

“Inner Excellence will change your life.”
—Vaughn Taylor, three-time PGA Tour Winner

INNER EXCELLENCE

TRAIN YOUR MIND FOR
EXTRAORDINARY PERFORMANCE
AND THE BEST POSSIBLE LIFE

REVISED EDITION

JIM MURPHY

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& THE BEST POSSIBLE LIFE

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PRAISE FOR INNER EXCELLENCE

“*Inner Excellence* changed how I see the world, how I think, and how I play golf.”

—Vaughn Taylor, Three-time PGA Tour winner

“*Inner Excellence* transformed my life—as a caddie, a father, and husband. This book is a masterpiece.”

—Brandon Parsons, PGA Tour veteran caddie

“*Inner Excellence* has had a dramatic impact on how I approach my life and how I play hockey.”

—Kevin Connauton, Defenseman, Arizona Coyotes

“*Inner Excellence* is an instruction manual that will teach you how to perform under pressure and live the best possible life. It’s something I’ll refer to the rest of my life.”

—Teddy Scott, 20-year PGA Tour golf caddie, 14 years with Bubba Watson

“I read the first edition of *Inner Excellence* ten times. I’ve practically memorized it. Incredibly, this revised edition is even better.”

—Jonathan Michael, Adjunct Professor, Trinity Western University, Governor General’s Gold Medal award winner

“*Inner Excellence* changed my life.”

—Ryan Dodd, World No. 1 ranked water ski jumper and current world record holder

“Jim is an expert in his field. ***Inner Excellence*** transcends athletics and will have a profound effect on everyone who applies these methods in their life.”

—John Kehoe, author of *Mind Power into the 21st Century*

“***Inner Excellence*** has profoundly influenced every area of my life.”

—David Bentall, President, *Next Step Advisors*, Adjunct Professor, University of British Columbia

“And now here is my secret, a very simple secret:
It is only with the heart that one can see rightly;
what is essential is invisible to the eye.”

—**Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince***

Above all else, watch over your heart,
for everything you do flows from it.

—**Solomon, 3rd King of the United Monarchy**

For my father, Donald C. Murphy

To the one who greatly influenced me to
think deeply about what to love and what to let go of.

I love you. See you soon.

For my mother, Michiko M. Murphy (nee Koyama)

To my role model. I love you.

For Naomi T. Murphy

My sister, my inspiration



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PREFACE

Koyama Bunpachiro had a difficult decision. Was he prepared to die? Was he ready to sacrifice comfort and pleasure and devote everything he had to the selfless way of the warrior? Would he honor the code?

To be a samurai in feudal Japan was to command honor and respect, embodied from a lifetime of training in moral leadership, duty and grace. Bunpachiro's life, like every other samurai, included daily training for battle and swordsmanship as well as calligraphy, poetry, art and tea ceremony.

The code of the samurai required total commitment. It would involve putting his country and master above himself, to the extent of imagining he was already dead. It meant waking up every day ready to die.

Bunpachiro chose the samurai way of life—and the acceptance of death that came with it. But in 1867, his entire lifestyle came to an abrupt halt. When two and a half centuries of samurai rule ended during his lifetime, he went from having incredible power to feeling powerless. His elite status, and everything he'd sacrificed for, was gone. His heart was crushed. Without a purpose for his life, the bottle became his unsympathetic friend.

If only Bunpachiro had learned what I've discovered, which is that every human heart has the potential for deep contentment, joy and confidence, and training it is the most important thing you'll ever do. Your heart is where all your hopes and dreams, fears and anxieties fade or flourish. It's the source of mental toughness and inner strength. If your heart is built around something temporary

that you cannot control, your life will be unstable. Bunnichiro's self-worth was attached to his role as samurai and when he lost it, he lost everything.

As you read this book and examine your heart, what you'll find is that your greatest dream is not realized in having millions of dollars or perhaps a house overlooking the ocean. Your dream is how you think these things will make you feel. Perhaps those things will bring happiness as you imagine people complimenting you on your success, or will bring great experiences as you have your friends over to enjoy your waterfront home. But maybe they won't. Besides, money and material possessions aren't actually what you're *really* after.

If you search your heart, beyond the desire for any measure of success, you'll discover, I believe, that what you really want is to feel truly alive, filled with vitality, purpose and meaning—absolute fullness of life. For most of us, perhaps unknowingly, life has been one long search for this fullness. We want deep, enriching experiences and meaningful relationships, a life where we're not constantly shrinking back in fear. We want to live courageously, learning and growing, fueling a fearlessness that awakens the lives of others.

That life is available to all of us, but we so easily get caught up chasing symbols of success rather than the real thing, sidetracked in busyness, losing sight of what we truly want. Rather than seeking fearless authenticity and personal growth directly, we pursue an illusion and get emptiness instead.

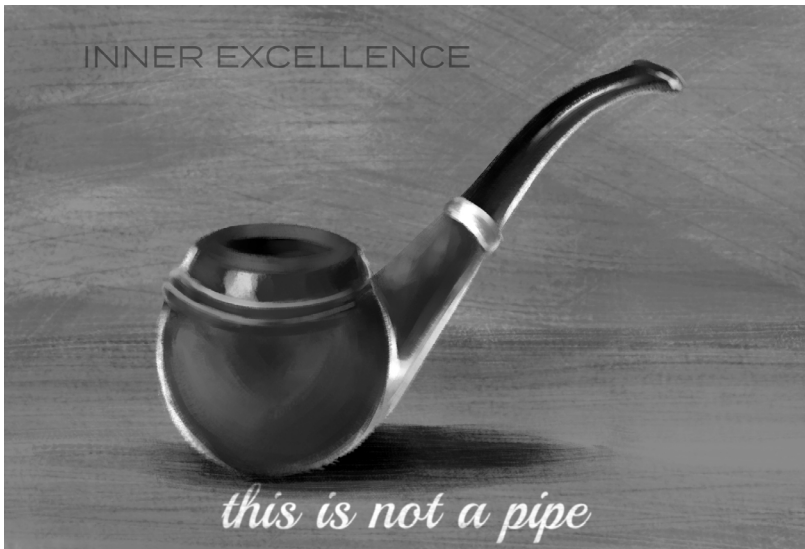
The direct pursuit means developing a new mindset and new skills, ones that lead to inner strength, peace, and confidence, independent of circumstances (the details of your life situations.) Your heart may need to re-orient its bearings and redefine success by prizing something that's more stable and powerful than your feelings or status, letting go of how society measures your life.

You can learn how to perform extraordinarily, under extreme pressure, *and* live a life of deep contentment, joy and confidence. In fact, you'll find that this re-orientation of the heart is the most efficient and powerful way to do so.

Yoshitaka Koyama, (Bunpachiro's son), watched his father, once a great warrior, lose his prominence and become an alcoholic. He saw that his father's identity was wrapped up in status and things he could not control. Yoshitaka began to think deeply about his own life, about what he truly wanted, and what was most important. He realized that what he craved was not power or prestige—he wanted fullness of life. As a result, Yoshitaka changed the course of his life, from one focused on power over others, to one focused on empowering others. Through this shift he gained deep contentment, joy and confidence and lived an extraordinary life.

This book was written by his great grandson.

PRESUPPOSITIONS (ASSUMPTIONS)



The quality of your *life* is based on three elements:

1. Your inner world of thoughts and feelings, beliefs and desires.
2. Your frame of reference (mindset) from which you see the world.
3. Your relationships.

How you think and feel is the result of the assumptions and beliefs that have formed in your heart (and subconscious, which we'll get into later). These assumptions and beliefs create a certain mindset that impacts how you relate to yourself, to others, and to everything in your life.

The quality of your *performance* is also based on three elements:

1. Your *belief* about who you are and what's possible for you.
2. Your ability to *focus* and be fully engaged in the moment: heart, mind and body (note: heart and spirit will be used interchangeably).
3. Your *freedom* to play like a kid, curiously exploring possibilities, excited for challenges that may arise.

The three elements that determine your quality of life, and three elements that determine the quality of your performance, are deeply interwoven.

I started writing the first version of this book in 2004 after moving to the Sonoran Desert in Arizona to live a life of relative solitude. I got rid of my television and over half my possessions, with Winston Churchill's words endlessly floating across my laptop's screensaver:

Those destined for greatness must first walk alone in the desert.

I went to the desert to live deliberately, in solitude, so I could live out Churchill's words. Words that also penetrated my heart were from Henry David Thoreau, who went into nature as well. Like Thoreau, I wanted to...

...front only the essential facts of life and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when it came time to die, discover that I had not truly lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms.

I ended up spending five years in full-time research, interviews, and writing, two and a half years of it in the desert. I was obsessed with learning how the best in the world performed with confidence and poise under the most pressure. The main question I studied—and posed to sport psychologists all over North America—was this: How can an Olympic athlete train for four years, for an event that may last less than a minute, and have peace and confidence under that kind of pressure?

As I dove into research, I realized that helping athletes win a world championship or Olympic gold medal would be meaningless unless it improved their quality of life—their inner life. So I started to study two main concepts:

1. How to have extraordinary poise and mental toughness under extreme pressure.
2. How to live the best possible life, one with deep contentment, joy and confidence.

In the desert I had an astonishing insight. I realized that the pursuit of extraordinary performance and the pursuit of the best possible life are the same path.

This realization changed my life.

I only wish I had learned it when I was playing in the Chicago Cubs organization. I could have performed with so much more freedom and confidence. I was playing the wrong game, but didn't know it.

Most of us have been playing the wrong game our entire lives. We've been focusing on short-term wins, temporary happiness, and surface-level achievements, when we were created for so much more. We've been playing a zero-sum, finite game, with a winner and a loser, a beginning and an end, when it's really an infinite one. Life is meant to be a journey connecting with others, growing together, discovering new and amazing things, rather

than a game of constant comparison and competition, always trying to fit in or be successful. We've been setting our sights too low, going for the low-hanging fruit on a single bush, when entire orchards await.

Which game have *you* been playing?

The best possible life—absolute fullness of life—is one with extraordinary experiences, deep, meaningful relationships, and, most of all: love, joy and peace. These three “resources” lead to an abundance of fruit that multiplies into so much more: peace becomes patience, patience becomes kindness, then goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and, ultimately, self-control.

Whatever dream you may have, I believe that in the end, what you really want is to be filled with love, joy and peace and all the other powerful resources that come with them. It's an extraordinary life and it's available to all of us, but the cost is high. It takes clear intention and devotion, and the willingness to be vulnerable in order to develop your inner world.

To develop your inner world is to transform your heart, so that what it loves most is powerful and meaningful. This enables you to grow in *belief, focus* and *freedom*, the three key elements of extraordinary performance. It enables you to direct your thoughts and create mental patterns around extraordinary possibilities and what you're most passionate and excited about—what you were born for—rather than being caught up in worry, stress or anxiety.

Most of us have had it backwards, trying to be successful in order to be happy. If we focus on improving our inner world, however, we'll achieve far more. We can have joy and peace, purpose and power—which will maximize our performance as well. But we need to get the order right if we want extraordinary performance over the long term—and an amazing life: heart first, performance second. Inner world first, outer world follows.

Besides, an extraordinary outer world is worthless without a meaningful inner one, is it not?

The journey toward the best possible life starts with adjusting the lens through which we see the world. According to Dr. Darrell Johnson, PhD, Teaching Fellow at Regent College:

Every human being has a vision of reality; every one of us looks out at life from a frame of reference. We all have deeply held presuppositions about the nature of reality. We may not be able to name those presuppositions but they're there. They're reflected in the way we treat people, the way we spend time and the way we spend our money. Or to put it more simply, every single one of us wears a set of glasses. These glasses were given to us by our families, by our childhood experiences, by the books we've read, by the experiences we've had, by the movies we've seen. These visions of reality affect the whole of our lives.

The most extraordinary performers and individuals who ever lived perceived their circumstances in remarkably similar ways. They had a lens through which they viewed the world that was similar to each other's but very different from everyone else's.

This book will help you understand how those amazing individuals trained their minds (and oriented their hearts) so that they were always learning and growing, and how you can train your mind and heart to do the same.

In order to have both sustained peak performance and fullness of life, we must examine who we are, how we're put together, and what drives us. In my five years of full-time research (post-Master's degree) the same component stood out for both peak

performance and having an extraordinary life: the heart. Learning that the heart (or spirit) is the key driver for both was the turning point in my research.

The heart is where we store our hopes and dreams, beliefs and assumptions. Out of the heart comes good or evil, love or fear. It's the source of our deepest motivations and greatest power. If we want to develop confidence and poise under pressure, as well as deep contentment and joy, we need to challenge the assumptions and beliefs we have in our hearts—to see if they are really true. We all have a story we've been telling ourselves over our entire lifetimes, based on assumptions and beliefs that have formed in our hearts. Some of these are empowering and true, some are not. We also have beliefs that allow us to see possibilities and beauty no one else can.

When your life is based on the Truth with a capital T, it expands every day—like the sun's rays filling a welcoming sky—revealing unknown beauties. On this powerful journey of *Inner Excellence*, we're going to direct what you think and how you think towards what's powerful and permanent.

First, however, we must let go of the assumptions (we'll call them presuppositions) that may have limited our lives without our knowing it. A life with unlimited possibilities is only possible when the assumptions that guide our lives are also free from limits.

Here are some old presuppositions we're going to drop (and the reasons why):

- I am my thoughts.
 - Sometimes terrible or shameful thoughts flash through our minds that are not true and have nothing to do with who we really are.
- My value is based on my results.
 - You may have grown up in a culture or family that

has instilled this in you, but your self-worth does not increase or decrease based on your performance.

- The best performers were born that way.
 - Whatever abilities you were born with can be improved far beyond what you've imagined, largely through hard work, deliberate practice on specific skills (that I will teach you), and learning to direct and control your desires.

Here are ten new empowering presuppositions that will form the basis of the mindset you'll develop as you read this book:

1. Every circumstance and every person you encounter is here to teach you and help you—it's all working for your good.
 - You were created for glory (infinite, inherent worth).
 - The life you've been given is meant to develop your character and prepare you for that glory.
2. Your life is a reflection of your beliefs.
 - The foundation for extraordinary performance, joy and confidence—and the primary skill to learn—is how to believe.
 - Beliefs are the control panel of your life, a subconscious thermostat, keeping your life in line with your comfort levels. To improve performance (and your life) in a consistent, powerful way, you must change your beliefs about who you are and what's possible.
3. Self-centeredness is the root cause of fear.
 - It leads to self-consciousness (concern about what others think of us), overanalysis, and ultimately, self-rejection.
 - Our greatest obstacle is getting in our own way through arrogance or self-rejection, both of which come from self-centeredness.

4. We all have the same deep needs and same deep desires.
 - Every human heart desperately wants to be loved and accepted; most of what we do is done in order to meet this need.
 - Our deepest need is for unconditional love and our greatest desire is to be fully known and fully loved.
5. Everyone does the best they can with what they have (in their hearts).
 - That is... according to their background, their understandings, their beliefs, their fears, their wounds, and their voids.
 - Whenever someone (including yourself) acts in a way that is painful or hurtful, it is because they lack resources such as love, joy and peace, looking through a self-centered lens of fear or pain.
6. The map is not the territory.
 - The world you see and interact with isn't reality; it's the one your mind created, based on the way you've interpreted and processed the events in your life so far.
 - The pipe you saw at the beginning of these presuppositions is not actually a pipe. It's a picture of a pipe. That may seem like a silly distinction, but actually it's quite important (as Rene Magritte shared with us in his 1929 painting, *The Treachery of Images*).
7. You are not your mind.
 - Your mind is a part of you that you need to train. You can learn to direct and control your thoughts, just like you learn to control your body.
 - The greatest freedom you have is where to place your thoughts. As you realize that you are not your mind, you will be less attached to the useless, negative

thoughts that come every day, and direct your mind towards empowering ones.

8. The problem is not the problem, the problem is the way you're thinking about it.
 - You're not happy or sad because of your circumstances, but rather because of what you *think* about your circumstances.
 - How you feel originates almost entirely from what you think; the state you enter caused by how you think about a problem is the real problem.
9. There's no failure, only feedback.
 - Success and failure are highly interrelated, equally important, and labeled as opposites by our culture.
 - Your ability to learn and grow and maximize your potential is directly correlated to your ability to embrace failure.
10. The person with the most control of their inner world has the most power.
 - Mastery of the ego is the great challenge (and greatest opponent) in every competition.
 - Selflessness—complete surrender—of the attachments, concerns and fears of the self, is the central component to extraordinary performance and cornerstone to creating beliefs that lead to absolute fullness of life.

Note: Definitions for some of the terms throughout the book are provided in the glossary.

These presuppositions are a crucial part of the mindset you'll be developing the rest of your life. You'll be learning a lot of new information and because much of this is new to you, it

may seem overwhelming at times. Don't worry, my professional athletes have achieved extraordinary success through this process, and most have felt the same way at the start. Remember, this is a lifelong journey. This is a manual you will refer back to many times.

As you go through the book, mark this section to keep these presuppositions and principles in mind. Commit them to memory and take notes, especially in the first few chapters as we analyze the challenging obstacles that we all encounter. As you do, you'll begin to notice how these perspectives will help you gain mastery over your greatest challenges. This will set the foundation for the tools and skills you'll learn throughout the rest of the book. Ok, it's go time. Let's do this!



INTRODUCTION

We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by an offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased.

—C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

In the early hours of June 27, 2011, Ryan Dodd woke up in an alley outside a bar in a rough part of town in Flint, Michigan. He had a fractured skull. Only hours before, he had been standing on top of the podium after one of the biggest victories of his life, holding the “King of Darkness” gold medal high in the air.

Professional waterski jumpers hit the ramp at 70 miles per hour and fly over 200 feet. Ryan was used to facing danger, but never so much as that night. At the hospital, he was diagnosed with a fractured skull and bleeding in the brain in three areas. He was rushed to the trauma center for emergency surgery to alleviate pressure on the skull. Twelve hours later they were able to stop the bleeding.

After a miraculous recovery, Ryan not only skied again, but he excelled. He won his first event back on the water in May the following year. Several weeks later he then won the next (and biggest) event of the year, the Masters, which he’d never won before. He went on to have the best year of his career.

Ryan continued to improve and in 2017 he broke the world record, became world champion, and number one in the world.

Over the past four years (2016-19) Ryan won 87% of the tournaments he entered. In August 2019, on a Sunday afternoon just outside Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, he won his third world championship in a row.

How did Ryan go from waking up in an alley with a fractured skull, to getting back on the water and achieving things he never dreamed possible?

Interestingly, his workouts and training volume stayed about the same. Yet, there was a fundamental difference between Ryan pre-head injury and Ryan post-head injury, one that helped propel him to the top of the world rankings and the world record. Ryan found a different way of living in the world – one that changed how he thought about his performance and entire life.

This book is about that difference.

It's a completely different way of seeing the world, one that transforms not just how we think, but what we think about. It's a different lifestyle, one that revamps our hearts from seeking temporary, surface-level goals to seeking powerful, permanent ones. It completely reverses how we pursue peak performance.

Ryan's life and performance dramatically changed by changing one thing in his life: he learned *Inner Excellence*. This book will teach you what Ryan and other world-class athletes have learned: how to train your mind for extraordinary performance and fullness of life.

Whether we're athletes or not, we're all performers. We all "compete" to have good days, handle adversity well, get in a rhythm that flows with peace and purpose, and get great results. We also all have a certain mindset from which our performance—and daily life—flows.

Your mindset is your overall attitude and way of thinking that comes from how you perceive yourself and the world. These perceptions create certain attitudes and ways of thinking that

become habitual. It orients your heart around what you believe is important and possible in your life. Your mindset sets the tone for everything you do.

The mindset of *Inner Excellence* is this:

I compete to raise the level of excellence in my life, to learn and grow, in order to raise it in others.

We don't pursue peak performance for the trophy or adoration, but to discover something within us and experience something we've never experienced before. We compete for the competition itself, to fully experience the moment and feel fully alive. We do this to help others—including our opponents—do the same thing, so we can all learn and grow and raise the level of excellence in our lives. We crave adversity and challenges as a means of seeing the truth about who we are in that moment and therefore who we can become.

We don't climb mountains to get to the top—we climb to see who we can become in trying to get there. The peak gives us a goal and focus for our behaviors, but the reason for climbing or competing is far more empowering than an expansive view and social media posts.

Consider the journal entry of Olympic speed skater Clara Hughes after winning a gold medal:

In my heart it is clear to me why I go to the line time and again. I can assure you it's not a medal hanging around my neck I'm after. Medals are things I send to my mom in Winnipeg, which she in turn shares with friends and family. They are not what provide the deep sense of accomplishment, which fills my sense of self, in turn teaching me how to live.

Hughes skates so she can learn how to live. The most powerful way to live is to raise the level of excellence in your life, to learn and grow, in order to raise it in others.

Here's a comparison of how the world sees competition and performance and how *Inner Excellence* views them:

The world's mindset	<i>Inner Excellence</i> mindset
Winning is everything.	Developing inner strength, fully experiencing the moment, and continually growing are far more lasting and empowering.
You are your results.	Results are an inconsistent measure of success and failure – you can perform poorly and win, just as you can perform well and lose.
The opponent is the enemy.	The opponent is our partner in the dance.
Failure is not an option.	Failure is the key component to growth. There is no real “failure”, only feedback.
Fierce competitors get mad when they lose.	The best competitors develop emotional control and use mistakes to get better.

Inner Excellence is an entire lifestyle and training system designed to help you, whether you're a professional athlete or everyday citizen, perform extraordinarily and be your true self so you can live with absolute fullness of life.

In this book, we'll look at how top Olympians and world-class performers train for years for an event that may last less than a minute. Despite not having full control over their results, these athletes perform with peace and confidence under incredible pressure. We'll then look at how you can do the same, whether you're an athlete or executive, baker or blogger.

In my experience talking to and working with world-class performers and leaders, I've learned that what we really want, beyond our tangible goals and pursuits, is to feel totally alive. We crave great experiences and meaningful relationships and we long to reach our full potential. We want to be challenged and creative. We want to grow. We want freedom to live with passion and pursue our dreams regardless of what people think, how much money we make, or what level of status we acquire. Ultimately, we want the best possible life—absolute fullness of life.

Fear takes all of that away. Fear lives in the painful memories of the past and unknown experiences of the future, taking us out of the unlimited possibilities in the present. Instead of challenges, we see obstacles; instead of opportunities, we see setbacks. Instead of experiencing growth, we live in the past. If we want to truly live, we need to embrace our fears and find the courage to be our true selves.

As an outfielder in the Chicago Cubs organization, my sense of worth and identity revolved around my performance, mostly my batting average. When I hit well, I walked tall and felt great. When I hit poorly, my shoulders slumped and my outlook was dark. Life was a roller coaster of emotions. I was a slave to results and it stifled my performance. I was afraid of failure and that fear kept putting my mind in the past and future.

When I started coaching professional and Olympic athletes, I saw this over and over again: athletes had lost their joy and

passion for life as they struggled under the pressure to perform. The fear of failure engulfed their lives.

This book will share with you how some of the best athletes in the world have learned *Inner Excellence*, how it propelled them to extraordinary performance even when they were filled with doubt, and how you can excel in the same way in your life. But far more than that, you'll learn how to live with deep contentment, joy and confidence in your everyday life.

We'll see how the basic principles are the same, whether you're an athlete or an executive, an Olympic team or corporate group. We'll explore the concept of selfless-actualization and the ways in which the study of extraordinary people teaches us to perform our best and truly live.

The first concept to learn is this: This book, this lifestyle, is based on a presupposition:

The biggest obstacle we face, in performance and in life, is self-centeredness.

It's not the morality of it that I speak of. The main issue is that in our preoccupation with ourselves, our vision narrows, our growth is limited, and our failures are amplified. Curiosity and excitement for challenges gets replaced by anxiety and fear of failure. The potential for self-rejection grows.

How you see the world, and therefore what you believe is possible, comes from the beliefs you've created and the story you made out of it about who you are. That story comes from your mind's continual assessment of your past, to which you've become attached. It's that attachment that limits us. Our biggest obstacle is in our mind, or, rather, the program our mind runs based on who we've subconsciously programmed ourselves to be.

The solution is one that has empowered world-class performers, Olympic and professional athletes, and some of the best teams in the world. It's a model based on three simple words: love, wisdom, and courage. Love is to lead with your heart, wisdom is to expand your vision, and courage is to be fully present. In this model, love becomes passion, wisdom becomes purpose, and courage becomes poise.

If in the pursuit of the extraordinary, you devote your entire life to learning and growing in love, wisdom, and courage, you'll find, I believe, that your heart will slowly transform to value experience more than results. You'll gain belief, focus and freedom (BFF). Soon, fully experiencing the moment will move up in priority over winning or the bottom line, which ironically, will allow you to win more often. Where it once focused on temporary, surface-level goals and desires, your heart will lose self-conscious concern for self and become devoted to what's powerful and permanent. Your performance will take off. Your life will change. Let's go. Amazing awaits.

1

MASLOW AND THE MASERATI

The Pursuit of More

Seduced by the siren song of a consumerist, quick-fix society, we sometimes choose a course of action that brings only the illusion of accomplishment, the shadow of satisfaction.

—George Leonard, Aikido master

If you want freedom, you might consider going into the wild. There's no mortgage, bills, or lawn to mow. If it's stability and security you're after, you might consider the three meals a day offered within the four walls of prison. But if you want a different freedom, the freedom of a life of vision and courage, peace and joy, it's going to cost you. Real freedom is costly.

In order to be truly free, we must have the courage to conform to certain disciplines, face our fears, and connect with our true selves. The path toward real success and long-term fulfillment is a risky one: obstacles of materialism, consumerism, and instant gratification confront us every day. They create a seductive numbness and a false reality that inhibits a powerful life, a life of freedom. As we gradually conform to society's expectations and its definition of success, we become defined by our day-to-day performance (and our results), we lose our freedom, and eventually, we lose our selves.

It's a daunting view, the risky path of our true dreams. It's much more comfortable to follow the easier, wider route of less risk, less failure, and more self-indulgence. We don't like to look at that unknown path of possibility; it's too scary. It's easier to

give in to that part of the mind that wants instant gratification and temporary pleasures, to cover up the bigger, scarier picture of what we really want: the sacred moments that come from feeling truly alive. So we end up using our God-given talents in pursuit of false idols—chasing money or status or numbers or approval—in an attempt to quench our deep thirst to be grounded and fulfilled.

We've all had times when everything came together in perfect harmony: sacred moments, when we were totally immersed in the experience and felt fully alive. When these moments occur, we wish, even for a split second, we had the courage to pursue this risky path with all our heart.

And we can! Often, though, we're so hard on ourselves, amplifying all our failures and regrets, that we neglect to see what's still possible—a life of freedom, filled with deep contentment, joy and confidence, independent of circumstances. We're all human, with the same deep desires and concerns. We all want great experiences and meaningful relationships; we want to be part of something bigger than ourselves. We want to love and laugh and be successful. It's human nature.

But each of us also has a mind that has judgmental thoughts, produces desires that hurt us, and creates beliefs that limit us. This all occurs because our minds have not been trained to manage the one component on which everything hinges: *our thoughts*.

In the pursuit of extraordinary performance, it's easy to succumb to anxiety and pressure, because so much is out of your control. When you learn to live a life that is fully engaged, however, then you can perform your best *and* love the challenge. Every performance, presentation, or problem you face is an opportunity to learn and grow and vividly experience each moment. You will find, as you take this journey with me, that your best moments always come from a clear mind and unburdened

heart. This allows you to take the risks necessary to be everything you were created to be.

The Narrow Road of Selfless Actualization

Don't aim at success—the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side-effect of one's dedication to a cause greater than oneself, or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself.

—**Dr. Victor Frankl, holocaust survivor, author,**
Man's Search for Meaning

In the quest for a life of freedom, there are two basic paths: the popular road, spacious and inviting, offering praise and admiration; and the narrow one that, though difficult, less glamorous, and often rocky, leads to deep contentment, joy and confidence. It's the latter path that sacrifices much but holds the key to extraordinary performance. There you'll find the freedom of an undivided heart, one not attached to your results or what people might think or say.

Psychiatrist Abraham Maslow studied this path in an interesting way. He analyzed the characteristics of successful people, such as Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, and Albert Einstein: how they thought, what they dreamed of, how they lived. In doing so, he found that they shared a number of common traits, including a strong sense of self, a close connection to others, and both the curiosity to solve problems and the resourcefulness to do it. They had high self-acceptance and were motivated to have peak

experiences. He called these people, who not only changed the world but also lived fulfilling lives, *self-actualizers, fully human*.

Self-actualizers, Maslow noted, with their greater vision, shared a unique ability to engage in moments in which they felt truly alive, creative, and integrated. Maslow's high achievers selflessly pursued a purpose beyond themselves. In light of this, we'll refer to these high achievers as *selfless actualizers*, or people who saw the world through a lens beyond self, and thus had the freedom to live fully. Here are nine characteristics Maslow used to describe them:

- 1. Total absorption** They learn to experience key events fully, vividly, and selflessly, with complete concentration.
- 2. Personal growth** They don't get hung up on lower level needs or desires (i.e., approval from others), but seek to learn and grow. Their goal is to experience the moment, more so than anything tangible they can get from it. For them, the means *is* the end; the journey is the enjoyment, not the result.
- 3. Self-awareness** Selfless actualizers do the work to uncover their true motives, emotions and abilities. They are guided by their own code of ethics, which often makes them feel like aliens in a foreign land.
- 4. Gemeinschaft** This German word means fellowship and community. Maslow felt that belonging is a fundamental human need and that connecting with others was an essential part of self-actualization.
- 5. Gratitude** Selfless actualizing people have the wonderful capacity to appreciate again and again, freshly and naïvely, the basic goods of life, with awe, pleasure, wonder, and even ecstasy, however stale these experiences may have

become to others. Thus, for such a person, any sunset may be as beautiful as the first one, any wildflower as breathtaking even after viewing a million wildflowers. For such people, even the casual workday, moment-to-moment business of living can be thrilling.

- 6. Authenticity/resistance to enculturation** Selfless actualizers are motivated to fulfill their own inner potential rather than society's external rewards; they have greater autonomy and resist passively becoming like everyone else.
- 7. Solitude** Selfless actualizers are able to be alone with their feelings. They desire solitude to a greater degree than the average person. Selfless-actualizers enjoy time for quiet reflection and do not always have to have people around them. They are able to be near someone and have no need to communicate with them; being in their presence is sufficient in and of itself.
- 8. Purpose beyond self** Selfless actualizers have some mission in life, some task to fulfill, some problem outside themselves which enlists much of their energy, for the good of mankind.
- 9. Lack of ego defenses** Maslow felt that we build walls we think will protect us but instead they hem us in. Selfless actualizers are able to identify their internal defenses and then find the courage to give them up.

In the pages that follow, you'll learn how self-centeredness leads to fear, and similarly, how selflessness leads to fearlessness. For selfless actualizers, their natural concern for self - and all its limits and petty quibbles - were overshadowed by a much bigger vision with farther reaching possibilities than a self-centered mind can envision.

For Maslow, these characteristics and the behaviors associated with them, reveal what's already within you, or, more accurately, what's already you.

Imagine Michelangelo chiseling away the marble block as he sculpted David. He cut away everything that wasn't David to expose this magnificent human form. Likewise, we are the rock with the potential to emerge into something incredible, but we're constrained by expectations, worries, and fears. We've been socialized to value the fame and popularity of success, however fleeting, over the experience that drives it. In this we lose our joy. We get so locked into winning that we become afraid of losing.

Attachment to something you're not in complete control of makes you needy and brings with it the fear of not getting what you want. Concern for self and self-consciousness kicks in, scattering your energy and dividing your power. Back and forth it goes, between the quest to win and fear of losing; tension rises as the pressure mounts. But beneath those constraints lies an undivided heart—the heart of a warrior—your true self. Remove what isn't you and like Michelangelo unveiled David, you'll discover tremendous strength and poise.

The Affluenza Virus

The true worth of a man is measured by the objects he pursues.

—**Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor, 161-180 AD**

To chisel away what's not you is difficult. It is easy to get sidetracked, seduced by the facade of what looks like your true dream. Western culture exposes us daily to the “affluenza” virus (the most dangerous type of virus—one that can steal your soul). This virus idolizes five things:

- **Possessions**
- **Achievements**
- **Looks** (physical appearance)
- **Money**
- **Status**

Merriam-Webster defines palms as (among other things) symbols of triumph or superiority. These five symbols of success can steal your true dreams by getting you to focus on them instead of what's truly meaningful, empowering, and permanent. The affluenza's virus injects you with the constant desire to gain more and compare yourself with others, and it's never satisfied. This phenomenon divides your heart and distances you from your true self.

Ironically, it's our fixation on the symbols of our dreams that takes us further from the real dream inside us. A nicer car. A bigger house. A million followers. Our natural attraction to things that make us look and feel good is where the road diverts from that which is powerful, fulfilling, and permanent.

According to Maslow, if we spend our life in pursuit of nicer places to live and fancier cars to drive (even if they are really cool), we're meeting only low-level needs. The problem isn't the components of the virus in and of themselves—the money, achievements, and so forth—but rather putting your trust and identity in something transient and unstable.

The real problem occurs when those external things become your ultimate treasure, because your heart will follow. The focus of your highest desires molds you to have the characteristics of that which you desire. Possessions and achievements, looks, money and status are all fleeting, and a heart built on temporary things will have insecurity as a constant companion.

As others praise or covet your symbols of success, you get a momentary sense of pride and false sense of worth, which

spurs you to chase after more of what you were praised for. The more you get, the more you want, and the more you have difficulty enjoying what once was really exciting. That striving becomes a sickness that leads to despair as your identity becomes characterized by what you have, what you've achieved, how you look or how others perceive you. When those things come, you see that they're hollow. It leaves an emptiness.

In Western culture, the affluenza virus is everywhere. When everyone around you has the cold or flu, it's hard not to get it yourself; you must take measures to strengthen your immunity against it, or you will succumb as well. Your immunity, as you'll see as we go along, is strengthened by a strong sense of identity, a purpose beyond self, and a powerful system for managing your thoughts, feelings and desires.

In my visits to other cultures, I've found life to be much simpler. In Costa Rica, for example, lawyers and cab drivers, shoppers and shop owners, all seemed socially equal. A dentist may socialize with a tow truck driver and invite the driver in for dinner after having his car towed, as my host family did while I was there coaching. I still recall my host asking him to stay during the meal—as if this was a normal thing—and getting so excited over dinner when the driver showed him on a map where he was from. The Costa Rican culture seemed far happier and more content than my own. They work. They eat. They play. In their developing country, they needed little and appreciated much.

Your Deepest Desire

O, God of wonder, enlarge my capacity to be amazed at what is amazing and end my attraction to the insignificant.

—**Dr. John Piper, Theologian**

About 1700 years ago lived a guy named Augustine Aurelius who was said to love wisdom and have a great thirst for truth. In his studies he shared an intriguing insight: *“We are shaped most not by what we think, not by what we do, but by what we love. For when we ask whether somebody is a good person, we are not asking what he believes or hopes for, but what he loves.”*

In other words, it’s our loves that govern our actions and the direction of our lives. What we love most at any given moment controls our lives at that moment. Augustine believed that the basic cause of our discontent was that our loves were out of order. Love popularity most, and insecurity will follow us everywhere. Love something much more powerful, however, like love itself—the unconditional kind—and we will be empowered *and* content. To live with fullness of life, then, we must get our loves in an empowering order. We must love most what is most powerful.

When I played professional baseball, I thought what I loved most was hitting home runs, the cheers from the fans, being athletic, and competing in the moment. What I’ve since realized, but didn’t know then, however, is that what I really loved, was feeling totally alive. I craved being fully engaged in the moment... playing with passion...being part of a team, growing closer together in a common pursuit.

What you love most is a good indicator of whether or not you’re afflicted with the affluenza virus. How do you know what you love most? Ask yourself three questions:

1. What do I dream about?

2. What do I worry about? (What has regularly made me anxious?)
3. What do I get upset about? (What has made me the angriest?)

The answer to these questions reveals what, in the deepest place of your heart, is most important to you. Your life will be as stable as whatever that *thing* is. That thing is what your life is built around. Do you have the virus?

One of the viral symptoms is the sense of entitlement that comes to those who are infected. When you've grown used to a certain amount of worldly success and your identity has become intertwined with it, you'll feel a deep disturbance when someone's words or actions threaten your reputation or status. Those things society says are great—even though they're fleeting—have entered your identity. They've become a part of you.

The most influential part of the virus is not the lust for more, but rather, the lust for more than others. The *more than you* issue is the fire under the simmering viral brew.

We all have an innate desire to grow, to become who we can become. It can be confusing, however, how to interpret what that means and how to go about it. It's so easy to get distracted, to get on the wrong path, pursuing lesser goals and being led by low-level pursuits. We want great experiences and a meaningful life, but often get lured into desires, comparisons and pursuits that are neither meaningful nor exciting. Life becomes repetitive and numb when your greatest pursuit or desire is ultimately empty.

Pulitzer Prize finalist David Foster Wallace says you're fooling yourself if you think you don't have some pursuit/thing/god that you're worshipping. Wallace explains:

In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice

we get is what to worship. And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of God or spiritual-type thing to worship — be it J.C. or Allah, be it Yahweh or the Wiccan mother-goddess or the Four Noble Truths or some infrangible set of ethical principles — is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things — if they are where you tap real meaning in life — then you will never have enough. Never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you. On one level, we all know this stuff already — it's been codified as myths, proverbs, clichés, bromides, epigrams, parables: the skeleton of every great story. The trick is keeping the truth up front in daily consciousness. Worship power — you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart—you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. And so on.

You might say, I am my own person. I don't have any attachment or thing I'm addicted to. I just want to be happy. Then perhaps happiness is your god. If that's the case, happiness will be ever elusive until your life has more meaning and desire than meeting your own needs. Your life will be a continual pursuit of more—more comfort, more acceptance, more followers, or just more busyness.

Pursuing Ghosts

In his thoughtful book *Season of Life*, Jeffrey Marx chronicles the unique coaching style of Joe Ehrmann, former NFL star turned volunteer assistant at Gilman High School in Maryland. Ehrmann's career in the NFL seemed outwardly successful, but it left him feeling empty.

Ehrmann explains:

I had expectations that professional football would help me find some kind of purpose and meaning in my life. But really, all I found in the NFL was more confusion. I kept having the belief that if it wasn't going to be this contract, I would certainly find some kind of serenity or peace in my life with the next contract, the next girl, the next house, the next car, the next award, when I got to the Pro Bowl, when we got to the Super Bowl. And what happened to me I think happens to an awful lot of professional athletes: you start losing perspective. You've kind of climbed the ladder of success, and when you get up there, you realize somehow the ladder was leaning on the wrong building.

Joe realized that he had been socialized to pursue ghosts of what he really wanted. "The single biggest failure of society [is] we simply don't do a good enough job teaching boys how to be men," he says. In his desire to be a man, he pursued a false masculinity by trying to validate himself as he grew up through his athletic ability, sexual conquests, and economic success. Joe asserts:

Masculinity, first and foremost, ought to be defined in terms of relationships. Success comes in terms of relationships. The second criterion—the only other

criterion for masculinity—is that all of us ought to have some kind of cause, some kind of purpose in our lives that’s bigger than our own individual hopes, dreams, wants, and desires. At the end of our life we ought to be able to look back over it from our deathbed and know that somehow the world was a better place because we lived, we loved, we were other-centered, other-focused.

Joe’s uncommon approach comes from firsthand experience in pursuit of the American dream, a dream that didn’t deliver on its end of the bargain. What Joe wanted was something more substantial than trophies, more meaningful than money. As he played pro football, he found that the alluring external symbols of success brought instant gratification but diverted his attention away from the qualities that would carry him throughout his life.

The trap Joe fell into, and the virus that afflicted him, is one that ensnares most of us. We all want to be successful, but what does that mean? Often people say they just want to be happy, but even that concept is difficult to define. We’re not very good at knowing what makes us happy, let alone how to feel truly alive. We want real and lasting joy, peace, and fulfillment, yet every day, we are presented with potential shortcuts that undermine this pursuit. There’s always something on the horizon that lures us towards temporary rewards, distracting us from the character development necessary to develop inner strength.

If you have inner strength, you move out into the world with peace and confidence, no matter what your circumstances are. If your inner life is unstable, you move out into the world with weakness, no matter how much money or success you have.

It’s natural to want to skip the character-developing process of your inner world. Our culture molds us into focusing on temporary, superficial goals. We easily get caught up in robotic

numbness, obsessing about getting to the next level in our lives and/or careers; we lose the meaning in the process; all that matters is the bottom line, win or lose, and how we'll be evaluated or viewed by others. We wind up losing sight of the reason we want the things that we do, which are the experiences we have and the growth that results. Rather than using each performance to learn and grow, every performance and corresponding result becomes an evaluation of and constant search for self-worth.

So often we just end up chasing feelings to feel better about ourselves, becoming a slave to our impulses, rather than doing what needs to be done to build a long-term foundation for the best possible life.

The Obsession with Winning

As a young boy and eventual professional athlete, I dreamed endlessly about being the hero—hitting the game-winning home run to win the World Series or scoring the game-winning touchdown in the Super Bowl. So when the Chicago Cubs drafted me, it was a dream come true. But my obsession with stardom brought immense pressure. I allowed my identity to become wrapped up in the Cubs uniform. My mind was filled with fear of not measuring up and not living the life I was meant to live. As a result, I became defined by my performance. My self-worth depended on how well I performed.

It's easy to confuse the excitement of winning with the experience of learning and growing and feeling alive. What I didn't realize was that what was most fulfilling wasn't wearing the Cubs uniform, hitting a baseball on the sweet spot or making a diving catch.

Winning has a deceptive fascination for us because our social-media-driven world obsesses about it. However, the fact that you won doesn't mean you were great, or at your best, or even

good. Winning, you could say, is part of both the solution and the problem—it straddles the line between what you really want and the affluenza-inspired illusion of what you want. Consider a race where one athlete has a personal best time yet loses by a tenth of a second and the winning athlete does not match his personal best. Who ran the better race? While most would say the faster athlete won, perhaps it's the athlete who beat his personal best who really won.

Playing to win is a strong motivator in competition, but when winning holds more value for you than fully experiencing the moment and getting better, you'll realize so much is out of your control, and tension and doubt will be your constant companions.

The price of anything, as Henry David Thoreau said, is the amount of life you exchange for it. To trade your soul for one victory is to get caught up in society's obsession with what's fast and hot and exciting: the 454 horsepower, the Italian mystique, the paddle gearshifts, the wow factor. With no awards (or press coverage) for the discipline, self-control, and hard work that it takes to succeed, the process gets undermined.

Winning the gold medal (or Maserati) isn't great because of the medal itself. The greatness lies in the person you become, the one meant to make a difference in the lives of others, the one who sacrificed themselves to learn and grow and become someone they never knew they could become. The process of learning and growing in love, wisdom and courage—to become more fully you—through all the adversity, is what makes the achievement great.

The best teachers and coaches know that an extraordinary life is possible, so they impart skills such as discipline, courage, and sacrificial love. They value learning and growth far more than the task they're teaching or game they're trying to win. Legendary North Carolina basketball coach Dean Smith relates:

Our North Carolina players seldom heard me or my assistants talk about winning. Winning would be the by-product of the process. There could be no shortcuts. Making winning the ultimate goal usually isn't good teaching.

He adds that former University of Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne believed that focusing on winning could be an obstacle as much as a motivator. Smith points out, "So many things happened in games that were beyond our control: the talent and experience of the teams, bad calls by officials, injuries, bad luck." Defining your success based on factors out of your control undermines the process that got you there, and Smith made sure his players knew that.

Winning and losing are so similar, yet their emotional effects on us are vastly different. For most of us, we're so attached to the outcome of our performance that it obstructs our vision and focus. We're so fixated on winning that we become afraid of losing, which takes away our freedom and joy. What we really want in life is much more than winning a game or a medal; what we want are permanent life-enriching rewards like great experiences, feeling alive, learning and growing and being challenged.

When we can "meet with Triumph and Disaster and treat those two imposters just the same," as Rudyard Kipling said, then we won't be seduced as much by the false sense of security that winning can bring, nor will we miss the growth that losing offers. Failure is painful, but the learning and experience of failing is so valuable, we simply cannot grow into our true selves without it.

Winning isn't the best measure of success because you can't control or sustain it, and you might win, but it may not be your best effort, which lures you into laziness. If your goal is to win an

Olympic gold medal or become CEO of Google, that's awesome, but as you learn *Inner Excellence*, you'll see the need for a much higher goal than that. You could use the principles and tools in this book to achieve your goal, but still feel empty. As high as those goals are, they are little lollipops when what you're created for is the whole candy store.

Five-time national champion basketball coach (Duke University) Mike Krzyzewski describes his approach:

If we're constantly looking at our win-loss record to determine whether we are doing well, we're not looking at the right barometer. If you're always striving to achieve a success that is defined by someone else, I think you'll always be frustrated. There will never be enough championships, never enough wins. And when you finally attain them, if you're lucky enough to do so, they'll only be numbers. Somebody will say you were great or successful, but ultimately you'll know it's an empty success. The only way to get around such an unhappy ending is to continually define your own success. Your definition of success should have more depth than the equivalent of winning a national championship. It should be whatever passion moves you deep in your heart.

As Krzyzewski discovered, in the end, the biggest victory isn't about getting something shiny, fast, and lavish, winning a gold medal, a corner office, or a national championship, but rather winning the battle with yourself – the battle for your heart. In every performance we undertake, we choose between our attachment to winning and our deep desire to feel fully alive, to learn and grow and become more at peace, more stable, more able to experience powerful, fulfilling moments. Of course, this

frees us up to perform with passion and perseverance—and to win more often.

In the pursuit of a courageous life, we must continually learn about ourselves—who we really are and what’s truly meaningful. There’s only one way to truly know freedom, and that is to find that part of yourself that longs for it and to find exactly what it longs for, beyond the temporary pleasures and possessions that possess us. We must be determined to be disciplined in ways that empower us, sacrificing pride and status for growth and experience. In this pursuit we can find a freedom that knows no boundaries, one not enslaved to the outcome or seduced by success, but instead focused on purpose and others.

Key Points for Chapter 1

- There are two paths in life: a life of freedom on a narrow, risky path that involves facing your fears to pursue your dreams and true self; or a guarded life where you travel a wider path of relative comfort and safety to pursue false, temporary rewards with less risk and fewer possibilities.
- Western culture is obsessed with external symbols of success, constantly pushing us to have more and be more, like a treadmill that never stops. This slowly replaces our pursuit of meaningful relationships and personal growth with temporary, superficial rewards.
- The price of fullness of life is costly, an amount most are unwilling to pay. It means doing the hard work of facing the truth about your inner life and relationships, and adjusting the lens through which you’ve been viewing and judging the world.

- Most of us have gotten sidetracked by our culture's definition of success and become defined by our feelings and performance, obsessing about what we want (good results) but can't control.
- People who have changed the world, according to Maslow, were able to set their hearts and minds on long-term personal growth rather than external rewards. This enabled them to develop inner strength that carried them through the tough times.
- Maslow's *selfless-actualizers* are people aware of their ego's need to be recognized; they guard against the ego's self-protective measures that isolate rather than enhance their lives.
- Unless you have a clear system for training your heart and mind, you'll get caught up in the cultural illusion of success, moving farther and farther from the inner strength and peace that comes with having an undivided heart that reveals your true self.

Follow-Up Questions and Activities

- ▶ Examine your life. Which path are you on? If you find your identity through what you do or what you have, does that give you real peace and fulfillment? If those things or achievements were taken from you, who would you be?
- ▶ Imagine you're 80 years old, looking back on your life. What was most important to you? If you continue to live your life the way you are now, will that be your legacy?
- ▶ When you've performed your best, what characteristics describe how you were feeling and what you were thinking?

- ▶ How much freedom do you feel when you're at work or home? What will it take to live and work with total freedom (even in the job you're in now)?

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After you buy the book, join our Inner Excellence Academy Facebook group for on-going discussions, and the latest tools and techniques.

Subscribe to the Inner Excellence Podcast, where we discuss Inner Excellence principles as well as interview extraordinary performers and leaders from around the world.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

On Dec. 21, 2003, I moved to the Sonoran Desert in Tucson, Arizona to find a purpose to which I could devote my life. My career as a professional baseball player in the Chicago Cubs organization was over and I felt like I was spinning my wheels.

I had a Master's Degree in Coaching Science from the University of British Columbia where I started the baseball team (which became a varsity sport across Canada) and played free safety on the football team (after an eight-year layoff). As a graduate student I did two years of research on how to build a championship team. I interviewed 38 Major League Baseball general managers, field managers and coaches in-person so I could learn how they developed their players' beliefs, set goals and built a championship culture. But on this day, I decided to simplify my life.

I got rid of my television, left my girlfriend, and gave away over half my possessions. I went to live a life of solitude, to put aside all that was not me so I could see who I truly was. I limited my social and dating life, and without a television, life was often lonely.

Towards the end of December after my first year I was sitting in my empty house writing in my journal. I heard a noise and went outside and saw fireworks. I suddenly realized it was New Year's Eve. I knew it was December but hadn't known which day it was. I walked back in the empty house and wondered, "What am I doing here, alone, in this empty house, when I could be back home having a good time with friends? Who does this kind of thing?"

I took a part-time job with my former teammate in pro baseball, Ricky Scruggs, at his newly formed Centerfield Baseball Academy. While there I decided to become a personal coach to pro baseball players and teach them how to have poise under pressure. My first two clients did extraordinarily well, so I decided to put together a little mental toughness manual to give to future clients.

I called up a sport psychologist and asked him, “How can an Olympic athlete train for four years for an event that may last less than a minute, and have peace and confidence in that situation?” That brought more questions than answers, so I called another. Then another. Then another. I spent the next five years in full-time research and writing, 60-80 hours a week. I interviewed sport psychologists, Olympic coaches, mental skills coaches for professional sports teams, and some of the best athletes in the world. This book is the result. The first edition of the book came out in December 2009 and went in bookstores around the world early 2010.

In the fall of 2011 PGA Tour golf caddie Jude O’Reilly from Dublin, Ireland read the book. He told his boss (pro golfer Henrik Stenson) I might be someone who could help him achieve his dreams. Henrik became my first PGA Tour client. Soon after, I got a call from Sean Foley who was coaching some of the best golfers in the world, including Tiger Woods. He read the book and wanted to see if I could work with one of his clients who had been struggling, Hunter Mahan.

The next year and a half I traveled to about 16 or 17 countries, working with Hunter and Henrik, as well as with corporate leadership teams around the world. Both golfers went on to have extraordinary success over the next several years, with Hunter winning two big events (including the World Golf Championship) in our first six months.

During that time I got a call from David Novak, CEO of *YUM Brands* (*Taco Bell, KFC, Pizza Hut*) who read the book and shared it with his executives. We did an *Inner Excellence* offsite retreat for the KFC Western Europe leadership team. It was an extraordinary week and led to more offsite retreats and many great relationships that continue to this day. I've been traveling around the world coaching world-class athletes and leaders ever since.

In 2018, I realized I had learned so much in the past nine years (the first edition of *Inner Excellence* was published in 2009). So I began two more years of writing 30-40 hours a week on this revised edition of the book.

Now I get to share the *Inner Excellence Revised Edition* with you, and for that I am extremely honored. This book is my life's work—what I've learned and the principles that have completely changed my life. I look forward to hearing your story.



INNER EXCELLENCE FAQS

1. What if I don't care about anything besides winning an Olympic gold medal, becoming world champion, or being the best Fortnite video game player in my neighborhood? Do I still need to clarify my life purpose and focus on love, wisdom and courage?

I totally get it. This is how I've lived most of my life—obsessed with success. The answer is no, you don't have to do any of those things. Many people have won world championships without ever thinking about what their heart wants most or why they want to be successful. However, if you're not naturally one of the most gifted performers in the world who also outworks everyone, you're going to want every edge you can get. Also, what good is it if you gain the whole world only to lose your soul? Wouldn't you want to go for what you want most anyway, a meaningful, fulfilling life with great experiences and great relationships, peace and joy, AND extraordinary results (the whole candy store)? Why settle for the Olympic gold medal or world championship (the little lollipop) when it may not bring joy and fulfillment? If you pursue *Inner Excellence*, you'll have the best chance of getting everything you could possibly want, and perhaps more than you ever dreamed.

2. I've always believed confidence is crucial to performing well under pressure. Shouldn't I have some ego and pride to bolster my confidence?

It depends on what you mean by ego and pride. If you mean, “Shouldn’t I tell people how good I am?”, usually you’re just trying to convince yourself. If so, there’s far better ways of doing that. If you mean, “Shouldn’t I walk tall and act confidently even though I may not feel it?” Yes, that is a much more empowering way to be confident. Essentially when you’re saying you want more confidence, what you really mean is you want to perform better, especially when the stakes are high. If that’s the case, even more empowering than confidence is to be fully engaged in the moment, heart, mind and body. You can be confident and perform poorly, which happens a lot. How many times have you thought, “Today I’ve got it—it’s going to be a great day,” and it ends up not being what you hoped for? But if you learn what your heart deeply wants, beyond the temporary cheers and trophy, and pursue that, and learn to train your mind and body to be fully engaged, then you will succeed far more often.

3. How can I relentlessly pursue my dream of becoming world champion (or whatever your dream is) and be content at the same time? Aren’t they conflicting?

Great question. A lot of professional athletes wonder the same thing. I think what you’re getting at is that in order to maximize your potential, you need to be obsessive in your pursuit, not “content” on a couch. I totally agree. In order to do anything extraordinary, which is what this book is about, you need to sacrifice and be prepared to suffer, continually learning, growing and improving, in order to become someone you’ve never been before.

The question is, how can you best do that? How can you maximize your daily training so that you are improving

as much as possible every day? The most efficient and powerful way to do that is to overcome your fears and self-consciousness, and have the freedom necessary to take risks and courageously pursue your dreams with passion and perseverance (what Stanford professor Angela Duckworth calls grit).

If you're not content, it might help you get up earlier, work harder, sacrifice more, etc. So we want to keep that fire and go one step beyond it. We want to have that sort of obsessive pursuit of excellence, while also not being bogged down by neediness... not "needing" love and acceptance from others, recognition, money or status. If we have deep contentment, joy and confidence, then we can dream great dreams, see new horizons, and not be caught up in our needs. Most people driven by discontent find that, in the end, their discontent was a deep need for love and acceptance, which can greatly distract from the process of daily improvement.

4. How can I have a strong sense of self if I am selfless?

Ironically, the most powerful way to have a strong sense of self is to be completely selfless. Our biggest challenge in life is our own self-centeredness, our own ego. We get in our own way with self-consciousness and overanalysis, and being attached to what we want but cannot control. These things bring stress, anxiety and fear.

To be your true self is to recognize that you were created for glory (infinite, inherent worth) and that the route to that glory is surrendering your "self" and all your needs, fears and concerns, for a purpose beyond self. Wouldn't that be amazing? Then you can have compassion, peace and joy, independent of circumstances, because there's no part of you

that needs those things. You would have deep connections with others and it would be far easier to be fully engaged, heart, mind and body when you perform, as well as when you're just... sitting on the couch.

5. What types of clients do you work with?

I work with professional athletes in all sports, business executives, performing artists—anyone who wants to maximize their potential at work and in their life. Often I'll be contacted by agents of highly talented performers who know their clients are not getting the most out of their abilities. Other times, a performer may have developed a mental block that needs to be sorted out right away.

6. You mentioned the extraordinary performance of *Inner Excellence* clients. Can you share a bit more?

While my current client list is private, I can tell you that since I started coaching professional and Olympic athletes full-time over 11 years ago, the majority of my clients (individuals and teams) have had the best year of their careers our first year together, or at least in the past five years.

7. How do I start creating routines and habits to live a life of *Inner Excellence*?

Go to www.innerexcellence.com and sign up for my VIP list and join my Facebook group. You'll get the latest tips and tools to help you live an extraordinary life. You'll also be the first to hear about upcoming *Inner Excellence* retreats around the world that you can join or an online course or webinar that I occasionally offer. You'll be sure to catch all the latest updates, principles and tools that I teach to the best

performers and leaders in the world. You can also follow *Inner Excellence* on other social media.

8. How is *Inner Excellence* different from sports psychology?

Sports psychology is important because it teaches essential mental skills (like ones I've shared with you) such as visualization, self-talk, affirmations, relaxation techniques, etc. *Inner Excellence* takes the best of sports psychology and adds depth and fullness of life, as well as an extraordinary way of eliminating mental blocks, fears and painful memories from trauma. The in-depth training of the heart and mind, combined with eliminating the mental blocks that come from trauma is a combination that has transformed lives around the world, as well as helped athletes and leaders achieve extraordinary success.

9. An *Inner Excellence* Retreat sounds amazing. Can you tell me more?

At the retreats, you'll learn more in 3-7 days (depending on the length of the retreat) than you would in a year of monthly coaching. We have amazing food, incredible fellowship, and every person clarifies their life purpose as well as learns the principles, tools and skills to live an extraordinary life. The feedback from the retreats has been amazing, most of which have been corporate leadership retreats or family retreats.

10. What is *The Inner Excellence Freedom Project*?

The Inner Excellence Freedom Project (IXFP) is the name of the 501c3 non-profit charity I started in 2019. This charity is devoted to providing choices to those who live in poverty or prison or just do not have freedom to do basic things.

When I am sick, I go to the doctor. When my roof leaks, I get it fixed. Much of the world does not have those options. I want to change that.

We choose various projects to help those living in poverty by providing tangible goods like building a house for a family in need, or leading an *Inner Excellence* retreat in prisons.

The purpose of my life is to share God's love, wisdom and courage with athletes and leaders around the world. The *Inner Excellence Freedom Project* (IXFP) is one of the primary ways I do that (besides sharing *Inner Excellence* with you all). Ten percent of the proceeds of this book go towards IXFP. I'll continue to donate greater and greater personal funds for these projects, with the goal of 95% of my income donated by 2028.

Since 2013 I've been on the board of directors for the Father's Heart Foundation, a non-profit charity/orphanage in El Salvador. I've also been sharing *Inner Excellence* retreats at prisons as well as building houses in Mexico with a group called *Youth With A Mission, Homes of Hope*.

For more information, please go to www.innerexcellencefreedomproject.org.

11. How can I order multiple copies of *Inner Excellence*?

If you would like to order 10 or more copies of *Inner Excellence*, please email livedeep@innerexcellence.com and my assistant will send you signed copies at a discount.

To reach me personally, email jim@innerexcellence.com. Generally I respond to all emails within 3-4 days.



APPENDIX A

12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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Note: I included the 12 steps because they have been extraordinarily successful in transforming lives when no other solution worked. In my experience talking with AA members, perhaps the biggest thing that turned around their lives is surrender. Surrender to a power greater than self that can restore you is the heart of excellence. Learning the power of selflessness and unconditional love are two of the greatest things one can ever learn.



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love and fear, and all the things we encounter in the pursuit of peak performance and fullness of life.

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NOTES

Preface

Yoshitaka Koyama (Bunpachiro's son) watched: Koyama, Michiko. Private correspondence.

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Introduction

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JIM MURPHY is a Performance Coach (mental skills) to the best athletes and leaders in the world.

10% of the profits from this book go directly to
The Inner Excellence Freedom Project.