



In every human endeavor there are two arenas of engagement: the outer and the inner. The outer game is played on an external arena to overcome external obstacles to reach an external goal.

The inner game takes place within the mind of the player and is played against such obstacles as fear, self-doubt, lapses in focus, and limiting concepts or assumptions. The inner game is played to overcome the self-imposed obstacles that prevent an individual or team from accessing their full potential.

—Timothy Gallwey

Developing Your “Inner Game”

Robert Dilts

The “Outer Game” of any activity has to do with its behavioral and environmental aspects. The “Inner Game” has to do with your mental approach to what you are doing. This includes your attitude, belief in yourself and your team, your ability to concentrate effectively, deal with mistakes and pressure, and so on. The concept of the “Inner Game” was developed by Timothy Gallwey (1974, 2000) as a way of helping people to achieve excellence in various sports (e.g., tennis, golf, skiing, etc.), music and also business and management training. Success in any area of performance involves using your mind as well as your body. Preparing yourself mentally to perform well is the essence of your “Inner Game.”

When your Outer Game and Inner Game are working together, actions flow with a kind of effortless excellence that is called “playing in the zone.” Some indicators that you are focused and in “the zone” are:

- A sense of “humble authority” – self-confidence without arrogance
 - A feeling of confidence and the absence of anxiety and self-doubt
 - No fear of failure or self-consciousness about achieving your goals
- A focus on performing beautifully and excellently
- A state of relaxed readiness in the body and focused spaciousness in the mind
- Performance comes without effort and without having to think about it

The opposite of this state—*anxiety, lack of confidence, low energy, fear, stress, mental paralysis*—are responsible for many difficulties and failures in organizational life. To put it another way, *limitations in people limit the organization.*

As Modern Dance founder Martha Graham stated:

There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening [energy] that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. If you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and be lost. The world will not have it. It is not yours to determine how good it is; nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep the channel open.

COACH Versus CRASH

It is said that things are always changing, but not always progressing. In our personal and professional lives, many challenges will present themselves such as meeting the fear of the unknown and the unfamiliar, dealing with loss or separation, and a general sense of uncertainty and vulnerability. These can plunge us into unhelpful survival strategies: attack, escape or rigidity (fight, flight, freeze). This might result in regression, inertia, ambivalence, the difficulty of letting go, confusion and conflict.

When this happens we are likely to collapse into a stuck state that can be summarized by the letters in the word **CRASH**:

Contraction

Reaction

Analysis Paralysis

Separation

Hurt and Hatred

In order to progress through change, it is important to cultivate qualities such as flexibility and stability, balance, connection and the ability to let go. This comes from being centered and in your “inner zone of excellence” and connected with something beyond the confines of our egos. These processes are characterized by what we call the **COACH** state:

Centered

Open

Attending with Awareness

Connected

Holding

It is important to have practices that help to create and strengthen the **COACH** state so that we may move through and accompany others through times of challenge and change. It is easy to stay balanced when life moves smoothly, but in order to maintain equilibrium during turbulent times, one must have developed these qualities until they are “in the muscle.” Preparing for life’s challenges requires durable practices to prepare you for moving through times of adversity and change with resourcefulness.

Practicing The COACH State: Finding Your “Inner Zone of Excellence”

Our capacity for both resilience and effective performance comes from being centered and in our “inner zone of excellence” and connected with something beyond the confines of our egos. This is what we are referring to as the **COACH** state:

1. Sit or stand in a comfortable position with both feet flat on the floor and your spine erect but relaxed (i.e., “in your vertical axis”). Check that your breathing is regular and from the belly. (Short, rapid breathing from the chest would indicate that you are in a stressed mode.)
2. Bring your attention to the soles of your feet (i.e., put your “mind” into your feet.). Become aware of the universe of sensations in the bottoms of your feet. Feel the surface of your heels, toes, arches and the balls of your feet.
3. Begin to expand your awareness to include the physical volume (the 3-dimensional space) of your feet and then move your awareness up through your lower legs, knees, thighs, pelvis and hips. Become aware of your belly center, breathe deeply into it and say to yourself: *“I am here.” “I am present.” “I am centered.”*
4. Continuing to stay aware of your lower body, expand your awareness up through your solar plexus, spine, lungs, rib cage and chest. Bring awareness to your heart center in your upper chest, breathe into your chest and say to yourself: *“I am open.” “I am opening.”*
5. Now continue to expand your awareness up through your shoulders, upper arms, elbows, lower arms, wrists, hands and fingers, and up through your neck, throat and face. Be sure to include all of the senses in the head: the eyes, ears, nose, mouth and tongue. Bring your awareness to the skull, brain and the center in your head, behind your eyes. Breathe as if you are breathing into your head center, bringing oxygen and energy, and say to yourself: *“I am awake.” “I am aware.” “I am alert and clear.”*
6. Staying in contact with the ongoing physical sensations in your body, starting from your feet and including all three centers (belly, heart and head), become aware of all of the space below you, going into the center of the Earth; all the space above you, reaching into the sky; all of the space to your left; all of the space to your right; all of the space behind you; all of the space in front of you. Feel a deep sense of connection to your feet and the centers in your belly, heart and head, and to the environment and field around you. Be aware of the vast array of resources available to you within yourself and in the field around you. When you can experience a connection to this sense of a larger Self, say to yourself, *“I am connected.”*
7. Keeping your awareness on your body and simultaneously on the space around you, sense a type of field or holding environment in which you can hold all of the resources, strength, intelligence and wisdom available to you as well as disturbing energies such as fear, anger, sadness, etc. Feel the sense of courage and confidence to face whatever comes your way as you stay centered and present with all of yourself and open to your environment. Say to yourself, *“I am ready.”*