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## Developing a Positive Self-Talk Toolbox

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## **Developing a Positive Self-Talk Toolbox**

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Honors College Thesis

December 7, 2023

## Abstract

The following thesis demonstrates how individuals can overcome high-pressure situations in both the business and athletic environments. Individuals are asked to perform in many different aspects of their lives. Oftentimes, individuals feel pressure when asked to perform at their optimal level. While there are many tactical skills to help individuals improve their skillset for a particular performance area, this thesis argues that a positive mindset can increase individual's performance levels during the act of performing. Primary research has been conducted between two different research groups (business professionals and athletes) to determine that pressure exists in each respective environment based on Dr. Spencer Woods' theory behind pressure. Dr. Spencer Woods believes that the difference between the expectation levels of a particular activity compared to an individual's confidence level is pressure. The results of the research indicated a notable difference between expectation levels and confidence levels in many different areas that were analyzed. Therefore, it can be concluded that pressure exists in both the business and athletic environments. The analysis argues developing positive self-talk strategies and mindset will help individuals handle adversity and increase their performance. The analogous relationship between business and athletics demonstrates how individuals can overcome challenges presented in comparable high-pressure situations. Creating a personal toolbox of strategies like the "Yes Factor" Approach equips individuals with the confidence needed to reach success. By implementing positive self-talk strategies and mindsets allow for an increase in performance without improving or changing any tactical skill for the corresponding activity. The analysis offers five potential strategies: (1) The "Yes Factor" Approach, (2) "I Love This Moment" Approach, (3) "BIG YOU vs. little you" Approach, (4) Scenario Planning Approach, and (5) Hype Number Approach that can be utilized to develop a positive mindset. By comparing examples from the athletic environment to the business environment, understanding of how each strategy can be utilized in many different situations will be gained.

## **Developing a Positive Self-Talk Toolbox**

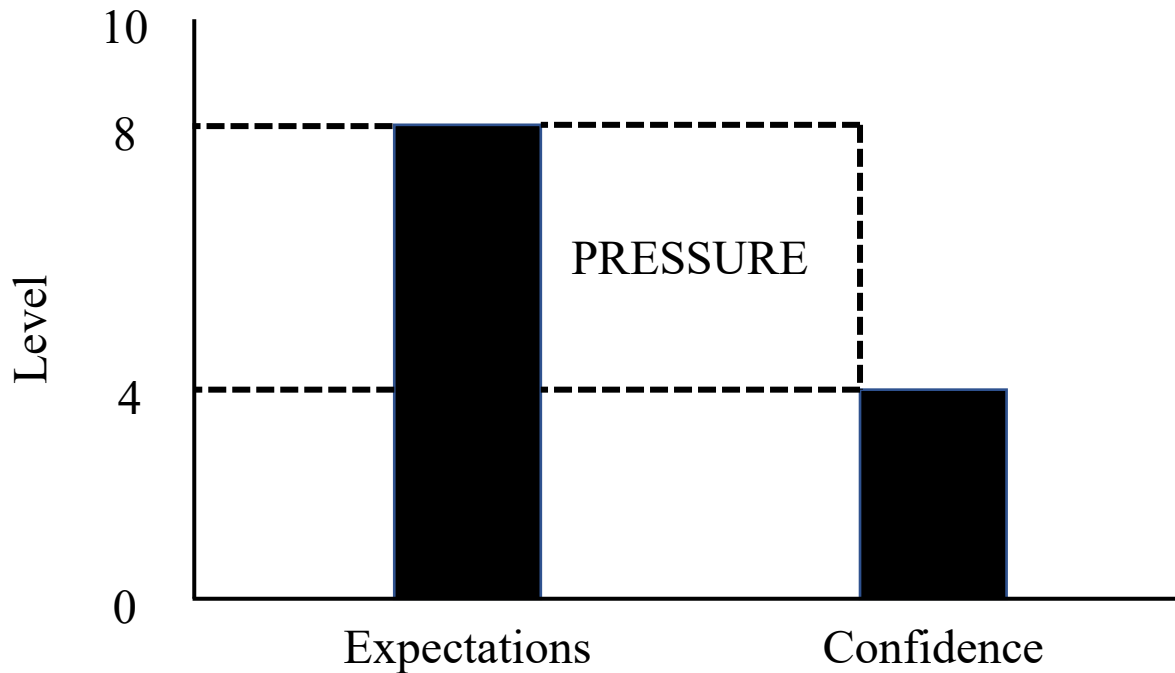
### **Introduction**

Performance is a part of everyday life. It can be as simple as completing a task like making a sandwich, or as complex as a surgeon performing a procedure. It is a part of life that no individual can escape, but if one were asked how they might increase their performance of a particular activity, what might they say? Maybe they would respond with one must practice their tactical skills aligned with the particular activity, or they might study the activity to develop a strategic plan of attack. Over time, tactical strategies like these have a good chance of improving performance, but it may not be the easiest solution.

Oftentimes, an individual is asked to perform a task when some type of pressure or challenge exists; business and athletic environments are great examples of this. Many parallels exist between these two environments like teamwork, leadership, and strategic planning. Most importantly, for this analysis, adversity is a daily aspect of these two environments. Business and athletics comparable high-pressure situations result in difficulties of individuals to perform at their optimal levels. While tactical strategies like the examples listed above can increase performance levels, it may be a difficult task. This analysis offers a different solution. It argues that the way an individual speaks to themselves and the positivity levels in one's mode of thought can make a great impact without actually changing any tactical skill. Developing positive self-talk strategies and mindset will help individuals handle adversity and increase their performance. The analogous relationship between business and athletics demonstrates how individuals can overcome challenges presented in comparable high-pressure situations. Creating a personal toolbox of strategies like the "Yes Factor" Approach equips individuals with the confidence needed to reach success.

### **Problem**

As many have experienced throughout their lives, pressure is likely to exist when the individual is performing a task or activity, but what are the reasons behind this feeling of pressure? Pressure can stem from multiple different areas including "worries about competition, audience presence, reward or punishment contingencies resulting from the performance, and ego preservation by social comparison" (Hallet & Hoffman, 2014). Additionally, the emotional stress that stems from pressure "heightens one's sensation, creates feeling of anxiety, and reduces confidence" (Hallet & Hoffman, 2014). Unfortunately, all of these attributes caused by pressure lead to a decrease in overall performance in any activity that the individual performs. Dr. Spencer Woods, who is a renowned sports psychologist, offers a different explanation. His theory suggests that the difference between the expectation level of performance versus the individual's confidence level of performance is equal to pressure. See figure 1 below for a visual representation of his theory.

**Figure 1***Dr. Spencer Woods Pressure Chart*

While analyzing the business and athletic environment, one of the main commonalities between the two is the fact that challenges, adversity, pressure all exist regularly. Therefore, one problem remains, many individuals often struggle to overcome these difficulties during performance. Contrary to popular belief, “the ability to perform effectively under pressure is considered a learned skill” (Hallet & Hoffman, 2014). It is not something that some individual’s just possess or is something that comes along with human nature. It is a mindset and ability that one has to develop if the individual wants to succeed. It has been stated that “the ability to perform under pressure has been suggested to be one of the most important psychological factors” that can serve as a competitive advantage during the act of performance (Schweickle, et al., 2022).

### **Primary Research**

Research was conducted according to Dr. Spencer Woods’ theory of pressure. The main purpose behind this research was to analyze the average difference in expectation levels versus the average difference confidence levels in both the business and athletic environments. The surveys included questions using a Likert scale to gather data. Additionally, two similar versions of the survey were sent out to two different research groups. All participants in each survey remain anonymous to the data collector as only the averages of all respondents were utilized for data analysis.

The first research group included 164 participant business professionals. About 73% of the business professionals indicated they work in the field of supply chain, while the remaining 27% of business professionals work in either sales, marketing, human resources, or other departments that were not listed in the survey. Each participant was asked to rate the average level of expectation level for three different categories: stakeholders' expectations, business leadership expectations, and internal (personal) expectations. Additionally, each participant was asked to rate their average level of confidence in their understanding of material that they present as well as their confidence level while they are presenting. Each of these questions were asked based on a Likert Scale of 1-7 where the rating of a 1 indicated a low expectation and a rating of a 7 indicated a high expectation. See table 1 and figure 2 below for the average results of business professional participations.

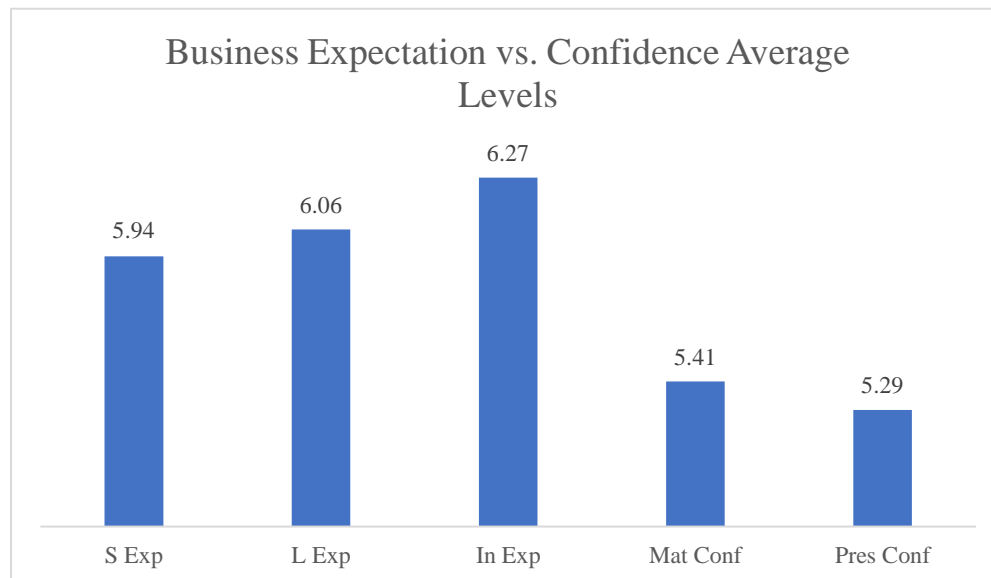
**Table 1**

*Business Likert Scale Survey Results*

	Expectations Levels	Confidence Level in Material	Difference (Pressure)	Confidence Level in Presenting	Difference (Pressure)
Stakeholder Expectations	5.94	5.41	0.53	5.29	0.65
Leadership Expectations	6.06	5.41	0.65	5.29	0.77
Internal Expectations	6.27	5.41	0.86	5.29	0.98

**Figure 2**

*Business Survey Results in Pressure Chart*



The survey results show that there is a notable significant difference between average levels of all expectation categories compared to both categories of confidence. These differences support the theory that pressure exists in the business environment across many different areas of

work. Additionally, the survey results indicate that the largest average level of expectation occurs from individual's internal expectations of themselves which aligns with the example reasonings behind pressure that was discussed earlier. The survey results also indicated that individuals are more likely to have lower average levels of confidence in their own presenting skills rather than in the material that they present.

The second research group included 76 participant athletes. All of the athletes that participated in the survey were Division 1 athletes across a variety of sports. Each athlete's specific sport was omitted from data collection to preserve anonymity. Each participant was asked to rate the average level of expectation for three different categories: coaches' expectations, parents' expectations, and internal (personal) expectations. Additionally, each participant was asked to rate their average level of confidence throughout their most recent competition season. Each of these questions were asked based on a Likert Scale of 1-7 where the rating of a 1 indicated a low expectation and a rating of a 7 indicated a high expectation. See table 2 and figure 3 for the average results of Division 1 athletes.

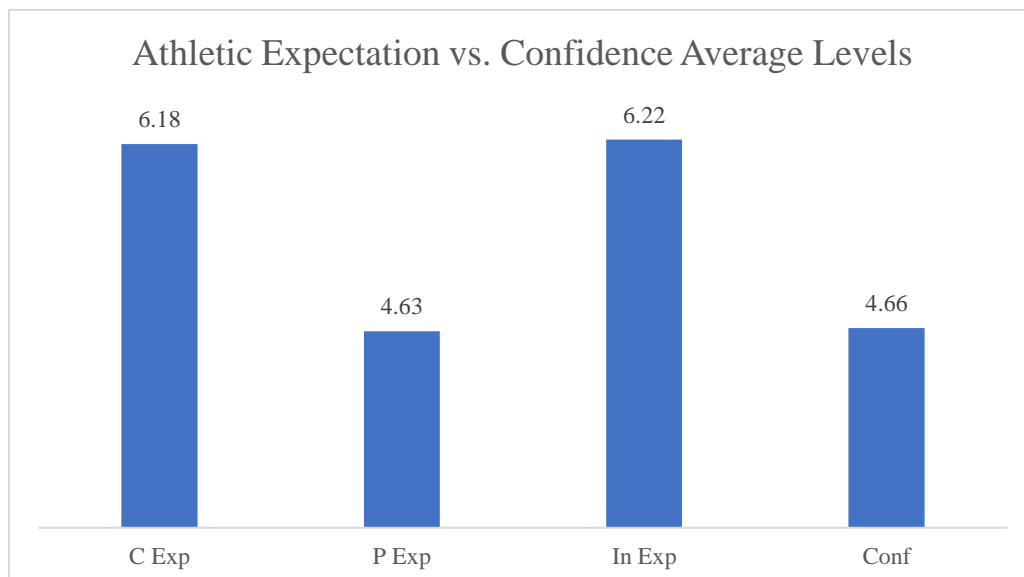
**Table 2**

*Athletic Likert Scale Survey Results*

	<b>Expectations Levels</b>	<b>Confidence Level</b>	<b>Difference (Pressure)</b>
<b>Coach Expectations</b>	6.18	4.66	1.52
<b>Parent Expectations</b>	4.63	4.66	-0.03
<b>Internal Expectations</b>	6.22	4.66	1.56

**Figure 3**

*Athletic Survey Results in Pressure Chart*



The survey results show that there is a large difference between the average level of coaches' expectations and internal (personal) expectations compared to the average level of the athletes' confidence level in the prior season. These differences support the theory that pressure exists in the athletic environment. On the other hand, the survey results shows that the average level of parents' expectation levels are just about equal to the average level of the athletes' confidence which indicates that for the average athlete, pressure is not a result of their parents' expectation levels.

### **How to Mitigate Pressure?**

Both survey results make one thing clear, pressure is present. As discussed earlier, if individuals do not know how to properly deal with pressure, challenges, or adversity, it can lead to fear and anxiety. Knowing that pressure is tied to performance, individuals in both the business and athletic environments must have ways to decrease pressure. Everyone deals with pressure differently and might have their own way to mitigate this feeling. Many may lead to over-practicing a skill through repetition, or searching for new ways to perform a task, but the solutions may not guarantee improvement. Therefore, this analysis will take a different approach. The analysis will provide ways to help individuals change their mindset through positive self-talk strategies that will help individuals increase their performance without changing any tactical skill needed for perform. In other words, individuals simply need to change the way they think while performing to increase their performance levels.

### **Strategies**

This analysis will discuss five positive mindset strategies that can be applied by both business professionals and athletes. The strategies include (1) The "Yes Factor" Approach, (2) "I Love This Moment" Approach, (3) "BIG YOU vs. little you" Approach, (4) Scenario Planning Approach, and (5) Hype Number Approach. Each one of these mindset strategies forces individuals to use their brain and thoughts in a different way to lead to a positive result. Additionally, at least one of these five strategies can be applied to just about every single type of adversity that an individual in a business or athletic environment may find themselves in. While all of these strategies can help lead to a positive result, some strategies may not work for everyone. The five strategies that will be discussed in this analysis are simply options that have been proven to be successful for many. It is important for individuals to try to find particular positive mindset strategies that work the best for them. Once individuals find one that works, they can add it to their "Personal Toolbox" of strategies. By creating a diverse Personal Toolbox, individuals will be equipped with different avenues to tackle challenges and adversity.

### **Strategy #1: "Yes Factor" Approach**

The first strategy that will be discussed in this analysis is the "Yes Factor" Approach. This strategy was developed by Charlie McMahan, who is a former college basketball player, current coach, counselor, and pastor from Centerville, Ohio. Charlie has a passion for helping young athletes learn how to deal with pressure and help athletes to perform at a high level. He has developed a program called PlayersBox which was created to help athletes perform under pressure. The "Yes Factor" Approach is at the core of his teachings, and has helped many



athletes learn how to maintain a positive mindset during adverse times. The main objective of this strategy is to essentially hardwire positive reactionary thoughts in both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ situations.

Prior to providing an example of how this strategy can be applied it is important to have a basic understanding of how the brain process thoughts. The brain is the most complex organ in the human body and is the central powerhouse for the body. It is made up of many circuits that work together to create and process an individual’s thoughts. The brain has a unique feature of being considered ‘plastic’ or in other words, it has the ability to change (Cherry, 2022). The brain’s plasticity allows “the brain [to change] because of experience – because of the patterns of activity that occur in the networks of the brain” (O’Mara, 2018). Therefore, based on the experiences that an individual may engage in or the internal thoughts that one may have, it will literally cause the brain to change physical form. The brain also has billions of neurons which are “the nerve cells that are the building blocks of the brain and nervous system” (Cherry, 2022). Thus, combining these two, neuroplasticity is the brain’s ability for the neurons to change and adapt as a result of the individual’s experience.

To take understanding one step further, it is important to know how neuroplasticity works. Contrary to popular belief, thoughts are actually physical structures in the brain – not just floating words in one’s head. Every thought that one may have has its own neural pathway in the brain - from as simple as thinking about an apple, to as complex as feelings in a relationship. Neural pathways are made up of neuron connections. Within one neural pathway, or within one individual thought, “as one neuron repeatedly excites another neuron, a synaptic knob grows at the end of its axon to improve the efficiency of transmission” (*Hebbs theory*). Therefore, a new thought is able to develop in the brain without much effort. With the brain’s great capacity, it can hold trillions of synaptic connections, but some are stronger than others. As Kendra Cherry (2022) describes, “neurons that are used frequently develop stronger connections. Those that are rarely or never used eventually die. By developing new connections and pruning away weak ones, the brain can adapt to the changing environment.” In other words, the more an individual thinks of a particular thought, the stronger the connection is and the more likely that thought will occur. The danger of this is at the heart of the reason why the “Yes Factor” approach is so important. If an individual continually speaks negatively to oneself, the stronger that negative thought will be in the mind. Additionally, this is why it can be so hard for an individual to gain confidence or overcome self-criticism – negative thoughts can be so strong in the brain. This is where the “Yes Factor” approach can play such an important role in one’s progress towards success. By hardwiring positive thoughts in the brain, the brain can eventually ‘prune-out’ the negative thoughts as the synaptic connection becomes weaker, and build a stronger synaptic connection of a particular positive thought. It is said that “neurons that fight together, win together” so it is critical that the neurons working together are those that will form positive thoughts (*Hebbs theory*).

### **Athletic Example**

Neuroplasticity is such an amazing attribute of the human brain. Athletes need to understand how to utilize neuroplasticity to their advantage. Athletes can do this in many ways,

but the “Yes Factor” approach is an easy and effective way to do so. Take a basketball player working on improving their shot as an example. When a player shoots a shot, there are only two possible outcomes – either a make or a miss. For the purpose of this example, every made shot is considered a ‘good’ outcome while every missed shot is considered a ‘bad’ outcome. For a typical player, a missed shot may lead to negative thoughts such as, ‘I am not a good shooter’, ‘I suck’, or ‘I am not good enough’. Additionally, negative self-criticism may be thought of as well. These types of negative thoughts are actually hurting the athlete on a greater scale than one may realize. When an athlete has a negative thought to a ‘bad’ outcome, the athlete is associating a negative emotion to that action of shooting. Therefore, the next thought in a shooter’s mind while taking a shot is negative because the negative synaptic connection is stronger. As a result, strong negative thoughts associated with missing a shot will likely lead to a shooter missing the next.

So, what should a shooter do? Basketball players should use the “Yes Factor” approach to hardwire positive or neutral thoughts to both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ outcomes of a particular action. Take the same example as above of a player working on improving their shot. When a player makes a shot, the only thought in their mind should be ‘YES’. In a similar way as above, this will associate a positive thought to the ‘good’ outcome of the action of shooting. Once again, performing an action alongside a positive mindset will have a better chance of resulting in a ‘good’ outcome. But, as any athlete knows, a ‘good’ outcome will not always occur. Athletes must find a way to remain in a positive or neutral mindset when a ‘bad’ outcome occurs. In this situation, when a basketball player misses a shot (a ‘bad’ outcome) their internal response should simply be ‘NEXT SHOT’. This is an example of a neutral response. Attaching a neutral response to a ‘bad’ outcome prevents the athlete from associating a negative mindset to the action of shooting. This allows the shooter to move on to the next shot with confidence. Additionally, the athlete can continue to develop a positive mindset. The more consistently a basketball player practices shooting with these two responses, the stronger this thought pathway will be in the mind. As discussed before, a shooter can change the physical make-up of their brain to through the concept of neuroplasticity. As the neuropathway increases in strength, the newly developed positive mindset will increase in occurrence which will eventually help a basketball player improve their shot making and ultimately improve their performance.

### **Business Example**

The “Yes Factor” Approach is a very effective way to hardwire positive thoughts. It not only works in athletic environments, but it can be applied to the business world as well. Take a salesman for example. To become a good salesman, an individual must develop a good persuasive tactics over time to make a good sale. As young salesman new in the field, it may be difficult to find which selling tactics work best to obtain the optimum deal. A salesman can use the “Yes Factor” Approach to help. For example, a salesman goes into a negotiation with the tactic of overshooting the asking price with the hope that the agreed price will be higher than what the product is worth. A ‘good’ outcome in this scenario would be that the salesman makes a deal with the customer and obtains a large profit. On the other hand, ‘bad’ outcomes in the scenario could either be that the customer does not accept a price that is any higher than the market value, or the salesman does not make a sale at all. Similar to the basketball player in the

example above, if a salesman uses the tactic of overshooting the asking price and makes a deal that is above market value to gain a profit, the salesman should have an internal response of “YES” to the action of the tactic utilized. This will associate a positive mindset when using the tactic and increases the chances of leading to a ‘good’ outcome of making a sale. Conversely, if the customer only agrees to make a deal at market value, the salesman’s internal response should simply be “NEXT TACTIC”. This applies a neutral response to the ‘bad’ outcome of the tactic that was utilized. Additionally, if the customer does not agree to make any deal, the salesman should simply say “NEXT CUSTOMER” to move onto the next deal. Often times, if a new tactic does not work, a young salesman might think that ‘they are a bad salesman’ or that ‘they are not good enough’. This type of negative response can greatly impact the results of the following deal that the salesman attempts to make. Once again, this example shows the importance of keeping a positive mindset when performing a particular action. A salesman will always have a better chance of making a deal when approaching their tactical strategies with a positive outlook.

### **Comparison:**

Whether working in a business environment or competing in the athletic realm, the “Yes Factor” approach is a great strategy to develop positivity. Individuals can leverage their knowledge of neuroplasticity to change their mind into thinking differently. In doing so, individuals can improve their overall performance without changing any tactical or physical skill. By utilizing this strategy, increasingly developing a positive mindset will allow both athletes and business professionals combat situations where pressure may arise. Looking back at the examples above, if a shooter can essentially train their brain to think positively while shooting, the shooter will have no choice but to be in a good frame of mind while shooting a shot in a high-pressure game situation. Additionally, if a salesman can stay positive going into a big negotiation, the salesman will have more confidence in the important discussion. The “Yes Factor” strategy can be used in so many different ways and in endless situations. No matter what the action is, the strategy will help individuals decrease the feeling of pressure and increase their levels of performance.

### **Strategy #2: “I Love This Moment” Approach**

What goes through one’s mind right before they are going to perform in a high-stake environment? Do butterflies fill one’s stomach? Or does a thought of doubt creep into their mind? Every individual may think something different, but in any situation one’s mindset in the direct moments leading up to performance is critical to determining a successful outcome. That moment is where the next strategy comes into play – the “I Love The Moment” approach. This is another strategy that was developed by Charlie McMahan for his program PlayersBox. The “I Love This Moment” approach helps individuals think positively in the highest moments of pressure.

Essentially, this approach is centered around the law of dominant thought. As Morela Hernandez (2018) stated, “neurological science has demonstrated that the human brain is incapable of focusing on two things at once.” For example, the human brain cannot comprehend ‘do vs. don’t do’ or ‘love vs. fear’ at the same time. One’s mind has a way of visualizing the thoughts in their mind. If the thought of the individual is to ‘not do something’ their mind will

visualize doing that very thing. As a result, that ‘something’ is typically the outcome of following action (*The law of dominant thought*). Human beings tend to do this in high pressure situations. Individuals are so worried about the outcome, the only thoughts going through their mind are the things they fear could go wrong. Instead, individuals should approach any pressure situation with love and confidence. Love is the opposite of fear which means if an individual loves a particular moment, no fear can exist.

### **Athletic Example**

Whether an athlete is in the midst of competition, or an individual workout, adversity and challenges arise often. How an athlete handles a challenge can impact the athletes’ short- and long-term careers. When faced with a challenge, an athlete can do one of two things; approach the challenge with fear, or approach the challenge with love and confidence. Love and fear cannot exist in the same moment due to the law of dominate thought. When an athlete loves the moment of a challenge, the athlete can rely on their preparation to have the confidence to conquer the challenge. On the contrary, when the athlete carries emotional fear when faced with a challenge, uncertainty and hesitation is likely to arise which can cause the athlete to underperform.

One of the most pressure-filled moments in all sports is a soccer player taking a penalty kick during a shootout. It is the kicker vs. the goalie – one shot. A make or miss can determine a win or loss for the whole team. The entire game all comes down to one moment. The amount of pressure in that moment can overwhelm a kicker - doubt might start to creep in or fear of a potential loss may enter into the mind. The kicker may be thinking to themselves ‘don’t kick the ball over the crossbar’ or ‘don’t kick the ball too wide’. With these types of thoughts, the chance that the kicker scores a goal is very low due to subconscious uncertainty that is derived from the kicker’s fear. In this moment, a soccer player should train themselves in the “I Love This Moment” approach. In moments of high pressure, the soccer player should simply say to themselves, ‘I LOVE this moment’. Due to the law of dominant thought, no fear or doubt will be able to be processed by the mind because love and fear are opposites. This only leaves the soccer player one choice – and that is to approach the penalty kick with love and confidence. A mindset like this will allow the athlete to utilize their preparation and training in order to put themselves in the best position possible to conquer the challenge ahead.

### **Business Example:**

There are many examples of high-pressure situations in the business environment as well, but the one that is most common is giving a presentation. According to Ruben Keshirim (2023), “the fear of public speaking, is considered the most common phobia, affecting approximately 75% of people.” Prior to giving a presentation, many might fear that they will sound funny, might forget what to say, or even freeze up completely. Unfortunately for many, public speaking is typically a large part of one’s role in the business environment. Similar to the soccer player, negative thoughts and visualizations will start to creep into the mind causing doubt and uncertainty. The “I Love This Moment” approach can be used once again. Instead of thinking about the key points or about how one may sound, saying the simple phrase, ‘I LOVE this moment’ and believing it will instantly calm one down. The business professional will be able to

enter into the presentation with confidence which will only improve their performance in high-stake situations.

### **Comparison**

This strategy is extremely versatile and can be used in any pressure-filled scenario. Just like the “Yes Factor” approach above, maintaining a positive mindset is crucial to the individual’s success. One can do this by understanding the law of dominant thought. As amazing as the human brain is, it cannot comprehend both a positive and negative thought at the same time. So, if the individual has thoughts of fear, they can alter their mindset by thinking about love. This is also true for opposites like do vs. don’t, yes vs. no, etc. Applying the law of dominant thought helps individuals quickly and easily decrease the feeling of pressure.

### **Strategy #3: BIG YOU vs. little you**

The third strategy that will be discussed in the analysis is called the “BIG YOU vs. little you” approach. This strategy was also developed by Charlie McMahan to help athletes maintain a positive attitude. This approach is based on how an individual’s inner voice speaks to oneself. In the simplest of terms, an individual is in “little you” mode when the individual’s inner voice speaks in judgement. On the flipside, “BIG YOU” mode is when the individual’s inner voice deals with only facts and actions. In other words, “little you” is the talker and “BIG YOU” is the doer. There are times when an individual should spend time in both types of modes (training vs. performing), but an individual should only be in one mode at a time.

It is important to understand the different attributes of the “BIG YOU” mindset vs. the “little you” mindset. As mentioned before, an individual’s “little you” state of being is a thinker in judgment. “little you” self-criticizes, complains, and turns mistakes personal and permanent. Most importantly, “little you” focuses on outcomes only. “BIG YOU” is just the opposite. It focuses on the literal act of doing something and analyzes those actions as facts. “BIG YOU” trusts the training and preparation that an individual has completed as well as allowing the body to be in a state of relaxed concentration. Most importantly, “BIG YOU” only focuses on the process.

In addition to the mindset attributes, the time and place when an individual should be in each state of mind is absolutely critical. The points in time when these mindsets should be utilized can be broken down into two different categories: training and performance. In a training period of time, an individual is practicing improving a skill, changing a tactical strategy of operation, or repeating an action to increase efficiency. This is where “little you” mode should kick in, but the individual has to be careful. Whenever an individual is in “little you” mode, they should always avoid being in judgement – especially negative judgement which is most common. As FayOnyx (2020) mentioned, “negative self-judgment is a harmful mental pattern where we judge ourselves and tell ourselves negative opinions as if they are facts.” When individuals engage in negative self-judgement during a training time period, their mind makes these harmful judgements permanent in their brain. Instead, individuals can utilize “little you” mode during training by focusing on the outcomes. In doing so, individuals can analyze or judge the skill or operation that is being practiced in a constructive way.

There is also a specific time and place where the “BIG YOU” mindset should be utilized. That time is during performance. In most scenarios, an individual will train or practice a particular action to perform it at a later date. Often times, the performance stage can be a pressure-filled moment which is why one must be in the “BIG YOU” mode. The “BIG YOU” mindset deals only in facts and relies on past training. An individual in this mode of thought can evaluate their current performance by looking at “the reality of a situation and sticking to the facts” without using any type of judgment in their evaluation (Supermind Platforms, 2023). The ability to look only at the root cause of a result during performance will prevent any type of negative reaction that could hinder performance levels. It allows the individual to learn and improve for the next performance opportunity. Additionally, the “BIG YOU” mindset is processed focused. This means that one can analyze performance by looking at the completed process steps and evaluate any needed adjustments.

### **Athletic Example**

The manner in which an athlete speaks to oneself whenever the athlete is in the act of playing their sport is critical to the success or potential shortcomings for the player. Take a basketball player once again as an example. Imagine that the player missed their first two 3-point shots in the first half. The player’s “little you” voice may say to itself ‘I missed those shots because I am a bad shooter’ or ‘I will never be able to make another shot because I am not good enough.’ This is the voice of judgement that turns mistakes personal and permanent. It can be detrimental to the athlete’s shooting performance for the rest of the game and potentially future games. On the other hand, the player’s “BIG YOU” voice may say to itself ‘I missed my first two shots’ or ‘my shot missed right because my feet were not square to the basket.’ This response deals only in fact and can help the player change the outcome of the next shot in a positive way.

As mentioned above, there are times for an athlete to think in a “little you” mindset. For example, when an athlete is training to learn how to incorporate a new skill, the player should train in this mode. In doing so, the “little you” mindset allows the athlete to focus on improving the outcome for a particular skill in a controlled environment where overall performance does not matter. If a basketball player is working on incorporating a floater shot into their skillset, the player will analyze how the outcome of their floater improves throughout their training. At first, the outcome of the floater may not be very good indicating that floater needs improvement. The player may then work to improve the arc and touch of their floater. Over time, the athlete will be able to judge the improved outcome.

Team practices and individual training sessions are a great time for a basketball player to work on skill improvement, but when game time rolls around, the athlete must be in “BIG YOU” mode. Playing in a game is the time where an athlete can reflect on their completed training and rely on their preparation to perform well. If a basketball player misses two shots in the first half, the player should avoid any negative or judgment thoughts about their shooting performance during halftime. Instead, the athlete should first try to analyze the facts of why they missed the shot - maybe the shot was rushed, or they did not hold their release long enough. Next, the athlete may think about the hours of shooting practice that has led to the player to be a very

capable shot maker. These thoughts are all facts – and reflecting on facts will help the athlete improve their performance.

### **Business Example**

The “BIG YOU vs. little you” strategy can also be applied to many different areas in the business environment as well. Just about every department at an organization must complete quarterly, semiannual, or annual financial reports every year. For example, imagine that a commodity purchasing manager must complete a quarterly financial report and present it to their Chief Procurement Officer. In this particular quarter, the commodity manager did not meet the mark of their cost savings and delivery on-time in-full metrics. The commodity manager’s “little you” voice may say something along the lines of, ‘I am not a good commodity manager’ or ‘it is not fair I did not reach my metrics because I have the most difficult commodity.’ These self-doubts and complaints will only hinder the commodity manager’s potential future success. Once again, the commodity manager should use the “BIG YOU” mindset and look at the facts instead. The commodity manager might have missed their delivery efficiency metric due to unforeseen circumstances like a large snowstorm which delayed multiple delivery dates. Additionally, the commodity manager might have missed the mark on cost savings due to the increase of inflation rates and prices. In any scenario, it is critical to look at the facts of performance results to know how to best improve on in the future.

In a similar way to the basketball player above, there are specific times where an ingredient commodity manager should utilize the “little you” mindset while working on improving a system or operation. For example, following a poor quarterly report due to sub-par delivery on-time in-full status, the manager analyzes the delivery system. Their analysis indicates that the main cause of the (judged) bad delivery outcome is due to the inaccurate forecasting. The commodity manager then works with the supply planning manager to develop a more accurate forecast based on supplier demand and market trends. After implementing the adjusted forecasting data, the commodity manager could judge the outcome of the following delivery statuses. By doing this, the judgement is strictly related to system and operation outcomes while avoiding any personal criticism. Once again, this allows for efficient outcome improvement.

### **Comparison**

The “BIG YOU vs. little you” approach is all about how an individual responds to various outcomes in both training and performance points of time. An individual’s inner voice can either be their biggest supporter or their worst enemy. The hardest time to control the inner voice is during times of performance because this is where pressure exists. When an individual feels any kind of pressure, it is easier to resort to the “little you” mindset as judgement is a part of human nature. These examples prove that this is not the best course of action. In times of performance, an individual needs to focus on the facts and rely on their preparation to ease the feeling of pressure. In doing so, as the pressure decreases their performance will increase. Whether the outcome is good or bad, the “BIG YOU” mindset allows the athlete or business professional to respond in a positive way. Additionally, finding opportunities to execute the “little you” mindset is critical to individual success. No matter if it is improving a technical skill, system or operation, the ability of non-bias judgement is crucial. It allows the athlete or business

professional to focus on the details of the outcome to ultimately find ways to improve overall performance.

#### **Strategy #4: Scenario Planning Approach**

Prior to going on a big family vacation, the family organizer will plan out an itinerary of what the family would like to do on the trip. The fourth strategy that will be discussed in this analysis is similar to planning for a vacation. The “Scenario Planning” Approach is a strategy used by individuals to plan out how they might react when faced with potential adversity or challenge in the future. The idea behind this approach has been widely utilized by Dr. Spencer Woods, a sports psychologist, who adds an interesting attribute to this idea that will be discussed further later in this analysis.

Philip Meissner and Torsten Wulf (2013) suggest that “scenario planning is a strategic planning tool for developing and thinking through possible future states and development paths.” Unlike the previous strategies, this approach should be utilized prior to the act of performance. Before entering into a big competition or a large sales event, an individual should start to think about what kind of pressures, adversities, or challenges may arise. Will it be a physical, mental, or emotional challenge? Oftentimes, during periods of performance, high levels of uncertainty cause trouble for decision makers. As a result, “research has shown that [cognitive] biases often lead to suboptimal decisions, which in turn have a negative effect on performance” (Meissner & Wulf, 2013). Scenario planning should be used to help individuals avoid this problem. Using this approach “has been shown to foster strategic thinking to enhance mental models of decision makers and reduce the negative effect of cognitive biases” (Meissner & Wulf, 2013). In turn, the individual will have a better performance.

As an individual undergoes scenario planning, it is critical to think about what kind of challenges they may face. As mentioned before, Dr. Spencer Woods adds an interesting take on scenario planning. He suggests taking things one step further to identify personal triggers that may cause the individual to negatively perform when they are present. Instead of simply analyzing what could go wrong while giving a presentation, the individual should think about how those occurrences may trigger a negative response and what that negative response is. This allows the individual to form a better action plan for their future performance and equip them with the ability to know exactly how to respond.

#### **Athletic Example**

Scenario planning is a tool that can be used for every single sport. In any kind of sporting event, it is just about guaranteed that everything will not go the exact way that the athlete would like. Therefore, it is important to be prepared when things go wrong. Golf is one sport in particular that scenario planning can be very helpful to the athlete. In a perfect world, any golfer would prefer to tally down a birdie or at least a par on every hole, but even the best golfers in the world do not have a perfect game. If the golfer shoots a bogey on hole 13 the golfer must be ready to quickly respond on hole 14. Prior to a golf match, the golfer could plan out what they might say to themselves when this occurs. The golfer might plan to say something like ‘refocus



on my swing speed and take each shot one at a time' in order to recenter their mindset to obtain future success.

Additionally, as Dr. Spencer Woods indicates, it is important for an individual to plan out how one may respond to potential triggers they may face during their competition. A volleyball player could make great use of this strategy. A volleyball match is a back-and-forth game with a lot of room for error. One error that could be a potential trigger for a volleyball player is when a serve goes straight into the net. This is a crucial mistake as a point immediately goes to the other team. In addition, the mistake solely rests on the shoulders of one individual. This has the potential to trigger a lack of confidence for the athlete and/or anxiety to enter into the mind – both of which can be detrimental to the performance of the athlete. So how can an athlete avoid this drop in confidence and anxiety? Scenario planning. Just like the golfer above, the volleyball player can plan out the events in a match that may be a trigger causing a lack of confidence. With a plan on how to deal with anxiety that occurs during a match, the athlete is prepared to not only recognize this feeling, but have a course of action on how to attack it and move forward.

### **Business Example**

The basic idea of scenario planning has been used for many years in the business world without many individuals even knowing it. One of the most common examples of scenario planning is preparing for an upcoming sales negotiation with a customer or supplier. Typical preparation includes preparing a spend-cost analysis, market research, best alternative agreement, and strategy planning. All of which are critical to a successful negotiation. This could be considered tactical scenario planning for negotiating. Tactical scenario planning is all about planning out responses to the actions of one's counterpart. Furthermore, it allows the negotiator to be equipped with potential countermoves to drive the discussion towards their desired outcome.

In addition to tactical scenario planning, one should also consider potential triggers that may cause unforeseen challenges during the negotiation process. As mentioned above, triggers can cause a lack of confidence, anxiety, uncertainty, or even cause an individual to freeze in the moment which all decrease the level of their performance. An example of a potential trigger includes receiving a question that the negotiator did not prepare for causing a gap in the negotiator's argument. If the negotiator does not know how to properly respond to this occurrence, the negotiator may freeze and exhibit great uncertainty. This would lead to a loss of ground in the negotiation. On the other hand, if the negotiator prepares for this type of trigger prior to the negotiation, the negotiator can craft a well formulated response without portraying any uncertainty. This would allow the negotiator to maintain the desired outcome.

### **Comparison**

The ability to prepare for the unknown is an underappreciated tactic that can tremendously increase the level of future success of any outcome. The idea behind scenario planning is so much more than just preparing for the actions that will occur in the future. In pressure filled moments, any action or words that cause an individual to lose confidence or experience anxiety, will likely lead to a decrease in performance. Therefore, thinking about what

the cause of these negative experiences might be allows the individual to develop a plan to mitigate their negative reaction. In the examples above, one can see that the best scenario planning mitigation technique is to craft an internal response that one can say to themselves when a trigger presents itself. In this way, an individual is able to keep moving forward and maintain a positive performance.

### Strategy #5: Hype Number

The final strategy that will be discussed in this analysis is the “Hype Number” Approach. A hype number is a rating based off the matrix of Hype Level (0 – Very Relaxed, 10 – Extremely Excited/Energetic) and Performance (0 – Worst Performance, 10 – Best Performance). Every individual’s hype number is different and can change based on the situation. Essentially, one’s hype number should determine their mental state in order to perform their best. Some individuals need to be ready to run through a brick wall in order to have their highest performance in competition, and others need to be very relaxed so they can process and focus to perform their best. A strong understanding of a personal hype number is critical to success. In addition, it is also important to know how to raise and lower one’s hype number so that an individual can enter every performance activity at the right mental state.

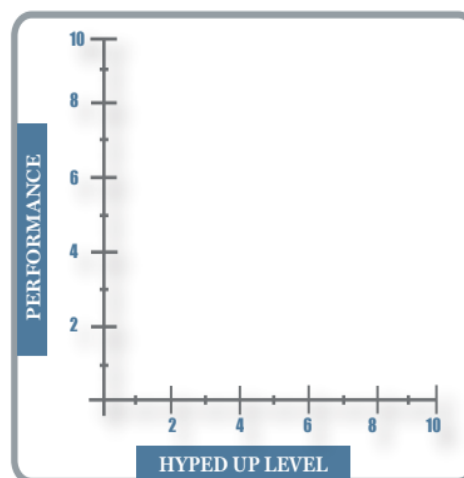
The diagram on the right shows the Hype Level Matrix. The best way for an individual to determine their hype number is to think back to a time where the individual experienced a high level of performance. Whether it’s an athlete thinking about a great game, or a business professional thinking about a strong presentation performance, the individual should think about their mental state prior to their top tier performance. If the individual experienced a lot of energy and high emotions, the individual would have a larger hype number. Whereas if the individual felt very relaxed and kept their emotions steady, the individual would have a smaller hyper number. It is critical to understand that a larger hype number should not be considered better than a smaller hype number. It simply means that the individual does not need to be in a mental state of extreme excitement in order to perform at a high level. Individual’s hype numbers can differ while on the same team, which makes an individual’s unique preparation that much more important.

### Athletic Example

Every athlete has a different way to prepare themselves for a big game or match. Sometimes superstitions or routines take the forefront, but an athlete should ensure to make ample time to mentally prepare to perform. An athlete’s ability to reach their hype number state

**Figure 4**

*Hype Level Matrix*



*Note.* Provided by Playersbox.com

of mind is absolutely critical to their upcoming performance. If an athlete's mental state is anything other than their desired hype level, poor performance is likely to follow.

Take a football defensive lineman as an example. If the lineman performs best at a hype level number of 7, the lineman needs to have a pretty high amount of energy and excitement leading up to a game, but must have some mental relaxation to focus. If a defensive lineman's hype number is at a 9 before a big rivalry game, the lineman may be so jittery with excitement that he jumps the snap count and gets a penalty for offsides. On the other hand, if the lineman's hype number is only at a 4, the lineman might be too slow to react and allow a runner through the gap that he was supposed to cover. Having the right mental state during competition is critical to how an athlete performs.

Any athlete is sure to have some "off days" where the athlete is not at their desired hype level prior to the start of the game. When this occurs, the athlete must find a way to either raise or lower their hype level. There is no right or wrong way to do this. In fact, the ability to change one's hype level is unique to every individual. Some examples to raise a hype number include playing upbeat music, joking around with one's teammates, or even taking a few bites of sour candy to stimulate the brain. On the flipside, some examples to lower an athlete's hype number include reviewing the scouting report, discussing game strategy with the coaching staff, or taking a moment to stretch. Each athlete must find what works best for them to ensure that they are in the correct mental state for high performance.

### **Business Example**

The hype number approach is easy to understand its impact in the athletics realm, but the strategy can also be very useful in the business environment as well. During typical business operations, emotional levels usually remain pretty consistent, but there are times where emotions are high. For example, a purchasing manager might be extremely upset with one of their suppliers due to delivery issues causing the purchasing manager and the company to lose thousands of dollars in revenue. When the purchasing manager goes to the supplier to discuss the issue, the purchasing manager might be full of rage and negative energy as a result of the loss of revenue. In this case, the purchasing manager might have a hype level of a 9 or 10. If the purchasing manager has optimal discussions at a typical hype level of a 4, such a high hype number in this moment of tension may cause havoc. In this scenario, the purchasing manager would most likely end up hurting the long-term relationship with their supplier instead of trying to reach a solution. This is why it is critical for a business professional to understand where their hype level is at throughout the course of a working day.

Similar to an athlete, a business professional must understand ways to either increase or decrease their hype level to ensure optimal performance. Some examples a business professional might utilize to decrease their hype number include venting to a reliable co-worker, brainstorming potential solutions, or even taking a walk. On the other hand, some examples of how a business professional might increase their hype number includes drinking a cup of coffee, eating a nutritious snack, or taking a moment to get some fresh air. Once again, every individual must find a method that works best for them.

## Comparison

All of the strategies that have been discussed up to this point in this analysis are very hard to do without the individual being in their optimal mental state. This is why the hype number is so important. Every individual operates at a different level of the combination between relaxed concentration and energy. Therefore, if an individual is not at their hype level, their mind will either be too slow or too excited to make the best decisions. Additionally, an individual's mind will not be capable of executing many other of the strategies shown above. It is also important to note that an individual's hype number can be different depending on the situation. When an individual is in the proper state of mind, the amount of pressure will decrease due to a few reasons. First and foremost, an optimal mindset allows the individual to think clearly and make proper decisions even in high pressure situations. Secondly, the right state of mind enables the individual to recognize when pressure arises and have the mental capacity to mitigate pressure. The hype number approach is one that is critical for success.

## Conclusion

The five strategies analyzed above have been proven to help athletes decrease the feeling of pressure and increase their performance, but these are not the only strategies that can be used. There are many other positive mindset strategies that individuals can utilize to help increase their performance levels. Some of these strategies include, (1) Growth vs. Fixed Mindset (O'Mara, 2018), (2) Visualization (Sport Psychology by Peak Performance Sports, 2023), and (3) Goal Setting (CMOE, 2023). More information about each strategy can be found by visiting the source directly.

Once again, these strategies may not work for every individual. It is important for one to find specific strategies that work for them and add it to their "Personal Toolbox". Focusing on improving performance by changing one's mindset is extremely effective. Similar to practicing a new tactical skill, developing a positive mindset strategy can take time as one is typically breaking an old habit of thinking. As an individual uses a strategy, they will find their confidence slowly increasing. Looking back at Dr. Spencer Woods' Pressure Chart, the expectation levels will most likely stay the same over time. If the confidence level increases, the gap between the two, or pressure, will decrease. As a result, less pressure will lead to less fear and anxiety when performing tasks or activities. Ultimately, the use of positive mindset strategies has the ability to increase performance levels without altering any tactical skill.

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