

CHAPTER 3
Release Your Mental
Emergency Brake

Jim was a so-so student, but his rich uncle promised him a high priced sports car if he graduated with honors. As soon as school started in September, Jim became a real student. He had never done that before. So every time he felt like sleeping late, he got up early. Every time he felt like cutting class, he went to class. Every time he felt like hanging out with his friends, he went to the library and studied.

His first semester in college, he got all A's. He never did that before, even in grammar school.

To make a long story short, in four years of college, Jim got a few B's, and the rest of his grades were A's. He graduated summa cum laude- just like his uncle had.

And just as his rich uncle promised, the night he graduated, his parents threw a party for him. And there it was- a brand new red Jaguar sports car.

Even though it was late, Jim drove over and picked up his best friend Ray. Ray was really into cars. He was in awe of Jim's new car. He took Jim to a drag strip like straight away, where the police never go, so they could see how fast the car could go.

Jim got the car up to 80 mph.

Ray said, “You don’t know how to drive a car like this. Let me show you.”

He got behind the wheel but couldn’t do much better. A little embarrassed, he said, “This car should be able to go 170, there must be something wrong with it. You’d better take it back to the dealer tomorrow.”

When Jim drove into the dealership the next day, he was greeted by the sales manager. When the sales manager heard the problem, he brought in the master mechanic.

The mechanic put the Jaguar up on the lift. He looked at the car for about a minute and then brought it down and turned to Jim and said, “You’re the kid who got all A’s in college, aren’t you?”

Jim nodded.

“How long have you been driving?”

“Five years.”

“Let’s see if I got this right. You’ve been driving for five years and you’re smart enough to get all A’s in college, but you don’t know that you don’t drive a \$75,000 sports car with the emergency brake on!”

HERE'S THE BIG QUESTION-

DO YOU HAVE YOUR EMERGENCY BRAKE ON?

You probably don't even realize you have an emergency brake.

You do.

Oh, it's not a physical one like in a car. It's a mental one.

Let me prove how destructive your mental emergency brake can be:

Do you ever perform better in practice than in competition?

That's because you have your mental emergency brake on.

Do you ever get intimidated by an opponent and play terribly?

That's because you have your mental emergency brake on.

Do you ever lose to someone that you've easily beaten before?

That's because you have your mental emergency brake on.

Look at all the thousands of hours you've spent practicing, working out, sweating, and sacrificing. In just a few seconds, this mental emergency brake can destroy all your preparation.

DON'T WORRY!

YOU'RE GOING TO LEARN HOW TO RELEASE
YOUR MENTAL EMERGENCY BRAKE SO THAT YOU CAN
UNLEASH YOUR TRUE POTENTIAL SO YOU CAN PLAY
AND PERFORM BETTER THAN EVER BEFORE!

Right now you might be asking why you haven't released this emergency brake before.

Simple.

You never even knew it existed.

It's impossible to control something that you didn't even know about.

Now that you know about it, you'll learn how you can control it.

Once you learn how to release your emergency brake, you'll be able to go all out without holding back.

“The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it. But that our aim is too low and we reach it.”

-MICHELANGELO



Let me give you a quick example of how destructive this mental emergency brake can be.

Recently when I was walking to class, I saw one of my students who was scheduled to give a presentation that day.

He was walking to class having a lot of fun talking and joking with friends.

When he got into the classroom, he took a seat and had a relaxed conversation with the young woman sitting next to him.

During class, he was very articulate, asking and answering questions.

But when it was time for his presentation, he was so stressed that he gave a terrible talk.

WHAT HAPPENED?

It all has to do with the mental emergency brake.

My student's mental emergency brake was OFF when he was walking to class.

His mental emergency brake was OFF when he was speaking to

that young woman before class.

His mental emergency brake was OFF when he was asking and answering questions.

But as soon as it was his turn to speak, his mental emergency brake went ON- full force. And it destroyed his talk.

Now let's assume this student was 20 years old. He has been speaking successfully his whole life. Thousand and thousands of conversations, millions and millions of words.

After class I spoke to this student. He confided to me that he totally stressed himself out. I asked him what he was so stressed out about. He said that he felt that he had to give a great talk so that he could get an "A."

In other words he did the two things that put his mental emergency brake on immediately:

- 1) He felt he had to give a great talk.
- 2) He focused on his grade.

I'm going to make sure you don't make these same mistakes . . .

So how are you going to make sure your mental emergency brake

is released? You only have to do two simple things.

#1

HOW TO RELEASE YOUR MENTAL EMERGENCY BRAKE

EMERGENCY BRAKE ON: if you feel that you must win or if you feel you have to win, your mental emergency brake will be on. **BIG TIME!** Athletes don't perform well under this type of pressure.

EMERGENCY BRAKE OFF: if you want to win and you don't feel you have to win, you'll release your mental emergency brake immediately.

When you think to yourself, "I have to win" and "I must win," it creates tension. When you think, "I want to win," it reduces tension.

"I have to win" and "I must win" causes you to overreact.

"I want to win" will help you underreact.

The change you can make right now is to go from . . .

I HAVE TO WIN TOMORROW.

to

I WANT TO WIN TOMORROW.

I MUST WIN TOMORROW.

to

I WANT TO WIN TOMORROW.

“I have lost tournaments by trying too hard.”

-DAVIS LOVE III, PROFESSIONAL GOLFER

“To win, you must treat a pressure situation as an opportunity
to win, not as an opportunity to fail.”

-GARDNER DICKINSON, PROFESSIONAL GOLFER

If you feel you have to win, you're hurting yourself by putting too much pressure on yourself.

Just suppose you're holding a hose and you're trying to water your lawn. But you're doing one thing wrong— you are standing on the hose.

What will happen? The pressure in the hose will build up until it explodes!

That's what happens when you feel you must win or you feel you have to win and you're putting too much pressure on yourself and you'll feel like you're going to explode.

Step off the hose.

Many years ago, I worked with one of the country's top female gymnasts.

Well, she was one of the top gymnasts until her senior year in high school. Her senior year started as a disaster. She was performing worse than she did her freshman year.

We finally figured out exactly what the problem was. Before each meet her senior year, her coach and parents would point out which college coaches were at the meet scouting her.

Her parents and her coaches created this “I have to win,” “I must win,” mindset. This was putting too much pressure on the gymnast. She felt she had to impress the college coaches so that they would offer her a scholarship. This is a losing mindset.

There’s a happy ending to this story. And here’s one of the stories that this gymnast told me help here get back to competing “like her old self.”

Once upon a time, there was a young wrestler who was a champion. However, during his senior year in high school everything changed. Wrestlers he used to beat easily were now beating him. Tournaments he used to win, he wasn’t even making it to the finals.

Needless to say, he was very upset. This was his senior year. Everyone thought this was his year to win the state championship. Everyone expected him to get a full scholarship to one of the big wrestling schools.

One day his coach gave him a phone number of a sport psychologist. He made an appointment.

At the first session, the wrestler told the sport psychologist all the pressure that he was under- wrestling, colleges, his parents, and his girlfriend.

The sport psychologist taught the wrestler a relaxation exercise. The wrestler did this exercise every single night. And he felt better almost instantly.

Within a week, he was his same old self again. Within two weeks, he was wrestling better than ever before.

His coach was amazed with this dramatic turn around. The coach wanted to know what happened.

“Well, I went to see that sport psychologist. He taught me a very simple relaxation technique that I do every night.”

“Can you tell me how do you do it?,” asked the coach.

“Sure,” said the wrestler, “Every night before I go to sleep, I sit in a chair and close my eyes for about 20 minutes and I repeat a phrase over and over again.”

“Would you be betraying any trust if you told me what the phrase was?,” asked the coach.

“No, not at all,” said the wrestler. “I just sit in a chair, relax, close my eyes and repeat to myself over and over again, “I don’t give a damn. I don’t give a damn. I don’t give a damn.”

It wasn't that the wrestler didn't give a damn about how he was wrestling. It was that he didn't give a damn about what everyone was going to think and what everyone was going to say about him.

Maybe you might even want to try this technique.

Here's how you can lessen the pressure on yourself right now . . .

RULE #1. Realize there are NO must-win games.

If you're dreading tomorrow, it's probably because you feel like you must win.

RULE #2. There are no have-to-win games.

When you feel you must win or you feel you have to win - you are weak. When you want to win- you are strong.

“Musts” and “have to’s” create stress.

“Want to’s” create energy!

When you feel you want to win, then you're in great shape psychologically! You're not putting too much pressure on yourself.

#2

HOW TO RELEASE YOUR EMERGENCY BRAKE

EMERGENCY BRAKE ON: FOCUS ON WINNING.

EMERGENCY BRAKE OFF: FOCUS ON GIVING A FULL EFFORT.

First of all, let's talk about focus.

Oprah once said, "Your focus is your future."

Almost every athlete focuses on the wrong thing- they focus on winning.

Let me see if I can get you to focus on the wrong thing . . .

RIDDLE: Anna's mother has three daughters. One is named Penny, another is named Nickel. What is the name of the third daughter?

Did you think the answer is Dime, Quarter, or Half-Dollar? That's because you are focusing on the wrong part of the riddle.

If you focus on the first two words of the riddle, "Anna's mother," you realize that the third daughter's name is Anna!

Most athletes do the same thing. They're focusing on the wrong thing. They're focused on winning.

This is a big mistake.

Why?

Because you don't have control over winning. You do have control over your effort.

Gandhi once said, "Full effort is full victory."

FOCUS ON EFFORT NOT OUTCOME!

Dr. Alan Goldberg is one of the very best sport psychologists in the country. In his talks and seminars, he tells the story of when he was a freshman at UMass/Amherst. He played #1 singles on the tennis team. At the end of the season, he was playing in the finals for the Yankee Conference championship. This is a big deal for a freshman.

Alan easily won the first set. He only needed to win one more set to become the Yankee Conference champion.

Between the first and second sets, the officials starting setting up for the awards presentation ceremonies. Alan saw the big, beauti-

ful stainless steel bowl that would go to the singles champion. He started thinking how cool it would be to bring that trophy back to his dorm.

All of a sudden, he started focusing more on the prize and less on the next point.

He started focusing more on the outcome and less on the effort.

Alan lost the next two sets.

The morale to this story is- you can't keep one eye on winning and the other eye on the ball. It won't work.

Let me give you another example. Suppose you're an actor and you have the lead in a Broadway show. It's opening night. All the critics are in the audience. As you're performing you start wondering what the critics are going to write about you in the papers.

The more you focus on how well the critics think you're performing- the poorer you'll perform.

You have no control over what the critics will write- you do have control over your own performance.

Keep your focus on your effort, not the outcome.

LET'S REVIEW:

In order to release your mental emergency brake, here's what you can do right now . . .

DO NOT feel that you have to win.

DO NOT feel that you must win.

DO FEEL that you want to win.

DO NOT focus on winning.

DO focus on giving a full effort.

3A Featured Quotes on Concentration and Focus

“We compete, not so much against an opponent, but against ourselves. The real test is this: Did I make my best effort on every play?”

-BUD WILKINSON, FORMER OKLAHOMA FOOTBALL COACH

“Focused action beats brilliance any day.”

-ART TUROCK, PROFESSIONAL SPEAKER

“The problem isn’t that you can’t focus. You’re always focusing. The problem is: are you focusing on the right thing?”

-ROB GILBERT, SPORTS PSYCHOLOGIST, AUTHOR AND SPEAKER

“I would tell our offense not to worry about winning or losing. Just take one play at a time. Focus on that one play, when it’s over—regardless of result—put in behind you and focus on the next one.”

-VINNY TESTAVERDE, FORMER NFL QUARTERBACK

“Learn from everyone you can and never cease trying to be the best you can. But don’t get caught up in the things you have no control over.”

-JOHN WOODEN

“I never hit a shot, even in practice, without having a very sharp, in focus picture of it in my head first.”

-JACK NICKLAUS, GOLF LEGEND

“I prayed before every game. I visualized making big plays. I try to dream about making them so they can become a reality. 9 times out of ten something good happened during a game.”

-LITO SHEPPARD, FORMER NFL ALL-PRO D-BACK

“Obstacles are the things you see when you take your eyes off the prize.”

-UNKNOWN
