

## CHAPTER 1

# THE WHEEL OF EXCELLENCE

Excellence in performance and in life begins with a vision of where you want to go and a commitment to do what it takes to get there. My life's work with thousands of performers has led me to a clear understanding of what is required to make this journey successfully. There are seven critical elements of excellence that guide your pursuit of personal excellence: *commitment, focused connection, confidence, positive images, mental readiness, distraction control, and ongoing learning*. These elements, which make up the *wheel of excellence*, provide the mental keys that empower you to excel and free you to become the person and performer you really want to be. The great news is that each of these elements of excellence is within your potential control (see figure 1.1).

MY GOAL IN  
WRITING THIS  
BOOK IS TO FREE  
YOU TO BECOME  
THE PERSON AND  
PERFORMER YOU  
CAN BE—TO  
EMPOWER YOU TO  
CONSISTENTLY  
LIVE AND  
PERFORM  
CLOSER TO YOUR  
POTENTIAL.

We are all performers living the drama of life in different contexts. We are all capable of pursuing our dreams and reaching our goals. We all possess unlimited strength within the power of our minds. By developing the seven elements of excellence, we create the quality and consistency of our own performance and enrich our own lives.

The heart of human excellence often begins to beat when you discover a pursuit that gives you a sense of meaning, joy, or passion. When you find something within a pursuit, or within yourself, that you are truly committed to develop, everything else can grow. The soul of human excellence grows naturally through a confident focus and an absolute connection to each step in the moment-by-moment pursuit. It is this focused connection that frees you to continue to learn, experiment, create, enjoy, and perform to your capacity.

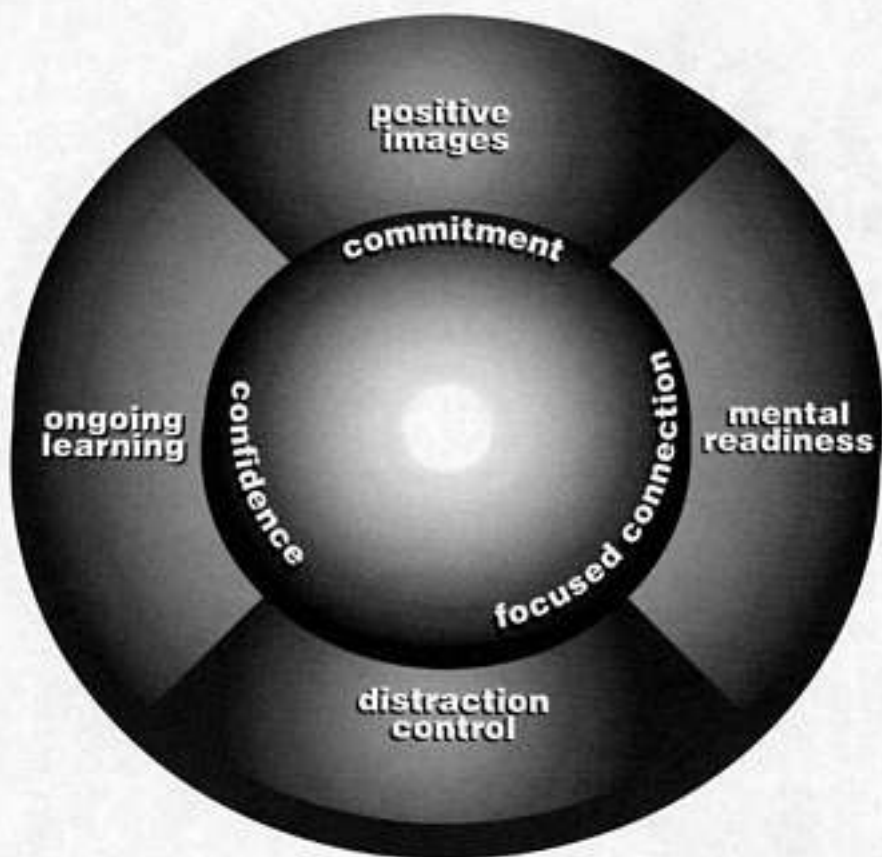


Figure 1.1 The wheel of excellence.

## FOCUSED CONNECTION

The second element of excellence centers on being *fully focused or completely connected*.

- for the duration of your task, performance, or interaction;
- on the task at hand;
- in the moment;
- in your zone;
- in the performance;
- totally absorbed in what you are doing or experiencing;
- on autopilot; and
- freeing yourself to let good things unfold naturally.

In a very real sense, **focus is everything**—in life and in performance pursuits. A positive and absorbing focus channels your commitment into a series of positive actions, thereby making your personal journey to excellence possible. A fully connected focus releases you from everything irrelevant and connects you totally with your experience or performance. It is a mind-place where nothing else in your world exists apart from being totally connected with what you are engaged in or experiencing at that moment. Focusing is the most important mental skill associated with ongoing learning and consistent high-level performance. Your challenge is to discover and perfect a focus that frees you to perform your best and to live that fully connected focus while you are engaged in the task, activity, or performance. The key to consistent high-quality performance is to consistently focus in ways that free you to perform to your capacity within different contexts. The quality of your focus affects every learning and performance situation you encounter. It determines your rate of learning, quality of learning, quality of performance, and quality of life. By guiding your focus in positive ways, you control the intensity, direction, duration, and consistency of your actions and reactions.

A best-performance focus is both absorbing and natural, free-flowing and intense, simple and magical. It is a focus that you lived often as a very young child. The ultimate goal of all preparation and performance is to enter this fully connected zone on a consistent basis. By training your mind to connect fully, trusting your

connection, and freeing yourself to let outside worries go, you can live and perform closer to your capacity in situations that count. The key to accomplishing this lies in absorbing yourself in the present—in the here and now—and gradually increasing the consistency, quality, and duration of your focus. When you step out of the performance arena, a simple shift in focus to something less demanding or more relaxing can free you to return with a clearer, stronger, more positive focus.

Your focus is the leader. Where your focus goes, everything else follows. Let it lead wisely.

## CONFIDENCE

The third element of excellence is *confidence, trust, or belief* in

- your own potential;
- your capacity to overcome obstacles and achieve your goals;
- your preparation or readiness;
- your focus;
- your choices;
- the meaningfulness of your mission or pursuit; and
- those with whom you work or play.

Confidence is the third essential ingredient guiding the pursuit of excellence. Performance confidence rises or falls based on the quality of your experiences and the extent to which you develop your mental strengths. Confidence comes from committing yourself to do the preparation or quality work, talking to yourself in positive ways about what you have done and what you can do, drawing lessons from your experiences and acting on them, and remaining positive with yourself through the many challenges and struggles along the way. Confidence grows when you discover what focus works best for you and regularly call upon that focus.

Where there is unwavering belief in your capacity to carry out a mission and absolute connection with your performance, doors are opened to higher levels of excellence. When negative experiences or negative thoughts interfere with your confidence, your performance wavers—not because you are any less capable, but because you let those doubts interfere with your best focus and limit your real