

Mental Skill #2:

Concentration

Definition: “The ability to repeat specific words and specific mental pictures; on demand”

The second mental skill is concentration. I admit, when I first learned this skill back in the mid 90's, I did not know that concentrating could be defined as a skill or ability.

Remember, this is a mental ability. Everything we talk about refers to the words and mental pictures you allow in your thoughts. When we talk about concentration, we're talking about your ability to pick specific words and mental pictures and keep them in your thoughts for extended periods of time.

6.1.1 Guiding Principle: Wandering chatter

Your mind will always wander away from that which you are specifically trying to focus. Seek understanding on this truth and do not struggle with it. For example, you focus and concentrate on item "A" and before you know it, your thoughts wander and you find yourself thinking about "X, Y and Z". This is normal. In fact, every time you bring your chatter back to the original item "A", it's

the same as a rep when weightlifting or physical training. Recognize that every time your chatter drifts and you're able to bring it back to your main idea is a good thing. This is when you are flexing, strengthening, and conditioning your mental skill of concentration.

There are many studies on attention disorders and supporting research to validate such a condition. However, you must learn to concentrate and do so on demand just like every other athlete. You must arrive with competitive results if you expect to compete, and concentration, regulating the chatter and keeping it focused is one key component. If you have a pre-existing condition and you struggle to stay focused, bottom line is that you must work harder, smarter. You must learn to develop this mental skill on demand in order to produce desired results. If you have to work a little harder than the one next to you, so be it.

6.1.2 Guiding Principle: Common Senses

God gave you five common senses: Sight, sound,

taste, touch and smell. You go through every second of your day gathering data from these five common senses. It's called sensory perception: Data comes in, your chatter defines it and your brain stores it by creating connections.

6.2 Movie Scene: For the Love of the Game

There is a classic scene in this movie with Kevin Costner who stars as a baseball legend hanging on for one more game. In this scene Costner gives one of the greatest lines of all time, "*clear the mechanism*".

Costner is on the mound, the fans are mocking him, the horns are blaring, each one of his five senses are on a mega-overload with hundreds of distractions. If you are a competitive athlete you understand this moment, you've been here before.

Then you hear it, "*clear the mechanism*". At that moment in the movie the sound goes off, literally. You start thinking that something is wrong with your television. Then, all of the sudden, visually

everything on the screen is blurred except Costner's character. The next thing you see is the batter standing in the box and everything is blurred except for the batter. What an excellent example of what you are now learning to do in developing your mental skill of concentration. You are learning to clear the mechanism, to turn down the sensory perception, and focus on the task at hand with specific words and mental pictures.

6.3.1 Guiding Principle: Your Words

Create your own set of specific words and mental pictures to engage your talent. You must define and refine the specific words and mental pictures for a specific task. Be sure to make the words short, not a lot of words or a long story. And be sure to make the mental pictures very clear and vivid. When actually executing a task, your mind does not do well with general words and casual mental pictures. Create your word and mental picture list and be very specific so you can repeat often with self-discipline in your chatter.

Costner's character used "*clear the mechanism*". Find your own and create many for different words and mental pictures that support your task. Most importantly, learn how to turn down the volume on your common senses. When you develop these mental skills and learn to lower the volume on your sensory perception your ability to focus on the task at hand improves. Rather than allowing your sensory perception to overload your chatter and run rampant you are able to prioritize your thoughts in that moment. This is an act of concentrating on your pre-defined thoughts (your specific words and mental pictures you've already defined) rather than the data from your common senses.

6.3.2 Guiding Principle: Can you sleep at night?

Controlled breathing is key to relaxing the body and your muscles. Meditation is a powerful tool that uses your mental skills in order to control body function. One way I have learned to practice this in my chatter is to focus on specific muscles

such as my heart and lungs. Visualize mental pictures of your muscles. I went out and found pictures of all the muscles in the body. I looked in books, the Internet, even posters from my doctor's office. I pull up these mental pictures from memory (connections) as I fall asleep, still amped from events that happened earlier in the day, or the movie I just watched. You must learn to understand how much power and control you have on your body functions by developing your mental skills and regulating the chatter.

Regulate, repeat and focus your chatter in your favor. You now have specific words and specific mental pictures you use to communicate with yourself, disciplined self-talk. You can now take these specific words and mental pictures and concentrate on them, often repeating throughout the day, by design and with purpose. You will drift off in your chatter; simply flex the mental muscle and repeat the specific words and mental pictures again and again.

6.3.3 Guiding Principle: Windows

Human nature is to rewind the game tape and seek out the negative. Your nature is to look through the window of the past and see everything you did wrong. For the sake of instruction and learning to understand how rapid the mind chatters, we refer to windows. You have one of three windows you are looking through at any given second of the day. Your thoughts will be looking through the past-window, the present-window or the future-window. By learning the windows and regulating your thoughts accordingly, you can bring structure to your chatter so that it's not so overwhelming at times.

Think back to our earlier conversations about Neuroscience; the study of the nervous system. We have recently learned the mind holds only one thought at a time. It is a truth hard to understand at first. It seems as though we can hold many different words and mental pictures at the same time, multi-tasking for example. Science validates

the truth, one thought at a time.

The important lesson here is to understand how amazingly fast the mind runs rampant, flashing these words and mental pictures. It's so fast that we are led to believe it's just a constant rattle, a bombarding cascade of too much and too many thoughts at one time. It's this amazing ability of the chatter to run so fast that we often compare it to a computer or computing power. In this case, all the computing power in the world does not compare to the awesome power between your ears.

To be a top-performing athlete who learns to summon your talent on demand, you train your chatter, no matter which window you are looking through. To put it another way, it doesn't matter if you are thinking about your past, present or future. You discipline your chatter with truth and in your favor. If you find yourself thinking (chatting) through the window of the past, then you must learn how to rewind and do it correctly; chatter in

the past, left alone and unregulated, will hurt you.

Today, in this present-window, in this moment, you must learn how to discipline your chatter on what is most important, right here, right now. Chatter in the present-window left alone and unregulated will keep you in constant feeling of uncertainty, a slave to emotions, and paralysis by analysis.

You might catch yourself thinking about tomorrow or the future, something you have no control over. In the future-window you must learn how to preview coming events in your life. Chatter in the future-window left alone and unregulated will distract you by wasting valuable time by majoring on minor issues and causing you to question yourself, your personal value and your abilities.

6.3.4 Guiding Principle: Window of the Past

The past is perfect; you can't change it. This is one of the harder lessons to learn when developing your mental skills. In regards to this past-window, you must act in courage and in faith,

regulate your chatter and seek to understand; seek the do-betters. This is a difficult lesson to teach, and often takes the most time to learn. A top performer understands that when you rewind and reflect back through the past-window there's a right way to do it and a wrong way.

There are two questions you must ask yourself after every task. For example, after an interaction with a family member, your coach, or a competition, you would direct your present chatter to reflect back, asking these two questions.

The first *“what did I do right?”*

This is your *“at-ta-boy”*. It is so critically important for you to point out too yourself what was good in your decisions and performance. One of the many important reasons for this reaffirmation is to capture the good in your mental recorder, which in turn prepares you for future performance.

The second question is a trick question. Most, just

like you, allow the chatter to focus on “*what did I do wrong?*” You must understand this is critical and is toxic to allow your chatter to run rampant on the wrongdoings. It’s harmful and holds you back when your chatter focuses on what went wrong. It’s like a curse that connects all the windows. Our lack of understanding how to reflect back correctly in the chatter allows the negative chatter in the present to dominate, in turn hindering the opportunity.

The “disciplined” second question is “*what can I do better?*”

It almost sounds too simple. It’s very subtle, yet so critical. Something happens inside of you with your body’s stress response system and the way your body responds when you seek the “do-better” rather than the ‘done-poorly’. You are now using your chatter, with skill & ability, when you reflect back correctly. By doing this often with repetition, you strengthen your mental concentration skill. In short, when you seek the “do-better”, it’s like

looking for where the dominos broke down in the sequence of tasks. You are intentionally seeking to understand where to make small little corrections. The domino exercise is one we use when instructing the “Task Analysis”, another great tool for targeting where the chatter need be disciplined for all three windows.

6.4 Natural Law: The Law of Concentration

In learning about the mental skill of concentration, there is also a law. You must learn and understand both the mental skill and the law.

The definition of the law of concentration says, *“You always move in the direction of your dominant thought; what you focus on grows, whatever you think about expands.”*

The mental skill of concentration is the ability to regulate the chatter and focus on demand. The law, however, is a natural law. The natural law of concentration can be compared to the law of gravity. We understand the law of gravity exists,

we understand there are consequences and benefits to the law. Obey this natural law and reap the benefits, disobey and you will suffer the consequences. Nature holds you accountable.

The same is true with the law of concentration and the chatter in which you repeat often or focus on. If you obey the law of concentration and create disciplined chatter; if you focus often on the right and the “do-betters” you will reap many benefits. If you disobey this law of concentration and allow the chatter to run rampant, out of control from disruptive thoughts and disruptive emotions, you will suffer the consequences, often revealed in poor performance.

If you understand the law and you work it in your favor, there are great benefits. On the down side, the consequences have great disadvantages. Remember, it’s a natural law so nature is the judge and the jury on holding you accountable. Whatever you are thinking about the most becomes your dominant thought. If your chatter is

focused on what is wrong, your dominant thought will be wrong. Your mental recorder captures and expands on what you focus on, the wrong.

The mental skill of concentration is the ability to create the right chatter and repeat often. The law of concentration says that whatever chatter you allow most often to repeat, right wrong or indifferent, that specific chatter will grow and pop up even more.

You must learn to force-feed the good; create a library of specific words and mental pictures that support all your dreams and desires in every aspect of your life. Remember, the weeds and negative chatter are going to grow on their own. The bad thoughts, the bad chatter will grow all by itself, it's natural. You do not need to nourish the weeds. You do, however, have to create your library of nourishing words and have mental pictures standing by and ready to pull into the chatter.

6.5.1 Guiding Principle: Enhance the skill

Concentration is a skill. Every skill can be enhanced with practice. In a recent study entitled, “The Latest Findings on the Brain”, Emotional Intelligence pioneer Dr. Goleman says,

“Many meditation methods from the Christian or Jewish tradition, or from Asia, are essential ways of building concentration. The cardinal rule of all concentration enhancement techniques is focus on “A” and to bring it back as soon as you realize your mind has wandered to “B” “C,” “D,” “E,” or “F”. It’s like being on a weight machine and doing physical reps for a muscle. Every time you bring a wandering mind back to a concentrated state, you’re enhancing the muscles of concentration.”

6.5.2 Guiding Principle: Optimal Performance

Your development goal is very clear. It’s called optimal state or optimal performance. It is a state

of mind that brings into alignment your chatter and the body when executing a task. You're going to hear more about optimal performance. Seek to understand what this means by researching it more.

Simply put, enough adrenaline and other stress hormones in the body for the task. It's complicated how it all works and what goes on inside of you. The key to understanding optimal performance is recognizing that the current chatter in the present window is sending stress hormones into your body. You can have too much or not enough for the task and it all begins with your chatter.

Think of it this way. When you perform a task such as weight lifting or any task associated with competitive play, what are you thinking about? When you perform the task exceptionally well, your body is in an optimal state. The mind is focused, chatter is regulated and the emotional brain states are releasing the right amount of

stress hormones for the task. This is what we refer to as an “optimal state”. By your own personal design and self-discipline in your chatter, you have the right mixture of stress hormones to create the physical power to execute the task.

Your development goal is to learn this optimal state and call it up on demand at will. In your new journey of awareness and regulating the chatter, you will begin to take inventory on good thoughts and bad thoughts, good feelings and bad feelings. This “good” and “bad” is defined by how your body responds when supporting in a task. The good thoughts that motivate you and enable you to perform at peak with the right amount of stress hormones in your system are what we are seeking in your personal development.

If the unregulated negative chatter continues, fear, doubt and worry become the dominant emotional response. This in turn creates a state of frazzle or *“performance anxiety”*. Your unregulated chatter will constantly set off the emotional alarm

releasing too much or too little stress hormones. This is bad business for many reasons. These stress hormones, which are intended to serve you, become a corrosive, toxic bath from being released too much and too often as a result of the negative chatter. It's called a state of frazzle and the extreme of which we have already learned is called an emotional hijack.

Notes & Quotes:

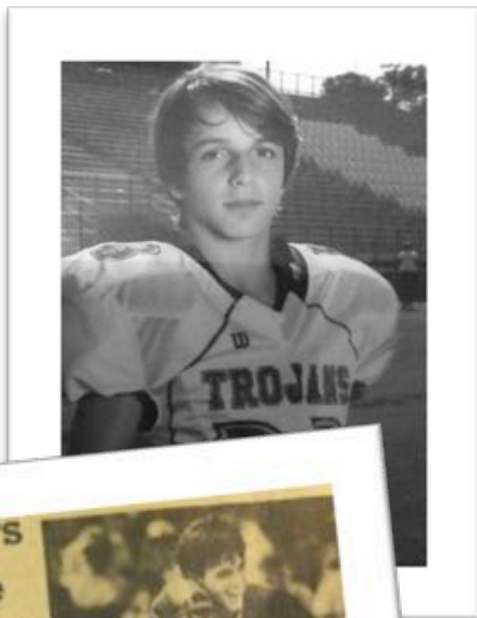
1. Dr. Daniel Goleman - Latest findings on the brain: Emotional Intelligence Webinar
 - www.danielgoleman.info
2. Robert Sapolsky – Stanford University
Professor, “Distress: The Body’s Silent Killer”
– National Geographic Documentary
 - http://www.thegreatcourses.com/tgc/professors/professor_detail.aspx?pid=124
3. History Channel’s Documentary: “The Brain”
2013
4. Les Brown – Author, public speaker
 - <http://lesbrown.com/>
5. Jim Rohn – Author, public speaker
 - <http://www.jimrohn.com/>
6. Dr. Jeff Garrison – Sport Medicine, Former NFL player

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- <http://mollydaniels.wordpress.com/>

To all those who have encouraged, remained patient and persevered on my behalf by continuing to stay on me. As God as my witness, your words remained in my chatter and were a critical part of making this dream become a reality.



Mavs, Pats win openers in Lafayette Semistate

By FRED LANE
Staff Sports Writer

McCutcheon's big-play baseball team edged Logansport, 5-3, in the second game of the opening round of the Lafayette Semistate Saturday afternoon.

The Mavericks, 24-14, advanced to the semistate title game Saturday night against Terre Haute North. The Patriots coasted in a 4-0 victory over Perry Meridian in the day's opener.

The two games were played before a crowd of about 1,500 at Losh Stadium in Columbian Park.

McCutcheon produced a pair of clutch hits and several sparkling defensive saves to eliminate three-time state champ Logansport.

With McCutcheon leading 2-1 in the top of the third inning, Steve Robinson — a senior batting .247 — lined a two-out, two-run single.

Logansport added single runs in the third and fourth innings to even the lead to 2-2. Matt Barry Taylor added an insurance run for the Mavericks in the top of the fifth.

Taylor, who finished with three hits in three at bats, found a soft spot in center field which was misplayed by Jerry Hunter. The ball rolled to the center field fence, and Robinson

McCutcheon Coach Jake Burton. "He had an excellent year last year, but has been struggling at the plate this season.

"It's easy to get frustrated with a bad season, but Steve never quit. And today, he came through with a big, big hit for us and made a super play in right field, too."

In the bottom of the sixth, Robinson dove into foul territory to catch a fly ball for the first out.

Jay House finished the Barron in the sixth, catching a foul pop near the Logansport dugout, and batting down Snider's hard-hit ground ball for an unassisted play for the third out.

And Brian Robinson — brother of Steve — added the final Maverick defensive jewel, diving to catch Tony Baldwin's line drive at third base for the second out of the seventh inning.

"We hit it where they weren't, but they got there anyhow," laughed Logansport Coach Jim Turner, whose team finished with a 23-8 record.

"Baseball is a game of inches, and those inches worked their way. Plus, McCutcheon played an outstanding game."

McCutcheon's Dan Payne allowed two earned runs on eight hits, and the senior pitched his fourth straight com-



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