



NOTES

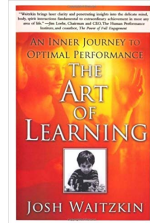
The Art Of Learning

AN INNER JOURNEY TO OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE

JOSH WAITZKIN

FREE PRESS: JOSH WAITZKIN LLC © 2007

265PAGES



KEY POINTS

Presence:

Are you here? Now?

Growth Requires a Challenge!

Antifragile:

Beyond Resilience

Injury =

Opportunity

Your Beliefs about YOUR BODY.

Discover Yourself

Through Learning.

This is one of the best books I have ever read! It's a reminder to all of us that we can learn, grow and develop our skills at any age. It is my hope that you will take some ideas from this book and fall in love with the process of learning, especially the process of learning about your body and how you can help your body recover and learn from pain. Optimizing performance can help develop progress with regard to pain. To do this we must engage in new behaviours. Learning and growing can help us to discover parts of ourselves that we didn't know existed. To grow we must first learn how to learn. Learning how to move better and optimize my skills is what I do and help others to do. I want to learn how to become a very effective and efficient learner and mover. Enter 'The Art Of Learning'.

Josh Waitzkin has written an incredible book. The Art of Learning is a very personal journey of self-discovery. It is clear that Josh understands himself and his desires in more depth than most people on the planet. He has dug down deep to pull out his process for learning and becoming highly skilled at two very different modalities: Chess and Tai Chi Push Hands. Josh unpacks the processes and skills he developed to become world class and embody skill at a very high level.

In this note I'm going to pull out some of his ideas that can help us become more skilled learners, movers and more skilled with our pain.

Presence

"I have always visualized two lines moving parallel to one another in space. One line is time, the other is our perception of the moment. I showed my students these lines with my hands, moving through the air. When we are present to what is, we are right up with the expansion of time, but when we make a mistake and get frozen in what was, a layer of detachment builds. Time goes on and we stop. Suddenly we are living, playing chess, crossing the street with our eyes closed in memory"

Josh Waitzkin from 'The Art of Learning'.

This quote really struck me. We are either present to what is or we are not! We either stay focused on the task or we don't. We are either stuck in our head ruminating about our pain or we are focusing on learning from the pain experience. We are either here NOW or we are off somewhere else, in the past or in the future. Sometimes that's fine, for example when planning or visualising what we want to happen in the future. But in the moment of performance we need to be present.

“One idea I taught was the importance of regaining presence and clarity of mind after making a serious error. This is a hard lesson for all competitors and performers.”

When we are perturbed or make a mistake how can we ensure that we keep up with time and stay present? This is a really big question! I love watching professional surfing. It’s a sport where presence really matters. Many of the surfers are incredibly talented but it’s the surfers who have mental fortitude and an intense but relaxed presence in the most critical moments who consistently win. When you feel challenged or have made a mistake can you stay in the moment or do you get caught up in an old story in your head?

“As this book evolves, I will gradually lay out my current methodology for triggering such states of creative flow. Eventually, by systematically training oneself, a competitor can learn how to do this at will”

How do master surfers trigger states of creative flow? How can we stay present when interacting with others and engaging in challenging tasks? How can we master this creative flow? Let’s dive in and find out.

There is No Growth Without Challenge

“In performance training, first we learn to flow with whatever comes. Then we learn to use whatever comes to our advantage. Finally, we learn to be completely self-sufficient and create our own earthquakes, so our mental process feeds itself explosive inspirations without the need for outside stimulus.”

I love this quote. Learning involves a series of performance levels. First we are amateurs and must learn the basics. With proficiency we learn to improve through distraction. Finally we master the process and create challenges of our own to inspire continued growth. Let’s dig into this a little deeper.

“First we learn to flow with whatever comes” What ever is happening is happening; we can either fight against it, or welcome it. We can know that what is happening is not our ideal but when we resist what is happening we only make life more challenging. What is happening in your life that you are fighting against? What do you need to accept and move through rather than constantly fight against?

“Then we learn to use whatever comes to our advantage” How can you use what is happening in your life to your advantage? Are you in pain? How can you turn your pain into an opportunity for learning? None of us want to be in pain but that doesn’t mean it can’t become a very inspiring part of your journey.

“Finally, we learn to be completely self-sufficient and create our own

earthquakes, so our mental process feeds itself explosive inspirations without the need for outside stimulus”. With a sense of mastery we have such intense trust and confidence in ourselves that we create challenges and undesirable situations simply so we can practice growing through the challenge.

Don't avoid discomfort; understand that failure is a learning opportunity. See your discomfort and pain as an opportunity to learn.

And on that note what hinderances are you bringing to your learning process? If you are learning how to get out of pain or recover from an injury what are you bringing to the experience that may hinder your learning and recovery? Any beliefs lurking that may inhibit your recovery? Do you believe you can get better?

“First we learn to flow with distraction, like a blade of grass bending to the wind. Then we learn to use distraction, inspiring ourselves with what initially would have thrown us off our games. Finally we learn to re-create the inspiring settings internally.”

What phase of learning are you currently experiencing? What's the number one thing you could start doing that would help you get to the next phase?

And to finish off this idea here is the third quote from the book that covers it.

“In the chapter The Soft Zone, I mentioned that there are three critical steps to a resilient performer's evolving relationship to chaotic situations. First, we have to learn to be at peace with imperfection....Next, in our performance training we learn to use that imperfection to our advantage...The third step of this process, as it pertains to performance psychology, is to learn to create ripples in our consciousness, little jolts that spur us along, so we are constantly inspired whether or not external conditions are inspiring.”

What challenges do you currently have? How can you use them to fuel your growth?

Antifragility

“My whole life I have worked on this issue. Mental resilience is arguably the most critical trait of a world-class performer, and it should be nurtured continuously. Left to my own devices, I am always looking for ways to become more and more psychologically impregnable. When uncomfortable, my instinct is not to avoid the discomfort but to become at peace with it. When injured, which happens frequently in the life of a martial artist, I try to avoid painkillers and to change the sensation of pain into a feeling that is not necessarily negative. My instinct is always to seek out challenges as opposed to avoiding them.”

What Josh is describing here is the complete opposite of ‘pain catastrophizing’ and fragility. In this quote Josh shows us his deep level of antifragility. He is not dwelling for a moment on his painful injuries he transmutes them into non-negative experience. Beth Darnall is currently leading research at Stanford University regarding chronic pain. One of her and her teams’ discoveries is that ‘pain catastrophizing’ is one of the most significant factors that worsens pain and can turn pain into a chronic ailment. Pain catastrophizing can increase pain intensity, increase distress, increase muscle and joint tenderness and induce poor responses to treatments. When in pain is it vital that we take the opposite approach, which is what Josh does. He says “I try to avoid painkillers and to change the sensation of pain into a feeling that is not necessarily negative”. He is using his pain as an opportunity to learn. When he says, “When uncomfortable, my instinct is not to avoid the discomfort but to become at peace with it” he is showing us his masterfulness of directing anything that happens to him into an opportunity to make him stronger. He is antifragile seeking out experiences that will challenge him and help him to grow. Instead of wanting your discomfort to go away how can you use it as fuel for your fire? How can you move forward despite your challenges? Can you reframe your experience of pain or discomfort? Of course no one wants to be in pain but reframing it as an opportunity to learn instead of it being something evil than needs to go away can really help us move forward with life.

Injury = Opportunity

In the book Josh also tells us the story of how he broke his hand seven weeks before the National Tai Chi Push Hands Championships. The doctor said there was no way he could compete. His break would heal in 6 weeks but then his arm would be so weak there would be no way that Josh could be ready. What would you do? Pull out, let your break heal and try again at the champs next year?

Josh was back training the day after he got his cast on! He focused on getting better at using his left hand (it was his right hand that he had broken and he is right handed). Josh protected his right hand and was thoughtful about his training to ensure he was healing and not putting himself in a position to re injure. He incrementally increased the challenge.

“Since I had broken my right hand, I was forced to cultivate my weaker side. I quickly realized that there were certain martial movements that I relied on my strong hand to cover, and now my left hand had to catch up so it could do everything”

The break to Josh’s right hand was an opportunity for his left hand to catch up and be as good if not better than his right hand.

“That said, it was fascinating to see how my body reacted. My left arm instinctively became like two arms, with my elbow neutralizing my opponent’s right hand and my hand controlling his left arm. I had no idea the body could work this way, and after a few days of training, the notion that I was playing at a disadvantage faded. I felt completely comfortable with one hand against two, so long as I was a bit more skilled than my partner”

Through his injury Josh learned that he could use his body in new ways. His elbow became like a second arm. He could use his left arm like it was two arms. And mentally he felt completely comfortable using only one arm. Imagine that, imagine feeling like you could perform really well with just one hand. Imagine what Josh is going to feel like when he is recovered from the injury and can use both hands. He is going to feel invincible.

And on that note what can you discover about your body as you move through pain or injury? What can parts of your body do when given the opportunity? Remember an injury is an opportunity! Are you using yours as one?

What Do You Believe About Your Body?

“There was also an intriguing physical component of my recovery. I wanted to compete in the Nationals; so bizarre though it may sound I resolved not to atrophy. At this point in my life I was very involved in the subtle internal dynamics of the body through Tai Chi meditation. I had an idea that might be able to keep my body strong by intense visualization practice. My method was as follows: I did a daily resistance workout routine on my left side, and after every set I visualized the workout passing to the muscle on the right. My arm was in a cast, so there was no actual motion possible --- but I could feel the energy flowing into the unused muscles. I admit it was a shot in the dark, but it worked. My whole body felt strong, and when the doctor finally took off my cast he was stunned. Four days before the Nationals an X-ray showed that my bone was fully healed, and I had hardly atrophied at all. The doctor cleared me to compete. On Wednesday I did my first weight workout on my right side in seven weeks, on Friday I flew to San Diego, and on Saturday, slightly favouring my newly empowered left arm, I won the Nationals”

That is worth a re read! What is your body capable of? Are you using visualisation as a healing tool? Might it be a good idea to try? It is stunning to see the level of belief Josh has in himself and his body. And his dedication to doing what needs to be done so that he can recover is astounding. What are you doing to aid your recovery? Get the book to find out more of the specific details.

Discover Yourself Through Learning

"It is my hope that you, the reader, emerge from this book inspired and perhaps a bit more enabled to follow your dreams in a manner that is consistent with the unique gifts you bring to the table. That has been my ambition. The ideas I've shared in these pages have worked for me and it's my hope that they suggest a structure and direction. But there is no such thing as a fixed recipe for victory or happiness. If my approach feels right, take it, hone it, give it your own flavour. Leave my numbers behind. In the end, mastery involves discovering the most resonant information and integrating it so deeply and fully it disappears and allows us to fly free."

How can you use these ideas to help you reach your dreams? Move through your pain or injury or challenge? What nugget of information resonated with you most deeply? Take it and make it your own and discover yourself and your potential through learning.

About the Author of 'The Art Of Learning'

Josh Waitzkin

Josh Waitzkin is an incredible human. He has mastered the art of peak performance and this book will help you do the same. Josh is an eight time National Chess Champ and holds many World and National Tai Chi Push Hands Championship titles. He teaches top performers to reach their peak. You can find out more about Josh at www.joshwaitzkin.com

About the Author of this Move Note

Hazel Boot

Hazel has a degree in Exercise and Sports Science. She is also an Anatomy Trains Structural Integrator and a Restorative Exercise Specialist. She works with clients to improve movement and reduce pain. She loves reading and geeking out on movement books. She writes notes on the books she loves to help others learn faster.

Find out more at www.mindinmovement.co.nz or get in touch at hazel@mindinmovement.co.nz

I hope you enjoyed the content of this note but please remember that it is not medical advice and should not be used as such.