

Peak Performance in Life and in Chiropractic

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What does it mean to perform at one's highest levels? No matter your domain, there are a few fundamentals essential to being the best that you can be. For chiropractors and students of chiropractic, the message is the same as it is in our work with elite athletes, Olympians, and business people. To reach peak performance, certain mental and physical qualities or conditions must be cultivated and put into practice. The following is a list of some of the factors necessary for peak performance, based on interviews with Olympic medalists, world champion athletes, and the world's leading business people. Assess your own rating and try to determine if there are areas where you could improve. Are you, like these leaders in business and sport.

1. Mentally relaxed? Described most frequently as a sense of inner calm. Some athletes also reported a sense of time being slowed down and having a high degree of concentration. By contrast, loss of concentration was associated with a decrease in performance.
2. Physically relaxed? Feelings of muscles being loose with movements fluid and sure. The implications for the adjustment here are obvious.
3. Confident/optimistic? A positive attitude, feelings of self-confidence and optimism. Being able to keep poise and feelings of strength and control even during potentially threatening challenges.
4. Focused on the present? A sense of harmony that comes from the body and mind working as one unit. No thoughts of the past or future. The body performs automatically without conscious or deliberate mental effort.
5. Highly energized? A high energy state frequently described as feelings of joy, ecstasy, intensity, and being "charged" or "hot."
6. Extraordinary awareness? A state of mind in which the athletes, chiropractors and business people are acutely aware of their own bodies and minds. They know exactly how they are feeling and thus are not being "run" by unconscious, self-defeating thoughts.
7. In control? The body and mind seem to do automatically what is right, yet there is no sense of exerting control.
8. In the cocoon? The feeling of being in an envelope, being completely detached from the external environment and any potential distractions. Also a sense of complete access to all of one's powers and skills. Athletes and chiropractors "in the cocoon" are able to avoid loss of concentration and accelerated, tight-muscled, out-of-control feelings. This is one reason why it helps to have patients in continuous succession as opposed to spread out.

Does an assessment of these factors help you to better understand the way you practice, and the way you live your life? For each of us, there usually is room for improvement in our performance. Are you taking steps to develop these qualities of mind and body? Can these be cultivated? According to research, most definitely.

An ideal performance state does not just happen. Top level athletes, business people, and chiropractors have identified their own ideal performance and have learned, for the most part intentionally, to create and maintain this state so that their talents and physical skills thrive. Achieving one's own ideal internal psychological climate is not a simple task. The mental skills needed to trigger and sustain an ideal performance state are learned through knowledge and practice, just as the physical skills of the chiropractic adjustment are learned.

These qualities that contribute to peak performance share many common elements with "present time consciousness." However, it is not enough to talk about being "present time conscious." Work is required.

Work to Be Done

When it comes to peak performance, many people believe that "when you're hot, you're hot, and when you're not, you're not." Peak performance is seen as something elusive: more a consequence of fate rather than something under one's own personal control. In reality, however, peak performance is not mysterious, it is a product of the body and mind, both of which can be controlled.

Finding mentors and becoming inspired are important elements to a successful practice and life. Many people feel that if we attend enough seminars and hear the gurus of successful chiropractic speak, we will gain the requisite skills to reach our peak levels of performance. Although this will help, it alone is not enough. The work must be done, the skills learned, and finally implemented. This is why with the right physical and mental training you can learn to repeat your best performance more consistently in clinic and in all domains of your life.

Control from Within

We need to learn to be in control of ourselves, rather than letting the environment or others control us. How many times does a negatives word or image about chiropractic get you down? It doesn't have to be way. We each have the ability and power within us to shape our existence. This power does not rest outside of us. We all must ultimately accept the fact that we are the only ones who can take responsibility for our lives, our choices, and how we choose to see the world. When we are in this "space," others notice it, particularly our patients. They feel our confidence and strength. This control and power is necessary for what Herb Benson, MD, calls "remembered wellness," which is really just another way to describe innate.

In a future article, we will discuss the importance of the interaction between the doctor and patient in empowering innate and the healing process, regardless of whatever modality we choose to employ. This will build upon our current theme of peak performance and provide insight into why it is absolutely crucial to be at our best when we interact with patients.

Mindfulness -- the Foundation

The key to developing this control in your life and your work is mindfulness or self-awareness. As Socrates said, "Know thyself." When you gain more awareness, you can make more accurate adjustments in your work and in your life. This ability to refine the subtle intricacies of life experience is the critical skill that ultimately leads to more balance and increased happiness. More on mindfulness in the next article.

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