



## MENTAL WINGS™ For Climbers

The quickest way to enhance your performance in almost anything is to improve the quality of your thinking. This is definitely true in climbing whether you're working a high-ball boulder problem, sport route, multi-pitch traditional line, or alpine route. All performance operates from the inside-out--your beliefs, focus, emotions, confidence, preparation and problem solving abilities, form the foundation from which you will either succeed or fail.

While off-season strength training and year-round technique training are paramount for progressing into the higher grades, your biggest breakthroughs will almost always result from strengthening your mental muscle. To this end, I have spent more than a decade developing and refining numerous mental training strategies. In aggregate, they may produce an effect similar to unloading a 20-pound weight from your back (that you have unknowingly been hauling up climbs). I call these strategies "mental wings."



Below are links to several excerpts from my climbing books, plus an introduction to a Mental Wings article that will run in CLIMBING this summer. Check back for more Mental Wings™ strategies.

- [6 Strategies to Unlock Your Hidden Mental Powers](#) - Great performances begin with bulletproof confidence, laser-like focus, positive emotions, and a bright picture and intense belief in a successful final outcome. Conversely, setbacks and failures result from worry, doubts, tension, and uncertainties that are born from a poorly harnessed brain running wild with fearful thoughts. It is my belief that whether you (or I) will succeed or fail on a climb is often predetermined in your subconscious before you ever step off the ground.
- [Turning Down The Pressure](#) - The control knob to pressure is completely in your hands--learn to control "bad" pressure and leverage "good" pressure!
- [Breaking The Ties That Bind](#) - Your pursuit of peak performance starts with getting to know your patterns at the crags, in the gym, and in life in general.
- [Training at the Crags](#) - Your rate of improvement (and degree of success) in rock climbing is based largely on your willingness to fail...
- [Getting Motivated](#) - Motivation is an integral part of the success formula in any sport and is a common topic in many sports periodicals. Interestingly, most of the articles I've seen on the subject get it all wrong!
- [Creating Your Peak Performance State \(PPS\)](#) - Athletes who find themselves on a psychological roller coaster will perform inconsistently. Conversely, world-class performers like Tiger Woods or, in our sport, Lynn Hill and Chris Sharma are able to create and maintain a highly distinct and specific mental climate. Consistency on the inside leads to consistency on the outside. Excepting the influence of physical factors, your internal climate will most likely determine your overall performance under varying and often stressful conditions.
- [Picking the Right Route](#) - Learn why choosing the right route should depend on whether the day's goal is practice or performance.
- [Practice vs. Performance Days](#) - The difference between "practice days" and "performance days" lies in the desired outcome. Learn why it's important to focus on just one or the other on any given day at the gym or crag.

(Scott Franklin in competition. Michael McGill photo.)

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## 6 Mental Wings™ Strategies to Unlock Your Hidden Powers

(An excerpt from Eric's upcoming book, [Training For Climbing](#), to be published in December 2002)

The quickest way to enhance your performance in almost anything is to improve the quality of your thinking. This is definitely true in climbing whether you're working a high-ball boulder problem, sport route, multi-pitch traditional line, or alpine route. All performance operates from the inside-out--your beliefs, focus, emotions, and confidence form the foundation from which you will either succeed or fail.

While off-season strength training and year-round technique training are paramount for progressing into the higher grades, during the climbing season your biggest breakthroughs will come from toning and flexing your mental muscle. To this end, I have outlined below six mental strategies and skills that will help elevate your performance and enjoyment.

Practice them with the same dedication and resolve as you would a new strength training program, and you'll be pleasantly surprised with the results.

Obtain the greatest payoff by applying these skills all the time, not just when you feel like it. For some, an almost instant breakthrough will follow on the rock, while others will need to persist and let these mental skills build to a critical value before they will produce a noticeable impact in your climbing. (This depends upon the current degree of "tone" or "atrophy" of your mental muscle.)

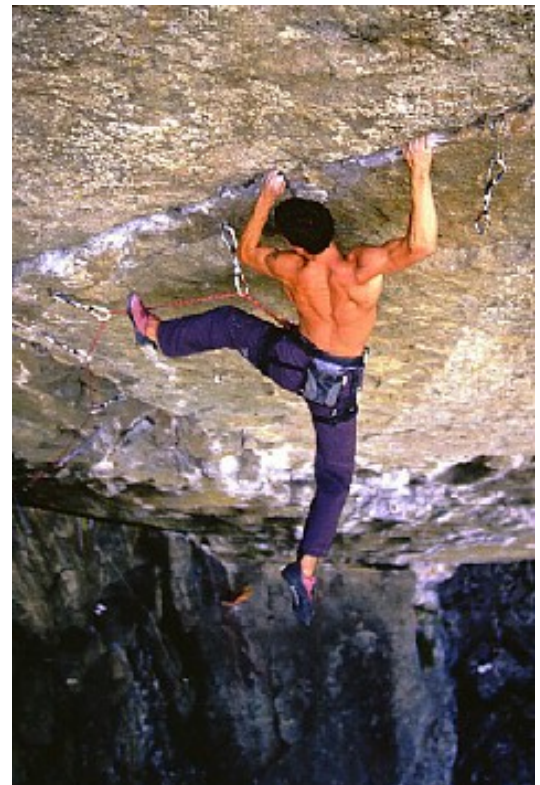
Recognize that these six mental training skills are interlaced and can produce a powerful synergy when all are in practice. In aggregate, they may produce an effect similar to unloading a 10-pound weight from your back that you have unknowingly been hauling up climbs. I call this using your "mental wings."

### 1. Separate your self-image from your performance.

If you are reading this magazine, then climbing surely plays a major role in your life. Unfortunately, when your self-image is tied too strongly or singly to this role, it translates to an overwhelming need to perform perfectly every time in order to prove your worth in that role and, thus, as a person. The subsequent pressure can become stifling and is maybe the single greatest cause of frustration in this sport (or in any endeavor).

Human beings perform best in a process-oriented, not outcome-oriented, frame of mind. Detaching your self-image from your climbing performance allows you to enjoy climbing regardless of the outcome. More importantly, it liberates you to try new things, take chances or, say, throw a dyno that might be required to get through a crux sequence. Bottom line: self-image detachment will reduce pressure and anxiety and, paradoxically, you'll climb better by not needing to!

### 2. Surround yourself with positive people.

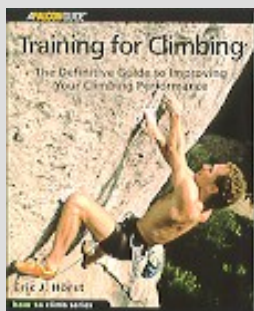


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There is an aura or influence that surrounds each of us and its effects are based on our personality and attitude towards life and its events. Your thoughts and actions will affect the thoughts and actions of those around you, and vice versa. As I see it, there are three options- either climb alone, climb with upbeat and positive people, or climb with cynical and negative people. Why would you ever want to climb with the "complainers" out there? Their negative aura impacts your climbing and enjoyment whether you recognize it or not. Vow to either climb with positive individuals or by yourself-both can be hugely rewarding. However, if pushing your limits is the goal du jour, then take advantage of the synergy afforded to you by having creative, motivating and positive people on your side.

### **3. Stretch your comfort zone.**

To improve in anything, your goals must exceed your current grasp and you must be willing to push beyond your comfort zone in your reach. In performing on the vertical plain, this means climbing onward despite mental and physical discomfort; it means challenging your fears head on by doing what you fear; it means attempting what looks impossible to you through your current set of "glasses." Through this process, you stretch the envelope to a new dimension and reshape your personal vision of what is possible.

### **4. Assess and proactively manage your risk.**

Climbing is an activity with obvious inherent risks, and the desire to climb harder requires taking additional risks. These risks can come in the form of obvious physical danger such as a potentially injurious fall or as invisible mental risks like opening yourself up to failure, criticism and embarrassment. It's interesting to note that for some climbers the physical danger feels more benign than the aforementioned mental dangers. Consider the climber who continues upward on a horrendously dangerous route he's not prepared for because he's afraid of being dissed by those standing safely on the ground!

Make it your goal to always assess the range of possible risks before you ever start a climb. By objectively analyzing the risks ahead of time, you'll often be able to lower the risk of the climb (e. g. taking other gear or rigging a belay differently than you normally would) and, at the least, be aware and able to respond to the most critical risks as you climb. As for the mental risks, see Mental Wings Strategy #1.

### **5. Fortify your confidence.**

Your degree of self-confidence is primarily based on your self-image and the thoughts you hold minute-by-minute and day-by-day. Thoughts of falls or poor performance in the past and self-talk loaded with words like "I can't", "don't", "possibly", and "try", lower confidence and are the seeds of failure. Conversely, focusing on past successes by actually visualizing and feeling the process and exhilaration of positive action leads to tremendous feelings of confidence. Using visualization throughout the day, everyday, to re-live great events in your past--climbing and non-climbing--is the best way to reshape and fortify your self-confidence for success in all future endeavors.

### **6. Be happy regardless of situations and outcomes.**

Superior traits of all real winners is resilience to bad results and/or criticism, and unwavering belief that success will come with time, effort and patience. Attitude is the wild card in the "climbing performance equation" that can often compensate for what you are lacking in strength, technique or reach. I can't understate the importance of always having fun. We all get into climbing because we love the outdoor experience and the feeling of moving over stone, yet in time far too many climbers become Grinches who have fun only when they are winning.

The biggest secret for better climbing is to love climbing unconditionally. Vow that any day of climbing is a great day regardless of the results, and you will usually get the results you desire.

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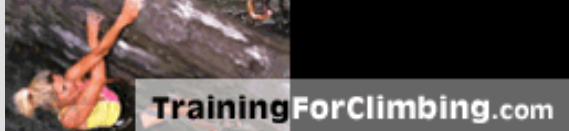
In my 25 years as a climber, perhaps the biggest breakthrough occurred when I realized that almost all the mental skills and strategies I learned through climbing could be applied to other areas in my life. (Read the first line of the 6 tips above--don't they all apply equally well to your non-climbing life?) I believe the process of climbing reveals the ultimate metaphors for life and,

if you transfer the many lessons and mental skills to other areas of your life, you'll ignite breakthroughs there as well. I wish you the best on the rock and in your pursuit of your own personal Mount Everest!

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(Photo: Sonnie Totter on Superman (14c), Cheakamus Canyon, BC, Canada. Courtesy: [Mike Landkroon](#) photography.)



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## Turning Down the Pressure

Pressure is not inherently good or bad. It's your ability to control and react to pressure that determines its value. You've probably experienced high-pressure situations where nervousness, anxiety, tightness and lack of focus prevailed, ultimately dooming your performance. Times like these make you dream of "no pressure" situations--surely that would be the ideal. Right?

Well, actually not. Some degree of pressure is good. It energizes you and enhances your focus on the task at hand. Remember, the pressure of cramming the night before a big exam? Moderate pressure acts as a bit of a "stick" and when combined with a tasty "carrot" (the goal) the results can be stellar. Learning to use this "good" pressure, and eliminate "bad" pressure, is the key.

The control knob to pressure is completely in your hands! Realize that while you will never have control over all elements of a situation, you do have control over your reactions to them. Psychologists explain that no one makes you feel pressure, fear, anger or frustration but you. Either you allow yourself to feel that way, or you empower someone else to make you feel that way. Acknowledge that you are at the helm of your emotions. Work for constant awareness of how you feel and why. Only then can you make the necessary changes to foster optimal performance.

Let's consider a few ways to optimize pressure in stressful climbing situations, whether at the crag preparing for a redpoint or in isolation at a competition. The goal is to maintain positive pressures while eliminating negative pressures.

Positive pressure evolves from effective preparations leading up to the event. For instance, a good training program, sound nutrition, proper rest and a good support team will leave you anticipating a solid, successful performance. You'll be focused and optimistic, and ready to get to the climb and shred. Such positive pressure is the antithesis of the dread, anxiety and negative attitude that can result from poor preparations like training too little (or more likely overtraining), too little sleep and poor nutrition.

Assuming you make it to the event positive and upbeat, your next goal is to maintain this state and ward off all the negative pressures trying to infect you. A solid and very detailed pre-climb ritual goes a long way toward this end. However, some negative tension or anxiety is often impossible to avoid. Use relaxation (\*\*see Relaxation Sequence BOX #2) to deflate such negative pressure and maintain your ideal performance state.

**TIP: Moderate pressure, not no pressure, produces top performances. Learn to foster good pressure, and nix bad pressure--you are in control. Your actions and thoughts in the days and hours leading up to the event determine your pressure levels. Use relaxation and visualization as your on-the-spot antidote to negative pressures which try to invade.**

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## Breaking The Ties That Bind

### Discovering Your Weaknesses And Turning Them Into Strengths

The pursuit of peak performance starts with getting to know your patterns at the crags, in the gym, and in life in general. You must become aware of your climbing-related strengths, weaknesses, and desires, for without this knowledge you will ultimately lack the power to succeed.

It will be quite easy to identify your strengths because it's human nature to think about and practice the things at which we are good. Because of this, I believe that your strengths are really your weaknesses because they consume the time and energy you should be focusing elsewhere.

Consequently, identifying your weaknesses will require a paradigm shift--a dramatic change in the way you "see" yourself. You must then break with tradition and focus your work on these weaknesses. Only then will you ever approach your true potential.

Too many climbers (myself included) have wasted precious years practicing and training the things at which they already excel, while the "ball and chain" of their weaknesses unknowingly holds them down. So identify your weaknesses and break the ties that bind!

### Asking The Right Questions

The best way to identify your weaknesses is to ask yourself a series of detailed questions. To identify your physical and technical weaknesses begin by asking things like: Do I fail on a route because my biceps pump out, or do my forearms go first? Does my footwork deteriorate when times get tough? Do I climb too slowly and get caught in the paralysis of analysis? Do I lack the flexibility to step onto the holds I need? Do I overgrip the rock when I get gripped? Do I lack the power to power off small holds? Am I carrying too much fat to escape the force of gravity? Are my muscles the right size for the beach, but too big and heavy for climbing steep routes?

Some questions for identifying mental errors are: Do I fail to see the sequence, or do I fail to try something new when the obvious doesn't work? Do I sabotage myself before I leave the ground by thinking about the "negatives" that might affect me. Do I try too hard or not hard enough? Am I aware of what I tell myself when the situation gets tough? Do I turn negatives into positives, or do I become the "King of Pain"?

### Three Steps To Success

Now that you're aware of some of your weaknesses you can begin to turn them into strengths with the following procedure:

- 1. Know your outcome--Write down, then regularly visualize what you want to achieve. Belief gives birth to reality.
- 2. Take action--Nothing worth having comes without a little work, pain and risk. Get started today!
- 3. Make Course Corrections--Are the actions you are taking producing the desired results? If not, modify or change your approach.

Step three is critical. It is all too common to get locked into workouts or climbing routines that are no longer effective. Have you become trapped in the same workout ritual, or do you climb at the same area over and over? If so, you are cheating yourself. You must be dynamic and take chances!

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## Training At The Crags

Rate of improvement in rock climbing is based almost entirely on your willingness to fail. While much of the joy in climbing comes from steady improvement and confidence-building red-points and flashes, it takes an increasing amount of time and sacrifice to gain each new level of ability.

As you continue to work up the grading scale, your progress will gradually slow. Eventually your improvement will become immeasurably small. At this time you must contemplate the greatest paradox of our sport: Failure is crucial to success and must be ruthlessly pursued if you want to improve.

Thus, the most efficient way to ensure your continued improvement is to regularly work on routes that are too difficult for your skill level, fail, and then analyze why. Identify the exact reason why you fell off the climb--lack of power, imprecise footwork, poor balance, inability to solve or remember a sequence, mental blocks about falling or the grade you're attempting, climbing too slowly, etc. Only then can you work on changing your weaknesses into strengths.

Of course, this will require a modification of conventional thinking. Starting today, view failures as a necessary step to greater successes in the future.

The expansion of your imagination is another result of attempting a route beyond your ability. If you are having problems with 5.10 climbs, I maintain that you will learn (gain) more by failing on some 5.11s than climbing all the 5.9s in America.

By using the traditional approach of climbing 5.9s in order to work up to 5.10s, it may take a year or more before you arrive at that level. If you decide to work 5.10s in an attempt to solidify that level, you may do better. Possibly you'll be comfortable on 5.10s in a few months. However, by working on some safe 5.11s, you will likely develop the skills and beliefs to flash 5.10s in a matter of weeks!

And this applies on up the scale. Trying a 5.14 makes 5.13 feel relaxed and obvious, and working something futuristic makes a 5.14 seem calm.

Remember, there is no practical reason to get to the top of most crags. Therefore, the real goal is not to stand on the summit but instead to have the ability to free climb there. Each stretch of rock you attempt represents a unique test of your ability. The climbs you fail on educate you on your weaknesses, as well as become the ideal measure of your future improvement--the rock never changes but your climbing ability does! And, of course, the climbs you succeed on are what make it all worthwhile!

With this in mind, I must point out that not every climb you get on should be a date with desperation. Spend at least half your time on routes at or below your maximum ability. Chalk up a nice list of red-points and flashes as motivation and confidence builders. But to ensure an increase in the difficulty of those flashes, don't be afraid to also spend hours on routes you have absolutely no business being on!

### THE STRATAGEM

- 1. Work on safe routes that are beyond your ability.
- 2. Analyze why you fail.

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- 3. Train the weaknesses you identify.
- 4. Remember how to win. Spend at least half your time on routes within your ability. Build a nice list of red-points and flashes.

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## Get Motivated!

Motivation is an integral part of the success formula in any sport and is a common topic in many sports periodicals. Interestingly, most of the articles I've seen on the subject get it all wrong!

So what is motivation? And how can you increase your motivation when it begins to wane? This powerful information is outlined below, but let's start off with what many people confuse with motivation.

### Some Get It Wrong

Most articles on motivation focus on getting you "psyched" for training or competition. They may instruct you to surround yourself with aggressive people, play loud music, find new training facilities, read inspirational stories, look at dreamy photos, maybe even quaff some coffee.

But these things do NOT motivate! They are simply external stimuli that change your state. They may provide a quick fix to your low-energy level for a single workout, but they do not provide the consistent drive necessary for long-term dedication to training/climbing. Once you remove the stimuli, the intensity and enthusiasm quickly disappear.

### All In Your Head

Unlike state changes brought about by external stimuli, motivation is a function of internal stimuli. Your level of motivation is a direct result of your thoughts!

Expectations and incentives drive persistent, intense workouts. Desire to achieve gets you out to try your "impossible" project at the crags. Unstoppable self-confidence lifts you when external things are getting you down. And your mental visions shape your future realities.

### Getting Motivated

Below I touch on a few of the larger contributors to motivation. Although described separately, they are interrelated. Review your day-to-day thought processes to determine your use of them (or lack of use) in motivating yourself. Make notes on changes you should make immediately!

### Expectancy

Expect success whether you're climbing or training. The best on-sight climbers believe they're going to on-sight the route. That expectation alone increases their chance of success!

In the gym both your expectation of how the "exercise" will change you physiologically and how that change will help you reach your goals, generate higher motivation. Simply put, you must believe there is a causal connection between your actions and the desired outcome. If you don't, you'll probably blow off the workout, not put your best effort into it, or grab a pizza and beer with your friends instead.

For example, you are more likely to do traverse training if you believe it will improve your technique and strength. What's more, you are more likely to want to improve your technique and strength if you believe it will improve your overall performance at the crags.

For this reason I believe every serious climber should want to learn as much as possible about human performance. The greater your knowledge about training principles, avoiding injury, motor learning, mental control, diet and nutrition, etc., the more likely you are to act

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accordingly! This is critical to motivation--so read FLASH TRAINING regularly (and leave it lying by the TV for your slug friends to pick up between B & B episodes)!

### **Incentive**

Motivation increases with greater incentive value. In the context of climbing competitions, you may be motivated by the possibility of placing in the cash. (Although this is probably a greater source of motivation for golfers!)

For most, the true incentives are the feelings experienced in cranking a hard climb, winning a comp, or as Jerry Moffatt says "just burning someone off."

Incentive motivation gets stronger the closer you are to the event or your goal. Set lots of short-term goals, in addition to a couple long-term aims, to shoot for (and hopefully achieve) on a regular basis. Too long a delay between your actions and their payoff makes it more difficult to stay motivated.

This explains why an active "tick-list" (a detailed list of routes to do) is such a great motivator. If you are regularly sending routes on that list then it'll be awfully easy to train between climbing trips. Oppositely, if your only goal is something broad or singular, such as to travel to Smith Rock or to climb a 5.11, your motivation will be consistently lower and you'll probably get spanked once you get to Smith or head up that 5.11!

### **Positiveness**

Confident, positive climbers are highly-motivated, successful climbers. Conversely, if you have a lack of confidence or are constantly negative about things, then your motivation is probably about 20,000 leagues under the sea.

Maybe more than any other trait, your degree of positiveness (in general) is something you learned as a child. Fortunately, a day-to-day effort to turn your negative thoughts around can have dramatic effects on your confidence and degree of motivation.

You must first become aware of your negative thoughts. Statements questioning the value of training or predictions of poor performances may be the most common among climbers. Learn to immediately counter these thoughts with something positive. Use self-talk and self-instruction such as "this will help me build strength," "stick it," or "I can do it."

### **Rewards**

To stick to a serious training program or diet, you're going to need some regular payoffs--maybe in the form of harder leads when at the crag. There are times, however, when you'll need other kinds of rewards.

Becoming a great climber means lots of sacrifice. Regular training, dieting, and climbing often result in missing out in other areas. But an occasional reward for a job well done may be just what you need to stay motivated.

The best application of this rule is to allow yourself a day off from training, dieting, or whatever, after achieving one of your short-term goals. Research seems to indicate that irregularly spaced rewards (like those received when reaching a goal) are more effective than regularly spaced rewards (like a weekly reward). Don't forget, too many rewards in the form of food, drink or blowing off workouts will sabotage your performance. So resist the peer pressure to participate in the decadence, except on rare, well-deserved days.

### **Visualizing Success**

The most powerful tool for increasing motivation may be visualization (a more detailed discussion later this chapter). Studies of peak performers in both business and sports have shown a common trait of being able to visualize the end result of labors long before they come to fruition. For example, athletes with long-term goals like winning an Olympic medal were consistently able to get motivated by visualizing themselves standing on a podium receiving a medal.

To motivate for training and climbing, visualize yourself honed and buffed. Visualize yourself cranking through the routes on your tick-list. Most of all, visualize yourself clipping the anchors or standing on top of the crag!

Visualization is most effective when your pictures are bright, crisp, big, and overly detailed. The more you blow up and exaggerate the picture, the more motivated you'll feel. This may sound strange, but it works!

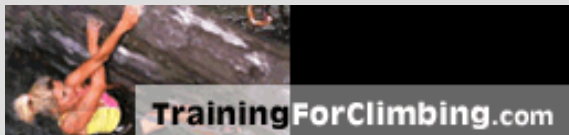
High levels of motivation are necessary for fueling the consistent, comprehensive training and practice that are so critical for improved climbing performance. As your skill level increases, you'll notice that the gains come more slowly and are less noticeable, so you'll need even greater motivation and devotion to improve.

Clearly, everybody experiences periods when motivation wanes. True peak performers, however, are able to maintain, or create, high levels of motivation through thick and thin. So practice the preceding motivational techniques and always visualize success!

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## The Peak Performance State (PPS)

Athletes who find themselves on a psychological roller coaster will perform inconsistently. Conversely, world-class performers like Tiger Woods or, in our sport, Lynn Hill and Chris Sharma are able to create and maintain a highly distinct and specific mental climate. Consistency on the inside leads to consistency on the outside. Excepting the influence of physical factors, your internal climate will most likely determine your overall performance under varying and often stressful conditions.

It is possible to attain a psychological state that can enable you to function at an optimum physical level. I call this your Peak Performance State" (PPS). But how do you get there?

In analyzing hundreds of athletes, sport psychologists have identified ten distinct stops on the road to this state of maximum performance:

- Physical relaxation
- Mental calm
- Low anxiety
- Energized
- Optimistic
- Enjoyment
- Effortless/Automatic
- Focused
- Confident/In control
- Alert

Peak performance will occur only when you learn the feeling of each component.

### Physically Relaxed

Athletes perform best when they are physically loose and experiencing no excess muscular tension. Particularly in our sport, even the slightest muscular tension can erode fine motor control and drain energy reserves.

Top performances require your muscles feel warm, loose and free. Review the Progressive and Differential Relaxation skills discussed earlier in this chapter. With these skills under your belt, you will have made the first and biggest step in developing your IPS.

### Mentally Calm

You climb best with a calm mind. A racing, accelerated mental state inhibits concentration and will allow bad habits to resurface.

First, you must learn to be consistently calm before a climb, then you can work on staying calm during the climb. Obviously, this goes hand-in-hand with the first component in that physical stress leads to mental stress, and vice-versa. You will once again want to use the techniques discussed earlier, especially the Instant Calming Sequence.

### Low Anxiety

Research has shown that athletes perform best when they feel no anxiety. However, competitions rarely come without pressure, and pressure results in anxiety. So how do you minimize or eliminate it? Simply by trying not to get rid of it!

To dwell on the nervousness, or consciously try to get rid of it often results in more anxiety and frustration. Instead, focus on trying to increase positive energy. It is always better to work

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towards a goal then try to avoid one.

Use "self-talk" to achieve this effect. Say to yourself (out loud works best) "I'm well prepared;" "I'll do great;" "This will be fun;" "Smile and relax." Never say things like "Don't be nervous;" "Don't blow it;" or "Don't make a mistake." In sports, playing not to make mistakes often results in more mistakes. Focus on being smart and confident.

### **Energized**

We already know that you need to be physically relaxed and mentally calm, but you also need to be properly energized. Being energized is characterized by the feelings of having fun, being in the groove, flowing, and being pumped up.

When cragging, this feeling is best achieved by flashing a couple of warm-up routes. In a competition situation it's a bit harder, particularly when you've been pent up in isolation for ten hours. Here you can use visualization, self-talk, or possibly some good music to achieve an energized feeling. Also, loosening up on the warm-up wall or stretching will help to prepare your mental climate.

### **Optimistic**

This component might seem obvious; however, it's surprising how many of us get pessimistic when under pressure. Even the slightest negative thoughts can completely undermine a performance. You must be supremely positive and optimistic, no matter how unlikely the climb looks or how long you've been in isolation. Self-talk works best here; the more you use it the greater the effect.

### **Enjoyment**

Although "having fun" is not necessarily something you might associate with serious athletic ability, it is nonetheless a vital ingredient. You are obviously more inclined to focus energy on things that are enjoyable. Performance problems in professional athletes are common when they stop playing for fun, but instead for the money or their egos. If you are having fun and enjoying yourself, you are probably fairly relaxed, calm, and free of anxiety.

### **Effortless/Automatic**

Top athletes report that their best performance, ironically, seemed easy. They describe a state in which they just "let it happen by itself." Some describe a certain "flow" where they suddenly perform almost unconsciously. For example, Lynn Hill, on the crux of **Rude Boys (5.13c)** at Smith Rock, pulled off a previously unknown lunge-sequence without really thinking about the moves. "It just happened," she says.

The next time you start climbing poorly, instead of trying harder, ease up and try softer. Doing this will enable you to relax and attain that effortlessness you desire.

### **Focused/Alert**

The ability to focus your attention is a key element for activities like climbing that require precisely controlled and synchronized movements. Even the slightest break in concentration can result in a fall.

Becoming focused seems to require a mixture of calmness and high positive energy. Use the Instant Calming Sequence to center yourself, then visualize past "great" performances for positive energy. Most athletes find that this works better than just "trying to concentrate on becoming focused."

### **Confident/In Control**

These ingredients are again very obvious, but absolutely necessary. Confidence reduces anxiety and programs you for success. Feel confident and you probably feel in control of the situation at hand.

Every time you climb, you are faced with distractions or situations that will try to steal your control and throw you into panic. You must stay in complete control, especially of your

emotions. Use self-talk and the Instant Calming Sequence before and during a climb; this will help to keep your emotions from snowballing. **Creating Your Peak Performance State (PPS)**  
To build your own PPS, use the ten components that we've discussed. Once you can identify each one, you will be able to develop a ritual that enables you to systematically establish and then maintain this mental state, under any conditions.

Every good athlete has a ritual he or she perform prior to a competition. This is a simple, yet possibly lengthy, sequence of procedures used to prepare the individual mentally and physically. Such a ritual will help in creating your PPS by deepening concentration, raising intensity, reducing anxiety, and increasing alertness.

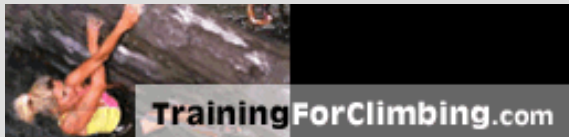
In creating a regular pre-climb regimen, try experimenting, noting the effect on your PPS and subsequent performance. It will also help if you observe the rituals of top climbers and ask them about their mental preparation before a climb. Don't be afraid to try something new. It's possible that what you think is your IPS is far short of it.

Once you think you've found the proper ritual to produce your PPS, stick with it. Be consistent. Unfortunately, when under pressure you may be disposed to rush through your preparations or skip them altogether. That, of course, is when you need them the most!

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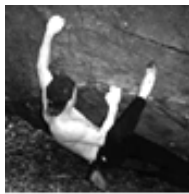
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## Picking the Right Route

### Practice or Performance?

The type of route you choose depends on whether the day's goal is practice or performance. If skill practice is the goal, pick a route that works one of your known weaknesses. For instance if you are intimidated or have technical difficulty on roof routes, pick a roof route to work (upon completing a few warm-up climbs, of course). Whatever your weakness, be it slabs, thin-finger cracks, steep routes or thin vert faces, it's your commitment to work them frequently that will make you better.

If performance is the goal du jour, exploit your strengths! Pick routes that focus on what you do well, "look good" and inspire. Exploiting your strengths won't make you better, but it will make for some brilliant ascents--the goal of performance days.

### On-Sight or Redpoint?

Your next decision is whether you'll climb on-sight or work a route for redpoint. If you've found a climb you like, the grade may determine this matter for you. It's unlikely you'll on-sight more than a letter above your hardest on-sight to date (although it can happen).

If you have a wide choice of suitable routes at "your grade," favor on-sight over redpoint at a 2-to-1 ratio. Both are valuable experiences, but on-sight climbing provides greater potential for learning. Over emphasis on redpointing is an all-too-common mistake of climbers "in search of big numbers." They spend a lot of the time flailing on the rock, learn very little and, only occasionally, succeed on such difficult routes. Exclusive use of this approach can demoralize and injure you, and has less learning and practice value than on-sighting routes near your limit.

### Consolidate Your Grade-Level Ability

Two common mistakes in cragging are: 1.) working redpoint routes too hard for you, and 2.) on-sighting routes too far below your limit. It's better to focus your climbing near your maximum ability level. Such "consolidation" of ability at a grade level establishes the foundation from which you can push the envelope just a bit farther.

Except for warm-up climbs, pick routes within one number grade of your hardest on-sight. For instance, if 5.11c is your top on-sight level, select routes between 5.10c and 5.11d to on-sight. Sending several routes at this grade solidifies your ability, while hiking a zillion 5.10a's or hoping to "get lucky" on a 5.13a holds little value.

As for picking a grade to redpoint, work routes between 5.11d and 5.12c, as per the example above. Routes in the low end of this range may go in just two or three tries while the hard lines may take several days. Avoid getting involved in projects more than a number grade beyond your best on-sight (no routes beyond 5.12c in this example). You'll use up too much time on too many climbing days when you could be consolidating your current ability level. The sooner you firm up skill and confidence at your current level, the faster you'll progress, for real, beyond it!

Use the four climbing grade pyramids located in the back of the book to plot your progress toward 5.12. Fill in the route name and date of each redpoint attempt. Try to complete one row of blocks at a time; however, if you find just the right route don't hesitate to push on to the next level.

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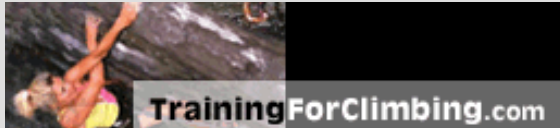
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- Determine if the day is for "practice" or "performance." On practice days, choose route types with which you have difficulties. Oppositely, use performance days to exploit your strengths for great performances.
- Dedicate two-thirds of your cragging time (and days) to on-sight climbing.
- Pick on-sight routes with a rating from one number grade below to one letter above your hardest on-sight.
- Work redpoint routes up to one number grade beyond your hardest on-sight.

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## Practice Days vs. Performance Days

The difference between practice days and performance days lies in the desired outcome. Practice days are for maximal improvement of climbing skills with little concern about performance outcome. Performance days are simply about shredding routes and winning comps with no focus on learning or practicing specific climbing skills.

With the exception of elite climbers, practice days should rule. On these days you are free to work on new moves, experiment to find clever rest positions, try new tactics and strategies, all without any concern or pressure not to fall. This curious and carefree approach will yield steady gains and an occasional major breakthrough!

Unfortunately, many climbers are plagued by the need to perform all the time. Not wanting to make a mistake and fall, they climb tentatively and are gun shy on trying chancy moves. Even worse, as insurance for good performances, they do the same routes, at the same areas or overdose on the local gym. The value of this approach is negligible.

Elite climbers are a different breed. With highly honed technical skills and fewer inhibitions, they generally don't hesitate on new moves and have little regard for the pressures of performance. In fact, performance days are their bread and butter. A heavy focus on outcome-based performance will train the few critical skills they may still be lacking: tactics, strategy and the mental game. Plus, after years of hard work honing the zillions of basic skills, now's their time to bag some savage routes and win a big comp. Besides, nothing beats trial by fire for training elites in any sport.

**TIP: Practice days have a greater training value than performance days for all but elite climbers. Each day you train or climb, pre-determine whether the goal is practice or performance. Shoot for a 3 to 1 ratio of practice to performance time.**

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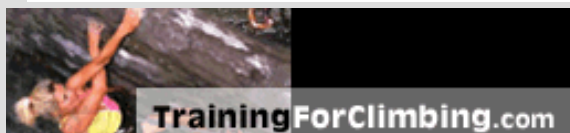
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