

THE BIG IDEAS

A.C.T. Backward

To move forward.

The Goal Staircase

Step by step by step.

Limits

Begin where vision ends.

Breathe and Focus

#1 way to deal with stress.

Confidence

It's the bottom line.

Your Enemy's Army

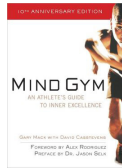
Don't enlist in it.

Consistency.

Consistency. Consistency.

Success in Life

Who will you be?



Mind Gym

An Athlete's Guide to Inner Excellence

BY GARY MACK · MCGRAW HILL © 2001 · 225 PAGES

“Studies have proven that mental training will not only enhance performance and improve productivity but also add to your enjoyment. Whatever your age, whatever your game, you can learn how to stay focused. You can learn to deal with adversity. Stay motivated during difficult times. Avoid fatal distractions. You can learn how to follow your dreams and live your life on purpose.

Achieving inner excellence is a process. Building mental muscle, like building physical muscle, requires time and effort. The more you work on the inside, the more it will show on the outside...

Think of this book as your mind gym. Read the lessons, do the exercises, and answer the questions. If you do, you will acquire the skills needed to create the ideal mental state that will allow you to rise to the next level and perform at your best by choice rather than chance.”

~ Gary Mack from *Mind Gym*

We go the gym to get our bodies strong.

[Gary Mack](#) tells us we need to go to the mind gym to get our minds strong.

I like it!

Gary is a leading sports psychologist and this book unpacks “an athlete’s guide to inner excellence.” If you’re into sports (like me!) you’ll enjoy all the great quotes from recognizable athletes plus the sports stories that bring Gary’s stories to life.

Either way, these ideas are absolutely applicable to whatever game we’re playing. Whether we’re creating a new business, a piece of art or raising a family, we need to get our minds right.

We need to hit the mind gym.

Let’s look at some of my favorite Big Ideas on how to go about doing that! :)

A.C.T. BACKWARD

“It is said that extraordinary people live their lives backward. They create a future, and they live into it. An exercise I teach is called **A.C.T.** backward. I want you to try it. The **A** stands for accept your present state. Understand your strengths and weaknesses, as we discussed in the last section. **C** stands for create your desired state. ... What’s your dream? Close your eyes, and see yourself exactly the way you want to be. Write down what this desired state would look like. **T** stands for take action steps to get you there. Success is a journey of one step at a time. And the longest journey begins with the first step.”

I love this.

First exercise for today’s workout at the mind gym? We need to **A.C.T.** backward.

“The greatest victory is over ourselves. Remember, it’s always too soon to quit.”

~ Gary Mack

"Believe in the power of your dream, then A.C.T. backward. Accept your present state. Create your desired state. Take action through goal setting."

~ Gary Mack

First step: Accept where we're at. Have a good sense of what we're good at and what we're not so good at. Got it.

Second step: Create your desired state. What's your dream. What's everything going perfectly look like for you? Get that clear!

Then: Take action to get you there. Massive action. Consistent action. Baby steps. Baby steps. Baby steps. Action. Action. Action.

A.C.T. backward. = awesome.

So... How about we get you **A.C.T.**ing backward?!

You accept where you're at?

What's your dream?

What action can you take *now* to get there?

P.S. Reminds me of some goodness from [Steve Chandler](#) + [Sonja Lyubomirsky](#).

In [Wealth Warrior](#) (see Notes), Steve tells us: *"The only good use of any future is artistic. You paint a picture of your positive imaginary future on your whiteboard. Then you PULL THAT PICTURE—WITH EVERY OUNCE OF STRENGTH YOU HAVE—into the present moment."*

(So good.)

In the [Hows of Happiness](#) (see Notes), Sonja tells us about the science of building our optimism muscles via a "best selves diary." She tells us: *"There are many ways to practice optimism, but the one that has been empirically shown to enhance well-being is the original Best Possible Selves diary method. To try it out, sit in a quiet place, and take twenty to thirty minutes to think about what you expect your life to be one, five, or ten years from now. Visualize a future for yourself in which everything has turned out the way you've wanted. You have tried your best, worked hard, and achieved all your goals. Now write down what you imagine. This writing exercise in a sense puts your optimistic 'muscles' into practice. Even if thinking about the brightest future for yourself doesn't come naturally at first, it may get there with time and training. Amazing things can come about as a result of writing."*

Here's to hitting the mind gym and working out the optimism muscles!!

THE GOAL STAIRCASE

"Goal setting is a master skill for personal growth and peak performance. I can't stress this too much. Without goals, where will you go in life? If you don't know where you are headed, you're probably going to wind up somewhere other than where you want to be. ...

I encourage athletes to set daily or short-term goals. The way to achieve long-term goals is to break them down into small steps. Effective goal setting is like a staircase. Each step is an action step—an increment of progress. The old saying is 'Inch by inch it's a cinch.'"

First point to drive home here: Goal setting is a master (!) skill for optimal living and peak performance.

As Gary advises, if you don't know where you're headed, you're likely to wind up somewhere you'd rather not be. And that is sub-optimal.

So, what are your goals?!

The big ones from your best-selves dream diary?

Alright. Great.

Now, let's break those down into smaller steps.

"I'm a firm believer in goal setting. Step by step. I can't see any other way of accomplishing anything."

~ Michael Jordan

*"Talent is never enough.
With few exceptions the
best players are the hardest
workers."
~ Magic Johnson*

In my Note on [Wealth Warrior](#), I described my new love for the physics of dominoes.

Short story: A domino can, by the law of physics, knock over another domino that is 50% bigger than it. If you line up 13 dominoes, you can start with one that's about the size of your little pinky fingernail (so small you need to put it in place with tweezers!) and, by the 13th domino, you have a 3 foot tall, 100 pound domino. Continue that for another 13 or so and you're looking at the Eiffel Tower.

The key point with the domino metaphor for goal setting: Identify the next domino!

Break your big goal down into micro goals and put ALL your energy into the next little one— knowing that a) you can knock it over + b) when you do, you'll have the momentum to knock over the next progressively larger domino.

Kinda like Mack's staircase.

You don't try to leap to the top of a staircase in a single bound.

You take it step by step.

So... Back to you and your goals.

What's your big dream?

What's your next baby step?

Line up those daily and weekly goals and take that consistent action and rock it.

LIMITS BEGIN WHERE VISION ENDS

"Limits begin where vision ends. You have to see yourself as a no-limits person. For years, breaking the four-minute mile was thought to be physically impossible. Then in 1954 Roger Bannister ran the mile in 3:59.4. Over the next two years, fifty other runners broke the barrier. Why? They had an image. In Bannister they had a model for success."

So much of that is so good.

Although we're all familiar with the fact that Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile it's always amazing to me to be reminded that a) the world was *certain* that it was literally (!) physically impossible to do so; so his audacity in going for it and then succeeding is simply awesome and b) as soon as he proved it could be done, FIFTY other people broke the four-minute mark in the next two years.

Think about that.

Impossible. Can't do it. Therefore, no one does it.

Oh, wait. It can be done. It's been done. Suddenly, fifty people crush it almost immediately.

Nothing changed in our physical biology. No bionic shoes or legs.

Our MINDS changed. And bam. The impossible was suddenly possible.

As Gary says: "*Limits begin where vision ends.*"

(← That's a REALLY good line.)

If you can't *see* yourself doing something, you just set yourself a limit.

We need to hit the mind gym and diligently, patiently, persistently train ourselves to see beyond our current limits. To stretch *beyond* our comfort zones into the realm of our infinite potential.

Shall we? :)

*"Be willing to take a risk.
Remember, there is no
security in life. There is
only adventure."
~ Gary Mack*

*"If you can relax your body,
you can relax your mind.
Quiet mind. Quiet body."*

~ Gary Mack

BREATHE AND FOCUS

"Oxygen is energy—it's juice. Oxygen helps relax muscles and clear the mind. When you hold your breath, you are creating pressure and a nervous feeling. Athletes who choke start to become nervous about being nervous. Anxious about being anxious. One psychologist says anxiety is excitement 'without the breath.'

The pattern of your breathing affects the pattern of your performance. When you are under stress, deep breathing helps bring your mind and body back into the present.

Over the years I have handed out thousands of little stickers to athletes that read 'Breathe and Focus.' A baseball player will place the bright orange circle on the shoulder of his uniform or underneath the bill of his cap, or on the barrel of his bat. A hockey player might affix it to his stick. Firefighters I have worked with place the stickers on their self-contained breathing apparatus. The stickers serve as a reminder. Whenever they feel themselves growing anxious, breathe in energy. Breathe out negativity. Breathe in relaxation. Breathe out stress."

Feeling stressed/anxious/etc.?

BREATHE.

Deeply.

And then try to stay anxious. It's not possible. (Seriously. Like totally impossible.)

Breathe and focus as the good teacher tells us. Breathe and focus.

The challenge is that when we're super stressed, the crazy little drunk monkey is so frenetically swinging from vine to vine to vine (to vine to vine!!) in our minds that we don't have the presence to REMEMBER to breathe and focus.

Hence the sticker. :)

Breathe and focus.

Breathe and focus.

Breathe and focus.

And rock it.

CONFIDENCE: IT'S THE BOTTOM LINE

"What do you think is the most important part of the mental game? It's a question I've asked hundreds of managers, coaches, and professional athletes during plane flights and bus rides to stadiums over the past twenty years. The answer is always the same. It's confidence. When you're confident you can relax, trust your stuff, and perform at your best. Confidence is the bottom line.

Where does confidence come from? Great athletes say that confidence is knowing they are prepared physically and mentally. Experience tells them what to do and confidence allows them to do it. Confidence is the *emotional* knowing that you are prepared, mind, body, and spirit, for anything."

Confidence.

So that's what it all boils down to.

As I read this passage, I wondered about the etymological origin of the word. *Confidence* is from the Latin verb **confidere**, from **con-** (expressing intensive force) + **fidere** 'trust.'

Confidence = INTENSE (!) TRUST. In ourselves. In our abilities. In the fact that we've put in the

*"Your attitude, more than
your aptitude determines
your altitude-how high you
go, how far you climb the
ladder of success."*

~ Gary Mack

work to earn that trust.

As Gary puts it: the “emotional knowing that you are prepared, mind, body, and spirit, for anything.”

I love it.

In his classic book on crushing it, appropriately called “[Overachievement](#)” (see Notes), [John Eliot](#) tells us: “Confidence is a resolute state of mind by which you believe nothing is impossible.”

And tells us: “Confidence is not a guarantee of success, but a pattern of thinking that will improve your likelihood of success, a tenacious search for ways to make things work.”

How’s your confidence?

Here’s to working diligently, patiently and persistently as we *earn* the intense trust in our ability to go out and rock it.

ENLISTING IN YOUR ENEMY’S ARMY (= NOT A GOOD IDEA)

“If I have lost confidence in myself, I have the universe against me.”

~ Emerson

“Doubts cause intellectual confusion. Doubts can be paralyzing. It is said that a person who doubts himself is like a man who would enlist in the ranks of his enemies and bear arms against himself.

Confidence and trust are essential in every sport. Hall of Fame pitcher Sandy Koufax of the Dodgers said it is better to throw a poor pitch wholeheartedly than to throw the so-called right pitch with a feeling of doubt. “You’ve got to feel sure you’re doing the right thing. Sure that you want to throw the pitch that you’re going to throw.”

Today’s Dodgers’ ace, Kevin Brown, says that if you make a bad pitch aggressively you have a much better chance of getting away with it.”

So good.

Living with doubt is like deciding to enlist in your ENEMY’s army and then attacking *yourself.* Last time I checked that’s not a good idea! :o

This great passage reminds me of the Buddha. On two fronts.

First, [Buddha](#) tells us (see Notes on [The Dhammapada](#)): “More than those who hate you, more than all your enemies, an undisciplined mind does greater harm.”

And, he adds: “If anything is worth doing, do it with all your heart.”

So, if you’ve decided to go for it, GO FOR IT. :)

CONSISTENCY. CONSISTENCY. CONSISTENCY.

“The greatest and toughest art in golf is “playing badly well.” All the greats have been masters at it.”

~ Jack Nicklaus

“Consistency separates good athletes from great ones. The best athletes win consistently because they think, act, and practice consistently.

Consistency is a defining quality. “Whatever your job, consistency is the hallmark,” said Joe Torre. “It’s much more important than doing something spectacular just once. Do your job consistently, and you will be considered good.” ...

The greatest athletes are those who can perform at a high level day in and day out, even when they don’t feel well or they are off their game. As Jack Nicklaus said, it is an art to “play badly well.””

Consistency. Consistency. Consistency.

We talk about it all the time. As Gary tells us, it’s what separates the good from the great.

*"When you leave the game
how do you want to be
remembered? How do you
define SUCCESS?"*

~ Gary Mack

[David Reynolds](#) (see Notes on [Constructive Living](#)) tells us: "The mature human being goes about doing what needs to be done regardless of whether that person feels great or terrible. Knowing that you are the kind of person with that kind of self-control brings all the satisfaction and confidence you will ever need. Even on days when the satisfaction and confidence just aren't there, you can get the job done anyway."

His #1 question: "Now what needs to be done?"

That's a heck of a way to stay consistent. And, as a result, learn to play badly well.

SUCCESS IN LIFE

"Success in life is peace of mind, the feeling of having no regrets. It comes from knowing you did your best. Everyone eventually leaves the game. Imagine for a moment you're attending a testimonial dinner in honor of your retirement from competition. ... Your friends are at the banquet and so are all your coaches, former teammates, and those you competed against. Each one stands up and says a few words about your character and how you played the game.

What would they say?

What would you *want* them to say?"

We're all going to retire from this game called life.

What will the people in your lives say at your end-of-life banquet?

What would you *want* them to say?

And... How can you act even more like the person worthy of that recognition starting TODAY?

Here's to living in integrity w/our highest ideals as we hit the mind gym and optimize our lives,

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

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[Unbeatable Mind](#)

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[Constructive Living](#)

[The Dhammapada](#)

About the Author of "Mind Gym"

GARY MACK



Gary Mack is a leading sports psychology consultant and counselor who has worked with athletes in the NBA, NFL, NHL, WNBA, and Major League Baseball. He is president of two consulting firms, Sports Assist and Planning Solutions; the director of sports psychology for Griffey International; and team counselor for the Phoenix Suns and Phoenix Mercury.

About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at brianjohnson.me.