

## **"PERSPECTIVE" - Can Make a Difference!**

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### **Abstract**

As we go through sport and life, a good "perspective" can make a big difference! Botterill and Patrick highlight and discuss KEY QUESTIONS about our perspective and focus that have practical implications for health, happiness and performance. The questions discussed allow us to sharpen and improve our perspective, so we have "a clearer mind and an unburdened heart". They are practical, "down-to-earth" questions that help us focus more effectively--in sport and in life. More details and discussion of these ideas is available in the authors recent book "Perspective: The Key to Life" (available from [www.mcnallyrobinson.com](http://www.mcnallyrobinson.com) ). The authors look forward to your feedback on these questions and their value. ENJOY sharpening your "perspective".

***Who has "perspective"?***

Most of the people we admire have "*perspective*". They are grateful, they have poise, they can see the big picture, they can focus, they can relate, they have natural energy, and they have *character*! They are able to live their life in a "*want to*" vs "*have to*" way, and optimize their health, happiness and performance. They are usually humble and love what they are doing. For them life is much more "*privilege*" than "*responsibility*". Start observing people who have "*perspective*"--there is lots for us to learn!

***What are the "core components" of perspective?***

Dr. Matt Brown did in-depth interviews with Canada's top "*character*" athletes. A profile of "*foundational*" elements of "*perspective*" emerged. The exciting thing is that these "*core components*" can be worked on in very *practical* ways. Ironically, many of us neglect these "core components", and wonder why we don't have perspective or why our perspective deteriorates!

*Identity*--People with perspective "*know who they are*"! They know there are several dimensions and attributes to "who they are", and they have a high level of "*self-acceptance*". In today's busy world it is easy to get pulled a thousand ways, and lose sight of "*what really matters*" about us. *Self-assessment* exercises are a great start.

*Support*--We can all benefit from knowing "*where our real friends are*". In today's busy world, it is easy to end up with lots of colleagues, but no real friends. Real friends are always "*unconditionally*" there for you! Nurturing a few "*real*" sources of support can be a big help in maintaining a healthy perspective. It can help you stay *rational* in an *irrational* world.

*Values*--People with perspective seem to know "*how they want to live and compete*". They know "*what they value*". They have decided what is most important to them. Often family, friends and community have been made a priority. Because they have strong *core values* and priorities, it's often much easier to embrace *higher level values* like "*positive rivalries*", which are an important aspect of a great perspective.

***Why are these "core components" so important?***

*Abraham Maslow* had a tremendous insight about human beings and human nature. He observed that if your "*basic needs*" aren't met, it is highly unlikely you will be able to "*actualize*" and realize your potential. If you improve your *perspective*, then you don't have to be a *prisoner* to your basic needs. If you look at yourself and the world in a healthy way, basic needs are either met, or dealt with by your perspective. *Acceptance, success, control and enjoyment* are a consequence of a good "perspective". The "*inner peace*" that results produces "*natural energy*" and higher level functioning. Psychological Skills and emotions become much easier to master and manage. Perspective is about "*foundational psychology*"! It's hard to be great without a good *foundation*.

***Are you enjoying the "process" of your sport or performance domain, or are you worrying about the "outcomes"?***

Young and elite athletes who enjoy the "process" of sport have a big advantage over those worrying about the "outcomes". To begin with, it's *impossible to fully focus* on the process of performing well, if one is worrying about outcomes. So motivation from within (*intrinsic motivation*) is much more suited to excellence and enjoyment, than motivation for outcomes. Enjoying

sport *for its own sake* is much more likely to produce *excellence and enjoyment* than extrinsic motivation. Advantages of *intrinsic motivation* include:

1. *Better focus on task*
2. *Less tension/pressure*
3. *Better images/thoughts*
4. *Less fluctuation in motivation*

So remember why you started sport (or another performance domain). In all likelihood, it was because it was *fun and* you enjoyed the *process*. If you maintain this focus, you are much more likely to continue until you get good. They say it takes up to 10,000 hours of practice to become a real expert. More importantly you will *perform better and have more fun*.

The best athletes focus on the *process* and let the results take care of themselves. Prior to the gold medal game at the 2002 Olympics and 2004 World Cup of Hockey, Wayne Gretzky reminded Canada's players *"to enjoy the process"*. Many of the top World Cup skiers are so focused on the *process*, that they don't even check results until they have rehearsed an even better run in those circumstances *in their mind*. Now that's focusing on *excellence & the process*. So for *enjoyment and performance*, adjust your motivation *intrinsically* and to the process of doing and enjoying.

#### ***Are you striving "to succeed" or "to avoid failure"?***

Most of us perform far better when our orientation is *"want to"* vs. *"have to"*. If we have a *"game plan"* that we are busy doing, we are less prone to *"fear of failure"*. And trying to *"avoid failure"* is loaded with the following difficulties:

1. *Negative images*
2. *Tension/fear*
3. *Less effective focus*
4. *Possible "negative fulfilling prophecy"*

Try golfing to *avoid failure!* "Whatever you do, don't hit the ball in the water"! We all know what is likely to happen with that outlook. *"Approaching success"* is much more effective than trying to *"avoid failure"*. So-o-o, deal with your fears EARLY (by preparing your responses and game plan. Then you can ENJOY the challenges of competition. A chinese proverb suggests that:

#### ***"CHALLENGE=OPPORTUNITY"!***

What a great way to look at things to solve this "avoid failure" tendency. Also if we remember the lesson from the 1st question (Who has Perspective?), it will keep us busy with the "process", rather than becoming fearful of outcomes.

#### ***Does being the "underdog", a "contender", or "the favourite" make a difference?***

In theory, if we stay focused on the *"process"*, it shouldn't make a big difference whether we are considered *underdog, contender or favourite*. However, because we are human, it is easy for these perceptions to start influencing our perspective. The *underdog* has *nothing to lose*--so they are less prone to *fear-of-failure*. Their main task is just to "believe" they are capable.

When one becomes a *"contender"*, it is easy to begin to feel the beginnings of *"pressure"* (from self and those around you). Ironically, feelings of *pressure* can often increase when you experience *temporary success* in competition. Our fear of *not being able to continue at that level* can often trigger an *avoid*

*failure response* (tension, too conservative, poor focus--due to outcome concerns). Being *emotionally ready* for temporary swings in scores can help prevent this problem.

Being the "*favourite*" is the toughest! Expectations to succeed can often trigger *irrational feelings of pressure*. Smart performers realize that there are always "*process*" things to be working on. Speedskaters like Catriona Lemay-Doan, & Jeremy Wotherspoon were always focused on *improving their race plan* and execution--despite usually being considered the "*favourite*". This helped them *maintain an effective focus and keep getting better*.

One of the best responses to "*pressure*" we ever heard came from former NBA star Magic Johnson. His comment was "*What pressure, I'm glad they are interested!*" He's right--*pressure is a perception*--AND if you have a great "*perspective*", it doesn't have to be an issue. Enjoy sport, enjoy opportunities and challenges, and it won't matter whether you are *underdog, contender, or favourite*.

### ***Do you "rehearse" strategies, execution and feelings for every competition?***

Every good performer spends some time mentally (and emotionally) *rehearsing their game plan*. Mental rehearsal prepares our body for action and produces a feeling of *readiness and confidence*. It's not possible to *rehearse* everything that will happen in competition, but it's extremely valuable to *rehearse* the main elements of one's game plan.

It's a good idea to do your rehearsal EARLY on competition day, so you can ENJOY the countdown. *Rehearsing early*, while your mind is clear, often has the most powerful effect. Occasional *spontaneous rehearsal* often happens, but 10-20 minutes of QUALITY preparation can often help you

feel ready and help you ENJOY the count-down to competition.

The main part of this kind of *preparation* is usually going over one's strategies and execution in different situations. Focus on YOUR performance, rather than spending too much time on your opponents. Also rehearse responses to some of the "*feelings*" you may have in competition.

Fear, anger, guilt, embarrassment, surprise, happiness and sadness are common *emotional feelings* in sport. Rehearsing a response to things that will trigger them is a form of "*emotional inoculation*".... When these feelings actually happen, you are much more ready for them and your response is better.

SO REHEARSE--so you are ready for the show.... and ENJOY it more!

### ***Are you "worried about how you look", or "enjoying what you are doing"?***

As human beings we are "*socially-conscious*". We often wonder (or worry) about how we look. If we are performing in front of friends, family, audiences, scouts, media, etc., this is often an unfortunate TRAP. Ironically, those that are NOT self-conscious and are just fully enjoying their activity, ALWAYS LOOK & PERFORM THE BEST. Total focus and engagement does that--it makes you look great.

So whether it is tryout camp, performing in front of parents, or performing in front of big audiences--BE YOURSELF--ENJOY WHAT YOU ARE DOING. *Prepare* to be this way, if you need to.... *People who worry about how they look, seldom look good....*

The key to solving this "*self-conscious*" tendency related to how you look, is "*self-acceptance*". If we know *who we are, where*

*our support is and how we want to live, we stop worrying so much about what others think. It frees us up to "be ourselves" and "be what we can be". Dr. Matt Brown found these elements in interviews with Canada's top *character* athletes. He believes these things contribute to a better "perspective" in sport and life. Working on "self-acceptance" and "perspective" in the emotional world of sport can help us realize more of our *potential* in life.*

### ***Do "irrational beliefs" creep in on you?***

Journalist, Scott Taylor, once suggested *"The great thing about sport is that it enables us to care passionately about something that really doesn't matter"*. It's true, sport enjoys an almost ridiculous status in life! In light of the importance of community and global challenges, sport probably doesn't really deserve such status. However, because we do get so passionate about sport, it is a great place to learn about emotions and *"staying rational"*.

Watch out for the following *"irrational beliefs"* that can interfere with one's *enjoyment and performance* in sport. Sometimes they can also interfere with our *recovery and health*. They happen because of the irrational status and significance often given sport.

*My self-worth is on the line* (in sport)--Our self-worth in life should be about many more things than a moment in sport. Make sure there is more to you than "jock". Family member, community member, student, friend, teammate, citizen of the world are all part of a *healthy rational identity*. Put sport back *"in perspective"*!

*I must be perfect*--By definition impossible, but in sport we often start thinking and feeling this way. The pursuit of *excellence* is highly commendable, but expectations of

*perfection* are *irrational* and often very *dysfunctional*. Free yourself up to take chances and excel--leave perfection for the *obsessive*. It's who responds best to their mistakes that usually wins.

*I must perform for others*--Guilt can be a deadly emotion! Wanting to perform for others can be a powerful motivator. Perceptions of *"have to"* as discussed earlier can destroy our focus and confidence. Perform with *"a clear mind and an unburdened heart"*. Don't let guilt (unintentional or not) develop from privileges you have been provided. Discuss this with parents, teammates and sponsors so you can do things for the right reasons.

*The world must be fair*--Unfortunately, it often isn't.... AND sport is a good place to begin learning how to cope with the reality that *the world isn't always fair!* Certainly we should always fight for justice, but an *irrational belief* that the world must always be fair can cause one a lot of agony and heartbreak, and hurt one's coping capability. Become a *leader* who can focus and perform through *injustice*.

The "raison d'etre" of sport, is to teach us how to *"stay rational"* in an irrational world. ENJOY the challenge.

### ***Do you enjoy "positive rivalries" with opponents & teammates?***

*"Positive rivalries"* have many advantages over *"negative rivalries"* in sport and life. Have you learned to *embrace* positive rivalries and enjoy the many *payoffs*?? With positive rivalries, everything is *positive*. You *respect and appreciate* those you are competing with. Your mindset is *"I hope you are good, because that makes me better, and that's good for both of us"*. This attitude clearly brings out the best in everyone.

Golfer Tiger Woods enjoys *positive rivalries* with his fellow golfers. He admires it and enjoys the challenge when his competitors perform well. This attitude has helped him perform superbly when being tested by a strong opponent. Speedskaters Susan Auch and Catriona Lemay-Doan developed a positive rivalry *on their own team* that enabled them to finish 1st & 2nd in the 500 metre Olympic Speedskating Race in Nagano, Japan.

Wayne Gretzky has become Canada's leader in hockey because he *loves* playing the best. As a player, captain, and now coach, manager and leader, Wayne *loves positive rivalries*. His play in Canada Cups, Stanley Cup finals and the Olympics is legendary. He knew *playing the best brought out the best in him*. The *respect* he has for the game and the people who play it is amazing.

Keep your rivalries *positive*.... When they slip and become *negative*, a lot of things deteriorate:

*fear of failure creeps in*

*tension/pressure builds*

*negative images occur (that interfere)*

*focus/concentration deteriorates*

*"perspective" disappears*

The person who is into *negative rivalries* is at a significant disadvantage in terms of focus, enjoyment and consistent performance. *Appreciate and respect* your competition--it will bring out the best in you and make for great *team dynamics*....

Where would we be without our competitors? Competing with ourselves? Think

about "*pick-up*" games of "*play*", where the competition is intense, but the welfare of the participants is always the priority. If rivalries turn negative, no one will play.... Ah, a *lesson for life*.

### ***Do you "draw lessons" after every competition?***

If you were an astronaut, you would "*debrief*" after every flight or exercise. When lives are at stake, it is critical to "*draw lessons*" from every experience. The debrief exercise is not just to *identify mistakes*, but to *see and recognize solutions*. We should do the same in sport and other performance domains. There is no point in feeling bad indefinitely about our mistakes. The key is to "*see the solution*" like great performers do, then *look forward to the next opportunity*.

Hopefully your coach helps you with accurate "*attributions*" after a competition. *Effort, ability, task difficulty and luck* can all play roles in most sport outcomes. If your coach doesn't clarify "*attributions*", seek out a trusted teammate and decide what you have learned and what you need to do next time. Once you have "*seen the solutions*", it's time to "*let go*" and get some *recovery*. It sure beats leaving with uncertainty, frustration and emotional "*baggage*" that can interfere with recovery and growth.

### ***How important is "recovery"?***

Most people realize how important it is to "*train*" if you are an athlete. You need to develop your "*capacities*" to perform well. Equally important, however, is your "*state*" of being. If you are not well *nourished, rested and hydrated*, most of your *capacities* will be "*masked*" or lost. So training can be a waste of time if you don't take pride in "*recovery*". Releasing worry, stretching properly, massage, hydration, good nutrition, rest and enjoyable activities are all part

of "recovery". Take pride in both *passive and active* recovery activities. It's the only way to make sure your training pays off the way it should.

Remember that "recovery" is *mental and emotional* as well as *physical*. *Mental* overload will affect your *mental* capacities and *emotional* fatigue can affect ALL capacities. So managing school and relationship demands can really affect your "state", and therefore your "capacities". The key to "emotional management" is learning to "accept" your feelings and then "interpret and process" them. Trusted friends can be a big help with this--so you respond and don't over-react to things *Repression or denial* of feelings on the other hand can interfere with recovery and emotional health.

RECOVERY is an important concept--in sport and life.... Get good at it early!

Do you focus on the 4 areas of "development" between competitions?

There are 4 important "areas of development" for every athlete. The first is *Skill development* which is obviously important and requires lots of *quality* practice. Although a certain amount of "quantity" of training is necessary for skill development, "quality" is probably the most important consideration! As well, for creative skill development, some time for exploration, trying things, taking risks etc. can be important. Many of the very best, including Gretzky, suggest we shouldn't underestimate the potential of "pick-up" games for skill development.

*Strategy development* is the 2nd major area of development and preparation. Every performer should have a "game plan" that involves the key strategies, cues, and responses. *Game plans* should be simple enough to *avoid overload* and comprehen-

sive enough to *hold your focus*. Simple strategies well-executed usually beat complex strategies that confuse or overload. Err on the side of simplicity.

*Fitness development* is the 3rd component of development and preparation. It involves developing *cardio-vascular fitness, flexibility, muscular strength and endurance*. Physical training loads should be progressive as you mature, but "recovery" should also be kept a priority. *Team* training can help make physical training enjoyable.

*Psychological preparation and development* is the 4th component to consider. Although this area is often the last area to be considered, top athletes like Olympic Diving Gold Medallist, Sylvia Bernier, believe good psychology can help you develop in all the other areas. Imagery can help you learn and train better. Relaxation can help recovery. Game plans can help you focus and execute strategies.

As well *psychology* can help you to get to know yourself better and develop a strong "perspective". It can help you with team and interpersonal skills, pre-competition plans, focus plans, refocusing strategies, emotional management, and debriefing. Take pride in ALL 4 areas of development if you are an athlete or performer. It is all part of helping you realize your *potential*.

### ***Do you get the "support" you deserve?***

To realize our potential we all need "support". We all need "challenge" from time to time as well, BUT *support* is a primary need! Ideally some of that support is "unconditional"--which means we feel loved for "who we are", not "what we accomplish". People who have that kind of support usually *feel more secure, have a better perspective and* as psychologist Abraham Maslow

suggests, *have a better chance to "actualize" their potential.*

Hopefully you feel "*unconditional support*" from some of the key people in your life. If you don't, explore some of the key relationships in your life. Sometimes support has accidentally and unintentionally come to feel "*conditional*". It's hard to perform well in sport and life if you feel support is always "*conditional*" on how you perform.

Good, caring 2-way communication can help with *rediscovering unconditional support or love*. If unconditional support is not there in traditional places (eg. parents), invest in the good people you *admire and trust* the most--It might be a friend, a grandparent, a teacher, a coach, a relative. We all benefit from a few people who support us for *who we are* rather than *what we achieve*, people who can remind us "*who we are*" in simple non-judgemental ways.

"*Belief*" starts with being accepted by others. Find those who *accept you for who you are*, & take pride in those relationships. We all deserve *support*--BUT sometimes we have to find it. Life is a "team" game....

***Do you think sport is good "preparation for life"?***

Like life, we don't always get everything we deserve in sport. Sport is a great place to work on our *persistence and coping skills* when things don't go the way we want. We start to learn "*what is within our control*" and "*what is beyond our control*". We can also learn how to *support one another* under

pressure, so *refocusing* is not so difficult. We can learn a good *work ethic* and improve our *persistence and resilience*. We can learn how to *manage our emotions* and become an exciting mix of "*caring*" and "*character*". We can learn more about "*who we are*" and "*the importance of values*". We can learn about *teamwork, collective belief, and human potential*.

Impressive *possibilities*--BUT no *guarantees*! Sport has tremendous *potential*--BUT *potential* to go many ways. For some it has led to drug abuse, eating disorders, violence, cheating, gambling, discrimination and lost souls. Approach this powerful vehicle with *perspective*, not *dependency*. Participate "*on your terms*"--so you get where YOU want to go ....AND realize your POSITIVE POTENTIAL!

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