

THE BIG IDEAS

Challenges vs. Threats

How do you see setbacks?

The 7 L's

Of the Champion's Comeback Code.

Your Contract

You outperforming it?

Practice

Until you can't get it wrong.

Want to Live Longer?

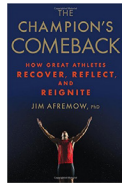
Smile.

The 3 P's

Of peak mental performance.

Your Comeback Story

Write a great one!



The Champion's Comeback

How Great Athletes Recover, Reflect, and Re-Ignite

BY JIM AFREMOW · RODALE BOOKS © 2016 · 272 PAGES

“Grasping the baton from the hand of *The Champion's Mind: How Great Athletes Think, Train, and Thrive*, this book looks at how all great champions continue to persevere despite losses, injuries, and other personal and professional setbacks. Success in sports rarely follows a straight line or predictable path.

The Champion's Comeback zeroes in on how champions learn to repeat their successes and pick themselves up after setbacks by consistently practicing positive habits and thought patterns. This book is for people of all ages and all levels of competition. If you have the heart and desire to get back in your game and compete like a champion, this book is for you.”

~ Jim Afremow from *The Champion's Comeback*

[Jim Afremow](#) is one of the world's leading sports psychologists.

We covered his first book *The Champion's Mind*. Check out the Notes on that.

This one is kinda like part 2 in which we look at how the Champion responds to the inevitable (!) setbacks faced on the road to greatness—using those setbacks as opportunities to bounce back and make a sweet comeback.

It's packed with Big Ideas + great stories of individual and team comebacks. Plus a ton of awesome quotes. (Get a copy [here](#).)

I'm excited to share a few of my favorite Big Ideas we can apply to our lives today so let's jump straight in!

(P.S. Check out our growing collection of [sports](#) books + great [mental toughness](#) books.)

CHAMPIONS LEARN TO SEE CHALLENGES RATHER THAN THREATS

“How will you achieve your goal and how can you adapt and respond to various challenges? Going through setbacks in sports and other areas of life is perfectly normal, as nobody can avoid such things. How you choose to deal with setbacks—such as threats or challenges—is what makes the difference. ‘One can choose to go back toward safety or forward toward growth,’ wrote psychologist Abraham Maslow. ‘Growth must be chosen again and again; fear must be overcome again and again.’”

We all want to make thinking, feeling, and acting like a champion part of our everyday life because, let's face it, demands and difficulties are part of all aspects of life. Making the move from contender to champion means stepping out of your comfort zone, calling on your inner strength and supporters, and reframing tough situations as growth opportunities and chances for comebacks.”

The contender sees all obstacles + setbacks as THREATS.

The champion sees those *same* obstacles + setbacks as CHALLENGES.

“I have one thing to say to those nonbelievers: Don't ever underestimate the heart of a champion!”

~ Rudy Tomjanovich

"Setbacks are your opportunity to bounce back to make a comeback!"

~ Jim Afremow

And that slight shift in mindset makes a HUGE difference.

Begs the question: How do *you* see obstacles + setbacks?

As a threat or as a challenge? I see setbacks as: _____.

This is the essence of [Confidence 101](#).

We need to KNOW we have what it takes to handle *whatever* life throws at us. Intense trust in our ability to not only deal with the challenges but to get STRONGER as a direct result of facing them.

[Joseph Campbell](#)-style (see Notes on [The Power of Myth](#)): "There is an important idea in Nietzsche, of *Amor fati*, the 'love of your fate,' which is in fact your life. As he says, if you say no to a single factor in your life, you have unraveled the whole thing. Furthermore, the more challenging or threatening the situation or context to be assimilated and affirmed, the greater the stature of the person who can achieve it. The demon that you can swallow gives you its power, and the greater life's pain, the greater life's reply."

Here's to moving from the contender mindset to the champion mindset, swallowing whatever demons life is throwing at us and getting that much more powerful!

P.S. Here's how [Kelly McGonigal](#) puts it in [The Upside of Stress](#) (see Notes): "If you believe that the demands of the situation exceed your resources, you will have a threat response. But if you believe you have the resources to succeed, you will have a challenge response."

She also says: "Like a fight-or-flight response, a challenge response gives you energy and helps you perform under pressure. Your heart rate still rises, your adrenaline spikes, your muscles and brain get more fuel, and the feel-good chemicals surge. But it differs from a fight-or-flight response in a few important ways: You feel focused but not fearful. You also release a different ratio of stress hormones, including higher levels of DHEA, which helps you recover and learn from stress. This raises the growth index of your stress response, the beneficial ratio of stress hormones that can determine, in part, whether a stressful experience is strengthening or harmful..."

People who report being in a flow state—a highly enjoyable state of being completely absorbed in what you are doing—display clear signs of a challenge response. Artists, athletes, surgeons, video gamers, and musicians all show this kind of stress response when they're engaged in their craft or skill. Contrary to what many people expect, top performers in these fields aren't physiologically calm under pressure; rather, they have strong challenge responses. The stress response gives them access to their mental and physical resources, and the result is increased confidence, enhanced concentration, and peak performance."

THE 7 L'S OF THE CHAMPION'S COMEBACK CODE

"Here are the 7 L's that champions use to crack the Champion's Comeback Code.

1. **LET GO**—release the mental brick
2. **LOOK FOR SUPPORT**—build a winning team
3. **LOVE THE GAME**—compete with purpose and passion
4. **LEARN**—embrace a growth-mindset
5. **LABOR**—keep pounding the rock
6. **LEARN OPTIMISM**—believe in your comeback story
7. **LEAN ON YOUR MENTAL GAME**—win the game from within yourself"

"It's better to walk alone than with a crowd going in the wrong direction."

~ Diane Grant

"You always recognize a great champion ... [by] how they come back from a loss."

~ Georges St-Pierre

Jim comes back to those 7 L's throughout the book.

Let's take a quick look at each of them now:

1. LET GO—release the mental brick

We need to let our disappointments go. The last point is over. It's time to train your recovery. Build in systems to flip the off switch on what just happened and be present—focused on what needs to get done right now to rock it.

2. LOOK FOR SUPPORT—build a winning team

Surround yourself with positive people. Remember that the fastest way to boost your grit is to join a gritty culture. Emotions are contagious. Get infected with the good stuff.

3. LOVE THE GAME—compete with purpose and passion

Pelé tells us: "Success is not [an] accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrificing, and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do."

4. LEARN—embrace a growth-mindset

It's impossible to talk about coming back and not mention [Carol Dweck](#) and her research. See Notes on [Self-Theories](#) + [Mindset](#) for more. Remember that failure is just feedback. We win or we learn. Know you can grow.

5. LABOR—keep pounding the rock

The stonecutter pounds the rock again and again and again and again. Nothing happens for the first 100 blows. Then the stone cracks. Was it the 101st strike or all the preceding? Work hard. Pound the rock.

6. LEARN OPTIMISM—believe in your comeback story

Do you believe your future is going to be better than your present if you put in the effort? You better. Be a functional optimist.

7. LEAN ON YOUR MENTAL GAME—win the game from within yourself

If peak performance is 90% mental, then we better be training that part of our game (and lives). Big goals, confident body language, visualization, positive language and deep breathing are key.

The 7 L's. Where are you strong? Where + how can you optimize?

ARE YOU OUTPERFORMING YOUR CONTRACT?

"An uncompromising approach in training and continuous hustle in competition is vital to achieving sports-related goals. J.J. Watt is an NFL All-Pro defensive end for the Houston Texans. His willingness to embrace the extra effort required for excellence is one of the main reasons for his success. Here's what Watt says about working hard and representing yourself well: 'I think no matter what job you do—I don't care what job it is—you want to outperform your contract. I feel like that's how everybody should attack their job, at least. You should want people to think you're underpaid because of how hard you work, because of how well you do your job, because of how you go about your business.'

Take a moment for honest self-reflection. Are you outperforming your contract? Are you attacking your job on a daily basis? What about in your sport? Are you one of the hardest workers on your team? Put in 100 percent maximum effort toward your goals and bring a passion to the work. Be willing to put in the blue-collar labor rather than wishing you had more talent so that everything would come easily. It never will. The great ones make it look easy, but only after they put in the time and work."

"Pessimism leads to weakness, optimism to power."

~ William James

"What keeps me going is goals."

~ Muhammad Ali

"Concentrate on what will produce the results rather than on the results, the process rather than the prize."

~ Bill Walsh

Outperforming your contract. <— What an awesome (!) standard.

Sounds a lot like "astonishing."

Are you committed to creating so much value in what you do that everyone looks around and says, "WOW!?"

That's the standard of a master en route to greatness.

Let's make it ours.

P.S. Jim shares some gems in this section, including these:

Michelangelo: *"If people knew how hard I had to work to gain my mastery, it would not seem so wonderful at all."*

Boxing champ Larry Holmes: *"Hard work ain't easy, but it's fair."*

Running legend Steve Prefontaine: *"To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the gift."*

NBA coach Gregg Popovich (who's won 5 championships) tells us: *"When nothing seems to help, I go and look at a stonecutter hammering away at his rock perhaps a hundred times without as much as a crack showing in it. Yet at the hundred and first blow it will split in two, and I know it was not that blow that did it, but all that had gone before."*

Here's to hitting the rock!!!

PRACTICE TILL YOU CAN'T GET IT WRONG

"If you think you're already perfect, then you never will be."

~ Cristiano Ronaldo

"Remember, you don't do something until you get it right, you do it until you can't get it wrong. Build solid mental and muscle memory! Don't just practice a move or technique and stop when you do it right once after several attempts. Instead, when you do something right, practice until you can do it right consistently. Continued practice will make proper technique and form feel like second nature. That should be your goal for each and every technique. Effort in becomes effortless out."

"You don't do something until you get it right, you do it until you can't get it wrong."

I remember when [Troy Bassham](#) said basically the same thing in our interview on [Attainment](#) (see Notes).

I LOVE that.

Don't do something until you can get it right.

Do it until you can't get it wrong.

Let's pause and think about how we can apply this gem to our lives starting TODAY.

What's an important skill you can work on in your life? The one that would most positively benefit you if you *really* nailed it?

This is it: _____.

Awesome.

You practicing it till you can't get it wrong?

WANT TO LIVE LONGER? SMILE! :)

"The positive psychology field has taught us about the benefits of optimism and happiness. One study correlated the life spans of Major League Baseball players with their smiles. In 2010, researchers Ernest Abel and Michael Kruger analyzed 230 baseball cards from 1952, a time when cards featured athletes looking straight at the camera. The results will make you want to smile."

"He who stops being better stops being good."

~ Oliver Cromwell,
military commander

"As you walk down the fairway of life, you must smell the roses, for you only get to play one round."

~ Ben Hogan

- Players not smiling had an average life span of 72.9 years.
- Players partially smiling had an average life span of 75.0 years.
- Players with a full smile had an average life span of 79.9 years."

That's fascinating, eh?

Players who had a full smile on their baseball card lived SEVEN (!!!) years longer than those who didn't. (Kinda nuts.)

If you had a baseball card with your picture on it, would you be smiling?

Jim shares this great quote from Charlie Chaplin: *"I have many problems in my life. But my lips don't know that. They always smile."* (He lived to 88.)

Of course, functional optimism is about more than just busting out a smile but it's one of those little, easy things that has a surprisingly big immediate impact.

Remember the research we talked about in our Notes on [Robert Emmons's](#) book [Thanks?](#) He told us about *"An ingenious series of experiments conducted a number of years ago showed that when people mimicked the facial expressions associated with happiness, they felt happier—even when they did not know they were moving 'happy muscles' in their face. Researchers have found that smiling itself produces feelings of happiness."*

The way they had them mimic a smile in that study? Holding a pencil in their teeth. (Rather than with their lips.) One leads to a smile, the other a frown.

That simple little change boosted feelings of happiness.

So, smile!! :)

#saycheese

THE 3 P'S OF PEAK MENTAL PERFORMANCE

"Hardship often prepares an ordinary person for an extraordinary destiny."

~ C.S. Lewis

"Our minds naturally drift or zone out; we're only human. Mental training allows us to notice this before it's too late and provides us with the tools to bring our focus back to the task at hand. With enough training and discipline, you will develop the determination to focus on the moment's challenges. Keep to the 3 P's.

Focus on the present—what is happening this play, this moment.

Focus on the positive—what you are doing well, your strengths.

Focus on the process—what you need to do in order to be successful."

Our minds will naturally drift in sports and life.

The key is to NOTICE that drift before it gets too bad and get back to balance as fast as we can.

As Jim says: *"During a performance, it's not your mistakes that matter; it's how quickly you recover from those mistakes."*

That's basically what [Marcus Aurelius](#) told us 1,700 years ago.

Check out the Notes on his classic [Meditations](#) where he tells us: *"When force of circumstance upsets your equanimity, lose no time in recovering your self-control, and do not remain out of tune longer than you can help. Habitual recurrence to the harmony will increase your mastery of it."*

I like to call it [The Equanimity Game](#).

And I love Jim's 3 P's:

- *Focus on the present.* What's happening RIGHT NOW. Put your focus there.
- *Focus on the positive.* What's working? What're you doing well? Put your focus there.
- *Focus on the process.* What're the next steps you need to take to crush it? Put your focus there.

"For me the most potent motivational fuel was not ambition, I think, but curiosity. I wanted to see how far I could go."

~ Chris Hoy,
six-time Olympic cycling gold medalist

Remember the wise words of an Emperor-Philosopher: "*Habitual recurrence to the harmony will increase your mastery of it.*"

YOUR COMEBACK STORY

"We play sports for the stories, some good, some bad. There is no greater motivation than wanting to tell a good story. You are now ready to take the first step on your next journey. Think about the comeback story you want to tell for the rest of your life. Then write it."

We are the authors of our own hero's story. (Or, victim's story. The choice is always ours.)

What's your story going to say for the rest of your life?

Think about it.

Then write it.

Then live.

Let's do this!!!

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

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About the Author of "The Champion's Comeback"

JIM AFREMOW



Jim Afremow, PhD, is a leading sports psychology consultant and licensed counselor. He is the founder of Good to Gold Medal, PLLC, former sports psychology consultant at Arizona State University, and author of *The Champion's Mind*. He has worked closely with athletes at all levels, including pros from the MLB, NBA, WNBA, NFL, NHL, PGA Tour, and LPGA Tour. He lives in Phoenix, AZ. Connect: goldmedalmind.net.

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.