

# TRAINING FOR GREATNESS

By Cole H. Baker

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Tiger Woods knows it! Michael Jordan knows it! Pavarotti also knows it! Every professional who excels in his or her field knows it. They know that training is the basis of good performance, **but not the key to excellence.**

Training allows a person to make basket after basket or hole after hole, but there is something beyond skills that allows exceptional performance in the face of tension and anxiety. Something one experiences when fighting up from defeat or coming through when the chips are down. **It is the ability to remain fully committed, yet calm and rational during a crisis.** It is the mark of a true professional. It is the observable difference between a good athlete and a great athlete, between a good manager and a great manager, between a good sales person and a great salesperson.

What is this key to exceeding our own expectations and excelling in the performance of our jobs and our lives? Where does the something extra come from that creates the difference between good and great? It lies in the area of inner motivation. But where does that come from? How is it acquired? Can training make an excellent manager, sales person, mother, father, husband or wife?

As training professionals, our job is to provide the tools to improve performance. Our goal should be to provide the tools to achieve greatness, the ability to kindle the inner spark that allows the recovery of a lost sale, or to flourish after a negative change or a personal crisis. It is not only about providing skills, but also about generating a mindset that allows a **self-generated ignition of internal fire.**

Skills are the basis of performance, but skills alone tend to plateau. Operating at greatness knows almost no limits. To go beyond the bounds of skills training requires an inner **self-change that occurs in real time and opens the door to “greatness”.**

## THE TRUTH ABOUT TRAINING PROGRAMS

In constructing programs we are faced with the truth about training. Too many students leave training programs without having made significant gains. Even many of those who have made gains tend to regress quickly. This is especially true in the area of soft skills training. The reasons are well known, but usually are only given lip service.

**We can't teach anybody anything. Yes, they might choose to learn, but we can't teach them!** All we can do is present information so as to improve the probability that they will choose to learn. Learning depends primarily on the attitude of the student.

Students can be classified into one of three groups:

**PARTICIPANTS** - 10% are there to get value. “This is good stuff.”

**VACATIONERS** - 80% are mentally on vacation. “It beats working.”

**PRISONERS** - 10% are prisoners. “I have a lot of other things to do.”

**Participants gain the most, Vacationers some, and Prisoners little.** The first goal of a training program is to maximize the number of mental participants early in the training.

**As skills learned tend to fall into disuse over time, easily available recall triggers should be provided to refresh learning.**

**Since skills, which are rarely used, tend to dull and become non-available, learning should be made applicable to a broad range of situations to insure maximum use and therefore retention.**

**Even those skills that are retained tend to disappear when one is under extreme pressure and feeling stressed.**

Learning should be internalized rather than be just a memorized façade that often may be rendered ineffective by stress.

Those who are trained, experienced, and receive reinforcement training still seem to **plateau** at a given performance level and seldom move beyond it. This may be an attitude issue, a “burnout” issue or an ability issue. They may attend the latest training program with an attitude that says, **”I know what I’m doing - been there, done that”**. They may just not be able to move from the classroom to life. The training must be internalized if it is to have true impact.

### TRAINING FOR GREATNESS

The solution to training for greatness is the restructuring of the skills training program to **provide a level of personal “transformation”**. This is achieved by providing the students with an insight into their own personal motivators, hidden agendas, and weaknesses. This accomplished, students will gain “ownership” of the skills and more effectively incorporate them in their day-to-day life.

To be effective, the program must include significant insights, early in the training, that aid the students in choosing to become “participants”. This can be accomplished by making the student aware of the self-defeating nature of **negative “self-talk”**.

This can be viewed as being similar to eliminating a “computer virus” in one’s mental software by introducing a cleanup program. The result is a cleaner operation that no longer “locks up” in meaningless processing.

The strategy of transformation entails the creation of a ladder of knowledge, based on insightful, but fully practical skill steps that are designed to achieve a high level of performance. Through repeated use, the skills no longer need to be consciously called upon to be executed. They have become automatic. Finally, the steps in the ladder of knowledge, while important, become irrelevant to operating at this new higher level of performance. Once **having experienced this level of transformation, the student can operate with a new level of certainty**—it is the difference between understanding and the gaining of an insight.

In order to achieve the greatest impact and longevity, the program material should be structured so that the student’s experience is “out of the ordinary”. In addition a method of on-going reinforcement should be provided.

**Role-plays and exercises must be performed almost to excess.** This is to make the learning event more memorable and to reduce “fall back”. It could be viewed like the overstretching of a spring. When it is released it does not return to its previous length i.e. when the participants regress after the training, they will not regress as far. For example, a role-play can be structured so that one is dealing with the worst person ever conceived and the requirement is to bend over backwards to accommodate him or her. This all makes the program more entertaining and challenging.

In the follow-on discussion, it is then pointed out that the exercise was overdone for emphasis. The role-play is then redone in a more normal way to provide actual application insight. To insure on-going reinforcement, **the key training elements should include a recall trigger or talisman.**

A shortfall of most training programs is the practicing of skills only in exercises or role-plays. **Training for greatness requires that the key skills presented are used for all in and out of classroom activities** including lunch time and breaks. Additional impact will result if the skills are to be used at home.

Since skills tend to disappear when one is upset or stressed, it is critical to provide easy to learn and easy to use mental tools for quickly letting go of upsets. **A University of Chicago study calls this “Developing Psychological Hardiness”**. After learning to calm oneself, one learns to calm others. The final result is a practiced successful strategy of “calm me,” “calm them,” and “deal with the issue”.

Through the use of a number of structural and **content innovations, learning and retention can be increased, transformational insights created, and self-igniting performance achieved.**

This type of course yields significant improvements in after-training productivity and morale, while reducing stress and burnout. Participants can now achieve higher performance and more moments of “greatness”.

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The Compo Group, established in 1982, specializes in sales and customer relations training programs. Courses provided by The Compo Group are based on internal transformation rather than just skills development and been used by a number of the Fortune 500 companies.