

# 5 Things You Should Be Doing Every Day to Boost Your Performance

**\*Medical Disclaimer:** These strategies are provided based on the assumption that you are healthy and have no medical conditions that may be adversely affected by the techniques described below. Always check with your health professional before engaging in any of the strategies listed. Particular caution should be taken if you have any diseases of the heart, eyes, or pulmonary systems.

## At Friesen Sport & Performance Psychology we believe:

- ✔ We often have more natural talent and resources than we are aware of.
- ✔ With one life to live, we have one shot to achieve our dreams and goals—we owe it to ourselves to do everything we can to make it happen.
- ✔ Nothing happens unless we make it happen.
- ✔ If we really want something, we need to use every tool at our disposal.
- ✔ Many of us are nowhere near tapping into our full potential.
- ✔ Most of us are not utilizing the numerous strategies and techniques that the fields of sport/performance psychology, executive coaching, and cognitive neuroscience have to offer.
- ✔ If we are serious about our success we will leave no stone unturned to achieve our full potential.

**SO, DO YOU WANT TO MAXIMIZE YOUR POTENTIAL ON THE FIELD, AT WORK, AND IN LIFE?**

Good. You're in the right place. These 5 strategies are backed by science and experience and are designed to bring you one step closer to maximizing your potential.

You no longer have to be an Olympic athlete or the CEO of a large corporation to get access to these strategies. Whether your goal is to climb a mountain or simply be more productive during the day, you can benefit from these easy to apply strategies.

Apply these strategies to your life on a daily basis and you will see an improvement in your performance.

## So let's get right to this!

### 01 Breathe at 6 breaths per minute for 5 to 20 minutes.

#### Why?

Because research has repeatedly shown that breathing at this rate strengthens your vagus nerve (we call it "vagal tone"). This essentially puts the breaks on your catabolic fight or flight stress system (i.e., your sympathetic nervous system) and turns on your anabolic rest and digest system (i.e., parasympathetic nervous system). Stronger vagal tone is associated with emotional and physical well-being. Doing this training on a daily basis will increase your nervous system's ability to handle and bounce back from stress.

#### How?

- Try to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- The idea is to take slow breaths, not the deepest breaths.
- You can either count 5 seconds in and 5 seconds out in your head or download a free app like MyCalmBeat which signals you when to breathe in and out. Check it out here: <https://www.mybrainsolutions.com/mycalmbeat>
- If you start to feel lightheaded, you are likely breathing too deeply. Just breathe normally for a few minutes and start again.
- Do this while you're sitting or standing (not exercising or walking).
- You can do it in the car, while watching TV, or surfing the internet. Or you can just focus on your breath (this last one is the best and can be tied in with #2 to save time).
- Keep in mind that your goal here is to improve your vagal tone.
- Don't just try to do this when stressed as it will be only partially effective. You need to build-up vagal tone first.
- Think of it as an exercise that you do one or two times per day (no need for more than 20 minutes per day), not something you try to do all day (i.e., don't try to breathe at 6 breaths per minute all day!).

### 02 Train your attention to stay in the present moment and defuse from your unhelpful thoughts and feelings.

#### Why?

Getting caught-up or "hooked" by your negative thoughts and feelings and not focusing on what's happening in the immediate moment is a recipe for underperformance in sports, business, and life in general. Of course I'm not saying you should never think about the past or future. I'm saying you need to train your brain to be able to stay in the present moment for longer periods of time and then be able to stay focused on the present moment when it is most helpful (e.g., during a sport or other type of performance, when conversing with people, or when trying to do good work).

#### How?

- Start by choosing one activity that you can try to stay fully present with. For example, on a daily basis try doing this for one meal or when you drink a cup of coffee or tea or whatever beverage you prefer.
- Your only goal is to try to keep your attention on what is happening in the immediate moment. So, if we use eating as an example, try to keep your attention focused on your senses. This means focusing on the texture, taste, smell, colors, and shapes of the food. You can even focus on the physical sensations of your shoulder, arm, and hand as you raise the food to your mouth and then mechanical action of chewing the food.
- This is a lot harder than it sounds. Your mind will repeatedly wander ("I gotta remember to buy milk today") or judge ("this is stupid!").
- Mind wandering is ok. The goal here is to notice when your mind has wandered off from your focus on the present moment.
- Then acknowledge and describe this in a non-judgemental way (e.g., say to yourself "I just had the thought that..." or "I just felt the urge to...", or "I'm judging"), and then turn your attention back to the present moment.
- In fact, this is the actual exercise. It is the act of noticing when your attention has strayed and then returning your attention back to the present moment that is the actual workout for your brain.
- So expect mind wandering to occur. Actually, you should be glad every time your mind wanders and you notice it and acknowledge what your mind just did (i.e., wandered off). Then turn your attention back to the present moment. Without doing these things, your brain isn't getting a workout.
- Just like when you exercise and actually want to feel a little pain (e.g., "the burn"), you want to notice your mind wandering and turn your attention back to the present moment because this is the actual exercise.
- To beat a dead horse here, expect and be glad every time your mind strays and you notice it and don't beat-up on yourself for not being able to keep your attention focused on the present for a more than a few seconds.
- Another way to do this is to combine this strategy with strategy #1 above (breathing at 6 breaths per minute). Instead of focusing on the process of eating, you can focus on the process of breathing. Combining these saves even more time.

### 03 Make yourself uncomfortable by taking a cold shower (or doing something else that is difficult)

#### Why?

Because doing things that are uncomfortable or difficult, like taking a cold shower, is bloody hard to do! Doing things that are hard to do builds mental toughness. The main thing here is that before we do something hard, we often tell ourselves that we won't be able to handle it or that in about 14 hours, it will be time to go back to sleep. One of these physiological processes is the release of certain neurotransmitters in your brain, such as serotonin. Serotonin functions to improve and balance our moods (among other things). You've probably heard of the antidepressant Prozac. Well, Prozac is a serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) which is a fancy way of saying that it increases the amount of usable serotonin in the brain. Increasing the amount of serotonin in our brains has been found to improve mood and reduce negative emotions in general.

#### How?

- For cold showers, put your timer on for 3 minutes.
- Before getting in, notice what your mind is telling you (e.g., "this is nuts!", "there's no way I can last 3 minutes!").
- Then say to yourself, "thanks for doing what you were programmed to do brain".
- Then get right in there and remind yourself that doing this will make you stronger.
- For those of you not sold, take your normal shower and turn it to cold at the end for only 1 minute to start. You'll notice that after a few days, it gets easier.
- Do this for one week and then see how you feel.
- Of course, if cold showers aren't your thing, then just replace this with something else you don't feel comfortable doing. Maybe this is public speaking or maybe it is getting up early to exercise.
- The trick is to push yourself out of your comfort zone in controlled spurts on a daily basis.
- You see, the most successful people in this world live their lives based on their values and goals and NOT on their immediate and transient moods, feelings, or circumstances!

### 04 Expose your eyes to bright light in the mornings

#### Why?

This will reset your circadian rhythm (biological clock). Essentially, once your eyes see bright light from the sun (or another source of full-spectrum light), a whole cascade of physiological processes take place that tells your brain and body that it is time to wake up and that in about 14 hours, it will be time to go back to sleep. One of these physiological processes is the release of certain neurotransmitters in your brain, such as serotonin. Serotonin functions to improve and balance our moods (among other things). You've probably heard of the antidepressant Prozac. Well, Prozac is a serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) which is a fancy way of saying that it increases the amount of usable serotonin in the brain. Increasing the amount of serotonin in our brains has been found to improve mood and reduce negative emotions in general.

#### How?

- Within an hour of waking up, make sure you either spend time outdoors or near a window.
- Definitely don't look directly at the sun though. All that needs to happen is the back of your eyes (your retinas) need to be exposed to full-spectrum light for 10 to 20 minutes.
- Another way to do this is to eat your breakfast outside or by a window. Even if it's cloudy outside, it is still helpful.

### 05 Avoid bright and blue-wavelength light in the evenings

#### Why?

This simple hack will definitely improve your sleep quality. One of the most important things to understand is the role our biological clock and the hormone melatonin plays in helping us get to sleep. Most of us have seen melatonin being sold in stores as a sleep-aid. Essentially, when melatonin is released (or consumed), we start to feel drowsy and tired. When the brain "sees" light (primarily blue wavelength light), it won't release melatonin. This was all fine and dandy when we were living in caves and the only light at night was from the moon, stars, and fire. But in modern society, many of our technologies give off high levels of blue-wavelength light. This includes the lights in our homes but also our TVs, computers, laptops, tablets, and smart phones. Exposure to these light sources essentially tells our brain that it is still daytime and to therefore not release melatonin. This wreaks havoc on our sleep as our brain needs external cues (i.e., darkness) to help it determine when to start the neurochemical cascade that needs to take place to get us to sleep.



#### How?

- Well, you can use this as an exercise in making yourself uncomfortable by doing something difficult (#3 above) and just turn down the lights and drop any screen time starting about 2 to 3 hours before bed. And yes, this includes no smartphones!
- Or, you can keep the houselights dim and turn down the brightness on your TV and monitors/screens. Most smartphones and tablets have an option of reversing the colors on your screens (on iOS phones this can be done through Settings>General>Accessibility>Invert Colors). Do this 2 to 3 hours before bed.
- Another option is to install f.lux (free) on your PC and laptop. This can be installed on your tablets and smartphones but requires you to jailbreak it (something I'm personally not willing to mess around with). You can download it and learn more here: <https://justgetflux.com/>.
- And now the latest iOS iPhone update does this for you (without having to jailbreak your phone). Go to Settings>Display & Brightness>Night Shift and then schedule it to shift your display to the warmer end of the color spectrum when it gets dark (e.g., from 7:00 PM to 7:00 AM). Move the Color Temperature setting all the way to the right ("More Warm").
- And if you want to really geek-out on this biohack, just purchase industrial grade blue wavelength blocking glasses like the Uvex S1933X Skyper Safety Eyewear. You can buy these from Amazon.com for \$10 and then feel free to leave your screens and lights as they are. Put these on 2 to 3 hours before you plan to go to sleep.

## ADDING THESE 5 STRATEGIES TO YOUR LIFE

will make sure you have the foundation to help you maximize your potential in sports, work, and life.

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Book 1: **ACHIEVE: Find Out Who You Are, What You Really Want, And How To Make It Happen** that is now available on Amazon.com and Amazon.ca