

Dare to be the best

Looking into the future

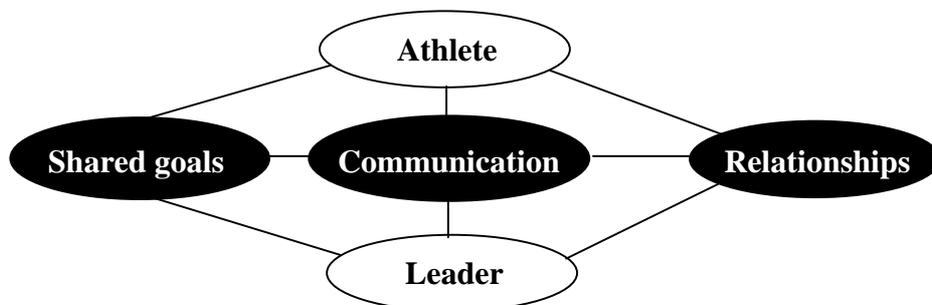
The dream of winning a major championship motivates many of us. To be a winner you need to be able to see into the future, and the only thing we can know about the future is that it is not going to be like today. Things that are true today do not need to be the same tomorrow, totally the opposite in fact. The only thing we know with any certainty is that there will be change. As an elite athlete you have to be ready for that change.

Daring to be different

A winner can be different. Perhaps you could even say that a winner must be an original thinker. Winners do not copy their rivals. They find their own way to success. A winner dares to think differently. There are many examples of new ways of thinking and creativity in elite sport. Björn Borg's double-handed grip in tennis, the Fosberry flop technique in high jumping, or Graeme Obree's extreme "superman" aerodynamic position in cycling are examples of how a winner thinks differently and looks beyond accepted wisdom.

A winner also knows that common goals, shared with leaders or coaches, release the energy needed to focus on hard work. If both the leader or coach and the athlete have shared goals it is easier to understand each other and this can help build a good relationship between leader and athlete. If goals are not shared it is much harder to understand each other, which can lead to a poor relationship between the athlete and leader. We should remember this when trying to help an athlete release the energy needed to strive to do their best. This is especially true when we face setbacks and when things are not working out as planned.

Release the energy needed to be a winner



Relationships are the basis of success

If a good relationship has been built up between an athlete and leader it is much easier to communicate with each other and also to solve any problems that arise. It is

therefore essential that relationships between athlete and leader be based on honesty, trust, security, fun, and camaraderie. These factors are extremely important for elite athletes if they are to achieve their goals. Many coaches, leaders and athletes, believe that this kind of teamwork helps the athlete to perform optimally. So we need to place a lot of emphasis on the social competence of leaders if we want to help and support elite athletes towards successful performances. By social competence we mean the ability to create enthusiasm in a group, to inspire, to care, to be honest and fair and to be a role model – to practice what we preach.

A winner:

- Has the ability to think in new ways
- Knows when to compromise and when something is worth fighting for
- Understands the need to experience something for real in order to master it
- Thinks in the present
- Sees possibilities
- Has self-confidence
- Knows that success breeds success.
- Knows that you can succeed if you want to
- Knows that good team spirit creates a winning attitude
- Knows that shared goals release the energy needed for hard work
- Sees the struggle as a challenge
- Has greater inner motivation than external motivation
- Knows that you need to give everything all the way to the finish line
- Works harder than a loser
- Always takes full responsibility for his or her performance
- Has fun
- Is modest
- Loves to compete

Top performance

On the top of the podium, a medal round your neck, head held high, looking at the Union Jack, tears in your eyes, a lump in your throat.

The feeling of standing on the podium, the feeling of singing the national anthem is something all elite athletes long for. The dream of success in the sports arena both culminates and ends as the flag is hoisted to the top of the pole. This intensive moment of extreme happiness is so very short. The national anthem lasts perhaps half a minute. If you are lucky they might play the second verse and your moment of glory will last a little longer.

This sort of success does not come by chance. Those who succeed have many things in common. Years of hard work, training and more training have eventually given results. Training weekends, camps abroad, endless sessions at home and careful preparation have resulted in the success that they longed for.

Even if physical form, which is essential to many sports, is at a peak before the competition it does not always bring an optimal performance. Many international

successes by elite athletes can be explained in other ways. Enthusiasm, self-confidence, attitude, mental strength, a winning instinct, the capacity to prepare thoroughly, the capacity to give everything in the race and to take responsibility for your own performance are some of the factors which have by far the greatest effect on your result.

Producing a great performance involves much more than the last few weeks before the championship. Top performance begins at the point where you decide that you will be the best at one special, chosen time. Getting to that day and achieving that successful performance requires a strategy that takes you there.

Strategic thinking

- **The competition, for example BOC or WOC, will dictate the content of my plan.**
- **Every training session will have relevance and meaning for that competition.**

If I want to succeed at a championship, how will my training look – technical, tactical, physical, mental – after my decision to achieve a certain result at a competition in the future? How can I work or study? How can I strike a good social balance with family and friends? What support can I get from my club or region? I must start by taking stock of my current situation in its entirety and then draw up a strategy to achieve my goals. I need a plan.

If you want to peak at a chosen point in the future, you could have a plan based on the following factors:

My surroundings

Which factors are going to influence me? Development of physical, mental, technical and social competence happens simultaneously.

The competition

What can I expect? An analysis of the demands I am likely to face in the race.

Me

Where do I stand? An analysis of my strengths and weaknesses.

Training

How can I keep my goal alive during my training? Competition-like model training.

Strategy

How can I achieve my goal? Build up my own model, which fits into my live and suits my personality, but can also be changed and developed with time.

My preparation for a top performance begins when I have decided on my goal. The process of preparation can be split into four periods:

- A long time before the competition: 1-4 years before the race.
- Before the competition: 4-10 weeks before the race.
- Shortly before the competition: the last weeks before the race.

- Just before the competition: the last day before the race.
- During the competition: actually competing in the race.
- Between competitions: often the competition will consist of several races, for example a championship with qualification and final races.
- After the competition: immediately after the race.



A long time before the competition

This is when I lay the groundwork for my strategy. I decide that this really is what I want to do. I change my goals from something verbal and external into a desire deep inside my heart. I try to create an all-encompassing vision that sets all the jigsaw pieces in place. Work, studies, family, friends, club, coach, leaders will all contribute to my struggle to achieve my goal. I get acceptance from my surroundings and I can focus on the coming championship. From now on my strategy is internal and my drive comes from inside me.

The desire to win is not as important as the desire to prepare yourself to want to win. Preparation for the championship begins right now with, for example, gathering information about things like the terrain, technical and physical requirements, course setter, the mapper and other important facts.

I make a list of everything that is new or can affect my performance capability. I look for things and ideas that I can introduce into my everyday training as model training.

A lot of my preparation involves informing myself about what is coming, and accepting this as something positive for my preparations to achieve the planned result. When I have realised and accepted what I have to do to reach my goals I “just” need to develop or change my training to reflect this. It is at this stage that I build on my strategy and try to create thoughts and images that influence my capability to perform, through belief in the route I have chosen to achieve my goals.

I will attend training camps and competitions near the championships area so that I can get to know the competition and accommodation environment. This gives me experiences, images and feelings that both strengthen my goal and make it more alive. It is also important that I compete in major fixtures where I can test my capacity fully. These competitions are model competitions: They are a testing ground where I can prepare for the race or carry out, evaluate and improve different models for the essential ingredients in my training.

Before the competition

It is now that I move away from basic training and start to prepare myself before the peaking process in the last few weeks. This part of my training contains more or less only specific sport-related training. The technical and physical parts of my performance need to become internal and automatic here. Then I can work more with mental preparation, thinking about situations I might face in the competitions. Those might be extremely warm weather, very heavy rain, meeting the race favourite in qualification, a bad course, or an unfavourable start position. I go through every distraction that I could face and mentally turn each one into something positive. I also need to think about social aspects at this stage, for example flexible working times, leave from work or studies, support from my family or club.

Shortly before the competition

The competition is getting closed and my preparations become more focused. My lifestyle is organised very carefully. Training and my attitude to performance have a very high priority now. Quality sessions, diet, rest and sleep are important factors in staying illness free. I concentrate more and more on how things are going to be when I am competing. The vision is becoming clearer and clearer and I begin to long for that perform-when-it-counts atmosphere. During this time I try to only think positive thoughts: “Eor-ism” and “can’t” has no place in my thoughts. It is important to only look for possibilities now. It is also important that I am able to carry out what I want to do. It is therefore important that leaders understand that each person must be treated a little more individually now than earlier. My physical and mental fine-tuning process has begun.

Just before the competition

Just one day left. I know the conditions for tomorrow’s competition now. It is time to set my pre-race routine into action and begin to psych up for the competition. Some of the questions I now need to address are: What is my last training session going to be? When am I going to eat? Am I going to jog in the morning? When should I start to warm up? Which coaches are going to be at the start? When am I starting? Is there anything new that has come up at the last minute?

In my concentration I can see myself execute a perfect race, I have flow, I think positively, I am strong, I can, I want to, I dare to and I think this is great fun. My opponents are there, but this is my competition and I am totally dependant on my own efforts and my own will power. It is me who has total responsibility for my performance.

During the competition

I stand on the start line and it is now that I will perform optimally and give my absolute best. At BOC, WOC or a World Cup many things surrounding the competition are different but actually competing, carrying out my race, is very like a normal competition. My technique, my speed and my thoughts are totally concentrated on the task I will carry out. My technique is automatic, sitting deep in my reflexes, while my concentration and motivation are totally focused on the task. I only think about the present and the future. I dare to be a winner!

Between competitions

Total exhaustion – you gave everything. Enjoy the sweet taste of victory. Relaxation and recovery. Time to charge the batteries again. The medal can sit on the side. I can read the newspapers when I come home. What is my next task? Is there something I can learn and take with me from the previous race. Any changes to the conditions? Back into my own routine.

After the competition

One of the most important parts of a top performance is to evaluate the result. Why did it go the way it did? Success or failure? Analyse how successful I was – write down and improve the things that went well, note and change the things that went less well. How can I develop in the future before the next exciting competition?

Keywords for athletes

The following keywords and phrases are a summary of interviews with athletes in different sports:

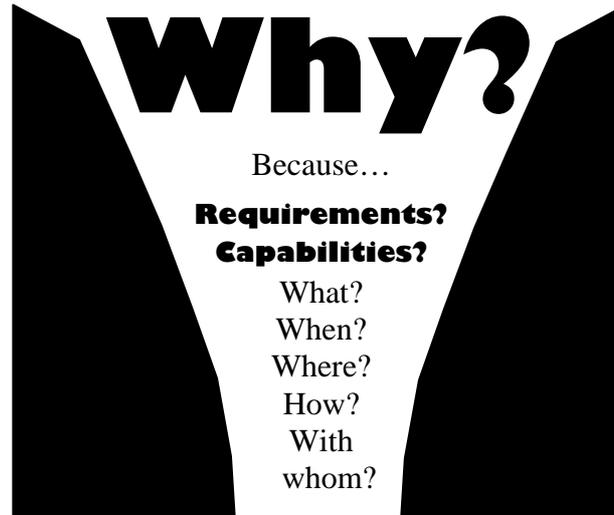
- Enthusiasm and commitment
- Think about the whole picture
- Planning in advance
- Take responsibility
- 24-hour athlete
- Performance focused
- Personal routines
- Performance analysis
- Attitude

Commitment

Elite sport today is exceptionally demanding. If you want to succeed nationally, you need to understand that you are really competing at an international level. You need to prioritise what is more and less important. You have to “choose sides.” Do I really want to be British Champion or get a place in the national team, and sometime in the future perhaps even be a world champion? What consequences will that have for the rest of my life? Or, if I become world champion, what happens then? What does that mean for me – socially, for my work and my finances?

Those elite athletes who can easily and quickly answer the question: *Why elite sport?* find it much easier to set goals and plan their way to achieving their goals. The content of their training is very clear for them. Being able to answer that question creates determination in an athlete. The vision of standing on the top of the podium releases the energy that is needed to train every day, year after year for 15-20 years.

The figure below illustrates how much time you need to spend answering each question for yourself:



The distance between the two dark areas symbolises how long each question needs to be considered. The more time you spend answering the big question *Why?* the easier it is to answer the easy questions later. *What sort of training shall I do? When should I train? Where should I train? How should I train? Who can help and support me?*

It is in my answer to the big question *Why?* that I create the passion to compete and develop the will to win. Passion, the spark inside, is the lynch pin in the process of achieving success. Terry Orlick, a sports psychologist from Canada, states clearly that passion and commitment, together with strong self-confidence are the building blocks of success. By commitment we mean a strong desire to achieve a goal - the athlete must be determined and have a positive attitude to the work to be carried out. The athlete works with her heart and has a strong inner motivation.

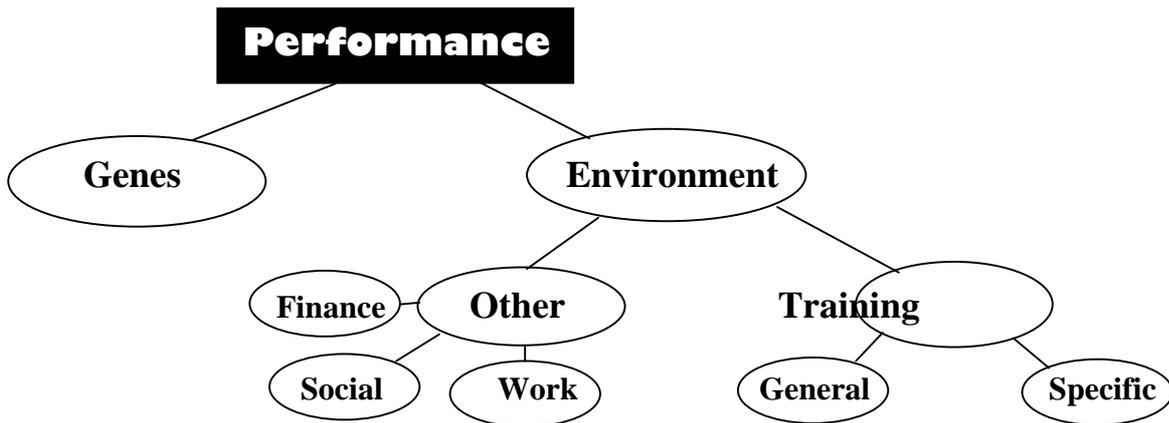
One way to strengthen and increase your commitment is to work with vision and goal setting. Commitment is also related to the level and importance of a particular competition. The more challenging a goal is, the more commitment is required. Commitment is often about the will to prioritise more and train harder, longer and more often.

I need to analyse orienteering, its demands and my own capabilities. What is orienteering like today, and how might it be in the future? What should I be prepared for? What is required of me as a future orienteering champion? What capabilities do I have now? When these questions are answered it is relatively easy to build a personal training program that is effective, varied and balanced.

A committed sports person is curious. He or she looks for new ways to approach a task, listens to coaches and other competitors, discusses and questions different solutions. She remembers the gems that others come up with and then creates her own approach to the task, in a way that suits her own personality. A committed sports person thinks that an important competition is a challenge, which she enters into with enthusiasm. A committed sports person loves her sport and, loves to compete and loves to test her capacity to perform. A committed sports person has strong will power, believes in herself, is positive and always takes the initiative in her actions. A committed sports person is a winner.

Thinking about the whole picture

What is it that makes a winner different from a loser? Apart from the earlier list of qualities that make up a winner, “a winner...” it is also likely that a winner is willing to make elite sport a central part of their life. Many athletes who have succeeded have had the ability to look both at small details, but also the whole picture. By looking at their sporting life from both perspectives, it is probably much easier for them to get structure both in their training and in life outside sport.



In order to perform optimally and achieve success you need to consider all the factors that can affect you and your progress towards your goals. You cannot change your inherited talent, but you can influence, change or develop many of the factors in your environment.

Areas which do not come under training but are more to do with health, family, work, studies, leisure or finance have a lot of influence on the whole for elite sportspeople. Most athletes who have stood on the podium at WOC or world cup have thought through these things very carefully. Before an elite athlete spends time planning the details of her training programme, That your partner accepts her commitment to elite sport, that your employer understands and supports your commitment, and that you are clear in your own mind that this is what you have chosen to do are some of the areas an athlete should think about before you start spending time planning the details of your training programme. Feeling good, being free from injuries and being in harmony with yourself and your surroundings creates a solid platform for winning performances.

When the big picture is solved, it is time to further with a detailed plan for general and specific training. What type of general training can I carry out? What other sports apart from my own can raise or complement my physical, mental and technical capabilities? Which specific training methods will I use to be a better competitor in my own event?

By analysing your own sport in detail, listening to other people, thinking about your sport's future requirement and possibilities it becomes much easier to answer questions such as when, where, how and with whose help you should train. Getting down to this detailed level of planning helps you to get the most out of your training.

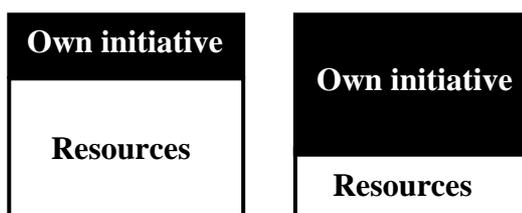
Long-term planning

A successful elite athlete makes an early mental decision – 1-4 years before the event. Peaking for a championship begins when you have decided to focus on that event. An early decision is important so that you can make a strategic plan that leads to the event. The chosen event therefore steers the content of your training. Things that are relevant to the event, physically, mentally, technically and tactically, dictate what sort of training you should do. At training camps, both at home and abroad, competition-like training should be a key component.

That which you expect to experience during the competition should also have been experienced in your training. For that reason, competition-like training should also be a regular and important part of your everyday training. When we talk about competition-like training it is important to remember that both physical and mental aspects are included in the idea. In summary we can say that every training session has significance for the approaching competition. The nearer the competition comes, the more competition-like training should be included in the elite athlete's preparations.

Initiative and responsibility

Far too many less successful elite athletes believe that resources, in the form of sponsors, coaches, training facilities, equipment or money are the limiting and decisive factors. Success is no coincidence for those who believe that their own initiative is worth much more than resources. Successful athletes take responsibility for their own performance. When things do not go so well in a competition, they look to themselves for the reasons and things they did wrong, not at their resources. Complaining about external factors is an escape from reality and creates excuses that do not help the athlete forwards.



Many believe that the figure on the left shows the right relationship between resources and initiative. The one on the right is of course much more likely to lead to success.

A lot of this reasoning stems from the fact that when the athlete is actually standing on the start line, it is only her who can influence her performance. It is me, just me, who can run a good race. Coaches and leaders can really only support and help me before the start and after I have arrived in the finish field. During the race it is me, and my thoughts which steer my body towards an optimal performance. It is my responsibility, no anyone else's, to succeed.

24-hour athlete

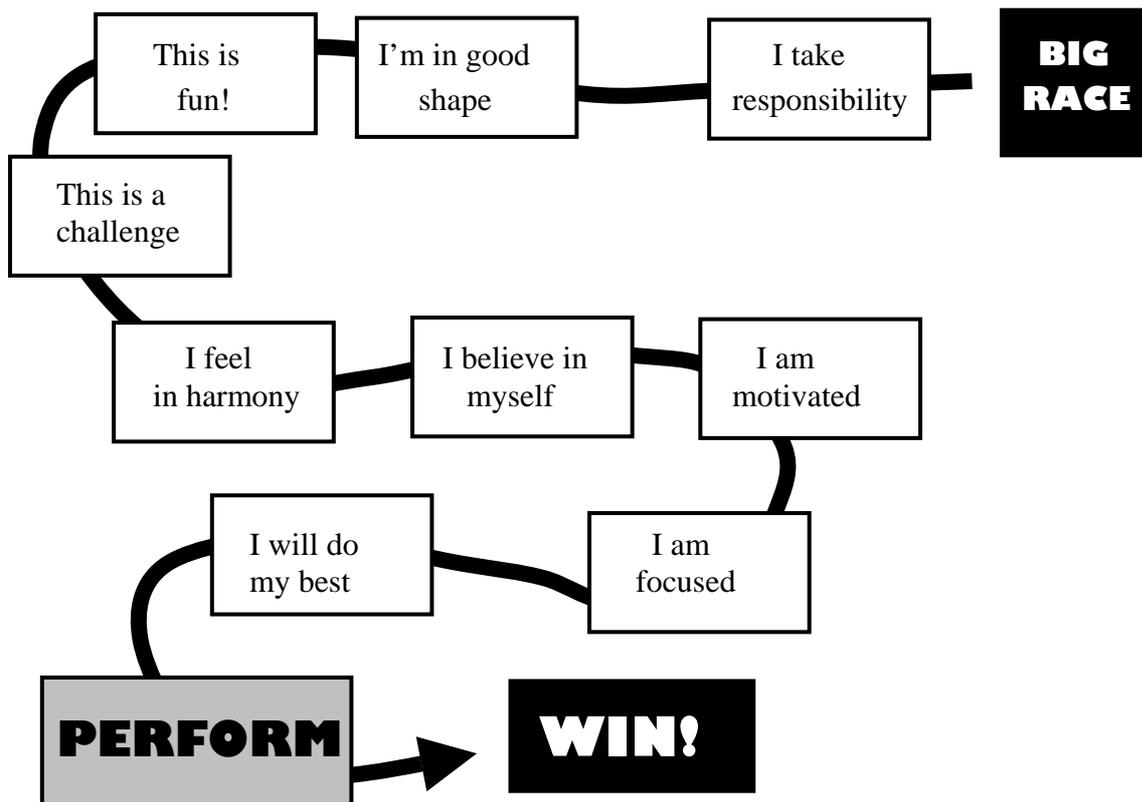
An elite athlete, in this case a winner, is systematic in almost everything. When she has decided something, she does it. A winner has the ability to put turn thoughts into

actions, or plans into reality. A winner can also use her time more effectively than others. She is effective and has very little “energy leakage”, which means that she focuses on the things are best done right now. In her life, she strives to give 100 percent the whole time.

By this we mean that when you are training or competing, you give it 100 percent. All your thoughts are focused on sport, it is here and now that matters. What happened at work, or what is happening at home with the family are of no interest just now. When you are work, you are a 100 percent worker, and when you are at home, you are a 100 percent family member. If your thoughts leave what you are doing now, your focus and concentration on the task will also be less. A winner is focused on the moment, therefore he or she gives 100 percent to everything he or she does. Whether it is sport, work, family, leisure or partying there is only one thing that is important for a winner: Giving 100 percent!

Performance focused

Everyone wants to win the competition. Victory is a signal that you have performed extremely well and that you were best when it counted. On the other hand, you could also produce an optimal performance near your maximum capacity but still not win the competition. You are still a winner in that you have given the best you can. “Spiking” all the controls as quickly as possible in a championship is a “victory” that we should all strive towards. As a runner, the important thing to remember is that I can influence myself a great deal, my opponents very little. In my vision and goal, which perhaps functions more as a source of inspiration for my performance, I stand on the top of the podium. But before and during the competition I am totally focused on doing my best with every stride, every route choice, every control. Thoughts only exist in the present, not in the past or the future – only right now. The only thing I can influence is the present, and I am going to do that to the best of my ability. A winner is performance focused. The diagram below shows how a winning elite athlete thinks before an important competition.



Personal routines

Everyone is unique. We all have different requirements for support. Everyone wants to do things in their own way. Many believe that it is important that a leader knows how each athlete reacts at the big race. Athletes have their own rituals before championships which can often seem totally absurd to the uninitiated, but can be crucial for the runner to get herself into the right frame of mind. A winner has the right to be different or unique in a winning environment.

Performance analysis

- What went well?
- What can I do better?
- When, where, how? With whom?

A winner analyses these things that went well during the competition. The analysis of what went well is strengthened and stored in her reflexes for competitions in the future. Things that went less well are dealt with through positive ideas to make them better. A winner analyses her successes because she knows that success breeds success. Analysing mistakes in detail does not make a winner. Think how much time we spend talking about mistakes we made out on the course.

Attitude

How you approach the task, or your attitude, is decisive for success. You can never change badly planned courses, cold and rainy weather, early start times, steep terrain, thick green areas, a bad map and so on, but you can change your attitude to the circumstances. If you compete in other countries, you cannot count on the conditions being the same as home, but you can learn to accept and like the situation and even see it as an advantage for yourself.

The importance of attitude has been expressed in the following way:

On a scale of 1-5, very weak to very strong, we rate *natural talent*, *current capacity* and *attitude*. These factors combine to create the final result, *performance*.

$$(Natural\ talent + Current\ ability) \times Attitude = PERFORMANCE$$

In the first example we have a person with normal natural talent, who is very skilled in their area, but a weak attitude towards the task. In the second example, the person has normal natural talent, normal ability, but a very strong attitude to tackling the task.

$$Example\ 1: (3 + 4) \times 2 = 14$$

$$Example\ 2: (3 + 3) \times 5 = 30$$

With these examples we can illustrate that the elite sportspersons attitude is one of the most important factors in achieving success.

Because thought steers a person's actions, perhaps the extract below can help us to think in a new way:

Attitude

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts.

It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company ... a church ... a home.

The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude.

I am convinced that life is 10 percent what happens to me, and 90 percent how I react to it. And so it is with you - we are in charge of our Attitudes.

Attitude, Charles Swindoll