

Focusing

From Roy Garner

One night whilst driving down a narrow country road near my home. Something ran out of the darkness into the road in front of me. My heart missed a beat as I lurched for the brakes. A large cat was in pursuit of a field mouse. The cat focused on that mouse as if nothing in the world existed, as if some kind of energy beam connected the cat to that mouse. If I had not hit my brakes I would have run over the cat, but it pursued that mouse as if I did not exist.

Only after she had the mouse firmly clenched in her teeth did she acknowledge my existence before sauntering off into the hedgerow. This is an example of focusing- the uninterrupted connection between two things: a cat and a mouse, an athlete and his/her goal.

Have you ever observed young children at play? I am sometimes amazed at children's ability to focus. When I watched a friend's three year old playing, while he was playing, the only thing that existed in his world is the movement of his little red truck. He is oblivious to the chaos around him.

His connection is very similar to the connection of the cat and the mouse. If a kid and a cat can focus so completely, why can't we?

Let's suppose that the cat began to worry about being judged on its form as it stalked the mouse: Do you think the complete connection would remain? If while three year old Johnny was playing, he began to worry about being assessed on his truck-maneuvering ability by all the big people around him, do you think the flow would be broken?

A fourteen year old skater was talking to me some while ago because he had lost this connection. He had entered his first competition some two or three years earlier. At that time he just went out and let it happen. He skated in the same way that the three year old played with his truck, totally absorbed in his performance, oblivious to the outside world.

It was only later, when he started to worry about the judges, other skaters, the audience, and the evaluation, that he started getting uptight. "When people said he was expected to win, the feeling of pressure started." His thoughts began to drift to others' expectations



of him. He began to worry about his performance and about how it would affect his acceptance by others. That is when his anxiety began to rise and his performance began to slide. That is when he lost his focus - his natural connection.

As he attempted to regain his connection, what worked best for him was to try to recreate the focus and feelings that he had taken into his sport in the earlier years, to focus only on his own performance and forget about everything and everyone else.

When you free yourself from dwelling on outside pressures or expectations. When you know that you will continue to be a valuable human being regardless of the outcome, worry is less likely to intrude and disrupt your performance or your life.

This is when your focus is free to flow naturally. Worry is one of the greatest inhibitors of skilled performance.

If you can find a way of focusing that is more absorbing than the worry, you will be well on your way to a consistent performance at your optimum level.