

Training The Powerhouse Coach Within You

A Breakthrough Insight for Competitive
Athletes and Teams



Workbook by Jim Loehr

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Workbook

In the last three years, an insight has emerged that I believe might be the most important of my entire professional career. And the insight was directly in front of me the whole time, hiding in plain sight, but for whatever reason I could not see it. Once I fully grasped the core insight, exciting new practical learnings started materializing almost immediately. I've been testing the training concept for three years with my clients and I've never been more encouraged by the results. No pre and post validation studies have been done so I continue to curb my enthusiasm until such research has been conducted. In spite of this, my own experience has repeatedly confirmed the value of the training concepts presented in this workbook.

QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of Coach are you to yourself in:

Rate yourself on both from 1 - 5

(1) Definitely not helpful - (5) Definitely a big help.

1) In your competitive sport? _____

2) In your life in general? _____

2. Are you aware you have an inner voice speaking to you?

3. Would you be proud if the way you speak to yourself were made public?

4. Would you want your inner voice embedded in the heads of those you love the most?

5. Is your inner coaching voice more critical or encouraging, more sarcastic or inspiring, more cynical or motivating, more fearful or challenging? Is the message and tone of your inner coaching voice more on the angry and annoying side or on the positive and confidence building side?

6. Is your self-coaching more fantasy-based or reality-based? In other words, is your inner voice coaching grounded in the real world?

NOTES:

Step 1: Awareness

Become acutely aware of the tone and content of your current inner voice when competing, particularly when under stress and not performing well. Purchase a journal and record as accurately as possible (from memory) how you coached yourself (inner voice) particularly during rough moments both in competition and in your life in general.

Do this step for a minimum of 1-week, answering these questions in your journal after a period of honest reflection:

- 1. What kind of coach were you to yourself? (A-F)**
- 2. Are you satisfied with the tone and content of your self-coaching? (A-F)**
- 3. Are you willing to commit energy and time to improve your inner voice coaching? (yes or no)**

NOTES:

Step 2: Reflection

Take a moment to reflect on who are your heroes in your sport (brilliant competitors) that you would like to emulate competitively. Try to recall seeing them in challenging moments and imagine what their inner voice was saying to them. What kind of inner-coach did they have to help them achieve world class competitive success?

IMPORTANT INSIGHT:

One's competitive strength is evidenced most clearly and certainly in moments of great adversity and crisis.

NOTES:

Step 3: Scripting

Begin scripting in your Journal how you would want to coach yourself in the following situations: Select 2 or 3 to write about daily.

- When you are nervous.
- When you have made a costly mistake.
- When you are not mentally focused in the NOW.
- When anger starts swelling up inside you.
- When your muscles feel tight.
- When you are too worried about the outcome.
- When you are not feeling well.
- When you have lots of personal problems invading your competitive space.
- When you are low on energy.
- When you are thinking too much – too analytical.
- When your mind is racing.
- When you have lost your confidence.
- When you can't stand your opponent.
- When you do not see eye to eye with your coach.
- When you are being cheated.
- When you have a lot of important people watching the event.
- When it's obvious that you are going to lose.
- When all the pressure is on you because everyone expects you to win.
- When you're having a bad competitive day.
- When almost everyone watching is cheering for your opponent.
- When your parents are giving you the evil eye on the sidelines because they are very disappointed with how you are performing.
- When the weather is extremely hot, cold, windy, etc.
- When you are competing against your best friend, someone you never play well against.
- When you've been benched for making too many mistakes.
- When your attitude is turning very negative.
- When you're playing so badly you want to quit.

IMPORTANT INSIGHT:

You are to coach yourself the way you would coach your best friend who was in the very same situation. Speak to yourself the way you would speak to help him or her perform better.

Inner Voice Examples:

- "You got this."
- "Let It Go."
- "More intensity and energy."
- "Relax and take a deep breath."
- "Believe in yourself."
- "Right here, right now."
- "Reset."
- "Be aggressive."
- "Courageous."
- "You love pressure – dig deep!"
- "Keep learning and looking for answers. Use this opportunity to get better, win or lose. Never, ever give up."
- "You show your inner strength when things get rough, hold your ground."

IMPORTANT INSIGHT:

No one knows you better than you do. You are the best person to provide the most important coaching advice, moment to moment, during tough times.

Here are two questions to think about:

- 1. Is your inner coaching voice becoming better (more positive and constructive) because of your competitive sport or is it getting worse (more critical and discouraging)?**

- 2. Is it possible to achieve competitive success and have a very critical and demeaning inner voice?**

The answer to the second question is clearly yes from my experience. But fighting yourself and your opponent(s) is also a tragic waste of energy. You are waging a war on two fronts which simply complicates your task of bringing out your best.

Some players have mistakenly come to believe that if they are not rough and hard on themselves for mistakes and subpar play, they will continue to make mistakes and perform poorly. By berating and chastising themselves, performance levels will improve. Athletes who have had coaches and parents who follow that way of thinking are more likely to use punitive and even abusive self-talk to elevate their play. Such thinking, from my experience, is very misguided.

IMPORTANT INSIGHT:

The human brain stores negative or painful experiences far more readily than positive ones. Punitive self-coaching simply amplifies and highlights mistakes and poor play. Doing so makes them more accessible to memory. Experience has repeatedly shown that positive and constructive images and memories will serve to enhance performance better than negative ones.

NOTES:

Step 4: Becoming a skilled storyteller to yourself and others

Everything we say publicly and everything we say privately is but a story—our story! Unfortunately, we do not have direct contact with the real world. What we do have is data streaming in from our five sensory portals: sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. Our brains must then make sense of the incoming data or total chaos would ensue. The meaning we give the data becomes our story and the master Storyteller is our inner voice. The stories we tell publicly or privately to ourselves can either contribute to our competitive success or hinder it. Remember, words matter to our neuroprocessor and when strung together form a story. Our stories represent our take on reality, our version of the real world. Our stories can be true, false, partially true or partially false, harmful, helpful, devastating, inspiring, or self-defeating.

Great competitors must be skilled storytellers! More important than what happens to you during competition is the story you tell yourself and others about what happened. The exact same facts can be used to create two entirely different stories, two vastly different versions of reality. Every story you tell yourself or others creates a neurological trace that fosters competitive success or hurts it. Stories that are repeated often, whether true or not, whether harmful or not, get the most neurological traction. Famed neuroscientist, Donald Hebb, discovered that “Neurons that fire together wire together”.

Stories that associate competition with fun, challenge, excitement, the spirit of adventure, etc. form vastly different neural-networks than stories that associate competition with pressure, threat, fear, disappointment or self-criticism.

Here are the guidelines for great storytelling, both private and public, that from my experience, enhance competitive success:

- The story is true and aligned with existing facts. It is not a work of fiction!
- The story is aligned with your best self, reflects the best part of you and is consistent with your core values and beliefs.
- The story takes you where you want to go in life
- The story is one that you would be proud to share with others (if made completely public).
- The story inspires you to take concrete action.
- The story provides you with a genuine sense of hope and optimism for your future.

Step 5: Carefully Screen All Incoming and Outgoing Messages and Information

One's inner voice is the gatekeeper to Command Central. Once incoming data reaches Command Central, the door for influence is open and everyone wants access – your parents, coaches, teammates, teachers, religious leaders, TV commercials, car dealerships, and so on. Everyone wants access because they want to influence you in some way. So, the issue is how do you keep harmful, false, distorted, defective data from gaining entry and impacting your inner coaching voice, your Y.O.D.A.?

If the data your inner voice is referencing to help you through challenging moments during competition or life in general is faulty or contaminated, the advice you give yourself will likely be compromised and misguided. For instance, if repeated messages from parents or coaches that, "you don't have what it takes, you're a loser, a choker, etc." get past the gate, your inner coaching voice may speak to you in the same dysfunctional way when things get rough, when you are struggling, when your back is against the wall.

You have three options:

1. You don't listen and deny access.
2. You listen and deny access.
3. You listen and grant access.

Here are some important questions to ask yourself:

- 1. Who should be given unlimited access because they only want the best for you and have always proven to be a great advisor?**

- 2. Who do you have to be careful about?**

3. Who has not always proven to be a trusted advisor?

4. Who should always be denied access?

So, what's the answer to keeping your central command center from contamination?

- Be aware, be on guard and scan everything before you open the gate.
- Say "stop" to yourself when you recognize you're getting bad coaching advice from yourself or others.
- Everyone has the ability to respectfully listen but silently deny access. Activate that capacity when it's needed.

The goal is to keep the space between your ears free from harmful data so that your inner voice (your Y.O.D.A.) is coaching you effectively.

NOTES:

Step 6: Establish Clear Navigational Coordinates for Your Inner Coach to Follow in Advising You.

Essential questions:

What is your inner voice referencing when coaching you?

What information is being tapped into for advising you?

Let's use the navigation system in your car to highlight what's important in getting where you want to go. Three things are necessary for your navigation system to work properly. First, the exact location you wish to go to must be loaded in. Your intended destination must be clear and precise or the system will fail. The second requirement is that your exact current location must be established. This is done by G.P.S. (Global Positioning System) where at least four orbiting satellites zero in on where you are now. The third requirement is that some action must be taken to close the gap between where you are now and where you want to go (e.g., take a car, a bike, walk, etc.).

Another way of putting it, successful navigation requires:

1. Purpose (your intended destination).
2. Truth (where you are now).
3. Action (the energy that must be expended to close the gap).

When these three conditions are met, Siri can be a valuable and trusted coach. The same conditions are true for your inner coaching voice as well. Analogous to Siri in our lives is Y.O.D.A. – Your Own Decision Advisor. As a side note, how would you feel if every time you made a wrong turn, Siri would chastise you – “what’s the matter with you? Are you stupid!? Get your act together!!” When you make a wrong turn or a bad decision, Siri’s response is simply, “recalculating, make a U–turn in 600 yards, etc.”

Equipping Y.O.D.A. with the right navigation coordinates.

1. Destination (Purpose)

There are two things to consider here. One is your purpose for playing competitive sport and the other is your ultimate purpose for living (your “why” for being alive). From my experience, the two must be completely aligned. For example, maybe your ultimate purpose in life might be to become an extraordinary person of high integrity, kindness, and resilience. Your purpose for playing your sport should clearly enhance and support that life purpose. Here might be a purpose for sport that aligns to that life purpose:

“To leverage the sport experience to help me acquire extraordinary integrity, kindness, and resilience.”

2. Where I am now (Truth)

Issues to face:

- What’s the truth about your integrity now?
- What’s the truth about your kindness now?
- What’s the truth about your resilience now?

3. What can I do to close the gap (Action)?

The central issue is using competitive sport to raise your levels of integrity, kindness, and resiliency. By doing so, you ensure that your sport participation and your life purpose are fully aligned.

From my experience, doing this results in greater fulfillment, less competitive stress, and more competitive success. Step 8 will explore this in more detail.

NOTES:

Step 7: Control What You Can and Let the Rest Go During Your Competitive Battles

Fear and anxiety are most often the primary things you struggle to control. One of the big secrets to being a great competitor from my experience is restricting your focus to things you CAN control. You can't directly control whether you win or lose (if you could, you would never lose), whether you will play to your absolute best, or whether you experience challenges with nerves. Once competition starts, the only things within your control are:

1. Your attitude (positive and constructive no matter what).
2. Your effort (you give your full and best effort regardless of the outcome).
3. The tone and content of your inner voice coaching.

By focusing on getting A's on these three things, your chances of playing to your full potential are significantly increased and your competitive anxiety will be reduced because all three of these are within your control.

NOTES:

Step 8: Getting Home: Defining Ultimate Success

"Getting home" is simply ending up at the end of your life where you feel you must to be a real success in life. Think of it as your ultimate mission in life, the mission for which failure is not an option. Put another way, it is your ultimate purpose for living, your "why" for being alive!

I love Mark Twain's quote:

"The two most important days in your life are the day you were born and the day you found out why."

I think it's important to understand that your ultimate mission (your "why") is never static, never fixed, but rather is always evolving and refining. The point here is that your inner coaching voice should always reference this coordinate in all important decisions. Your competitive sport experience should help you get "home", help you achieve ultimate success in your life. The best exercise I have found for determining where home is, I call the Tombstone Exercise. It is covered in considerable detail in my latest book which I co-authored with Sheila Ohlsen, entitled, "Wise Decisions".

TOMBSTONE EXERCISE

Set aside at least 30 minutes of quiet, uninterrupted time for reflection. Consider what you would most want inscribed on your tombstone to reflect who you actually were when you were alive. The words carved in stone should represent your highest priorities in determining what a truly successful life means to you. You may choose six to eight separate words, or, alternatively, a couple of short sentences.

In your soulful deliberation, consider society's scorecard for success in life, such as wealth, fame, achievement, privilege and so on. Do you want any of these carved into your tombstone?

Now think about being a loving father, mother, son, or daughter; consider any moral or ethical character strengths like integrity, kindness, loyalty, humility, compassion, caring, gratefulness, or generosity.

Here is the critical understanding: The words you finally choose to most accurately reflect how you want to be remembered in life is "home" for you. Whether this is your first or your tenth attempt to get this life coordinates right, you must continue to check the accuracy and overarching precision of what you have determined to be home for you. Getting this right is vital because it will become the filter through which all your critical decisions and choices in competitive sport and in life are made. And just as your car's navigation system requires a precise address, so does your Y.O.D.A. Once determined, "getting home" will be the single most important set of operating instructions to be programmed into your inner Command Center.

NOTES:

Step 9: Train Your Inner Voice Every Day for The Rest of Your Life

Every day is another opportunity to improve the accuracy and wisdom of your inner coaching voice. Because so much is at stake, use competitive sport to clean up the space between your ears, to ensure the voice no one hears but you becomes a trustworthy, brilliant advisor. This is hard, demanding work and we will never be finished in our quest to become the best coach to ourself that is humanly possible. Competitive sport is a priceless gift if it becomes a powerful tool for getting home in life, for living a life of true success.

NOTES:

I am hopeful that the concepts presented in this podcast resonate with you and, if they do, commit to listening to it several times. Take notes in your journal of all the key concepts that will help take your inner coaching to the next level of excellence.

You can contact me on my website at jim-loehr.com or on the LinkedIn site under **Jim Loehr**.