



chapter ten

Plan for Excellence



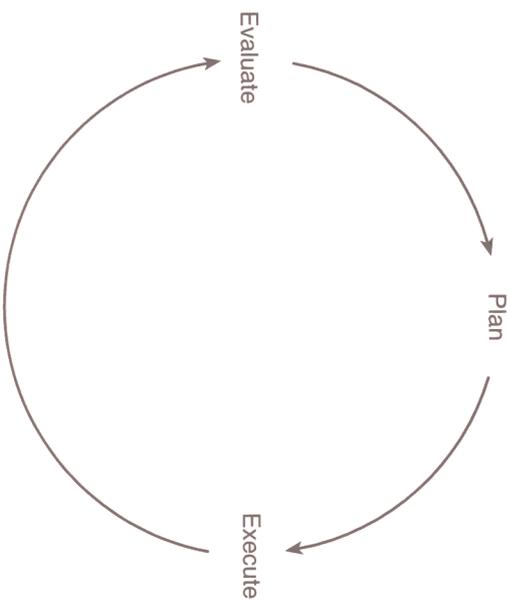
Excellence is inspired by passionate visions and guided by positive planning.

We need passion and planning to excel. Passion without planning won't take us to our potential, nor will planning without the passion to act willfully on our plans. Passion comes from embracing a big vision, accepting that it is possible, and knowing that the pursuit of this vision is worthwhile in itself. To rekindle our passion when it subsides we must re-embrace our visions, and focus on keeping the joy and quality in our pursuits.

Plan, Execute, and Evaluate

Great performers **plan, execute, and evaluate** every day of their lives. They plan their goals, plan for quality execution, and plan for careful, insightful evaluation. This keeps them on a positive path and allows them to continue to learn and grow along the way. It frees

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them to focus on the small steps that make a huge difference in their lives and performance. When you have invested yourself in this pursuit to become your best—*plan for it*—anything less is to short-change yourself and your vision.

Plan

To plan for excellence, think about your goals, your dreams, your strengths, and your assets. Think about *why* you are playing, performing, and pursuing what you are doing. Think about your best experiences, best performances, or best parts of performances. Think through the following questions and write down your answers.

- What is your *big* vision?
- What would you really like to do in your chosen performance domain, career, or life?
- What frees you to feel your best and be your best?
- What focus allows for your best performance focus?
- Why can you achieve your goals and dreams? (List the reasons.)
- How can you achieve your goals and dreams?
- What can you do (that you are not already doing) to become more positive or more focused?
- How can you be your best in your next performance or interaction?

If you are not sure of your answers to some of these questions, read through the remaining chapters in this book and review part I to see what you can come up with. Once you have answered each question (or at least the most relevant ones for you) in light of your own experiences, write down a step-by-step plan that you can begin to put into practice. Turn your thoughts about what you want to do into a game plan for action.

Execute

Focus on executing your plan—step-by-step and day by day—even when you are faced with distractions or setbacks. Stick with what you feel or know works best for you regardless of whether you are up or down, energetic or tired, happy or frustrated—because your plan is your best shot at performing well consistently.

Use Written Reminders

At times you may need lots of reminders to be consistent with your plan. Before each performance or interaction and, if necessary, during breaks in the action, remind yourself of what you want to do and how you want to focus. One method of reminding yourself is to write out your plan in simple words, drawings, or pictures, or put each step or reminder on an index card. You can keep these reminder cards in your bag, on your desk, next to the phone, or taped to things you touch or see. You can stick a piece of white tape with a one-word reminder on it on your agenda, hockey stick, water bottle, handlebars, or the steering wheel in your car. *Focus, Relax, Breathe, Trust, Positive, or Do It*—you can use simple, positive reminders like these, choosing whatever is relevant for you in different settings. If you persist, these positive reminders eventually will become a natural part of you, but in the beginning it helps to attach them to something you use or touch every day in your work, sport, study, or leisure pursuits.

Focus on actually doing your reminder. In situations or events that are important to you, clear your mind and channel your focus. Stay positive with yourself. Remain flexible. Search for opportunities. Create chances. Move forward with full focus and no regrets. Make a commitment to focus this way during the event, before you even begin it, rather than wishing, once the event is over, that you had focused this way. Think about how you can get yourself to do what you want. Answering the following questions should help you:

- How can I get myself to act now on things that will help me accomplish what I want to accomplish?
- How can I get myself to do what I want to do on a more consistent basis?
- How can I be more positive with myself?
- What reminders are likely to be most effective for me? I'm going to write them down on cards!
- How can I practice my best performance focus?



Written reminders help you concentrate on your goals.

Evaluate

Excellence is highly dependent upon evaluating and refining your game plan and your performance on a consistent basis. The event itself is the only real test of your plan's effectiveness. Each performance provides a great opportunity for evaluation and self growth. Take an honest look at yourself after each performance. Ask yourself these questions:

- Did I prepare myself to perform my best in this event (or interaction)?
- Did I execute my game plan?
- Did I enjoy the interaction or performance?
- What parts of my performance went really well? Why?

Self-Assessment

The Performance Reflection questions ask you to reflect on your previous best and not-so-best performances. The questions are designed to help you draw on your own history in performance situations to determine the conditions under which you have performed best. They ask you to reflect on how were you thinking, feeling, and focusing before and during these events.

These questions should help clarify the difference in your mental states before and during best performances as compared with less-than-best performances. Ongoing postperformance reflections will further clarify what works best for you and how your focus plays a critical role in your performance. Having studied the reflection forms of many exceptional performers, clearly in most situations the quality of a performance is determined almost entirely by a person's state of mind and focus. Pick an area where you would like to improve the quality or consistency of your performance. Answer the questions with respect to that performance domain. Reviewing the earlier chapters of this book may help you to think more clearly about many of the questions. And turning back to them and rethinking your answers once you have finished the book will give you other helpful insights to include.

Performance Reflections

1. Think of your all-time best experience or performance within your chosen domain and respond to the following questions, keeping that performance in mind:
 - How were you feeling going into that event?
 - What were you saying to yourself or thinking shortly before the start of the event?
 - How were you focused during the event (i.e., what were you aware of or paying attention to while actively engaged in the performance)?
2. Now think of one of your worst or less-than-best experiences or performances and respond to the following questions, keeping that performance in mind:
 - How did you feel going into that event?
 - What were you saying to yourself or thinking shortly before the start of the event?
 - How were you focused during the event (i.e., what were you aware of or paying attention to while actively engaged in the performance)?

- How did you feel going into that event?
 - What were you saying to yourself or thinking shortly before the start of the event?
 - How were you focused during the event (i.e., what were you aware of or paying attention to while actively engaged in the performance)?
3. What were the major differences between your thinking and feelings *prior* to these two kinds of experiences or performances (i.e., best and less-than-best)?
 4. What were the major differences in your focus *during* these experiences or performances (i.e., best and less-than-best)?
 5. Why do you think you perform so well in some situations or during parts of some events and perform less well in other situations or in other parts of the same event?
 6. How would you prefer to think, feel, act, or be just before an important performance?
 7. How would you prefer to focus or connect during an important performance?
 8. Is there anything you would like to improve about the way you approach your preparation or performances: for example, your attitude, perspective, focus, consistency, level of intensity, or state of relaxation? If yes, are you ready to commit to work on making this change?
 9. Is there anything that you would like to improve about the way teammates or colleagues interact: for example, in the workplace or performance arena or some other setting? If yes, what can be done to improve the interaction?
 10. Is there anything you would like to improve about the way the coach or supervisor interacts with you or the way you interact with him or her during regular work sessions or performances? If yes, what can be done to improve this interaction?

- What parts of my performance can be improved? How?
- For my next performance (or interaction) what can I do better to prepare myself to be my best, perform my best, or stretch my limits?

Regular performance evaluations will give you some positive direction for ongoing learning, as will the remaining chapters in this book.

Evaluate yourself with a view to becoming the best you can be. Try to discover what frees you to perform your best and, conversely, what interferes (for example, with respect to your state of mind, your focus, your rest, nutrition, or your life outside the performance domain). Learn something from each performance to apply in another performance or in another situation. Refine your plan along the way, so you continue to live and perform with more consistency and confidence. Be confident in your unique best focus. It is based on what works for you.

Develop Your Own Blueprint

You are a unique individual with a unique history. When you look closely at your own best performances in different domains you will discover that there are certain ways of thinking, feeling, and focusing associated with being your best. When you allow these kinds of feelings or thoughts to surface more frequently, you will live and perform more consistently, moving closer to your potential.

All great people embrace the process of self reflection, planning, and ongoing refinement. They may apply it to living more joyfully, contributing more meaningfully, or performing more consistently. Individual plans for excellence are unique and not all approaches apply to all people. Some people prefer and perform best when following very detailed, almost minute-to-minute, sequential plans. Others feel constrained by too much detail and perform best by carrying a positive perspective into an event or experience (rather than a detailed plan). Still others like to engage in detailed mental planning about how they want to live or perform and then free themselves to do it, virtually without conscious thought, at performance time.

When you develop your own plans keep a spirit of flexibility in mind. Use what you think can help most in pursuing the things that



To build confidence it's important to create a plan, a plan that you believe will work. When I had been with the Pittsburgh Pirates, I had difficulties and was sent down to the minors. I went down to spring training and had a terrific spring camp. Terry and I had created a plan, worked on it all winter long, and I felt confident. I was called up to the major leagues about a month into the season, and the first at bat I had was a home run off "Buller" Bob James. The third at bat, I hit another home run. I was thinking to myself, "Terry and I worked so hard, what a terrific plan." I felt so confident—except for one little thing that I hadn't planned for. We had a coach who decided that if I could hit two home runs in my first three at bats, what a great thing if I would change what I was doing and try it his way. I really believed at the time that the plan we created would work, and I still believe it today. But I needed to be prepared to say, "I appreciate and respect what you're saying, but I believe what I'm doing is right for me." Confidence comes from having a plan and sticking with it, because as soon as you start allowing someone else to tell you to do something that you're not 100 percent sure of, your confidence level goes down.

—Doug Frobel, major league baseball player

are important to you. Adapt approaches to fit your personal history and present needs. Experiment with different possibilities to see what works best. Move from positive reflection to positive action. Thinking is not enough. Only action counts. Act upon your plans and continue to refine them so they take you to your goals and lead you toward your dreams.

- Embrace *big* visions.
- Focus on taking meaningful little steps.
- Think about your best focus.
- Plan your path.
- Follow your plan.
- Relax, rest, regenerate.
- Enjoy the pursuit.
- Trust that your plan and actions will take you to your goal.

Embrace Your Uniqueness

If I could sit down with you, I would ask you about your goals and dreams. I would ask you to tell me about your best performances, your best relationships, and where you think you need work to be a more fulfilled person or more consistent performer. I would want to know whether you are keeping a sense of joyfulness in your pursuit and in your life. These are very important questions. We both want you to be the best that you can be. This means developing a personal plan based on what already works for you so you can live and perform consistently closer to your potential, and—equally important—so you will learn essential positive lessons that can help you throughout your life.

The time you are living right now is a very special time of your life. It is a great opportunity for personal growth. There are many valuable lessons to be learned and simple joys that you can embrace every day. If you open yourself to these daily opportunities within each of your pursuits, you will thoroughly enjoy parts of every pursuit and find positive lessons in each which you can carry to all areas of your life.

This is an action-filled adventure you are on, aimed at improving the quality of your performance and the quality of your life. Act upon your dreams, plans, and insights. Others may guide your growth, but, ultimately, personal excellence and mental strength are self-directed and self-administered. **You** must select, act upon, and consistently refine a perspective or approach that is most beneficial for you.