

Choices

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Life is filled with choices, and the choices we make have a significant influence on subsequent behavior. Are you aware of all the choices you have related to exercise and sport performance? Think for a minute about the numerous choices you make. On a daily basis, you have a choice about whether or not to exercise. You have a choice regarding how you talk to yourself, you have a choice about what and how much to eat and drink, you have a choice about what to focus on during a workout or competition, etc. Throughout the day you have endless choices.

Now, for a more difficult question – what are you doing with all these choices? More importantly, do you make a choice after consideration? Often, athletes just act or think a certain way without really making a conscious decision to do so. This may happen because it has become habitual – such as automatically grabbing for an apple instead of potato chips or telling yourself you are a horrible golfer after missing putts. Or, it could be because we do not realize it is something we have a choice about — “I had no confidence” “I couldn’t get into practice today” — are examples of statements that connote a choice being out of one’s control. In reality, an athlete may struggle getting motivated for practice but actually has the choice about whether to wallow in that low motivation or take

purposeful steps to increase motivation. Think about how much more productive practices could be, how you could enhance performance and achieve your goals by being more aware of and purposeful about choices that influence your performance.

The following are three steps that should serve to increase your awareness of the choices you have and how you can be more purposeful in how you act and think; to make choices based on consideration rather than by habit or ignorance.

1. Be clear regarding what you are trying to accomplish as it relates to sport and exercise. That is, identify your goal. Your goal could be to run a specific time, to lose weight, to lift a given number of kilograms, etc.
2. Become aware of the numerous choices you make that tie into the pursuit of your goals. We can fool ourselves into believing that “it is the way it is” rather than believing that we have created things as they are through the choices we make. Take the example above about the athlete who “couldn’t get into practice today”. Such lack of motivation is not out of one’s control. In truth, she allowed herself to be ambivalent about practice. She had the choice to implement strategies to enhance motivation and energy, but did not.

3. Make purposeful choices, after consideration, that can lead to achievement of your goal. Now that you are aware of all the choices you really have, ask yourself, “Am I making the right choices? Are my choices helping me reach my goal or holding me back?” Commit to making better choices. Commit to putting forth the effort to break habits and to take control of your thoughts and behaviors.

Follow these steps and take control of your performance by purposefully considering all the choices you make. Think about why you do the things you do. Know that the choices you make, conscious or not, directly impact your practice and competition. Make the right choices and watch your performance improve.

About the Author

*Suzie Tuffey Riewald, PhD, NSCA-CPT,*D, received her degrees in Sport Psychology/Exercise Science from the University of North Carolina – Greensboro. She has worked for USA Swimming as the Sport Psychology and Sport Science Director, and most recently as the Associate Director of Coaching with the USOC where she worked with various sport national governing bodies (NGBs) to develop and enhance coaching education and training. Suzie currently works as a sport psychology consultant to several NGBs. ▲*