

Are You Under Attack by Your Inner Voice?

by Ray Collins



“In the zone.” That elusive but welcome sensation when you’re seeing, hearing and observing almost one-second ahead of the rest of the world. In sports, you can’t miss. In business—or even casual conversation—everything you’re saying and doing is on the mark and making perfect sense. Confident, calm and focused. Why can’t we summon up our peak state on demand?

Lorenzo Beltrame says you can—and it starts with the ability to control your thoughts. Beltrame (pronounced ‘Bell-trommy’) is a pro tennis coach who now teaches athletes how to get into their ideal performance state. He shows them how to quiet the nerves, anxieties, negativity, expectations, and perpetual inner critic inside their heads. He leads two-and-a-half day seminars around the world for the Human Performance Institute. The facility has been based in Orlando since 1995, but founder Dr. Jim Loehr began looking at the link between physical performance and mental preparedness decades before that. (Mental toughness training has become so successful, Johnson & Johnson purchased Loehr’s company a few years ago as part of its new emphasis on wellness.)

Beltrame was born fortysomething years ago in Milan, Italy and came to Orlando in the 1990’s after meeting his wife who was studying overseas. Both their children are rising tennis stars. Lorenzo has been around the pro tennis tour for decades. He’s drilled with Pete Sampras, Jim Courier, Andre Agassi—and taught many of the biggest names in sports, but is sworn to confidentiality. One thing he says he has learned—a champion’s brain is different from the rest of ours.

“While you may hope for a default or a poor performance by your opponent, real competitors

hope for great competition and full stadiums. They never doubt their abilities to perform. They don’t panic,” he said.

Athletes and non-athletes from around the world have learned Dr. Loehr’s approach to tapping into the Ideal Performance State. The institute reports working with sixteen #1 athletes in their sports or Gold Medal winners. Leaders in medicine, law enforcement—including the Navy SEALs, the Army Special Forces, and the FBI’s elite anti-terrorist force, and many Fortune 500 Company executives. In a recent seminar I attended, the ten others were natives of places like Italy, South Africa, and Colombia—as well as New York, Tennessee, and Maryland. My classmates included coaches of major college tennis teams, founders of tennis academies, and pro tennis coaches.

This is not just a ‘pep talk’ or a quick-fix. Beltrame compares it to developing a muscle. You’ll learn that controlling the state of mind isn’t just an accident or ‘dumb luck.’ He says you’ll have the ability to summon up ‘the zone’ if you follow this system. Repetition facilitates the development of new neuro-pathways. Changing the way the brain works requires training and repetition. The right emotional state requires effort and changing how you think.

CHICKEN VS. EGG

▶▶ Do we play well to get into our peak states? Or do we get in our peak states to play well? The former leaves it to chance; the latter is more of a sure bet. In your Ideal Performance State, or IPS, your thoughts and body language are under control. You’re mentally tough—regardless of the circumstances.

An athlete must be like an actor. But actors have to portray many emotions while athletes have to perform just one state.

▶▶ Does success breed happiness, or does happiness breed success? Beltrame believes you have to be happy first before you can achieve greatness.

He says you can’t be miserable practicing and only happy when you cross the finish line. You have to change your approach to sustain your self-worth. “Otherwise you’re just like a poodle jumping through hoops at the circus,” he laughed. “The journey has to be enjoyed, if you only look to cross the finish line, then you don’t get the full benefit of the process—and you won’t have a good time in the first place.”

▶▶ If your motivation is purely extrinsic—to impress others—that creates short-term happiness. Intrinsic motivation helps you sustain your self-worth and well-being. Beltrame says, “a good foundation and character is essential—and competitive sports helps develop it. We want to use the forces from competitive sports to develop character, just like people use the weight room to develop muscle. Competitive sports is a process to help you dig deep and build your character. That process is so gratifying to the individual. It allows a person to find sustainable well-being.” He defines character as “the sum of qualities that a person habitually demonstrates.” And it can be improved only if the desire is present.

THE ENEMY WITHIN

Andre Agassi burst on the scene in the late 1980’s with a shallow image and a career that began plateauing within years. And then, Beltrame points out, Agassi found balance in his life, substance, turned outward and success followed.

▶▶ Once Andre ‘re-purposed’ his tennis career, he came in sync. He even began a foundation for kids and developed a larger mission in life. He found energy in helping others,” Beltrame recalls. Agassi then attracted the girl of his dreams (fellow-Hall of Famer Steffi Graf), and he went on to win more Grand Slams.

Beltrame says Agassi used his stage with popularity and fame to raise money for the kids. He wasn’t playing for himself, but for the kids. He found energy, focus and determination to compete better and that’s why he won more.



But it wasn’t easy. According to Agassi’s 2009 tell-all book, “Open,” Andre had to quiet his demanding father’s voice inside his head.

▶▶ That private voice inside your head is often an inner critic that tends to sabotage your best efforts. Development of that voice begins when you are born, is different from person to person, and becomes molded by events, circumstances and the most important people of your life—usually parents.

“We’re often under attack by our inner voice—so we’re competing against our opponent, and ourselves.”

▶▶ Beltrame compares a faulty inner voice to an international terrorist, a relentless voice of personal attack, unmerciful self-criticism and self-loathing. Unfortunately, that private voice is your ultimate coach and master story teller, he says. “Sometimes we need to fire that coach!”

“We are tougher on ourselves than we are on others. We have an enemy within, a relentless critic. We are conditional to ourselves. We need to give ourselves at least five positive messages for each negative one.

▶▶ Choose better words. Be honest and challenging, but compassionate and optimistic within yourself. Train your brain to tell yourself the right messages. We create our own barriers. Changing your story can change your destiny. But it takes work over a period of time to build that muscle.

FIND A PURPOSE

Beltrame recalls hearing of one of his colleagues who counseled one of the top players in the game, and asked, “What do you want it to say on your tombstone?”

“That I was best in the world.”

“Okay,” and he starts to write out in the air with an imaginary pen, “Former #1 in the world. So what?”

The player’s eyes open wide.

“Why do you want to be best in the world?” The player thought and said, “To make enough money to buy a lot of things for my family.” The coach wrote in mid-air, “Owned lots of cars.”

With that, the player got up and left the room. He says the player came back the next day with a new mission and purpose in life that transcended themselves.

“I want to be ‘sunshine.’ I want others to watch me play and be inspired in their own life.” Success followed.

▶▶ Glory and material possession collapses right away. But inspiring others as a purpose gives direction. Your journey on the court—or in life—must have some direction. When you have more gratifications and enjoy your life more, people want to be around you more. Once you find your peace, you have an aura. Develop your own Ultimate Mission Statement.

PUT IT IN WRITING

Dr. Loehr’s “Human Performance Institute” believes you need to script a new story for your private voice—and that literally means writing it down, longhand, and reviewing it daily until it becomes the way you think privately and speak publicly.

▶▶ Stop giving life to bad stories. Change your neuro-pathways. Beltrame says your brain will physiologically adapt to whatever you tell it.

▶▶ You can convince your brain your pen is a camera if you want. Your brain is the hardware, you provide the software. You need to brainwash yourself for better results,” he says.

Beltrame said, “Pretend we went outside and the grass had grown as high as the roof-tops. And I told you to walk to the courts. You see a path and start to take it and wind up at the 7/11. You come back to where you began, look around for awhile, see the path, take it again, and wind up at the wrong place again. Stop re-enforcing the wrong way of thinking! Repetition forms and re-enforces a new neuro-pathway that takes you where you want to go. It takes courage and perseverance to create a new path for where you want to go.”

▶▶ A cornerstone of mental toughness training is literally writing out your old story. This identifies the barriers for the

player. “When I get nervous, I don’t play well. And if I don’t play well, eventually I’ll have to drop down a level.” This creates tension and anxiety.

Is there a way to see the story from a more intelligent perspective? Yes. “When I play it is a good moment for me to challenge myself. I love the company of my friends and other people. Each time I stand on the court is a benefit for me socially, physically—and my friends will like my company regardless of how I hit the ball. So THAT’S your new story. When you craft the new story, you feel excitement, optimism and you feel like you want to be on the court,” Beltrame says.

▶▶ Write this new story—in just 2-3 sentences—in various incarnations every day until you develop a more positive neuro-pathway. (They say writing in cursive hand-writing will make the best connection to your brain, far better than a keyboard.) Gradually build your mental muscle, and remember, any change takes time. Don’t expect to flip a light-switch and make your previous faulty thinking disappear.

TIPS:

- Snuff out your inner terrorist who constantly sabotages you.
- Create an Ultimate Mission Statement about your purpose.
- Write your old story, get leverage to change, then write a new story.
- Improve on your new story by writing a daily forward-looking paragraph.
- Develop new neuropathways and build a new mental muscle with repetition.

Contact information:

www.corporateathlete.com

Nearby Hotel:

Embassy Suites Orlando Airport is a few minutes from the institute. The hotel features a complimentary hot breakfast each morning and a complimentary Happy Hour and hor d’oerves each evening.

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