

EMBRACING PRESSURE

By Ty Hillman

Whether or not you are a fan of golf, you can appreciate the feeling a golfer feels when faced with a ten foot putt for the win of a major championship. Throughout the day, he has played well and made several shots that were much more difficult and now all he has to do is make this easy putt to clench the victory. As he approaches the hole, all of a sudden he starts to hear voices he has not heard all day. First, he hears the voice of doubt, which makes him start to question his method. Next, he hears the voice of fear, which starts asking him questions about what will happen if he chokes. What will everyone think and say? Finally, he hears the voice of criticism telling him all of the mechanical moves he will have to

make in order to make the putt. The golfer has been focused and played great all day making some difficult shots and being emotionally resilient when making a few mistakes. Now the championship is on the line and all he has to do is sink an easy ten foot putt and he is an emotional mess. He begins questioning whether or not he thinks he can win. What happened?

In "The Inner Game of Tennis", author Timothy Gallwey states there is a formula for measuring one's potential in any endeavor; Potential = Performance - Interference. In this case, Potential is the possibility of becoming the best the person is possible of becoming, Performance is the action or the process they are performing, and Interference is what intercedes or interferes with the performance. Mental toughness could be summarized as "Interference management". Some of



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the most common types of interference are loss of confidence, anxiety, fear of losing, worry about what others think, choking, and any other number of things. The first step in managing interference and minimizing its impact on your performance is embracing and welcoming pressure.

In order to win or reach the top of your field, a person will have to go through the heat and pressure prior to the trophy celebration. For example, there is no way to be the Super Bowl champs and hold the Lombardi trophy without going through all of the hype, the interviews, the autograph sessions, the criticisms from fans and media, the expectations from friends and family, the minutes before the game in the locker room, and the game itself.

Since winning and pressure go hand-in-hand, the first thing we need to do is change our attitude from avoiding pressure and being uncomfortable, to embracing the feeling. By changing our perception that pressure is our ally rather than our enemy, we begin to look for and welcome it. Since this is a skill we develop, and repetition is the mother of all skills, we need to look for opportunities daily to feel some pressure or to be uncomfortable so we can practice working through it. The more you are able to do this, the more confident you become. Of all the emotions

you want to feel on game day, confidence is the most significant when striving to reach your potential.

This could be as simple as making bets with your friends at practice. Make sure, however, that if you lose the bet, the consequences will be significant enough that you are going to feel some pressure not to lose. Another way to practice managing interference is by stepping out of your comfort zone and doing things that are uncomfortable in a social setting, like talking with strangers if you are generally reserved, or participating in something unfamiliar when you are with other people. This helps strengthen the same "emotional muscles" by facing your fear of being judged by others. Also, there is no substitute for actual competition. As often as possible you need to compete. Whether you win or temporarily fail, you will learn something. At the very least, you will learn that you can fail and the world will not end, even though it may feel like it.

Remember, there is no way to hold the trophy without feeling the heat first. By embracing pressure rather than resisting it, and looking for opportunities to get comfortable feeling uncomfortable, you are on your way to becoming mentally tough.

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