The Knowledge Project Keypoints — Performance, Habits & Mental Toughness

The Knowledge Project Keypoints

Episodes in this pack: 9

No.1 Performance Psychologist: The Secret to High Performance and Excellence

Guest: Gio Valiante
Date: 2026-07-07 · Duration: 1:08:17
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JOh-9iaPcGU

KEYPOINTS

• Underperformance is the default: a 'central governor' in the brain puts survival and comfort ahead of potential.
Valiante cites the central governor hypothesis. Even marathoners, who build their lives around pushing limits, almost never push themselves to death; of roughly 5 million, only five to ten die in a year, mostly from things like being hit by a car. Single-celled organisms in a petri dish move away from heat and cold toward comfort. Reaching your potential therefore takes a deliberate act of agency, which he calls 'the opening bid'.

• Change comes from what you do, not what you think, say or feel.
He leans on Bandura ('behavior is a cause of behavior') and John Dewey ('We don't think our way into a pattern of living. We live our way into a pattern of thought.'). Most New Year's resolutions are dead by February or March. His one practical step is to find the single comfortable habit holding you back, whether your phone, your food or an excuse, change it, and hold yourself accountable to it repeatedly.

• There's an 'everydayness' to excellence: you work through the bad days to reach the good ones.
His answer to 'How do I write a book?' is to sit down every day, and when nothing comes, stay in the chair and write badly. Writers in his workshops at Rollins College and Emory learned the same thing. Great performers learn to love the mundane details of the work rather than waiting for inspiration.

• Mastery motivation lasts; ego motivation burns out.
People with mastery motivation do the craft for its own sake. People with ego motivation use it as a vehicle for money or importance, like a doctor who doesn't care about medicine or a lawyer who just wants to be rich, and they burn out. The common arc is that you start out loving the thing, the rewards become more powerful than the thing, you lose yourself, and the best performers find their way back, as Kelly Slater and Brooks Koepka described 'falling in love again'.

• Presence is a trainable habit, and a divided mind is the enemy of good thinking.
Flow can happen while gardening, cooking or talking. Its signs are that time disappears, hard things feel easy, and you forget you're being watched. Dewey wrote that 'a divided interest' is the greatest enemy of effective thinking. The best performers are present for everything, and since distraction and attachment are what pull you out, small consistent practice goes a long way.

• If you want to be someone else, change your environment, not just your mind.
He corrects a Sister Hazel lyric using 'situated cognition': the brain responds to its surroundings mostly unconsciously, the way we sweat or get goosebumps without choosing to. Citing Atomic Habits, he says we fall to the level of our systems. A portfolio manager under a risk officer who automatically says no will hit that ceiling no matter how talented they are.

• The gap within one person, between their best and their worst, is usually bigger than the gap between two candidates.
Firms spend heavily comparing candidate A with candidate B but never ask what someone looks like at their best or worst after hiring. He says research shows the variation within an individual usually exceeds the variation between individuals, so there's more 'psychological alpha' in removing a person's 'mechanisms of suppression'. The biggest of those is how they've been conditioned to handle mistakes.

• Confidence and motivation predict performance better than IQ.
IQ began with Alfred Binet's narrow goal of identifying French schoolchildren who needed help, and it survives partly because testing is a multibillion-dollar industry. He prefers Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences, including interpersonal (reading others), intrapersonal (knowing yourself) and bodily-kinesthetic (Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods, Martha Graham).

• Confidence, or self-efficacy, comes from four sources, and each is biased toward the negative.
The four are mastery experiences, verbal and social persuasion, vicarious comparison, and physiological states. Failure hurts more than success feels good, and criticism stings more than praise lifts, so over a lifetime people anchor to their failures and underrate themselves. Self-esteem has no empirical link to excellence. Being slightly overconfident relative to your skill is useful, while being a lot overconfident leads to sloppiness and self-delusion.

• Forethought is a human superpower, but anxious people use it to live in worst-case futures.
Only humans plan ahead, like saving now to be comfortable in ten years. But that same ability produces endless 'what if' questions, which almost always go to the worst case and are then reacted to as though they were real. He also notes that because natural selection is slower than social change, we're trying to do modern work with a brain built for the tribe, where exclusion meant death, which is why fear of rejection runs so deep.

EXAMPLES

• Why 200 golfers play golf
One of his earliest studies asked PGA and LPGA pros and amateurs a simple question. The answers split into love of the game versus competition or money, and he found the same split later among doctors, lawyers and teachers.

• Getting a fund manager out of a drawdown: 'Let's make $100 this week'
A manager running $500 million who's down 15 against a limit of 20 tends to panic and try to win it all back in one swing. Valiante cuts their risk so they get back in the habit of making money, first $100, then $1,000. Fear makes the market look like landmines everywhere; confidence makes it look like opportunity.

• Michelle Kwan's 'I won the silver'
After losing Olympic gold to Tara Lipinski, Kwan reframed the result. Both versions were true, but hers protected her confidence, and she won the world championship later that year.

• The $600 million man still solving for an 18-year-old's heartbreak

A Wall Street client in his late 40s grew up poor with a brother addicted to drugs. His high-school girlfriend, whose mother drove a white Jaguar, dumped him because 'you don't fit'. He vowed never to be hurt for being poor again and worked 20-hour days while his family fell apart. In their second year of work together, Valiante told him, 'She's never coming back, and look at your life.' Years later the client texted that his family was intact again.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Do a Friday detachment audit

Valiante spends 10–15 minutes every Friday asking which thoughts, feelings and attachments have taken hold that he didn't consciously choose, and then deliberately lets them go.

• Interview questions that reveal character

Ask about a time they had to work with someone they disliked and watch for blame, shutting down or engagement. Ask about their biggest obstacle and then what they leaned on to overcome it. Ask what they're good at and why they believe it.

• Use self-talk patiently

Your parents' language becomes your inner voice. Affirmations work if they aren't delusional, and they work over time, the way religions use prayer or saying grace at dinner to build gratitude. Adopt Tiger Woods' line: 'You got yourself into this mess, now get yourself out of it.'

• Audit the 'debris of childhood'

Freud's observation is that we spend our adult lives undoing the debris of childhood. Both poverty and inherited wealth, which causes 'identity foreclosure', can distort who you become. Valiante's own reset was a four-month sabbatical in Austin, where he found four free sources of happiness: working out, books, conversations and hitting golf balls.

The Silent Cost of Bad Habits | James Clear

Guest: James Clear
Date: 2026-01-01 · Duration: 2:13:27
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zChiVdbSp5M

KEYPOINTS

• Every action is a vote for the person you want to become, and pride in that identity makes habits self-defending.
Making your bed is evidence you're organised; one sales call is a vote for being a salesperson. One push-up won't transform your body, but votes build a body of evidence, and once you take pride in being 'someone who doesn't miss workouts' you fight to keep the habit. The goal is not to read a book but to become a reader — let behaviour lead belief.

• Small actions only matter if they accumulate toward something; the two key time frames are 10 years and 1 hour.
People also waste time on trivial minutiae. Clear asks whether small actions are 'accumulating or evaporating.' His rule: don't let a day pass without doing something that will benefit you in a decade — think long term, act in the next hour.

• Progress is often stored, not wasted, until a phase transition.
An ice cube in a cold room doesn't melt from 25° to 31°, then melts at 32°. A month of running with no visible change, or six months of Friday meetings without shipping, is like that. The San Antonio Spurs' locker-room quote: the stonecutter's rock splits on the 101st blow, but it was the 100 before that did it.

• Try, try differently — then double down until it stops working.
Naval's line: not 10,000 attempts but 10,000 iterations. Five or ten approaches usually show what works, and an early mentor told Clear to try things 'until something comes easily.' People shortcut every step: too few experiments, weak commitment, then boredom — like a friend who abandoned a squat program that was working 'because I got bored.' It's why Clear hasn't published another book.

• Discipline is often just a good environment.
A former Philadelphia Eagles player said trainers, nutritionists, prepared food and coaches made success automatic — sticking to habits got hardest after he retired. Clear asks of every room: what is this space designed to encourage? Couches face the TV; apples moved from the crisper to a counter bowl vanish in two days.

• Make good habits obvious, attractive, easy and satisfying — and invert all four for bad ones.
Instagram nails all four; it even auto-swiped to the next slide of albums you'd seen. To break habits, make them invisible, difficult and unsatisfying; making them unattractive is hardest, since desires are hard to change. Clear's bonus question for any habit: 'What would this look like if it was fun?' — then brainstorm 10–50 versions.

• Standardise before you optimise: the two-minute rule.
Scale a habit to two minutes — read one page, take out the yoga mat. Reader Mitch, who lost 100+ lb and kept it off for over a decade, began with a rule not to stay at the gym more than five minutes. He was mastering the art of showing up; a 45-minute plan is a theory if you can't show up. As Ed Latimore says, the heaviest weight at the gym is the front door.

• The cost of good habits is in the present; the cost of bad habits is in the future.
The real trick is making habits positive in the moment too. Habits are recurring solutions to recurring problems — tired at 6pm, one person games, one runs, one smokes. By 22–25 most of our solutions are inherited, so it's statistically unlikely they're optimal.

• Reflection is the habit upstream of all others, because you can't outwork someone working on a better thing.
Hard workers use effort as a crutch, but working on the right thing gives 100× results. Clear does a Friday metrics review and an annual review against his values using his calendar — workouts per month, nights away, newsletters published. One recent principle at the top: 'move like thunder' — fewer things, bigger impact.

• Identity has a dark side: the tighter you cling to a label, the harder it is to grow.
The 'tyranny of labels' traps talented people — needing to be a professor narrows options, while 'a flexible life where I teach' opens podcasting, writing and coaching. Belonging also beats accuracy when beliefs threaten our tribe. He treats identity like a painting being retouched; progress requires unlearning.

EXAMPLES

• A four-year-old blog post led to the launch-day CBS interview.
'The Physics of Productivity' sat quietly for four years until a New York Times reporter linked it; a CBS producer booked him. After that three-minute segment he asked Gayle King to have him back for the book in 10 months; she agreed if CBS got the first interview. Surface area put him in position for luck.

• Margin of safety paid for six months off.
A family member needed $200,000 of custom medical equipment; later his wife broke her knee into four pieces and he took six months off. He judges each year by whether his position is stronger, not by net worth. On investing, he follows JL Collins — mostly Vanguard — and would trade 12% vs 15% returns for his time back.

• Deleting social media and email from his phone.
He averaged roughly 42–48 minutes a day on Instagram, which 'just evaporated.' Email off his phone has needed reinstalling twice in a year. On desktop he's logged out of Twitter, and logins route through his assistant's phone. Audible replaced the phone-in-line reflex.

• Mining three-star Amazon reviews to position Atomic Habits.
Reviews of books like The Power of Habit and 7 Habits said they explained habits but not how to apply them, so he aimed to write the most actionable guide ever. The first draft was ~712 pages, cut to ~230. He laid 12 index-card chapters on the floor with stacks of four to six books each, aiming to make those books unnecessary.

• What makes a book title work.
It addresses a timeless desire, says what the book is about, is an ownable odd phrase (Man's Search for Meaning, 'atomic' habits), and has contrast (Astrophysics for People in a Hurry). It had to be a habits book with a chapter on deliberate practice,

not the reverse — covers get seven seconds.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Filter opportunities for leverage, durability, sequencing and tailwinds.

Prefer work that keeps working — recorded podcasts over radio. He traditionally published his first book to make 'New York Times bestseller' a lifelong marker, cross-links all his platforms, and rides growing email lists. Opportunity cost should rise yearly, so say no to last year's yeses.

• Use current advantages to gain new ones.

With only time, he spent 15–20 hours per article, twice weekly, for three years. That built 100,000 subscribers, about 200,000 brought the book deal, and the book brought new leverage. Launches release potential energy built over years.

• Read with a broad funnel and tight filter; organise notes by project.

He might open 50 Reddit tabs to keep eight sentences. He brackets and stars passages, photographs them into a project doc organised by chapter — two manuscripts are 500 and 600 pages of notes. Choosing inputs is choosing your future thoughts.

• Make priorities visible.

Clothespins on a string with a red line — kids and workouts above, film or music-label ideas must earn their way up. His parents log an X per swim. Success, to Clear, is power over his days.

The Psychology of Mental Toughness: How Top Performers Override Biological Limits

Guest: Jim Murphy
Date: 2025-11-25 · Duration: 1:16:32
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvJg4SMzzQ8

KEYPOINTS

- **The path to peak performance under pressure and the path to the best possible life are the same.**
  Jim Murphy, a performance coach to pro athletes, gave away over half his possessions to live in solitude in the desert and decide what to devote his life to. Writing a manual for his first baseball clients, he asked what good it is to make people more successful if it doesn't change their hearts. He concluded that the poise needed under pressure comes from the same 'wholehearted' path as a meaningful life: walking in love, not fear.
- **The quality of your life rests on three things: your inner world, your frame of reference, and your relationships.**
  Inner Excellence's preface lists your thoughts, feelings, beliefs and desires; the mindset through which you see the world; and your relationships. Murphy argues that human optimisation must go deeper than technique, to where your greatest fears and greatest dreams live — the heart and subconscious.
- **Hold outcome goals loosely; they're secondary to who you're becoming.**
  He calls results and circumstances the 'third world', your inner life the second, and the unseen world of love, joy and peace the first. He had 'New York Times bestselling author' as a phone affirmation for 15–16 years before dropping it; it later came true. You don't even know if a goal is good for you.
- **The achievement treadmill traps talented people most.**
  Set a goal, get a result, judge it, feel temporarily good or bad, update your beliefs, chase a bigger goal. The more talented you are, the bigger the highs and lows, and the more you depend on achieving to feel okay. Murphy cites Jerry Seinfeld working because it's how he can 'feel', and Tom Brady asking 'is that it?' Busyness often keeps us from facing our fears.
- **Everyone worships something, and you're only as stable as what sits at the top of your heart.**
  Echoing David Foster Wallace, Murphy says baseball was his god. He spent five years in the minors, never made the majors, and was devastated — after bad seasons he didn't want people to know he was a pro. The ego is 'always threatened, always comparing, never satisfied,' implying success brings love and failure brings rejection.
- **Dirty fuel works, but at a cost.**
  Shane describes his 'dirty fuel' — a 2018 New York Times commenter's '15 minutes of fame' jab and a grade-nine teacher writing he'd be 'lucky to graduate high school.' Murphy agrees fear and anger can accomplish a lot, but the long-term cost is often lost inner peace and joy.
- **Being fully present beats being fully confident.**
  Given two equally talented performers, Murphy takes the present one, because confidence can breed carelessness. A major-league All-Star said that on days he wasn't confident he'd tell himself 'walk 10 guys, I don't care, but be present,' and often pitched better. Presence is self-forgetfulness, like being enraptured by the Grand Canyon: 'selfless is fearless.'
- **Courage is the resource anyone can have, and the common trait of top performers.**
  They're willing to look foolish, fail and be judged. Murphy warns clients chasing world No. 1 that the climb brings more exposure and longer falls, so pick a smaller goal if you won't accept merciless judgement. Principle one of Inner Excellence: everything is here to teach me; seek out your most uncomfortable moments. Its three pillars are belief, freedom and focus.
- **The best possible life has one foot in joy and one foot in suffering.**
  Muscles grow by breaking down, and wisdom and courage come through adversity, not comfort. His mentor's image: God gives you a jacket two sizes too big so you grow into it. A quote he loves: 'aging is the aggressive pursuit of comfort.' An easier life isn't the best life.

EXAMPLES

- **A.J. Brown reading Inner Excellence on the sideline.**
  Published in 2009, the book sold modestly; Murphy reacquired the rights in 2018 and revised it to about 85% new stories by 2020. On 12 January 2025, when the Eagles receiver was seen reading it during a playoff game, sales exploded to No. 1 and 100,000+ copies. His mother died four days later at 91, and he hadn't paid off his credit cards that month.
- **The homeless harpist named Zoe.**
  After five years of 50–60 hour writing weeks, Murphy was $90,000 in debt and near breakdown. A friend told him to find a homeless Christian and help him; he gave his last $100 to a harpist in Denver. The man returned with a bracelet, chocolates and a card signed 'Zoe' — the Greek word for fullness of life that Murphy had built the book around.
- **Missing a short birdie putt for ego.**
  In a PGA Tour playoff practice round at $100 a birdie, a client missed a short putt after two rivals birdied. Murphy told him he'd have made it at home; he was thinking about what they'd think. The question in such moments: do I want to succeed this once, or get better at these moments?
- **Lewis Gordon Pugh's North Pole swim.**
  He swam a kilometre at the North Pole in just a Speedo. His coach placed a flag every 100 m, each representing team members, and told him to think only about the next flag — mirroring marathoners who focus on the next stop sign.
- **Two weeks without civilisation in French Polynesia.**
  Sailing with a grieving friend who picked mould off bread and ate food off the floor, Murphy — who slept in an Oura ring, Whoop and Biostrap — realised his perfectionism was limiting his freedom.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Give 100% of what's available today.**
  After a four-hour drive and little sleep, Murphy told himself it was a 30–40% day and gave all of that. Shane worries it becomes an excuse; Murphy notes the 'you're slacking' voice is common in driven people.
- **Before quitting, play the scene forward.**
  To a golfer who wanted to walk off the course: you can quit — tell your caddy, withdraw, slam the trunk, sit in Chipotle. Is that what you want? If you're missing the cut anyway, use the round to practise the shot you've been avoiding.
- **Make the first step tiny and lower expectations to what you know you can do.**
  Put running shoes by the door, as in Atomic Habits. Scottie Scheffler's caddie Ted Scott helps players aim for the centre of the club face, not a result. Shane adds a Kahneman-inspired rule: he works out daily, varying only scope.
- **Give kids more than resources.**
  Asked what he wants for his kids, Shane says independence; Murphy calls that a low bar. Model a life of love over fear, wisdom over knowledge, and courage.

No. 1 Performance Coach: What the Best in the World Know About Success

Guest: Jim Loehr
Date: 2024-04-30 · Duration: 1:23:29
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0CF7-hhtl0

KEYPOINTS

- **Almost everything we tell ourselves is a story, and the story we build around events matters more than the events.**
  We have no direct contact with reality. The brain interprets the data coming in through our senses, and it prefers explanations that fit what's already 'loaded in', discarding contradictions. Loehr calls the inner voice the 'command center' that largely determines your destiny: your belief in yourself, your joy and your resilience.
- **A parent's public voice becomes the child's private voice.**
  Loehr realized that offhand remarks to his three sons, like 'you're always screwing things up; if I'd had your opportunities I'd have been a star', were being installed as their inner critics, and he stopped 'on a dime'. Parents and coaches get direct access to the space where meaning is made. Under stress, people pass their own parents' voice down. A harsh inner critic means fighting a two-front war, against the world and against yourself.
- **Test your stories against three guidelines: true, aligned with your values, and taking you where you want to go.**
  Is the story grounded in objective reality, or just convenient? Does it reflect the best of who you want to be? Does it make you more hopeful about your future, or convince you you're not capable? His benchmark: if your self-talk were shown on a Jumbotron, would you be proud of how you coached yourself?
- **Rewrite a limiting story by hand, repeatedly, and listen to yourself read it.**
  After testing visualization and many other methods with a strong faculty, his institute found handwriting changed thinking most durably. Write the new story, rewrite it several times from memory, compare versions, then record it as a voice memo and play it back, so your private voice becomes public. He points to James Pennebaker's research on expressive writing and trauma. His own data suggested handwriting beat typing.
- **Most number-one performers never expected to get there; love of the pursuit came first.**
  Of the 17 world number ones he worked with, most were astonished by where they ended up. They had parents who enabled rather than forced them, and coaches who believed in them early. Loehr's own basketball coach, Guy Gibbs, told him, 'I believe in you more than you believe in yourself.' One early coach told a young Novak Djokovic he had the greatest potential she'd ever seen. Success forced on a child by a parent rarely lasts.
- **Who you become in the pursuit matters more than what you achieve.**
  Loehr built his career on mental toughness, but noticed that athletes who developed moral and ethical character alongside their sport were the true winners. They also sustained success longer, 'because everyone wanted them to succeed'.
- **Time has value only when it meets energy, and full engagement is the skill of investing that energy.**
  At the Nick Bollettieri Tennis Academy he filmed 240 elite juniors. All arrived on time, yet some got worse through practice because they weren't engaged. He told Stephen Covey's son that time management rests on a faulty premise: four hours at home spent irritable and watching the game can produce 'a reverse return'. Bringing energy when you're low on it is what shows people you care.
- **We're oscillatory beings: chronic stress without recovery is the problem, not stress itself.**
  Nothing in human physiology is a flat line 'except death'. To spend a lot of energy, you must recover a lot, through sleep, regular meals, hydration and fitness, since fitter people recover faster. 'Health ignites performance.' The hormones of stress are the hormones of life: surround yourself with marshmallows and pillows and that's all you'll be able to handle. He worked on recovery with surgeons and nurses on 12-hour shifts, and with special forces.
- **Rituals are habits you deliberately acquire to serve your mission.**
  Most of our days run on 'the unbearable automaticity of being', habits we never chose. Humans can pause between stimulus and response and rewire, but it takes energy and a purpose strong enough to carry you 'into the storm'. Start with tiny rituals: a fixed wake time, a small breakfast instead of a huge dinner.

EXAMPLES

- **The 16-second cure**
  Tracking players' heart rate and recording their self-talk aloud, Loehr found you could tell great competitors by watching only the time between points, roughly 70% of a match. Copying what the best players did produced a routine of at least 16 seconds: a positive physical response, relaxation, a preparation ritual such as bouncing the ball, then instinct. Anger sent heart rates too high, and giving up sent them too low.
- **The Matador walk**
  He flew to Spain to ask the famous bullfighter Martín Vázquez how matadors control fear. 'Is it not obvious?' Matadors train from boyhood how to walk, turn, carry their shoulders and place their eyes, and they dominate the bull through presence. Loehr taught tennis players the same walk. To control your inner chemistry, look on the outside how you want to feel on the inside.
- **Rewriting the bad putter's story**
  Instead of 'I've never been a good putter', the edited version admits the poor stats, then commits: I'll make putting the most important part of my game, light up at every green as a chance to practice, and treat a missed three-footer as 'getting it out of my system'.
- **From 'worthless video games' to a shared conversation**
  Rather than banning games or phones, explain the concern: 'I love you, and I worry too much screen time limits your creativity and progress.' Then ask how social media has hurt them and what limits they'd set. Kids lock out preaching but let in stories and questions.
- **Books kids actually want**
  Shane describes funding books chosen by the kids themselves for about 50 classrooms a year for five years, after his son

refused assigned reading but devoured books he chose. Teachers still write about the difference. Loehr's grandkids became readers through Harry Potter and Star Wars.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Write a laminated purpose**

  Loehr keeps his purpose in his wallet: live what I teach. Each morning he journals and asks whether he lived that mission yesterday with his sons, grandsons and colleagues.

- **Mental toughness is more than mental**

  Athletes from 21 sports described their 'ideal performance state' in the same terms: calm, relaxed, confident, positive energy. It depends on emotions, fitness, fuel and a purpose of your own, not only on thoughts.

- **Guard kids against social media**

  Kids become 'only as good as their last post'. Loehr's youth program uses young people who have come through hard times as mentors, because peers get through where parents can't.

The Art of Failure: The Unexpected Path to Success (Audio)

Guest: Gio Valiante
Date: 2023-11-14 · Duration: 0:54:58
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tEcdIIb5_o

KEYPOINTS

• Failure is woven into success — the question is how to fail.

Performance psychologist Gio Valiante says success and failure aren't opposites. Failure is woven into the fabric of success, so the useful question is how to fail in ways that build skill and belief. It's like teaching a child to fall on skis so they don't get hurt. To predict how someone will react to failure, don't look at the reaction. Go back to the beginning and ask why they do what they do.

• Mastery orientation versus ego orientation.

Research on achievement goals sorts people into two buckets. Mastery-oriented people are curious and intrinsically motivated; they love the problem and the practice. Ego-oriented people want to beat others, prove something or manage their image. He says children love learning until about third grade — when grades arrive. When mastery-oriented people fail, they get curious, like Edison calling the light bulb 'an invention that simply required a thousand steps.' When ego-oriented people fail, they feel embarrassed.

• Embarrassment is the toxic emotion that makes people underperform.

Valiante ranks humiliation as one of the most painful human experiences, second only to the grief of losing a child. Embarrassment floods the body with cortisol and adrenaline and distorts perception, so you see threat instead of opportunity and stop taking risks. Twenty years later you wonder where the time went, and so does everyone who thought you could have been better. His first agreement with every client: take embarrassment out of the equation, because the brain will anticipate it and put you in a 'psychological straitjacket.'

• Incentives can kill the love of the game.

He cites Born to Run's argument that marathon times got slower once Nike contracts arrived and runners ran for the reward. He also tells a parable. An old man whose garden kept getting trampled by neighbourhood football players paid the kids $5 a week to play, then stopped paying — and the games ended. Praise, approval and money are fine, he says, but the order matters: love of the craft first, then enjoy what comes with it.

• Choose your mirrors and pre-decide your reactions.

To move a client from ego to mastery, Valiante starts with why, then picks three or four people the client will actually listen to — people who love them, observe accurately and tell the truth. Most of us over-index on what an imagined 'they' think, when people form opinions carelessly. Then they rehearse reactions to failure on a ladder of five: embarrassment, anger, acceptance, humour, and ultimately curiosity. Accepting a miss and laughing at it avoids the toxic chemistry entirely. He calls sense of humour one of the greatest tells of psychological health.

• When effort is commoditised, judgment is the edge.

At the far end of the curve, everyone works hard and everyone is persistent. The advantage becomes knowing when to quit a bad bet, when to rest, and when to fold. At the top of Bloom's taxonomy of thinking — above knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis and synthesis — he puts judgment. After back-to-back visits with Bills coach Sean McDermott, golfer Jordan Spieth and hedge-fund manager Steve Cohen, he realised they were all having the same conversation. That conversation is humility, endless testing, work ethic and flow.

• The best combine humility with conviction.

Valiante says almost every success book is already in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. Top performers believe in their path but readily admit they don't know, so they keep testing and risking. Tiger Woods rebuilt what experts called the greatest swing in history, in a spirit of kaizen — continual improvement. Peter Buck of R.E.M. recorded an album on mandolin rather than repeat the formula. The ability to 'play the shot that you see' means trusting your own vision. And when you're afraid, stare at it: go eyeball to eyeball with the fear rather than letting life bully you.

• Press an advantage only after checking your why.

Pressing at the wrong time usually comes from impatience or frustration. An investor with a 10% mandate who is up 5% in a quiet market forces a low-probability trade and loses their job. Desire powers innovation, as in Adam Smith or Ayn Rand. Left unchecked, he says, it drives most cognitive errors. He points to Tiger Woods: the desire behind his greatness also fuelled the decisions that blew up his marriage and the injuries from refusing to stop. Map your edge, decide what losses you'll tolerate, and notice if a loss would rattle your future decisions — 'that's your tell.'

EXAMPLES

• The NBA free-throw gap.

One player shot about 85% from the line in practice and in the 50% range in games, because he cared what people thought — what sports calls having 'rabbit ears.'

• 'You want me to suck and enjoy it?'

A PGA Tour golfer had gone seven or eight years without a win. Once he started accepting bad shots instead of beating himself up, his swing loosened — and he won about two weeks later. Valiante later spotted him laughing with his caddie mid-round.

• Tiger played against history.

Jack Nicklaus said he played better trailing. Woods is the only golfer Valiante knows who played better with a lead, because he was always chasing Nicklaus's record — like a greyhound chasing the rabbit.

• Two houses, two jet skis.

In his early 30s he had a PhD, a professorship, a bestselling book and two of everything. A friend said he must be so happy. He realised he wasn't — his possessions were starting to own him.

- **Friday beers with the mechanic.**
  The man who fixes his car can repair any engine on Earth, and nobody knows. Valiante spends Friday afternoons hearing his stories of growing up in the Deep South.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Watch out for headwinds at home.**
  A spouse or boss who takes satisfaction in your failure can cancel out every other advantage. Have trusted people audit your setup.
- **Do more of whatever puts you in flow.**
  Time disappears and hard things feel easy. If it's healthy, that's your signal to do more of it.
- **'No money fun.'**
  Borrowing from Mike Myers, Valiante finds his happiness in active, cheap things — range balls, books, workouts and people.

Beyond Luck: The 5 Sources of Advantage You Need to Win (Audio)

Guest: Gio Valiante
Date: 2023-10-31 · Duration: 0:53:43
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6f0rtpXPiM

KEYPOINTS

• There are five main ways to win, and raw talent is only the first.

Valiante's framework, drawn from 15 years as a sports psychologist on the PGA Tour and thousands of hours coaching hedge-fund investors, is: talent, effort, a differentiated perspective, process, and hiring well. Talent looks like Rory McIlroy, whose swing at six is the swing he has today, or Eddie Van Halen picking up his brother's guitar and playing licks Alex had worked on for weeks. But about 140 players tee off at a PGA Tour event and the most talented doesn't win every week. The other four routes are how everyone else competes.

• At the extreme top, work and hobby fuse, and people come to love the boring parts.

Psychologists often tell people to keep identity separate from work, but at the top hundredth of a percent the two tend to blend: Kobe Bryant, Bode Miller, Kelly Slater, Newton, Einstein. Valiante says Steve Cohen ran his high school investing club and, over roughly 10,000 trading days, took four off, all because he was in the hospital. Valiante calls the key shift an 'inversion': you start to love the hard parts. Tiger Woods practiced three-foot putts for so long that he wore lines into the grass. Swimmers who drill flip turns do the same. Talent plus the most effort, as with Michael Jordan, becomes legendary.

• A differentiated perspective lets you win by seeing the same game differently.

Valiante sees the Big Dipper; Van Gogh saw Starry Night. In college football, he says, Nick Saban treats the game as an arms race for talent, Steve Spurrier as a game of space (throw into open field and let the receiver run under it: 10 SEC titles despite never having top recruiting classes), and Urban Meyer as a foot race where every position must love to run. Bode Miller skied by 'feeling speed in my feet', not technique. In markets, some investors win with a high hit rate and equal-sized bets. Others are 'sluggers' who are often wrong but size up heavily when they spot a great idea.

• Process guards against variability and frees your mind to think.

'We are what we do every day.' Consistent waking, eating and exercise, like a pilot's pre-flight checklist, hand routine work to automatic habit during cognitive overload, so attention is left for real decisions. A consistent process also tells you where to look when something goes wrong. If you aren't the smartest and there's a limit to how hard you can work, Valiante says, you can still design a life of 'wash, rinse, repeat'.

• The fifth way, common in business, is hiring and managing well. Luck is real but not a strategy.

He says no one would call Citadel founder Ken Griffin a prodigious trader, yet he built 'the ultimate meritocracy' by hiring the best person at each position to cover his own gaps. Luck is a sixth path: flip a coin five million times and you'll see long streaks of heads, and some lives simply land on heads. Valiante leaves it out of the five because you can't plan on it.

• Discipline is changeable. Start with behavior, go all in, and allow no exceptions.

Separate fixed traits (personality, mostly IQ) from malleable ones, and stop trying to fix the unfixable, a mistake he often sees in marriages. 'Discipline' comes from 'disciple', a student, so self-discipline means being a student of yourself. Change behavior first, because 'behavior is a cause of behavior' (Albert Bandura). Old habits are 'ruts long traveled'. Following William James, don't let an exception happen until the new habit is rooted: no celebratory pizza after a healthy month. Like the recovering alcoholic 20 years sober, keep working at it a little every day.

• Change the environment and you often change the person, no willpower needed.

Thinking happens in a place ('situated cognition'). Howard Gardner told him nature and nurture are each more important than we think. A casino has no windows or clocks, swaps money for chips, serves free drinks and plays chosen music, so disciplined people walk out at 5 a.m. asking what happened. 'If you want to be somebody else,' Valiante says, more often than changing your mind, 'change your environment' and the people around you.

• Talent hotbeds run on 'primal cues', and comfort tends to breed fragility.

Drawing on Daniel Coyle's The Talent Code, he notes that places producing outsized talent (Russian tennis, South Korean women's golf, Dominican baseball, Brazilian soccer) are rarely comfortable. The message is 'there's no plan B', which sharpens focus and speeds up skill-building. His exam question for students: why has no golfer from an elite club he names made the PGA Tour, despite the best coaches and new balls on perfect grass? Comfortable formative years leave people without the grit for when the game gets hard.

• Resilience comes from normative failure. Overprotecting children makes them fragile.

'When failure is the norm, resilience becomes second nature': a boxer's bones strengthen, Mount St. Helens grew back into a thriving ecosystem, foresters run controlled burns, and the lotus grows from muck. He cites Erik Erikson's warning that overprotection robs children of their lives. Often he's 'the last phone call', after a golfer has fired his caddie and coach. Crisis strips the ego away and frees people to create, as Steve Jobs described after being fired from Apple.

EXAMPLES

• The Fearless Golf routine

In 2002, asking golfers who they competed against got five different answers, which meant no constant. His routine covered before, during and after the shot, roughly 'pick a target, make a fearless swing, let it go', in 20 seconds, then repeat. It contributed to about 50 wins. Urban Meyer teaches 'seven seconds of greatness' for each of 60–70 plays.

• The boy who kept getting in trouble

Sitting unnoticed at the back of the class, Valiante saw the teacher had seated the boy between two best friends he messed around with. Moving him to the front fixed his behavior.

• Parenting as a vanity project

Parents yelling at their kids at the club are often embarrassed for themselves, and children feel it. Love means time, honesty and taking things away even when it's inconvenient. You've succeeded when your kid says, 'I got this.'

- **Confidence predicts persistence**
  In a study he describes, students rated their confidence on 20 math problems. The confident ones kept reworking hard problems and solved more. Persistence, not ability, predicted their scores. Following Carol Dweck, praise effort rather than intelligence.
- **Shane's eight extra advantages**
  Shane adds patience, the ability to withstand pain (financial, emotional, social), temperament, the right partner, energy, curiosity, luck, and positioning: 'everybody looks like a genius in a good position.'

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Delayed gratification pairs with resilience**
  Valiante says both outrank raw ability over a lifetime. Teach both and your kids are 'pretty well set up'.
- **Wealth has its own pathology**
  He's writing a book called Rich and Miserable: abundance often comes with anxiety, depression and drug abuse, and a smooth path leaves kids fragile.
- **Habits set early last**
  The earlier discipline enters someone's habits, the more likely it lasts. Later in life, go all in the moment you decide to change.

Dr. Julie Gurner: Standards, Rules, and Curating Friendships

Guest: Dr. Julie Gurner
Date: 2023-07-25 · Duration: 0:43:22
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTGZg6GYc0Y

KEYPOINTS

• Keep your high standards, but lead people up to them instead of punishing them for falling short.
Gurner says the biggest frustration among the CEOs she coaches is that employees don't share their obsession. Most never will. The standard that put you in your seat is the reason you're there and they aren't. Someone who reliably hits 80% of your bar still pushes the business forward and takes work off your plate. Don't drop expectations, though: 'If you want to be happy, don't have expectations' is, she says, 'a really good way to be unhappy for the rest of your life', because you'll put up with anything. Raise people through inspiration rather than fear. Teammates lift their game because they get to play with Tom Brady.

• How much you care sends a signal, and people treat you accordingly.
Everyone has high standards for the things they truly care about, like the person who studies food photos on Instagram before choosing a restaurant. Shane adds that average standards at work quietly signal 'this is a job, not a career', and you'll be treated more transactionally. Gurner agrees, and says it should be so. When you're looking for a partner to build with, you look for different traits than in someone who clocks in and out. That's fine, as long as they're happy at the level it leads to.

• See the business as something you do, not who you are, or you'll stop seeing it clearly.
If you're the driver rather than the car, you make better calls. When a company is too precious to you, it skews how you invest, makes you take valid criticism personally, and hides operational problems you refuse to see. That detachment, she argues, is 'essential to making optimum decisions'. Fusing yourself with the company puts it at risk.

• You can't see your own blind spots, so build real ways to hear them.
Gurner runs anonymous 360s with eight to ten people around a leader: direct and skip-level reports, people who've never worked with them, board members, and the 'whisper network'. The reports run around 13 pages. One revealed a CEO with 'shiny object syndrome', chasing crypto and then AI while the team begged for focus. She treats an out-of-hand dismissal as a flag: if a client wants to discuss 'everything but product', they need to discuss product. A one-to-five 'effective communicator' rating tells you nothing.

• Hard feedback only lands when people know you're in their corner.
Radical Candor is often misread as license to be blunt, but its basis is caring deeply so you can challenge directly. Feedback meant to shame or dominate backfires. You want the friend who says 'definitely don't buy those jeans', and you don't resent them because they want you to look good. One CEO asked her to find out 'what does he think he's great at that he's not'. The answers stung. She accepts pushback and brusqueness as signs of trust.

• Choose words that frame feedback from strength, and make it 'us versus the problem'.
Her session notes never use words like 'weak' or 'ineffective'. She frames gaps as a 'next level of operation' and talks about survivors, not victims. Clients often come back after rereading them and say, 'I'm in, let's do this.' Instead of 'Ted, you're missing your numbers', try 'Ted, our marketing numbers are slipping. Let's problem-solve how to pull them up.' Pulling someone to your side of the table lowers defensiveness, and it helps leaders hold conversations earlier instead of avoiding them.

• A bad ten minutes doesn't have to become a bad day. Decide how you want people to feel and step into the role.
After a fight or a 30-minute traffic delay, ask: do I want my team to feel my frustration, or excited about what's ahead? A bad mood blocks the very outcomes you want. She admits it's controversial, but a leadership role is called a role for a reason. 'Nobody wants' your full self at work. Bring your best work self and lead from the front.

• 'Fight up front': deal with problems early, before the secondary location.
From her forensic psychology training: if someone tries to pull you into a vehicle, your best chance is to fight right there, because wherever they take you will be worse and unpredictable. The same goes for the hire your gut doubts. You monitor, delay, start a performance plan, and six months later a weak CMO has hurt your brand and profits. With a dating red flag, waiting until lives are intertwined makes leaving far harder. Done early and well, she says, 'it shouldn't be a fight'.

• Escape cognitive ruts by bringing in ideas from outside your field.
You're the biggest engine of your results and also the biggest limit on them. A marketer with marketing friends, conferences and books wonders why they aren't exceptional. Great ones borrow from artists and affiliate marketers, the way Steve Jobs used his calligraphy class for fonts. She points to the FIRE movement and The 4-Hour Workweek as fresh takes on retirement and work. Prisons showed her how creative people get when forced. Comfort gives you no such push. You climb out gradually, up the wall and back, until you pop out.

EXAMPLES

• Ending friendships that no longer fit
Rather than ghosting, she prefers being upfront: 'I'm locked in on my business, so unsubscribe me from the Friday-night chain.' Or: 'I don't have the bandwidth to answer every text.' Most people take the hint. Actively toxic people need a direct conversation.

• Red flags in relationships
People who push past boundaries you set ('can't the project wait?'), who belittle rather than question, and above all how you feel afterwards. A persistent pattern of draining 'vampire' interactions is the signal, as distinct from a friend going through a divorce.

• Setting goals before coaching
Clients name two or three goals at the start. She measures herself against them, warns that some sessions will be tough, and says every client is her 'calling card'.

• Her reading diet
She deliberately reads biographies, artists and philosophy, not just psychology and performance, and complains that LinkedIn

content and conference lineups could have come from five years ago.

- **Perspective ties it together**
  Shane notes that blind spots, ruts and seeing 'the next level' all come down to perspective: it's hard to understand a system you can only see from inside.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Clients expand her range**
  Working with founders of billion-dollar companies shows her levels she didn't know existed and pushes her to think bigger.
- **Success is optionality**
  For her it means having enough to never think about needing it, plus choices over time, place, future and the scale of help she can give.
- **Expectations protect you**
  Enforced high standards stop you tolerating a bad relationship, workplace or employee, and model the same for your kids.

Dr. Julie Gurner: How to Reach Your Potential

Guest: Julie Gurner
Date: 2023-06-27 · Duration: 0:53:02
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5D6HAskUaE

KEYPOINTS

• Discipline is a push; motivation is a pull.

Executive coach Dr. Julie Gurner says relying on discipline is a poor primary strategy. Her high performers don't need pushing to work; their spouses are telling them to switch off at night and on weekends. Discipline is useful in three cases: restarting a lapsed routine, taking a frightening leap into something new, and getting through off days. Grit and happiness are correlated, so pushing through does feel good. But if a role feels like a daily slog for too long, that's often a sign you shouldn't be in it — it's when you see Olympians retire.

• You can't install drive, but you can release it.

Gurner thinks internal hunger can't be taught — you have it or you don't. A leader's job is to learn each person's goals and drivers in one-on-ones and tie the work to them, rather than trying to create motivation. Shane's framing: we can't create drive, but we can get in its way. Startup equity works when it aligns company success with life-changing, generational money for a team. She hasn't seen her driven clients turn complacent. One family-business chairman in his mid-70s is as hungry as ever.

• Negative fuel works if you channel it.

People work against things — poverty, an upbringing — as much as for them. A chip on the shoulder never fully gets disproved. The third-grade teacher who said you'd never amount to much still motivates you with $50 million in the bank. Mike Tyson said he trained out of fear of public humiliation, and that by the walk to the ring the fear faded and he felt like a god. Rage and resentment can burn your own house down, but channelled properly they're 'a force to be reckoned with.'

• Survivor, not victim — and start from today.

When Gurner hears helplessness, she helps people rewrite the story around survivorship and the strength it took. She starts with who you are now, not your inner child, because revisiting powerlessness sets you up badly. With people who hesitate to take risks, she has them recount risks that paid off. People bury 20 compliments under one 'what did you do to your hair?' Her traffic example: some drivers rage and others relax with a podcast. If traffic itself made people nuts, it would make everyone nuts. Blaming your childhood hands your power to something outside you.

• Imaginary rules keep you small.

Beyond useful rules like manners, we absorb unspoken ones about what we can earn, do or become. Growing up, Gurner thought a physician was the richest thing you could be. Ask people if they're the author of their lives and they'll say yes. Ask what they wanted to be, and most haven't done it or didn't think it was possible. Frustrated, they then tell stories about others: anyone earning a million must exploit people or have been born rich. Your social circle either reinforces these rules or helps you break them.

• Boundaries are freedom.

They protect your highest and best use of time. Founders who keep their tentacles in product too long compromise on scale. Boundaries also protect a weekly date night that you actually hold to. Setting them makes few people happy, and others will test them. Think of your life as a stool: if your whole identity is the business, it's easy to kick out. Build several legs — relationship, sleep, nutrition, spirituality — and fix the nagging shoulder now, so it stops eating headspace. Some people overwork precisely because work is where they feel they're winning while home is falling apart.

• Outliers are quirky, make big bets, and trust they'll figure it out.

Gurner's outliers are 'resolutely themselves.' They're often not the most popular kids in high school, which may push them to go further. They like risk and winning, and don't care how others think they operate. One client spent $8 million on a machine and bought several more, betting his company would catch up. She pushes back on the idea that they 'burn the boats.' They're confident that whatever happens they'll figure it out — there's always a dinghy.

• Hesitation erodes confidence; action stacks it.

Watch a friend take chance after chance while you're still thinking about your idea, and each step widens the gap and erodes self-esteem. Eventually you rationalise why you didn't do it, and the idea goes 'to the place where dreams die.' Each leap that doesn't go wrong is a shot in the arm. If someone says 'you've changed,' take it as a compliment.

EXAMPLES

• One intentional thing per role.

An executive carried a note card each day with one thing to be a better husband, dad and CEO — sometimes just bringing home candy or taking the family for ice cream.

• Oprah's one believer.

Gurner recalls Oprah saying everyone told her she'd fail when she left to start her own talk show, except one person, her best friend. Your validation circle should be that small.

• Discrediting Kris Jenner.

People explain away a former airline stewardess who built multiple billion-dollar companies. We discredit what we don't think is possible for ourselves. Critics on Twitter have rarely done the thing they're dismissing.

• A 5K in five months.

To learn risk, start small and private: sign up for a race far enough out to train for, nail it, and carry the swagger into work.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Don't announce your goals.

Praise for stated goals can sap motivation to achieve them. Swap the vision board for a progress board. Gurner prefers Sun Tzu to building in public.

- **Intervene early.**
  Fix the unhappy job or the conflict before it reaches the breaking point you'll eventually reach anyway.
- **Make it you versus you.**
  Personal goals achieved quietly build confidence. As they compound, the research stacks in your favour.

The Science of Setting and Achieving Goals | Emily Balcetis | Knowledge Project Podcast

Guest: Emily Balcetis
Date: 2022-12-13 · Duration: 1:25:04
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYAe0zXt8xg

KEYPOINTS

• We trust our eyes more than we should.
NYU social psychologist Emily Balcetis points out that the world rarely corrects our vision. Touch a 'silk' shirt and the label says polyester; mishear someone and they correct you. If we miss something visually, nobody tells us, so our trust is miscalibrated. The anatomy compounds it. Horses see about 270 degrees, but our forward-facing eyes take in a narrow slice. Only an area the size of two thumbnails at arm's length is sharp; the rest comes in fuzzy and colour-poor. The brain fills the gaps with memory and expectation, testing input against a visual hypothesis. That's the 'perception–reality gap.'

• Your body and motivation change how far things look.
In her lab's studies, people with a higher waist-to-hip ratio or BMI literally saw distances as farther — the people for whom the finish line would be hardest to reach. But motivation compensated. Highly motivated people with higher waist-to-hip ratios saw the distance as short as leaner people did. Visual experience isn't a camera feed. It reflects what the body can do and what the brain supplements.

• Narrow your focus and you'll move faster.
Balcetis expected elite sprinters — including Trinidad's fastest man and someone who'd trained against Usain Bolt — to describe superhuman peripheral awareness. Instead, they described a spotlight on the finish line; over longer distances, they picked a target, reached it and picked another. So she taught ordinary exercisers to do the same: choose a target, imagine a spotlight on it, ignore the periphery. On an identical course they moved 23% faster and said it hurt 17% less. Over the next week, fitness-tracker data showed they took more walks, more steps, and walked faster. The illusion of proximity raises self-efficacy, so the gap becomes something to use rather than fear.

• Save the narrow focus for the end.
Surveying thousands of runners in 5Ks, her team found narrow attention is used slightly more than wide at the start. The gap grows dramatically towards the finish. Checking bib numbers against official race times showed the fastest runners widened that gap the most. Constant targeting is tiring, so they conserve it. Distractions — rivals neck and neck, the sister cheering with a sign — widen attention exactly when it hurts. This echoes the goal gradient from 1930s and '40s animal studies: rats ran faster and pulled harder in harnesses near the end of a maze, despite having less energy left.

• In the murky middle, choose where to look.
Drawing on Ayelet Fishbach's research, Balcetis says beginnings and endings have their own energy, but the middle is where people drop off. If you're deeply committed to a goal, look forward at the gap still to close. If you're less committed — a new goal, or one handed to you — look back at how far you've come. And keep goals out of the impossible zone. NYU colleagues found systolic blood pressure drops when a goal feels impossibly hard, as if the body gives up before starting. Sub-goals bring difficulty into the Goldilocks zone.

• Pair the big vision with concrete steps and plan B.
A TD Bank survey found over three-quarters of small-business owners use or believe in vision boards. But a board of your loftiest goals can be depressing and gives no route. Couple big-picture sessions with concrete actions for this week and month, then list likely obstacles and backup plans. When an obstacle hits, you're short on time and bandwidth — like being stuck in a bunker unable to see the green. The plan has to be practised, and kept salient, to work.

• Plan the week, not just the day.
Balcetis's team, each pursuing a big personal project — a first film, a new social organisation, a novel — tested two approaches. One week they planned each morning for that day. Another week they planned the whole week on Sunday, slotting in blocks. Weekly planning found 2.5 more hours of goal work and helped 66% of people. Seven days out, the calendar is freer, and a block you can see gets worked around like a meeting with the boss. It also explains overcommitting: distant requests are judged on desirability, near ones on feasibility.

• Let your environment do the reminding.
Self-encouragement is effortful. Use the perception–behaviour link instead: keep running shoes near the door you open every day rather than in the dark back of the closet, and put workout clothes on the dresser rather than your robe. Most people break New Year's resolutions by Valentine's Day, often by setting impossible goals like losing 40 lb by swimsuit season, then quitting after six weeks and 3 lb. Set sub-goals ('down, not up, in six weeks'). Plan for February's busier schedules with backup times. Treat a miss as a debrief, not a 'failure' label.

EXAMPLES

• Phelps swimming blind.
In the 2008 Beijing 200m butterfly, chasing a record eighth gold, Michael Phelps's goggles filled with water. He'd practised for it — his coach reportedly smashed his goggles before dives — so he counted strokes and won.

• Her mother's saucer.
After part of her stomach was removed following a cancer scare, Balcetis's mother can eat only 5–6 oz per meal, less than Balcetis's 7-month-old. She uses appetiser plates and teacup saucers so the meal feels full.

• Google's frosted M&M jars.
Without removing free snacks, Google put M&M's in opaque containers and unhealthy drinks on low cooler shelves. Restocking reports showed less unhealthy consumption.

• Mass General's traffic-light cafeteria.
Placing healthy items at eye level and using green, yellow and red price tags raised healthy eating and lowered unhealthy

eating.

- **Spider phobics spot spiders first.**
  Clinical research shows people with phobias orient to, and fixate on, the feared object faster — seeing evidence that reinforces their belief.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Bad looms larger than good.**
  Negativity dominance means one insult outweighs one compliment; memory of past experience also shapes whether the glass looks half full.
- **Be a better accountant of progress.**
  Star charts work for adults too, correcting our tendency to under-credit our successes.
- **One hat at a time.**
  Running a lab of 40–50 people with a 6-year-old and a baby, she reminds herself: you've committed to Legos now — enjoy them.