

This book is your competitive advantage!
– Alex Baumann, CEO, Double Olympic gold medalist

SIMPLIFY

A high performance playbook
to win the real game



RICHARD YOUNG PHD

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING ABOUT THIS BOOK

Simplify is a crucial read for those working in High Performance and Leadership. Richard has brilliantly and succinctly captured what it takes to achieve mastery at the highest level in both sport and life. There are so many insightful take outs: a focus on improvement rather than winning, uncovering strengths rather than fixing weaknesses, finetuning the system through subtraction not addition and relentlessly reflecting. Effective questions throughout the text help to frame concepts of individual and team competitive advantage. *Simplify* is a stimulating read that provokes meaningful action along the pathway to exceptional performance.

– **Katie Sadleir, GM Women's Rugby, World Rugby.**

I have had the good fortune of knowing Richard for close to twenty years. I always thought I was pretty good at keeping things simple and then I met Richard. It was clear that I was the novice and Richard was the expert. Richard, through his book, *Simplify*, has done it again. His insights have provided a guiding light on a couple of areas that have been puzzling us at the Padres. It has enabled us to sharpen our thinking, remove clutter and adapt our system to provide us with a greater chance of success. Like me, if you are serious about taking your game to another level, then *Simplify* is a must-read.

– **Don Tricker, Director Player Health and Performance, San Diego Padres.**

Whether in business or in sport, applying an agile approach is critical to unlocking and unblocking potential. Take the smallest part of the best idea, be willing to experiment and should it fail –do it fast. In *Simplify*, Richard explains so clearly how great coaches focus on creating learners and leaders who, in turn, deliver achievement and fulfilment. Where to start and how to break down the complexity are all too often the barriers to being the best one can be. The complexity of how to be your best has now been removed in this must-read book.

**– Duane Kale, Vice President International
Paralympic Committee, Paralympian.**

Richard had me from the opening sentence and it simply grew from there. In our work in broadcasting and analytical graphics, we are part of many of the great events in the world (PGA golf, Americas Cup, Formula 1, International cricket, Major league baseball etc.). My company, Animation Research, analyses high performance on the world stage and the insights within the book *Simplify* captures so succinctly how the best can achieve world class results. To have a book pull these insights together is a competitive advantage for both performers and business. When you decide that you are going to play on the world stage then it is a given that you need to surround yourself with a world class system and world class people who share that vision and see no limits. Richard has superbly captured what that means and how it can be actioned and achieved to make the complex simple and let the results look after

themselves. Read *Simplify* for your performance advantage in sport, business and life!

– Sir Ian Taylor, Emmy award winning sport analysis and broadcasting, MD Animation Research Ltd.

Such a timely book for the world, following eighteen months of disruption where many routines have had to adapt and overcome in a new environment. This book breaks down performance in a simple way and provides tools to re-examine your performance principles and either design a new system or redesign an existing system. It's a must-read for any high-performance players.

– Danny Klima, Director, Abu Dhabi Motorsport Management.

Having spent 27 years in Olympic level sport and knowing first-hand how complex this environment is, I read Richard's book with much interest. *Simplify* is a fantastic reference book, both enthralling and insightful. It really brings high value for those aspiring for higher performance. Richard has skills, experience and a human dimension that makes him unique in our industry. He has deeply simplified the complexity of high performance matters to uncover core principles we can use in our work as leaders and performers. His book is essential reading for anyone aiming for higher performance through concrete elements and experiences. Richard lays out a map across nine key principles to help us simplify and understand the opportunities in front of us and lift the game! Read this book for immediate value to your world, challenges and objectives.

– Jean-Laurent Bourquin, CEO AdviSport, Geneva, Switzerland.

Richard understands the keys to performance and shows how the basics must be clear before any real high performance can be achieved. *Simplify* is an incredible guide to performance leadership: leading your system and leading performance in you and others. It will help you build deep belief and confidence in your action. Read *Simplify* to find your highest performing self.

**– Tanya Dubnicoff, 3x Olympian, World
Champion and Olympic Coach.**

High performance is an often misunderstood term. In my experience those who have the ability to simplify its meaning and then adapt provide direction to focus on where you can make the most effective and sustainable gains. *Simplify* is key in figuring out this critical process. Read this book to uncover your performance advantage!

**– Mike Hesson, Director of Cricket Royal
Challengers Bangalore (Indian Premier League),
Former Blackcaps Coach 2012-2018.**

Wow, what a great book! Richard Young's book, *Simplify*, is a goldmine of insights about high performance. Based on his extensive and successful experience as an athlete, coach, and performance improvement expert, Richard shares many important secrets of success in such a clear and practical way. As I read, I kept filling up pages with notes that I will refer to often. Richard explains that too many performers complicate performance, thinking that adding techniques will improve performance, when it most often detracts from high performance. Those who truly understand and have confidence in their system will eliminate (subtract) non-essentials, and thereby streamline performance. If you want to become better

at whatever you do, and want to help others do likewise, then *Simplify* is a must-read and a must-use book.

– Dr Dean R. Spitzer, International expert on performance measurement, Author of eight books including the bestselling *Transforming Performance Measurement*.

Simplify is a must read for insights into creating high performance. The book delivers unique actionable thoughts of how to unpack systems that will help athletes and performance groups to have impact on high end performance. *Simplify* will give you insights that usually come much later in an athlete's development. You now have the opportunity to get ahead in this game. You will also learn the secret to finding clear language when communicating performance tactics and techniques. Richard has presented critical information to accelerate performance faster and simpler. This book is a vital read for a head-start.

– Per Lundstam, Alpine Sport Science Director, US Ski & Snowboard, Former Director of Athlete Performance, Red Bull.

SIMPLIFY

SIMPLIFY

**A HIGH PERFORMANCE PLAYBOOK TO WIN
THE REAL GAME**

RICHARD YOUNG PHD

Published by Richard Young

First published in 2021, Dunedin, New Zealand

Copyright © Richard Young

www.simplify2perform.com

Saint Clair, Dunedin, New Zealand

The moral rights of the author have been asserted. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except as provided by New Zealand copyright law.

Disclaimer

The material in this publication is of the nature of general comment only and does not represent professional advice. It is not intended to provide specific guidance for particular circumstances, and it should not be relied on as the basis for any decision to take action or not to take action on any matter which it covers. Readers should obtain professional advice where appropriate, before making any such decision. To the maximum extent permitted by law, the author and publisher disclaim all responsibility and liability to any person, arising directly or indirectly from any person taking or not taking action based on the information in this publication.

All inquiries should be made to the author.

Edited by Jenny Magee

Designed and typeset in Australia by BookPOD

Printed in New Zealand by PHPrint

ISBN: 978-0-473-56470-4 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-0-473-56474-2 (e-book)

To Donna and our beautiful children Oliver, Gracie,
Emily-Rose and Leo. That is the game that matters.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been a privilege to be involved with high performance over so many years. I acknowledge the collective intelligence of that worldwide community with whom I have had the privilege to meet, work with and learn from. They have made this book possible.

I have also had the great privilege over many years to meet and learn from a team of world experts who changed my thinking about sport and performance; Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus, Patricia Benner, Robert Fritz, Peter Senge, John Edwards, Brendan Spillane, Paul Chippendale, Matt Church, Dean Spitzer and Sir Ian Taylor.

The support of my family through highs and lows has been the rock in the sea.

My community of Thought Leaders has inspired me to accelerate personally and share messages to help others lift and clear their way.

My outstanding editor, Jenny Magee, who always had a smile and provided strong, creative support. And I appreciate the early steer on the creative direction from Michael Levine.

My business manager, Holly Grimmer, for logistical support to make things happen.

To you, a current or future high performer with this book in your hand, I want to acknowledge your potential and hope you find something here to lighten and accelerate your step!

FOREWORD

It is my pleasure to write the foreword for such a valuable book for the global community of future and current high performers.

After more than forty years in high performance sport, working in numerous systems around the world, I know first-hand how complex this environment can be. To optimise performance, we need to know the simple truth about what matters most, and the insights in this book are vital pointers.

At the 1984 Olympics, I won two gold medals, both with world records, because of great coaching and a performance system. Dr Jeno Tihany was my coach, mentor and our bond was deeper than sport, as he clearly understood the value of connecting me to a system that worked for me.

Since then, I have made my career as an executive in sport in Canada, Australia and New Zealand by focusing on improving international performance through individualised high performance systems.

While a performance system sounds like an abstract concept, it is simply how you do what you do and why you do it that way. It is the medal behind the medal. It supports personal

performance in sport and beyond to family life and service to others. The learning is greater than the medal and carries on well after sporting careers have ended.

I had the pleasure of working with Richard when I was CEO of High Performance Sport New Zealand. He understands systems for exceptional performance better than anyone. Richard was responsible for performance gains through evidence and system growth that could be easily understood and used by coaches, athletes and performance staff across dozens of sports. His work worked.

Richard simplifies performance insights to make them directly applicable to the context of any performance. The insights in this book are important tools to find competitive advantage and accelerate.

Reading this book has also been a fascinating journey of recollection into my own performance and leadership history. High performance is a game of learning. If you have a system, this book can help you tune and polish it. If you don't yet have a system, this book is the road map you need. It simplifies the complex so you can lift and accelerate performance.

This is the primary focus for those of us who work to support others' performance – to help current and future experts in high performance know why and how and accelerate.

Competitive advantage comes from the quality of the system you are in. As Richard writes, if you are not clear on your system

and what works best, you will be in motion without progress. There is no time to waste in high performance; quality counts most.

The principles underpinning *Simplify* will create a competitive advantage in your performance context. I hope you enjoy the learning and accelerate.

– *Alex Baumann, CEO Swimming Australia
and former CEO High Performance Sport NZ,
Double Olympic gold medallist and
former double world record holder.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: The Quest Begins	1
Part One: The Performance Principles	
Chapter One: The Decision	11
Part Two: The Performer	
Chapter Two: Total Self-awareness	33
Chapter Three: Values	59
Chapter Four: Conviction	75
Part Three: The Learning Team	
Chapter Five: The Truth	87
Chapter Six: The Routine of Right Action	101
Chapter Seven: Flow Simplified	119
Part Four: The Optimised System	
Chapter Eight: The High Bar	135
Chapter Nine: The Evidence	151
Chapter Ten: The Creative Future	171
Afterword: The Performer's Dashboard	185
About the Author	191
References	193

INTRODUCTION

THE QUEST BEGINS

The Puzzle

Duff Gibson was a wrestler in high school. He was a far better fighter than me – stronger, with more stamina and better technique.

My sport was cycling, and I worked my way into the Canadian team for the 1988 Olympics. At the first team meeting in Seoul, I was tackled from behind and wrestled to the ground. It was Duff – there, not as a wrestler, but as a future youth Olympian. After a hug, he said, ‘I will get to the Olympics, and I will win.’

Clear and confident, he asked me to coach him in cycling when we got home. I was still racing, so couldn’t do so, but I watched Duff’s name move up the cycling ranks over the next few years.

Then I heard he had moved into rowing and was nationally ranked.

In 1992 I had the opportunity to do a PhD in Calgary, where Duff, now a nationally ranked speedskater, also lived. With

SIMPLIFY

his Olympic dream burning bright, Duff had switched sports again. And, once more, he made the national team.

I have never seen anyone train harder, smarter or with more commitment. His whole essence was pointed to the Olympic performance. Duff didn't just follow a training programme; he created a performance system he could use in any context.

Next, Duff saw an opportunity in bobsleigh and became one of the top drivers in the country. At the same time, the sport of skeleton racing was evolving and added to the Olympics in 2002. Duff moved to skeleton, racing headfirst down steep tracks at speeds of up to 130 kilometres per hour. He applied his performance system to the new sport, winning the world championship in his third year, then taking the Olympic gold medal at Turino in 2006. At the age of 39, Duff was the oldest individual gold medallist in Winter Olympic history.

And then, having proved what he'd told me in Seoul, he retired.

Duff showed me that excellence comes from understanding and being grounded in your personal high performance system. That high performance means layering specialist skills and focusing on what matters. He taught me that knowing what works best for you enables success in new environments and adventures.

Moving between sports, Duff was never starting from zero. Ninety per cent of his effort went into finding and polishing

INTRODUCTION

his performance system, leaving ten per cent to adapt to a new context.

Inspired by Duff and his clear-sighted ability, I have spent thirty years focused on the performance systems behind people, teams and organisations.

Each of us can develop such a system. The purpose of high performance is not to be a great skeleton athlete, cyclist, sailor, hockey player or rugby captain, but to be a high performer in life. That is the real game.

High performance can feel like a giant complex puzzle that requires years of experimentation with no guarantee of a successful outcome. A win is more likely when the performance system is solved correctly to deliver a performance on precisely the right day. In sport, we call this the peak.

Performance is contextual – for some athletes, it means a medal, while for a coach, it may be the development of a new athlete. A scientist may find success through discovery and a leader through a high-performing team dynamic. Your win will have a deep meaning specific to you. You

**High
performance
can feel like a
giant complex
puzzle that
requires
years of
experimentation
with no
guarantee of
a successful
outcome.**

SIMPLIFY

will be busy trying to uncover and optimise your performance system.

My youngest son Leo arrived home from a class gift exchange at primary school with a bag of thousands of puzzle pieces. 'Dad,' he said, 'Can we build this puzzle?' 'Sure, what is the picture?' 'I don't know. There is no box, so let's just start.' We began by laying down the edges and corners, then finding pieces that went together. After several hours, Leo said, 'Wow, now I know why they put the picture on the box!'

For most people, this is exactly how high performance evolves – from a giant bag of puzzle pieces. Some pieces we know well, some we have seen others do, others we have read about, and many come from what we are told is the way to high performance. Our coach may tell us what the edges are (sleep and good nutrition). We may learn that the other teams are using plyometrics, but we don't know where it fits.

At first sight, the options seem overwhelming – and they are. There are so many books on high performance, training, mindset and nutrition that it is impossible to build one picture. And anyway, the pictures conflict. Each new approach, supplement or technique looks like an essential piece to add. We struggle to find the magic missing piece that holds it all together. Most athletes I have raced with, worked with and met are eager to add that crucial piece, but to do so, they must continually experiment to discover which elements work. The unseen picture grows more and more complicated.

INTRODUCTION

And if that's not enough, we must also attend to the ticking stopwatches on the puzzle. The event is coming on a set day, time and place, and they can't be late. Many sports require a physical body that can handle training and recovery, and most athletes have only four to eight years at the highest level of their game.

Solving the puzzle is me telling my son, 'OK Leo, you need to finish this as fast as you can tonight because you won't be interested by next week.'

In some cases, best practice would be to find the box. While that approach is critical in fields such as engineering and the sciences, in high performance sport, fitting into someone else's picture of success can be too slow and too late. We need to uncover our own performance system first and build it quickly. Once it is clear, we will have our own best practice.

But to solve the unknown, we need best principles to build a performance system. Best principles beat best practice. It's like finding the corners and the edges first, as without them, there is no starting point.

**Best principles
beat best
practice.**

Performance and expertise are contextual. A violin virtuoso in a sail boat with no training is not an expert sailor. But with the right principles, likely found in their system of music expertise, the violinist can know where to start – or at least know what questions to ask.

SIMPLIFY

That is where this book points – uncovering the principles of high performance systems to solve your own puzzle and create your own performance system. One that, as Duff discovered, you can carry into any environment. One that will give you the power to win the long game.

Throughout this book, we will explore principles and systems to uncover and simplify your own performance picture.

The book is in four parts.

In Part One, you'll explore the overall performance framework and its underlying principles to build your ecosystem for exceptional performance. We are all capable of exceptional performance, and the discovery begins here.

Part Two explains the priorities that exceptional performers have set for themselves. We explore how they move and realign their self-awareness, values, and conviction to achieve the extraordinary performances they are capable of.

In Part Three, we unpack how the wider team and supporters interact – together and with the performer. No exceptional performer does it alone. We explore their focus on rigorous honesty, why it matters to find and adhere to the right action and, finally, the delivery of flow through strategic simplification.

Part Four looks at three core system components; knowing the standard we must reach, collecting the right evidence to

INTRODUCTION

see progress, and building momentum to bring the desired future to reality and avoid performance oscillation.

Finally, in Part Five, we combine all the components to explore the ecosystem as a dashboard. You can use it to track your progress and identify key areas to polish and align. Here we bring your system into full view to enable exceptional performance in your world.