

GOLDMIND Excellence

A Winning Focus

A helpful 'charge' for highly skilled athletes
Case example

Normally, athletes are told to focus on what they are doing and on personal goals. The idea is that if you focus on what you have to do, the winning will take care of itself. But there are exceptions in which highly skilled athletes get an additional and helpful "charge" by going out

to win. That is not the central focus they hold during the performance, but it is the orientation they take before the event. This one such athlete was involved in alpine skiing. Her personal goal is "to win." She was skillful enough for this goal to be within reach.

Sample Self-Talk

- "She blew it, I have to take up the slack"
- "It's up to me"
- "This is it"
- "Do it now or never"
- "Now's your chance"
- "Charged up"
- "Charge"

HIGHLY CHARGED FEELINGS GAVE BEST RESULTS

When this athlete was highly charged, determined, and challenged before the event, she had her best results. She seemed to "perform better in the spotlight . . . I do well because I have to . . . I don't have a choice because the challenge is there." Her first World Cup win was a good example of this orientation. It indicated what she could do if she got into the right psychological frame. The capacity to perform consistently well was within her grasp if she could replicate this "charged-up" pre-race feeling and absorbing race focus.

When no one was expecting anything from her, or when she perceived people as having given up on her, she could either accept the challenge or forget it. Under these conditions she had an inclination to forget it—unless she consciously set a personal challenge for herself. For her first World Cup win, she skied after a poor performance by a teammate

who was favoured to win the race. As she expressed it, "She blew it. I had to take up the slack, I approached it as if it were my job. I was thinking 'It's up to me. I am the only Canadian left with a chance to win.'" Her immediate pre-race thoughts were, "This is it! Do it now or never! Now's your chance." She felt that this helped her get psyched to go out and win.

Performance outcomes are always "up to you" because you have the capacity to give your best in any event. Wanting to win and going out to win are always up to you. Much of this athlete's pre-race psych fell into place as she moved away from hoping to win toward believing that she could win. Once that happened, she made a commitment to go out and turn her beliefs into reality. She seemed to benefit from that kind of "charge." It made her deter-



mined to do the job that she was fully capable of doing.

If you are like this athlete, thoughts relating to winning could be tied into your pre-event plan in order to generate the kind of intensity that will allow you to win. You may not always come out on top, but at least you will have a good shot at it. If you do not generate the intensity that comes with wanting to win, you can almost be assured that you will not perform to your limit.

So during your warm-up, remind yourself that you want to win, that you are capable of winning, and that you are going to do it. At least you are going to perform at full intensity. You didn't do all that training in order to go out and perform half-charged. The winning focus will raise your activation level and will energize you, both of which should enhance your performance if previous best performances have been associated with a winning focus.

You almost always get what you expect. If you expect a bad performance, you are pretty sure to realize your expectation. If your performance expectations are positive or your challenges and goals are set high, you have a much better chance of a high-level performance. This is particularly true for someone like the athlete who had a history of needing to feel "charged up" to perform well.

FOCUS

Do it!

Do it right!

Do it right now!

Prepared for the Athletes at
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**FOCUSED:
Right HERE,
Right NOW**