



## Develop Your Mental Game

**A**s a business leader, how do you develop your mental game?

Consider today's outstanding athletes. Like outstanding business leaders and managers, they overcome obstacles, deal with set-backs, and persevere to reach their goals. After watching a match or two it's easy to take their impressive skills for granted. After all, they make it look so easy.

Then they make a clear mistake.

Such was the case for one such player in last year's US Open tennis championship: with a single swat, Novak Djokovic—the favorite to win—unintentionally hit a ball at a line judge, and was disqualified.

How can such a well-trained, highly-skilled, and disciplined leader make such a mistake?

He got caught in a momentary lapse of un-mindfulness, distracted and fueled by frustration. And it happens to the best of us. We lose our clarity and focus.

## Clarity and Focus

**C**larity is knowing exactly what you want to achieve as a leader: your vision. Focus is knowing and doing the actions required to get you there. Great leaders do the right thing, right now. How?

First, they develop a clear mental picture of their intention. Then, they make a conscious choice to commit to and pursue that intention. And last, but certainly not least, they develop strategies for protecting their intention against distracting feelings or emotions, like boredom and frustration.

Just like great athletes, great business leaders take purposeful action to preserve and strengthen their mental abilities. After all, leaders who work on their brain fitness are less prone to errors. They

### *A Message from Nancy...*

Let me ask you:

- Are the people on your team engaged and committed or just collecting a pay check?
- Do you have the right people in the right seats on the bus? Are *you* in the right seat?
- Is the high cost of turnover eating away your organization's bottom-line?
- Are your processes and procedures (or lack thereof) delivering productive and efficient results?
- How comfortable are the members of your senior team managing and leading others?



In today's highly competitive environment, it's no surprise that *"what got you here may not get you there."*

At **Proffitt Management Solutions** we are fully committed to providing a unique blend of team and individual development and executive coaching sessions where participants achieve more focus, a sense of purpose, and better results in their leadership roles.

Find out how services such as individual or team coaching and development, motivational and skills workshops, seminars may help you better answer those 5 questions and benefit you...

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understand that clarity and focus require three key areas of brain function:

- **Cognition:** Education and experience contribute to your cognitive abilities, so wise leaders engage in learning new skills which they practice to improve their processing speed (how quickly they can recall information, names, and memories). This allows them to make wise and timely decisions and responses, and, it also inhibits actions that could sabotage their best efforts, like hitting a ball at a line judge.
- **Emotion Management:** Learning how to self-regulate emotions, including stress and anger, is crucial for personal and professional success. You see, when an event or action is stored in our memory, the associated emotion is also stored. This unconscious emotional tagging process can influence our clarity, focus, and future decision making process.
- **Executive Judgment:** This operational part of the brain enables us to receive information, assess our feelings, identify and analyze pros and cons, formulate plans, and discern outcomes.

## Build Your Foundation

Wouldn't it be nice to have a true brain enhancement pill that could increase our health, wellness, and performance?

While research reveals that nootropics benefit cognition, learning, and mental clarity, they don't actually improve intellect or IQ. If you're not familiar with nootropics, they are a class of substances (natural or synthetic) comprised of vitamins, minerals, amino acids, fatty acids, antioxidants, and other herbal ingredients. Nootropics can have some effect on our memory, thinking, or other brain functions, but, more non-biased studies (non-brand or product related) must be conducted. In the meantime, we do know that diet, exercise, and meditation are key to higher brain function.

- **Diet:** in a perfect world, we'd get all the vitamins and minerals we need through a healthy diet of a wide-range of plants that fight inflammation. You see, science has linked many diseases, including those affecting our brain health-, with chronic inflammation. According to an article published by [Harvard Health Publishing](#) (November 2018), choosing the right anti-inflammatory foods reduces your risk of illness.

If you're looking to improve your mental game, consider the Mediterranean diet: it's high in

vegetables, fruits, nuts, whole grains, fish, and healthier oils. And of course, avoid processed foods, or those high in sugar. Researchers are finding greater evidence linking poor brain health to sugar. So while it might give your brain an initial surge, it's not the best tool. Instead, give yourself a boost with exercise.

- **Exercise:** exercise increases activity in parts of the brain that have to do with executive function. Not only that, exercise promotes the growth of new brain cells. The key is to push yourself (with approval from your health care professional): reach your target heart rate for a period of 20-minutes, totaling a minimum of 150 minutes/week.

Why? Aerobic exercises increases blood flow to the brain, reduces stress, and improves mood. And, if you are actually enjoying the activity, this only improves your outlook.

- **Meditation:** the beneficial effects of meditation for brain fitness are the result of changes in underlying brain processes. Through MRI (fcMRI) scanning, [researchers](#) with the National Institutes of Health found that Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), a form of meditation, alters intrinsic connectivity networks (ICNs).

MBSR is an attention-training technique that focuses on present moment internal and external experience. It includes breath awareness, body awareness (scanning), and attention to the impermanence of sensory experience. After eight weeks of MBSR training and practice, researchers identified changes in the subject's brains reflective of a more "consistent attentional focus, enhanced sensory processing, and reflective awareness of sensory experience."

## Beware of Distractions

Distraction has become an ongoing challenge for many leaders and managers. And it's not just our devices or technology, rather, it's often our emotions, or our responses to our emotions.

According to Nir Eyal, an expert on technology and psychology published by Harvard Business Review and author of [Indistractable: How to Control Your Attention and Choose Your Life](#) (BenBella Books, 2019), we need to recognize the difference between traction and distraction. Gaining traction requires purposeful action: channeling our energy and focus.

**Energy** is much more than effort. It is engagement in a meaningful activity, propelled by both internal and external resources. Purposeful action is self-driven behavior; it is self-generated and engaged to generate traction.

**Focus** is conscious, intentional and disciplined thought and behavior. You see, purposeful action requires discipline to resist distraction, overcome obstacles, and persevere in the face of setbacks. Our focus and energy might fall into one of four categories:

FOCUS	H i g h	The Detached	The Purposeful
	L o w	The Procrastinator	The Frenzied
		Low	High
		ENERGY	

- The Frenzied:** Are you highly energetic and enthusiastic about your work, yet distracted or overwhelmed by tasks? How do you feel about deadlines, demands, and the tyranny of the urgent? The need for speed may trigger you to act without hesitation, but you could achieve more if you consciously concentrate your efforts on what really matters.
- The Procrastinator:** Are you feeling low energy and focus? Insecurities and fear of failure may cause you to work on minor details, rather than tasks that could make a real difference for your organization.
- The Detached:** Are you focused, but without energy? What is the cause? You may be passing on apathy or disdain to your co-workers, sending mixed signals.
- The Purposeful:** Are you highly focused and energetic? You signal calm, reflective, and able to get the job done, even in chaos.

## Boost Your Mental Game

Answer these questions to boost your energy and hone your focus:

- Focus on one goal.** Without judgment or self-censoring, ask yourself:
  - What is the big picture?
  - What data, research, and strategies do I have and/or need for wise decisions about objectives and goals?
  - Is my goal well defined?
  - Where are the limits in my understanding?
  - How does the goal align with my values and those of my organization?

- How would I benefit from a mentor?
- Build confidence.** Consider past personal goals, and ask yourself:
    - What was my experience with achieving comparable goals? Is it repeatable?
    - Who is my role model? Can they help me understand what it takes?
    - Where can I go for feedback and evaluation?
    - How can I experiment, rehearse or practice critical tasks toward my goal?
  - Practice positivity.** Overcome negativity, and develop positive thoughts and feelings by asking yourself:
    - What are my patterns of feelings and experiences?
    - How are they related to my thoughts and behaviors about my goal?
    - Where do I find healthy outlets and support? (hobbies, sports, friends)
    - When do I experience fun or excitement?
    - What about my work creates enthusiasm?
    - Work aside, where do I draw strength? How do I gain balance?
  - Harness the power of visualization.** Visualize your goal, or objective, and ask yourself:
    - What does my objective look like? When I need to remember my objective, what simple image can I conjure?
    - What are the small steps I need to take to reach my goal?
  - Commit to your goal.** Make it personal, and ask yourself:
    - Does this goal feel right for me?
    - How much do I really want to achieve my goal?
    - What positive feelings are attached to this goal?
    - How does this goal align with my values and beliefs?

Boosting your mental game requires a clear mental picture of your goal or objective and a conscious choice to commit to and pursue your goal.



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