

7 Qualities That Define Athletic Success

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Courtesy of [Dr. Peter Thompson](#)

There is nothing quite like experiencing, or witnessing, moments of outstanding achievement, much like we are seeing this week at the high school and NCAA levels. This excitement and satisfaction is particularly meaningful, and more satisfying when significant obstacles have been overcome on the journey. So, what accounts for these performance successes? According to Sport Psychologist Dan Gould, there are 7 qualities that define athletic success.

- **Ability to cope with adversity**
- **Confidence**
- **Resiliency**
- **Focus on the task**
- **Sport IQ**
- **A sense of hope**
- **Positive expectations/optimism**

Ok, so now we know what they are. That's a start. Now for the bigger question; How do we manifest them? How do we find within ourselves the inherent ability to overcome adversity, manifest resilience, have laser focus on the moment, etc...It can be a tall task, particularly when the stakes are high.

1. Go beyond performance strategies

Mental performance strategies that include methods for managing emotional energy, coping with adversity, regulating positive self-talk, and maximizing potential – All good things to know and do!!!! – have proven to be very effective. That's why we have so many performance coaches (like me!). However, *their efficacy depends on your starting point, and your starting point depends upon how you view your world* and how this view has been shaped in relationship to your personality.

2. Be open to having other folks support your personal and athletic development.

If I asked you to think back on a time when someone (parent, coach, teacher) made a significant positive impact on your life chances are they did so by focusing on you as a person first, and a performer second. In other words, they were interested in your *development*. *In some small or large way they were calling on you to learn and grow* and you were challenged and supported to make this journey. Perhaps this challenge and support was encouraged by a rich tradition of excellence, a positive team culture, and lots of social support. On some level, the atmosphere

was one in which you not only came to expect success but enabled yourself to go beyond perceived limitations.

3. Have the courage to “fail”...expand your horizons and dare to fail again. Look at the experience honestly. Learn from it. Move forward.

All of your experiences and your interpretations of them are ways in which you have learned to construct meaning...about yourself, your team, community, and environment. When circumstances are ideal our interpretations tend to be more positive. That's easy. When these circumstances are not ideal (sometimes they just aren't) we tend to make different meanings, and these meanings matter! A lot! Why? *Because the meaning we make about ourselves, and our circumstance, is our starting point for every performance strategy that we employ.*

The more positive the meaning-making, the more effective the strategy will be. So, how do you interpret challenges and obstacles?

You might start by asking yourself the following questions so you can determine where to begin:

- **Is it more important for me to look good, or to challenge myself to be great?**
- **How much is fear, self-doubt, and mental distraction holding me back?**
- **To what degree do I associate failure with missing a time cut or not making finals or coming in second?**
- **Where do I find myself being cautious about going for what I want? (what's holding me back?)**
- **Are my “shoulds” getting in the way of my “wants?”**

Look honestly. Seek support. Know that your answers (and courageousness) are already inside of you. Good luck and please let me know how it goes.

About [Dr. Peter Thompson](#)

[Dr. Peter Thompson](#) was an elite level swimming coach for over 30 years. He currently maintains a private High Performance and Personal Development coaching practice in Rochester, NY, teaches, and consults with a local collegiate athletic department. Dr. Pete is available for one-on-one, small group, and team workshops via phone, skype, and in person. www.ThompsonCoachingGroup.com; DrPete@ThompsonCoachingGroup.com