

Enhancing Expertise in Business, Sport & Life

Perfectionism: Harmful or Helpful?

Arguing that perfectionism contains both helpful and harmful factors, a study of female athletes (N = 74) investigated how two facets of perfectionism--perfectionistic strivings and negative reactions to imperfection--are related to achievement motives and attributions of success and failure. Results found striving for perfection was related to hope of success and self-serving attributions (internal attribution of success). Further, striving for perfection was inversely related to fear of failure and self-



depreciating attributions (internal attribution of failure). In contrast, negative reactions to imperfection were linked to fear of failure and self-depreciating attributions (external attribution of success) and inversely related to self-serving attributions. The researchers concluded that striving for perfec-

tion in sport is associated with positive motivation and self-serving attributions of success and failure, which promote performance. In contrast, negative reactions to imperfection are associated with negative motivation and self-depreciating attributions, which likely undermine performance. Perfectionism may help those who strive for perfection, but can control their negative reactions when performance is less than perfect.

Source: Stoeber, et. al. (2008). Perfectionism, achievement motives, and attribution of success and failure in female soccer players. *International Journal of Psychology*, 43, 980-987.

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Whattaya gonna do?

You know when you get old in life things get taken from you. That's, that's part of life. But, you only learn that when you start losing stuff. You find out that life is just a game of inches. So is football. Because in either the game of life or football the margin for error is so small. I mean one half step too late or too early you don't quite make it. One half second too slow or too fast and you don't quite catch it. The inches we need are everywhere around us. They are in every break of the game every minute, every second. On this



team, we fight for that inch On this team, we tear ourselves, and everyone around us to pieces for that inch. We CLAW with our finger nails for that inch. Cause we know when we add up all those inches that's going to make the difference between WINNING and LOSING between LIVING and DYING. I'll tell you this: in any fight it is the guy who is willing to die who is going to win that inch. And I know if I am going to have any life anymore it is because, I am still willing to fight, and die

for that inch because that is what LIVING is. The six inches in front of your face. Now I can't make you do it. You gotta look at the guy next to you. Look into his eyes. Now I think you are going to see a guy who will go that inch with you. You are going to see a guy who will sacrifice himself for this team because he knows when it comes down to it, you are gonna do the same thing for him. That's a team, gentlemen and either we heal now, as a team, or we will die as individuals. That's football guys. That's all it is. Now, whattaya gonna do?

Source: Al Paccino's Inch by Inch speech from Any Given Sunday

First of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself - nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.

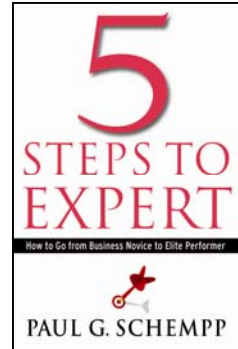
Franklin D. Roosevelt

Functional Skills

The management of Cabela's, one of the largest retailers of outdoor equipment in the US, faced a mountain of challenges as they prepared to open a 175,000 square foot megastore in Wheeling, WV in August, 2004. Finding people to fill the 400 front-line positions was high among those challenges. The criteria for selecting those who would be on the sales floor itself were clearly put by

manager Tony Gatti, "You give me somebody who's dedicated and has a love and a passion for the outdoors, and I can teach him what he needs to know about retail." Novices can be taught functional retail skills to make them capable salespeople if they possessed knowledge, skill and experience in the core industry—the outdoors. When a task or job is performed capably, you can get the job done with serviceable skills. Cabela's is clearly not the only business that relies on functional skills from certain employees. Many

positions in business require only functional skills. Assembly line workers, for example, are required to repeat the same skill again and again with a degree of both speed and accuracy. The fast food industry requires most of their employees to perform functional skills. As long as the skill execution completes the required task within acceptable standards, the job is satisfactory. Capable employees who execute functional skills do so with consistency, which is critical to quality control. And because those with functional skills usually demand a lower wage than those with ad-



vanced skills, these people are critical to cost control. Source: Schempp, P. (2008). *5 Steps to Expert*. Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black.

In the most recent issue of *Harvard Business Review*, Jack Covert and Todd Sattersten identify 5 lessons we can learn from heroes. They wrote "like Hercules, Luke Skywalker, and Jack Welch, we all struggle with five recurring challenges as we journey through work and life: We wander without knowing where we're going. Data and circumstances confuse us. Fear blocks us from acting. Change paralyzes us. And despite our best intentions, we talk more than we listen. An examination of business writing from the past 30 years shows that these challenges emerge again and again—and the best books offer simple yet

Learning from Heroes



profound lessons for overcoming them: Find a clear purpose. Be aware that past experience and a mass of

information can interfere with wise decisions. Maintain a bias toward action. Be open to change. Seek feedback. The five lessons feed into one another. Clarity of purpose provides wisdom in decision making, which informs action, which creates change, while feedback makes everything work better. They also resonate with the stages of the "hero's journey" made famous by mythology scholar Joseph Campbell.

Source: Covert & Sattersten (2009) Learning from Heroes. *Harvard Business Review*, 87(3), 24.

The First 100 Days

According to Tom Pettibone, 35% of new managers either quit or are fired within 18 months. A primary reason is that they are too anxious to make changes before understanding their new organization. He suggests new managers do four things in their first 100 days on the job.



1. **DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS.** Establishing trust and credibility with those with whom you work is critical for success, for it is these people who will educate you on company policies and culture. These relationships are also necessary for managing expectations and mutual understanding of goals and the requirements for accomplishing them.

2. **LEAVE YOUR OFFICE.** Go to other department meetings, on sales calls and visit customer sites. You boost your credibility by demonstrating a sincere interest in learning how the organization works.
3. **GET A SECOND OPINION.** Having an independent, dispassionate

- third party identify what is working and what isn't will enable you to establish a baseline and develop long-term planning.
4. **DEVELOP A PLAN.** The culmination of what you have learned in your first 100 days should be your plan. This plan, based on both internal and external assessments, should address strengths and limitations of the current environment, make recommendations for performance improvements, and provide a time table for implementation.

Source: Pettibone, T. (2009). The first 100 days on the job. *Baseline*, March, p. 13.

What does it take?

Previous research has supported the notion that expertise development is largely possible for any healthy individual who undertakes sufficient deliberate practice. This position has led to a vigorous debate regarding the role of innate talent in expert performance. A recent study in the journal *Intelligence* sheds some interesting insights into this issue. A team of researchers from Oberlin College in the USA studied the effects of both environmental factors and talent on expert performance in high school and conservatory-level musicians.

Audition scores and accumulated practice time were recorded, and correlated with scores on music audiation and progressive matrices. Interestingly, higher-level musicians report significantly higher scores on innate characteristics such as general intelligence and music audiation, in addition to higher levels of accumulated practice time. These factors together accounted for more of the variance in music performance than practice alone. More evidence is needed to make a strong case, however, this study does support the view that neither talent or practice alone lead to the attainment of expertise, but rather, it is multiple factors that comprise the expertise equation.



Source: Ruthsatz, et al. (2008). Becoming an expert in the musical domain: It takes more than just practice. *Intelligence*, 36, 330-338.

Seeing the bigger picture and doing the right thing

Mark Cuban has long been known as a business and sports maverick. But more often than not, when you look closely at people who are consistently successful, one sees principles. It is those principles that guide the actions that often lead to success. One of the principles we consistently see in experts is that they often overlook the short-term in favor of the long-term. In other words, they see the bigger picture. In a recent blog, Mr. Cuban clearly reveals one of his principles in discussing executive decisions in these tough economic times. He writes, "I have a simple question. Why are profitable companies laying off people? I can see if a company's survival is



at stake. If payroll can't be met. If debt can't be paid. Then layoffs are a necessary evil. Even if companies have created cash flow deficits through their own mistakes, that's the nature of business. Mistakes are made. What I have a problem with is that discussion of executive pay never includes whether or not the executive has been good enough to preempt or prevent layoffs. Executives are not stupid. Usually. They recognize that killing off employees can juice a stock price. Even in this market. Which in turn can juice the value of their options and compensation. At the companies I run, we have cut raises, put a freeze on hiring, done what we need to do, but we have done all we can to avoid layoffs. Why? Because it's the right thing to do. It's the patriotic thing to do. I'm selfish enough and arrogant enough to think that maybe if I pay attention to the big picture that I can impact the big picture. As a shareholder, where possible, I would prefer that the companies I own shares in do the same thing. I own stock in some firms whose backs are up against the wall because of debt. Unfortunately, they don't have a choice but to cut jobs in order to save jobs. I understand this reality. It's unfortunate, but a fact of life. I also own stock in firms that are profitable. Put a freeze on hiring. Put

a freeze on all raises to employees of all levels, including yours. You don't have to try to squeeze every nickel to the bottom line. I realize these are extraordinary times. I'm happy to accept a P/E ratio that is 20pct or 50pct higher (lower earnings vs the current price). I want you to manage for the long term benefit of the company rather than manage to the stock price. I don't have data, but I'm willing to bet that private companies are far less likely to lay off people than public companies. As the discussion on executive pay continues, my message is simple. Give credit to those executives who bust their asses to avoid layoffs except in cases where it's an absolute necessity. Pay 'em a premium vs those who cut jobs in profitable companies. Look to private companies as guides to what a well managed company can accomplish, and how executives are compensated. Capitalism isn't about having the biggest bottom line for the current quarter. Capitalism is about individuals busting their asses to maximize value for shareholders. Sometimes you have to look at the bigger picture in order to reap the biggest returns. Not all rewards are short term." Source: Cuban, M. (April 1, 2009) www.BlogMaverick.com

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Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other.

-Abraham Lincoln, U.S. President

I failed over and over and over again in my life and that is why I succeed.

-Michael Jordan, Basketball Player

The young man knows the rules,
but the old man knows the exceptions.

-Oliver Wendell Holmes, Supreme Court Justice

The Crocus

-Harriet Beecher Stowe

Beneath the sunny autumn sky,
With gold leaves dropping round,
We sought, my little friend and I,
The consecrated ground,
Where, calm beneath the holy cross,
O'ershadowed by sweet skies,
Sleeps tranquilly that youthful
form,
Those blue unclouded eyes.

Around the soft, green swelling
mound
We scooped the earth away,

And buried deep the crocus-bulbs
Against a coming day.

"These roots are dry, and brown, and
sere;
Why plant them here?" he said,
"To leave them, all the winter long,
So desolate and dead."

"Dear child, within each sere dead
form
There sleeps a living flower,
And angel-like it shall arise
In spring's returning hour."

Ah, deeper down cold, dark, and chill
We buried our heart's flower,
But angel-like shall he arise

In spring's immortal hour.

In blue and yellow from its grave
Springs up the crocus fair,
And God shall raise those bright
blue eyes,
Those sunny waves of hair.
Not for a fading summer's morn,
Not for a fleeting hour,
But for an endless age of bliss,
Shall rise our heart's dear flower



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