



The Performatist
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Optimal Human Performance

A beginner's guide to the psychology of human performance

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PERFORMANCE

by **Larry G. Maguire**

Welcome to the Optimal Human Performance Course. This course is suitable for newcomers to the study of the psychology of human performance. It is an introduction to the basic mental concepts every performer, no matter what the domain of work or level of expertise, needs to understand in order to produce exceptional performance under pressure and on a consistent basis.

INFORMATION

- ✓ Suitable for beginners
- ✓ Delivered over email
- ✓ Includes PDF lessons
- ✓ Available in members area
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Conclusion & Wrap-up

I was about 13 years old, training with the junior team after school. We were playing a short game into the goals at the railway side of the field. I was in corner-forward when the ball came to me. I turned and took a shot – it went wide. The coach looked at me and shouted; “Maguire! you can't shoot. You can't shoot Maguire! You're not accurate enough. In future, pass it to someone else. Do you understand?”. I believed the old bastard – for the next 20 years of my playing career, I believed him.

The relevance of the experience escaped me until recently when for some reason it came back to mind. With hindsight, I realised the impact that 20 seconds had on my success in the game. Like many kids I played with, I had talent, but the coach's words became my active belief about my ability and dramatically affected my sense of belonging and ability to perform. I realised in a very practical sense, the vital role our minds, thoughts, beliefs and ideas about ourselves, have on our life experiences. Because although this is an example within a sporting context, it's not just about sport.

Past life experience influences our self-concept and the version of ourselves we present to the world. It is why I have come to understand that on any given day, despite commitment, dedication, will to win, training, superior nutrition, professional surroundings and so on, we can fail. Failure is an essential part of the process. But it is often these repressed experiences, unconscious habitual tendencies and behaviours, that perpetuate our lack of success. All other things being equal, it is the mental game that must first be won. The psychology of performance is, perhaps, the missing link in all real-world achievement.

What Makes An Elite Performer

It's tempting to assign the tag “magic bullet” to the field of performance psychology, but that would be a mistake. The aspects that make you who you are and what make a team what it is, are as unique as the contours of your fingerprints. Every person and every group is different, and there are a dynamic, not a stagnant, set of attributes particular to every individual or group in a given condition. The performer's job, therefore, is to discover how these unique attributes work together. If predicting success was easy, if there were some winning formula that you could apply, then everyone would apply it and win. But there's not – so be careful of promises that seem too good to be true.

"I realised in a very practical sense, the vital role our minds, thoughts, beliefs and ideas about ourselves, have on our life experiences."

In the pursuit of excellence and of elite performance, there are no shortcuts, there are no loopholes, tricks, backdoors or wrangles that work. In fact, the more you try to outsmart the system, the more it will work against you. There is no way to hack success. You cannot “make” it happen. Instead, you must allow it to happen, and you allow it by getting in deep for lengthy periods. Get in so deep that these things conducive to success become that thing you do. If there is a secret to success, then this is it.

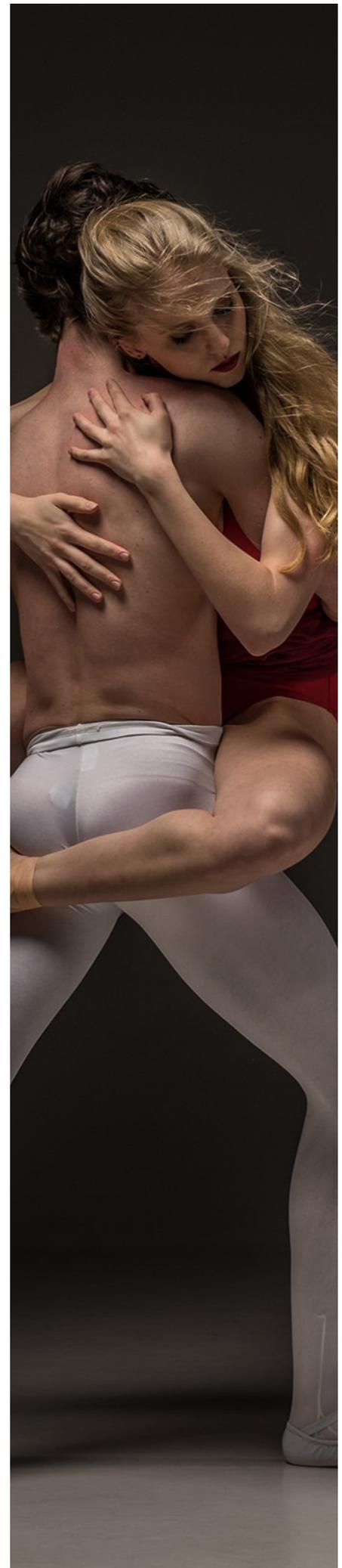
In the pursuit of individual performance excellence, there are many moving parts. What I hope to offer you with this course are not all, but some, of the most important and fundamental concepts for understanding human performance. In forming this understanding of how the human organism operates and performs in its environment, we can perhaps be better prepared, and indeed programmed, for higher level success in work and sport.

What Is Performance Psychology?

We can observe performance in all walks of life and in all domains of work and play. We use the word performance as a catch-all term to describe the behaviour of individuals or groups of individuals such as teams or a business. The focus of the following material is on human performance directed towards achieving specific goals such as achieving a sales target or winning a sports competition.

Performance can be examined from many perspectives. In this course, we will take a psychological perspective, however, including physiological aspects are unavoidable. We will also include references to neuropsychological aspects of performance and refer you to books and research that take those perspectives further.

The study of human performance from a psychological perspective has validity across all domains where human beings perform, including sport, business, education, science, military, and many more. Because through empirical research it has become apparent that common to performance in all of these are the same psychological components, i.e. perception, memory, emotion, and cognition. The following chapters will refer mainly to business and sport, however, the material can be applied broadly.



What You'll Learn

The aspects of performance that we will cover in the Optimal Human Performance Course are the discrete psychological components of that thing you do – your work or sport. They relate to creativity, memory, attention, perception, imagination, and emotion and apply to all domains of performance.

You will learn about the brain and how it interacts with the body. You will learn about psychological pressure, methods of coping with stress and the neurobiology of anxiety. We will cover how elite performers make decisions that aid success, what deliberate practice is and how you can create performance habits and strategies that will help you reach your goal.

The strategies we will present here, as mentioned earlier, are not a magic bullet for success in your work or sport. Rather, they are ways by which you can get in the zone, to get on autopilot and stay there for longer. This is really what we are talking about. In this state of mind, which Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls Flow. Here, we can perfect the skills and reach what Maslow called Peak Experience. It is in peak experience that we can realise the success we crave.

The following chapters will introduce you to the concepts of human performance psychology. Apply the principles where you can and read broadly on the subject, but be sure to go to the source. Pop psychology this material is not. To the best of my ability, and with integrity, I have distilled the following content from coursework, core academic texts, research papers and books, and reproduced for you here in ways you can easily digest.

Download the PDFs, share with your coaches, teammates and colleagues, and come back weekly for new content on the psychology of performance.

Thanks for being here.

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