

Being able to listen to and master your emotions is the key to personal effectiveness and sporting performance. Elite athletes and teams clearly apply positive emotion to enhance their competitiveness. In this Resilience Insight we apply the concepts of Emotional Intelligence to the world of sport.

The modern concept of Emotional Intelligence (EQ or EI) is only 16 years old (EQ – 40.7m Google hits in 0.7sec). Popularised by Daniel Goleman in 1995, EQ is now a leading theme in health, psychology, politics and brain sciences. It is vital for our children's development, our relationships, our communities, sport and business. EQ research defines the benefits:

1. Increase in math/reading tests scores (11%)
2. Greater social and sporting success
3. Improved health and longevity
4. Reduced distress and problem behaviour
5. Contributes 85% of outstanding leadership
6. Guides judgement and decision-making

The challenge is to make this real and practical in our lives. Here is a brief overview of how to grasp and use these concepts.

Body, emotion, & thought

To succeed in life we must understand how the body, emotions, thoughts, and action interact in daily activity. Then, we must learn to master and align them. This is the essence of our Performance Supply Chain (PSC) methodology.

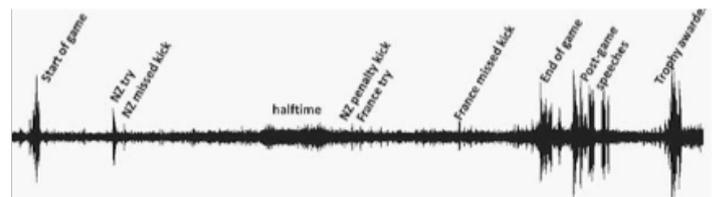
The body is the physical reality of bone, muscle, blood and skin that interacts with the world. The body can be strong, flexible and adaptive or weak, rigid and resigned. Emotions act in the body – muscles, viscera and blood chemistry. We have known since 1988 that holding the body in the position of an emotion (such as a forced smile)

affects the emotion (happiness) and it's perception as a feeling (exuberance).

With 412 mutually exclusive emotions it is not surprising that most are unconscious. In fact, Professor Paul Ekman believes that humans are not designed to be aware of emotions. Rather, emotions evolved to evoke rapid survival-based action. Confronted by a sabre-toothed lion, it might be unwise to ponder the vagaries of fear and debate whether to run or not.

In this situation it is best to run! Fear sends blood to the legs, adrenaline to the heart and motivates flight. However, in a tight competition fear becomes your enemy as it interferes with concentration, problem-solving, fine skills and breathing. In the World Cup Final in 2011 New Zealand felt the sickening sense of fear in the final 20 minutes. Could it be All Black fear that delivered a mediocre response? Or was it the passion of the French?

The seismometer reading of the Rugby World Cup final in 2011:



A feeling is the mental image created by the body's expression of emotion. This feeling milieu is the context within which thought emerges.

We connect body, emotion, mind and action in the Performance Supply Chain (PSC). In brief:



Body	Emotion	Mind	Action
Distress	Fear	Worry	Avoidance
Tension	Anger	Blame	Attack
Relaxed	Calm	Clear	Skilful
Fatigue	Sadness	Self-blame	Withdrawal
Energised	Happy	Hopeful	Engage

If we can recognise the emotion, we understand the state of our bodies, the nature of our thoughts, and thus, can predict how we might act. With this insight we can challenge the emotion – and its effect on us – for usefulness. For example; if fear is present would we benefit from generating calm, relaxed focus? Most athletes know the answer.

With knowledge and emotional skill we can create a performance supply chain better suited to the situation. Awareness of our emotions allows a whole new set of choices from which we can select the most effective solution. Psychologists call this SELF-AWARENESS.

Practice Self Awareness

Federer is the master of calm. In the first picture he whipped Djokovic at the French Open with passion and joy. In the second he lost to Tsonga after being two sets up. In the first he had the



stadium roaring for him. In the second Tsonga won the spectators. Note how his body tells all.

There is enormous pressure in elite sport, which can cause you to tune out of self-awareness. This is called choking. If you cannot track your emotions it is very hard to fine-tune elite performance. Perfect execution is felt rather than thought. We can be much clearer on emotions.

Begin, knowing that we are designed to fail in this task. Leading academics build careers demonstrating that EQ is the key to health, happiness and performance. IT IS VERY IMPORTANT. Yet very few people really grasp the value and apply the knowledge.

Athletes start with a huge advantage. Through years of training and competition, they learn to be more aware of their bodies. The body is the source of emotion so with a very subtle shift in attention, self-awareness is quickly learned.

As you can see in the table anger, fear and sadness handicap elite performance. In fear the body is tense, the eyes wide, eyebrows draw up horizontally and the mouth is stretched horizontally. Breathing is rapid and shallow. In anger, blood rushes to your face, shoulders and fists. Blood pressure goes up, decision-making is impaired and you tend to strike out.

The athlete's first challenge is to be able to consciously describe their emotions, identify the trigger event and reflect on value. Once you can do this you can choose the smartest response.

Practice Calm Restraint

No good comes from inappropriate emotion. In the moment, fear immobilises. Over time it ruins your life. Thus we must learn to calm and restrain it. You can get very good at this.

Invest in learning competent relaxation. Breath control, mindfulness, deep relaxation and sleep are tools we must master. Daily practice builds resilience against fear. Real-time practice allows us to catch and contain fear before it compromises the situation.

For example, practice a long, smooth exhalation every time you feel anxious or angry. We have to get good at this. It takes time, skilled guidance and repetition – preferably 10,000 hours.

Practice Emotional Combat

Once we learn to calm and restrain destructive emotions, the next challenge is to build the constructive opposite. Emotions can be used like muscles. If anger operates in one direction, kindness works in the opposite countering the negative effects of anger and liberating creative solutions. Calm counters fear. Joy counters sadness. Notice Djokovic smile when receiving.

You can help build positive emotion by changing your posture or facial expression. It is essential to hold a confident stance. It reinforces performance and intimidates the opposition. With practice, switching to more helpful emotions becomes natural and fast.



Watch the Competition

Finally, never forget that your strategy and tactics should be informed by the emotional state of your opposition. Learn to watch their posture, expressions and movement. Capitalise on their weakness and confront their strength. Empathy can be applied to enhance your performance and challenge your competitor.

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