

ATHLETE²⁵ PROJECT

Any athlete, Any age, Any sport...

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PART V
MENTAL



Mental Timeouts

What is a mental timeout? Meditation, prayer, basically any moment when you disconnect from the world to search your own heart and/or mind. Mental timeouts help separate yourself from the world and everything around you for just a couple moments. Some prefer this first thing in the morning, last thing before bed, or during the day in the midst of crazy and stressful situations. Either way people know this is important for personal health reasons as well as staying focused on the goals and task at hand.

From an athletic perspective, prevent burnout for yourself by taking small periodic breaks. I am sure you have heard, “you are your own biggest enemy.” It’s inevitable; there will be times when you get on your own case because you did not meet the expectations you had for yourself. At that moment, take a time out. Separate yourself from the social media, from the teammates, from all distractions and embrace in a mental timeout. Encourage yourself, say positive affirmations, visualize your dream,

imagine your goal, forgive yourself for the mistakes made, spend time in prayer; whatever it is you need to do, take the time to do it.

A clear focused mind is a huge positive advantage when going into training and competition. Personally, I use to take my mental breaks moments before training so when it came time for competition it was part of a habit. I was able to set the stage for the task at hand and focus all efforts in one direction. When a training session or competition did not go the way I planned, the first moment I had alone I would reflect, time out, and calm my nerves, frustration, and thoughts.

Diaphragmatic breathing is a key part of meditation. Getting fresh oxygen to the brain has this amazing effect on the nervous system. Just search the benefits of breathing and you will be surprised at how many people breathe incorrectly and how inhalation utilizing the proper musculature can dramatically change how you think and feel. Alternate nostril breathing is also another method commonly used to stimulate specific sides of the brain.

Moral of the story: schedule purposeful time outs for you in any manner that suits your needs and beliefs. Take a break from the hustle to prepare your

mind, the most important part of your actions. You are what you think! “Those who think they can and can’t are both right.” Sharpen the most important tool in your athletic toolbox, the brain.

Remember: It’s the fight **in you**, not the size **of you** that wins the fight.

Internal > External

External motivation is watching a video online, getting excited and going out to do something. Internal motivation is having a desire within to go out and get what you want. Of course there is nothing wrong with utilizing external ways to push you and give you that edge. Don't get me wrong, sometimes that comes in handy and really can make a difference in someone's day. Key word- someone's "day". In all reality, there will be days where you need to push yourself to get out of bed and do what you do not feel like doing. Not everyday will be positive vibes and extreme drive. Some days will suck.

To make a difference in someone's life the internal motivation goes a further distance. You can listen to one song or watch one video over and over and over. However, after awhile the mind will become accustomed to the stimulus and that same drive will lose its power causing the person to look for another driving force to get them going. Use caffeine for an example, one cup of coffee before a training session

and you will have a good day. Repeat over a few months and one cup of coffee will not be doing much, it will now take two cups of coffee to produce similar outcomes. The body becomes accustomed to the routine, which lessens its effects.

What makes internal motivation different? Internal motivation has meaning, has power, it is the unlimited gas to the engine. Yes, a photo of a loved one is a good example of external motivation that will get you going. But the hurt and loss of a loved one is internal which drives the athlete to play their heart out. There is meaning and a purpose that is deeper than a motivating or inspiring story. When the athlete can relate on a personal level they are able to use that as fuel to the fire.

How often have you heard a story of someone who went through a very rough period in their life, which was later, used to catapult their career? We can list thousands; broken household, death of a loved one, major accident or injury, etc.

I want you to think of why you are doing what you love. What is your motivation? What gets you up at 5am even when you are tired and don't want to? What is your ultimate goal in Life and sport? Who do you want to make happy and smile by your actions? What type of example do you want to lead for others?

Spend a moment reflecting on yourself and think; are you able to get yourself going or do you need the help of someone or something else to practice? I am not saying it is impossible to utilize external aspects to help you achieve a long-term goal. However, I want to bring to light the power of self-motivation because it takes zero effort and can power the most exhausted athlete to still sprint past the finish line.

Acceptance of Failure

Losing, missing, falling short, being wrong, etc.: these are the crappy parts that come with every success story. You need to fail. You are going to fail. You will miss shots, actually you have to miss shots, and this is something that comes with honest effort. Miss to the left, miss to the right, and make the shot. If you did not fail those two times how would you know the angle, force, technique, and position to make the basket on your third try? I am sure you have heard sayings along these lines, “don’t give up” and “try, try again.” The key to failures is being able to learn from them. Being able to see where you went wrong, why you went wrong, and how to fix the problem to become better in the future.

Sport ignorance is missing and just trying again and again without evaluating why you are missing. There is an unexplainable natural force that uses trials and testing to teach the human species. It is almost like a cause and effect or exploratory nature of animals to try something. As an athlete, you use

practice as continuous repetitions of trying. What makes the difference is the athlete who can utilize their failures and shortcomings as a positive learning experience.

Personal flashback: I have been there, I have felt the pain of losing after every effort of every day was working toward one goal. I fell short by my loss of focus, I learned lessons from my method of cutting weight, I understood more of who I was by dealing with one of the toughest athletic losses in my life. I went quiet from the world and separated myself from every family member and friend for hours after competition. I hated myself for the outcome, I felt like I let so many people down. Believe me, I have seen the dark side of a sport where I was on the brink of quitting and leaving it all behind me.

I took months off without any training, without any discussion of coming back, until my mind was clear and I was able to convince myself of not ending my competitive career in that manner. I decided to do one more competition that was going to be my last hoorah in the sport. I knew before even telling anyone or beginning to train that this was going to be my last time to leave it all on the platform. My mind was stronger and even though this would be a new challenge I was ok with my decision. I decided to no

longer cut weight, move up a weight class, and go after one more state championship.

I learned how to channel my focus. I learned how to fuel my nutrition differently. I learned how to remove distractions. I learned how to use my body more efficiently. I learned how to train. I learned how to listen to my body. I learned my boundaries of when to push it and when to pull back. I learned a lot that year and I ended up with my having my best competition ever with all new personal records and another state championship title. I went out on a great note because of what I learned from my heart breaking loss the year before.

Moral of the story: Get up because you fell. Do not give up because of failure, do not throw in the towel because you are upset, and do not quit because you feel you are not good enough. Do not give up because you fall.

Learn from it.

You will be amazed at how things can turn out when you never give up on yourself. It will never be easy and no success is ever a straight path without obstacles. Keep your head up and keep trucking through, train hard and train smart. Success is a gift wrapped in failure. If you want it, you have to open

it. Look to fail with the intentions to learn, because if you don't fail, that means you achieved something.

Power of the Mind

The mind is the creation and start to all action. The power of believing in yourself and knowing in your heart you can achieve something is commonly stated as step one. The idea has to start somewhere and it has to have a stable base. If you know you can make a 3-pointer, it starts with you observing the task, knowing you can do this, believing in your ability to successfully complete the shot, and then creating the action to do so. The stable base is yourself and your confidence in who you are as an athlete. Thinking negative thoughts will result in negative actions. A quote I read on social media said, "You are not who you think you are but what you think about." This resonated loud and clear with me, so I know I cannot be the only soul on planet Earth to also think this way.

Self-doubt can often lead to failure in whatever the particular area it is you doubt yourself in. Putting your mind in a state where, making or taking the shot needed is doubted, it prevents you from taking the

step to act. This restricted action is a product of fear. Not only does it stem from fear; it is poison to your future. This inaction becomes a habit in decision-making. Being indecisive in everyday life is not uncommon for some people, however when viewed in an athletic standpoint, being indecisive has ruined professional careers. Athletes have lost their dream job, missed the easy shot, or gotten hurt for not taking the chances they should have for whatever reason it may be.

When you dive into the psychology of sport, the mind is a very complex aspect of competition. For the creation of this book athletes of all ages in various different sports were given a questionnaire and beyond my control, 98% of the responses mentioned something involving the mental aspect of sport. Whether it is a strength, weakness, observable trait, or important fundamental skill, everyone commented on the mental aspect of sport.

Surprisingly to me, I totally overlooked this area in preparation trying to make this awesome project when I realized I was making progress in sport more complicated than it needed to be. Each athlete is one person with his or her own mind. Their mind commands their actions. That is it! The better one can command him or herself around the playing field in the grand scheme of athletics makes them a better

athlete. The level of efficiency, reaction time, and decision-making comes with experience. Consistent neural pathways, which are created, developed, practiced, and perfected.

What if we looked at the mind in the same manner? Imagination is limitless, which in theory, means the strength of your mind is far beyond imaginable. What if we created a powerful positive mind? What if we developed tremendous skill with self-motivation and self-belief? What if we practiced this mental game for days, months, and even years? What if we perfected utilizing the strength of our minds?

Be Coachable

This is an area where I struggle so I will try my best to help you. Being coachable is extremely important and for some people extremely difficult for various reasons.

I can only speak for myself on this topic. Being somewhat educated has become my biggest downfall in being coachable. Why? Because I challenge everything I hear with everything I think I know. Successful past achievements do not help, nor do a couple degrees in relatable fields. An athlete like me needs to submit to someone else who is a better “coach” and I should just stick to myself being a doctor. Trusting someone else knows better athletic technique than you in a specific field means giving them the benefit of the doubt even if you do not agree and following through with their directions. Do some athletic positions; put the body into positions not outlined in anatomy books and may at some times be seen as dangerous or unnatural? Of course! This is why all elite athletes have some sort of structural or

functional dysfunction. They have adapted their bodies to their sport at the highest level. Being the analytical body movement man I am, this is hard for me to let go of and see past. However reality is, this is what makes a sport so beautiful.

Being able to hear direction, act on the direction, and consistently utilize the guidance is arguably one of the most important aspects of an athlete's growth. Being able to take constructive criticism to build you into a better person and competitor. Being able to humble yourself to the man or woman above you who taught you everything you know. Being able to alter your performance in the midst of all your focus and determination. Being attentive to someone else's attention. Being an athlete when you only need to be an athlete. Being respectful to the person or people who see more in you than you currently see in yourself.

Take home message: SHUTUP and LISTEN. Then do it.



I was fortunate to live with my coach and would often train in the garage.

Purposeful Passion

No purpose? No passion. Are you participating because you have to or because you want to? Do you practice because you are forced or because you want to get better? Let's take this even deeper, what is your purpose as an athlete? What is your passion as an athlete?

Having a purpose is the basis for action. Without reasoning as to why you are doing something there is no need for you to be wasting your time. To me passion is the fuel to the fire. When someone loses his/her passion for the game, he/she has run out of gas. He/she still has or once had a purpose, however, for some reason there is no passion and without passion, their purpose dies. Having one without the other is difficult and pretty much gets you nowhere. There are no rules as to what your purpose or passion needs to be. This is an individual decision and not even something you have to share with others if you choose not to. Unfortunately, there are some young athletes out there who are participating

because someone told them to or made them do it. If no passion builds within these athlete they are the ones who will eventually leave or quit the sport.

For the purpose of this project I will be transparent and give you an insight on my personal life. Growing up I played almost every sport my township offered and truly loved participating. Met a lot of cool guys and had many coaches who taught me awesome things. Secretly I did certain things to make my father happy because he was ultimately the person who led me into the world of sports by playing and teaching me the sports he loved as I grew up. Having some athleticism I exceled in various areas and had a really good time doing so. A crossroad came where most of my friends were doing football and I was strongly involved with soccer. I would hear all these kids talk about practice and things I did not understand which made me feel left out. My dad would talk to me about football and explain the general basic ideas of the sport, which only intrigued me more.

I would put volleyball kneepads all the way up my arm and pretend there were shoulder pads. I would take any knee pads I could find and slide them up my leg to have what I thought were football thigh pads. I would proceed to throw the football in the air to myself over and over and over again while throwing

my body all over the grass and dirt so my body could be dirty and my clothes or “pads” could get stains.

The next year came and I did football; I gave it a shot and had a good time. I wasn’t too bad. I started as a running back and I experienced the taste of scoring a touchdown. It was a beautiful thing. But a part of me still wanted to play soccer. The following year came and I did not sign up for football again because I went back to soccer and this time I made the traveling team. I wasn’t the best but I was happy. I started on the field and was pretty quick and aggressive. Later on in the traveling year I learned my father liked football more than soccer. That day I quit soccer to never return. Why? Being 10 years old, I wanted to please my dad, the man who taught me about sports.

At my last HS football game, I walked off the field on Thanksgiving Day against our rival town with the largest victory margin in the history of the matchup. I had my best day as a receiver and cried on my dad’s shoulder because I knew the journey was over for me but silently him too. I participated and developed passion for a purpose that was through me but for someone else. Do I regret the switch from soccer? Not at all. Would I play football again if I could go back to the beginning? In a heartbeat. What happened? I found a purpose in making my father happy

which developed a passion within to love what I was doing while I did it.

My junior year of college I was diagnosed with Type-1 Diabetes. This completely changed my life and I spent the week in the hospital planning what I was going to do when I got out. Exercise has a tremendous effect on controlling blood sugar so I created a workout and diet plan to gain all the weight I lost back. Upon exiting the hospital I had a plan and a purpose. This motivation grew into a passion, which led me to joining the powerlifting team at Penn State and then onward to Olympic Weightlifting a few years later.

My passion is motivating and inspiring others to do what they may think they cannot do. My purpose is controlling my diabetes and living a better life.

Whatever it is you do, do it with meaning, do it with purpose, do it with passion.

Believe in Yourself

Simple. If you do not believe in yourself then why should anyone else? Believe in yourself, whether it is future ability or future accomplishment. Believe in the plan and believe in the purpose. Believe in your ability to reach the goal and do what you dream to do. Believe is be-lie-eve, the lie you tell yourself before you become.

When you doubt yourself you are already guaranteeing a miss or failure. I am sure most of you have heard, “whether you think you can or can’t; you’re probably right.” Well it is true; thinking is a process from your current mindset. If you are faced with a lift that is 105% of your one-rep max and think it is too heavy to complete, the mental aspect of fear and doubt cultivate off of each other. Before you even attempt the weight your mind has already missed the lift.

Believe in yourself before you enter an uncomfortable situation. Believe in your ability to do whatever

it may be. Trust in your skill and training to have prepared you for these moments. Remove mental fear and attack the task with tenacity. If you do not try to push your limits then how will you ever know if you can do it or not. It is ok to fail, strive to fail. Remember, success is a gift wrapped in failure.

A common theme heard in various aspects of life is: commit. Commit to the lift, commit to the jump, commit to the swing, commit and believe. Believe and commit. Whichever way you want to look at it (chicken or the egg), you must believe. Committing out of hope or with a lack of effort will result in a half-ass outcome. If you want something, then believe in yourself first and foremost. No one else can do your goal or dream for you. Even when no one else believes in you, believe in yourself.

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Thank you for reading!

Athlete 25 Project

is exactly what it says, a project

Any athlete,

Any age,

Any sport.

The project is designed to highlight areas of weakness that have a correlation to improving overall athletic performance. The goal is to get better, no matter your choice of activity or level of competitiveness. We can always do something better.

Take the challenge and join the project.

Find a weakness and work on it.

A champion mindset takes a champion effort.

PROGRESS IS A PROCESS.



Dr. Edward C. Camacho is a licensed Sports Chiropractor currently practicing in State College, PA. A decorated collegiate powerlifter, he has utilized his strengths and ambition to “Live the Dream”. Aside from working with many athletes on various competitive levels, Dr. Camacho strives to be a great positive influence by inspiring to motivate others.

“Chest Up, Strong Back.”