

3. COMMITMENT

The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will.

Commitment is a critical, fundamental ingredient of success. It reflects the effort, energy, and time you're willing to invest into pursuing your life endeavours. It is what keeps you hooked to your activity through the good times and the bad.

As you have read in the previous section, setting goals can help you become better in your sport, however, if you're not strongly committed to achieving your goals, your chances of attaining them will be seriously decreased. It's like saying you want to fulfill your long-term goal of going to the Olympics but you skip practices every chance you get because you don't feel like going. Is this a true commitment?

There is no question about it, if you want to be great in your sport or perform with the highest quality in any aspect of your life, you must develop and maintain a high level of commitment, even to the point where your chosen activity becomes the central focus of your life for a certain period of time. However, remember that being overly committed could have detrimental effects on your performance. To prevent overtraining and burnout, balance your deliberate work with appropriate recovery periods and fun activities that truly make you feel the way you want to feel.

There are several ways to **increase your level of commitment**. Following are a few suggestions.

1. Remind yourself of why you are pursuing your sport or endeavour. Staying in touch with that inner feeling that allows you to remain engaged on a daily basis can lead to higher levels of commitment.
2. Set worthy and achievable goals that inspire you. It will likely be very fulfilling when you achieve them.
3. Believe in your capacity to accomplish your goals. This will give you some energy to keep striving for success and endure the long and arduous hours of training.
4. Think about the personal benefits and rewards you will reap in the future when it is difficult to perform less than enjoyable activities in the present.
5. Seek support and encouragement from your coach, teammates, friends, parents, sport psychology consultant, or anyone you trust can help.
6. Share your commitment with others. When the time and effort you invest is acknowledged and nurtured, it makes it easier for you to stay committed.

Take a few minutes to reflect upon your current level of commitment in your sport or other important areas of your life, and complete the following exercise.

EXERCISE 3.1 - MY PERSONAL LEVEL OF COMMITMENT

Go back to Exercise 1.7 to remind yourself of the important areas of your life. Reflect on how you want to feel and what you want to achieve in these areas and indicate your level of commitment by rating it on a scale of 0-100%. Can you be more engaged or committed in certain areas?

Area	Level of Commitment (0-100%)
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____
6. _____	_____
7. _____	_____
8. _____	_____
9. _____	_____
10. _____	_____

If there is room for improvement, think of specific, creative ways you can increase your current level of commitment and write them down. Refer to these personal suggestions whenever you question your involvement in an activity, when you're about to give up, or when you don't feel the way you want to feel.

Sport

- ◆
- ◆
- ◆
- ◆
- ◆

Other areas in life (i.e., school, work, leisure, relationships)

- ◆
- ◆
- ◆
- ◆
- ◆

If you are engaged and committed to achieving your best in life, continue reading, I'm sure you will find the following information quite interesting.

a) Deliberate Practice

Many researchers attempting to explain how athletes become World and Olympic champions revealed that what is most important is *deliberate practice*.

Deliberate practice (DP) is any type of training activity that you do to **improve** your performance. It is quality time you spend working on specific aspects of yourself (i.e., self-confidence) or your performance (e.g., dribbling with your left hand) with the intention of enhancing it. Unlike play or scrimmages, DP is not always intrinsically motivating and fun because it requires serious effort and concentration. When you're engaged in DP, you are not just going through the motions, you are totally focused on what you are doing so that at the end of it, you are able to say that you have learned something valuable. Also, unlike work, DP does not necessarily lead to immediate rewards (e.g., praise, money). Its effects are often only seen down the road.

All things are difficult
before they are easy.

-John Norley-

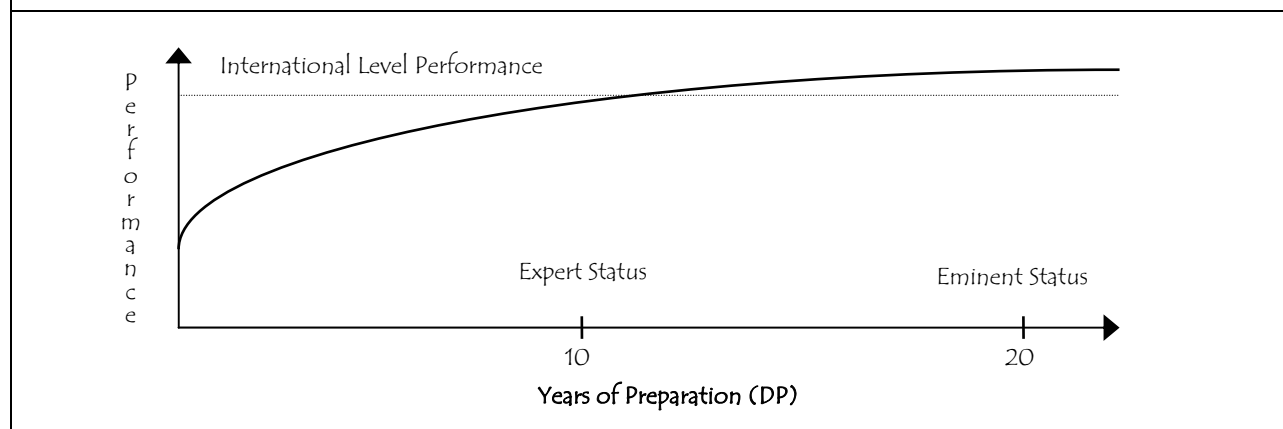
How often do you engage in deliberate practice?

Once a week, every second practice, or a few hours every day during training?

According to several researchers, the minimal length of time required become an expert in a particular domain is approximately 10 years or 10,000 hours of deliberate practice. Note that this is a necessary, but not sufficient condition to attain this level, which means that it is not guaranteed that you'll be an expert after you've put in your 10,000 hours. Also, remember that 10 years of experience in a sport is not the same as 10 years of DP. Given the effort, motivation, and resources required to "deliberately practice" your sport for this length of time, there is not doubt that you must be extremely committed!

Here's something else. To become *eminent* in a domain, you need to put in an additional 10 years or 10,000 hours of DP. Eminent means that you have not only superbly mastered the available knowledge and skills in your domain, but you have also gone above and beyond it to make a significant contribution. Examples of eminent people are Albert Einstein, Mozart, Michael Jordan, and Wayne Gretzky.

FIGURE 3.1 - NUMBER OF YEARS OF TRAINING REQUIRED TO BECOME AN EXPERT



EXERCISE 3.2 - NUMBER OF HOURS OF DELIBERATE PRACTICE IN MY SPORT

Try to estimate the number of hours of deliberate practice you have invested so far in your sport or in another important endeavour if this is more relevant. This exercise will give you great insight into the level of commitment you have carried to make every hour or every minute count in your sport. To make it easier, break down your training into the following steps:

- a) Number of years you have trained thus far: _____
- b) Number of weeks per year: _____
- c) Number of practices per week (include any relevant activity to your sport): _____
- d) Number of minutes per practice: _____
- e) Number of **deliberate practice** minutes per practice (refer to the definition of DP): _____
- f) Multiply **(e)** by **(c)** to obtain the number of DP minutes per week: _____
- g) Multiply your answer in **(f)** by **(b)** to obtain the number of DP minutes per year: _____
- h) Multiply your answer in **(g)** by **(a)** to obtain the number of DP **minutes** you have trained in your entire career: _____
- i) Divide your answer in **(h)** by 60 to obtain the number of **hours** of DP you have trained in your entire career: _____

Now, ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you surprised of your total number of hours of DP?
- Would you have expected more hours or less?
- Are you close to the 10,000 hour mark, or have you surpassed it?
- How many hours of DP are you aiming for?
- How does this reflect your level of commitment?

Countless, unseen details taken care of with the highest quality are often the only difference between mediocre and magnificent.

Remember that although 10,000 hours of DP are required to become an expert athlete, this is not necessarily sufficient to become a World or Olympic champion. Regardless if you want to become an expert or not in your sport, keep in mind that the number of training hours you invest is important. The quality of these hours is as equally or even more important.

EXERCISE 3.3 - COMMITTING TO HIGH QUALITY TRAINING

Think about your next training session. What things can you commit to doing before, during, and even after it to make sure you are putting in **quality time** and **effort**. Is this going to help you engage in deliberate practice? It would likely help to revisit Exercises 1.10 (your preparation to feel the way you want to feel) and 2.5 (your daily training goals).

*BEFORE TRAINING SESSION**DURING TRAINING SESSION**AFTER TRAINING SESSION*

b) Motivation

Putting in quality time every day means that you have to stay motivated through the inevitable ups and downs. This is not always easy because after all, you're only human. Motivation is a process, not just an outcome. There are things you can do to nurture and monitor your own motivation. First, consider Exercise 1.2 in which you identified why you engage in your sport. Remember you were asked to figure out which reasons were internal and those that were external? These reasons are directly related to your motivation. Your internal reasons reflect "intrinsic motivation" while your external reasons likely stem from "extrinsic motivation." Some people argue that intrinsic motivation is what will allow you to engage in arduous training over time and persevere through challenges or obstacles. If you are only extrinsically motivated (e.g., motivated by money or trophies, acceptance of parents or coach, recognition by peers), you are in fact depending on others or things outside your control for fulfillment and satisfaction. Is this what you want to do? Or, would you rather have control over your own process and more importantly, do things that are meaningful and rewarding for you (i.e., make you feel the way you want to feel)?

The first step in nurturing your motivation is to be aware of when you are motivated and when you are not. When you are motivated, pay attention to what you are doing and how your environment is influencing you. Chances are, you're doing things that are contributing to your performance and well-being. When you are not motivated, it is also important to be aware of what's happening inside you and outside in your environment. What is different this time? Is it something that you can resolve?

For example, if you have not been getting adequate rest or sleep or you have not been eating properly, this may affect your energy level and after a while, decrease your motivation. The good thing about this is that you can change your sleeping and eating habits. The more difficult question is "Are you willing to do it?" Reminding yourself of why you are doing what you are doing can help you answer this. How much does your sport mean to you? How much do you want to achieve what you set out for yourself? Is changing your habit of sleeping or eating worth your work? Only you can answer this. Focusing on how you want to feel in the process of improving the habit may help.

If, on the other hand, you are lacking motivation because you feel pressured by your parents or coach to win all the time and this is preventing you from enjoying your sport, this is a different story. In this case, your situation is to some extent out of your control because your parents and coach are outside factors. You cannot control your parents or coach but you can control how you respond to them and the situation. What can you do to nurture your motivation in this case? Do you ignore the pressure and continue practicing your sport because pleasing them and getting their approval is more important to you than fulfilling your own desires (in other words you are extrinsically motivated by their approval)? Or, can you build enough courage to talk to them and explain not only how some of their actions are affecting you (i.e., decreasing your motivation) but also what you need from them to be able to enjoy and succeed in your sport. Perhaps this is what it would take for you to increase your motivation. However, if you and your parents or coach make changes and this doesn't work, perhaps there are other issues at play here. What you may need to do is spend some time searching deep inside of you to identify what may be causing your lack of drive. Observe, collect data, and reflect. Have your interests changed? Do you no longer feel the way you want when you play your sport? Be honest with

yourself and those in your environment. Sometimes after trying everything you can to increase your motivation, especially your intrinsic motivation (i.e., doing the sport or activity for the pleasure of doing it), you realize that you have to leave it altogether. This is a difficult decision to make and accept, but in the long run, if you feel you made the best *informed* choice for yourself, it will likely be better for your own well-being.

Here's another situation. At this point in time, you might *think* that you are committed to your sport but you may *feel* a lack of drive. How can you resolve this discrepancy? Your mind says "Yes I want to do all of this deliberate practice to get better in my sport or in life" but when it comes time to *do* it, you don't feel like it. If this happens once in a while, I wouldn't worry because it's normal not to feel like doing something. However, if you feel like this more often than not, then I would start questioning my motives.

My argument is that if you take care to feel the way you want to feel on a regular basis, motivation will not even be an issue. When you feel great, nothing really stops you, right? But... inevitable obstacles will detract you, although if you're good at responding to them, your motivation shouldn't dip too low or for too long. Complete the following exercise to reflect on your motivation and what you can do to nurture it over time.

EXERCISE 3.4 - NURTURING MY MOTIVATION

Describe your current motivation. How does your motivation affect your performance and well-being? What influences it? How is "feel" linked to your motivation? How can you nurture your motivation? How can others help you nurture it?

Set a goal to carry out the activities or strategies you cited above as they are likely to bring significant meaning to your life and inspire you to keep going, particularly when you are struggling, discouraged, or when you are searching for energy to give that little bit of extra. Look within yourself but also reach out to people whom you trust and love to give you support and encouragement when you need it the most.

c) Effort

Aside from commitment and motivation, there is another component you should consider in your pursuit of excellence in sport or life. Think of a training session in which you worked really hard to refine a certain aspect of your performance. How long were you able to sustain your concentration and effort? How did you feel afterward? Physically, mentally, emotionally exhausted? What you have to remember is that engaging in deliberate practice is intense and effortful. In fact, it is believed that people can only engage in about 3-4 hours of DP per day. When this level is exceeded, the quality of practice appears to decrease and over time, you may experience excessive fatigue and exhaustion, which can lead to burnout.

So, what do you do with this type of information? Do you think it may be important to regularly monitor the number of hours of deliberate practice in which you engage? I think so. Coaches or teachers typically do this for you but there is no reason why you can't do it yourself as well. After all, who's ultimate responsibility is it to feel healthy and in control? YOURS! Also, teachers and coaches usually train many people at the same time and it is difficult for them to know everyone intimately enough to always make the right decisions. They make mistakes too. They can overtrain you without intentionally wanting to do this. So what's the best solution? Take care of yourself and keep a log or a journal of your training and competitions. Don't just keep track of hours, listen to your body and let the "feel" data help you regulate the level of effort and intensity you invest every day. Are you getting stale and burned out? Perhaps you are not incorporating enough recovery periods in your training schedule. Talk about it with your coach, parents, or who ever else could help you. Allowing yourself to engage in high quality moments of rest and rejuvenation on a regular basis will help you balance all those arduous hours of preparation.

How often do you fill up your energy tank on a given day? Once, twice, every couple of hours? Sometimes you have to remind yourself or give yourself permission to do this. It is quite healthy to let go of some power or give up some control to let your body and mind rest. Your response might be, "There's no time" or "I can't do this, I'm in charge," or "I have to be strong." Sometimes you do but there are also times when you can slow down, it's a matter of doing it. I have seen so many people slow down only once their health was compromised and guess what? I'm one of these people. I used to reward myself for doing a lot and going fast in life. The more I did, the more I perceived myself to be successful... until my body said one day. "Enough. You're not going to push me any longer." I listened. I didn't have the choice. Now I choose to rest and recover when I need to. I pay attention to how I feel and I don't take my body and my life for granted. Are you one of these people who will wait until it's too late? Until you literally crash? I hope not.

What I learned is that it is not selfish to want to take care of yourself, and it certainly isn't selfish to say no when you need to take a break. So feel good about letting your body and mind rest when it is appropriate to do so. This is not a sign of weakness but one of respect, knowledge, and appreciation of one of life's most precious gift: HEALTH.

Complete the following exercise to identify what you can do on a weekly basis to ensure that you rest and stay fresh, focused, and energized to sustain intense high-quality training.

EXERCISE 3.5 - REST ACTIVITIES FOR HIGH QUALITY RECOVERY

Identify moments in your day when you feel the need to mentally, emotionally, and/or physically recover. Describe actions (nap, read, massage, avoid answering the phone, etc.) that will help you maintain a balance between work and recovery. Think of what has worked well for you in the past.

Time of day	RECOVERY ACTIVITIES						
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

TABLE 3.1 - SUMMARY SUGGESTIONS

1. Set meaningful and realistic goals that will allow you to appreciate and derive satisfaction from the process of achieving them. This will likely help you sustain your commitment over time.
2. As often as possible, engage in activities for the pleasure of doing them rather than for external or monetary rewards, which are harder to control.
3. Remind yourself to enjoy the little things you are doing on a daily basis.
4. Build a supportive network of people with whom you can share your commitment and who will understand the sacrifices you have to make.
5. Engage in appropriate daily amounts of deliberate practice that will allow you to achieve your goals and keep track of them.
6. Be smart by investing quality time and energy into your pursuits as this can make a huge difference in the long run. In other words, when you do something, do it the right way and make it count.
7. Be creative in your attempts to find strategies to increase your commitment or motivation. Innovation and variety may help.
8. Balance your hours of training with adequate recovery periods.
9. Pat yourself on the back when you have done something well. Feel good and celebrate your successes along the way and not just at the end when you have achieved your goals.