



Wake Up Eager Workforce Podcast, Episode 46
A Series About Wake Up Eager Leader Habits: Enter the Zone: How Athletes Get In The Zone – An Interview with Sarah Derrenbacher -- Produced By Suzie Price

Enter the Zone – Transcript
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Suzie Price: “All of us, every day are standing right next to this “River of Flow,” and we have a choice whether we surrender and drop into that “River of Flow,” which gives us a sense of limitless potential or do we stay in a place where we need to control and predict everything?” That’s a quote from Coach Sarah Derrenbacher, she’s a Leadership and Performance Coach and we’re talking today about one of the Wake Up Eager Leader Habits which is: Enter the zone, and Sarah’s talking about the “River of Flow.” We also talk about playing from the neck up and working outside the pocket of play, what that means in athletic performance and what it can mean for you as a leader, how it can impact your level of performance. A lot of what we’re talking about today with Sarah is her work with athletes and how that translates into work in the office and in your organization. Sarah shares four performance barriers that can keep athletes “out of the zone” or “out of the flow,” five actions that you can take to prepare for high performance and four actions you can use when you’re in high pressure performance situations. So I know that you want to prepare for high performance, I know that you have high pressure situations that you’re dealing with, these tips and this insight I think will be inspirational to you and I think you’re going to walk away with some new thoughts about managing mindset and dropping into, as Sarah calls it the “River of Flow,” what that looks like, what that means, and how you can create that for yourself.

Suzie: Also, if you’re a client and you worked with the TriMetrix assessment, there’ll be some references to some of the parallels about what’s being covered in our conversation today to that assessment, if you haven’t taken the assessment, no worries, but, there’ll be some nuggets in there for you if you are TriMetrix client. So I’m excited to share this information with you, it’s “How Athletes Get in the Zone,” Michael hit it.

Intro: Welcome to the Wake Up Workforce Eager Podcast, a show designed for leaders, trainers and consultants who are responsible for employee selection and professional development. Each episode is packed full with insider tips, best practices, expert interviews and inspiration. Please welcome the host who is helping leaders, trainers and consultants everywhere, Suzie Price.

Suzie: Welcome, welcome, welcome, episode number 46 with Suzie Price. Glad to be here. So fun to talk to you and to share this information, to have spent the time I did with Sarah Derrenbacher on our topic today, which is, “How Athletes Get Into the Zone” and how we translate that into YOU and the Wake Up Eager habit of entering the zone. I am an Assessment Facilitator and Author and Professional Facilitator; I am the Producer of this and the Owner of Priceless Professional Development. We are in our 15th year and I want to tell you about audible.com. They provide some support to podcasts and give us a gift that we can give to you. Audible is a service that makes it very easy to listen to audio books on your iPhone, and any of your smart phone type tools. If you use our link audibletrial.com/wakeupeagerworkforce and you sign up for audible.com for a 30 day free trial, they’ll give you a free audio book. So they have over 150,000 titles that you can choose from. As I mentioned, you can listen to them on your

iPhone, Android, Kindle or MP3 player. Recently, one of the books I recently listened to was the *The Alchemist*, a fable about following your dream. It was interesting. It was one of the favorite books of Tim Ferriss, which is a podcast I enjoy listening to. He always has interesting and outrageous topics, and he interviews interesting people and I learned a lot from him in regard to podcasting and how to interview, as well as his content. So I listened to that book, *The Alchemist* and really enjoyed it. And several of the books that we talk about today, actually all of them we talk about today in my interview with Sarah, are available on audible.com. We talk about *Presence*, *Finding Flow*, *Finding your Why*, *The Rise of Superman*. There'll be links to all of those books in the show notes so you can get them from Amazon. But you could also go to audibletrial.com/wakeupeagerworkforce, that's all one word, audibletrial.com/wakeupeagerworkforce. And if you try that out, you get to keep your audio book whether you keep audible.com or not. And it gives us a little bit of recognition through audible that you visited there.

Suzie: So I mentioned that we're talking about in the Wake Up Eager Habit, enter the zone and I want to take a minute just to tell you about this series that I talked about at the end of our last podcast. It's a series that I'm doing right now on the five Wake Up Eager Habits. The Wake Up Eager Habits are explained through an acronym, eager, E-A-G-E-R, and they are habits that are applicable across all levels of leadership and in your whole life. I started blogging about these areas back in 2009. They have been things that I've been thinking about and working on and learning my entire life and I believe that they are five key areas that are important to having a successful and happy leadership career. They are both personal and professional. They are based on scientific research, professional development, and my own experience. So I'm happy to revisit these. Here are the five habits and here's the acronym; E - Enter the zone and I've got two podcasts that I will have on this in this series, A - Activate greatness, I'm working on a book around that topic now, G - Grow trust, E - Evaluate job fit, I have a book on that, *How to Hire Superior Performers*, and R - Recalibrate daily, and I have a book on that. So eventually I'd like to have five books, one for each of the habits. So the habits are a combination of technical things like evaluate job fit, you can't create a Wake Up Eager Workforce if you're not hiring the right people. And then interpersonal skills, activate greatness, grow trust, and then the two ends, they are about some of your own self-management, self-awareness, so that you bring the best of who you are to your work. So I'm excited about this.

Suzie: So, enter the zone, what is it? Because that's what this podcast is about. It's a focus on working at a high level of energy. It's your ability to reduce your internal resistance and focus your efforts and outlook so that you not only excel in your work, but you're positively influencing and empowering others. And you'll hear a lot of that when we talk today with Sarah because we talk about her top player on this basketball team had a fear of failure and so she had internal mental tension even though she was a standout and she was a key leader on the team. So Sarah provides tools around that, how do I mentally get out of my head and get away from the worry of failure and produce, and then you know the influence that she had on the rest of the team when she got into alignment or she entered the zone. Athletes and artists talk about it a lot, about being in the flow or being inspired or spiritual teachers will talk about surrender or getting in the vortex, all of that to me, I see that as the same thing, which is entering the zone, getting in this place of high performance where you're not pushing against what you're trying to produce or do and you're in the zone, you're in the flow and I believe that you can consciously choose to work towards being in the zone by growing your confidence, growing your expertise, managing your mindset, and doing a lot of the things that we're talking about today in this



podcast so that you bring all of who you are to your work as a leader physically, mentally, and spiritually. Work is a lot more fun when you're doing that and that's what we want. We want you to have high performance and to enjoy it while you're doing the work.

Suzie: So let me read to you a little bit about Sarah's background. She's a Leadership and Performance Coach. She's works with entrepreneurs, executives and sports teams in the areas of peak performance, leadership, team culture, flow mindset. She's got 15 years of experience, worked with a variety of businesses. The name of her business is The Evolve Ability and I'll put a link to her website in the show notes. And she helps athletes and leaders grow beyond limitations and a lot of times those limitations are mental, it's just not all mechanics. She uses neuroscience research, mind-body alignment practices and human growth and development strategies. And so a lot of what we're going to talk about today, in fact that's how she was introduced to me, was through her work that she did with the Rochester Institute of Technology Women's Basketball team. So the head coach engaged her to help that team get through a very specific goal. They had a three week, six game losing streak, so the pressure was on and they had had this kind of losing streak in past seasons, so the Coach talked to Sarah and said, "Hey, help me help the players improve their leadership skills, help them gain their confidence, get more self-aware and help them perform well under pressure." So they knew how to play, they were good players, but it wasn't coming out in the games shown by the six game losing streak. And there were 15 new records for the program after the work they did together. So great results. Just a couple of the records, they had their best record in the program, history of Rochester Institute of Technology, they had a 23-7 season, they have their first ever NCAA tournament victory and they had Liberty League Coaching Staff of the Year. Those are just some of the accolades out of the 15 that I'm mentioning here. They had a tremendous number of breakthroughs from the staff to the players and the overwhelming feedback from the athletes was, not only was it their best season ever, but it was the most fun they had compared to any other season and that they would take what they learned with them as they move forward in their career. So that's pretty awesome, and that is the goal and one of the things, and there's another quote by Sarah and then we'll kick it off to get into the interview. She closed our interview with this, "Elite performance does not have to come at the expense of yourself. When you drop into the river flow, you can be more of you and deliver high performance." So that's what it's all about, drop into the river and let's talk about that now with Sarah. What does it mean to drop into the river flow? We're going to kick it off with a quirky question and then we get right into the content. Hope you enjoy it.

Suzie: Hi Sarah. Welcome to the show.

Sarah Derrenbacher: Thank you for having me. I'm glad to be here.

Suzie: Glad you're here. We are going to start with our quirky questions, which before the call you said it was not easy to pick which ones you wanted to have me ask you. I cannot wait to hear your answers, it is just a way to get to know you. What is your favorite possession?

Sarah: Favorite possession? I am not super attached to things, but one of the things that I have kind of carried with me through all of my different moves in my life is this tiny photograph of my great grandmother, and she is in this 1920s flapper dress, complete with the hat on top and she is smoking a cigar with her pearls on and her foot kind of cropped up on this pail, and the whole picture just kind of radiates this freedom and a little bit of that inner wild that she very much had.



Suzie: What a great picture.

Sarah: Yes. Yes.

Suzie: That was probably taken when?

Sarah: 1930s.

Suzie: Wow. And she's smoking a cigar, got a foot propped up, but is all dressed in female outfit. Very girly.

Sarah: Yep. She's got her heels on, her pearls and almost this kind of 1920s, 30s flapper dress style attire.

Suzie: I like it, I like that, she must sit on your shoulder and guide you as you do the things you do.

Sarah: Yeah, she sure does.

Suzie: Love that. Amazing how those folks, we don't even know it when we're little, but they kind of become our way showers going forward.

Sarah: They sure do. She and I had a very special connection. There was a lot that was said in the silence between us and she is very much still with me.

Suzie: I love that. Let's dig in some more now, talk about how athletes get in the zone? And what's so perfect about our discussion or you taking time to be with us today is, you not only work in Corporate America but you work with athletes. So this whole idea, and I'm just going to preface this a little bit so that everybody listening will get where I am coming from and then you and I will definitely know that we're in sync, Wake Up Eager Leader Habits is: Enter the zone. And usually when we're talking about that, it's about reducing resistance, it's about internal resistance of your mental and emotional focus, it's about excelling in your daily life, it's about in your work and as well as how you influence others being a leader and it includes spending time focusing your mind and your energy so that you go to meetings and as a leader the work you do you perform at a high level, work on reducing your internal resistance. Talk about a situation about athletes, since you do both athletes and leaders and work with both athletes and leaders, where an athlete was struggling to meet their goal and it might be a female since the basketball team might be your example, but what was getting in the way for this athlete to meet their goal of performance. And then how did you work through with them so they could get back in the zone or get into their high performance?

Sarah: This is a really exciting topic for me to talk about and particularly this example, so it was a female athlete, happened to be a fourth year student in college. She's in the physician's assistant program and so she's got this jam-packed curriculum. She's brilliant. She was carrying a 3.9 average, team captain and she was a phenomenal presence, and yet even with all of that going for her, she was crippled by fear inside of these big game situations. She could show up to practice and have the scrimmages of her life leading up to this really big game and once

Friday night rolled around and it was time to perform she went into this kind of paralysis, her depth of field or “court vision” is what it’s called in basketball, shrunk. She would get out there and she would play reactive versus proactive. She would miss most of the shots that she had made all week in practice, they were close, but they rarely would go in and she would fall on defense, which are kind of quote unquote, mistakes that just were not present in practice leading up into this game. We had a meeting and we started through this kind of inquiry process, really looking at and identifying, okay, what is it, you know, that she is afraid of, knowing that fear really constricts and provide some pretty heavy resistance for us in performance, and it became clear that she had this fear of failure, which is not uncommon for humans obviously and given you know, physician’s assistant program maintaining a 3.9 average, right? Failure wasn’t an option for her.

Suzie: And really with high performers, people think they don’t have any fear, but I think it’s what propels them to be a high performer. Right? Was that what was going on with her?

Sarah: Yes, absolutely. And so there’s actually this thing called “The challenge to skill ratio,” that’s talked a lot about in being in the zone or what I call “being in flow,” which is...

Suzie: Challenge to what?

Sarah: Is the challenge to skill ratio

Suzie: To skill ratio. Ok.

Sarah: Which is to say, in low stress situations, those typically produce low performance in most cases, in high stress situations, that we’re in too high of stress situations, oftentimes that produces a low performance. And so the idea is to find the middle, to find that optimum, kind of what I call “taughtness,” where it’s enough stress to push you just beyond your comfort level, but not so much stress that it causes that shutdown, that paralysis.

Suzie: Okay. So you’re challenge to skill ratio. That’s a great thought. I think that’s awesome. So for her, she had the high skill in this, but the challenge went up, her ratio change, is that right?

Sarah: Yes. Yes, exactly. And so, you know, the experience that she was having as she went onto the court was this really disconnected experience. She was playing the game from what I call the neck up, just entirely in her head. And so for my...

Suzie: Yup, yup.

Sarah: Yeah, so her mind would take over, but obviously when you’re trying to be in the zone, you need all of yourself in those really important moments. So she was playing from inside of the fear versus coming from inside of the trust in her ability. And so as we continue to kind of unpack this fear, what we ended up doing was redefining failure, right? And she came up with this idea that failure is not making a mistake or misstep on the court, failure is simply not putting in the effort to be the best that you can be, because we all know we can have the game of our lives or the presentation of our lives and we’re probably gonna make some mistakes inside of

those really important games. But that's not failure. In fact, if you actually learn to anticipate that failure as part of high performance, you will be less stuck when that failure happens.

Suzie: So did she resist that? I see this, and maybe you have too in corporate, especially with high performers, it takes a little while before they'll admit or even realize, maybe they don't even know that they're playing or working from the neck up and have this ratio being off, their challenge to skill ratio. So in high stress situations they're not performing well, but they would deny for quite a period of time if you were to try to say, "Do you have a fear of failure?" How hard was it to help her realize or get to the realization that that was getting in the way, because I think, I don't know if it is just men or if it's just in corporate because of the fear of corporate oversight. Any thoughts on that?

Sarah: Absolutely. I think fear has been kind of a terrible four letter word for a long time and not just in corporate but for humans, right? Be fearless. All of the rhetoric that we are sold is to have everything under control. And so yes, really peeling back the layers and finding out that in most cases fear is actually what is running the show. That takes a little while.

Suzie: Yeah. You see enough, so that's what helps us as coaches and consultants, we see enough and we can get to know the person and figure out how to help them see it, but in this case, since she's such a high performer and had so much going on, how did she get to the realization, "Oh yeah, that is getting in the way?" Was it just out of questions or conversation?

Sarah: We had a couple of conversations and she was also really committed. She is what I would call "Connected to her deep desire," because she had a really big sense of what she really wanted out of this experience of being an athlete and that desire is actually what was keeping her open to, "Whatever we need to put on the table here, to figure this out because I know my skill set, something else must be going on." She was willing, I would say, to really look at some of the stuff that some others aren't, and so we kind of did this four-step process that was about awareness, acknowledgement, acceptance, and then adjustment. Each time she went on the court, she had more and more, what I call "body awareness," where mind-body was connected and she could feel if she was about to hit a shut down, then she would acknowledge that that fear was there, she would accept it, which to your point reduces the resistance. You just acknowledge it. Of course there's fear there, we're terrified as human beings in most situations, right? We have a very fragile ego in a lot of ways, of course we're going to be scared and once she acknowledged it and didn't try to pretend that it wasn't there and she made the adjustment to shift to the part of herself that she trusted.

Suzie: Yeah.

Sarah: Yeah. She went on to play nearly every game of the season and she played more minutes in this particular season than she played in the last three combined, including making an appearance in the Sweet 16 game.

Suzie: Awesome. She conquered the fear, conquered it by feeling it, excepting it, "Ok, this is how I'm feeling in the moment," kind of wash through. It's interesting, the more you push against it, the more it persists. She let it flow through your coaching and then was able to adjust.

Sarah: Yeah. There's a really new age saying called, "What we resist, persists."



Suzie: Yeah. She had a strong desire to, what did you call it? You said she had a strong connection to her desire. What was the word you used?

Sarah: She had a strong connection or alignment to her deep desire.

Suzie: So sometimes what that could look like in corporate and on the TriMetrix assessments that a lot of people listening have taken, it's the coachability, so someone you know has confidence in who they are, but they're open and receptive to learn more. That is somebody who is, if they really lacked confidence, and sometimes they're very reactive and it's hard to hear, so they're defensive because they're trying to protect themselves. "Okay, I know who I am and I'm not so threatened by you questioning this so I can let it in and learn," which is like more alignment with yourself, even though in the moment you might be holding back, but I liked that she had a strong alignment to her goals and who she was and wanted to experience. So she really knew what she wanted in these, you said her 4th year, her last season, right?

Sarah: Yes.

Sarah: And all of that Suzie, is just so beautifully said. So beautifully said.

Suzie: I love the four-step process, so I've got to be aware that something's going on and I got to be aware of it in the moment. I've got to acknowledge it and not act like it's not there. Some people don't acknowledge because they're afraid it'll take over. Is that what you experience?

Sarah: That is 100 percent of what I experience, and if I allow myself to be afraid or acknowledge that there is fear there, yeah, it's going to absolutely consumed me and also right, because we worry about the external, who am I going to be if I say that I have this fear and this is actually a really big discussion on this team because if they said they had some fear or performance anxiety, they were afraid the coach was not going to play them.

Suzie: Yeah.

Sarah: They have this thing where they need to package it all up and put a bow on it, even if it was fault versus sitting in the reality. I would say that that is absolutely prevalent inside of Corporate America, I see that with some of the executives that I coach as well.

Suzie: So our fear is reasonably put them because we don't want to get kicked off the team or we don't want to look weak, but if you actually sit in the reality, which would mean, "Okay, yep, I'm really feeling this. It sucks, but I failed." What actually happened, especially like with this team, what do they experience when you are able to sit?

Sarah: Yeah, when you sit in it, it actually reduces the power of that feeling. It takes away the energy of the fear and so when we acknowledge that it's there, there's kind this "Oh." Much like all of the rest of our feelings, kind of come and go, fear comes and goes as well. And so when that power is removed from this pathologized kind of negativity around feeling the sphere, we actually have more access to our kind of inner strength, power and presence. This idea of presence. Right? When we are in that really deep alignment with ourselves, we show up as incredibly present.



Suzie: And we've talked about that on this podcast. How would you talk more about it? How you see it showing up when someone is more present or they have more presence. What happens?

Sarah: There's a wonderful book actually by Amy Cuddy. I'm not sure if you're familiar with it, but the book is actually called *Presence*.

Suzie: Yep. I am.

Sarah: Okay, wonderful. And there is a phenomenal example that she uses about, you know, this big presentation that this individual is going to do, and anyway, the analogy that I make for this is, especially with these athletes and sometimes student athletes, it's the difference between sitting in a lecture and being delivered important information by a professor and you leave and you know that you got what you needed to get versus sitting in a lecture hall and being captivated by this professor who is so in alignment with what it is that they're doing in front of the room, that not only do you get the information but you can feel the resonance. You can feel the inspiration and you can feel the motivation and there is an actual energy exchange that happens when you were inside of that pocket of presence.

Suzie: Love it. And is key for this basketball team, that she was the leader, team captain, the team captain, is that right? Captain?

Sarah: Yes. Team captain. She was one of a few.

Suzie: She was the role model. So if she could do this, acknowledge as she was feeling and increase her performance, it helped the whole team. And the record, I had you send me the information based on this work, they ended a 6 game losing streak and ended up having their best record in history. They had their first NCAA tournament victory, it's not even all the accomplishments, the award of coaching staff of the year. So starting from, we've got a 6 game losing streak to, you know, you working with this team captain and there are other players to get everybody aligned, in the zone, getting back on their "A" game, even their "B" game as opposed to the CDF game. You know, look at all that happened. That's amazing.

Sarah: Yeah, it was great.

Suzie: So let's talk about enter the zone is the word I use, you can walk out of it kind of thing. What would you say your definition of being in the zone is? Is it being in flow?

Sarah: My language for being in the zone is being in flow and there is a ton of research that was started by the Godfather of flow, Hungarian psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and the idea is that when you in flow you have this total absorption in the task at hand. It's when awareness meets action. The example that we just used with that player, she had the awareness that the fear was kind of, you know, driving her performance. She met that awareness and that fear with action and shifted into that place of trust. So it is absolutely when awareness meets action, there is complete concentration and when you're inside a flow, there's a bunch of performance enhancing neurochemicals that start kind of firing off in our minds. And



so that self-consciousness, that inner critic that is pretty relentless for all of us completely disappears. Essentially, all aspects of performance are heightened.

Suzie: Yeah.

Sarah: I have this analogy that I make of kind of, you know, all of us, everyday are standing right next to this river of flow and we have a choice about whether we kind of surrender and drop into that river of flow, which gives us kind of that sense of limitless potential or do we kind of stay in this place where we need to control and predict all of the time.

Suzie: Love that.

Sarah: When you drop into that river of flow, you know you're really kind of surrendering every other thing that is going on in your life right at that moment in time and you are saying that this is exactly where I'm supposed to be in this moment doing this particular task and when you're able to do that and this is how it shows up for athletes, there's this anticipation that happens inside of clay that you don't see if you are not in quote unquote flow. There was this situation that happened and I think it was the first round of the NCAA Tournament for this particular team and on paper, Rochester Institute of Technology should have lost that game, and with a couple of minutes left, they were down by 16 points and they were in flow. The point guard, she's one of the best point guards in D3 in the country, banked a three pointer that she had never made before, never.

Suzie: Yeah.

Sarah: It was evidence of how in flow they were. And so there is this kind access to limitless potential when you're inside of this flow.

Suzie: Okay, so now let's talk about what you've observed in athletes. You know, what difference does it make when they're in the zone, out of the zone or in the flow, out of the flow. You hear a little bit about it, about what happened with the situation that you just shared. Talk a little bit about that.

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely. So one of the things that feels important to note in our time together is that athletes and teams, or leaders and executives, they can play when they're out of flow and still do well, but you just won't be able to easily access or go beyond the limitations in our mind or go beyond the actual level of talent. It's that whole notion of working harder, not smarter, flow or being in the zone really allows us to open up to working smarter and so it's not that you won't do well if you're not in the zone. It's just in the zone, gives you kind of that extra ump, if you will, in whatever it is that you're doing.

Suzie: Would you say a leader would know, if they're paying attention, I think I know for myself, but I pay attention to it, when I'm in flowing out of flow. You can still do the work, so I can still do what I do and it'll be okay. How do you think, let's talk about athletes and then talking about leaders. How do athletes know when they're out of flow? Because we kind of know when we're in flow because everything's kind of perfect. What's feeling different? Any thoughts on that?

Sarah: Yeah, so athletes describe being out of flow as being kind of just outside of the pocket of play. So this could be, you know, one second too late to the pass. It's anything when you're not anticipating, when you're not in that really anticipatory moment-to-moment, some of the flow research describes that aspect of flow as kind of time dilation and so time either dilates or shrinks. You either feel like you are in this infinite moment, or you feel like time has just passed incredibly fast. And what's interesting is when you're in the zone or in flow, because you're so in that moment, you don't actually know you're in flow. You only know that you're in flow when you come out of it and are reflecting.

Suzie: Hmm. So it's being in the moment. It's the mindfulness. It's being talked about it and had interviews here about relational presence. So being present, that's a sign you're in the flow and you might not even notice it. You're just on, is what I'm hearing.

Sarah: Exactly, exactly. Because when we're in that zone, when we're in flow, that whole piece of the self-consciousness where we're evaluating what is happening is shut down because we are just in performance mode.

Suzie: Yeah. Yeah. So you're present. I like this frame outside of the pocket of play. I'm there, I'm doing it, but I'm a second behind or, yeah that's really good. What else would you share about this?

Sarah: Yeah, I think when you're in flow, if someone was to observe you, this individual would be having less time spent in fear, more time spent in a moment, again, the anticipatory energy. You have a greater ability to take more risks. You're able to make plays or shots or again, get presentation that exceed your actual level of talent and you get done and you wonder where the heck that thing just came from. There's a flow of communication that is happening. You have this sense of full trust in yourself and in your team and just this higher level of overall individual and team performance. There's an individual athlete that I'm actually working with right now who has had chronic injuries, she's a soccer athlete and she, from a talent standpoint has a pretty phenomenal talent, but this injury has provided mental blocks and hurdles to her showing up on the field and really being, you know, in that moment, and so we are working on a series of visualizations where she can move through that block and have that full sensory experience prior to her performance on the field.

Suzie: So what she's doing because of the previous injuries is she's holding back kind of almost anticipating another injury? Probably?

Sarah: Yes.

Suzie: Some of the blocks?

Sarah: Yes.

Suzie: So the visualization is kinda helping her see her playing injury-free so she can kind of release the negative imaging that she's having that's holding her back. Would that be?



Sarah: Absolutely. There are a couple of common, what I call personal performance barriers, to being in flow. There's actually four of them that show up pretty regularly. I can go through those if that would be.

Suzie: Yes. That would be awesome.

Sarah: Okay, wonderful. So the first one that shows up, we'll just call these all for athletes, but you will see that they are pretty core to the human experience. So the first one is fear of failure, and that shows up as kind of this paralysis if you will, and not really taking risks and the impact is if you've got, for example, on a soccer field, you know a forward whose goal is to go to goal and she is afraid of missing that shot, she is likely not going to take a whole lot of those shots. And so that whole ability to take risks at critical times completely shuts down. The second personal performance barrier that comes up frequently is this idea of perfectionism, which just provokes this anxiety in high-pressure situations for some elite performers. There was, for example, a freshman, she was a starter last winter on the basketball team and because of her lack of tenure on the team, and just being in kind of the situation, then need to get it right again, just kind of shut her down. And that whole concept of playing from the neck up, set in.

Suzie: And when you're playing from the neck up, you're just in your head. There's no connection with intuition or instinct, is that right? How would you describe, you talked about it earlier, but how would you restate from the neck up, what that looks like or is?

Sarah: That is complete, just being in your head and not having that mind-body connection and in order to really be in flow or be in the zone, you have to have full-body awareness. You have to have that sensory experience that's going. You need to be aware of how you're showing up to the moment with as much of yourself as you can, and so playing from the neck up precludes you from being able to do that for sure. That's fear. You know that saying, "Running around like a chicken with your head cut off." The way that these chemicals affect our bodies are real and that paralysis, that shut down is not just proverbial shut down, that is an actual experience that your body is having from the wash of cortisol, that it is getting from trying to manage that stress and that situation.

Suzie: The analogy you think about is, I think about a speaker who freezes or they're doing a presentation and they're just kinda disconnected from the audience, so like this good content, but they're just, there's no connection with the audience. So what I would say is they're playing from the neck up as well. Their whole self isn't into it, so it just almost robotic.

Sarah: Yeah. I mean, I don't know about you Suzie, but I certainly have had those experience.

Suzie: Ah, yeah, I did. That's why I did speaking circles for awhile because I wanted to, and that's where you have to, and I did a podcast on it, but it is where you present with no notes and you get feedback, and so it's to not try to be in my head so much, you know, to just be present and have confidence in the fact that if I show up, what I need to say will be said. I've had big old dose of that perfectionism. A lot of it's released now, but I see it.

Sarah: Yeah.



Suzie: Yeah. Okay. So we've got four personal performance barriers right there, they are the four high performance barriers: Fear of failure, perfectionism, what else?

Sarah: The third one is not being connected to your deepest desire or your why. And how this shows up with athletes is, when they're getting ready for the game, if they're only desire or their purpose for playing is to win the game, their ability to win that game is really challenged at that point in time. It's very limited, because that is not enough. What we know about the way that we perform as humans, when the going gets tough, if you're not deeply connected to what it is that you're doing there on that court, on that field, beyond just winning the game, you know our body loves equilibrium, so we will negotiate away any discomfort in any way that we can. And so if all of a sudden halfway through that game, we decide that it's okay if we don't win, we're not gonna show up. We're not going to have our whole selves there, we're not going to be able to find that flow state. And so being able to make a very solid connection to that deep desire, to your why is essential. And when you think about flow, for example, in adventure sports, right? When you've got someone climbing Everest, right? When they could fall off the mountain and essentially die at any point, you know, talk about really needing to be connected to your why and to your reason, to be able to be in flow, to sustain that kind of experience. That's what we're talking here. That's the kind of connection that we need to the why.

Suzie: If you ask someone casually, so if your why, if you're a soccer player or basketball player, is to win, I think on the surface many of us would think, well that should be enough, that it isn't enough because what you could not win, and so if you get to where you're not winning, you might give up. So what are some examples of otherwise in the athletic world first? Outside of, "Hey, I want to win this game," because in corporate what you see is a lot of people saying is, "I want to make as much money as I can." That might be similar or a similar assumption. What would you say for athletes, what is some other whys that you've gotten people to realize?

Sarah: Yeah.

Suzie: Take hold of.

Sarah: Yeah. This is one of my favorite pieces to really work with athletes on and it's all around passion, which is the level of desire, and actually in Latin passion means "to long or wish for," and there's two levels, if you would, around passion. There's surface, which is more of the external, just kind of what we've been talking about. We can call that the house, the money, the car, the winning, and then there's this other kind of passion called deep passion, which is there are things like creativity, innovation, complete acceptance of ourselves, belief in our own talents, serving our highest good, and so you can feel the energetic difference between those two on the surface, it's not that those are unimportant because these can work in tandem, but when you think about going through a difficult situation where you need to have some resilience, the more deeply connected you are to that desire, or to that why, the greater ability to move through that, but so the surface is a lot of the external motivation and has kind of this quality of chasing, and the deep desire is the intrinsic piece, and the idea here is that you really become the desire in this place.

Suzie: Love that. What I would also note is some of that will come from, and if's people have taken the TriMetric assessment, they'll see their motivators. So what are your motivators? Those are clues sometimes on your desires, you know, it can give you some more insight plus I

think influenced by others or things that have always important to you that may or may not have gotten paid for, but are part of who you are and what other people say are your strengths and how you add value. It's probably tied in there. Do you think? Do you find that with your athletes?

Sarah: Absolutely. And this is really big inquiry process that I do with them around the right, because in a lot of cases there's not just one answer and there certainly is no right answer. This is highly guidance and very individual. But one of the things that I like to ask on this topic is what is it that makes you feel alive?

Suzie: Ooooh.

Sarah: Because so often we put limitations on how we think about this, right? So for example, to the audience, their going to be thinking about, "Okay, what's my passion, what's my role for this job or this company that I'm working for them as a human being, what is it that makes me feel alive?" It doesn't have to have any connection right now to this thing that you're doing. And then eventually as you kind of live into that desire, it will start to show up in different, more connected ways. But free yourself, these are the exercises that I do with clients that I work with, free yourself of all those limitations that we so often place on ourselves. Really ask these questions. You know, what is it that we really want? What is it that makes us come alive?

Suzie: I can remember, oh gosh, it was probably 20 years ago, and I remember I was talking to a career counselor because I had a good job but I wasn't happy, and she said something about what is it you want, what do you really want? Or something similar to that. I remember just staring at her like, "Oh my gosh, I don't know," like a deer in the headlights. I mean I'm very clear on it now and it's part of every day discussions, but at the time it was so new and I would think too probably a lot of folks it might be, you know, what do you want and why do you want it is a good discussion. I love what you just said too, about what is it that makes you feel alive? Do you get immediate answers from folks or do they have to think about it or what happens when you asked that question?

Sarah: Oh no. People have to think about it and actually there's probably like a solid 60 to 90 seconds of, you know, "Is this woman in front of me a little crazy?" "What is she asking me this for." I'm on this path and then as they start to follow that thread, there was an opening that they've never experienced before and a connection to that desire and that's it. Once you get that spark, once you find that it does not matter how small it is, once you find that spark, it's like you can't un-see it, you can't un-feel it.

Suzie: Love that.

Sarah: And that really ignites this other way of being. You know, I'll tell you another story. There was a player again on the basketball team who was up to become the leading scorer, to take the record for leading scorer, and she was really conflicted because she was a team player and she didn't want to necessarily put that goal out there and be viewed as quote unquote "selfish." She wanted it, but she wasn't necessarily wanting to kind of share that with her team, with her coaches. And so, you know, we did kind of this inquiry exchange, you know, over coffee where I was asking her, you know, "How bad do you really want this and what is this about for you?" There is something called a repeating question, which was the technique that I used with her where every time she gave me an answer I said, "Okay, how bad do you really want this?" She

gave me answer, and then I said, “How bad do you really want this?” And it took about 15 times for her to meet up with that spark, where she actually could feel how bad she really wanted this. And she did it. She went onto take the record.

Suzie: Do you recall what she landed on after the 15th time or some summary of it?

Sarah: Yeah, it went from this tentative “Well, yeah, I want it,” and almost this kind of desire for me to see that she wanted it and for me to believe it, which, you know, we all know it doesn't matter how much someone else believes it.

Suzie: And so it was still in her head, right?

Sarah: Yes. Very much in her head. And then even when she acknowledged and became aware of it and shared it, it wasn't until that 15th time that she just looked at me, she's like, “Yeah, I want this, I want this thing.” And it was immediately following that she took it upon herself to go have the conversations with the people she needed to have them with and find out if this was something that the team was in support of, and so she really created her own opportunity here to be able to do this because she was able to connect to that spark.

Suzie: So if you connect with your deepest desire and you actually connect, like she did, move from tentative to owning it, feeling it, there's not much else that has to happen. Because I think what you just said and what I think I really agree with is, once the spark is ignited, it's ignited. So you don't have to continually stoke it. Your coach or colleague or friend or family member could help remind you periodically if you forget for a moment. But for the most part it has energy that carries us forward, is what I'm hearing.

Sarah: It does. There are things that we need to do to get out of the way of that energy, to let it continue to use the analogy, “Stoke it.” Which is a great analogy. But yeah, once it's there, it is there.

Suzie: It all gets back to, what do I internally care about. Which is such a great reminder to anyone either leading a team or in a corporation. You can talk about the extrinsic all day health, car, you know, you gotta make the money, so we all win if you're an employee, owner or whatever, your bonus, but that only goes so far. You've got to help people connect with their deep passion. That's good. And I think everybody can find that and I don't think it requires a rewiring of your entire work. If you know what drives you, then you can find ways to use it and do more of it on the job, off the job. Okay. So what else do you want to share around or feel would be important to share around not being connected to your deepest desire, your why? Performance barrier. Anything else?

Sarah: Yeah. With the fourth and final performance barrier is stress, and that is a small word for such a huge bucket. Especially the way that we all live our lives in this constant state of kind of pressure to perform, and stress absolutely has an impact on our ability to move in and out of flow because if we can't do it with our head, what else are we going to do it with? And when our minds are just completely occupied, that's the stress and it sends us into this high cortisol fight, flight, freeze, our amygdala is going crazy and we're not actually able to drop into the now and so you know there are, especially with student athletes, so many number of stressors, from papers to relationships to money to all of these things that you wouldn't necessarily attribute to

performance, but they absolutely affect our ability to be in flow. This is why if there is, for example, an executive who is having a say financial difficulty at home, carrying that pressure into work almost guarantees you that you will not be in flow. It doesn't mean you won't be able to perform the task at hand, but your ability to do it in a certain conduct way will absolutely be impacted by the level of stress that you were carrying.

Suzie: There are people listening who have taken the TriMetrix assessment, there's a part in the assessment that measures internals in it, part of his role awareness and it's how and harmony are you in around your roles, you know, so who am I as a human, as a husband or wife, as well as my work role. And sometimes we'll see where that's dropped really low. You can get a score of 0 to 10 and when it's low, what I always say is, you know, is this work related or personal and every time it's low, if I'm talking to the person one-on-one, there's something usually either work, I'm not clear about what's expected at me at work, so they're under a lot of stress because I don't know whether they need to go right or left, and/or it's somebody's ill, really sick, like a close family member or there's financial, there's something every time. And you know, then all coaching, everything goes towards, "Okay, how do we help you help yourself fix this?" You have this growth, have this harmony with your role. I love what you said is if you have that, you cannot drop into the now so you can still do the work, but you're not going to have any chance of being in flow. That's powerful. So with athletes, how do you help them manage this? Their a pressure cooker in regard to, you know, like, so this team you were working with, they were trying to go for the championship, what are some things there? And then we can also talk about just people who aren't athletes, but what are some things that you do as a coach?

Sarah: Yeah. So you know, one of the things that I'm not sure if we've talked about yet, but it's essential for being in flow is high consequences. So there has to be a risk that someone is taking an order for them to actually be in flow. And so being really specific and clear about that in combination with being really clear about your goals, helps to balance the lens that we're looking through when we think about stress. That's kind of how I would set the stage from the mind standpoint, from the mindset standpoint. And then there are embodiment practices that I use with players and sometimes coaches actually that helped bring them into single attention. So another factor that's essential for flow is that state of concentration and where we are validated in many ways for our ability to multitask in the world. This is one place where that does not serve us. So to be able to come into this single attention, to let the stress dissolve or at least compartmentalize it for this performance and really come into full body awareness there are some embodiment practices.

Suzie: What would be a couple? That you would share?

Sarah: Yes. So there are the visualization, which we've talked about.

Suzie: Yeah.

Sarah: There are multiple kinds of these visualizations, whether for visualizing specific moments in performance or we're visualizing the performance from kind of beginning, middle to end. That's one. There is meditation and there are multiple forms of meditation. Usually what I work with athletes is kind of a full body scan, where again, it takes us from our head back into our body. A third embodiment practice is restorative movement. This is any kind of movement to

get you back into your body, whether this is, you know, dance or I had a player who said that there was this movement that she would do on the court, she would shake her hand. That was just her cue to come back into her body. Could be a walk in nature, could be anything that again helps you leave, your mind and just come back into your body.

Suzie: Breath. Breathing, just right. Probably that.

Sarah: Breathing. Absolutely.

Suzie: Yup. Yup. It just calms everything down.

Sarah: Absolutely.

Suzie: So when we're under stress, if we clarify our goals, that's important because there's good stress, right? So if I clarify what the goal is, it is like I am committing to climbing Mount Everest, so I get it that there's going to be stress in climbing Mount Everest. So something about clarifying that helps us be able to manage the stress better or just know that's part of it. Is that how you'd say it?

Sarah: And there's something that happens when we clarify our goals, we actually put ourselves in a position to receive immediate feedback when we're not meeting them from ourselves, when we buy into and agree to our goal, there are little triggers that happen along the way where we know, "Yes we are on the path. No, we're not on the path." And so that feedback, that immediate feedback to reaching our goal is actually what creates some mental space and clarity.

Suzie: Okay. So the feedback could be, I'm thinking about *Finding Flow* book, where he talks about, and I'll put a link to that book in the show notes, but playing the guitar, I mean it causes you to focus because your goal is to play the song. So that immediate feedback is when you miss a note. So how would that show up for an athlete? They want to hit so many baskets, free throws or something like that, or practice 100 free throws a day or something. If they set that goal, then they'll know they'll miss, right?

Sarah: Yeah, exactly. Or for example, they have a number of points they want to try to get in the game and then they set their performance measures for that week, so I'm going to go in five minutes before every practice and hit 100 shots. They will know, "Okay, if I do this for five days in a row, 100 shots is going to translate to x percentage increase in the game."

Suzie: That's so important. I talk about that all the time, there's this dashboard that I want every leader to have for every employee, which is their top three to five priorities and then have the employee help come up with the measurements. I don't know how many people actually do it. I talked to a guy at Amazon and they were talking about how much time they spend on dashboards and how important they are for everybody to know what their performance goal is and yet, I mean, I think everybody gets it, but I don't think everybody likes doing it. I feel like I'm talking to the wind a lot about it. What do you say? Athletes, they get it.

Sarah: They get it, but I'll tell you, it goes right back to that barrier of fear of failure, right? Because if we set the goal, it activates the fear that we may not actually achieve that goal. And



that is why humans prefer this state of ambiguity sometimes, right? Because it keeps us in equilibrium. And again, our body, our physiology is designed to keep us in the state of equilibrium.

Suzie: So we fight against it against, the very thing that could help us get what we want. But I like what you say because I can get over that if I connect with my why.

Sarah: Exactly.

Suzie: We can move past it. So I want this. So that's interesting and I like your embodiment practices. Are most of the athletes open and receptive to these?

Sarah: They are, they are. And I will tell you the drastic differences you can imagine in working with any athletes compared to the executives, to some of these practices because when you're an athlete, everything is with your body, right? So movement is not a big deal. But doing that in more of a corporate world, you know, and I've had one or two executives who kind of play with some of these things and see pretty big results. I find athletes to be incredibly committed to doing whatever it takes to move past some of these blocks.

Suzie: Yeah, I would think athletes and artists understand the difference between flow and not flow more because so much of what they do has to be mental and know it has to be the intrinsic and the extrinsic, both, and sometimes in the corporate world we get caught up in all extrinsic and forget that this, this whole internal part that goes with.

Sarah: Intellect shows up in the corporate world and it is a strength, and it is also a limitation. And again, when we rely too heavily on intellect only that is when it becomes a limitation.

Suzie: So if we're leaning on intellect only, we know that we're thinking a lot about the end goal, want to make X amount in bonus, we know all that is good, we're happy, we're intellectual, would you guide people with, they say, well, there's more that I want to kind of think about these performance barriers. Would that be the place you start?

Sarah: I sure would.

Suzie: Alright. Let's talk a little bit about getting into the zone and staying in the zone or getting into flow. What the athletes do that will parallel and think about in corporate, what are some things that you prescribe around helping athletes to be their best? Bring their best.

Sarah: There's two sets of habits if you will. There is the performance preparation, which is how do we set the stage for kind of what it is that we're about to embark upon and really create the conditions that we need individually to drop into flow, and then there are the in performance habits or triggers that happen while your, for example, out on the court or out on the field and something happens that just takes you out of flow. So a couple of the preparation for performance habits, we've talked a little bit about these, but just more concisely. Number one is identify the risks. So what is it exactly that you know you are risking inside of this activity? Number two, clearly articulate the goals and again, this goes beyond the win. Number three is to be aware of the performance barriers, what is going to get in the way or what has the potential to get in the way of this performance. Number four are the embodiment practices, so this is the

visualizations, the meditation and the movement, could also be deep breathing. And number five, which are often overlooked, but relief and recovery strategies. So for a long time we thought that being in flow or in the zone was binary, you're either in the zone or out of the zone, and it's a lot of research that is coming out that is describing the flow state as a four stage process of which release and recovery are two of the stages that allow us to really open to our potential and then rest and recover after we have this kind of flow experience and really making sure that you're finding ways to nourish yourself.

Suzie: Alright, so talk a little bit about in-performance triggers.

Sarah: So in-performance triggers, how this shows up is you've got, for example, an athlete who just misses a shot, and you know in a game situation where every second counts, you know, spending time outside of that pocket of flow isn't necessarily helpful, right, to advancing, you know, the team to the ultimate goal. And so there are again four triggers, if you will, to help get you back into flow while you're in performance. The first of which is this idea of self-talk. An athlete takes that shot, they missed the basket, you know what's happening and this is all in milliseconds and seconds here, what's happening is, you know, will you berate yourself for not having done it better, or not having made that shot, or what will you find a way to connect to, again, that trust, in your talent and ability, except that you just missed that shot and move on to the next opportunity. And this is all around keeping that energy moving forward.

Suzie: I love that. Going back to the TriMetrix assessments, the higher they score on sense of self and some of the internal things that are measured on the TriMetrix assessment, the acumen part, the higher sense of self, higher role awareness. What we also see are higher resiliency scores, which is an indication that they're self-talk would land on the, "Okay, I trust what I do. I just miss that shot, or I trust who I am, I'm bummed that talk didn't go the way I wanted," but they're able to bounce back.

Sarah: Absolutely.

Suzie: So relevant. Okay, so triggers in the middle of the performance depends on how I talk to myself when something bad happens or something less than optimal happens, what else are some of the triggers? You said there are four.

Sarah: So another one, if something less than optimal happens to be able to bring you back finding, and we've talked about this, but finding someone, a buddy who you connect with who knows what your kind of cue words are or can bring you back with a question, a comment, a reminder, is another way of kind of coming back to flow or back to being in the zone.

Suzie: I would relate that to somebody understanding you.

Sarah: Yeah, and they maybe, you know again in the world of athletics, it might be a team member with whom you have a meaningful relationship that you can have a conversation and ask them, "Hey, you know, I get really down on myself when I missed this shot or I follow, or I whatever that mistake is, if I look at you, can you say whatever it is that they need to say and that's going to bring me right back."



Suzie: Yeah. With leaders, I would always say too is you know, you need to demonstrate that you've heard, you know, listen, tune-in, be within, doesn't mean you're going to agree, you know, if they messed up because you didn't do what they were supposed to do, you can listen to and understand where they are and once you do that they're going to be able to more easily hear some suggestions, but if you start giving suggestions or advice right away, it may not happen, they're not going to hear it. It's not going to help.

Sarah: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Suzie: I love that. So many parallels here and I know you know because you do corporate work and have been in corporations, so I know you transfer all this back and forth, but yeah, what's the next trigger? Because these are great.

Sarah: Another one is to take a couple of deep breaths and what this does beyond calming us down, is it brings us back into our body. So if we miss that shot, fear takes over, all of a sudden we're playing from the neck up. I mean this all happens, like I said, in milliseconds. Fear takes over and then we're disconnected again, are disconnected, and so doing that quick couple of deep breaths as you're moving down the court or down the field, just brings you back into your body.

Suzie: When you were coaching this team and maybe you still are, did you go to the games and if somebody like the top players that you were talking to, would they check in with you or were you watching them and trying to help them remember, "Hey, take a deep breath," because if you're not used to doing that, you just got to go back to freezing.

Sarah: Yes.

Suzie: You could have a plaque card that says "Breath."

Sarah: I will have to try that that with the next team. Yes. It was a ton of fun to have that experience with them, but I was down there with them on the court, as they were kind of subbing in and out, and reminding them of their key words because it is, you learn these things as anything through repetition and so until you're used to kind of relating to yourself in this way, it does take a little bit of work to remember to revisit these tools.

Suzie: I love how you just said, "Relating to yourself." And that's what this is, this is self-awareness. This is tuning into what you need in the moment, what you're thinking, what you're feeling. I love that relating to yourself. I mean simply said, but I don't know if we often think about it and in regards to performance and actually, it's everything it is.

Sarah: It is. Yes.

Suzie: What's the fourth one?

Sarah: The fourth one, and this is actually one that I work with coaches on, and it's something called "Yes and," "Yes, and, this is about maintaining forward momentum. And the analogy that I love to do is improv comedians. When you think about, for example, that show "Whose Line is it Anyway?" or any kind of improv, the whole idea is to "Yes, and," you are building on moment

after moment after moment, right? You can't go up there and get your queue and then resist the queue, right? Because that takes you out of flow. And so the idea is, and there were a couple of really defining moments for the coach that I was working with, the coach of the basketball team, where you know, I'm on the bench and I'm kind of screaming at her, "Yes, and," in the heat of competition because she is really wanting her players to perform at a certain level and are not for whatever reason. And so she can either be in resistance to where her players are, or step back and say, "Yes, and," this is where my players are, how do I meet them in this moment and to help get the most from them and get the best from them by doing that. So that can keep moving the energy forward.

Suzie: So it's really a leader, coaches, athletes, coach's mindset cannot be "Damn it, you didn't make the shot," it has to be "Okay, yes, you did not make the shot, okay, so now," and here's what's next. What's a better way to say that?

Sarah: Always say yes.

Suzie: Oh. So I'm just trying to show what the difference is. So for our leader, it might be, "h, you didn't do right on that call. You need to do better." That would be the stopping momentum.

Sarah: You got it.

Suzie: And the beforehand would be, "Yes, that was a challenging call and now let's see how we can learn from that and see what's next." Is that?

Sarah: You've got it, Suzie. Yes.

Suzie: Okay. Okay.

Sarah: You got it.

Suzie: How did the coach take to that? How hard was that? You said something about screaming.

Sarah: I only use that because there's a gym full of people.

Suzie: I know, I totally got the image, that there was like a lot going on and you're trying to help her remember what she knows is going to help the team or what you know will help the team.

Sarah: Exactly.

Suzie:: Yeah.

Sarah: Yeah. This was a hard one for her, just given her leadership style. We actually did some DISC profiles and things of that nature for the coaches and for the team, and given her style this "Yes, and," strategy was, not an opposition to, but certainly not a strategy that she had used prior to this season.

Suzie: It didn't come naturally?

Sarah: No, no, it did not.

Suzie: Let me guess, she was a high dominance?

Sarah: You guessed it, you got it. And now this particular strategy is one of the game changers for her. This is the one that she talks about the most when she reflects on how transformative the experience was. It was this specific thing. So for all of the leaders out there or who pushed hard against, you know, the one thing that might be the most uncomfortable, I would encourage you to open up to that. That's probably a sign of where there's some opportunity there to spend some time.

Suzie: So if being in the flow, or my language, to enter the zone, is about reducing resistance, this is a key leadership tool, if you're reducing your tension that you're now spilling out on your team. So "Yes, and," represents, say it in another way, besides just those two words, how did you help her get it? Who is used to being very direct and assertive? That coach.

Sarah: The language was shifting from resistance to forward movement. It was shifting from this critical kind of lens, if you will, to a learning and growth when...

Suzie: There we go. Ding, Ding, Ding. I like that.

Sarah: The mental clarity that we have when we aren't in so much resistance, which I know I'm preaching to the choir here, is just profound. The access that we have to ourselves, to our potential, to so many other things when we're not sitting in that resistance. Here's another example because she was able to take that strategy, that "Yes, and," in this specific game that I was mentioning, you know, she met the players where they work and the play that she drew up, there might've been 10 seconds maybe left on the clock, the play that she was able to draw up as she was meeting them where they were, again, helps them win that game, that on paper they would have lost, because of her ability to be in the moment with them as opposed to resistant to where they were.

Suzie: That's profound really, and what's so awesome about that, that's a mind shift. It changes your actions. You have to change the mental state, which then impacts the actions that you decided to take.

Sarah: Absolutely.

Suzie: That's awesome. These are great tips and insights.

Sarah: Wonderful.

Suzie: So talk a little bit about resources. Folks are listening and they're interested in, "Hey, I want to bring the best of who I am. I want to bring more flow to my work, to my life, to my team." Resources would you recommend?

Sarah: So there's a couple of books that come to mind here. I think I've talked about two of them. The first one was called *The Rise of Superman* by Steven Kotler. It's a fairly dense read, but there certainly are some really great nuggets that can go and be applied. The second book,



I think that I've mentioned is *Presence* by Amy Cuddy, which is just phenomenal. Her way of taking this really abstract thing that happens that we haven't had a lot of language for describing in a way that resonates, is pretty profound. Another one, which is a basic, but just such a gem, is *Finding Your Why* by Simon Sinek. I mean in his story of how he landed and in the kind of work that he does is fascinating to me. I mean, it was through his own pain of being disconnected from his work he kind of founded this whole, you know, find your why movement. And so when we talk about connecting to your deepest layer, and your why, he has a ton of invaluable questions and ways to think about accessing that. There's a fourth one for the performance junkies. I would say there's a book called *Peak Performance: Elevate Your Game, Avoid Burnout and Thrive With the New Science of Success* and it's by Brad Stulberg and Steve Magnus, and they did a phenomenal job of bringing these worlds of executives and athletes together. At the end of each chapter there are some really basic performance strategies. Again, you can go do and integrate into your day-to-day that you know, just kind of help you take it to the next level.

Suzie: Awesome. Those will be in the show notes, pricelessprofessional.com/zone, Z-O-N-E. So there'll be show notes and we'll have links to those. Anything else from there? We've gotten your key resources for the moment.

Sarah: Those would be it for the moment.

Suzie: So let's talk about you and how you get in the zone for your work and interaction. What are some key tools, actions, mindsets that you use? So know you're coaching these athletes, you're coaching executives, doing your branding work, what do you do to get into flow?

Sarah: Yes. I actually have a daily meditation practice that I do, which about 20 minutes, at least 20 minutes every morning, and it just keeps me clear and grounded and I find that I'm a lot more intentional about the time that I spend. If for example, there's a big presentation or I'm going to talk to this team of athletes, you know, I will take an additional five or 10 minutes and do some meditation prior to going to that presentation. That's kind of standard foundational, that's so much a part of my day that had just happened. But I use a lot of the same tools that I kind of recommend athletes and executives use. The second one is the visualization. So I will walk through from the time I get in my car to the time, you know, I get back in my car after that presentation, what the delivery will look like, what it will feel like, how I want to feel energetically when I'm in front of the room, all of that based on how I want to show up and what I think the situation calls for, so it is a sensory experience for me before I even get there. That's a second tool, if you will. A third piece, which is about the embodiment. Once I get in that car, that music is on and I am not thinking about that presentation, and if I'm lucky it will be at least a 10-minute drive to wherever I'm going. I turn on that music and I just kind of lose myself and give my mind a rest so that I can get into my body and so that when I show up I'm less worried about the content that I'm delivering and I'm more worried about the way that you know, I feel in front of that room.

Suzie: Interesting.

Sarah: As you've kind of articulated, that whatever is supposed to come, will come.

Suzie: Yup. I mean all of it fits together, but that is so key because if we are intellectual and we're used to being in charge and control, we can have great content and people aren't going to hear one word. If we can't somehow be present to people and people feel like we are with them, kind of like the "Yes, and," mindset. You can be accurate all day but they're not going to do a thing, they'll say yes and do no. You know? It's like, "Well, yeah, she was brilliant," and nothing comes of it. Anything else that it was important to you that you want to add, or does that cover it?

Sarah: There is a fourth thing, and I feel obligated to say this because we talked so much about it as a strategy, but there is a big piece of mindset for me and from a focus standpoint, so when I get out of the car to do that presentation, there is not one other thing that I'm thinking about, that is the most important thing that I am doing in that moment. And so it goes from again, this multitasking right down to the single attention. And then the second part of that mindset is risks. You know, when I'm walking in to do that presentation, I'm reminding myself of what is that risk, and what is at stake here. And I think that's part of what I personally love about working in athletics because in no other industry is performance, you know, more monitored and measured. My feedback around whether or not the work I'm doing is making a difference is so evident. I just have developed this love for this kind of high risk, high reward environment because of that. So I'm really clear on what risk is on the table when I'm working specifically inside of athletics.

Suzie: So it ties to what you said earlier on about being in the flow, that there has to be consequences, you know, you recognizing or reminding yourself of the risk and the reason you love this so much is because the risk helps you focus, it sounds like, or at least a piece of it is that, helps you focus which actually causes you to dip into flow with your athletes.

Sarah: Absolutely. Wholeheartedly.

Suzie: I feel like my work, I've been doing this for 15 years, but it became exponentially better when I started walking through everything I was going to deliver in minute detail prior to, and some would call it obsessive, but it's my way of visualizing, you know, so I have to the minute everything that's going to happen and how it's gonna unfold and what I'm gonna wear, that's not a natural thing for me. I'm a high D, high I off the chart style wise. But when I started doing that pre, like I guess it's visualization, never thought of it that way. I just thought of it is I got to go better prepared. It's like pre-paving and so then once it's clicked I can feel it's clicked. I'm done. I don't think about it again until I walk in, until you fly in or wherever. Whatever happens, happens. It never happens exactly the way I unfolded it, it's usually better. So with leaders, that's a big piece of it, is just really pre-paving, doing the agendas for meetings, thinking things through before you do them. Just being more deliberate about what you do.

Sarah: When you're not worried about what you're going to say, you can simply focus on how to say it in a way that simply meets your audience.

Suzie: Oh, Yep. And that is the definition of being present.

Sarah: Yes, it is.



Suzie: Can't say enough about meditation. I liked doing meditation, but I would get busy and stop. I've just started this month doing a one-year commitment to meditating every day.

Sarah: Good for you. That is not east.

Suzie: Well, you know what I did, I'm using that's app, Stick, S-T-I-C-K-K, when you sign off and it sends me a reminder every Wednesday night. How'd you do this week? And then I also did an anti-charity, so if I don't do it, which doesn't sound very meditative like, but it works. If I don't do it, I have to pay 10 bucks towards a cause I don't believe in.

Sarah: There's the risk.

Suzie: Oh, maybe that's it. Maybe that's why it made me giggle when I did it and I was like, "That doesn't sound very spiritual." I think I have to do that. Like yesterday I was busy and my personal time on a Sunday and about didn't do it. And I'm like, "Oh no, I'm, hold on honey. I got to go meditate. See a little bit."

Sarah: Yes. Yeah, you know we have to set that up, that consequences of ourselves sometimes, at least until it becomes a habit.

Suzie: Yeah. There we go. I hadn't even associated with consequence logically. That makes sense. I love the key tools that you shared. Anything else about that? Actions, mindsets on the key tools for you for getting in the zone?

Sarah: No. Nope. That pretty much says it. Yup.

Suzie: So if you could put a billboard to leaders and athletes about being in flow, getting into zone, about high performance anywhere, where would it be and what would it say?

Sarah: Where would it be, have to come back to that one, but what it would say, it would say, "Feel the flow," "Feel the flow."

Suzie: Love that.

Sarah: As a reminder that this is a feeling thing, that yes we are bright, smart, talented, brilliant people, but that ultimately, you know, the kind of connections that we need to make to have our content even make a difference happens in this feeling state. And so just as a reminder to ourselves, right? Yeah, there's this whole other piece here. Can I feel the flow?

Suzie: If I'm not feeling the flow, go back to the beginning. Try again.

Sarah: Exactly.

Suzie: Well said. Ultimately the connections that we have, that we make is what makes a difference or allows people to perform high or make a difference. Anywhere in particular you'd put it? All over the country or in one particular place?

Sarah: All over the country and as I'm saying this somewhere on the highway possibly where it's this sea of cars where we are commuting to and from probably a place that we may not be

connected with our purpose around. You know, when we think about work in this autopilot that we all kind of go on sometimes, so putting it front and center on the highway where perhaps it may evoke some questioning of, "Gosh, am I feeling the flow? Where am I? What exactly am I doing? Where am I driving to right now? Is this really where I want to be driving right now?" So possibly on the highway would be a place, but yes, I would say all over the country, absolutely.

Suzie: Certainly in Atlanta where there's tons of traffic and I know in New York there's tons of traffic. Everybody might be so aggravated with traffic that they might not read it, but a couple of people might. What advice would you give your younger self about this topic?

Sarah: This is a really interesting question. The advice would be to open up to the awareness that goes kind of beyond mind and beyond fear. I was a pretty regimented, very from the neck up kind of operator, especially in my work world, up until about eight years ago and in fact it almost precluded me from getting my previous job because all of the answers that I was giving in these interviews were so quote unquote perfect that they were wondering what was real about any of it. That would be the advice. Just trust myself and really open up to the awareness that goes beyond, you know, the intellect and the mind and the fear and all of these things that, you know, really limit our curiosity because when we follow that curiosity, that gut feeling, that intuition, that leads to really uncovering our passion, and when we're following in that thread of fashion that oftentimes leads to our why. And as we've talked about, once we get to that place of why, once that spark is ignited, anything is possible.

Suzie: So how did it shift for you eight years ago if you were feeling like, "Ok I was a neck up operator?" So something in particular that happened, was it those interviews? Was it a connection to your wife because you're obviously not there today?

Sarah: There was a heavy feeling of this chasing energy that I was experiencing and I never could quite make contact to what, you know, I thought it was going to happen with, you know, a promotion or you know, having the title of VP or having a raise or in these feelings that I had associated with these kinds of accomplishments. I just wasn't feeling that overwhelming fulfillment.

Suzie: You get the accomplishment, but it was like there was a dud feeling about it once you've met that goal?

Sarah: Yeah. I mean it was like an initial hit of a high. I was really energized and really, but that would fade, it would fade and that it would be onto the next achievement. And so that was around the time that I actually injured myself playing indoor soccer game and I was down for the count for like about a month and a half, just completely laid up. And that was how I found meditation, actually listened to a Deepak Chopra kind of meditation podcast when he was first doing this 21-day podcast and combination of how I was feeling, you know, in my work world with this opening to, oh yeah, the deeper joy and fulfillment and connection that I was looking for just was the right recipe to really start investigating some bigger things about my life and my purpose.

Suzie: Love that you shared that because I would assume all of us have a story like that or there are many people listening right now who would like to have a story like that. They're feeling a little bit disconnected with what they thought they wanted that they now got and not



sure it's so great. That's great. So let's close with your last bit of advice or wisdom, something you would want every leader to take away from this discussion about entering the zone, finding flow. What would you say?

Sarah: I would say that if there's one thing to remember, it's that elite performance or being in flow does not have to come at the expense of yourself. That there is a different way of achieving high performance and in fact this kind of way, this dropping into the river of flow actually gives you an opportunity to be more you, bless you, but more of you and at the same time help you achieve higher levels of performance.

Suzie: If that's not inspiring, I don't know what is. That was beautiful. Drop into the river of flow and you bring more of you. That's awesome.

Sarah: Yeah.

Suzie: And you'll have higher performance.

Sarah: Can I share a story about that that's coming up right now?

Suzie: Please.

Sarah: There was an athlete who was sharing after the season that, you know, when I first came in and was going through kind of this goal setting with them about what it was they wanted to accomplish as a team, when we put the NCAA tournament up there and possibly getting as far along as they did, you know, there was some fear that took over about, "Gosh, who am I going to have to turn into in order to accomplish the goal? It feels like such a monumental feat and you know, I've got all this other stuff in my life that I am trying to do. I can't be a WNBA player this season," and she said at the end that she would have never guessed that the way to get to that goal was to simply being more of who they were as individuals and as athletes and as a team. That would be the differentiator to getting to this amazing place that they got last season.

Suzie: That's beautiful. Well, I, for one, I'm very glad that you had your experience when you got hurt eight years ago and you've tapped into all this information that you're sharing it with athletes and leaders and that you took time today to be here with us, so thank you very much.

Sarah: Yeah, I appreciate being on here and this is such an amazing kind of time that we're all experiencing in the world. It's great to be able to talk about this kind of stuff.

Suzie: Yeah. Awesome. Now we're going to have show notes and we'll have everything we referenced in the show notes. Best contact information from you. We'll put it in the link in the show notes, but the best way to reach you would be?

Sarah: Yes, you can. The website at evolveability.co

Suzie: Eveloveability.co

Sarah: Yes. And all of the rest of the information to contact me is right on there.



Suzie: Okay. Awesome. So we'll reference that. Are you also on LinkedIn? You are, aren't you?

Sarah: I am, yes. You can find me on LinkedIn.

Suzie: I just know a lot of leaders are on there too, so thank you so much Sarah.

Sarah: Alright. Thank you Suzie.

Suzie: So I hope you enjoyed my discussion with Sarah. I feel like this idea or understanding of entering the zone, dropping into the river of flow, knowing that there is a bigger flow or energy that you can tap into for a greater impact and influence and effortless performance, that you could cultivate that, I think that's a game changer, it's a life changer to understand it. It doesn't have to be about struggle, you know compromising yourself, that you can tap into all of that in the zone, good influence and help people bring your best self to performance and coach all of those around you to their greatest performance.

Suzie: So the show notes for today's episode are pricelessprofessional.com/zone, pricelessprofessional.com/zone, Z-O-N-E, all lowercase there. There you're going to be able to capture the four barriers to performance areas that Sarah talked about, actions you can take for high performance and high-pressure situations, and I believe that all of these apply to your work as a leader. You can also get links to all the books, pricelessprofessional.com/zone. Also, don't forget about the audible.com offer where you can get a free audio book, will have a link to that in the show notes, [audible trial](http://audibletrial.com/wakeupeagerworkforce), all one word, audibletrial.com/wakeupeagerworkforce. So if you are a TriMetrix assessment client, go back and look at your top two motivators, that section in the assessment that's about putting gas in your tank, look at your top two and your number six motivator, so your top two are things that you're passionate about. When Sarah talked about, you know, what makes you feel alive in the language that we use around TriMetrix, what puts gas in your tank, your top two, and then your number six is some indication of things you might avoid, which can also be a motivator. Look at how you scored there. If you want some insights to the answer to that question, what makes me feel most alive, and then you can also look at the dimensional balance page on the acumen part of the assessment to see how clearly you're valuing yourself, your roles and your future. That's a lot of internal. Explains a little bit about your mental focus and so you can kind of see because those areas can move, we call that what's under the hood, and you can really work under the hood to grow those areas and that's the idea of that part of the tools to see where you landed when you took the assessment and it's about increasing your clarity, which will increase your stability, help you handle stress more. If you have questions about any of that, give me a shout if you're a client, give me a call and we'll talk it through. If you're not a client, you want to know more about the TriMetrix assessment and how you might would score in those areas to better figure your why and any questions you have about the podcast or information that we cover. It's pricelessprofessional.com/Suzie, S-U-Z-I-E, pricelessprofessional.com/Suzie.

Suzie: The next episode, I already recorded it today. It is with a Sports Psychologist, Dr. Tom Hanson. You'll notice a lot of parallels between what Sarah shares and what he shares. They say it differently, but a lot about mindset. You know how helping athletes, Major League baseball players, manage their mindset. I know you're going to enjoy that episode as well. It's at pricelessprofessional.com/zone2, Z-O-N-E-2, pricelessprofessional.com/zone2, the number two.



You can also look at that and listen to that. I'd love for you to leave a review. You can leave that at our Wake Up Eager Workforce Directory Page, wakeupeagerworkforce.com, or go to the show notes page. If you have the app, we have a free app, iPhone and Android app. If you have that, you can leave a review right there on your phone. That'll go into iTunes to help people find us, kind of be nice to hear what you like and how it's working, and also reach out to me with any suggestions, pricelessprofessional.com/Suzie. I'm on Twitter at Wake Up Eager. That's my Twitter handle, Facebook, same thing, Wake Up Eager, and Suzie Price on LinkedIn. Look forward to connecting with you. Thank you for tuning in and I can't wait to see you on the next Wake Up Eager Workforce Podcast. All the best.

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