major breakthroughs in everything that you do. Her program has helped thousands to use the mind-body link to accelerate personal achievement and long-term success of many organizations.

Whether your goals are to improve your fitness, increase your confidence, lose weight, maximize your sports performance, take your business to the next level, or be a better parent or coach, Dr. Dahlkoetter’s book will offer you the definitive method and tools to create Your Performing Edge!

Joan Benoit Samuelson

Olympic Gold Medalist, Women’s Marathon

Dr. JoAnn Dahlkoetter brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the inside lane of the athlete’s mind and body. Her background as a competitive athlete and her professional practice as a psychologist place her in a prime position to inspire and guide people to realize their true potential. When Dr. Dahlkoetter came to speak at my running camp in Vermont, she gave a dynamic and perceptive presentation on sports psychology. Her new book now captures the essence of mental training in a concise and easy-to-read format that is filled with practical tools and exercises.

Dr. Dahlkoetter offers an uplifting, energetic, and enlightened approach to improving performance. She has a unique and encouraging style that makes learning a valuable and enjoyable experience. In *Your Performing Edge*, she shares a broad range of ideas, insights, and experiences that will help athletes and performers of all abilities to focus on their goals while achieving greater levels of success.

Acknowledgments

The creation of this book has been a long-term goal that would not have been possible without the support and assistance of many people at different stages from its origin to the final production.

I would like to give my sincere thanks to Jack Canfield and Joan Benoit Samuelson for writing the foreword; to Geoff Faraghan, whose brilliant mind, computer expertise, and generosity over four editions has played a major part in making this book possible; to my graphic artists, Tim McGee of Tim McGee Design and Anitra Nottingham and Jan Allerman of London Road Design, for all their creative work, insights, and perseverance in designing the book cover; and to Dan Poynter, my mentor, the wisest person I know in the book business.

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I wish to give a special thank William Dunn, for his photography expertise and creative eye, and his continual encouragement and support throughout the writing of this book.

And thanks to all of my clients over the years, who have taught me so much about life.

Preface

A passionate involvement in sports as an elite athlete and my experience as a performance consultant have provided me with a multidimensional perspective on performance. Through my 30 years of professional private practice and research, I have been able to absorb and reveal the collective wisdom of others. What I offer in this book is a reflection of my direct experience with athletes, coaches, and people in high stress professions striving to excel and improve the quality of their lives. Some of my clients have been Olympians, some have been serious life-long athletes, and some were just starting on their journey toward health and fitness. All have been dedicated to enhancing their level of performance and to discovering their true potential.

Valuable lessons come not only from one's own experiences, challenges, and triumphs but also from the stories and insights of others. It is gratifying to connect with people who truly commit themselves to improving their mental training skills. Athletes who commit to enhancing their mental discipline gain the greatest prize of all – the ability to live a higher quality of life. Through a series of extensive interviews this book contains the wisdom of many of the world's greatest athletes and performers, including Lance Armstrong, Brian Tracy, Jeff Galloway, Zig Zigler, Picaboo Street, Dave Scott, Alberto Salazar, Mark Allen, Dan O'Brien, Stacy Dragila, Bill Rodgers, Joan Benoit Samuelson, Marty Liquori, Scott Tinley, Katherine Switzer, Misty Hyman, Payton Jordan, Grete Waitz, and Derek Parra. I entered their worlds, grew from their insights, and have presented their stories in the chapters to follow.

The mission of this book is to be the complete mind-body-spirit guide for optimal performance in sports and in life. It is written to address performance issues for a wide range of sports and ability levels. The most effective tools and approaches discovered during my research and individual consultations are outlined in these chapters. I have provided clear guidelines with specific examples so that you can examine your own circumstances and goals, and then create a program that works for you.

Beyond pursuing excellence, I have found that sport teaches us countless lessons about how to live our lives. Thus, in addition to discussing athletic achievement, each section of the book also provides you with guidance on how to perform better in your personal and professional life. In doing so, this book provides the practical approach that is missing in many books on performance. You'll find over 100 mental training exercises that allow you to practice and incorporate the strategies presented. This approach will accelerate and enhance the learning process, and will allow you to fully integrate these techniques into your daily life.

CHAPTER 1

JOURNEY TO EXCELLENCE

**“Anything is possible,
but you have
to believe
and you have to fight”
Lance Armstrong**

1. Journey to Excellence

By Dr. JoAnn Dahlkoetter (<http://www.DrJoAnn.com>)

Involvement in sports can be conceptualized as a personal journey that presents a wide variety of challenges for the body and mind. Most journeys have a predetermined destination and estimated time of arrival. However, when you begin your athletic voyage, regardless of age or ability level, the experience is one of continuous new beginnings - a lifetime of discovery and learning. The lessons may appear on many different levels - emotional, physical, and perhaps even spiritual - if you are open to them. As you evolve both athletically and personally, you'll discover that this voyage has no final destination. The purpose of traveling is for continual transformation and renewal as you keep refining the definition of what is possible.

Lance Armstrong is the definition of personal transformation, resiliency, and inner strength. He won the Tour de France, arguably the greatest bicycle race in the world seven times, but even this accomplishment pales when compared to another victory he achieved earlier. In 1996 and '97 he fought the greatest battle of his life in overcoming testicular cancer. With only a 50 percent chance of living, Armstrong beat the odds, moving beyond mere survival to capture cycling's most prestigious crown.

Called the comeback athlete of the decade, Lance gave new hope to people who had all but given up in their own battles. With his second Tour de France win in 2000 and his bronze medal at the Olympics in Sydney, he was able to enjoy the victory while fully appreciating his extraordinary journey.

In athletics we encounter the full range of lessons and experiences that are needed to be successful in life. When you train and compete, you will eventually experience every conceivable emotional state, as you are compelled to respond to many demanding situations. The athletic arena is like a miniature play of life's trials, with all of the joys and hardships, progress and setbacks, success and shortcomings that we face in day-to-day living. Training becomes far more than physical activity or competition. It provides us with the perfect teaching ground for personal discovery and development.

Lance Armstrong knows about life's setbacks; he's a master at turning them into comebacks. In an interview just prior to the 2000 Olympics Lance said: "I owe all my victories to the cancer; this illness enabled me to win the Tour. Had I gotten just an early stage

illness, I wouldn't be the same now. I would not have won the Tour de France two times. If I had not been through hell, I couldn't be here now."

Lance treated his cancer as aggressively as possible. He had brain surgery to remove tumors that temporarily blinded him. Then there were four rounds of the most potent chemotherapy treatment available to rid his body of a cancer that was out of control. After each session he would ride and try to understand why this was happening. He said: "I was mad at the illness. In sport you have competitors that are a little bit like the enemy. You have to put an enemy's face on them. So I tried to do that with the illness. I mean here you have something that was literally trying to take my life. I was pissed off that it chose me. So I tried to make it a fight – Lance versus the cancer.

"I had a lot of people that worked hard for my second life. I have a great family, and I met my wife through all of this. They have given me an awesome second life."

When Lance came to San Francisco for the Grand Prix cycling series in September of 2001, I had the opportunity to interview him. I said, "Lance, I know that coming back from cancer has made you mentally tough. How has that experience helped you stay positive in your training and racing?" He told me: "Whenever I feel like I'm having a bad day out there on the bike, I think back to Indianapolis in '96 and '97, when the cancer was in its worse stages, and that puts life into perspective. I realize that things aren't so bad. Coming from that experience, I can keep a positive outlook and handle any workout."

If you are to be successful in sports you are bound to develop those strategies and skills that are necessary to do well in other aspects of your life. For long-term accomplishment in athletics you need to learn determination, discipline, commitment, sacrifice, courage, mental toughness, confidence, and positive mental attitude. These are the primary skills that the majority of successful athletes exhibit in their training.

There is another part of training, however, that many people are missing. For personal satisfaction and growth you also need to develop those "softer qualities" of patience, humility, expression of feelings, faith in your plan, belief in yourself, accepting responsibility, and most importantly, a sense of enjoyment and fun. The good news is that these same abilities, once acquired in sports, are easily transferred into one's professional and personal life.

However, instead of creating joy and fun while developing potential, sports in our high stress competitive culture can often have a negative effect. Most athletes at some point experience

tremendous pressure, fear, and anxiety produced by a strong compulsion to win. They become overly concerned with their time, score, or place - the external outcome - rather than receiving an inner sense of satisfaction from simply doing their best.

Common Concerns for Peak Performers

In my 30 years as a top endurance athlete and sports psychologist, I have worked with Olympic, professional, college, and recreational athletes of all ages in a wide range of sports. I have observed that regardless of ability level, the same kinds of problems arise: lack of motivation, self-doubt, stress and nervousness before races, low self-esteem, fear of recurring injuries, weight concerns, performance slumps, and lack of balance in one's life.

Athletes have particular difficulty with the issues listed below. Each of these concerns will be discussed in more depth in this book:

External Orientation: Continually chasing tangible rewards and recognition rather than looking for inner fulfillment

Low Self-Esteem: Basing self-worth on performance and results alone rather than on a strong sense of personal identity

Unreasonable expectations: Setting unrealistic standards that lead to feelings of disappointment and failure

Self-Deprecation: Blaming oneself for mistakes and setbacks leading to anxiety and poor self-confidence

Results: Focusing primarily on the final outcome rather than on the actual process of one's training

Whether you've been preparing for an Olympic event, training to set a personal record, or working out for fun or fitness, there's an element of training you're probably neglecting. If the issues listed above sound familiar, you may not be putting an adequate amount of time into the psychological aspects of your training.

Mental preparation can do for the mind what stretching does for the body. It can make all the difference in how you experience your workouts and racing regardless of your fitness level. Yet it is a skill that even the most conditioned athletes fail to practice sufficiently.

Just as we work out our bodies, we need to exercise the brain. Mental training is like taking your brain to the gym. We want our bodies to have many different gears and speeds. We also need the mind to be flexible, to shift into different gears, depending on the task at hand.

External or Internal Fix?

When I give professional seminars at corporations or clinics, people inevitably ask: "So what's the secret; what's the magic potion that's going to produce that quantum leap in performance?" Everyone is looking for an external fix: the special nutritional supplement, the rocketing gold track shoes of Michael Johnson, or the twelve-thousand-dollar bicycle of Lance Armstrong in the Tour de France.

You may be thinking: "If only Nike would design for me a pair of custom golden shoes maybe I could run a 19.32 world record in the 200 meters." They brought Michael the gold medals, right? However, if you took a good look into his eyes as he was warming up, stretching, approaching the starting blocks, and executing his events, you could appreciate his sense of unwavering focus, drive, and internal strength which brought him the results he was looking for. As Gail Devers said right before her Olympic 100-meter heat: "All I'm thinking about is what I have to do right now in this race. I'm just here to take care of business."

The good news is that you already have all the resources you need to produce the results and satisfaction you want. They are all right inside your head. It's just a matter of developing those mental skills as you have improved your physical endurance.

The Ethiopian medal count for running events at the 2000 Olympics demonstrates what is possible when athletes fully utilize their inner resources. The Ethiopians dominated the distance running events: first and third in the Men's Marathon; first and second in the Women's 10,000 meters; first and third in the Men's 10,000 meters; and first in the Men's 5,000 meters! In fact, the Ethiopian government declared a holiday for all employees to greet the athletes when they arrived home!

Imagine what would happen if the children of that country had access to running water, electricity, good nutrition, training facilities, serious coaching, and running shoes. Their potential is enormous in spite of their minimal resources. These achievements are based on sheer talent and incredible perseverance. The fact that the Ethiopians won so many Olympic distance races under these circumstances is astounding.

Could I Have a Major Breakthrough?

Let's say your next competition is two days away. No amount of physical training between now and then will make a significant improvement in the outcome (except of course over-training, which may well hinder your performance). However, the techniques that I

will discuss in this book have the potential for creating a major breakthrough in both your workouts and in competitions. You can experience substantial growth as an athlete and have more fun and enjoyment as well. You'll learn to train smarter and with more intensity while reducing the risk of injury because you'll gain a new sensitivity to your body's signals. You can develop the ability to train with a sense of relaxed concentration so that your mind and body are 100% in the present moment, focusing solely on the task at hand. Then you'll tune in to a channel of energy that perhaps you've never before experienced, and broaden your perspective of what is possible.

Attributes of Top Performers

Take for example two people with similar physical capabilities (same maximum heart rate, bio-mechanical make-up, ratio of fast-twitch muscle fibers, etc.). One becomes an Olympian and the other ends up as a mediocre athlete, never making it beyond a few local competitions. Why do they perform so differently when they have virtually the same bodies? The answer lies in one's motivation and in using what one has to the fullest capacity.

Mental training techniques can help you bring back that joy and excitement for training and competition. You can develop a mindset of relaxed attention that allows you to open up to your greatest potential while enjoying the process of personal growth. You can develop a source of inner strength that you never knew existed. With mental training you can enhance your repertoire of tools and abilities and respond effectively to the demands of any situation.

With proper training in sports psychology, using techniques such as confidence building, mindfulness, concentration, imagery, and goal setting, you can develop the qualities listed below. We'll be expanding on each of these issues in sections II through VI of this book:

Vision: Follow your passion; let your dreams unleash the exceptional powers of the body, mind, and spirit that will guide you to success in any activity.

Mental Flexibility: Become a multidimensional athlete with many ways of viewing a situation.

Self-understanding: Use sports to gain knowledge and foster personal growth.

Self-improvement: Assess your weaknesses and work toward changing them.

Balance: Strive for a healthy, harmonious lifestyle with time for a variety of pursuits.

Courage: Learn to handle adversity, take risks, learn from mistakes, and be able to move on to the next level.

Responsibility: Take charge of your own training, do your absolute best in racing, and accept your part in the outcome.

Resilience: Recognize that there will be inconsistencies in performance, and be able to weather both the good days and hard times.

Openness: Allow sports to set the platform for acquiring valuable lifelong lessons.

Enjoyment: Participate in a sport for the pure pleasure of it.

The greatest barriers in our quest to excel are the psychological ones that we impose on ourselves, often unconsciously. Whether it's the fear of a recurring knee pain, or going out too fast in the first mile of a triathlon, or hitting the wall at mile 20 of the marathon, or losing focus during the last mile of a bike ride, we all have mental or physical obstacles to overcome. With proper mental training you can learn to work through these blocks and enhance your motivation and self-confidence. You'll find that as your beliefs about your limits change, the limits themselves begin to shift. Beliefs give rise to reality.

Integration of Mind, Body and Spirit

You are a multidimensional person - a synthesis of body, mind, and spirit - capable of accomplishing extraordinary things. As you look through this book you'll begin to understand the many elements of the successful athlete and integrate a variety of components that complement one another. You'll find that you can be intellectual and emotional, energetic and relaxed, aggressive and sensitive, competitive and cooperative. All of these qualities can coexist in harmony in the same person.

The purpose of this book is to nurture and develop all of these attributes so that each part supports every other part of your being. It will help you to experience the broader, deeper elements of your sport. You will begin to comprehend the profound connection between your training and the subsequent changes in your heart and mind. You'll discover that your training is an interaction between your inner spirit and the natural environment around you.

Once these concepts are understood, you can then take the lessons from sport and allow them to enhance the way you think, feel, and behave in your everyday life. You'll become the complete athlete, who is also the focused student, the disciplined professional, or the nurturing parent. You can enjoy and appreciate the true value of the athletic lifestyle. This book will encourage and guide you to discover your true potential. So relax and get ready for a wonderful journey.

CHAPTER 2

YOUR PERFORMING EDGE PRINCIPLES

**“Go confidently
in the
direction
of your dreams”**

2. Your Performing Edge Principles

By Dr. JoAnn Dahlkoetter (<http://www.DrJoAnn.com>)

Have you ever been totally in sync with the activity you were performing? Have you ever had the sense that, for a single moment, you were in complete control of your destiny? Have you ever felt such an intense pleasure in an action that you could continue doing it all day just for the experience, regardless of the outcome? The activity could involve completing a personal goal in a workout, or doing a brilliant presentation at work, or spending quality time with someone you care about. These types of occurrences make up the essence of your performing edge - those extraordinary moments when the mind and body are working together effortlessly, leaving you feeling that something special has just taken place. This state of consciousness has a multitude of well-known labels: peak performance, optimal experience, flow, and being in the zone. However you wish to portray this frame of mind, these experiences are certain to be connected to the most treasured moments in your lifetime.

I recently consulted with a runner on the U.S. track and field team who was training for the 2000 Olympics in Sydney. He described his peak experience in the Olympic Trials: "I felt strong and in control the whole time. Although the race was long, it seemed like I was in a time tunnel, with an endless source of energy. I was running faster than I ever had before, and yet it felt so easy.... with no pain or fear, just a sense of pure joy and excitement."

I interviewed Stacy Dragila, world record holder and Olympic gold medalist in the pole vault. Just before the U.S. Olympic Trials in Sacramento, she related that: "Even when I enter a competitive event with an initial sense of nervousness, I turn that feeling into an expectation of success. I get this feeling of awesome power, an acute awareness, like there's nothing I can't do if I put my mind to it. It's a kind of knowing that comes from inside, that I can always jump higher."

Sports provide a variety of ways for athletes to experience optimal performance. People can feel this sense of control and power when they are winning a competition, setting a personal record, or just doing a morning workout. Yet this special state escapes many athletes; it appears mystifying and unattainable to most people. Many individuals encounter this state by chance and find it difficult

to replicate. Indeed, some athletes work very hard for many years just to re-visit that ultimate feeling.

In contrast to the rest of life, athletics can offer a state of being that is so fulfilling one does it for no other reason than to be a part of it. These feelings are among the most intense, most remarkable ones we can obtain in this life. Once achieved, these optimal experiences remain engraved in the mind and supply the means to return to this state.

My studies and interviews with a wide variety of athletes over several years have established the framework for a better understanding of the performing edge state. Through this research, I have found several behavior patterns and attitudes that are clearly linked to the creation of this state. While achieving an optimal state of mind is not easy, this chapter describes how this ideal state can be achieved more often and identifies the conditions that allow it to occur.

Your Performing Edge Profile

What do athletes report during an optimal experience? This is a state of consciousness where a person becomes completely absorbed in the task at hand, to the exclusion of all other outside influences. You are totally focused on the present moment – the everyday world seems to recede into the background. During the peak experience you feel more self-assured and more fully integrated. Your mind, body, and spirit are tuned in to the moment. These are the times when you feel most energetic and fully alive.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow first studied individuals with peak experiences, called “self-actualizations,” in the early 1960s. He researched human behavior at its most personally fulfilling levels. He found that during peak experience “the human powers come together in a particularly efficient and intensely enjoyable way.... in which the person is more open to experience, more expressive or spontaneous, fully functioning, more truly oneself, more fully human.”

One top triathlete I coached recently noted that during his best event: “It was like I was in an invisible envelope where the only thing that existed was this race. I was essentially unaware of myself.... like my body was being directed from an unconscious part of myself, rather than by my thoughts. I did not have to think about each move.... I was on automatic pilot.”

An equestrian athlete talked about her performing edge: “I remember my best show at Pebble Beach. I could remain focused and relaxed no matter what happened. I was able to manage my nerves. I recall moving toward the first set of fences, riding clean, conservatively at first. Then I got into a rhythm; it felt smooth. For each of the turns I was helping the horse get into the best spot; I kept him moving forward. The moment we were in the air, I was looking for the next fence. I was becoming more comfortable going faster and faster. I wasn’t afraid of the speed. I just went with my instincts; my body seemed to know exactly what to do. The quality of jumping was so good. My horse was jumping two feet over the fence, yet it felt effortless.”

During these moments the athlete focuses on the precise details of the event that allow him or her to respond optimally. Athletes often report intense concentration on a small action – passing a competitor on the bike or finding just the right swimming form. People speak of the unusual sense of stepping into a heightened state of awareness. Sometimes there is a keen sense of “the big picture,” where a person says: “I could almost tell exactly how the next play would develop, and I could anticipate the correct moves to handle the situation.”

Brigette McMahon, from Switzerland, gold medalist in the 1st Olympic triathlon, said: “I used the same tactics in Sydney as I did at the World Championships. I knew the course well. I had a relaxed focus. I could sense every move and I knew exactly when to attack and take control of the race.”

Athletes also report a feeling of power during optimal performance that transcends their usual level of strength and energy. This outpouring of power is often apparent to other athletes or spectators. When people watched the eyes of Mark Allen in the marathon section of the Hawaii Ironman Triathlon, they reported: “He looks so driven, so consumed by the momentum of the race itself, that nothing can stop him.” The activity itself takes over and the individual feels completely synchronized within it.

Misty Hyman, 2000 Olympic gold medalist in the 200 meter butterfly, talked about her performing edge experience:

“For some reason at the Olympics I said, OK, I’m not going to try to control this. I’m going to allow it to happen. So I walked in there and just relaxed, and said OK, I can do this.

“Everything went so smoothly. I don’t remember the events of the finals exactly. I know that I was definitely in the moment, and I wasn’t thinking too much. I was doing what I needed to do.

“I remember feeling nervous while going through my warm-ups. I felt different than I ever had before. Things would just happen naturally when I would get in the water. Even though I wasn’t thinking about my stroke, I would just do things correctly without really trying. My body would just take over.

“When standing on the blocks, I just said to myself, Ok, I’m going to do a 200 butterfly, and I’ve done a million 200 butterflies in my life. I have been training for this and I know exactly what I need to do. I remember being able to feel every cell in my body and be completely present. Things felt like they were in slow motion. I dove in the water and it just clicked. I felt more power than ever before.”

One key characteristic of the optimal experience, perhaps the best of all, is a sense of sheer ecstasy or joy. Although a peak performance or personal record is desirable, the optimal experience does not depend on it. One athlete I worked with recalled her feelings swimming in the ocean as a child: “I developed an emotional and physical attraction to the water and the simple joy of movement.” When she finally completed her swim across the San Francisco Bay in the Escape from Alcatraz triathlon, she related: “There is no amount of wealth, no position in life that can equal that experience. It’s not the prize at the finish line that counts. It’s doing an activity that is totally pure and experiencing an ideal state of well-being.”

Whenever athletes describe their peak performances, similar images tend to emerge, as they relate what happens internally. One top athlete summed up what many athletes feel as she related her experience during an extraordinary performance:

“The morning air was crisp and clear, just like my thoughts and feelings. I felt very calm, but energized and focused at the same time. I was optimistic about doing well that day, but I wasn’t concerned about the outcome. As soon as the event was underway, the fear and anxiety subsided, and I felt quiet inside. All my actions seemed to flow effortlessly. I did not have to decide about what to do next; it all just happened so naturally.

“Even though I was moving very fast, I had a sense that this was the right pace. I seemed to have enough time to complete each action without hurrying. Sometimes it felt like I was in a time tunnel, as if things were in slow motion. I felt strong and powerful, like there was nothing I could not do. My confidence was at an all-time high. I felt invincible. I was in total control.

“This heightened awareness made it easy to concentrate and be in the moment. I felt really tuned in to the task at hand. All that mattered was what I was doing at that time. The outside distractions just faded into the background, as I focused my

attention solely on what was happening and what was about to happen. It was intense, and yet fun at the same time. The whole experience was so exhilarating and enjoyable.”

In my work with athletes I have found that maintaining this type of internal climate is critical for performing well and for producing an enjoyable experience. Playing well is a natural outcome of having the right kind of internal feelings. When you feel good, your training improves. Your level of performance is a direct reflection of the way you think and feel. Thus, to produce an optimal performance you need to create and sustain the right type of internal climate regardless of what is going on around you.

Athletes’ Expressions for the Optimal Experience:

- “Strong and powerful” - Effortless speed”
- “Physically relaxed” - On automatic pilot”
- “Calm and at peace - No fear or anxiety”
- “Mentally focused - Feeling invincible”
- “Light and fluid - Total self-confidence”
- “Optimistic and positive - Floating with ease”
- “Tuned in to the moment - Completely engaged”
- “Acute awareness - Detached from the outcome”
- “Natural and spontaneous - In perfect control”
- “Fun and enjoyable - Ideal sense of well-being”
- “Embracing the task at hand - In the zone”
- “Energized - Everything falls into place”
- “Absolute composure - Fully alive”

I asked two-time Ironman winner Scott Tinley to describe his greatest moment as a triathlete. Surprisingly, it was not his victories in 1982 and 1985. He said: “The race that meant the most to me was the 1981 Ironman when I placed third. I did not have any expectations. I was not hoping for a certain place or time and so I didn’t put any pressure on myself. I just told myself, it is what it is.”

The mind and body are so well connected that it becomes difficult to achieve a good outcome when the proper mindset is not present. The right internal state must be created first. Once you feel right inside, a quality performance can occur naturally and effortlessly. The appropriate internal state can bridge the gap between what you think you can accomplish and what you actually achieve. It can make the difference between having the ability and realizing your true potential.

Key Characteristics of the Performing Edge State

1. A focus on the present moment that is so intense actions can often be foreseen before they occur.
2. A sense of unusual power that appears to come from an outside source or from a new source within oneself.
3. A feeling of being totally immersed in an activity, being completely in tune with the task at hand.
4. An expectation that one has the ability to meet the challenge ahead.
5. A perception that the past and future seem to fade away as the present action is the only thing that matters.
6. A sense of total joy and elation, a harmonious experience of mind, body, and spirit.

The performing edge is a state that can be experienced by anyone in a wide range of contexts. We'll be discussing more specific techniques for developing your edge in sections II and III. Use the affirmations below to allow this type of experience to occur more often in your training and competition.

Your Performing Edge Affirmations

Try repeating these phrases before your next event.

- I feel a sense of power and strength from within.
- I stay positive and optimistic no matter what happens.
- I am tuned into what I am doing each moment.
- I fully enjoy every part of my workout.
- I project confidence and energy.
- I am physically relaxed and mentally focused.
- I am in my element; I am fully engaged in this activity.

CHAPTER 3

CREATING AN INNER DESIRE

**“Look around you, find your passion
See what makes you whole”**

3. Creating an Inner Desire

By Dr. JoAnn Dahlkoetter (<http://www.DrJoAnn.com>)

To excel as an athlete you must be hungry - hungry for success, for results - hungry simply to become the best athlete you can be. It starts with a dream, but somehow you must be inspired or you will never be able to reach your goal. We often read about athletes overcoming physical disabilities. Lance Armstrong survived testicular cancer and won the Tour de France two times. Marla Runyan ran in the 1500 meters of the 2000 Olympics while being legally blind. It is out of these challenges that athletes develop a fierce, burning desire to succeed. They need to prove to themselves that they can achieve their goals. Through these kinds of examples we can begin to understand that desire is sometimes more important than even talent or a healthy body.

The movie "Prefontaine" depicts the life of a running legend who had one leg shorter than the other and did not necessarily have "the perfect runner's body." Yet from a very early age he developed an insatiable love for running. Through his drive and determination Steve Prefontaine went on to break the American record in every distance from 2,000 - 10,000 meters, a feat never attained by any other American man.

Without a true love for your sport and a burning desire to be the best you can be, you will never be able to push yourself to do what has to be done. It will be too easy to skip a workout now and then. A coach or parent can give you support and guidance, but you have to supply the rest. Only you can push yourself when you're tired or make yourself work out when distractions get in the way. After Steve Prefontaine had reached the height of his running career, he lost to Lasse Viren in the Olympic 5,000 meters in Munich. The loss led him to consider quitting the sport. His coach, Bill Bowerman, told him: "If you're gonna run, be at the track and I'll give you the workouts; or if you're gonna stop running, then do that. You decide. I can't coach desire."

So the drive must come from within, regardless of whether you're a novice, a serious athlete, or a competitor at the elite level. The good news is that building and maintaining a high level of self-motivation is a learned skill that anyone can acquire. Motivation is energy, and that sense of self-directedness is one of the most powerful sources of energy available to an athlete. From internal motivation you gain the willingness to persevere with your training,

to endure discomfort and stress, and to make sacrifices with your time and energy as you move closer toward realizing your goal.

Profile of the Highly Motivated Athlete

What are the key characteristics of well-motivated athletes? Through my extensive work with numerous athletes over several years, I have developed a constellation of traits that defines the champion's mentality. Elite athletes do not possess superhuman powers or extraordinary qualifications limited to a select few. The characteristics that make a champion can be attained and developed by anyone who wants to excel in a sport.

Enthusiasm and desire - love for your sport: Top athletes have a hunger, a fire inside which fuels their passion to achieve an important goal, regardless of their level of talent or ability. To accomplish anything of value in life you need to begin with some kind of vision or dream. The more clearly you can see that picture in your mind, the more likely it is to become reality. Wherever you place your attention, your energy will follow.

Courage to succeed: Once an athlete has the desire, he or she needs to back it up with courage - the incentive to make any dream you dare to dream become reality. It takes courage to sacrifice, to work out when you're tired, to seek out tough competition when you know you'll probably lose. It takes courage to stick to your game plan and the relentless pursuit of your goal when you encounter obstacles. It takes courage to push yourself to places that you have never been before - physically or mentally. It takes courage to test your limits and to break through barriers.

Internal motivation and self-direction: Champion athletes decide early on that they are training and competing for themselves, not for their parents, their coaches, or the medals. Direction and drive need to come from within. The goals must be ones that you have chosen because that's exactly what you want to be doing. Ask yourself, what keeps you training? Whom are you doing it for?

Commitment to excellence: How good do you want to be? Elite athletes know that to excel at their sport, they must decide to make it a priority in their life. They make an honest effort each day to be the best at what they do. At some point you must say, I want to be really good at this; I want this to work. To notice significant growth, you must live this commitment and regularly stretch what you perceive to be your current limits.

Discipline, consistency, organization: Winning athletes know how to self-energize and work hard on a daily basis. Because they love what they do, it is easier for them to maintain consistency in training and in competing. Regardless of personal problems, fatigue, or difficult circumstances, they can generate the optimal amount of excitement and energy to do their best.

Being focused and yet relaxed: Champions have the ability to maintain concentration for long periods of time. They can tune in what's critical to their performance and tune out what's not. They can easily let go of distractions and take control of their attention.

Ability to handle adversity: Top athletes know how to deal with difficult situations. Adversity builds character. When elite athletes know the odds are against them, they embrace the chance to explore the outer limits of their potential. Rather than avoiding pressure, they feel challenged by it. They are calm and relaxed under fire. Setbacks become an opportunity for learning; they open the way for deep personal growth.

Dan O'Brien, Olympic gold medalist in the decathlon, knows about handling adversity. During my interview with him he recalled: "When I didn't make the opening height for the pole vault in the 1992 Olympic Trials, there was no doubt in my mind where I was going. Sure I was upset, but I dealt with it and quickly moved on. That event set the pace for the next four years of my training. I was driven. I knew I could be the best. I surrounded myself with people who shared that same vision. I wrote my goals down on paper so I could see them every day."

Only six weeks after the Olympic Trials Dan shattered the world record in the decathlon at the Deca Star Meet in Tolance, France. He went on to become the 1996 Olympic Decathlon Champion in Atlanta. Adversity fueled his vision. Dan says: "If you can see it, you can achieve it."

Building Desire and Motivation

The people who develop these qualities and practice these skills regularly have the best chance of excelling athletically as well as personally and professionally. Each of us begins at a different starting point physically and mentally. We all have strengths that we can build upon. Now that you have an idea of the constellation of traits that successful athletes possess, how do you begin to build them into your life? How do you turn these qualities into useful behaviors that will make a difference in the way you train and race? Numerous researchers in the sports psychology field have reported on the critical skills and behaviors of successful athletes. Below I

have offered suggestions that have helped many of my own clients tremendously toward excelling in their sport.

Generate a positive outlook: Direct your focus to what is possible, to what can happen, toward success. Rather than complaining about the weather or criticizing the competition, the mentally trained athlete attends to only those things that he or she can control. You have control over your thoughts, your emotions, your training form, and your perception of each situation. You have a choice in what you believe about yourself. Positive energy makes peak performances possible.

Visualize your goals daily: Put yourself in a relaxed state through deep abdominal breathing. Then, as vividly as possible, create an image in your mind of what you want to achieve in your sport. You can produce a replay of one of your best performances in the past. Then use all those positive feelings of self-confidence, energy, and strength in your mental rehearsal of an upcoming event. See yourself doing it right. Then use your imagery during the event itself.

Practice being focused and yet relaxed: Develop the ability to maintain concentration for longer periods of time. You can tune in what's critical to your performance and tune out what's not. You can easily let go of distractions and take control of your attention. As you focus more on the task at hand (e.g., your training form, how you're feeling), there will be less room for the negative thoughts to enter your mind.

Build a balanced lifestyle: Create a broad-based lifestyle with a variety of interests; strive for a balance between work and fun, social time, personal quiet time, and time to be creative. Develop patterns of healthy behavior. Eat regularly, get a consistent amount of sleep each night, reduce your work load at times if possible, and allow time to relax and reflect between activities. Develop a social support network of close friends and family, some who are sports oriented, and some with other interests. Learn to communicate openly; resolve personal conflicts as they occur so they don't build to a crisis on the night before an important race.

Vary your workouts: Train at a new, scenic place at least once a week. Change your normal training schedule, even if only for two days. Try "active rest" by doing a different sport for a few days (e.g., hiking, swimming, inline skating, cycling, or cross-country skiing). You'll get a tremendous psychological boost and probably not lose any of your fitness level. Put new spark in your training schedule by doing interval work, tempo work (fast 20-30 minute training), or fartlek training (variable speeds), rather than slogging along at the same old pace.

Enjoy and take the pressure off: Make a deliberate effort each day to create enjoyment in your sport, renewing your enthusiasm and excitement for training. Don't try to force your physical improvement. Lighten up on your rigid training schedule and exercise according to your feelings each day. Remove the strict deadlines and race dates which have been cast in stone. Let your next breakthrough occur naturally, at its own pace, when the internal conditions are right. Use setbacks as learning opportunities. Do the best that you can do, draw out the constructive lessons from every workout and race, and then move on. Look for advantages in every situation, even if the conditions are less than ideal.

Sport offers a wonderful chance to free ourselves for short periods and experience intensity and excitement not readily available elsewhere in our lives. In endurance sports we can live out our quest for personal control by seeking out and continuously meeting challenges that are within our capability. To develop an inner desire and maximize your true potential, make the most of the talents you have and stretch the limits of your abilities, both physically and psychologically. Athletics can become a means to personal growth and enjoyment of the pursuit of your goals.

In my personal interview with Alberto Salazar, three-time winner of the New York City Marathon, I asked him about his perspective on running and life. He told me, "When I coach high school kids, I try to convey to them is that winning a race is not nearly as important as the lessons they take from their training and racing experience. They can transfer their confidence, self-discipline, and perseverance from sports directly into the rest of their lives."

Try incorporating the profile above into your mental preparation, and you can learn to live more fully, train more healthfully, and feel exactly the way you want to feel.

Power Words for Creating Desire

Now try repeating each of these power words two times:

I believe in myself, I radiate an inner confidence.

I am fully focused and self-directed during my workouts.

I am strengthening my motivation and drive every day.

I am becoming better friends with my body.

I like myself more and more each day.

I see steady improvement in physical fitness and strength

CHAPTER 4

OLYMPIC THINKING FOR PEAK PERFORMANCE

**“Sports is the complete metaphor
For comprehending all of life’s challenges”**

4. Olympic Thinking: For Peak Performance

By Dr. JoAnn Dahlkoetter (<http://www.DrJoAnn.com>)

Misty Hyman, a student at Stanford University, pulled off one of the biggest upsets of the 2000 Olympic games with her gold medal swim in the 200-meter butterfly. This is the event that people will remember for decades. Confident, calm, and in the moment, Misty accomplished the unthinkable. She beat Australia's "Madam Butterfly," who had been undefeated for six years. Misty beat Suzie O'Neil, the world record holder, in her best event on her home turf. In the process she swam 2:05:88, setting new Olympic and American records and clocking the 2nd fastest time in history.

I had the opportunity to interview Misty just two months after her Olympic gold medal swim.

JoAnn Dahlkoetter: It sounds like you've been very busy since you got your gold medal in Sydney.

Misty Hyman: Yes, during the week after my event I was on the Today Show four times, then I was on Good Morning America, followed by an interview with Bob Costa. Shortly after the Olympics, the swim team got to visit the White House and meet the President. And just last week the Olympic gold medalists were honored at the *Sports Illustrated* Athlete of the Year Awards in New York. I got to meet Tiger Woods, talk with Michael Johnson, and ride in a limousine with Sugar Ray Leonard. Lance Armstrong was honored with an award as well.

JD: What was the road to the Olympics like for you? Were there mental hurdles that you had to overcome?

MH: Oh, definitely! We arrived in Sydney three weeks prior to the competition. The Olympic Village was overwhelming; there was so much energy. *Sports Illustrated* would put on these wonderful parties. You'd see athletes from so many countries. It was exciting and yet tiring. There would be those self doubts that would come up. "Am I good enough? What am I made of? Do I belong here?"

Being in Sydney was frustrating at times. When you're back at home everything happens like clockwork. When you get to the Village, you're out of your normal routine. There's a loss of control. There was a lot of waiting around. You have to take buses everywhere. You know you're in a team setting. You have to make a lot of decisions based on other people's schedules.

We were lucky to have people like Dr. John Moore, our team chiropractor. There was a set-up called the High Performance

Center. That was where the U.S. team people had a massage staff, physical therapists, and sports medicine doctors. In the past you didn't have a facility to meet with those types of people.

JD: Take me through your experience two days before your race.

MH: The first couple of days after I arrived in the Village, I ended up twisting my ankle, just walking down the stairs. So I was limping around for a while and had to miss a practice. I was really nervous about that. I couldn't believe it. That was a week before my event. They taped up my ankle. But it was a little thing, maybe just nerves. But that gradually went away.

Then the day before the opening ceremonies I came down with a 24-hour Australian flu bug. I was completely out of it. I was really tired with a bad stomach ache. So I ended up sleeping for 18 hours one day, going on a new anti-flu medication, and not being able to eat for a day. Because of that, I decided not to march in the opening ceremonies. I think that was a good decision, because there would be a lot of walking, and I would have to stay up late.

The swimming events start on the first day of the Olympics. So it's always a big decision whether or not to be in the opening ceremonies. I'm glad I made that decision, but it was so hard to watch it on TV, being so close to the event and not being able to go. The greatest thing was every morning I could wake up and look out my window and see the Olympic torch. It was so beautiful. I would get the chills each day, just gazing at it. I would think, I can't believe I'm here. It was just like a dream come true.

JD: Did you ask yourself, "Am I going to be well enough for the race?"

MH: Absolutely. My coach, Richard Quick, had to give me a big pep talk. A lot of decisions had to be made there. And when you're facing something that big, every little decision becomes huge. I had spent all summer doing everything I possibly could to prepare for the event. So when it came down to the final few days, every decision I made seemed so crucial. I probably blew it out of proportion.

So while I was recovering from the flu, Richard said, "You know, this isn't going to set you back. You're in good enough shape; you've done everything you can for this event. You've got plenty of time to recover." But I was really questioning myself. When you're at the Olympics, you try to control everything, yet you can't control all the variables.

Looking back, I had also been on antibiotics all summer because of an illness I had contracted earlier. In May of this year I got a multi-layered sinus infection. There was fluid in my lungs. When it was diagnosed, I almost had to quit swimming completely. So I'm thinking, "Am I falling apart, or am I gonna get myself together here?"

My event was on the fourth night of the meet. The timing was perfect. Every night we would go to the meet, and I would watch my teammates swim. There's something special about being on the U.S. team. There is a certain energy about the team, a camaraderie, a spirit, a synergy that's so powerful. I think that's one of the keys to our success. There is something special about wearing the red, white, and blue. You are out there, and you know why you are doing this. Everybody wants you to do well. When you look at your teammates up in the stands and they're cheering for you, there's a unique kind of power that really can make a difference. I would come home every night and be walking on air.

When you're watching your teammates down there, you know that they are the people you're going to see at the village that night. Yet it still seems like you're watching a movie. The sound was so amazing, 18,000 people cheering. For swimming that's pretty incredible.

JD: Tell me about the night before your race.

MH: On the night before my race, it took me about an hour to fall asleep. I remember I had to keep reassuring myself. I'd say I know what I need to do, I don't need to question myself. I had to have that core belief in myself and have the courage to just let it all go.

The qualifying actually takes place over two days. They have the prelims and the semi-finals on the first day. Then, the finals are the following night. During the prelims I was very relaxed. I knew that even despite a sprained ankle and being sick, in the summer leading up to the Olympics I had the best training camp of my life. I had some training times that were absolutely unbelievable, breakthroughs like I had never seen before. Then after the trials, I made even more improvements. So I had that confidence to build on. That made a huge difference. Every day the coaches would say, "I've never seen anybody do what you did today."

Dennis Pursley is the national team director. He used to coach Mary T. Meagher. She held the World records for butterfly. She's the one whose Olympic and American records I broke. He used to train her, and he said, "Mary never could have done what you just did today." She was the legendary Madam Butterfly because she held the 100 and 200-meter butterfly world records since 1981. They were the longest held world records in swimming. Nobody had even come close until 1998. Then Suzie O'Neil broke her 200 butterfly WR, and Jenny Thompson broke her 100 butterfly WR.

So that was really special for me to hear that feedback leading up to the Olympics. I knew that my body was ready. Actually I think the illness may have been a blessing in disguise. One of the

biggest keys to me doing well was that. So maybe those things happened for a reason. I realized I needed to sleep for 18 hours. Without being sick I wouldn't have let myself do that.

I remember feeling nervous while going through my warm-ups. I felt different than I ever had before. Things would just happen naturally when I would get in the water. Even though I wasn't thinking about my stroke, I would just do things correctly without really trying. My body would just take over.

I remember every time I would walk into that ready room, before going on deck, I'd just get into 'the zone.' I would just be relaxed. For some reason at the Olympics I said, "OK, I'm not going to try to control this. I'm going to allow it to happen." So I walked in there and just relaxed, and said, "OK, I can do this."

JD: So you didn't let your head get in the way.

MH: Exactly. So I didn't get up on the blocks thinking I'm at the Olympics, there's 18,000 people, this is the biggest race of my life. Instead of building it up like that I said, "OK, this is a swim meet, I've done all that I can to prepare, I'm just going to go out there and have fun."

JD: Take me through each race. What was your mental state like during the prelims?

MH: In the prelims I was pretty relaxed. I took two seconds off my best time. My previous best time was 2:09:20. I swam 2:07:60 in the prelims and qualified first for the semis. I felt so smooth, relaxed, and within myself. I got really excited when I saw my time. People were saying, "Misty, it's just the prelims, you're not supposed to go that fast." I was cheering like I had won the gold medal. Going into the race, I had no idea how I would place. Then, taking two seconds off my best time, how can you argue with that?

JD: Were you more nervous in the semi-finals?

MH: Definitely, I was a little more nervous. I was saying, "I don't know if I can do it again. Was that just a fluke? Did I already use everything up in the prelims? Now I've set myself up for people expecting me to go that fast."

I like to warm up for my event really close to the time that I march out for the race. We have these new Speedo fast skin suits made from a new material. They are full body suits that are faster than shaved skin.

The night of the semi-finals I was nervous. Richard said, "You need to get over there. They're waiting for you in the ready room." I ran to the bathroom to put on my fast suit. When I pulled it

up, a big hole ripped up the side of my suit. It was huge; I was screaming, “This is the semi-finals of my only Olympic race!”

So I took the suit off and threw it in the garbage. Richard ran and got me a second suit. So I’m saying, “Stay calm, keep my composure, don’t use up all my energy.” But I’m thinking, they’re going to start the race without me. You know, being in the zone is really important, and at that point I kind of lost it.

Then when I finally got my suit on and was ready to go, there were long TV delays. So I ended up sitting in the ready room for 20 minutes. Now I was actually nervous about not being warmed up enough instead of about getting there in time.

They announced our event and I got up on the blocks. I managed to get it together enough to swim the race. Richard and I both knew that I was not in my optimal mental state. So the fact that I swam a 2:07 again while not in the perfect state, and I was able to pull it off by sheer will gave me a lot of confidence.

JD: Were you thinking, can I go even faster in the finals?

MH: Yes. I was pretty excited about the possibilities. The night before the race I slept pretty well because I was tired from swimming two races. The next morning I slept in, had breakfast, and went to the pool. I remember stretching and packing a towel in my bag. I noticed I was shaking, thinking I can’t believe this is actually the finals of the Olympics.

JD: Did you do anything the night before your race to help you get ready mentally?

MH: I visualized my race. I like to visualize my kick count and walk through my race in my head. I always count my kicks underwater so I have an idea of how many strokes I want to do on each length. I would visualize what I was going to think about on the blocks. I remember thinking I just really wanted to start the race. There had been so much anticipation for this one moment. Like let’s just get to the punch line. I remember that night before the race I ate dinner alone. I actually ate a lot, since I’m an emotional eater. I remember eating way too much, but I was thinking, I have to have enough fuel. I felt very introverted. I really didn’t want to talk to anybody or see anybody. Then I listened to some of my favorite songs. I always listen to the Sting song “Fields of Gold” before I go to bed.

How to Handle High Level Pressure

JD: What was your mental set like going into the finals?

MH: Everything went so smoothly. I don't remember the events of the finals exactly. I know that I was definitely in the moment, and I wasn't thinking too much. I was doing what I needed to do. I was accepting the fact that I'm at the Olympics. I was telling myself I know how to do this.

I remember getting into the ready room. That was when I finally relaxed. My friend and teammate Katlin was with me the whole time. She was in the lane right next to me in the race. We were just joking around. When we walked out onto the deck, I remember slapping hands with her. I remember just smiling and thinking this is fun. I waved to the 18,000 people. I could see the team USA banner up there. They were cheering for us. I'm usually pretty tense during that moment before a race. But for some reason I was the most relaxed that I've ever been in my life.

I walked out there and I was thinking, all right, I'm going to show you what I can do. This is what I love. I'm going to just show the world what's inside me, what I've been doing every day of my life, and what is such a huge part of me.

One of my favorite movies is *The Cutting Edge*. It's about a figure skater and hockey player who are doing pairs skating. They end up winning a gold medal in the Olympics. Right before they start their competition, the woman says, 'I'm in the mood to kick a little ass.' It's a movie that has always inspired me.

When I marched out to the pool to swim the final race, they were actually playing a song from that movie. It was so perfect. I walked up onto the blocks and said to myself, "I'm in the mood to kick a little ass." I was laughing at myself that I could actually say that. I thought I'm just going to have fun out there. I'm going to do it.

My Dad was in the stands watching me. He said to me later, "I haven't seen you that relaxed in a very long time. I knew you were going to do well. You were smiling on the starting blocks." Richard laughed because I was the last one off the blocks when the gun went off. I told him I was too busy smiling. The amazing thing is that I was not even thinking about the fact that this was the Olympic finals. I wasn't thinking at all about Suzie O'Neil. I wasn't thinking about the fact that I was swimming in front of the whole world.

I just said to myself, "Ok, I'm going to do a 200 butterfly; I've done a million 200 butterflies in my life. I have been training for this and I know exactly what I need to do." I remember being able to feel every cell in my body and be completely present. Things felt like they were in slow motion. I dove in the water and it just clicked.

In the past I would sometimes have too much tension in my body or put too much effort out in the beginning of the race. There

are so many things to be concerned with. You just have to hit that right balance between effort and flow. And there's a certain rhythm especially for a 200 butterfly. It's such a long race you really have to manage all your energy. It's not something you can think about, it's more the sort of thing you just have to let happen.

So as I dove in, I remember feeling the cold water. I could feel how the water was flowing smoothly on my brand new suit. I remember looking down and thinking, Oh, I'm actually in the lane where the underwater camera is. Instead of forcing my arms with each stroke, they were just flowing. It's not like I was making anything happen. I just stayed in that zone the whole time. I don't think I knew exactly where the other competitors were in the race. I remember counting my kicks and strokes.

It's definitely a mental thing. In the Olympic Trials I fell apart mentally by using too much energy at the beginning. Typically I would take out the first 100 very quickly and then not be able to hold on. I'm often first to the 100, first to the 150 sometimes, but rarely first to the finish. If you get too mentally greedy, to try and get it all now, you end up using up too much energy too early. I needed to have the courage to trust myself on that last turn, and know that I could be strong enough to the finish without allowing that wall to hit. I needed to keep pushing that wall away.

In the Olympic final, for the first time in my career I said, "I know I can make it home. I know I can finish this." I said, "Nothing is going to stop me." It was that last turn that made such a difference. I really gained on the field. And that's right where I knew I was going to be able to do it.

JD: Did you know at that point that you could win the race?

MH: On the final lap I didn't actually know that I was winning. But I realized that all the pieces had finally come together. The moment I hit the wall, I knew I had just swum the best race of my life. It was amazing that I didn't feel tired at all. I had to look up at the scoreboard three times. I saw the #1 by my name, but it took a while for it to register. I hadn't really thought about the outcome. I was so wrapped up in executing my race. Then, I asked myself, "OK, number one, what does that mean? That means I just got first at the Olympics; that means I actually won the gold medal!" My teammate Katlin yelled, "You did it, you did it!" The crowd was actually silent for a long time. It was such a big upset. Everyone expected Suzie O'Neil to win. Finally I recognized I had won. Then I started screaming and smiling. The whole night I was walking on air.

It had been such a long build-up for so many years. So much went into creating the stage for this to happen. All the difficult

challenges and hard work that had led up to that moment flashed through my mind. I mean, what are the chances of that happening, to have that one breakthrough race come together on the night that it's supposed to? There are some variables you can regulate, but there are so many that you can't control. I felt a very special energy that night. I remember seeing the American Record on the scoreboard and realizing that I had just beat Suzie O'Neil. It was almost too much for me to grasp. Suzie hadn't lost a race in six years. She was defending Olympic Champion and world record holder. She is basically their national hero. There are 10 x 10 foot billboards of her face everywhere downtown. She is like the Michael Jordan of Australia. Everyone expected her to win.

The best part for me was that I really felt comfortable in my own skin. A lot of times world class athletes feel like they have something to prove or there is an image that they have to live up to. There's a certain idea of what Olympians are like, and people are always trying to live up to that. But this time I finally let go, and I was completely myself. I was honest with what I was feeling. I felt like there was no wall between me and anyone else.

JD: What was the awards ceremony like for you?

MH: The ceremony was immediately after the event. It was amazing. Ever since I was a little girl, I would go to the swim meets. They would start the meet with the national anthem. I would put my hand over my heart, and I would imagine that someday they would play it for me on that Olympic podium.

I remember this past summer when my goal became real for me. I said to my coach, "Richard, I am on a mission. Every cell in my body is moving toward this goal. I am going to do everything I can to live this dream." So when it was actually happening, I was just savoring every moment.

An Olympic gold medal is not something you do on your own. There were so many times when I was ready to throw in the towel. I could not have made it through without the support of my parents, my coach, my friends, and Dr. John Moore, my chiropractor. He would sit down and help me find solutions. He even helped me with some unique chiropractic techniques. He did emotional chiropractic work called the Durlacher technique, which is based on the meridians of the body, to help me work through some mental blocks. His support made a big difference.

JD: Now, looking back on the race and your preparation, you said all the pieces came together for you. Could you tell me what the important pieces were for you?

MH: I have been practicing mental training techniques for the past three years. So the most important piece that came together for me was the mental component - just being in the right zone and having the courage to stay within myself.

Other important elements included strength, endurance, overall health, and my stroke mechanics. The underwater factors are distance per kick, rate of kick, distance per stroke, and rate of stroke, executing my turns, and managing my breathing. I needed to learn to go out fast, but do it within myself and not spend too much energy trying to get out in front. It's all about management of energy. You have to gain a feel for the pace that's best for you.

JD: Can you give an example of a specific mental strategy that worked for you?

MH: Here's one technique: I have an inner control, a key word or phrase that I use. I will say to myself: "Get on top of that, rise above it, stay in your inner control." So I'm saying, "I'm going to do this. I've made up my mind. I've made the decision to do this." That keeps me from getting overemotional and putting up a wall. I'm able to stay open and in the moment. I tend to use up all my energy leading up to the race, thinking about it too much instead of just being in the present moment.

JD: Tell me about your experience in the closing ceremonies.

MH: That was my favorite memory of the Olympics. Before we went out into the stadium, all of the teams would meet in their different venues. The closing ceremonies are different from the opening ceremonies in that everybody gets mixed up together so there's no separation of team or sport. As we were walking toward the stadium, I was aware there were no divisions anymore. Everyone was just walking together. As we were walking through this long 100-yard tunnel into the stadium, I remember looking at all the athletes going through together. It didn't matter who had won or had who lost, what country you were from, or what sport you were involved in. We were all celebrating together.

Walking into the Olympic stadium in front of 100,000 people was such a powerful feeling. It was so overwhelming and inspirational. I started to cry. Everyone in the stands was waving lights back and forth. I had been through so much and won the gold medal. It was a great way to cap off that experience. There were TV cameras and media people from all over the world wanting to interview me. It was great to share my experience with them. I will remember that race for the rest of my life!

CHAPTER 5

THE ART OF FOCUSING for HIGH LEVEL PERFORMANCE

**“Wherever you place your attention,
your energy will follow”**

5. The Art of Focusing

By Dr. JoAnn Dahlkoetter <http://www.DrJoAnn.com>

Success in your training requires total concentration, whether you are at the novice or at the highest levels of performance. If your mind begins to wander, you can easily become distracted and lose your edge. It is not only your performance that declines, but the quality of your experience as well. You cannot take pleasure in an activity when you are not fully present.

Complete and undivided attention is difficult to come by. As an athlete, you can easily become sidetracked by a myriad of external factors or the mind's thought processes. Focusing is a challenge when there are numerous tasks to attend to (e.g., preparation for your event, work responsibilities, family demands, children's needs, etc). You may have input from several different sources at once – your coach, your training group, or your sports medicine doctor. The challenge is to integrate all of this information, separate the important issues from the nonessentials, and make important decisions about your training. Knowing how to focus and being able to maintain concentration throughout the day is critical for athletes at any level.

The Right Focus

So what is the correct focus for athletes? This depends, of course, on the particular demands of each situation. There is no one right way to focus your attention. However, there is one vital principle: successful concentration depends upon a present-centered focus where you are totally connected to the task at hand. A present-centered focus is one in which all your attention is directed to what is occurring at the present time. So, for instance, in a race, your focus may be on the competitor in front of you, or on how your body is feeling, or the decisions you are making about this information.

Concentration is the learned skill of fully attending to the task at hand and excluding irrelevant external cues and internal distractions. Internal factors for athletes might include self-doubt, fears, expectations, or fatigue. External distractions may involve heavy traffic getting to a competition, a rival competitor showing up unexpectedly, or sports equipment problems. You need to be able to concentrate in spite of these disruptions. The true test comes when

the amount of time you need to stay focused extends beyond your current abilities.

Exercise: Assess Your Focusing Ability

Practice this exercise before beginning your training each day. Find a comfortable, quiet place where you will not be interrupted and take note of the time on your watch. Close your eyes and narrow your focus to one point – your breathing. Notice your inhale and exhale. Continue this exercise for as long as you can sustain this focus. Once your mind begins to wander, open your eyes and notice the time on your watch. How much time passed since you started this task? Ten seconds? One minute?

Unfortunately, deep concentration is not as simple as it appears on the surface. The brain is not clearly programmed to stay in the present moment. The capability to assimilate large quantities of information can make it difficult to sustain attention on any one subject for long periods. Thoughts about the past or future can cry out for attention whenever you attempt to focus one subject.

The critical mind too often focuses on the mistakes and the “what ifs” – what might have been and what should have occurred. You think about the training you should have done, or the critical move that was made too late in the competition, or the great shape you were in last year. Focusing on what could have happened will not change the past, but the present can suffer as a result of trying.

Now let’s look at how top athletes tune in to the present moment during an optimal performance. Throughout these periods athletes focus on the precise details of the event that allow them to respond optimally. They often report intense concentration on a small action – passing a competitor on the run, or finding just the right swimming form. Athletes notice, evaluate, and fine-tune their actions without emotion or judgment.

Lance Armstrong, remarkably soon after defeating testicular cancer, completed one of the most inspiring comebacks in sports history with his dramatic and commanding seven consecutive wins of the Tour de France. In most of those races, it was stage 10 on the Alps d’Huez, that Lance would take control of the race and explode into a light-footed dance up the mountains. When you looked into his eyes as he peddled up the hills, you could see his intense focus. You could feel his energy and sense his passion for doing what he loves the most – riding and racing.

Athletes at any level can experience this same single-minded focus and drive that you see in elite athletes. Concentration

is a learned skill that can improve with practice. The key is to recognize that good concentration is a constant vigil. The mind is like a gypsy - there will always be a certain amount of mind-drifting. But if you regularly work on your attention span, you can begin to take control of the most distracting situations. As you sharpen your focus, you can experience the effortless stretching of the mind and body as you are totally immersed in the present. You will gain a keen sense of “the big picture”, and be able to anticipate the correct moves to handle any training or racing situation that comes your way.

Exercise for Focusing

Begin by doing deep abdominal breathing where you feel your belly rising and falling with each breath. As you inhale, imagine that your breath is carrying particles of concentration into your body. As you exhale, notice that all the distractions and stress are drifting away. The incoming breath is like a sedative that supplies you the peace you need to focus on the present.

CHAPTER 6

TOOL FOR FOCUSING on PEAK PERFORMANCE

**“Success is only one step out of
your comfort zone”**

6. Tools for Focusing

By Dr. JoAnn Dahlkoetter, <http://www.DrJoAnn.com>

In the last section we discussed the fundamentals of focusing and found that complete attention requires constant vigilance. Successful concentration depends upon having a present-centered focus where you are totally connected to the task at hand while excluding irrelevant environmental cues and internal distractions. Yet the mind often focuses on the mistakes of the past, thinking about the “what ifs” – what might have been and what should have occurred.

Now, in order to learn from your mistakes, you must correct them as they are taking place, and that means paying attention to why the last mile was run much slower or why your swimming stroke was deteriorating. Tactical adjustments require observing the results of your past actions. However, in order to be effective, analyses about what just happened should be quick and objective, not influenced by emotion. The important thing is to dissociate the emotional content from the objective fact of what is occurring in the present moment. You may not be able to entirely tune out the distractions, but as long as you don't let them affect your feelings, the diversion need not detract from your focus.

Just as the past is not a healthy target to dwell upon, pondering the future can be just as damaging. Thinking too far ahead can keep you from fully experiencing the present. Future events cannot be controlled; you simply allow them to unfold as you remain grounded in the present.

In my interview with Olympic decathlon champion Dan O'Brien he said, “I remember one track meet in Europe when everything was going perfectly. I was about to do my final attempt on the high jump. As the audience started clapping, I thought, if I make this jump, I can win this thing. That was a big mistake. As soon as I focused on getting that medal, I just fell apart.”

The possibility of meeting your goal can be a strong incentive, especially if you feel you are getting close to your destination. However when you focus too intently on the outcome, you can easily lose sight of what you need to do to get there. The

pressure of performance can be overwhelming when your focus is primarily on the end result. However, focusing only on the event itself will allow you to fully connect to what is happening in the present moment.

Tools For Focusing On The Present

Using Process Goals

In addition to your time orientation, the object of your focus is also critical for doing well in training and competing. Attending to process goals is far more effective than thinking about the outcome. A process focus is where you concentrate on the specific task you are doing. So your focus, for instance, is on your technique, your breathing, your pace, or your mental attitude. A process focus keeps your attention directed toward what needs to be done right now.

Refocusing

If you lose your focus your aim is to regain your attention as quickly as possible. When distracting thoughts interrupt your flow, you want to re-tune your brain into the correct psychological channel. Awareness of inattention is the first step. The sooner you notice the lapse in attention, the quicker you can turn it around. The second step is selecting another point in which to direct your mind. You can return your attention to the same focus you had before you were interrupted, or go to something else of importance at that moment.

When you're doing a triathlon, for example, the right focus depends on what is happening at that moment (e.g. finishing the swim, making a quick transition to the bike). So concentration becomes dynamic and changes according to particular challenges of your event. Knowing what to focus on is a skill that you can develop with time and experience. As you encounter a variety of scenarios, you can store your responses in memory, and improve your ability to take action. You'll learn to return your focus to what's relevant more quickly.

Changing Your Focus

Athletes also need to be flexible in their range of focus – being able to switch gears whenever necessary. For instance, during

the start of a marathon you need to have a wide focus, and attend to what is happening all around you. You want to be aware of others so you don't get run over by the people behind you. By the middle of the race, you are more attuned to proper pacing, your breathing, and your running form. In the final miles of the race, you switch to a more narrow focus, where you are putting all or your energies into putting one foot in front of the other and getting yourself to the finish line.

Mentally Rehearsing

Successful athletes need to prepare for their events in advance. They have practiced every scenario in their mind a 100 times before it occurs. The more your plan is rehearsed ahead of time in training, the more automatic it will become, and the less thought will be required during the actual performance. You will be able to react appropriately to what is happening each moment. Once you have a game plan in place, you can keep your mind on what is relevant, and follow the plan when it really counts.

Exercise for a Present-Centered Focus

Whenever you want to concentrate on something, find a way to become more attracted to it. The next time you are out training, if you want to go faster, think of a song that has an upbeat cadence and synchronize your movement to that rhythm. If you want to focus on your breathing, imagine that your lungs are expanding, filling every cell in your body with clean, healthy oxygen. When attending to your form, watch your shadow on the road, and get feedback from your "shadow coach."

As you learn the art of this focused state of consciousness, you can become completely absorbed in your event, to the exclusion of all other outside influences. You may experience an unusual sense of stepping into a heightened state of awareness. You can be totally tuned in to the present moment, as the everyday world seems to recede into the background. You feel more self-assured, and more fully integrated. Your mind, body, and spirit are completely engaged in your experience. These are the times when you feel most energetic and fully alive, and can perform your absolute best.

I hope you've enjoyed this book, and I look forward to you reading my next book called "Olympic Thinking", the 3 P method.

7. Your Performing Edge: Top 10 Tips

Dr. JoAnn Dahlkoetter - www.DrJoAnn.com

10. POSITIVE IMAGES: Use your mental images throughout your event or workout to create feelings of speed and power. (e.g., If you're walking or running and you come to an unexpected hill visualize a magnet pulling you effortlessly to the top). Use visualization before, during and after your training to build confidence and new motivation.

9. POWER WORDS: Make positive self-statements continually. Be aware of your negative thoughts early on. Don't fight with them; simply acknowledge their presence, and then substitute positive power words. (e.g., When you're thinking: "This hurts too much, I want to lie down and die"; say to yourself: "This feeling is connected with getting healthier and doing my absolute best").

8. PRESENT FOCUS: Practice being in the present moment. Be Right On – Right Here – Right Now. Remind yourself to stay in the here and now. Let past and future events fade into the background. Remember, the only moment we can do anything about is the one we're in right now.

7. ADVANTAGE: Use everything in the workout to your advantage. For example, if another person passes you, tuck in behind and go with his or her energy for as long as possible. You may catch a "second wind" and be carried on to a personal record.

6. CHUNKING-GOALS: Focus on your immediate target. Break your training goals down into small, manageable pieces and begin to focus only on the first portion, not the entire practice (e.g., Say to yourself: "I'm just relaxing and getting my rhythm during the first part, or the first workout session").

5. BODY SCAN: Pay close attention to your tension level and training form. Do a body scan while working out and relax your tight muscles frequently. Ask yourself: "Are my shoulders and

neck relaxed; how does this pace feel; how much energy is left in my legs?”

4. PAIN AS EFFORT: If you have “good pain” that is not seriously damaging your body, just shift attention to your breathing or cadence of movement, and let the discomfort fade into the background. You can also use the pain as feedback. Register it not as pain but as effort level. Say: “Now I know exactly how hard I’m working. I know how this pace feels. My body is doing what it should be doing.”

Would you like to learn my other three tips? You can!

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Dr. JoAnn Dahlkoetter, best-selling author of **YOUR PERFORMING EDGE™**, is an **OLYMPIC** Keynote Speaker and Performance Coach from **STANFORD**, sports psychologist to **OLYMPIC Gold Medalists** and CEOs, **Winner** of the **San Francisco Marathon** and 2nd in the **World Championship Hawaii Ironman Triathlon**. She is an internationally recognized Keynote Speaker, TV SHOW host, columnist, and TV expert commentator on **NBC** and **ABC**.

Dr. JoAnn provides **corporate training** and **personal coaching** programs for sports, business, wellness, and reaching your potential in life.

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About the Author

Dr. JoAnn Dahlkoetter, best-selling author of *Your Performing Edge*, is an internationally recognized keynote speaker and world-class athlete. She has been on the medical staff at Stanford University Medical Center for 10 years and is a licensed psychologist. She is winner of the San Francisco Marathon in 2:43:20, placed 2nd in the Hawaii Ironman Triathlon, and was rated the No. 1 triathlete in the U.S. by *Triathlete Magazine*. Dr. Dahlkoetter has appeared on ABC's *Wide World of Sports* and NBC's *Sports World*. Her work has been published in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* and *Runner's World*, and she has been featured in *USA Today*, *Time Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek* and *Sports Illustrated*. She is currently a contributor to several national magazines, including *Triathlete Magazine* and *Running Times*.

Dr. Dahlkoetter is a Diplomate in the field of Performance Psychology and Sports Psychology. In her 30 years of clinical practice she has worked with numerous Olympic and professional athletes, CEO's, performing artists, and those in high stress careers. She has been on the faculty at the University of California at Berkeley, and she frequently conducts workshops for corporations, universities, and sports clinics worldwide. She currently maintains a full-time consulting practice and continues to train and race in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her work with Olympic athletes and top-level business executives gives her special insight into using the mind-body connection to achieve the best in personal performance. Her work includes:

- **Sports Psychology Performance Coach Certification at <http://www.PerformingEdgeCoach.com>**
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*The Psychology of Winning***

Dr. JoAnn Dahlkoetter is an in-demand, internationally recognized keynote speaker, performance consultant and world-class athlete. Her clients and audiences include Fortune 500 top executives and multi-national corporations, professional athletes, coaches, surgeons, and high achievers. Her work with Olympic champions and business executives gives her special insight into using the mind-body connection to achieve the best in personal performance.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

- **Consultant to Olympic and professional athletes**
- **Winner of the San Francisco Marathon**
- **2nd in the Hawaii Ironman Triathlon**
- **Stanford University Medical Center, medical staff member**
- **Featured in *Sports Illustrated*, *Newsweek*, and *USA Today***
- **Frequent expert commentator on ABC, NBC, BBC-TV networks**
- **Over 500 media interviews and published articles**
- **Contributor to *Triathlete* and *Running Times Magazine***
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Recommended Resources

Dr. William Dunbar, M.D. (805) 963-2729

<http://santabarbaraorthopedicsurgery.com/>

Dr. Dunbar is my Orthopedic surgeon, who performed surgery on my fractured hip following my bicycle accident in 2011. Now I'm back to successful racing again, getting faster every day.

Dr. Robert Plant, D.D.S. (650) 367-0562

<http://www.robertplantdds.com/>

Dr. Plant has been my personal dentist for over 20 years. He is also a world class triathlete and knows how to take good care of your teeth.

Dr. Les Waddel D.C. (800) 871-7970

<http://www.docwaddel.com>

Dr. Waddel has been my sports chiropractor for 30 years. He is an experienced triathlete and knows how to take care of athletes' needs.

Dr. John Moore D.C. (650) 851-4860

Dr. Moore has been my sports chiropractor for 20 years. He has worked with the Olympic team athletes and understands athletes' needs.

Dr. Sunny Young D.D.S. (650) 568-9889

Dr. Young has an Endodontics practice, and does outstanding work with root canals. He has worked on my teeth with great success.

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