

THE BIG IDEAS

How's Your Desire?

Inferno, please.

DROP

Into WOOP!

Motivation

Can be fickle.

Power Talk

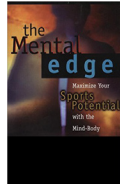
Think of a glass of water.

26,000

Breaths per day.

Maslow Warning

What one can be, one MUST be!



The Mental Edge

Maximize Your Sports Potential with the Mind-Body Connection

BY KENNETH BAUM · PERIGEE BOOKS © 1999 · 192 PAGES

“The Mental Edge is a concrete program that will significantly improve your game. It involves specific, proven techniques—setting goals, strengthening your belief in yourself, improving your concentration, using imagery, overcoming obstacles, and conquering anxiety, among others. Every exercise is strongly based in science. Each one contributes to the power of the rest. And if you incorporate all of them into your own athletic life, your performance *will* improve. I’ve seen it happen to athletes at all levels. With this step-by-step program, it *will* happen for you, too. ...

The most potent performance enhancer you have is the three pounds of gray matter located between your ears. It is more powerful than any other mechanism that you’ll find. And by using it in the ways I’ll describe in this book, *you can improve your performance by up to 40 percent*. That’s right—40 percent. This is a startling but proven fact.”

~ Kenneth Baum from *The Mental Edge*

This is an old-school mental training book written for athletes in 1999.

When [Kenneth Baum](#) wrote it, the mind-body connection wasn’t as well-established as it is now so many of the ideas he shares were cutting-edge at the time. (Get a copy [here](#).)

I’m excited to create as comprehensive a collection of [mental training books](#) as we can so I got this book on the recommendation of one of our members. I enjoyed it as a nice re-cap/reminder of Ideas we’ve explored in similar books.

As I’ve mentioned, I LOVE sports mental training books as they provide such a concrete forum in which to develop our skills. Of course, all of the ideas apply to our LIVES as much as they do an individual sport. With that in mind, I’m excited to share some of my favorites so let’s jump straight in!

HOW’S YOUR DESIRE?

“Just like small fires create small amounts of heat, weak desires generate weak results. But when a powerful Desire Statement transforms that small fire into a raging inferno, it can put you on the fast track toward accomplishing your athletic [and life!] goals. It will produce an ‘I want to’ attitude that is so intense that it dramatically increases the likelihood of dreams becoming real.”

How’s *your* desire?

It’s pretty much a given at this stage, but it’s always helpful to remember: Weak desires generate weak results.

Reminds me of [Piers Steel’s Procrastination Equation](#) (see Notes) where he tells us that motivation is driven by our confidence in our ability to achieve an outcome multiplied by the perceived value of the goal. Then divide that by your impulsiveness and how far out the goal is.

“Great achievements don’t start with reality. They start with desire.”

~ Kenneth Baum

Here's the fancy, handy-dandy equation it's worth tattooing on your brain:

$$\text{MOTIVATION} = (\text{EXPECTANCY} \times \text{VALUE}) / (\text{IMPULSIVENESS} \times \text{DELAY})$$

In other words, if your DESIRE is *weak*, your motivation is going to be very low and you're going to be blown off track by other things easily.

Note to self: Start with strong desire.

So, what do you REALLY want?

Kenneth has us capture our desire in what he calls a "Desire Statement" and tells us: "If your Desire Statement is important enough for you to make a strong commitment to it—that is, for you to decide that you'll do whatever it takes to make your desire come true—it can become a powerful motivator that allows you to pursue your goals aggressively."

Let's go ahead and take a moment to create our Desire Statement.

What do you REALLY want to see in your life?

What fires you up so much you're willing to do whatever it takes to make it come true?

Dream. Stretch. Think: Challenging but possible.

Desire Statement:

Awesome. You fired up?

If not, and if you're serious about optimizing + actualizing, please repeat.

Tend the fire until it's an inferno.

P.S. One way to tend it is to add a "Reward Statement" that captures all the great things you'll feel as a result of achieving your desire. Let's create one of those as well, shall we?

Reward Statement:

P.P.S. Speaking of burning, I love the way [Michael Lardon](#) captures it in [Finding Your Zone](#) (see Notes): "Activation energy is the energy required to start a chemical reaction. For example, you may not know that paper burns at 451 degrees Fahrenheit and does not ignite at 450 degrees. Now imagine yourself lost in a forest, cold, needing warmth. You invest energy by rubbing two sticks together, causing friction in hope of igniting some paper and leaves. You create heat by your efforts and even raise the friction area's temperature up to 450 degrees without successfully creating fire. Sadly, you quit in discouragement, not knowing that the activation energy is 451 degrees. However, if you push a little harder and create a little more heat and raise the temperature one degree, the chain reaction occurs and the fire ignites—burning without more effort, burning by itself."

Great champions know that if they push a little more and prepare better than their competitors, they will move past the threshold and consequently set the stage to enter into the Zone. The difference between good and great is immeasurably small. Sometimes all it takes is a bit more perseverance and you find yourself at the next level. This process of giving that little extra builds upon itself and forms the foundation for great performances."

"Never lose sight of your Desire Statement. Repeat it again and again. Begin each day with your goals in mind."

~ Kenneth Baum

DROP INTO WOOP

"Remember, you already have everything inside of you necessary to become as great as you desire. The Mental Edge will activate that sleeping giant within, and turn you into the person you want to become."

~ Kenneth Baum

"As you progress, allow yourself to be driven by your Desire Statement and Reward Statement. See the future that you want. Then work backward, picturing yourself overcoming the obstacles in your path. And along the way enjoy the process of striving toward your desire."

When I read books, I'm always (of course!) connecting new Ideas to old Ideas and seeing how I can weave them together in my life and in my work to help you integrate, etc.

As I read this passage (and preceding chapter), I immediately thought of Gabrielle Oettingen's new science of motivation which she unpacks in her great book *Rethinking Positive Thinking*.

She tells us we need to WOOP our goals.

Specifically, we need to identify our Wish + the Outcome (/ #1 benefit) we'll experience from its fulfillment then we need to add the Obstacles we'll face plus our Plan to deal with the obstacles.

Wish + Outcome + Obstacle + Plan = WOOP!

Well, that's basically what Kenneth is talking about here.

As I played with the language he uses, I discovered the acronym **DROP**.

He talks about "**Desire**" then "**Reward**" then "**Obstacle**" then we can add "**Plan**" and #bam.

We **DROP** into **WOOP**.

Let's DROP WOOP your goal meow.

See if you can capture each of these in 4-6 words:

My #1 Desire = _____

My #1 Reward = _____

My #1 Obstacle = _____

My Plan to deal with the obstacle = IF the obstacle appears THEN I will do this:

#highfives

P.S. You may have noticed we come back to the same Ideas often in these Notes. :)

That's by design.

In *The Little Book of Talent*, [Dan Coyle](#) tells us REPETITION is key to mastery: "*Repetition has a bad reputation. We tend to think of it as dull and uninspiring. But this perception is titanicly wrong. Repetition is the single most powerful lever we have to improve skills, because it uses the built-in mechanism for making the wires of our brains faster and more accurate.*"

I LOVE that.

And, I very deliberately repeat similar ideas again and again and again.

If we're committed to *really* getting this stuff, we need to commit to repetition.

I like to imagine a spider web. One thread doesn't do a whole lot. Neither does two. Or three. Or four. But you weave enough threads together and you start creating something super powerful.

#wisdomthreads!

"The images you visualize are likely to come true, so make sure that these pictures are the ones you want to become part of your reality."

~ Kenneth Baum

MOTIVATION CAN BE FICKLE

"Motivation can be fickle. In fact, research shows that motivation lasts an average of about seventeen days. Almost inevitably, your enthusiasm will wane with time, unless you do something to keep your eye on the prize.

To work on motivation, I urge my clients to take Consistent Resilient Action, or CRA. It is really nothing more than action pursued by a made-up mind—an internal drive that creates excitement and commitment and never lets up. Through mind-setting you can develop enthusiasm and passion for a game plan—e.g., a training schedule, a work-out routine—that you can stick with no matter what. It's really a matter of never losing sight of your Desire Statement, reading it often, and sticking to the course that you've charted."

Motivation, as you might have noticed, can be fickle.

That's not a new discovery.

As we've discussed, the wise men and women of India actually had a name for this trait in Sanskrit: *arambhashura*—the art of being a hero in the beginning.

[Gregg Krech](#) captures this brilliantly in his great book [The Art of Taking Action](#) (see Notes) where he tells us: "*It's not really the feeling of excitement itself which is the culprit here, it is the loss of excitement which then prompts us to abandon our efforts towards fulfillment of our dreams — dreams which were, at one time, very exciting to us. If anticipatory excitement moves us to action, the loss of excitement often prompts us to stop. Action dissolves into inaction.*

Meditation teacher Eknath Easwaran tells us of a Sanskrit word — arambhashura — which means 'heroes at the beginning' — people who take up a job with a fanfare of trumpets but soon find that their enthusiasm has tiptoed down the back stairs."

17 days.

That's how long Kenneth tells us most people can show up as heroes.

Then? Then they tiptoe down the back stairs, out the back door and far, far away—pretending they never really wanted to do whatever it was that so fired them up moments before.

(Laughing as we've all done that more times than we'd like, eh? :)

The antidote?

CRA.

CONSTANT. RESILIENT. ACTION.

Keep your Desire + Reward + Obstacle + Plan in mind.

DROP-WOOP the *arambhashura* in the butt everytime you *insert whiny voice* "don't feel like" doing whatever it is you said you were going to do.

Know that your motivation will wane. THAT'S A GIVEN.

Then, simplify, re-commit and apply CRA.

Remember: "CRA is the difference between your dreams remaining a fantasy or becoming real. CRA is the internal drive that creates the enthusiasm that keeps you working harder toward your goals. You won't give up when things don't go right the first time; you'll go back and do it again. If you can't go through the obstacle ahead, you'll go around it; if you can't go around it, you'll go over it; if you can't go over it, you'll go under it. With belief and all the emotion you can muster, you'll stretch yourself and find a way."

*"Every great achiever—whether in sports, business or any other endeavor—is never content just doing what everyone else does. Every high achiever *goes beyond normal.*"*

~ Kenneth Baum

POWER TALK AND GLASSES OF WATER

"Power Talk is quality thinking. It is tied to emotions that eventually displace any negative feelings that you're experiencing. Picture placing a glass of dirty water under a running faucet; eventually, the dirty water will be displaced by clean water, and once the glass is filled with that clean water, there won't be any room left for the dirty. In much the same way, once you fill your mind with Power Talk, there won't be any space for negative thoughts. This technique has the ability to transform your belief system and propel you in a new direction."

Power Talk.

You can't read a book about getting a Mental Edge in sports and life without reading about the importance of our internal dialogue.

(Check out the Note on [What to Say When You Talk to Yourself](#) for a bunch more on this.)

I love the image of a glass of dirty water under a running faucet.

EVENTUALLY (!), the dirty water will be displaced by the clean water.

Think of that image and turn on the Power Talk faucet the next time your negative little chit chat gremlins are starting to fill your head with the dirty stuff!

P.S. You also can't read a book about getting a Mental Edge in sports and life without reading about the importance of our breath. That's our next Big Idea:

26,000 TIMES A DAY

"One of the quickest ways to get on track is to gain control of your breathing. It sounds pretty simple, doesn't it? After all, from the moment of birth, we've all been breathing—about 26,000 times a day for the average adult—almost always without paying attention to it. But just think what a crucial, nurturing process breathing is. You can live for thirty days without food, and many days without water. But you can live only about six minutes without a breath of air. Breathing delivers the oxygen that revitalizes all of the cells in the body, including the brain cells that allow clear thinking. It also permits our blood to energize the muscles for strength and endurance."

26,000.

That's how many breaths the average adult takes per day.

That's a lot.

* busts out calculator *

Approximately 18 breaths per minute.

Now, first of all, that's WAY too many breaths to be taking. In my interview with Navy SEAL Commander [Mark Divine](#) (see [Unbeatable Mind](#)), he talks about getting his breath rate *way* down (4 per minute is actually relatively easy once you've practiced a bit) and how critical that is to elite performance.

Fact is: If we want to be calm and confident, we MUST learn how to regulate our breathing.

I'd read that for years. When I *finally* got how important mastering my breathing pattern was I started practicing nice long inhales, a little mini hold and nice long exhales ALL.THE.TIME.

When I'm meditating. When I'm reading. When I'm typing (like now). When I'm driving. When I'm walking. When I'm waiting. When I'm napping. When...

There are countless opportunities to bring ourselves into this moment, connect with the most precious resource we will ever have and vitalize every cell in our bodies in the process.

*"Remember, good things
don't come to those who
wait; they come to those
who go out and get them."*

~ Kenneth Baum

Let's practice now.

Inhale to 6. Hold for 2. Exhale for 7. Repeat.

Ahhhhhh...

MASLOW WARNS YOU

"Abraham Maslow, the renowned American psychologist and founder of humanistic psychology, once said, 'If you deliberately plan to be less than you're capable of being, then I warn you that you'll be deeply unhappy for the rest of your life.'

I love that statement. So often athletes at all levels are content just to get through the next practice and the next game, without giving much thought to reaching their full potential. While I don't think any of us have to win gold medals to feel successful, we should feel good about what we're striving for and what we're accomplishing. ...

No matter what you're background, and no matter how many advantages in life you did or didn't have, you *can* maximize the potential that may still be sleeping within you."

It's time to WAKE UP (!) to the potential within us.

Or, alas, we will experience the consequences of Maslow's dire warning: *"If you deliberately plan to be less than you're capable of being, then I warn you that you'll be deeply unhappy for the rest of your life."*

Here's to getting 4% better today (and tomorrow and the day after that and...) as we get our mental edge on and optimize + actualize!

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

If you liked this Note,
you'll probably like...

[Unbeatable Mind](#)

[Motivation and Personality](#)

[Finding Your Zone](#)

[The Procrastination
Equation](#)

About the Author of "The Mental Edge"

KENNETH BAUM



For more than 30 years Ken Baum has been making athletes better, improving business and sales performance and creating strategy's to help people change and improve their lives. A recognized leader on the Psychology of Sports and Business performance as an well innovative trainer and nutritionist. Ken Baum has a unique skill set culminating in maximum performance and results that highlight his effectiveness. Connect: kenbaummentaledge.com.

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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.