
Creating a Mental Playbook:

Strategies to Build Resilience and Sustainability

Lessons Learned from Professional Sports

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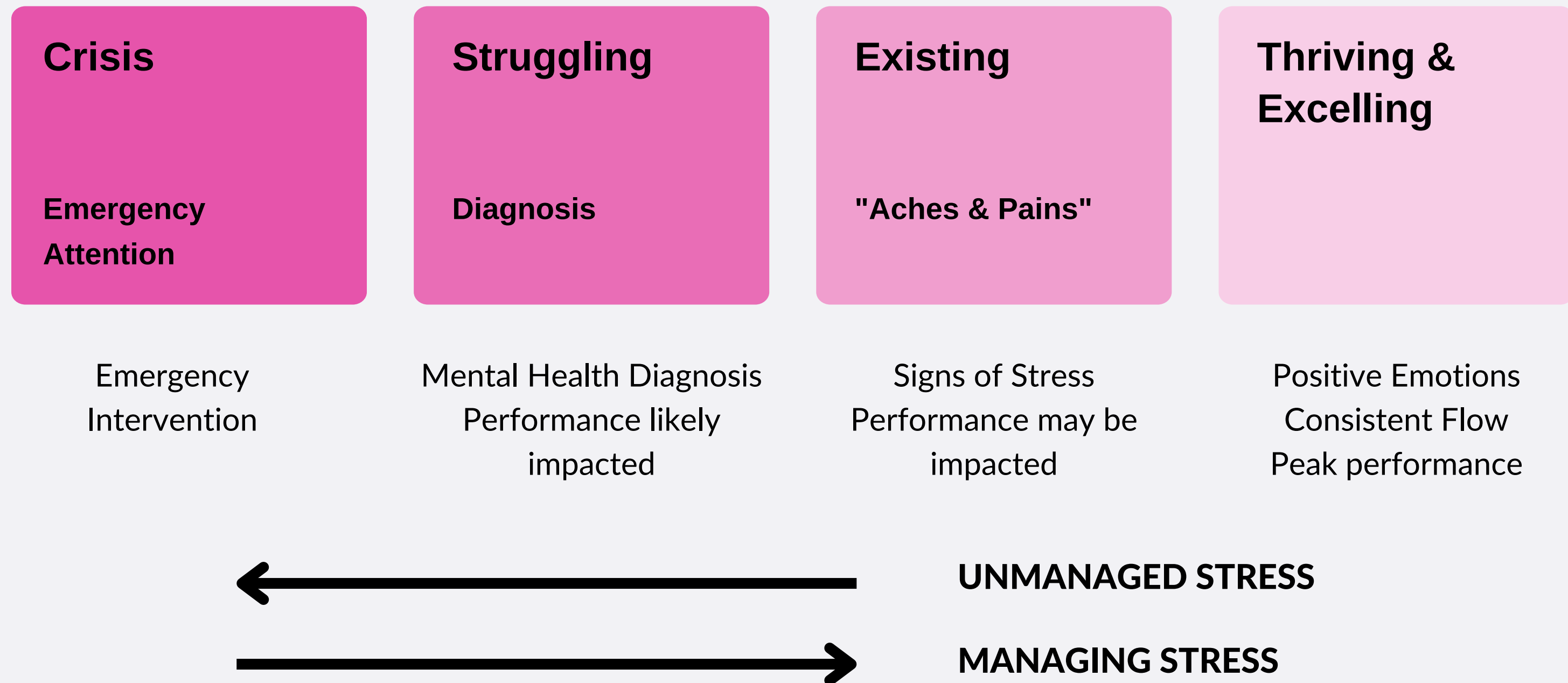
Checking In

What drew you to this work? Why do you do this?

What has helped you stay resilient in the face of challenges?

What are 1-2 things you hope to get out of today's session?

Our understanding of “Wellness”



PART 1.

Identifying your “Roots”

What are my values, mindsets, & perspectives? What am I grounded in?

What beliefs do I hold about myself, others, and my work?

How do these beliefs influence my decisions and behavior?

Which beliefs are serving me well? Which may be limiting me?

High Performers Paradox

The same beliefs (roots) that create success can create suffering when they become too rigid.



Achievement
Oriented



High
Standards



Extreme
Responsibility

ACHIEVEMENT-ORIENTED

ROOT

"I want to grow, improve, and accomplish meaningful things."

STRENGTHS

Strong drive for excellence and improvement
Persistent in the face of challenges
Committed to development
Disciplined and goal-directed
Willing to make short-term sacrifices
Finds purpose and motivation in pursuing
meaningful goals

PITFALLS



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PITFALLS

Achievement = self-worth
Outcomes > process
Difficulty celebrating success
Guilt when resting
Unhelpful relationship w/ mistakes/setbacks
Achievement treadmill
Happiness exists in the next accomplishment

HIGH STANDARDS

ROOT

"I want things done well."

STRENGTHS

Strong accountability for self and others
Commitment to quality and excellence
Attention to detail and preparation
Consistency in effort and performance
Persistence when things get difficult
Creates high-performing environments
Refuses to settle for mediocrity

PITFALLS



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- Strong accountability for self and others
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PITFALLS

- Excessive self-criticism
- Difficulty feeling satisfied with performance
- Less patience and understanding of others
- Frustration, disappointment, or resentment
- Immediate shift to what could be better
- Chronic feelings of "not enough"
- Unintentionally put pressure on people

EXTREME RESPONSIBILITY

ROOT

"If something needs to get done, I'll make sure it happens."

STRENGTHS

- Strong sense of ownership
- High level of productivity
- Reliable and dependable
- Natural leadership qualities
- High follow-through and accountability
- Proactive problem-solving
- Builds trust with others
- Takes action

PITFALLS



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PITFALLS

- Difficulty delegating or trusting others
- Feeling responsible for everything
- Taking ownership of other people's emotions, behaviors, or outcomes
- Over-functioning (enabling under-functioning)
- Prioritizing others' at the expense of well-being
- Burnout, exhaustion, and resentment
- Feeling like everything rests on your shoulders

Small Group Discussion



Reflecting on the spectrum of wellness, what are some signs that suggest you're moving to the left? *(towards struggling and crisis)*



What are some of the stressors that pull you to the left? What are some skills or habits that keep/pull you right?



What, if anything, resonates about the roots we discussed? In what way can you relate to these?



What is one change you could make this week to move in a more balanced direction?

PART 2.

Building your “Reps”

What do I do intentionally and consistently to perform at my best?

How do I manage stress and navigate challenges?

How do I maintain focus, energy, and motivation?

What practices help me stay aligned with my values during difficult moments?

MENTAL PERFORMANCE

REPS

Things I do intentionally and repeatedly to optimize my mentality, manage stress, and appropriately recover (*How do I stay focused, poised, and driven?*)

SKILLS

Trainable tools you use in real time

Breathwork
Self-Talk
Imagery/Visualization
Relaxation
Mindfulness
Reset routines

HABITS

Patterns you repeat automatically

Process/preparation
Coping routine
Mental framing
Off-day structure
Music
Phone use

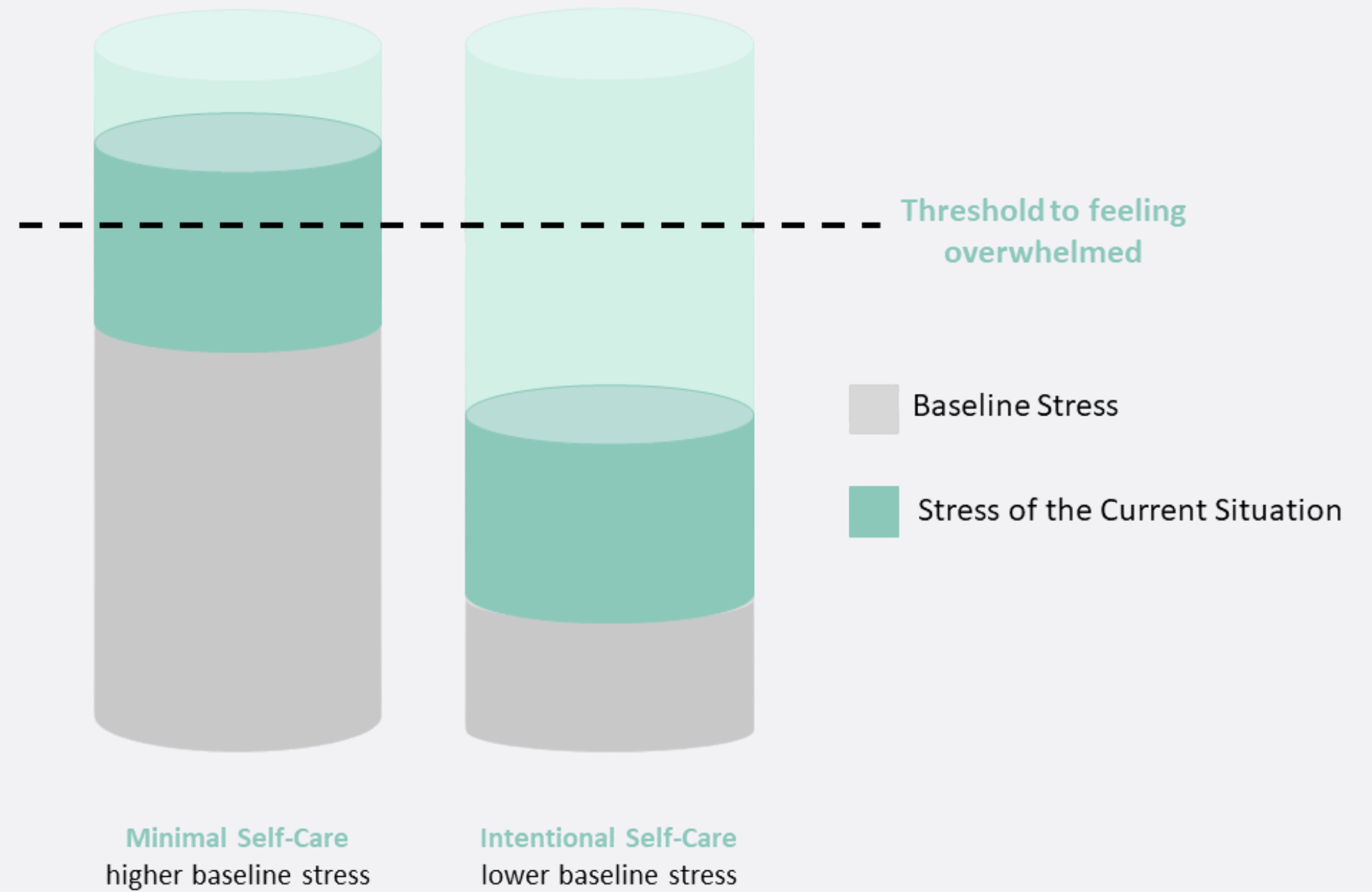
ENVIRONMENT

Who and what you're around

People you spend time with
Physical spaces (*recovery, studying, etc*)
Digital environment
Cues (photos, quotes, etc)
Sleep environment

SELF-CARE

- What am I doing consistently to take care of myself (manage my stress)?
- Behaviors that maintain psychological, physical, and emotional functioning under stress
- Collection of small habits > big changes
- Investment in your future self



Self-care is not a sign of weakness - it makes us more RESILIENT in the future.

BREATHWORK

- Our breathing is one of the best skills to train intentionally (significant impact on HRV and coherence)
- The way we breathe is crucial (**light**, **slow**, and **deep** breathing promotes better oxygen delivery, recovery, calmness, and focus)

CALMING DOWN (OR SLEEP)

4-7-8 BREATHING

Inhale 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, exhale for 8 seconds

Focus on soft nose breathing

Repeat for 4 rounds

MANAGE FRUSTRATION & STRESS

EXTENDED EXHALE

Take a deep inhale through your nose. Before exhaling, take a second short inhale through your nose to “top it off.”

Slowly exhale through your mouth.

Repeat 1–3 times

LOCKING IN FOCUS

BOX BREATHING

Inhale through nose for 4-5 seconds - hold breath for 4-5 seconds - exhale slowly for 4-5 seconds, hold for 4-5 seconds

SELF-TALK

- The internal dialogue you use to influence your thoughts, emotions, attention, & behaviors during sport.
- Your voice is a guide for your attention.
- We want our self-talk to represent the mindsets, mental framing, and perspectives that are important to us

Examples:

OPTIMISM (REALISTIC)

The expectation that effort & persistence will lead to positive outcomes. Choosing to see possibilities and find solutions even, and especially, when things are tough. Mistakes or adversity are seen as specific, temporary, and changeable.

GRATITUDE

Noticing and appreciating the positive moments in your life, your family, your teammates & coaches, your faith, and the challenges that push you to grow.



"THE MIND IS EVERYTHING. WHAT YOU THINK YOU BECOME."

**SIDDHARTHA GAUTAMA
(BUDDHA)**

MINDFULNESS (STAYING PRESENT)

Be where your feet are.

- The intentional practice of tuning into the present moment and allowing internal experiences (thoughts, physical sensations, emotions) to exist without judgment
- Trick is to catch when our attention is pulled to the future/past and redirect using a **present cue**

Present cues to pull attention in the present:

BREATH

SOUNDS

VISUAL CUE

PROCESS GOALS

S.T.O.P

Stop, take a breath, observe, proceed
with attention back on the task

**SENSORY CUES WITH
MOVEMENT**

Small Group Discussion



What is your current approach to managing stress and navigating challenges? (*e.g., skills, habits, environmental considerations*)



What does self-care look like for you?
When do I need to be most intentional with this?



What are 1-2 changes you want to make over the next few weeks?

**Self Care
Assessment**



PART 3.

Creating your “Ripple”

How do I support my team and shape a healthy culture?

How do I want people to feel when they come to work each day?

How do I build trust, connection, and psychological safety?

How do I promote well-being and resilience?

MENTAL PERFORMANCE

RIPPLE

How I intentionally provide support, connection, and resources to my team and create an environment where people can thrive.

CULTURE

Best antidote to burnout.

Culture relates to the way members interact. The way they show up.

Feeling connected to systems (organizations or teams) is an evidence-based prevention strategy for mental health challenges.

PROGRAMS

Strategic strategies for support.

Intentional programming to identify specific groups. Create opportunities for connection and skill development.

Consider: (1) How might your team benefit from these initiatives? (2) Who are the target populations?

CREATIVE INTEGRATION

Subtle reminders of wellness.

Incorporate reminders for wellness throughout aspects of the environment.

Consider: resources created for specific groups, experiences, or situations. The more customized, the more likely to be utilized.

Programming Examples

Rookie Success Program | NFL

- League-mandated program for all 1st year NFL Players
- Incorporates dedicated sessions for the following wellness topics: mental health, stress management, time management, decision making, substance use, relationships, and two clinician-selected electives

PROSPER Program | Carolina Panthers

- **Physical Recovery, Optimal Support, Personal Enhancement & Resilience**
- Designed to support players on the Injured Reserve (IR) list
- Includes individualized & group meetings that promote professional development, wellness, and performance

High Performance Program for Surgeons | Novant Health

- First year pilot program for ortho surgeons new to NHOSM
- Goal of creating relationships, support, and introducing information

NHOSM: HIGH PERFORMANCE PROGRAM FOR SURGEONS

SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

STRUCTURE

- Monthly meetings (60 minutes)
- Modeled off of NFL Rookie Success Program
- **Goals:** holistic support during transition, development of culture within surgeon class, & peak performance interventions.

TIMELINE

Month 1: Introductions & Team Culture

- Introductions & discussion of this program
- Consider: Leader to present to discuss culture
- Goal setting (What do I want out of this?)

Month 2: Veteran Surgeon Panel

- Their approach, what they have learned, and advice they would give

Month 3: Developing a Process

- High performance lens of "process"
- Development of routines for peak performance & efficiency

Month 4: Time Management & Efficiency

- Strategies for managing a busy schedule
- Best practices for OR efficiency

Month 5: High Performance Habits

- Sleep & performance, stress management, and coping skills.

Month 6: Mental Performance Best Practices

- Towards vs. Away moves
- Intro to mental performance skills

Month 7: Group Check-In

- Open discussion re: first 6 months of practice. Exploration of TDs, fumbles, and kick-offs.

Month 8: Relationships

- Discussion of healthy & unhealthy relationships dynamics
- Best practices for communication
- Boundaries

Month 9: "The Business Side"

- Understanding the business aspects of NHOSM, surgeon compensation, etc.

Month 10: Managing Mistakes

- Discussion of fear of failure; exploration of impact of mistakes
- Discussion of how to manage difficult emotions

Month 11: Financial Best Practices

- Guest speakers to discuss financial planning for surgeons

Month 12: Group Reflection

- Discussion about this year & this program
- Goals for next year
- Feedback on program

NH

Creative Integration Examples

Rookie Success Deck



Lift Education Slides

WINNING THE CHOICE POINTS

Every day you face **choice points**. Subtle moments where you can choose to act in line with your values or against them. The difference between good and great comes down to the decisions made in the quiet moments.

WINNING	LOSING
During walk thru visualizing assignments, staying focused, & executing small details.	Mindlessly going through the motions while half-focused.
Putting your phone down 20 mins before bed.	Staying on your phone until you accidentally fall asleep while looking at it.
Responding to adversity by taking a breath and finding solutions.	Reacting to adversity by letting attention get pulled to the future or worrying about the outcome.

CHALLENGE: At some point today, catch yourself in a choice point. Be intentional in your response. Choose the move consistent with your values and goals. Notice how those small acts stack up over time.

FINDING FLOW

Flow is our peak performance state. In flow, we unlock a level of focus and energy that elevates our performance. It can happen at any time. Because it's such an effortless state, flow can't be forced. Instead, we want to try to "set the stage" for flow, so it can emerge naturally when certain conditions are met.

Setting the Stage for Flow:

#1: Clear goals
What can we do? **PREPARE** (know your role as much as possible; we want decisions to be as automatic as they can be; uncertainty can pull us out of flow)

#2: Strain and discomfort always happen before flow
What can we do? **EMBRACE THIS** (lean into this strain; frame challenges as opportunities for flow)

#3: Maintain present and objective attention
What can we do? **MINDFULNESS** (mindfulness practice literally trains the style of attention predictive of flow; it is massively helpful to use pre-performance)

"THE BEST MOMENTS IN OUR LIVES ARE NOT THE PASSIVE, RECEPTIVE, RELAXING TIMES. THE BEST MOMENTS OCCUR WHEN A PERSON'S BODY OR MIND IS STRETCHED TO ITS LIMITS IN A VOLUNTARY EFFORT TO ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING DIFFICULT AND WORTHWHILE."

MIHALY CSIKSZENTMIHALYI

Train your Brain Series

CAROLINA PANTHERS | TRAIN YOUR BRAIN

GROWTH THROUGH STRUGGLE

"There is no better teacher than adversity. Every defeat, every heartbreak, every loss, contains its own seed, its own lesson on how to improve your performance the next time."

Malcolm X

GROWTH THROUGH STRUGGLE

Adversity, setbacks, and even suffering are unavoidable parts of life and competition. While it's natural to want to avoid discomfort, true growth happens when we face it head-on.

Research shows that resilience develops through repeated exposure to challenge. Each time you move through discomfort (whether it's physical or emotional), you train your mind and body to adapt, strengthening your ability to regulate emotions, recover quickly, and stay focused under pressure.

We don't control when adversity strikes, but we do control how we respond. And that response defines who we are.

Challenge: Identify 2-3 key values or characteristics you want to demonstrate after adversity (maybe it's courage, composure, perseverance, enthusiasm, or leadership). Use the challenges you encounter as the arena to put those traits into action.

Discomfort isn't the end, it's the starting point for growth.

CAROLINA PANTHERS | TRAIN YOUR BRAIN

FINDING FLOW

"The best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times. The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile."

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

FINDING FLOW

Flow is a state that can happen to anyone, at any time; whether you're in practice, a game, or meetings. Because it's such an effortless state, flow can't be forced. Instead, we want to try to "set the stage" for flow, so it can emerge naturally when certain conditions are met.

To set the stage for flow, three things need to come together. First, you need clear goals. Knowing your role and understanding exactly what you're responsible for on the field. Second, the situation needs to be highly challenging, pushing you to use all your skills and effort. Finally, strong focus on the present moment is essential: being fully engaged in the moment and on the task at hand (mindfulness practice helps us train this last piece).

Flow isn't magic; it's about aligning your mind and body with the demands of the moment.

Challenge: This week, focus on: (1) knowing your role inside and out; (2) embracing the challenge of situations as opportunities for flow, and (3) keeping your attention in the present moment.

Other Examples

Potential Resources to Create

Post-Work Mindfulness
Audio (makes these
specific)

Value clarification
worksheet for leaders and
executives.

“Develop your process”
podcasts and resources
for staff.

“Reset routine” worksheet
to identify routine for
between meetings, clients.

Mental skills for
employees toolkit.

“Wind Down” worksheet to
help staff clear their minds
before sleep.

Pre-work meditation audio
specific to your team’s values
& standards.

Self-care assessment and
planning podcast & worksheet
for understaffed teams.

Podcast on relationships
(e.g., setting boundaries
around busy times of year).

Small Group Discussion



What are some of the current challenges my team/organization has in terms of promoting wellness?
(e.g., understaffed, low resources, etc.)



What have I found to work or be successful in terms of promoting or modeling wellness?
What have I seen from other leaders that has been helpful?



What kind of programming or resources have we provided? Or, what could we consider that might help create a ripple?



What are 1-2 changes you want to make over the next 12 months?

Thank you!

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