



TEN MINUTES WITH...



AUTHOR, SPORTS PSYCHOLOGIST AND LEADERSHIP CONSULTANT, GAVIN FREEMAN

What can sports psychology teach us about developing our own peak performance?

Many sports psychology principals are relevant in the business world, but ultimately it's all about being able to perform consistently under pressure. My book, *The Business Olympian*, shows professionals how to apply those principals to improve individual and team performance.

There's a lot of doom and gloom in markets right now. How can we expect staff and clients to react?

How people react in tough times boils down to what motivates them. If they are focussed on avoiding failure, you will see defensive behaviours like deflection and mediocrity. They may feel that the problem is 'bigger than them' and that their efforts are futile. On the other hand, those who are focussed on success will be looking for opportunities to shine. Imagine this scene in the AFL Grand Final. It's two minutes until the final siren and the star full forward is coming off the field injured. Look along the players bench and you'll see two distinct reactions. Those who want to avoid failure will be looking at the ground, praying they don't get called up. The players who want that opportunity to succeed will be warming up, ready to go.

How can we break a pattern of worry or negative thinking in trying times?

I don't subscribe to the notion that negative thinking must be replaced with positive affirmations. If you are concerned about your professional performance, simply telling yourself to 'be positive' won't have much impact. What you can learn from elite athletes is to keep a 'training diary'. A simple record of successes and how you achieve them.

Next time you're up against it, you can go back and reflect on how you dealt with similar obstacles in the past. Often we have the experience and knowledge we need to tackle challenges, but it's difficult to access under pressure. A good coach you will help you tap into your training history, in sport or business.

How can professionals maintain perspective under pressure?

It's amazing how absorbed we can become by our day to day challenges. To gain perspective, we really need to look outside those parameters. I call it 'checking the catastrophe scale.'

Incidents like Victoria's recent bushfires are a devastating reminder of what a real catastrophe looks like. If you put this on a scale alongside losing a client to a competitor, suddenly you realise, losing that client is not so bad. The next step is to put it behind you, remind yourself of your training history and focus your skills and energy on getting the next client.

What does it take to create high performing teams?

One of the techniques we can mirror from successful sports teams is the development of an effective team work model. It doesn't just take care of itself. Coaches put a lot of time, skill and effort into making it happen. The model will include a range of roles and responsibilities assigned to both the leader and the team members, but the most crucial component is accountability – what each team member will have to account for at the end of the game. In an elite sports team, everyone is accountable for an element of the performance. In business, we often assign accountability to the leader, but not necessarily the team members. Improving accountability is the starting point for creating a high performance team.

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What's the most impressive sporting triumph you've been part of?

It would have to be Simon Fairweather taking out the gold medal for Archery in the Sydney Olympics in 2000. He hadn't won since 1991, when he won the World Championships. The sports media had written him off, but he never wavered from his training schedule, or the utter belief that he could win. In the end, that's exactly what happened.

Any other thoughts about doing business in 2009?

I think Warren Buffet's classic comment about investing 'Be cautious when others are greedy and greedy when others are cautious' is equally applicable to doing business in a downturn. What an opportunity to improve business processes, invest in your team and go out there and grab market share.

Gavin Freeman is the author of *The Business Olympian* and a psychologist with over ten years experience in both the sporting and corporate worlds. Gavin was the team psychologist for the Australian Winter Olympics Turin 2006, the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games, and the Olympic archery team in the Sydney 2000 games. He has worked with elite athletes from some of the world's best sporting leagues including the NBA, WNBA and PGA.

Gavin consults to CEO's, managers and elite coaches on achieving peak performance through his *Business Olympian* professional development workshop series. For more information visit