

Mental hurdles must be overcome to succeed

I am fascinated by the factors that affect personal and professional performance, and am lucky enough to have a business that allows me to work daily in that area with smart businesspeople.

I got a very difficult, but invaluable lesson, in my mid-20s that forced me to learn more about the inner game. I suffered what would be described as a complete mental breakdown, where I literally could not function effectively. This was brought about by very high levels of sustained stress.

I fought back and made a decision that this extreme level of pain would never happen again. I became preoccupied with learning how to protect myself, and devoted myself to countless hours of reflection, study and practice.

In the process, I discovered that, in the same way there are healthy eating habits, there are also healthy mental habits. Yet, it took a breakdown to learn them.

The biggest lesson learned? Success in anything starts and ends in your mind. I made a lot of changes and gradually came back, but something strange had happened. I was better than before. My confidence was up, and so too was my clarity and my effectiveness. This translated into better performances in business and my life. I was dealing with challenging situations again, but now I could handle them.

When I stopped to analyse why I was better, I



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realised that, unknown to myself, my new mental habits had raised my level of performance. That was when I first realised that there are really two games in business and life – the inner and outer games.

The outer game is the one most people focus on – skills to succeed in your field. If it is business, that could be leadership skills, marketing skills, sales, financial, technical skills and so on. The inner game is what's going on in your head – that is, mental skills. You might have the skills to succeed in your business life, but if your head is saying something different, we know which one wins.

My own experience has shown that, if your head is not right, you are wasting your time working on the outer game. The inner game needs to be sorted first. Top sports people know this, so why should a professional-business person be any different? This insight has proven to be of immense value, not only to me but to others close to me.

As an adviser working

with business owners and chief executives, I get paid to help very smart people improve their clarity and focus, based on the lessons I learned. For me, it is like working with top athletes helping them achieve their version of a 'gold medal'. In September 2008, the world felt a seismic economic shock. Yet something else also happened.

The number one agenda item in all of my meetings with business leaders changed. Suddenly, they all wanted to talk more about the inner game – and this trend has continued.

The future of business is mental. We are in the middle of a complete mind shift, where we will really need to understand how to use our most valuable asset. For Irish businesses in the months ahead, it will be a 'tale of two cities'. Some businesses will continue to thrive and others will falter. There are many companies out there doing very well. Yet, you could be conned into thinking there are no opportunities.

I believe there possibly has never been more opportunity. Irish people are more resilient than we give ourselves credit for, so despite the global outlook I have high expectations for new and existing business in 2013.

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