



FOURTH
EDITION

IN PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

*How to win in sport and life
through mental training*

TERRY ORLICK, PhD

In Pursuit of Excellence

FOURTH EDITION

Terry Orlick



Human Kinetics

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This book is dedicated to YOU—for choosing to excel, for choosing to become what you are capable of becoming, for choosing to make a positive difference in your own life, for choosing to make a positive difference in the lives of others, for choosing to embrace a path with heart.

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I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my daughters—Skye, Jewelia, and Anouk—for the wonderful gift of pure love and support that they have given me and continue to give me.

To the thousands of great athletes, coaches, students, and performers who have challenged me to give my best, find a better way, and continue to learn and grow as they have explored their own potential—

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Thank you all for the ways in which you have inspired me and enriched my perspectives, my life, and the thoughts shared in this fourth edition of *In Pursuit of Excellence*.

PREFACE

This book tells you in simple and practical ways how you can excel in your life and live your dreams. You can turn challenges into opportunities in every part of your life so that you can succeed in your sport, school, profession, and relationships. You can make your focus work for you to raise the level and consistency of your performance. Perhaps most importantly, this book will help you see that you control your own destiny through your decisions and your focused actions. You are the only one who can take full control of you and your own focus—this alone puts you in a position to direct the course of your own life.

The strategies presented in this book work because they are derived from the hard-learned experiences of real people who have excelled in sport and many other high-performance domains. You can apply and adapt these lessons to surmount every conceivable challenge in your life. The recurring theme in their experiences is that focus is incredibly powerful. The focus you adopt in your life leads your performance and your reality in positive or negative ways. You decide.

As you read, keep in mind that different strategies work for different people, in different contexts, at different points in their lives. Clear your mind of clutter. Open your mind to possibilities and read with full focus and full intent to act on what is most relevant to you right now. I wish you the best in this quest.

Simple Joys,
Terry Orlick

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CONCENTRATION ▶ CONFIDENCE ▶ POSITIVE IMAGES ▶ MENTAL READINESS ▶ FOCUS ▶

PART I

Envisioning Excellence

CHAPTER 1

Choice of Excellence

Every journey to excellence is filled with challenges, victories, setbacks, lessons, and simple joys. I hope that the simple wisdom contained in these pages will make your personal journey richer and more joyful, and that you will apply what you learn to the various contexts of your life. I encourage you to act in ways that make your mission and my mission a reality.

If you picked up this book, you probably want to excel at something. In your heart, you know that you can be better and more consistent than you are right now. The great performers I have worked with have taught me how to live and perform closer to full potential—right now—and you can learn to do so as well.

Excellence in every part of your life is a decision—decide to excel.

Excellence is a choice—choose to excel.

Excellence is full focus—focus, focus, focus.


That's it! If you know exactly how to act on what you just read, you can close this book and simply act on it—every day, every opportunity, every interaction, every practice, every performance, every step along the way. If you are not quite sure how to act on what I have just told you to do, read the rest of this book to find out how other great performers do it and how you can do it.

The most important steps you can take to excel in any part of your life are the following:

Decide what it is that you really want to do.

Decide to do what you really want to do. Choose to do it!

Focus fully on doing what you want to do—every day.



My goal in writing this book is to help you become the person and performer you can be—to empower you to perform and live consistently closer to your potential. That is my mission.

Decisions and Choices

Virtually everything that you do or do not do in your life is ruled by the choices that you make. You can choose to excel or choose not to excel. You can choose to bring focus and quality to what you do or choose not to. You can choose to get stressed out about things beyond your control or choose not to. You can choose to let other people upset you or choose not to. You can choose to approach obstacles and react to challenging situations in positive ways or in negative ways. You can choose to dwell on the negatives or focus on the positives. You can choose to embrace your dreams and go after them or let them drift away without really trying. These are your choices, and your choices direct the quality of your performance and the joyfulness of your life. You decide.

I have never met an Olympic champion, world champion, or world leader in any field who did not decide that he or she was going to go after his or her goals with full focus. If you want to perform and live to your personal potential, at some point you have to decide to do it with full focus. After you decide to pursue your dream or follow a path with focus and commitment, the next challenge often becomes staying on that path when it becomes bumpy. The first big step is choosing to excel. The next big step, which is sometimes even more challenging, is deciding to persist through the obstacles. No one reaches his or her personal potential without facing obstacles, setbacks, and challenges along the way. Adversity is a normal part of the journey to excellence in every field.

People who are successful at persisting through obstacles, challenges, setbacks, bad patches, uncertainties, doubts, and sometimes fear find a way to keep a sense of purpose, passion, or perspective in their pursuit. They feel that they have meaningful reasons for doing what they are doing and are able to retain those reasons for doing it. What are your reasons for doing what you are doing, for pursuing what you are pursuing? Why are you doing it? What are you hoping your pursuit will give you in the short run and in the long run? What do you like or love about doing it? What do you hope it will give you and those who have supported you or those you care about?

If you can retain your passion for pursuing your dream and find sustainable reasons for doing it, pure excellence will become a realistic goal. If you lose your passion for pursuing your dream and are not able to find sustainable reasons for continuing to do it, pure excellence will become an elusive goal. Retention of passion, retention of purpose, retention of focus, retention of love or joy, and retention of choice are all essential for living your dream of personal excellence.

The Choice to Focus

In every pursuit, focus drives consistent high-level performance. The recipe for high-quality focusing is simple—stay positive and stay fully connected. Acting consistently on the recipe, however, is extremely challenging. You

have to decide to focus, choose to focus, find good reasons for focusing, and commit yourself to work on improving your focus so that it works for you and not against you—every day, every assignment, every practice, every training day, every preparation session, every simulation, every meet, every game, every interaction, every presentation, every shift, and every part of every performance—from the first second to the last second.

You can choose to go through the motions, to slop through whatever you are doing, or choose to focus on performing with quality, to the best of your ability. You can choose to listen with full focus or choose to nod your head as if you are listening and not listen at all. You can choose to be wherever you are—fully focused with every fiber of your being—or choose to be only partially there or not be there at all mentally. You can choose to focus on the positives or the negatives. You make these choices every day.

When I am working with athletes, students, and other performers, I often ask, “If you are there physically (at practice, in class, at work, with another person, or performing), why not be fully there?” What is the point of being there physically but not mentally? Why not be there fully—fully focused, fully connected, and fully positive? I challenge you to see how long you can maintain a fully connected, positive focus in a class, conversation, practice, or performance. I challenge you to see how quickly you can regain a fully connected focus if your focus drifts away. I challenge you to find something positive in every situation you enter—to see it as an opportunity to test yourself, to learn, and to grow your focus.

When you get your thoughts and focus working for you and not against you, you immediately begin to take control of your destiny. You turn poor performances into good performances, good performances into great performances, and great performances into consistently great performances.

Perspective Is Everything

A powerful example of choosing to find a positive perspective in an extremely difficult circumstance came to me from Dan Nadeau, an officer and highly regarded instructor in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), a championship shooter, and father of three wonderful children. After reading a previous edition of this book, Dan wrote to me to share his story about how he got through what is every parent’s worst nightmare.*

I have read several of your books, and the one that has affected me the most was *In Pursuit of Excellence*. In your book you speak of athletes you have worked with and how they have enhanced their performance and reached their goals. I also have a success story that I will share with you, as your insight and knowledge has been a major contribution in my being able to live life and not simply exist in it.

*Excerpts from Dan Nadeau’s letters courtesy of Dan Nadeau.

I have suffered the loss of my three children, Christan, Angela, and Kurtis. They were all born with cystic fibrosis. Angela passed away in 1979 while I was doing my RCMP training in Regina. Kurtis passed away in January 1995, and my oldest son, Chris, passed away 13 months later. As the children were growing up, it was a very painful and extremely stressful task to keep the boys positive toward life, despite their knowledge that if a cure was not found, their life expectancy was short.

In the early part of 1990, I was introduced to your work by my assistant coach. We were coaching a local high school volleyball team. Between the two of us we gathered as much material as we could find on the subject of focus, imagery, and visualization. It was at this time that my life as I knew it began to change. Through the acquired learning of the various life skills you detailed in your books and articles, I felt a surge of new-found inspiration. I brought this sense home with me. I would often find myself and my boys engaged in discussion on how powerful our minds are and how we can control our thoughts and feelings. This opened a door of communication between my children and me that completely changed how we perceived our situation. We were able to deal with the loss of Angela and finally able to discuss openly what each of us was feeling. The few years that followed provided us with many fun and exciting events. My boys have redefined the definition of courage. They were both visualizers and used it daily in keeping themselves positive. The last afternoon I spent with my son Christan, he said to me, "Dad, I can still see my dream. I'm just too tired to get there right now." He passed away that night.

Since then I have had some really trying times. When I lose sight of my focus, I bring myself back to those final few years I had with Chris and Kurtis. I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am for those years, how grateful I am to have been inspired by you and your knowledge.

I am presently instructing at the RCMP Academy in Regina and continuously pass on what I have learnt and continue to learn from you to the next generation of RCMP officers. I may not have a gold medal around my neck, but I have a comfort zone and thank you for that.

I wrote back to Dan, sincerely thanked him for sharing his story, and requested more details on how he used my material to get through the huge challenges that he was living. This was his response:

At the time I was introduced to your book my life was a living hell. On the outside I was a vibrant individual, police officer, volleyball coach—a community icon, as someone put it. Inside I was an angry,

confused, and worn-out man. No one had any idea how afraid and depressed I was. I had never gotten over the guilt of not being there for my daughter when she passed away, and the outlook for my two sons was not good. They were getting older, and unless a cure was found, they would not be with me much longer. There was so much stress in my work and in my personal life that it just became a way of life—don't think, don't deal with it, just keep myself busy.

While reading your book the first time, in all honesty I got angry and frustrated. I was reading about athletes training mentally and physically to win, to stay focused, and to be positive. That's a great thing. As a coach that is what you want to see in all your players. But as a father with two young boys who were fully aware of their pending outcome, it was difficult to keep my perspective on life. My oldest son wanted to play slow-pitch ball, and the doctor advised that it would not be good for him. I decided it would and let him play. I was sitting in the bleachers watching my son play ball, and the tears were running down my face. He was having the time of his life. His first at bat, he got a hit right between first and second, all the way to the fence. He ran the bases and collapsed at third base, completely out of breath. That didn't matter to him—he hit a triple.

I continued reading your book, and upon finishing it, I found myself thinking more and more about the stress that I was feeling, all the hours I spent worrying, how I had no harmony in my life. The positive self-direction chapter was the catalyst, in a metaphoric sense, not in the perspective of an athlete, but rather a personal challenge for me in my life. The biggest revelation for me was the fact that I was coaching young athletes on how to play their sports well and how to make the connection to other productive aspects of their lives. My children needed coaching as well, and I wasn't coaching them.

As you put it, think of the process, not the outcome. All I thought about was the outcome. Quiet reflection—this is where the transformation took place. I started thinking a little more rationally. I felt I was slowly coming to terms with my situation. I was engaging in conversations with my sons more and more. We established a form of communication that allowed all of us to speak openly about our fears. What a gut-wrenching initiation. Many tears, many hugs, many "I love you guys."

I read your book a second time, and this time I shared with the boys my thoughts on how so many things in the book could be applied to life itself. Many good days followed that transformation. My sons have since passed on, but what fond memories I have to reflect on. The second reading was done in a totally different mind-set, which

allowed me to heal, to learn, and to become aware of a man who wrote of simple joys. He showed me where to look. Because of your ability to express life in a pure, honest, and rational way, I have been able to celebrate my life every day and make a difference in many people's lives. When a loved one leaves you behind there is no filling the void, but you can make a conscious choice to continue living your life in honor of theirs.

A little over a year after I received Dan's first e-mail, he wrote to me to share how he had directed his focus (chapters 3 and 11) and imagery (chapter 8) toward a best-ever shooting performance and a major competition victory.

I simply wanted to share with you my experience in competing for the Connaught Cup. This cup is awarded to the best shooter in the RCMP. Each province is represented by their best shooter. I was representing our training academy. The event was held today, and I won the cup. As you know, you have been my mentor for many years. I can't begin to tell you how much you have contributed to the quality of life that I share every day with hundreds of cadets and coworkers.

In the days leading up to the competition, I prepared myself using your Focusing for Excellence audio CDs. Wow—what a tremendous help. Last night I listened to CD #4, *Performing in the Zone*, after which I sat down and did some focused imagery, seeing myself perform my best ever. Today I not only won the Connaught Cup but shot my all-time best. I'm still in a state of amazement in what one can achieve when inspired through the wisdom of a mentor such as you. On a final note, today my son Kurtis would have celebrated his 23rd birthday. He was a part of me today on the range, and I felt his spirit. Hard to explain. All I can say is that it felt good.

Over the three years since he first contacted me, Dan continued to update me about his success in applying the practical lessons from *In Pursuit of Excellence* to his work.

I am still instructing firearms for the RCMP and applying mental training with all the cadets. I continue to use the wheel of excellence as the basis of my instruction in the mental-training side of police work. As a result over 5,000 cadets have a better mind-set at the start of every shift. I personally make it a part of my cadets' training, and the senior officers are starting to take notice of the benefits. Since I have been instructing here I have not had one of my cadets fail firearms yet—knock on wood. I have been involved in coaching for 25 years. I know I have a natural ability to motivate and inspire people and over the years have gained a lot of experience. I have all this knowledge, I want to continue working in this area of expertise,

and I know my potential—unlimited. I must say, Terry, you have been an unbelievable source of information and inspiration to many of us Mounties.

Learning from each experience and performance is a choice. You can choose to apply the lessons that you learn about your best and less-than-best focus in your next practice, experience, or performance. When you act on these choices, you become a better performer and better person. You separate yourself from those who never come close to living their true potential.

Choose to focus on the positives rather than the negatives.

Choose to focus on the opportunities rather than the obstacles.

Choose to bring a fully connected focus to your practices and performances.

Choose to focus fully on the step in front of you rather than on distractions.

Choose to live and perform closer to your potential.

The control that you have over your choices, your focus, and your destiny is real and powerful. It is the key to unlocking the door to your true potential.