

PREFACE

Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now.
—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Poet

Success is the peace of mind that comes from knowing you did your best.

—John Wooden, Basketball Hall of Famer as both a Player and Coach

As much as we pump iron and we run to build our strength up, we need to build our mental strength up...so we can focus...so we can be in concert with one another.

—Phil Jackson, Basketball Zen Master (and 13-time NBA Champion)

Quality leadership is commonly sought but seldom achieved. Everyone talks about it. The need for it seems omnipresent. Almost everyone claims to want to be a leader, yet effective leaders are rare. In short, superior leadership

is easy to talk about and difficult to achieve.

At the risk of giving away the golden ticket before this book officially begins, leadership is a simple four-step process:

1. Have a clear vision
2. Lead by example
3. Connect with empathy,
and
4. Take action to make
teammates better.

This is not a step-by-step process, but rather a constant pursuit of all four elements. It cannot be achieved without interminable, subtle adjustments. Deficiency at any step in the process threatens or even terminates a leader's effectiveness. The most common misstep is leading by example. The others are not easy, but they do not require as much courage and relentlessness as giving your best effort one step at a time, accepting whatever happens, and then doing it again and again...

Many athletes today want to lead and are willing to work, but they lack the mental toughness that equals the consistency of a leader. When you achieve consistent excellence, others will want to follow. This book provides the details for how to discover and display your potential, setting you up to be the ultimate competitor and leader. It is about leading others by first leading yourself effectively through the inevitable trials and tribulations of elite level sports. In the course of clarifying how to achieve this, it also provides the means to develop a clear vision, empathize with others, and find the resources (e.g.

confidence, energy, time) left in your tank required to make your teammates better, too.

Many smart athletes believe that all it takes to win is talent and hard work, but experience teaches us that:

Talent + Hard Work ≠
Performance.

Why do athletes perform well at certain times but poorly at others? Why do many work hard and have talent, but still fail to consistently get the results that they expect and deserve? Are they practicing efficiently? Do you know specifically what to do to guarantee a successful performance in “clutch” situations?¹ The solutions exist not in athletes’ physical skills or abilities, but in their mental skills. This book will guide any athlete or coach who wants to learn how to bridge the gap between potential and performance and consistently give his best effort. You will want to be clear about what you want, develop your self-awareness, and anchor successful thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This book discusses leadership in baseball, though mental skills training breeds leaders in any performance situation.

Mental skills training significantly improves both rate of learning and performance under pressure. As the level of play increases, the impact of the mental side of the

¹ Yes, this is very possible, though you have to be willing to define success and “failure” in abnormal ways, pursue how to give your best effort, and follow through on what you know.

game increases, in large part because the differences in athletes' physical skills diminish. The physical mechanics of sports are often taught with impressive skill, but baseball is typically a sink-or-swim world when it comes to mental skills. This is odd since mental toughness is the mark of every great leader. However, it is also good news because it means that you can get an edge over your competition by practicing your mental skills.

Most coaches know that attitude, focus, teamwork, self-control, confidence, courage, and other mental skills are the keys to leadership, execution, and fun times on the diamond. Still, many do not dedicate much time to teaching these skills. Some coaches teach them haphazardly and some figure that the cream naturally rises to the top. It is not uncommon to hear a coach request (or demand) confidence and focus, but it is unusual for them to tell their athletes *how* to achieve these skills.

Top coaches get their edge through the four steps of leadership listed above. They have a clear vision about where their team is headed and how they will get there. They lead by example, because confidence, poise, focus, courage, and tenacity are required of them every bit as much as they are required of athletes. They connect with empathy because they know that most athletes do not care how much they know until they know how much they care. Finally, they have the resources to help their players give their best effort. They are not overwhelmed by the busyness of their jobs; they make time

for what is important, including providing guidance for improving mental skills. When athletes are well trained in mental skills, they are able to coach themselves effectively and get better, faster.

Many coachable, hard-working athletes consistently perform far below their potential because they are unaware of their deficient mental skills. They hear comments like, “If we could just turn his brain off, he would be one heck of a player,” but they have no strategies for keeping thoughts out of the way. They know that focus is desirable, but they have no strategy in place to get locked in. Professional and Olympic athletes have formal mental skills training readily available. Now you do, too!

The lucky athletes are the ones who have parents and coaches who teach leadership skills effectively, usually without using labels like “sport psychology” and “mental skills training.” (John Wooden is a great example.) Some universities now have a sport psychologist on staff or an undergraduate course related to coaching the mental game. This is progress, but there is still a long way to go. Poor coaching suggestions such as “RELAX,” “We need...,” or “Don’t...[make this mistake]” are commonplace. Some coaching personalities make it harder rather than easier for athletes to maintain an ideal attitude and focus.

I wrote this book because I want to help you, whether you are a coach or an athlete, increase the enjoyment you get from your investment in baseball. If you have the courage and motivation to be

uncomfortable, honest (synonym: aware), and persistent, I want to accelerate your process of approaching your potential. I love helping athletes give their best effort now! You are an impressive person if you are really trying to approach your potential; most people prefer a safety net for their ego. I am honored if you find that my words aid your journey.

Sport psychology and leadership training may seem confusing and complex. They should not. This book will open up the world of mental skills training to you in an easy-to-understand manner. The principles are straightforward and logical, so when you combine desire with discipline, acquiring these skills is inevitable. This book will guide that quest with clear definitions, common examples, relevant quotes, challenging ideas, intriguing stories, clarifying figures, action steps, and written exercises.

I began thinking of this book while in college in the early 1990s and began to actually write it in graduate school in the late 1990s. Many revisions followed. I love the question “Why?” “Why did that individual or team win?” Focusing on what is controllable, these questions follow:

- Why did that team or individual perform at that level in that situation?
- Why does one person break down under pressure while another breaks through?
- Why does the athlete who played so well one day play so poorly on another?

After a good deal of research, thought, trial-and-error, discussions with experts, and participation as an athlete or coach in literally thousands of ball games, I have a fairly good understanding of how the combination of an athlete's mental and physical skills leads to his performances, which in turn leads to outcomes such as scoring and winning. This book is designed to share that understanding with you. It will also provide strategies to develop leadership skills so that your outcomes can more likely be the ones that you have always dreamed of.

The course of study herein is a progressive one divided into five parts. Part 1 (Top Jocks are Scientists) discusses the foundation skills of control, awareness, and discipline. Part 2 (Attitude, Meet Altitude) discusses how to optimize attitude, including confidence, for performance. Part 3 (Get Ready, Get Set) discusses the skills needed to have the best approach possible. Part 4 (Go!) looks at what to do when it is time to perform (preview: focus and trust your stuff). Finally, Part 5 (Now What?) addresses responses, thus completing the performance cycle. This includes responding effectively to both situations and other people. Effective responses lead to effective approaches, and then a quality approach and a "locked-in" focus lead to superior performances. These behaviors combined with a proper attitude throughout will guarantee success as it is defined in these pages. They will *also* ensure the best possible chance of achieving all the

positive outcomes that typically (in America's competitive culture) define success.

Sport psychology has been called the study of what successful athletes do. I am a quote fan, and I have included many sport psychology quotes that relate to the topic being discussed. These quotes demonstrate that many famous athletes have superb mental skills. You will own these skills if you have enough desire, patience, and persistence. Be pleased with small steps; developing mental skills is a process like any other. It takes time and effort. Take it one step at a time, for if you continuously make appropriate adjustments, you will continually improve. Occasional leaps forward in performance are likely, but no shortcuts exist. Continual improvement, itself, is the essence of success.

Before you begin, I am tempted to wish you luck in your pursuit of excellence. But since one point of all that follows is to take luck out of the equation as much as possible, I will resist. Instead, I wish you personal excellence and growth as you figure out more and more details about how to coach yourself and others towards peak performances. And I trust that because you are sincere in your motivations, disciplined in your approach, and courageous enough to know that your best effort is always good enough, the outcomes will work out for you quite well.

IT ALL COMES DOWN TO ONE PITCH (PART 1)

Nobody who ever gave their best effort regretted it.

—George Halas, Athlete, Coach, and Owner

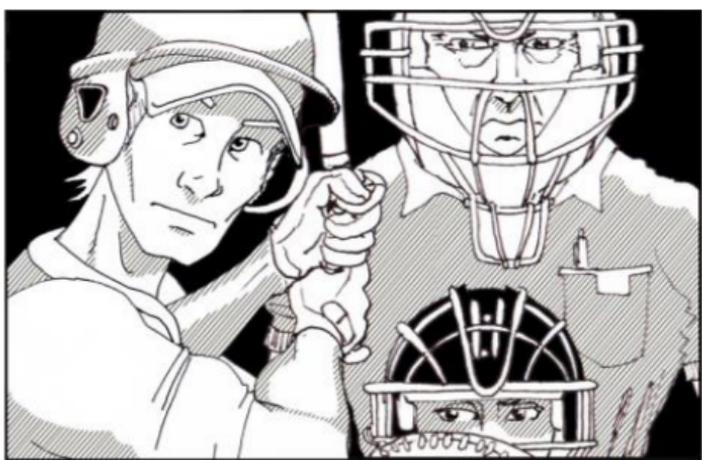
It is the bottom of the ninth inning in the last game of the Super Regionals. A record crowd is on hand and fired up to watch two powerhouse teams duke it out in pure championship competition. It is “put up” or “shut up” time, because this will be the final game of the year for the loser, but the catapult to the College World Series for the winner. The first two games have been close, but this final game is the best one yet. In the bottom of the second inning, Mark’s team opened the scoring with a single run on a beautiful triple off the center field wall, but the visitors answered with a two-run home run in the top of the fifth. Since then, the pitching has dominated, keeping the score at 2-1. Now it is the bottom of the ninth, there are runners on first and third, two outs, and one of the best hitters in the country is up to bat. It is “Do or Die” time. Mark is on deck.

Mark truly loves baseball; his life has revolved around the game for the past 15 years. He is a senior who has had a solid collegiate career. He will probably not get drafted into professional baseball, however, because he stands only

5'8" tall and there are so few available jobs. The possibility that this will be his last game playing organized ball briefly crosses his mind as the count on the current batter goes to 3-2. In the stands, the fans love this excitement. Despite their confidence in the home team, which has already won 47 games this year, many hearts are pounding as though they are trying to escape from their cages. In the dugout and in the stands, palms are sweaty and stomach butterflies are jumping. Through the incredible tension of this moment, the pitcher throws a nasty slider low and away...and the batter lays off of it. It is outside...ball four.

Now, Mark must [sic] step into the batter's box.

Is he ready? Is he sufficiently prepared to not just try hard, but to actually give his best effort?



(At the book's conclusion, you will find out more about Mark and what happened next in "It All Comes Down to One Pitch: Part 2.")

INTRODUCTION

DON'T TELL ME "NICE TRY"

Mental toughness is many things and rather difficult to explain. Its qualities are sacrifice and self-denial. Also, most importantly, it is combined with a perfectly disciplined will that refuses to give in. It's a state of mind – you could call it character in action.

—Vince Lombardi, Football Coach

Developing and refining my mental game has played a critical role in my success. For years, players have had to develop these skills on their own.

—Dave Winfield, Baseball Hall of Famer

Solid training in the mental game allows us to meet obstacles head-on and play with every ounce of our ability.

—Jim Abbott, (one-handed) Baseball Player

Leaders are made, they are not born. They are made by hard effort, which is the price which all of us must pay to achieve any goal that is worthwhile.

—Vince Lombardi

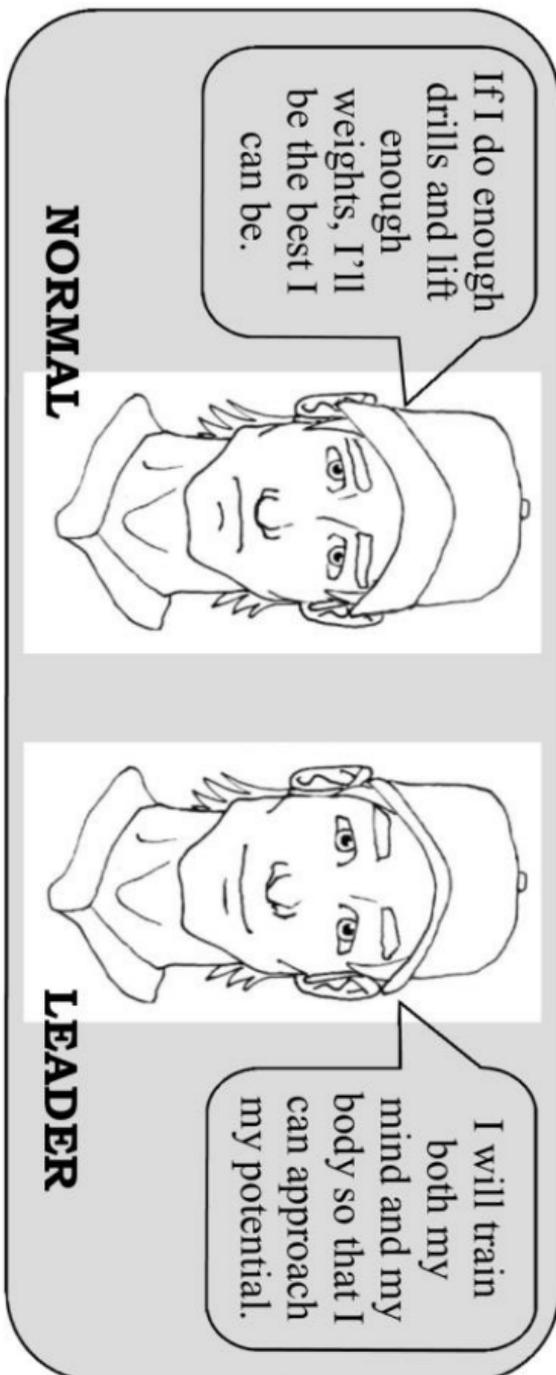
“Nice try.”

It sounds like a compliment, but is it? Close only counts in horseshoes. No one says “nice try” after a best effort performance. They say, “Wow!” “Awesome!” or “You did it!”

After the game, when someone asks if an athlete or team tried hard, the answer is consistently “yes.” But was it truly their best effort? Probably not, because tapping into the personal power necessary to perform the best

they are capable of at that moment in time requires a lot more than trying hard. Trying is a huge part of it, and the motivation to compete with consistent intensity is not something to take for granted. However, to give a best effort performance, athletes also have to do everything they know to do at this point in their life to create an ideal performance state, commit to a specific and controllable plan of attack, and focus. To restate this foundational model of a best effort performance, leaders get their minds and bodies ready, know what they can control and what they want to do, and then avoid thinking too much by focusing completely on the task at hand.

Figure I-1



THANK YOU FOR READING
THIS PREVIEW!

COACH TRAUB
MENTAL SKILLS TRAINING

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN POTENTIAL AND PERFORMANCE
Excellence Enthusiasm Forgiveness

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE SICK TO GET BETTER
NO EXCUSES Best Effort Now

STRIVE FOR PERFECTION BUT NEVER EXPECT IT
Control the Controllables **W.I.N.**

CONFIDENCE **FOCUS**
COURAGE **EFFORT**

Trust Be a **Scientist** Let it happen
ENJOY YOUR JOB KNOW YOUR JOB DO YOUR JOB

The graphic features a dark grey background with white and light grey text. At the top, 'COACH TRAUB' is written in a large, bold, blocky font, with 'MENTAL SKILLS TRAINING' underneath in a smaller, simpler font. The central focus is four interlocking puzzle pieces arranged in a 2x2 square. The top-left piece is light grey and contains the word 'CONFIDENCE'. The top-right piece is white with a black outline and contains 'FOCUS'. The bottom-left piece is white with a black outline and contains 'COURAGE'. The bottom-right piece is light grey and contains 'EFFORT'. Surrounding these pieces are various motivational phrases and slogans in different orientations and weights of font. On the left, a vertical phrase reads 'BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN POTENTIAL AND PERFORMANCE' with 'Excellence Enthusiasm Forgiveness' below it. At the top center, it says 'YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE SICK TO GET BETTER' followed by 'NO EXCUSES' in large bold letters and 'Best Effort Now' in a smaller font. On the right, a vertical phrase reads 'STRIVE FOR PERFECTION BUT NEVER EXPECT IT' with 'Control the Controllables W.I.N.' below it. At the bottom, it says 'Trust Be a Scientist Let it happen' followed by 'ENJOY YOUR JOB KNOW YOUR JOB DO YOUR JOB'.