

## Enhancing Expertise in Business, Sport & Life

Well-meaning experts often advise performers to take their time—slowing down delivery, the thinking goes, helps to quell nervousness—but it is actually better just to get on with things if you are well practiced. A 2008 study divided novice and skilled golfers into two groups and instructed them to perform a series of golf putts. The researchers encouraged members of the first group to take their time, whereas they exhorted members of the second group to swing as quickly as they could. Novice golfers performed less accurately when speed was emphasized, but

### Do You Choke?



skilled golfers showed exactly the *opposite* pattern: they performed best when told to execute quickly and faltered when advised to take their time. The researchers speculate that this occurs because taking extra time when performing a skill practiced ad infinitum encourages too much conscious thought. Too much

self-monitoring hindering performance aligns with the well-established theory of how the brain learns. The part of our brain most involved in learning a new task is the cerebral cortex, which controls higher-order, conscious thought and is adaptable to novel situations. But as we practice, we gradually shift control of that activity to another area of the brain, the cerebellum, which orchestrates the lightning-fast motor activation needed to perform complex actions. Therefore, to avoid choking when performing a well-rehearsed and extensively practiced skill, stop thinking and just do it. Source: Svoboda, E. (2009) Avoiding the Big Choke, *Scientific America*, February.

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### Why Teams Don't Work

We often assume that teams represent potent work forces. After all, the whole is supposed to be greater than the sum of the parts. Not always so. In fact, teams often have a debilitating effect on progress. Here is why:

1. Teams are often seen as safe places where people can be highly creative and productive. However, research shows that



teams underperform their potential.

2. Teams need to be set up to ensure they have a compelling direction. Small teams who are together longer perform best.

3. Organizations with good human resource departments often have the least effective teams because HR focuses on improving individuals, not teams.

4. Leading a team requires courage because authority is required, causing anxiety in team members. Great leaders consequently put their jobs at risk.

Source: Cotu, D., Beschloss, M. (2009). Why Teams DON'T Work. *Harvard Business Review*, 87(5), 98-105

*We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.*

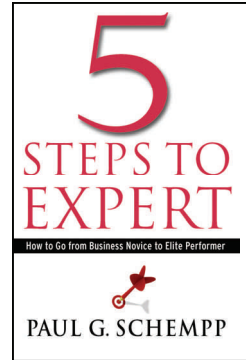
*-Aristotle*

**The Written Word**

Those who have a thirst to learn make it a habit to read. Books, professional journals, magazines, the Internet, and the popular press all offer knowledge in a written format. Experts tend to be voracious readers. It is not a stretch to believe that one of the dividing lines between being proficient and expert is reading. Reading gives you

access to ideas, information, people, and places that may otherwise be far beyond your reach. The thoughts of business, political, or military leaders from eras long past as well as descriptions of the decision making or action initiatives in major contemporary innovations are accessible through the written word. You will never be able to discuss science with Marie Curie or negotiation strategies with John D. Rockefeller

or business growth with Sam Walton, however, you can read about these people and the decisions they made and actions they took. You may gain insights into what is working (or not) for others and find new options in your own practices. Reading is a major predictor of knowledge. The more reading you do, the more you will learn and know. The more you know, the more able you are to appreciate and respond to a situation.



Source: Schempp, P. (2008). *5 Steps to Expert*. Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black.

**Social Support Improves Performance**

A recent study investigated the effects of coaching designed to increase social support and improve performance. Participating were 3 high-level male golfers averaging 25 years in age. The coaching sessions offered regular interaction with the coach to discuss their performance and to receive social support targeted toward the players' self-esteem, emotional state. The coach-



ing sessions occurred over 10 competitive rounds and lasted approximately 45 days. All participants reported experiencing significantly higher levels of

social support. The performance of all participants was statistically superior as a result of the coaching. Therefore, one-to-one interventions may be useful for increasing social support and consequently improving performance.

Source: Freeman, P. et. al. (2009). An intervention to increase social support and improve performance. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 21(2), 186-200

**Restoring Belief**

We are a people in a quandary about the present. We are a people in search of our future. Many fear the future. Many are distrustful of their leaders, and believe that their voices are never heard. Many seek only to satisfy their private work -- wants; to satisfy their private interests. But this is the great danger America faces -- that we will cease to be one nation and become instead a collection of interest groups: city against suburb, region against region, individual against individual; each seeking to satisfy



private wants. If that happens, who then will speak for America? Who then will speak for the common good? Are we to be one people bound together by common spirit, sharing in a common endeavor; or will we become a divided nation? For all of its uncertainty, we cannot flee the future. We must address and master the future together. It can be done if we re-

store the belief that we share a sense of national community, that we share a common national endeavor. It can be done. There is no executive order; there is no law that can require the American people to form a national community. This we must do as individuals, and if we do it as individuals, there is no President of the United States who can veto that decision. As a first step, we must restore our belief in ourselves. We are a generous people, so why can't we be generous with each other?

Source: Barbara Jordan (1976). Keynote Address. Democratic National Convention, New York.

### How to Build a Team

In *Leading Teams*, J. Richard Hackman identifies 5 basic conditions that organizations must establish to create and nurture effective teams.

1. **Teams must be real.** People must know who is on the team and who is not. Leaders need to make this clear.
2. **Teams need a compelling direction.** Members need to know and agree on what they are suppose to do. Without a
3. **Teams need enabling structures.** Poorly designed tasks, the wrong number or mix of members, or unclear and unenforced norms of conduct usually get teams in trouble.
4. **Teams need a supportive organization.** The reward system, human resource system, and information system must all facilitate teamwork.
5. **Teams need expert coaching.** Teams need coaching as a group (not as individuals) in team processes—



especially at the beginning, midpoint and project conclusion.

Source: Hackman, J. (2002). *Leading Teams*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Press.

### Overachievement

In his book appearing in April 2009, performance psychologist John Eliot offers some rather counterintuitive insights regarding achievement:

Hard work is overrated. Overachievers know when to stop working at their job and start playing at it. Too much practice can turn you into a classic case of the "over-motivated underachiever."

Setting goals doesn't work. Goal-setting can actually be an obstacle to sustained, vigorous motivation.



Using your head is dumb. In high-stakes performance, the real genius is someone like Yogi Berra. On his way to 10 World Series rings and the Hall of Fame, Yogi thought about—nothing.

The world is run by arrogant S.O.B.s. You can never have too

much self-assurance. The best in every field are likely to strike most people as irrationally confident, but to prove you are the best you first must believe "I am the best!"

Legends never say they're sorry. A long or frequent memory for mistakes and a short or infrequent memory for successes is a guaranteed way to develop a fear of failure.

Source: Eliot, J. (2009). *Overachievement*, Portfolio Trade Publishers.

Do we learn to be workaholics, or is it inherited? Being a social/personal habit, you can't inherit it. But a new study suggests parents do have an influence. A recent study examined the relationships between workaholism, perceived parental workaholism, self-acceptance, psychological well-being, and physical symptoms among 347 college students. Statistically significant relationships were found between college students' perceived parental workaholism and

### Heredity and Workaholism

their own workaholism. Also, relationships between workaholism, self-acceptance, psychological well-being, and physical symptoms were discovered. Students with higher perceptions of parental workaholism reported lower levels of psychological well-being, lower levels of self-acceptance, and more physical health complaints. Few people believe that workaholism is related to high levels of performance, and now it seems it is not related to health or

happiness either. We need to be careful what we hand down to our children.

Source: Chamberlain, C. (2009). Workaholism, health, and self-acceptance. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 87(2), 159-169.



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A person hears only what they understand.

*-Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, poet*

Moral excellence comes about as a result of habit. We become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.

*Aristotle, philosopher*

Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation.

*Robert F. Kennedy, U.S. Senator*

## **An Inspiration**

*-Ella Wheeler Cox*

Still truth proclaims this motto,  
In letters of living light, -  
No Question is ever settled,  
Until it is settled right.

Though the heel of the strong  
oppressor  
May grind the weak to dust,  
And the voices of fame with one ac-  
claim  
May call him great and just,  
Let those who applaud take  
warning,

And keep this motto in sight, -  
No question is ever settled  
Until it is settled right.

Let those who have failed take  
courage;  
Tho' the enemy seems to have won,  
Tho' his ranks are strong, if he be in  
the wrong  
The battle is not yet done;  
For, as sure as the morning follows  
The darkest hour of the night,  
No question is ever settled  
Until it is settled right.

O man bowed down with labor!

O woman, young, yet old!  
O heart oppressed in the toiler's  
breast  
And crushed by the power of  
gold!  
Keep on with your weary battle  
Against triumphant might;  
No question is ever settled  
Until it is settled right.



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