Brian Johnson's PhilosophersNotes
More Wisdom in Less Time

THE BIG IDEAS

The Five Superpowers
Faith. Diligence. Mindfulness. Concentration. Insight.

Stimulus & Response
Find the space between.

1,300 3-Pointers
Intention + paying the price.

Your Discomfort Zone
Time to romance it.

Cultivating Self-Efficacy
Is key. How's yours?

Deep Listening
What do you REALLY want?

The Mindful Athlete
This is the path.

The Mindful Athlete

Secrets to Pure Performance

BY GEORGE MUMFORD · PARALLAX BOOKS © 2105 · 234 PAGES

"When Michelangelo was asked how he created his masterpieces, he replied that all he did was chip away to get to the masterpiece that was already inside. I believe we're all chipping away to get to that masterpiece, even those of us who grew up in the ghetto, on the wrong side of the tracks. We all have a divine spark within us, but we've either crushed it, created an ingenious system for hiding out, or devised ways of being that make us feel separate. I now regard each person I meet as a caterpillar in a chrysalis. In order to become butterflies, we have to break our way into freedom and transformation. Mindfulness is a tool we can use to do this in the most skillful way. ...

What I offer in this book is a synthesis of mindfulness principles that fall under the aegis of what I call the Five Superpowers. These Superpowers are my personal spin on the Buddha's Eightfold Path and on his teaching of the Five Spiritual Faculties: faith, diligence, mindfulness, concentration, and insight."

~ George Mumford from *The Mindful Athlete*

We all know Phil Jackson as the Zen master coach.

But do you know who HE turns to to get his players in the right mindful state?

George Mumford.

A former collegiate basketball player (Dr. J's roommate at U Mass), George shares his personal struggles with drugs in his younger days and the inspiring story about how mindfulness helped him bounce back from rock bottom—leading him to work with Jon Kabat-Zinn and other leading mindfulness teachers decades ago, which led to him coaching everyone from Michael Jordan (and his championship-winning Bulls) to Kobe Bryant (and his championship-winning Lakers) and countless other athletes.

This book is about WAY more than just athletics. It's one of the best introductions to mindfulness I've ever read and it's ESPECIALLY great if you have a sports-loving husband at home who otherwise wouldn't be so interested in the subject. (Or, if you happen to be in the same boat. :)

Connecting everyone from the Buddha, Thich Nhat Hanh, Pema Chödrön, Rollo May, and Wayne Dyer to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Pete Carroll, Tim Gallwey and Bruce Lee, George does an extraordinary job at inspiring us to cultivate our Five Superpowers: faith, diligence, mindfulness, concentration, and insight.

Most of my book is underlined and marked up. It's *packed* with Big Ideas. (Get a copy here.)

We'll barely scratch the surface of all the goodness in the book but I'm excited to take a quick look at some of my favorite Big Ideas so let's jump straight in!

" I also came to realize that you couldn't solve problems with the same consciousness that created them. It's only in changing your consciousness that you can solve problems and transform your game, whatever it is and wherever you're playing it."

~ George Mumford

THE FIVE SUPERPOWERS

" The more you practice mindfulness, the more readily you set yourself up to experience conscious flow. Put differently, having a mindfulness practice is like watering your garden; it's the only way to make things grow."

~ George Mumford

"The Five Superpowers are mindfulness, concentration, insight, right effort, and trust. These spiritual superpowers are interconnected and they work together. Buddhism sometimes calls the first three powers—mindfulness, concentration, and insight—the threefold training. Our unconscious mind contains the seeds of all these energies. You can cultivate these three energies throughout the day, in whatever activity you're engaged. Mindfulness, concentration, and insight contain each other. If you're very mindful, then you have concentration and insight in your mindfulness. Generating these energies is the heart of meditation practice. They help you live every moment of life deeply. They bring you joy and happiness and help you to handle your own suffering and the suffering in the people around you.

The fourth power, right effort, or diligence, is the energy that makes us steadfast in our practice. Cognitive function improves when we have a positive state of mind. Bringing diligence to our practice of mindfulness is a great way to cultivate positive mind-states. But when we practice sitting or walking meditation in a way that causes our body or mind to suffer, that isn't right effort because our effort isn't based on our understanding.

The last of the Five Powers is trust. It can also be seen as faith or confidence, but the way I like to look at it is as courage. Having the courage to delve into the unknown and trust what is found there makes the practice of mindfulness and other powers possible."

Gotta start with the Five Superpowers:

Mindfulness. Concentration. Insight. Right effort. And, trust.

Each has its own chapter where George shares some great stories and helps us bring the wisdom to life.

Let's take a deeper look at a few of them!

THE SPACE BETWEEN STIMULUS AND RESPONSE

" When you're faced with a challenge, do you have the mental suppleness and belief in yourself to get quiet, stay connected to that space between stimulus and response, and move forward with right effort?"

~ George Mumford

"Think about the eye of a hurricane, or the calm still center in the middle of a cyclone. No matter how intense the storm or what's swept up in its gale-force winds, that calm, blue center is always there. This is the metaphor I like to use when talking about the space between stimulus and response. We all have this quiet center within us. Mindfulness reconnects us to this center space, where we fully experience the present moment and have access to the transcendent wisdom that's often associated with conscious flow. In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, neurologist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl famously described it this way: 'Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.'"

As Viktor Frankl tells us (see Notes on *Man's Search for Meaning*), there's a space between a stimulus and our response.

Stepping into that space and choosing our most empowered response more and more consistently is where our growth and freedom exists.

Mumford tells us that we can either mindlessly *react* or mindfully *respond* to whatever happens to us.

If we're always REACTING to life it's as if we're being thrown around in a hurricane.

If we can slow down and operate from the center of the hurricane, we can RESPOND to life's challenges with a *lot* more grace and power.

We need to cultivate our "Response-ability."

"Through conscious breathing, or what I call Awareness of Breath (AOB), concentration and relaxation coexist."

~ George Mumford

Cultivating the ability to choose our most empowered response is what our mindfulness practice is all about.

1,300 3-POINTERS = INTENTION + PAYING THE PRICE

"Every high-performing mindful athlete knows that if you want to achieve something, there's a good chance that you can, no matter what, if—and this is a big if—you're willing to pay the price. You not only have to focus on your intention, but you also have to be willing to get up early in the morning and do the same thing thousands and thousands of times—and then another thousand times—*with* intention. Which leads me to deliberate practice. ...

When I worked with Kobe Bryant, he was making about thirteen hundred three-pointers a day in the off-season when he was working on his three-point shot."

So much goodness in there.

First, let's look at the self-confidence/self-efficacy of the elite athlete. They know that if they want to achieve something, there's a good chance they can, no matter what IF (all caps) they are willing to pay the price.

Scott Adams says the same thing in *How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big* (see Notes): *"One of the best pieces of advice I've ever heard goes something like this: If you want success, figure out the price, then pay it. It sounds trivial and obvious, but if you unpack the idea it has extraordinary power.*

I know a lot of people who wish they were rich or famous or otherwise fabulous. They wish they had yachts and servants and castles and they wish they could travel the world in their own private jets. But these are mere wishes. Few of these wishful people have decided to have any of the things they wish for. It's a key difference, for once you decide, you take action. Wishing starts in the mind and generally stays there.

When you decide to be successful in a big way, it means you acknowledge the price and you're willing to pay it."

Let's focus on *you*.

What do YOU want?

Do you believe you can have it?

What price will you need to pay?

Are you willing to pay it?

P.S. Fun sports fact: Early in his career, Kobe Bryant wanted to be an extraordinary three-point shooter. He knew he could be. Decided the price was 1,300 three-pointers PER DAY during the offseason. And he went out and paid the price.

P.P.S. Let's do this! :)

"It is estimated that we take between seventeen thousand and thirty thousand breaths a day—usually without even being aware of a single one of them."

~ George Mumford

ROMANCING YOUR DISCOMFORT ZONE

"Our bodies like to be in homeostasis. We like to be balanced. Life is hard enough—we want to be comfortable! But, again, to get better and improve our game on and off the court, we need to move out of our comfort zones. That doesn't mean you should so far out of your comfort zone that you can't function well. Our bodies work best when we push them in small increments. If we push ourselves too far, eustress can become distress. We have to really pay attention, because they can manifest the same symptoms. Eustress is achieved through moderation, sticking to the middle way, and not going to extremes. ...

*" From my experience working with thousands of professional and amateur athletes, the number one reason elite performers succeed, skill and resources being equal, is their desire and *intention* to succeed. Intention is what motivates players to do what they have to do, even if it means pushing themselves out of their comfort zones–in fact, especially if it pushes them out of their comfort zones."*

~ George Mumford

Moving out of your comfort zone through experiencing eustress is a continuous incremental process of romancing your discomfort zone. It's not like you get to a certain level and then stay there. Things are always either going forward or backward; they're not staying static. If you are comfortable where you are and you just want to stay comfortable, that's fine, but that isn't the way to pursue excellence and wisdom."

Stress.

It comes in two different flavors: Eustress and distress.

Eustress is good stress. It's essential for growth. We experience this juuuuuuust on the other side of our comfort zones.

Distress, on the other hand, is what shows up when we push ourselves too far.

Imagine stretching a rubber band. Pull it hard enough so it stretches but no SO hard it snaps.

Eustress = The stretch.

Distress = The snap.

The important thing to note here is that growth takes TIME.

It's the continuous, INCREMENTAL gains we're after.

If we're a little too gung ho, we want to change DRAMATICALLY and IMMEDIATELY. That's a good recipe for burnout. As George says, "You can't push yourself so far out of your comfort zone that your body breaks down or that you ultimately give up because you can't sustain your own self-imposed pressure."

In *Toughness Training for Life* (see Notes), Jim Loehr describes this as "Adaptive stress"—that optimal level right below overtraining that catalyzes growth. (His #1 tip, btw? Make sure you train for adequate recovery—challenge yourself to go outside of your comfort zone AND invest the proper amount of energy into recovering from each bout of eustress!)

With the mindfulness of a master, we romance our discomfort zones, stretching ourselves but not snapping. Taking baby steps and allowing the compound effect to do its work over the long run as we work diligently, patiently and persistently.

" The thing is, if you're comfortable, and you just want to stay that way, that's fine. But if you want to pursue excellence and high performance, then you have to be willing to get uncomfortable."

~ George Mumford

When we do that, we share this experience with masters like Dr. J, Jordan and Kobe: "Their comfort zones were like a horizon, always moving forward in front of them as they approached them."

P.S. In *Mastery* (see Notes), George Leonard put that beautiful image this way: *"For a master, the rewards gained along the way are fine, but they are not the main reason for the journey. Ultimately, the master and the master's path are one. And if the traveler is fortunate—that is, if the path is complex and profound enough—the destination is two miles farther away for every mile he or she travels."*

CULTIVATING SELF-EFFICACY

"It's been my experience with all the athletes I've worked with, from the Lakers and the Bulls, to girls' soccer teams, to weekend warriors, that while there are always calamities, extreme circumstances can make you stronger. This is what's called having a strong sense of self-efficacy: the ability to tell yourself that no matter what happens, you will take everything as a challenge, not a curse. You'll rise to the occasion and say, 'Okay, the going is tough but this is going to be great!'

Self-efficacy is the ability to see yourself as capable. It's a core mental strength. Self-efficacy is cultivated when we know ourselves well enough to work through whatever internal obstacles we have, whether that's a negative self-image, an ingrained sense of defeat or other issues.

" Failure is what you make of it. Failure can be an opportunity. Mistakes are feedback for learning."

~ George Mumford

Self-efficacy, or stress hardiness, is the galvanizing force behind what I call the three Cs: *Commitment* to your growth and development; *Control* over how you respond to stressors; and viewing every crisis or pressure as a *Challenge*. These three Cs are mental and emotional pillars of wisdom that help us increase our performance, effectively field whatever fastball might come hurtling our way, and stay in flow."

Self-efficacy.

Science says unequivocally: It's HUGE.

Do you believe in yourself?

Do you believe in your ability to handle whatever life throws at you?

Know that cultivating this sense of *intense* trust in yourself is KEY to optimizing and actualizing.

Check out our class on **Confidence 101** for my Top 10 Big Ideas on how to go about creating indestructible trust in yourself.

For now, let's embrace George's three Cs:

COMMIT to your growth. Get fired up about who you are becoming.

Cultivate your CONTROL by practicing stepping into the space between Stimulus and Response.

See crises or pressure situations as a CHALLENGE not a curse.

DEEP LISTENING

"Some people say that they don't know what their intention or purpose is, but often they simply haven't spent enough time listening to themselves carefully and in silence. Deep Listening is very useful here. Deep Listening is the practice of stopping and listening without judgment or advice. Before you can listen deeply to someone else, you need to begin by deeply listening to yourself. Sit down, clear your mind, and ask yourself in silence: What do I *really* want? What is my life for? Intention will emerge if you go deep enough. Nearly every single elite athlete or successful individual I've worked with had intention and a clear sense of purpose. They knew their charter, their reason for existence."

Deep Listening.

What a powerful concept. Let's do a little practice right now...

Get quiet.

Ask yourself: What do you REALLY want?

Seriously.

Get quiet right now.

Take a deep breath. And another. One more.

What do you REALLY want? What is your life for?

In *Wherever You Go, There You Are* (see Notes) Jon Kabat-Zinn calls that your Job with a capital J. He tells us: *"Rarely do we question and then contemplate with determination what our hearts are calling us to do and to be. I like to frame such efforts in question form: 'What is my job on the planet with a capital J?' or, 'What do I care about so much that I would pay to do it?' If I ask such a question and I don't come up with an answer other than, 'I don't know' then I just keep on asking the question."*

Here's to listening deeply as we tap into our Superpowers and give ourselves most powerfully to the world!

THE PATH OF THE MINDFUL ATHLETE

"The convergence of the principles I've outlined–concentration, outcome expectation, visualization, intention and deliberate practice–are the secret of pure performance."

~ George Mumford

"The more you practice mindfulness and the more often you access conscious flow, the more you feel that spirit of love. Because in some respects, the two are connected to that same big 'Something.' The more you feel that greater spirit of love, the less room there is for distraction. There is no room for concerns about being good enough or better than so-and-so, for all the concerns about what other people will think or say in the future, or how you did or what happened in the past. There is no room for any negative self-talk and distracting chatter, or for feeding the wolves of your hindrances.

Instead, you are flooded with consciousness and are fully and wholly concentrated on the here and now. This si the experience every athlete has when he or she is fully in the Zone. Sometimes we call this 'being on fire.' All distractions are burned away. This is pure performance at its best. This, ultimately, is the path of the mindful athlete."

Those are the final words of this great book.

As I mentioned in the intro, we barely scratched the surface. If you're looking for a fun, inspiring, practical look at mindfulness through the eyes of one of the world's leading peak performance coaches, I think you'll dig it.

Here's to burning away all distractions as we practice mindfulness, connect to something bigger than ourselves and let our light shine!

Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

If you liked this Note, you'll probably like…

- Wherever You Go, There You Are
- Mastery
- Flow
- Win Forever
- The Inner Game of Tennis
- Striking Thoughts

About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON

Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.