

Insights from *The Champion's Mind* by Jim Afremow

"The difference between a pedestrian performance and a peak performance begins and ends with your state of mind... Adopting a winning mind-set will help you perform at the top of your game and enable you to succeed when you want to succeed the most."

Jim Afremow is a sports psychologist who has helped dozens of athletes prepare for the Olympic games. However, you do not need to be an Olympian to leverage the lessons in this book.

Thinking like a champion will allow you to step up and stand out in any competitive environment, be it at work or in sports. If you cultivate the following four champion mind-sets before your next performance, you will be more likely to perform your best.



Belief

Champions go into every competition believing that success is inevitable - success seems like destiny. But how can someone develop a 'destiny-like' belief when failure is a real possibility?

A champion doesn't doubt his or her ability because they believe they've trained harder than anyone else. The key to an unshakeable self-belief is to, as sprinter Maurice Greene a one-time world record holder in the 100-metre dash said, "Train like you are No. 2, but compete like you are No. 1."

Train and prepare as though you have come up just short of winning. Imagine you've lost by a millisecond or a single point. Now work tirelessly to make sure that does not happen again. Before a competition, reflect on the strengths you have honed while training, and victory will seem inevitable.



Enjoyment

Enjoyment combats the fear of failure and eliminates tension in the body. It is impossible to be afraid and grateful at the same time. That's why champions enter every competition with an attitude of gratitude. A champion routinely thinks, "I'm so lucky to be here, competing at the highest level," or "I've trained so hard for this. I can't wait to show the world what I'm capable of."

Jesse Owens, the legendary track and field star who won four gold medals in front of Nazis at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, famously said, "Find the good. It's all around you."



Self-Talk

If you want to perform your best, you need to eradicate the Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs) that eat away your performance. The ANTs you will encounter during a performance include, "Don't screw this up," or "What if I (then imagine the mistake)." The negative thoughts you experience during a performance bring to mind images of potential failure, which creates tension in the body, and increases the likelihood of failure.

During a performance, a champion gets his or her mind to stop thinking of a potential mistake by using positive, present-focused self-talk. A champion might repeat to herself, "Right here, right now. Right here, right now." Jim Afremow advises his athletes to think, "One-good-play-in-a-row." On May 23rd, 2002, professional baseball player Shawn Green went six-for-six at the plate with four home runs by repeating the Zen mantra, "Chop wood, carry water. Chop wood, carry water," to help stay present and execute the fundamentals. Whatever self-talk you choose to use during your performance, make sure it's simple, positive, and focused on the present.



Toughness

"Mental toughness does not entail clenching your teeth, trying harder, thinking more, straining your eyes to focus, or having someone scream 'Be tough!' at you. Mental toughness is the ability to remain positive and proactive in the most adverse of circumstances."

See every setback as an opportunity for an epic comeback. Use the lessons learned so far in this summary to stay positive through adversity and quickly bounce back from a bad performance - remind yourself of your training to **reaffirm your belief, enjoy the moment** by laughing at mistakes or being grateful for what is going well, and using **self-talk** to direct your attention away from the error and back to the task at hand.

Or perform a symbolic gesture – toss a piece of grass, clear your throat, or crumble up a piece of paper and throw it in the trash to symbolize throwing out the mistake and clearing it from your memory.

Mental Performance Scorecard

Keep a mental performance scorecard for each performance by rating yourself on a scale of 1-5 in each of the four areas:

- **Belief** - did I prepare so well that I felt as though I could not fail?
- **Enjoyment** - did I maintain an attitude of gratitude and a sense of humor throughout the performance?
- **Self-talk** - did I deploy a steady stream of positive self-talk to kill my automatic negative thoughts and stay present?
- **Toughness** - how quickly did I reset and recover after a setback?

If you improve your scorecard with every performance, you will be well on your way to becoming a champion.