

RICHARD YOUNG PhD

5,000

~~10,000~~ hours:

*Principles of Success in
High Performance sport*



ACHIEVING FASTER, LIGHTER AND MORE MEANINGFULLY

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The Warm Down

Why this paper?

This brief paper summarises observations and analysis of the learned habits of success in Olympic performance, from experience and data from 30 years in high performance sport helping Olympic teams build systems of learning and innovation.

Many talented performers struggle for too long with too many priorities, too many problems to fix, and too many ideas to implement. The approach taken by successful performers is simpler and lighter.

This paper is written to help you simplify performance in your world for faster, lighter and more meaningful results.

– Richard Young



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The Warm Up

I spent many years creating and leading innovation and learning programmes for high performance sports teams. The questioning and decision making were very different between novice and expert performers.

10,000 hours

Anders Ericsson, the originator of both deliberate practice and 10,000 hours concludes, "There is nothing magical about 10,000 hours"!¹

The number has been popularised but wrongly highlights quantity over quality. How many hours you put in is no longer proven as the main thing.

According to Macnamara² the impact of deliberate practice and length of training on elite athletes accounted for only 18% of performance! There is a missing 82%!

This white paper focuses on the missing **82%**. Not how they practice and how long they practice but how they learn and how they act on that learning.

Novices and Experts

If you are practicing the wrong things it doesn't matter how effective you are, how deliberate you are, or about your 10,000 hours!

Competitive advantage is about keeping what works and removing what doesn't – fast! Many new performers are too busy "doing" to spot the difference and therefore are on a very slow learning loop.

In my work in Olympic learning, the novice would focus on how to solve the problem (how long, how often) and the expert would focus on what problem to solve. Single loop thinking (fix the problem) and double loop thinking (decide on the right problem)³.

This paper highlights what the experts discovered to be the most important themes in learning how to learn.

High performance is
"learning what matters
most and removing
what doesn't – fast!"

The Start: Decision

The decision to go for high performance is not about winning. It is a process decision. A learning decision. It is not the medal or result! It is not about grinding people down, nor 10,000 deliberate hours! There is a “high” in high performance for a reason.

It is a decision about learning and continuous improvement in life. Learning is the accelerator that focuses attention, trims the wasted energy, grows people and grows systems. That is the real game, and learning always wins!

The Finish: Performance

A word about performance. This is not just about medals and sports. Everyone is a performer, and the challenge is to become a higher performer.

Performance is communication. What we know, what we have prepared for, rehearsed, and trained for to deliver the message behind our preparation. Whether sport, business, family, hobbies, there is always a performance (i.e. a delivery)! This is about learning faster and delivering better. Performance that is lighter, faster and more meaningful.

“Higher performance is a decision about learning, not winning!”

“You do not rise to the level of your goals.
You fall to the level of your systems.”

– James Clear

1: The Performance Basics

Get the basics right. How often have you heard that? But what does it mean? What are the “basics” and what are your “basics”? What do you know that is most important in your preparation for a higher performance?

High performance is the basics mastered! High performers actively uncover and master what is most meaningful.

Prior to Usain Bolt, it was believed sprinters were unlikely to reach world-class level when over 2m tall. It was published in the Journal of Sport Science and Medicine that “there is an inverse relationship between height and performance in disciplines such as sprint running”⁴. Usain Bolt may not have read that paper!. He learned how to uncover and maximise his unique strengths and his own basics. And proved a new fact for everyone else: tall sprinters can win.

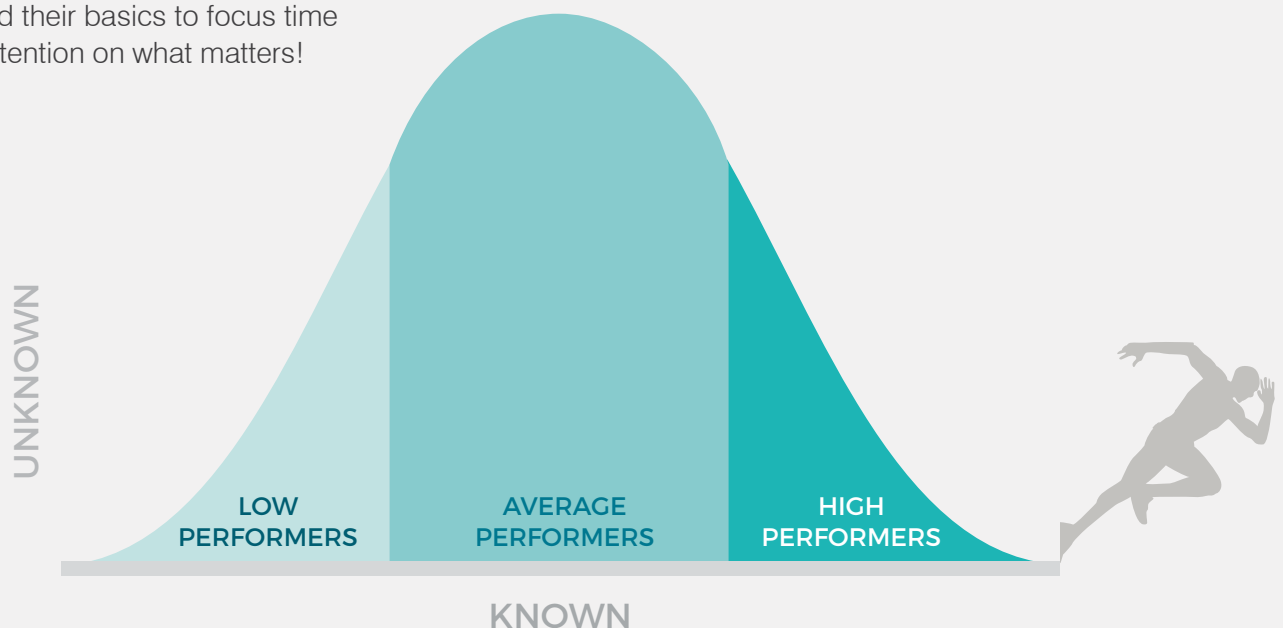
The basics are not only physiology and biomechanics. The performer is the whole package and whole person. The basics cover mental outlook, values, training environment, family life, etc. Each performer has unique strengths. And even basics that are seen as “weaknesses” can be repackaged as strengths.

For example, a successful rowing athlete I know of in the UK was so highly anxious that her coach reframed this. He gave her feedback repeatedly about how her performance was tracking and the evidence calmed her and lifted her effort. They repackaged anxiety into “more evidence more often”. A personal basic for her. A basic that would work only for her and was a key in her performance.

Finding your basics is a strengths-based approach giving you fewer problems to fix and more freedom to create your future!

THE BASICS

We will explore how the best have learned their basics to focus time and attention on what matters!



2: Knowledge Experts vs Performance Experts

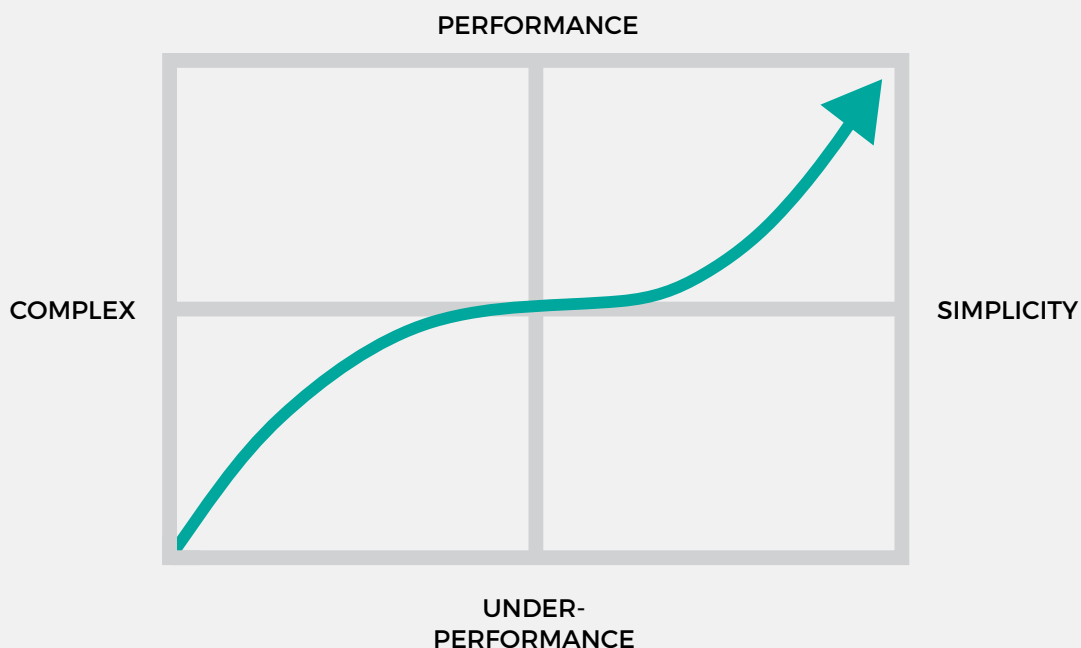
Knowledge experts are different to performance experts. To become an expert, more information, knowledge and skill are added. To become an expert performer the focus turns to subtraction to deliver exactly what is called for at the right time! Not every expert is an expert performer. The art of simplification and reduction is the learned skill of the best performers and it is trainable sooner than most think.

Expert performers have learned what matters and they are very clear: “this is what I do, this is why I do it, this is what I don’t do”. The new performer is thinking a lot about many layers of ideas, problems to fix, where the magic might be and not ready until...“the busy middle”.

Some spend many years here, spinning wheels and fixing problems. This “busy-middle” in sport and business is an untapped resource of performance potential. The group yet to discover their basics and simplify their world. I was responsible for dozens of Olympic performance reviews. In some we asked Olympians what they would Keep, Start and Stop for the next event. Repeat medallists were 5% of the population and owned 80% of the Stops!

Simplifying is a learned skill of discernment. The territory of the high performer. And an accelerator for the developing performer, coach, manager or leader. One in, one out. To know means “no”. The art of discernment and simplification taught early is an accelerator.

**“Knowledge experts add.
Performance experts subtract.”**



3: The Expert Performance Clock

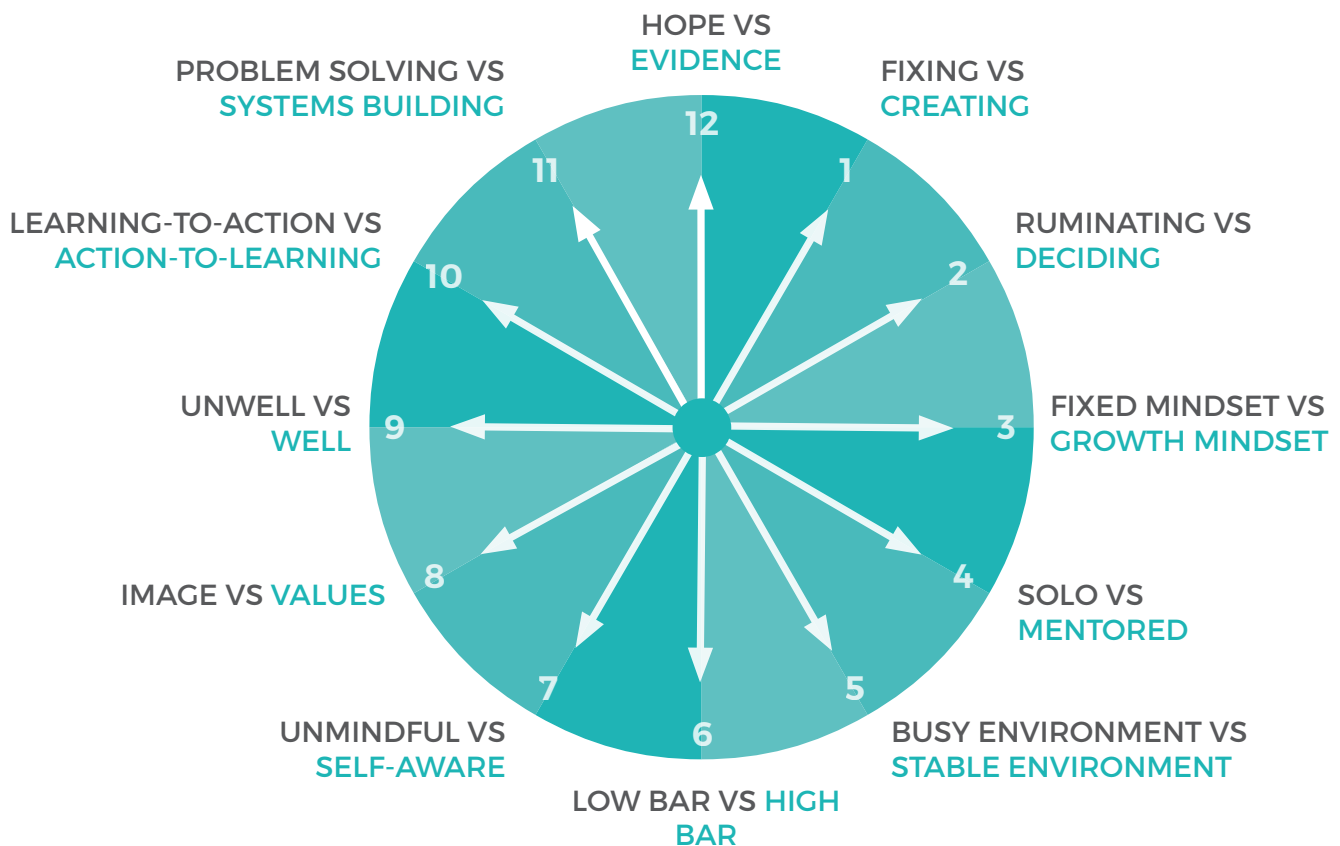
Let's look at the themes for people who have uncovered what is important for their performance system.

You will notice obvious aspects to performance like training, competition, mental performance, nutrition, etc., do not appear. The beliefs and approach the expert performer has learned is the system impacting all components of their preparation.

It is their learned frame of reference in how they approach performance in all areas!

The learning system affects all outputs!

It is a system to accelerate expert performance in any world. Let's explore briefly the 12 learned domains.



1 Fixing vs Creating

High performers focus on creating the future rather than fixing the present. Fixing is stuck. Creating is forward movement.

Fixing is perpetual problem solving and wheel spinning. It can feel like movement and action but it is keeping busy. Busy is lazy!

Low performers ask “how can this problem be fixed?” High performers ask “is this the right problem?”

They have retrained “fixing-habits” into “learning habits”. The expert is not free of things needing fixing. They are free of those things taking their attention.

2 Ruminating vs Deciding

Expert performers decide and act.

Expert performers focus on exploring the past to build evidence to make a decision for the future. They do not dwell for perfect clarity about a past that is gone.

Novice performers, without the habit of action, ruminate; reanalysing and rethinking the same situation and exploring what should have happened. This can feel interesting but is not effective in moving forward. It often overwhelms performance reviews.

Ruminating parked. Decisions and action accelerated.

3 Fixed Mindset vs Growth Mindset

High performance is not a winning decision, it is a learning decision. The expert performer knows that learning is the difference maker. The podium separator.

The terms fixed vs growth, from the work of Carol Dweck⁵, refer to the learner and the non-learner. Or the low performers and the high performer.

Like kids lined up tallest to shortest, you could line up the Olympic finish learner to non- learner. Learning wins the real game.

4 Solo vs Mentored

Expert performers rely on the reflection and perspective of experienced observers. There are no solo expert performers.

Experts know their growth requires deep focus. But deep focus narrows perspective. The “head in the sand”. The hole you are digging is the right hole for now and it is getting deeper faster. But the tide is coming in and now it is the wrong hole!

Experts know they cannot see themselves without reflection from a key observer.

Learning teams win the long game.

5 Busy Environment vs Stable Environment

The ecosystem is the satellite system surrounding the expert performer. Their home, training space, workspace, living patterns, family patterns, social patterns, etc.

They know performance is a systems game and their ecosystem is a reflection on their main things.

The low performer’s environment is often as cluttered as their approach to preparation. The expert performer has learned to stay underwhelmed with daily challenges. They reduce where they can and accept what is out of their control. They are playing for the long game.

6 Low Bar vs High Bar

The high bar is the benchmark and the ambition.

Expert performers move their current reality to meet an ambitious future. This is where I am, and this is where I’m going.

The novice performer can train for a “win” by bringing the goal downwards. It looks like progress but you know the difference when it is time to perform!

Layering affirmation and mindset on top of proof is rocket fuel! Without evidence of achieving a high bar in preparation, the affirmations are camouflage. Our brain knows the difference!

7 Unmindful vs Self-aware

Expert performers have a dual lens. They see themselves as clearly as they see the process. They have trained to match the two.

The low performer is not yet deeply inside the process, they are outside looking in. They focus most on what to do and are not yet connecting on who they need to be.

You can see the difference in the performer who is deeply inside their performance. The flow and the synthesis. This is a learned skill from trained self-awareness. The novice is doing a performance and the expert has learned to be the performance.

8 Image vs Values

Image is at the surface. Values-based performance is where the expert lives. They know their values and what they value.

It is evident in their language and their behaviours. Values are how they make their decisions.

What did I expect? What happened? What did I learn? It and me. Win or lose. Repeat.

To the high performer every event is a deeper meaningful win.

9 Unwell vs Well

In a sport example it seems obvious for an athlete to be healthy and well at the event. But many performers arrive either over-cooked or under-cooked. As well as their support teams! This is a bad start for any performance.

The best performers know their body, minds and limits, and stay within these limits. They keep themselves healthy and well more often than others.

Like compounding interest, they are winning the consistency game of compounding experience!

10 Learning-to-action vs Action-to-learning

An old story of two doors at the Pearly Gates. Both closed, both with a sign pinned to the door. No one in front of one door marked "heaven". Millions in front of the other door marked "lecture on heaven".

Most need to feel ready before doing. The expert performers know they are more ready to start than they think!

Expert performers learned early to walk through the action door. They are experts in action-for-learning and speed past the slower learning-for-action group.

11 Problem Solving vs System Building

The expert performers know it is a longer interconnected system game.

The problem in front of the performer today may not be the main problem to fix. There are deeper causes and interconnections.

"Fix" this and they know there can be future impact on other things that are more important.

Systems win the long game. And systems are not built by solving every problem. They are built through addressing the deeper root cause of problems.

12 Hope vs Evidence

Novice performers are yet to have convincing evidence of their performance capability.

Hope and affirmation are often prioritised when evidence is unconvincing.

Experts have learned to reframe hope as a positive prompt for action: "What am I not yet convinced of? And what evidence will convince me?"

They point their actions towards closing the gap.

Overall, from the expert performance clock we see the main themes in the bigger game. The game of basics-finding, action-learning and system building to accumulate high-quality evidence and experience: the game of the high performer.

"Goals don't make high performers, systems do!"

“Champions are brilliant at the basics.”

– John Wooden

4: Discovering Your Own Basics

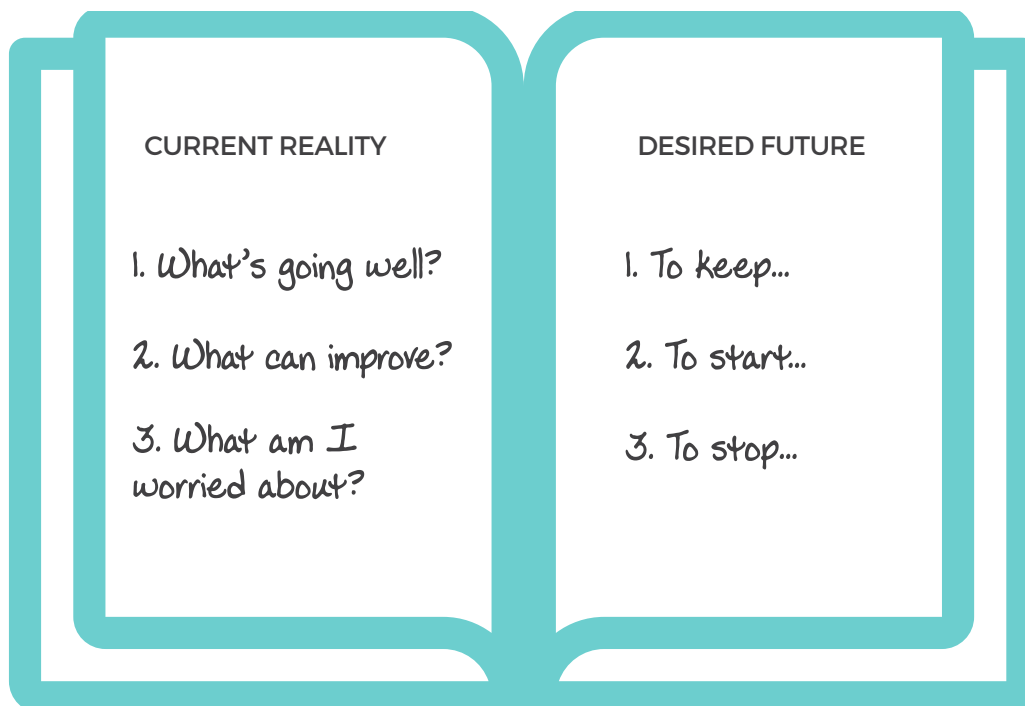
The following schematic is a simple Reality vs Future check in.

What is the evidence behind current reality (what is going well, what can improve and what worries me currently)?

What needs to be adjusted to reach my desired future (to keep, to start, to stop)?

Expert performers live with the truth. A future cannot be created without it.

Actions can be tuned and basics uncovered from the truthful evidence that comes from a quick and repeated Reality vs Future check-in.



HIGH PERFORMERS REPEATEDLY ALIGN

REALITY



FUTURE

The Warm Down: Your Next Step

Whenever you are ready and need support with your learning, figuring out what matters most or aligning your actions with your performance, here are ways we can help you.

1. Join the mailing list for periodic performance insights to accelerate higher performers.
2. Come to one of the regular webinars on performance habits. See upcoming dates on the website and book a spot.
3. Ask about any of the services you see in the panel below to see how we can help you or your organisation.

For any of the above, go to:
www.simplify2perform.com
Email: info@simplify2perform.com

3 Keys to Higher Performance

- 1 High performance is learning, not winning. Have you made the decision?
- 2 Systems always win.
- 3 Know and polish your own basics.

About the author

Richard Young has been involved with nine Olympics across most roles as an athlete, coach, scientist and leader. He has researched human physiology, performance technology and performance behaviours.

He has won international gold medals, coached world champions, researched performance and created programmes that contributed to Olympic medals for three countries.

He focuses on advancing human behavioural performance. He works with businesses, organisations and individuals to increase performance and achieve results through a range of growth, perspective and organisational performance programmes.

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