

The Art of Mental Training

Chapter 9

On Anger

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“Let’s review, Danielsan,” he told me as we sat down. Sometimes after a workout we’d drink some tea and enjoy the view from his simple patio overlooking the coastline.

“At this point you understand that—whether positive, negative, or anywhere in between—all emotions are created by what we are thinking. You understand that the stronger the warrior is able to build his self-belief system the better. You understand that self-belief, a good attitude, confidence, and positive self-talk are what “get things going.” You understand that emotions affect performance. So if bad emotions arise, you understand there are ways you can learn to control their impact on your performance. Right?”

“Roger that.”

He gave me an odd look.

“Yes,” I corrected.

“Good. Then you also know how imagery, focused breathing, and relaxation all help to give us a mental edge over the competition.”

“Very tricky,” I teased him.

“Be serious now, Danielsan, and pay close attention, because today we must talk about anger . . . We all get angry; this is normal. Yet you must always remember that if the warrior does not control his anger it will always end up controlling him. And when that happens, victory will be much more difficult. You see, anger is an emotional response. Before the emotion is allowed to take control, the warrior must redirect its energy. Real champions work to develop an ability to control their anger so that it cannot hurt their performance.”

I grappled with this: “Do you mean that they end up no longer *feeling* this kind of emotion?”

“Not at all. I mean that they have learned how to channel such an emotion so that it won’t affect their focus and performance in a negative way. With anger, once the emotion comes up—or boils up!—real champions make a deliberate choice to use the energy but not allow themselves to lose control to it and fall victim to it.”

“How?”

“They ask themselves, “Who is in charge here?—Myself? Or this fury inside myself?” By that simple act, the warrior spirit begins to regain control. And that control begins with a simple choice, a decision. The warrior decides to channel the anger into making his resolve stronger still. He redirects the anger into tough play. He creates a stronger resolve to beat the competition and to raise his own level of play. Rather than losing control to the anger, he becomes like a smiling assassin; he’s mad, yes, but it’s a cool, calculating mad. He is using the intensity and the passion of the emotion, yet he doesn’t lose control to it. The champion knows that in order to perform well he must stay in control. How else can he expect to control his performance?”

“OK, so how does one manage the intensity of the emotion?” I asked him.

“It always starts with a choice to not let it control you.” said Leo-tai. “Focused breathing, concentration, relaxation, imagery, returning to the present, all these —worked on and practiced—will help. But there must first, always be a choice.

“And remember, if you ever feel that you must vent your anger, that it's better to do it privately, so that you do not shake the confidence of the team’s trust in you. To let them see you lose control, even if you felt you needed it for yourself, can only hurt that trust.”

Remember: If anger arises, make the decision to not let it control you. Redirect its energy; use it to make your resolve stronger. Become like the smiling assassin that sees his mark.