



You Already Know How to Be Great: A Simple Way to Remove Interference and Unlock Your Greatest Potential

By Alan Fine, Rebecca R. Merrill

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But Alan Fine, an accomplished tennis, golf, and executive coach and a renowned authority on peak performance, believes that this "outside-in" method is precisely what's holding you back from doing your best work. He's found the biggest obstacle to improved performance isn't not knowing what to do; it's not doing what you already know. Ironically, the quest for information and instructions designed to help you get ahead can often interfere with your ability to focus on doing something.

Fine reveals his simple and proven approach to achieving breakthrough performance. It starts with reducing the interference that blocks your potential through an amazing process called G.R.O.W. (Goal, Reality, Options, Way Forward).

No matter who you are or what you do, *You Already Know How to Be Great* will help you eliminate what is standing in the way of your goals.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Alan Fine is president of InsideOut Development, which offers training programs, executive coaching, and organizational consulting. His powerful approach to performance improvement has been adopted by some of the world's most respected organizations in an array of industries including IBM, NASA, Honeywell, Procter & Gamble, GAP, and Coca Cola. Fine lives in Utah.

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You Already Know How to Be Great

You Already Know How to Be Great

To all those amazing people *who make it safe for others to explore their own experience—especially those who did and still do it for me*

FOREWORD

by Stephen R. Covey

Over the years, one of the most important ideas I've learned about and taught is the power of a “paradigm shift”—of seeing something in a new and different way that creates a huge change in thinking and behavior.

In *You Already Know How to Be Great*, Alan Fine creates a paradigm shift of major proportion. Most often, he says, dramatic performance improvement does not come from gaining new knowledge; it comes from getting rid of the “interference” that gets in the way of using the knowledge and capacity we already have. That one idea has phenomenal implications and applications. It literally transforms the way we approach improving our own performance and also the way we approach helping others improve theirs.

Five Reasons Why I Like This Book

There are a number of reasons why Alan's approach resonates with my passion for effectiveness in leadership and in life.

TO BEGIN WITH, it taps into two fundamental human desires that are deep within each of us—the desire to be and do our best and the desire to be significant to others, to make a difference. These desires created a catalyst for my own work on *The 8th Habit*—“Find Your Voice and Inspire Others to Find Theirs.” In *You Already Know*, Alan shares a paradigm and a process to help readers fulfill these basic desires by improving their own performance in any area of life and also helping others to improve theirs.

SECOND, it's not some fad or “flavor of the month.” It's based on sound, universal principles. For example, Alan's approach recognizes top performance only comes when the *performer*, not the coach (or leader or manager or teacher or parent), proactively accepts responsibility for results. This frees individuals to release their talent and creativity and increase their performance capacity.

THIRD, this approach is highly pragmatic. It not only acknowledges the principles of breakthrough performance; it provides both the performer and the “coach” a simple but robust way to implement them

through Alan's GROW process.

FOURTH, it stands solidly apart from approaches that while they enable people to perform in the moment create a dependency on the advice and direction of others. Truly great leaders, great managers, great coaches, and great parents help others strengthen their core capacity, thus empowering them to be effective not only in the moment but also in multiple applications over time.

FIFTH, this approach is universally applicable. It provides a template that can help *any* individual improve performance in *any* area of life. It can help *any* group or team resolve *any* issue and improve performance in *any* organization. One of the important implications is that this truly is an approach for a global world.

I'm excited by the insight this book provides into the nature of human performance and how to influence it in self and in others. I'm even more excited by the language Alan has developed to help people understand and talk about performance issues and by the simple, highly pragmatic tools he has created to address them. But most of all, I'm excited by the results. There are a lot of people with a lot of good ideas for making the world better. But Alan is one who's been able to translate ideas into simple doable actions that truly create breakthrough outcomes.

To me, this book is really a book about leadership—both personal and public. It gives readers the vision and the tools to exercise personal leadership by improving their own performance and public leadership by helping others improve theirs. In doing so, it helps readers walk an enriching path of fulfillment and contribution. It is a truly landmark book on helping yourself and others journey to greatness.

UP FRONT

If we did the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves.

THOMAS A. EDISON,
American inventor and businessman

Do any of these scenarios sound familiar?

- You know that if you had a regular exercise program you'd have more energy and feel better. You've bought a variety of exercise equipment. You've tried a lot of different types of programs. Each time, you've lasted about three weeks. You ask yourself: "What's the matter with me? Do I just not have the character to do this—or was I somewhere else when the exercise genes got passed out?"
- You've been told that your job as a manager includes coaching the people in your division, so you've been meeting with them regularly, giving them good instruction and trying to help them improve. But much of the time, your help doesn't seem to matter, and sometimes it's even rejected. One person you need to talk with about an accountability issue refuses to even meet with you. You think: "How can I coach these people, and how can I do it in a way that will truly make a difference?"
- You're trying to help your daughter grow up to be a responsible adult, but you can't even get her to clean her room. You've tried everything—incentives, encouragement, punishment, withdrawal of privileges, even yelling—but nothing seems to work. You wonder: "What's it going to take to make her want to keep her room clean?"
- You're standing on the golf course at the first tee. You're playing with some clients, and you'd really like to make a good impression. You know what it's like to hit a really nice drive, but you can't do it consistently. So you worry: "What if I hit the ball into the trees or 'whiff' it? What are these people going to

think?”

- Your organization is not performing as well as you’d like. You’ve tried a variety of approaches and had some success, but the goals you set at the top never really make it down the line and your employees are not fully engaged. You spend most of your days dealing with internal problems instead of external opportunities. You keep asking yourself: “How can I raise performance throughout the organization? What can I do to get everyone fully engaged and on the same page?”

These scenarios represent a wide range of common experience, but they have one important element in common: they all deal with issues of performance—either in self or in others. Most of us want the results of top performance. We want the enthused organization, the engaged work team, the exceeded sales quotas, the responsible child, the low handicap on the golf course, the increased energy and the washboard abs. But even when we know what it takes, we don’t always have the tools that make those kinds of results possible.

This book is about those tools. It’s about a paradigm, a principle, and a process that can lead to breakthrough performance in the workplace, on the golf course, in the boardroom, in the family room, or anyplace where higher performance makes a difference. It’s about how to improve performance in your own life and also in the lives of those you are trying to help. It’s based on the premise that

EVERYONE has the potential to perform better;

potential is blocked by interference;

interference can be reduced by focused attention; and

focused attention can be simply and systematically increased.

Let Me Introduce Myself

My name is Alan Fine. I began my career teaching tennis in Wales. In my search to be a better coach, I stumbled onto a paradigm of human performance and a simple process to improve it that have led me to successfully coach CEOs, managers, and leaders in organizations worldwide, as well as world-class golfers such as David Feherty, Colin Montgomerie, Phil Price, and Stephen Ames.

The primary focus of my company—InsideOut Development—is working with business leaders and managers, and that’s what I’ve spent most of the past twenty-five years doing. But I’ve also been thrilled to see how people immediately apply these principles in other areas, including parenting, sports, hobbies, and the performing arts. As many have observed, this “whole life” approach consistently reinforces the paradigm and process, making it significantly easier to improve performance both on and off the job.

As I’ve worked with these ideas over the years, two things have become clear to me:

1. When we don’t understand the nature of human performance, we tend to diagnose performance problems and come up with solutions from a perspective that represents only a fraction of what it takes to be a top performer; and the solutions we come up with typically do not sustain long-term performance improvement.
2. If we don’t have a way to consistently make quick, accurate decisions and execute them well in today’s fast-paced global economy, we’re going to be left in the dust.

This book can help you both understand human performance and make quick, accurate decisions in moving

ahead. It will give you a simple, effective paradigm and a scalable, replicable process that will enable you to consistently improve performance in any area of life.

My Invitation to You

You Already Know How to Be Great has been written in response to the many requests I have received over the years to put the inside-out performance principles into writing. It reflects my ongoing quest to make these principles highly practical and simple to apply in everyday life.

My invitation to you is to simply play with the ideas in these pages and use what's helpful to you. As you will discover, this book is less about gaining new knowledge and more about getting rid of what's keeping you from using the knowledge you already have. It's less about doing new things and more about understanding and giving language and order to some of the great things you already do, so that you can do those things more consistently and with better results.

I encourage you to approach this book in whatever way you feel will work best for you. If you like supportive research and quotes, check out the call-out boxes. If you want to give the content deeper personal thought, go through the Reflective Questions at the end of each chapter. If you prefer to skip the research and questions, just read the text. I do recommend that you pay particular attention to each of the stories. They represent the “live” research for this book. They come from people who have had experience with this material not only in their organizations but also in their personal lives. Because the fundamental ideas are based on principles, even if you don't happen to be a manager or a leader or a teacher or a parent now, you'll find the insights shared by these individuals can be applied in almost any situation. Besides, you never know when you might end up in one of these roles.

I also invite you to check out the You Already Know How to Be Great online community at www.alan-fine.com, where you can find additional examples, exercises, and tools to help you apply the principles in each chapter of this book. Within the community, you'll also be able to learn from the experiences of others and share your own experiences so that others can learn from you. I've placed a link at the end of each chapter as a reminder of this additional resource.

I'm excited to share these principles and tools with you. I certainly don't have all the answers. And I'm not suggesting that what's in this book is a panacea for every performance issue. But in years of coaching, I've become convinced that understanding some essential elements of human performance and having a simple process to influence those elements can help you achieve your greatness in any arena. My guess is that deep inside, you—and the people you're trying to help—have nurtured some dreams of what's possible in life, but that “stuff” has gotten in the way of realizing those dreams. It's my hope that this book will help you get rid of the “stuff” and free you—and those you help—to make those dreams come true.

ALAN FINE

Part 1

PARADIGM and PRINCIPLE

CHAPTER ONE

A Blinding Glimpse of the **OBVIOUS**

As I look back, it seems that everything was gray—the sky, the pavement, the walls surrounding the

pavement, the castlelike building with its turret-topped roof, even the endless terraced rows of tiny, two-up, two-down houses outside the walls. From a distance, there was no indication that this very gray place—the Mackintosh Tennis Club—was the home of some of the best tennis players in Wales. There was also no indication that this place would become the scene of one of the greatest epiphanies of my life or that it would open the door for me to help managers, leaders, salespeople, athletes, teachers, musicians, parents, and others around the world achieve breakthrough performance.

The journey that led me to this place on that eventful morning was something of a fluke. It had begun years before when I was eleven and my brother entered me as a contestant in our school tennis tournament. I was a severely asthmatic, skinny, and painfully shy kid, and up to that point, I'd only been on a tennis court three times in my life. Somehow I found myself in the finals and discovered I was up against a thirteen-year-old who was six feet tall and captain of the rugby team—the school “jock.” To this day, I can remember exactly where I was standing on the court when I suddenly realized that I was ahead, 6–4, 4–0. I remember a voice in my head saying, “Okay, you’ve won ten games. You only have to win two more, and you’ll be the school champion! How hard can that be?” Suddenly I froze. I didn’t win another game. The jock beat me 6–0 in the final set. I could feel the disappointment of my PE instructor all the way from across the court and up on the second tier of the playground. I could sense the kids who had been watching whispering, “Wow! What happened to him?” All I could think in that moment was, “Please, please don’t let me cry!”

Though I was mortified by the defeat, from that day I decided to take up tennis with a vengeance. For the first time in my life, I'd found something that both my peers and the adults in my life recognized me for.

During the next few years, one of the local sports administrators took me under his wing. He took me to training programs for tennis coaches where I got to be the guinea pig for the trainee coaches. It was there that I learned a lot about what did and didn't work in coaching. After graduation from high school, I went on to college and studied optometry for two years. At the same time, I began using what I'd learned from the trainees to teach tennis on the side. Unfortunately (or maybe fortunately), I was thrown out of college for spending too much time teaching tennis. So I decided to do the training necessary to qualify as a Registered Professional Coach, which was the highest tennis-teaching certification a person could get in the UK at the time.

It was as a certified coach eight years later that I stood on the court on that gray day that totally changed my life. I had been working with one of my students—a shy little nine-year-old girl. Her mother and I both agreed that she was a bit uncoordinated, but her mom felt that if I could help her improve a little, she would be able to participate in the group sessions, which would be very good for her socially. The instructions I'd given her had been very simple (“Shake hands with your racket.” “Hit the ball on its way down.” “Hit the back side of the ball.”). But the best she'd been able to do was to hit the ball about five times consecutively across the net.

Feeling frustrated as I watched her struggle, I decided to try something different. I'd just begun to expand my approach to coaching, including studying disciplines such as Neuro-Linguistic Programming™ (NLP™), psychosynthesis, Zen, and everything I could find on sports psychology. One particular approach that caught my attention was Timothy Gallwey's *Inner Game of Tennis*. The basic idea is that we each have a Self 1, the analytical, critical self (“You didn’t hold the racket right.” “You should have hit that differently.” “You moved too slowly, you dummy!”), and a Self 2, the natural, curious self that learns by experience and performs best without the interference of Self 1. Performance improves when we're basically able to silence Self 1 and free Self 2 to do its thing.

So I said to this little girl, “Look, let’s not worry about all the instructions I’ve given you over the past six weeks. Just say ‘bounce’ when the ball touches the ground and ‘hit’ when the ball hits your racket. That’s all.

Just focus on those two events. Don't worry about anything else." The first time she tried it, she hit fifty-three shots in a row over the net! The girl was thrilled. Her mother was so shocked she literally fell off her chair leaning forward to watch. Personally, I was astonished and frustrated. My fundamental view as an educator had been challenged. Was it possible that much of the specific technical instruction I'd been giving my students was not only *not* helping them but was actually getting in the way?

It was at that point that I was struck with a "blinding glimpse of the obvious." This girl hadn't been performing poorly because she didn't *know* what to do; it was simply that there was too much *interference* getting in the way of her doing it! And sadly, the principal source of that interference was me.

That day on the tennis court, that little girl improved her performance by over 1000 percent, or 10X. For that reason, I've come to think of her as "the 10X girl." Can you imagine what would happen if you were to get that kind of breakthrough performance—or even a tenth of it—in your team or organization or in other areas of your life?

Outside-In

What I learned on the court that day—and have since developed and taught for more than twenty-five years—is that there is a simple paradigm (inside-out), principle (focus), and process (GROW) that can create significant—often dramatic—performance improvement in any arena of life. Prior to that day, I had believed—as most people do—that the best way to improve performance is to increase knowledge. If you want to get better, read a book. Take a class. Hire an expert. There's some bit of knowledge "out there" you don't have, and if you can just figure out how to get it, your performance will dramatically improve. A "formula" that reflects this approach is

Performance = Capacity + Knowledge

or

$P = C + K$

This is an "outside-in" (telling, didactic, instructional, directive) approach. It assumes that people are lacking in some way and that additional knowledge has to be put in from the outside to help them improve. Clearly, this is the most common approach used to improve individual and organizational performance. It reflects the fact that individuals, managers, and leaders tend to *see* performance problems as knowledge problems and therefore look for knowledge solutions.

Of course, there are times when a lack of knowledge really is the problem and circumstances in which the $P = C + K$ formula works. *But much of the time it doesn't.* If knowledge really were all it took to be a high performer, then all any of us would have to do would be to read that book or take that class and we'd be winning golf and tennis championships. We'd all be incredible managers, great teachers, phenomenal parents and performers. But obviously we're not. Why? Because typically, ***the biggest obstacle in performance isn't not knowing what to do; it's not doing what we know.*** In other words, the problem is not as much about knowledge *acquisition* as it is about knowledge *execution*.

THE KNOWING-DOING GAP

In their book *The Knowing-Doing Gap*, Stanford University professors Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton point out that thousands of books are published each year that essentially contain the same analyses and prescriptions contained in books published a year or even a decade ago. "Yet," they say, "these books have a ready market because the ideas, although often widely known and proven to be useful and valid, remain unimplemented."¹ They also point out that of the billions of dollars spent on training and consulting, most of

it is on information that is being repeated—and still not implemented.

Their conclusion? “Anyone can read a book or attend a seminar. The trick is in turning the knowledge acquired into . . . action.”²

Most of us can easily validate this in our own lives. For example, when we perform well—ace a presentation or a sales pitch, shoot a great round of golf, or play a favorite song on the piano flawlessly—we often say it’s exhilarating, it’s fun, it feels natural, it flows. We don’t even have to think about it; it feels almost effortless. Our mind is quiet; our muscles are relaxed. But when we’re performing badly, what’s happening? Our muscles are tense. We have an internal dialogue going on: “Wow, that was awful! What did I do wrong? What’s my problem?” So we try to analyze what we’re doing wrong, and then we try hard to fix it based on our analysis. As a result, muscle tension increases. Internal dialogue increases. And typically, our performance gets even worse! So in other words, we *know* that when we’re performing well, we’re not using a lot of effort and not thinking about what we’re doing. Yet when we’re performing badly, we try to improve our performance by thinking *more* about what we’re doing and using *more* effort. In other words, we do the exact opposite of what we know we do when we perform well. Why is that so?

Let’s look at another example. How much of a game such as golf do you think is mental versus how much is physical or technical? When I ask this question of both professional golfers and weekend enthusiasts, the typical response is that golf is at least eighty percent mental and less than twenty percent physical or technical. Yet when I ask people how much of their practice time they actually spend rehearsing and developing their mental skills, I have yet to have anyone tell me more than 5 percent. So basically, people are saying they spend less than 5 percent of their effort on something they believe contributes 80 percent toward their performance. Something here doesn’t add up!

Here’s a third example. If we’re in a managerial role in an organization, we may know we need to hold a performance evaluation with a poor performer. We know that if she doesn’t become aware of her blind spots, she’ll never improve, and we know that has consequences for her and her future as well as for the team and organization. Yet, we keep putting it off. We don’t do what we know is a vital part of our job and is in the best interest of all concerned. Why?

The problem in my life and other people’s lives is not the absence of knowing what to do, but the absence of doing it.

PETER DRUCKER,
writer, management consultant, social ecologist

Most of us *already know* of one thing we could do more or less of that would significantly improve our performance at work. We *already know* of something we should do to improve our personal lives, such as exercise or budget or eat better. We *already know* that if we give in to our kids’ nagging for that new video game system today, we’re going to regret it when they nag us even more for the latest games to go with it tomorrow. Yet, we *don’t* do what we need to do to improve our performance at work; we *don’t* exercise, budget, or eat better; and we *do* give in to our kids’ nagging and buy that Nintendo game anyway.

Why do we behave so illogically? Knowledge alone is not what creates high performance. It’s an important component, but it’s not the only component. Most of the time, acquiring more knowledge will not make a difference. Closing the gap between what we know and what we do will have far greater impact on improving our performance than any additional knowledge we might gain.

Execution is the great unaddressed issue in the business world today. Its absence is the single biggest obstacle to success and the cause of most of the disappointments that are mistakenly attributed to other causes.

RAM CHARAN,
business adviser, author, and speaker

Inside-Out

A different way to look at performance improvement—the way that was dramatically demonstrated to me that day with the 10X girl—is “inside-out.” This approach is less about adding new knowledge and more about eliminating the interference that’s getting in the way of experimenting with and using the knowledge we already have. The formula for this approach³ is

Performance = Capacity – Interference

or

$P = C - I$

As I’ve admitted, that day on the court the primary interference to that little girl’s performance was my own well-intended effort to increase her knowledge. My verbal instructions—“Shake hands with your racket,” “Hit the ball on its way down,” “Hit the back side of the ball”—were actually taking her focus away from what she was experiencing. She was so busy trying to listen to all the things she was being told to do “right” that she couldn’t pay attention to what was actually happening.

Experience is the most efficient teacher of all things.

PLINY THE ELDER,
1st-century BC Roman scholar, naturalist, and military commander

We see the same phenomenon in organizations when managers or leaders become so obsessed with policies, procedures, and their own ways of doing things that they become disconnected from results. They begin to micromanage. They divert employees’ attention away from learning and creating and toward trying to remember and comply. What an enormous loss of possibility!

Once the interference was removed from the 10X girl’s awareness, she was free to focus on a critical variable* of what was happening—the location of the ball—and to learn directly from her own experience. *Most performance improvement is a direct result of this kind of learning*—processing real-time experience, unencumbered by interference. And this is just as true in the organization, the classroom, or the family as it is on the tennis court.

Even in the absence of a coach giving constant verbal instructions, interference can be created by a performer’s effort to recall past instructions while trying to practice or perform. It’s like trying to be in both “send” and “receive” modes on a walkie-talkie at the same time. It simply doesn’t work.

TRY THIS EXPERIMENT

Hold up your hand in front of someone, and ask that person to focus on your palm. Then ask the person to think about someone he/she was with yesterday and tell you what that individual was wearing (color, style,

etc.). Likely the person's eyes will glaze over or will quickly move up and to the left as he/she tries to remember. Trying to recall information stops people from focusing on the present, the here and now.

The same thing happens on the tennis court (or in any other sports venue) when a player tries to remember all the instructions he/she has been given. If a tennis ball is coming at the player at 100 miles an hour, trying to recall past instruction makes it hard to focus on what is actually happening and is a sure formula for disaster. You simply can't focus on the past and the present in the same moment.

Another way to think about it is to imagine that you're driving your car down the road with one foot on the gas pedal and the other foot on the brake. If you want to go faster, you can certainly push harder on the gas (which is the *outside-in* or "+K" approach). But as long as that other foot is on the brake, you're going to get very little increase in performance and you'll burn the car out fast. On the other hand, if you simply take your foot off the brake (which is the *inside-out* or "-I" approach), you can immediately get a massive increase in performance without even having to add additional knowledge or gas.

Force Field Analysis

In the early 1900s, Kurt Lewin, the founder of social psychology, developed the Force Field Analysis model, which shows that a person's levels of performance is affected not only by driving forces that tend to push it up but also by restraining forces that tend to suppress it or drive it down.

Many restraining forces are created by interference. Therefore, reducing or removing interference can clear the way for a dramatic surge in performance.

Clearly, performance improvement is not just a matter of adding knowledge. Most often, it's an issue of reducing the interference that's getting in the way of using the knowledge we already have.

A 180-Degree Turn

My experience with the 10X girl that day on the court led me to a 180-degree turn in the way I worked with my tennis students—and eventually the way I've worked with people in all kinds of organizations and many different walks of life. For one thing, it helped me realize that we're consistently forming beliefs about ourselves and other people that limit performance—people who have the same kind of potential demonstrated by that shy little girl. For example:

At work when we see . . .

- The employee who avoids accountability or doesn't seem engaged

(We say he doesn't want to be responsible. He doesn't care about his work.)

- The boss who always has to have her way

(We say she's arrogant. She doesn't care about what the rest of us think.)

- The colleague who resists change

(We say he's stuck in his ways. He's probably afraid of change.)

At home when we see . . .

- The teenager who won't fulfill her responsibilities around the house

(We say she's lazy. She doesn't care about the family.)

- The child who doesn't do his homework

(We say he doesn't think doing well in school is important.)

- The spouse who doesn't communicate on spending

(We say what she wants is more important to her than I am.)

In the classroom when we see . . .

- The student who sees no relevance in what the teacher is trying to teach

(We say he's not very bright. He just doesn't "get" it.)

- The teacher who struggles to deal with a student's learning style

(We say she's stupid and lazy; she just wants to do what's comfortable for her.)

- The student who struggles with peer relationships

(We say he's a "loner.")

In the performing arts and sports when we see . . .

- The golfer who keeps saying, "I'm a slicer!"

(We say she's got a negative attitude. She'll always trail the pack.)

- The musician who plays the "notes" but not the "music"

(We say he may have some technical knowledge, but he doesn't have much talent.)

- The marathon runner whose legs turn to rubber after twenty miles

(We say she just doesn't have what it takes to "pay the price.")

In critical performance moments when we see . . .

- The executive whose speech reads well on paper but comes over flat in front of an audience

(We say he has no charisma. He'll never make it to the top in this organization.)

- The musician who plays well in practice and freezes up onstage

(We say she has too much "stage fright" to ever become a top performer.)

- The student who does all the class work well but fails the exams

(We say he'll never be a top student. When things are really on the line, he can't perform.)

We form these beliefs about others. We form them about ourselves. And these beliefs not only limit performance; they also limit the way we try to help ourselves or others improve.

The Three Performance Gaps

My experience with the 10X girl also forced me to take a deeper look at the three critical performance challenges, or “gaps,” I had constantly been struggling with in trying to help people as a coach. First was the *awareness* gap. While some of my students had been swinging the racket exactly the way I told them to, others seemed to be unable to follow my instructions and would persistently swing the racket differently than I had taught. In other words, *there was a gap between what they thought they were doing and what they were actually doing*. I had thought, “These people must have some kind of learning disability. I taught them the ‘correct’ way to swing the racket and they’re not doing it. Clearly this must be their problem—not mine!”

Second was the *pressure* gap. Watching my students who were on the national training team practice, it was difficult to tell them apart from professional players. But these students never made it past the semifinal rounds in tournaments. When the pressure was on, they choked and couldn’t do what I had seen them do in practice. And I didn’t seem to be able to help. Clearly, *here was another gap—a gap between how people performed in practice and how they performed under pressure*.

Third was the *expertise* gap. Like every other serious coach, I dreamed of being able to train some of the best players in the world. I believed that in order to coach someone you had to be more expert than that person—otherwise what advice could you give him/her? But since at my best, I could only play at county level (which is the equivalent of a state-ranked player in the United States), that meant I would never be able to coach anyone who played better than county level.

These same gaps show up in almost every area of our lives, including organizations. People communicate differently than they think they do. They perform well in practice but poorly under pressure. They’re often called upon to supervise others who are far more expert than they are. As a result, performance rarely even approaches what’s possible.

The traditional approach I’d been using of adding knowledge had done little to close these three gaps. But as I began to experiment more with removing interference, I started to notice a dramatic change in my students. Suddenly I was beginning to see them swing their rackets correctly. I saw those on the national training team start winning tournaments. And through a series of recommendations, I found myself working with professionals—including two of Britain’s Davis Cup* players, who were far better players than I was—and actually helping them!

The gaps began disappearing, and I was ecstatic. But this whole experience was really shaking my fundamental beliefs about coaching. As much as it massaged my ego to think that I was the one with all this wonderful knowledge and that I could help people improve their performance by dispensing that knowledge, I was quickly beginning to realize that providing too much knowledge was actually getting in the way. I discovered that by and large, the most effective thing I could do to help others was to remove the interference that blocked their ability to learn and execute.

From Tennis Courts to Companies Worldwide

When one of the Davis Cup players I coached, Buster Mottram, moved from ninetieth to nineteenth in the world in six months, I began to receive inquiries from up-and-coming professionals on the European golf

tour. They thought what I was doing might help them with their game. My first response was, “No, thanks!” I’d never played golf. (In fact, I wasn’t even sure it was a proper sport, with players wearing long pants in 100-degree weather and not running around at all like they do on the tennis court!) Nevertheless, I did become involved—in good part because I enjoyed the insanity of an Irish golfer named David Feherty (whose roles as CBS broadcaster and author have since put his wit on public display) and the effervescence of David Llewellyn (the former Welsh national coach, who still holds the record for the lowest four rounds of golf ever scored in a PGA European tour event).

So then I found myself working in a field I truly knew nothing about. But through the application of the principles I was using, significant performance breakthroughs kept happening for my students. And as a result of the accompanying publicity I was asked to work in a number of other sports, including fencing, pistol shooting, swimming, running, and squash. I was also asked to work with teachers, musicians, and even with kids who were having a struggle fitting into the mainstream education system. The inside-out approach continued to create breakthrough results in every application. As I began to help executives with their sporting hobbies, some suggested that this approach might apply in their businesses as well. Subsequently, I became involved in working with executives and managers to help them improve performance in the workplace. I created a company. We made the process scalable and replicable. We began to work with organizations worldwide.

Through it all, the more I continued to read and talk with psychologists and other performance improvement experts and the more experience I had in working with people in all walks of life, the more I kept coming back to the same conclusion: ***The biggest obstacle (and opportunity) in performance isn’t about knowing what to do; it’s about doing what we know. And what keeps us from doing what we know is interference.***

Reflective Questions

- To what extent do you typically turn to outside sources to improve your performance (new books, different approaches, another coach, the latest equipment, etc.)? What has been the result? How much has your performance actually changed?
- What are one or two things you already know you could do to significantly improve your personal or professional life that you’re not doing now? What’s getting in the way of your doing them?
- Think of a time when you performed well and a time when you performed badly. Compare the two experiences. What interference got in the way when you performed badly? In what specific ways did it affect your ability to perform?
- How much “interference” is getting in the way of performance in your organization, family, or team? If you’re a leader, manager, or parent, is there a chance you may be creating interference and actually getting in the way of performance—no matter how well intended your efforts?
- Think about times when “pressure” causes you to perform poorly. What is it about pressure that inhibits your performance? What actually happens?
- When—and in what ways—has instruction/advice from others either inhibited or enhanced your own experience and learning?

CHAPTER TWO

The Nature of Performance

Cherish that which is within you.

CHUANG-TZU,
Chinese philosopher, 4th century BCE

As I continued to work to help people and organizations improve performance, I had another blinding glimpse of the obvious. Knowledge was not the only thing—or even the most important thing—being blocked by interference. There were three other elements at the very heart of high performance. And not only were these elements important in and of themselves; they were also important because they facilitated the use of knowledge. When these elements were blocked, performance suffered. When they were unleashed, performance soared.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Peter Hudson:

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