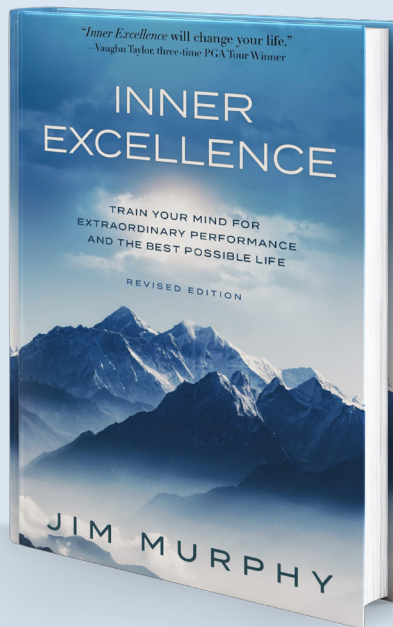


Book Snaps™

In-depth reviews of best-selling business books.



Inner Excellence

Train Your Mind for Extraordinary Performance and the Best Possible Life

By Jim Murphy

Jim Murphy is a Performance Coach (mental skills) to the best professional athletes and leaders in the world. Jim played professional baseball in the Chicago Cubs organization, coached with the Texas Rangers as well as in the Olympic Games. For his Masters Degree in Coaching Science, he interviewed 39 MLB GM's, field managers and coaches on how to build a championship team. In addition to coaching professional athletes and executives, Jim leads Inner Excellence offsite retreats at beautiful locations around the world. Jim is the president of the Inner Excellence Freedom Project whose mission is to build communities to alleviate spiritual and physical poverty around the world.

A Book Review by Soundview

Mastering Your Inner Mind for Peak Performance

In his book, *Inner Excellence: Train Your Mind for Extraordinary Performance and the Best Possible Life*, Jim Murphy shares with his readers keys he has learned that have helped him and those he has coached and aided move beyond fear and stagnation into lives of true meaning and worth. He believes that mindset is crucial in determining how a person both experiences and succeeds or fails in life. This mindset involves helping people focus on raising the level of excellence both in their lives and in the lives of those they compete with. Murphy maintains that a life focused solely on winning or gaining in certain areas of life is bound to lead to anxiety and fear. Rather than focusing narrowly on winning, Murphy wants his readers to seek out excellence in all areas of life, both external and internal. This, he maintains, will lead to contentment and a feeling of a life well lived.

What We Pursue

Our culture, according to Murphy, is one set on a definition of success and a means of achieving it that will, in the end, fail to deliver what it is that people most want. Many people are likely familiar with Abraham Maslow and his hierarchy of needs. Murphy discusses people who Maslow termed self-actualizers. These people are not concerned with the external rewards that so often preoccupy the minds of most people. Rather, they have a firm idea of what they want out of life in the long term, and because of this, they are able “to develop an inner strength that [will carry] them through tough times.” These people understand that their egos will want to protect themselves, and they actively work to bypass the needs of the ego in order to achieve their deeper dreams. These are the people Murphy hopes to help his readers become.

Western culture, Murphy maintains, is suffering from the affluenza virus. Because of this, people are focused on “possessions, achievements, looks, money, and status.” The teachings of Maslow insist that these outward rewards will never bring true happiness. This is because the attainment of these riches often lead to envy and praise, and when this happens, we then

want ever more success in order to garner even more praise. One of the primary problems with this state of mind is that it is concerned primarily with others as people begin to want more not for themselves but in order to impress others. This ultimately leads people to feelings of emptiness.

Becoming self-actualizers requires people to develop self-awareness. This self-awareness is necessary because it allows people to perceive all of the world, rather than just what they can see through the lens of their own comparisons. Comparison can lead people to feelings of fear because in an effort to gain praise from others, they start to believe that they have no option but to succeed. This overwhelming desire to succeed can lead people to fear failure and become overly concerned with themselves and their appearance. This fear, according to Murphy's experience, stifles the freedom of people more than any other factor. Murphy is careful to note that while he insists that all people are self-centered because we necessarily see the world through the lens of our experiences, feelings, and perceptions, this is not the same as selfishness. Selfishness, in Murphy's view, is a moral issue whereas self-centeredness is just the lens through which people see the world.

Murphy moves into a discussion of self-consciousness. This occurs when people are attached to their past mistakes. He believes that when people feel self-conscious and afraid, they tend to turn to comparison centered around the five criteria of affluenza. "Looks and achievements" are especially relevant avenues for comparison because they are so personal. Murphy states that there will always be people who excel beyond us in these areas. This leads us to want ever more in order, leading to ever deepening affluenza.

The Critic, The Monkey Mind, and The Trickster

A person must be able to control their thoughts in order to overcome the negative consequences of the affluenza virus, but there are three main obstacles to achieving more control over our thoughts. The first is the critic. "The critic is obsessed with (and attached to) our circumstances." It is the critic that is most concerned with comparisons. Murphy writes that "when we absolutely have to have something over which we are not in full control, we become a servant to it. In this we lose our power." In order to defeat the critic, we must learn to take our single-minded focus away from outcomes and focus it more on process.

The second obstacle to overcome is the monkey mind. The monkey mind refers to the "endless stream of thoughts" that are constantly running through our minds every moment that we are awake. These thoughts are often negative, fluttered, and unproductive. The main obstacle these thoughts provide is that they stop people from dreaming bigger. While Murphy understands there is a place for analysis, he believes that our minds become too focused on analysis as we replay our doubts. We become overly attached to our thoughts, and these thoughts establish their own reality.

The trickster is the final of the three impediments we may face as we try to gain control over our thoughts. Murphy writes that

"when we're attached to our circumstances and invested in our goals, we don't reject the lies of the Trickster." Because of this, we can start to believe arguments about our own limitations. The Trickster tries to get us to believe that our "worth is entirely dependent on [our] results," and it uses "deception and accusation" to get a hold of us. The Trickster can get us to think either too highly or too lowly of ourselves, and both distortions lead to problems. When we base our identity on our successes and failures in this way, we begin to believe that we are a failure when we fail.

Love, Wisdom, and Courage

Love, wisdom and courage are the "three pillars of excellence that overcome fear and form the foundation for mental strength and an extraordinary life." Love, for Murphy, is the antidote to fear. He wants his readers to lead from their hearts. This requires a pursuit of self-awareness so that a person can see what unique gifts and talents they have to offer the world. Murphy writes that "when you lead with your heart you have the capacity to see beauty and make connections only you can. You can connect ideas and people and dreams that no one else can." Instead of focusing solely on winning and defeating an opponent, someone who leads with their heart desires to always bring their best to a competition so that they can push their opponent to be their best. They pursue excellence in all areas and want to help others improve and grow as they, themselves, improve and grow. Competition is more about the pursuit of excellence than it is about single-minded victory.

Wisdom, for Murphy, "is the deep truth about who you are, why you're here, and what's possible in your life." This purpose must go beyond just the self and involve others. Wisdom also requires humility which Murphy defines as "an accurate view of self" as well as "freedom from self-inflation or self-rejection." Murphy believes that the byproduct of this clear view of self is gratitude. He believes that empowerment comes when a person finds a purpose that is rewarding in the pursuit of it, not just the attainment of it. The pursuit of a worthy purpose can infuse a life with meaning. Murphy writes, "your value increases and your concern for self decreases."

The final pillar Murphy focuses on is courage. "Courage," he writes, "is the ability to be fully present in adversity." It is easier to find courage when goals are focused on the process rather than on an outcome that we cannot fully control. Murphy lists four goals that focus on process. These are to give one's best, to be present, to be grateful, and to "focus on my routines and only what I can control." Winning is best achieved when it is the byproduct of a pursuit of excellence rather than the end goal itself. These three pillars of love, wisdom, and courage can help people in their pursuit of Zoe which "is absolute fullness of life, the selfless-actualization of those who are true to themselves."

The Samurai

Murphy devotes considerable attention to the Samurai warriors in feudal Japan. These warriors followed what they called the "way of the warrior." This way prized "virtue and character above all else" and centered around "love, wisdom, and cour-



To achieve self-mastery, you need to, like the Samurai, 'let go of the fears and attachments that have mastered you - to surrender them to a power greater than your own.'

age.” The Samurai “found pleasure in improvement, freedom in discipline, and connection in service to others.” To achieve self-mastery, you need to, like the Samurai, “let go of the fears and attachments that have mastered you - to surrender them to a power greater than your own.” Murphy believes that the strongest forces are love and fear and that with love we can overcome fear. It is in giving up one’s life that one can gain the most. This is because clinging to one’s life means a bondage to comparison. Samurai were always prepared to die, and Murphy believes that the highest purpose the rest of us can focus on is a “single-minded devotion to the purpose of your life.” We must be willing to let go of our self-protection in order to love and so that we can allow our whole selves to engage in our pursuits.

Murphy then moves on to a discussion of the difference between happiness and joy. While many people seek out happiness in their lives, the pursuit of joy will bring more fruit. Happiness is dependent upon external circumstances. When good things happen to us, we feel happy. Joy, on the other hand, can be our companion even in the most dire of circumstances. “Joy is based on love and hope and truth, about who you are, created for glory, filled with infinite, inherent worth and unlimited possibilities.” A pursuit of happiness often leads to a pursuit of comfort, but this can lead to a reactionary life. Murphy writes, “Stop running from discomfort and emotional pain. When you face it, you’ll find out you’re far stronger than you thought you were.” Once people are able to divorce themselves from a fear of suffering, they will become more able to live lives of self-mastery. Murphy believes that “everything is here to teach” us and to help us to grow.

Feelings

Murphy writes that “your state is the combination of your greatest desires, your beliefs about yourself, where you place your attention, and your physiology.” Feelings dictate much of our lives, and they help determine how we experience the world. Our memories and beliefs filter our experiences. The results of this filtering creates thoughts which lead to feelings. Our feelings then determine our actions which in turn influence our results. There is a bias inherent in beliefs. Because of this, people can experience the same event in very different ways, drawing different conclusions.

Our brains are great at finding patterns. Patterns are how the brain is able to accommodate for so much information and make meaning from it. There are four processes through which our brains seek patterns: “assumptions, generalizations, deletions, and distortions.” When we accept something without proof, we are working in the realm of assumption. Assumptions help the human brain because we do not need to take time in deliberation.

Assumptions help us fill in the gaps when we have a small piece of information. For example, if we see part of an animal, our brains can fill in the missing body parts even when we do not see them or are focused on them. This can be problematic, however, when we want to narrow our focus and our brain keeps trying to zoom out and focus on aspects besides that which would serve us best. Murphy writes that “the key message here is that your focus improves when you can break down a task into its most basic element and concentrate on that alone.”

Generalizations also deal with patterns but in a different way. When we experience a cause and effect, our memory stores that data and the next time we recognize the cause, we will come to expect the effect. Deletions occur when we filter out information that is not necessary. Oftentimes multiple things are happening at one time, and a person must be able to focus just on the necessary stimuli. Distortions occur when our brains give “too much meaning to a pattern.” All of this is important because self-actualizers “organize their environment” purposefully, making sure to focus their time and attention on what matters most. They are intentional. Because of the importance of a strong and tailored focus, people need to learn how to both focus and relax and how to switch seamlessly between the two states.

Beliefs

As mentioned previously, our beliefs are a key part of how we make sense of and perceive the world. Because of this, it is important that our beliefs are “in line with [our] dreams.” Beliefs can develop quickly from external stimuli, but they can be changed. Just because a person is afraid of spiders because of one brief childhood incident does not mean they are destined to always be an arachnophobe. Beliefs are important because they “set the boundaries for what’s possible in your life” and also because they “attract situations that keep those beliefs in tact.” If a person begins to succeed in areas they did not believe they could, they will start to unintentionally sabotage themselves so that their outward circumstances reflect their inward beliefs. What we choose to believe about ourselves has great consequence.

Because of the power of beliefs Murphy maintains that “it’s especially important to speak the truth about the past.” He believes that it is important to think about negative past experiences as events that happened in the past rather than as ones that continue on into the present. Oftentimes the Trickster will appear when we try to move past failures. In times like these, it is important to stop negative thoughts as soon as we recognize them so that negative thoughts do not dictate our current realities. He believes that affirmations can be helpful in changing our current beliefs.

One belief that can harm us is a belief in the negative consequences that could arise should we achieve a particular goal. If we are pursuing a goal but deep down believe that the negative consequences of achieving it may be great, we may negatively and subconsciously sabotage ourselves. An example of this is when a smoker may have conflicting feelings about quitting smoking because if they quit smoking, they will lose the social ties they have that revolve around the habit. In these cases, “it’s important to make sure your goals and dreams align with your true self.”

Subconscious and Resonance

Murphy claims three goals of the subconscious. The subconscious helps protect us from danger. It helps us live some aspects of our lives in the background to free up mental space for that which needs more attention, and it helps make sure our circumstances align with our beliefs. Our subconscious tries to protect us, sometimes to our detriment. For example, if a tennis player double faults, they may become distressed. The subconscious stores this feeling of distress in an attempt to protect against it in the future. The player then focuses on this in the future making it more likely that a double fault will happen again. When Murphy works with people struggling with fears and mental blocks, he tries to help them reprogram these painful areas. He does this in part by helping people remove emotion from the situation and figuring out what they could have done to change the situation and then inserting “a positive, high energy feeling – as well as the small change – into the context of the mental block.” Finally, he has his clients “anchor that positive feeling into the original painful context.” His clients are able to get rid of their fears permanently through this method.

Resonance refers to “the freedom and passion that come when we’re fully present and in sync.” Resonance depends on four factors. The first occurs when a person shares their heart rather than their ego. When a person performs in order to gain something from the performance, they likely will face great pressure. They will do better if they focus on sharing what it is they love. Second, they must work to pursue mastery, trying to improve in excellence. Third, they must strive to love their opponent, respecting them and realizing that great opponents are necessary for peak performance. Finally, a person must visualize presence. They must realize that failure is a part of the success journey. They must “visualize the path of mastery, seeking to be wholehearted and fully engaged” in life.

Murphy’s purpose in his book is to help his readers achieve lives of deep meaning. While he works frequently with athletes, the principles he provides can guide people in all areas of life to achieve their biggest dreams and live lives of true meaning and purpose. While he walks his readers through his general principles, he ends each chapter with a list of questions to consider as well as activities they can partake in to implement the ideas in that chapter. Because of this, he is able to help make these principles concrete in the lives of readers despite the fact that much of the book talks about overarching ideas and principles. He ends with a list of the twelve steps developed by Alcoholics Anonymous because he believes that

these principles can help people overcome stumbling blocks when other attempts fail because they are based on surrender, and this surrender can lead people on a path to excellence. Excellence comes to those who relish the process.

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