

Lessons Learned: In Pursuit of Excellence

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In the following article, graduate students enrolled in Terry Orlick’s “Sport Psychology and Mental Training Consultation” course (all of whom were students as well as athletes or coaches) discuss the role of lessons learned in pursuit of excellence.

In all of our graduate course work, consulting experiences, research pursuits and quests for individual improvement, Orlick consistently emphasizes the importance of drawing out lessons and applying those lessons on a daily basis: “Learn from every experience, every opportunity, every challenge, every day. Act on those lessons. This is the path to personal excellence”.

In most of his classes (at the graduate and undergraduate level) Orlick requires his students to keep a “Lessons Learned Journal” to help ensure that lessons are captured, remembered and acted upon. He also encourages athletes and other performers to keep a log on lessons learned so that they can speed up the learning process and enhance the consistency of their best performances.

When we read articles and books for his classes, he asks that we write down the most relevant lessons we have learned from each reading and challenges us to reflect on how we will apply these lessons in real world situations. Reading and performing with this goal in mind has helped us to accelerate the application of concepts and lessons in real-world performance or consulting contexts.

In the following pages we share one example of lessons learned. These lessons are focused on what each of us learned from Orlick’s 2000 edition of *In Pursuit of Excellence*. These lessons were personally meaningful but varied largely in content, probably due to our different backgrounds, experiences and stages of life.

As much as In Pursuit of Excellence was geared towards top performers, it also assists us in the pursuit of excellence in life; a pursuit to be the best that we can be. Keeping my own life in mind, I felt encouraged and motivated. Setting goals, taking risks, staying focused and all the other underlying ingredients of the “Wheel of Excellence” are very relevant in my life at the moment. (JF)

I have learned the importance of setting priorities appropriately to gain control of my present life and to steer my life onto the path I want (the path that has heart). This will always be relevant to my life. (LF)

Visions of Excellence

Orlick maintains that excellence in performance and life “begins with a vision of where you want to go and a commitment to do what it takes to get there”.

The Wheel of Excellence allowed me to immediately see what I need to do, mentally, to be my best. The fact that the best leaders and performers in the world are strong in these areas gives me a clearer vision of what I need to work on to reach my goals. (KD)

Commitment to Excellence

Orlick refers to commitment as “the ‘heart’ of human excellence”.

One simple question in this book hit me hard “Are you doing something everyday that takes you a step closer to your goals?” (p.18). I now know that it is crucial for me to be organized, have a plan and write down my daily goals to help me achieve excellence. (KM)

The book has helped me make a firm commitment to bettering myself, first as a person and second as an athlete. Making a total commitment to achieving my personal and athletic goals has rejuvenated my excitement about what lies ahead and I am already feeling the benefits of seeing something I want in my life and committing myself to going and getting it. (JG)

Mental Preparation for Excellence

A large part of attaining excellence is “becoming more aware of your own capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses and chart-

ing your own path to excellence” (Orlick, p. 79).

On positive images...

After reading this book, I have realized that seeing yourself making great plays and putting yourself in glorious, realistic situations can only help develop your confidence. (ND)

On simulation training...

In the book, an astronaut (Chris Hadfield) described the importance of simulation training. Such detailed simulations are very important in modern day coaching if athletes are to master their desired performance responses and coping strategies. (PS)

On learning from setbacks...

It was reiterated in the book that one cannot spend their life living with regret. The book motivated me to learn from my mistakes, and draw positive lessons for the future. (JF)

On confidence...

In Pursuit has helped me learn that confidence is an important tool for success. I know I am good enough but I also know I can be better. Attitude can help people get to the next level. (ND)

On coaching...

What was particularly interesting for me was the fact that the book was mainly centered around players perspectives. So, being a coach, I was able to get a players point of view towards issues such as effective feedback, positive communication and mental preparation. I am sure that I have some players who do not

fully understand what I am trying to teach them or are afraid to ask questions because they think I will get upset with them. In Pursuit helped me realize that there are many areas of my coaching that need improvement. I have a better understanding on how to create a better communication link with my players. (AL)

On communication...

Anxious feelings interfere with the message trying to be communicated. This book has identified some strategies I could use to overcome these anxious feelings, which I will immediately implement to achieve my goal. Understanding my communication patterns will help me to develop the skills I need to be more effective. (PS)

The chapter on Getting the Best from Coaches reminded me that as a coach that I have my own coaching “style”, but not all athletes learn the same way. Therefore, I need to concentrate on determining what is the best learning style for each player and use this knowledge to help the athlete improve. (MD)

Overall

There is no doubt that I need to develop many of the mental skills described in this book in order to be on the path to excellence. It seems to me that all of these things must begin with a firm commitment to my goals and myself. I have come to realize that the greatest risk is not risking at all. (JG)

Everybody is unique. In Pursuit of Excellence recognizes this and explains that some techniques might work for some athletes but not for others. (JF)

In sum, we believe that the emphasis Orlick places on drawing out lessons from all of our experiences and acting on them, is important in helping us to develop as students, athletes, coaches and consultants. Looking for personal lessons through *In Pursuit of Excellence* provides one example of a larger process that can lead us to simple, step-by-step strategies for reaching our potential. This approach to ongoing learning can be applied in many pursuits, to help reduce stress, improve relationships, embrace challenges and commit to goals that will enhance the quality of our lives and improve the consistency of our performance.

Reference:

Orlick, T. (2000). *In pursuit of excellence (3rd ed.)*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.