



How to Manage Your Emotional State for Peak Performance

by Four-Time Olympian Ruben Gonzalez

Your emotional state affects your performance everywhere - in sports, in business, in school, at home, everywhere. Learning how to manage your emotional state is not hard and it pays great dividends.

Think of your emotions as the engine revving up in a race car. One to four means you're idling. Seven means you're running fast and smooth. Eight and nine mean you're redlining. And ten means you blew your engine.

Let's say that your goal is to keep your emotions at seven.

Just like a Formula One driver constantly monitors his engine, champions in every field get really good at constantly monitoring their emotional level so they can be their best.

Peak performers pay close attention to their tension level. You need to do the same thing. Start paying attention to how you feel and get to know yourself so you can detect signs that you might be getting too tight or too loose. Because when you are on either extreme you'll start making more errors in your play.

The closer you can stay to your peak emotional level, the more consistently you'll be able to reach your highest potential and your highest performance level.

Tight muscles, fast, short, choppy breathing and nervous sweat are signs that you are getting too stressed. You're redlining. If you start taking slow, deep, even breaths you will slowly start relaxing. Using trigger words like *calm, relax and slow down* while making a calming motion with your hands will help too.

Smiling will also help you relax. Make it fun. You can't have fun and be stressed at the same time.

Anger will make you redline and lose focus because instead of focusing on your game you're focusing on what's making you angry. Whenever you get angry you need to quickly do whatever you can to get over it and focus on your game. Say to yourself, *That's OK, I'm bigger than that, I will focus and I will win.* Victory is the best revenge.

If you haven't started your event (making an important presentation, or taking a test might be your event) and have a few minutes, stretching your muscles, listening to your favorite music, and thinking about a time when you have excelled in the past will help you relax.

That's why it's important to arrive at the field (or office, or classroom) with plenty of time. If you arrive late, you won't have time to do anything about it.

If you notice that you're rushing through your motions, that could be a sign that you are over-stressed. Slow down. Take a few more seconds whenever you can pause. Breathe deeply. When you do you will start relaxing and your performance will become more fluid and effective.

While it's more common to be over-stressed, sometimes you can get too loose. When you're too loose you'll make errors and won't care. You are getting lackadaisical. When you're too loose you need to pump yourself up. You need motivation. Pump your fist, yell, tell yourself to focus. Do something that'll get your energy up because you aren't racing. You are just idling.

Remember, you control the gas pedal. It's not hard. With a little practice you'll develop a feel of whether you need to step on the gas or take your foot off the gas. When you start doing these things your performance will improve and it will be more consistent.

Breathe Tension Away

Taking slow deep breaths will help you relax. You'll always perform better when you're relaxed because you'll have better reaction time and your muscles will move more fluidly.

Sprinters are taught to run with loose hands and a loose jaw. By doing that they're able to run faster.

I take a couple of deep breaths right before I take a luge run. We're taught to exhale at the entrance and exit of every curve to stay relaxed. Believe it or not, if you don't breathe correctly on a luge run your time is about a half a second slower. In a sport that is measured to the one thousandth of a second, a half a second is an eternity.

If you play a sport that has many breaks like golf, tennis, football or baseball, deep breathing (taking a couple of slow deep breaths) needs to be a part of your in between performance routine. If you're in sales, you can do this right before your next call.

World War II pilots and gunners were trained to remain relaxed and speak slowly on their intercoms. By staying relaxed the gunners were able to identify enemy planes faster and shoot more accurately.

Success Tip

Go to YouTube and look up “The Memphis Belle (1944) in Restored Color.”

It’s a great documentary about the B-17 bomber missions in WWII. Make sure you watch the section starting at the 24:10 minute mark. That’s when the bomber is being attacked by fighter planes. You can actually listen in to the gunners’ radio intercom communications. It’s amazing how cool, calm and collected they sound in a life and death situation.

By practicing and mastering these techniques you will be able to stay calm, cool and collected during the most stressful performances and your performance will improve. Once that happens, your confidence will soar and then, the sky’s the limit.

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