

HR Review

Human Resources Intelligence for the City

Making workplace athletes

In the world of elite sport the fundamental question of performance has been embraced as the very essence of sport. In comparison, business has a very poor understanding of human performance, and in particular how to perform at a peak when it matters.

As in business, talent is a pre-requisite of being an elite sports performer. But talent is not enough. To maximise their potential, the talented must learn how to perform.

This concept of learning to perform is a vital one and lies at the core of maximising human potential.

We suggest performance can be defined as: 'A dynamic process requiring the understanding and development of key attributes in the pursuit of defined outcomes'.

This definition recognises that performance is a process, so excellence in the field can be modelled. Key attributes or characteristics have to be studied and then developed. Well defined goals are key and remember it is a question of pursuit, so do not expect that the path to the desired outcome will be a straight line.

The *K2 Performance Pie* is made up of six key elements, all of which must be satisfied:

- ◆ Technical – 'what skills/equipment do I need?'
- ◆ Tactical – 'how should I apply those skills?'
- ◆ Mental – 'have I prepared my mind?'

- ◆ Physical – 'have I prepared my body?'
- ◆ Emotional – 'who is supporting me?'
- ◆ Contextual – 'have I ensured my environment is right?'

So if you're going to meet the performance demands made of you, all six segments of the performance pie must be worked on, practised and nurtured.

Watching athletes peak is fascinating – it involves three main concepts: variation, 'periodisation', and rest and recovery.

Varying the activity in preparation for a peak is vital. Roger Bannister did not prepare by running a mile flat out each day in training. He knew that would mean he would have become physically and mentally stale very quickly. He would mix the training he did, perhaps long easy runs one day, shorter faster runs the next. In the same way preparation for a key presentation, for example, should not mean just running through the slides and script from beginning to end in the days (or hours) immediately before. Spending time on each area of the performance pie in the lead up will much improve the ability to peak when it matters – time spent considering the tactics you're going to use on the day or using imagery work for mental preparation are just a couple of ways in which variation could be introduced.

In preparation for a peak, the balance between volume and intensity of workload needs to change dramatically. At the start volume of training is key and the intensity is less important. As time progresses they get more into balance and then intensity of work becomes much more important. As a guide, if you find yourself spending the three days immediately before a presentation putting in lots of hours going through it, you have not prepared to peak – more likely you have prepared to fail. At this stage it should be a question of spending short periods of time sharpening things up.

In the period immediately preceding the big day, rest following the right level of preparation leads to a phenomenon known as 'super-compensation', or a new high in performance capacity as a result of recovery. Rest and recovery is not a result of weakness – weakness results from too little rest and recovery.

By using these three principles and combining them with the tools to increase the capacity to perform, you can perform at your peak – and become an athlete at work.

Keith Hatter

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