

Breaking Out Of The Matrix

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**“It takes guts to stand out from the crowd.
You must trust your instincts over the voices of dissent, including your own.”**

For those few who achieve at the highest level and do so consistently, repeatedly, and over a long career, there is no real mystery. It just seems that way. This article will provide a very high-level outline of four interrelated concepts that shed light on how the very few dominant athletes or performers become so dominant. They are keys to true performance.

1. The Performance Equation
2. Your Two Selves
3. Improving the Results
4. The Three Levels of Performance

1. The Performance Equation

The Performance Equation is quite simple. “ $R = P - I$ ” meaning “Result = Potential – Interference.” This is the big “secret”. No one is hiding it – most do not realize it exists, do not understand how to train because of it, or refuse to believe that it applies. Again, “Results equal Potential minus Interference.” This equation rules all performances – in sport, in performance, and in life.

Potential – Potential is the vast store of all the experiences of your life. Incredible detail and “knowledge” is stored in the “memory” of your mind. This is not just data; it is feelings, impressions, kinesthetics, tastes, smells, sounds, and any other sensation, thought or feeling you experience. This is where true talent lies – deep within us. Can you quickly compute the calculus in your head to determine how to catch a fly ball? Of course not! Yet, you catch it effortlessly with very little training and effort! Potential is:

- Talent
- Skill & Ability
- Knowledge & Experience
- Enhanced Through Training

Actual training in this context takes many forms:

- Traditional technical training
- Traditional physical training
- Participation in different disciplines (e.g. rifle, pistol, shotgun, archery, crossbow)
- Participation in different sports (e.g. ice skating, swimming)
- Participation in different activities (e.g. music, dance)
- Participation in alternate forms of training oneself and one’s mind and heart (e.g. Yoga, Pilates)
- Making time to plan, think, dream, set goals, evaluate progress, and take control of your training and your life.
- Realizing that it is what you think and how you feel – your mind and emotions – that have the greatest effect.

How many forms of training on this list are incorporated effectively and appropriately in the “training” activities of most athletes and coaches? All are critical to ultimate success.

Interference – Around age 8 or so, our childlike innocence begins to be modified by perceptions, judgments, and biases. This closes us off from our performing self. We no longer think, or even breathe, naturally as a child. We no longer “just do”. We think about everything, attempt to control it, and lose our natural rhythms, actions, and thoughts. We are loaded with a burden that is fatal to performance:

- Judgments & Baggage
- Doubts & Fears
- Results & Appearance Concerns
- Societal Bias & Judgment

The negative effects on our results are astounding. Athletes who perform well in training, especially solo training, and who perform poorly in competition or intensity training have developed the Performance side of the equation and neglected the Interference aspects. The same is true of athletes who sometimes do perform at seemingly incredible levels now and then, but cannot sustain their performances. We will return to this theme after exploring the next topic.

2. Your Two Selves

Remember your best performance? Remember how easy and effortless it was? Remember your worst performance? Remember how difficult and painful it was? Why, when we “try” hard for an outcome, do we do so poorly? Why, when we “just do”, is the result so great? Most importantly, why do we repeatedly forget or ignore this lesson! The answer becomes clearer as you examine “Your Two Selves” – the Interfering Self and the Performing Self. Fear not! We are not schizophrenic – just multi-faceted! We should understand and use each “self” for the benefit of our training and results.

Interfering Self – This “self” is the “voices” that we hear in our head when performing. This “self” is full of constant chatter, judgment, bias, and evaluation. It places a large emphasis on past and future, right and wrong, correct and broken. The Interfering Self has a number of unhelpful attributes.

- Judgmental & Critical
- Focus on Past & Future
- Closed Minded & “Knows Best” – HUGE EGO
- Constant Chatter & Criticism

This “self” can be useful for analysis... but only at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way. Otherwise, it is a burden.

Performing Self – This “self” utilizes all the “memory” in our body, mind, and nervous system. It operates in Present Moment without care or concern and is capable of “superhuman” feats with little effort. Most of all, it yearns to be free of the Interfering Self in order to soar! The Performing Self has a number of helpful characteristics:

- Deepest Talents & Skills
- Carefree & Childlike
- Effortless Performance
- Operates Only In Present Moment

Now that we have looked at the Performance Equation and Your Two Selves, bringing the two together lends insight for improvement in our results.

3. Improving the Results

There are two primary methods for improving our results. The obvious method is to improve performance. The overlooked method is to reduce interference. Both seem obvious, yet one is routinely ignored.

Our society is all about physical and technical, thus the typical narrow emphasis in training on those two aspects. If you break your leg, people think you are “crazy” if you do not see a doctor. Our society is afraid of the mental and emotional. If you have emotional or mental problems, people think you are “crazy” if you do see a doctor. This is ludicrous! Seeking help for mental or emotional problems should be as normal as for physical or technical problems!

Because it isn't all the same in our society, we fear the topics, even when there is no illness or problem involved. Paradoxically, we wish to “work on our mental game” – without having a clue what it really means.

What good is it to train the Performing Self if we do not really believe in it and if we interfere with it? Why do we ignore the Interfering Self and allow it to sabotage our performances? Because it is “scary”, like other mental or emotional topics. Release that bias and learn to soar!

Before we look at increasing performance and decreasing interference, there is one more concept required. In a typical 60 shot match, what percent of the time is actually spent shooting, that is, releasing the shot? It turns out that the actual shooting time is roughly 5% of the entire match. (One may quibble with the actual number. It is close enough for the purposes of this discussion.) Thus, we spend about 5% of a match actually releasing the shot. With this in mind, we turn our attention to increasing potential and decreasing interference.

Increasing Potential – Current training focuses almost exclusively on technical and physical aspects of the sport, addressing only the “5%” part of the game. Yet, within that 5%, traditional training misses the essential elements of the most critical moments of all. It also ignores what is going on during about 95% or more of the competition. Clearly one must have a solid foundation – quality breathing and sleep, proper hydration and nutrition, physical stamina and flexibility, and technically correct equipment and technique. We spend a great deal of time on the technical part! Yet our results fall short. The missing elements are found in the other half of the equation.

Decreasing Interference – One must understand the power of the Performing Self and the debilitating effect of the Interfering Self. Alternate forms of “training” are critical. New patterns of thoughts and emotions are essential. You can change the way you think! You must decide to do so. Your coaches cannot do it for you.

This involves activities that some folks call “weird” or “soft” or “fruitcake” training. However, it addresses the critical moments of the shooting and it addresses the other 95% of the competition. One must utilize the power of the Mind in both mental and emotional aspects.

There are three essential attributes one must develop to conquer the Interfering Self, decrease interference, and unshackle the Performing Self.

Awareness / Sensing – Awareness and focus are two very different things. While you are focused in the Present Moment on the task at hand, you are also aware. Information gathered is passed to the Performing Self without “comment”, judgment, or bias where an automatic response takes place – all without breaking focus. Sensors “on.” No judgment or “processing.” No Thoughts. Merely “sensing.” See, Feel, Hear, Taste, Smell, “Sense”, Be.

Will / Determination – Force of will is powerful – direct it appropriately! Appropriate goals are a true and driving self-motivator, not a burden. (If your goals, or goals placed on you,

are a burden, resolve that now!) You must have or develop the will to actually DO what you need and want to do. Rejecting shots takes will power! Breaking an old habit or pattern takes will power!

Look beyond the current obstacle to your goal on the other side. Instead of “observation, judgment, reaction” resulting in obstacles and bad actions, use “awareness, response” to resolve issues without concern and they issues never become obstacles.

Desire – to do correctly. Goals – strive and work. Action – actually do right things. Yes, it is “hard” work. Above all, DO it! Get over yourself, stop reminding yourself that you cannot or that this “mind” stuff is stupid, and just DO it!

Trust / Faith – How often do we say we trust someone or something – and then retain control? That is not trust! We are wrong to think that our actively controlling, arrogant, Interfering Self can do it all – it cannot. Release active, Interfering Self “control” – LET GO! GIVE IT UP! The Performing Self actually has far better and true control!

Trust in self & training. Relinquish perceived active “control.” FAITH – trust without reservation. Scary at first, when experienced all of this is incredibly liberating. Then it is trusted and sought after. Very few fully make this transition; those that do are often unbeatable.

4. The Three Levels of Performance

All of the concepts discussed so far come together in this final topic, the three levels of performance.

These three levels are a natural progression. There is no mystery about how to get from one level to the next, though it is seldom taught. Accordingly, traditional training methods mire us in level two and make level three a mystery.

1) Active Learning & Control – The Beginner

Task is learned systematically through repetition. Basic timing is also learned. This can be natural if athlete is not over taught with traditional “training” methods.

Operating mode:

- Learn steps one by one
- Learn sequence and timing
- Constant active thinking and chatter

Role of the two selves:

- Interfering Self – In “control” and quite happy
- Performing Self – Quietly assimilating information

This is our normal mode for initial learning and is well understood.

2) Partial Automation – The Intermediate / Improver / Advanced level athlete

Most athletes and performers operate in this mode. Although much is automated, it is not truly trusted. Ultimate, or level three, performance is repressed – though it does break out at moments. Misunderstood, this glimpse of level three is feared and repressed because we are “not in control”. This is the Interfering Self holding us back because – remember it has an ego – it wants to be in what it thinks is control.

Operating mode:

- Partial sequences automated
- Some great results – highly variable
- Great deal of chatter

Role of two selves:

- Interfering Self – Dominant and quite happy about it

- Performing Self – Crying for freedom, rare and short breakouts

This mode is reached rapidly by beginners and is the mode where a great deal of time is spent. Indeed, for most athletes this is where they spend their entire careers.

3) Full Automation – The Master

We “Just Be” and “Just Do”.

This is the “Zone” or “Flow State” or “Zen” performance that is talked about, yet so poorly understood. There is nothing mysterious about it... the Interfering Self is out of the equation! Flow has been researched and techniques for facilitating it almost (but not quite) on demand are easy to learn and incorporate into an athlete’s routine.

This type of performance reaches deep within our being – and can be very emotional. The feelings are beyond description and the emotional release is astounding! Of course, that is yet another reason so many in our culture recoil from it. Athletes who understand it are overjoyed... and dominate their matches.

Operating mode:

- Performance seemingly on “autopilot” athlete is spectator
- Results are staggeringly great
- Quiet Body, Quiet Mind, Quiet Heart, Quiet Eye – Peaceful Warrior

Role of two selves:

- Interfering Self – Totally silent and trusting
- Performing Self – In true total control

Those who grow to understand this type of performance embrace it and refuse to revert. Many others may experience it at times and then give it up because of their Interfering Selves and the criticism of others who also do not understand.

Final Thoughts

This article merely scratches the surface of the topics discussed. However, enough information is provided to allow one to evaluate and then make up their mind to take initial steps ultimately leading to understanding level three and experiencing it in regular competition. In many quarters, these ideas are thought to be stupid, wrong, or worse. Those who have the guts to break out of “The Matrix” reap the rewards.

In the next installment, we will explore the ramifications of these ideas, look at actual examples, and the impact of these ideas on training, competition, ...and winning.

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Based in the Atlanta, Ga., area, JP O’Connor (jpoc@acm.org and <http://www.america.net/~jpoc/>) is involved in rifle and pistol target shooting as a competitor, is a former Assistant National Coach – USA Paralympics Shooting Team, is a Level 3 coach, serves on the National Coach Development Staff, and coaches the rifle and pistol teams at North Georgia College & State University. He enjoys working with a number of pistol and

rifle athletes from around the country, ranging from beginners to the highly advanced, in clinics and one-on-one private coaching, all on a volunteer basis. He also works with musicians and athletes in a variety of sports.

(Biographical information as of October 2009)