



*Performance Enhancement, Awareness & Knowledge*

## Participant's Workbook and Journal



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# INTRODUCTION

mPEAK (Mindful Performance Enhancement, Awareness & Knowledge) is an intensive course in mindfulness training for those who seek a more balanced way to achieve their goals, both personal and professional, as well as attain new levels of performance and success. This cutting-edge training program is built around the latest brain research related to peak performance, resilience, focus, and “flow”. The mPEAK program enhances the human capacity of mindfulness through established and empirically supported practices and exercises. Mindfulness is effective precisely because it is a way of being and relating to all aspects of life, rather than a specific technique or tool for a particular goal. As with physical training, this brain-training program is based on the understanding that optimal outcomes occur most often when participants continue to engage in the practices and exercises on a daily basis as a part of their training regimen. The foundation of this program is drawn from the highly respected and empirically-supported Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD. Additionally, the program incorporates specific practices and exercises formulated to correspond to recent neuroscientific findings, competitive advances, and related research regarding optimal performance.



# HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook is a companion to the mPEAK 3-day intensive or 8-week course. It organizes the informational material about mindfulness and performance into one resource to streamline the didactic portions of mPEAK. In the pages provided, you can also record insights and reflections on the various experiences you'll have along this journey. Your time in the mPEAK course will be distributed over the following categories:

**Formal Mindfulness Meditation Practices** Meditation is a specific period of practice often done in stillness and silence. Meditation training re-wires the brain through neuroplasticity to increase your capacity for presence, discernment and flow in your life, work and sport. The formal practices introduced in mPEAK are: The Body Scan, Awareness of Breath, Mental Noting, Mindful Movement and Self-Compassion.

**Experiential Exercises** These exercises are like a mirror to more clearly see the way you relate to various aspects of performance. By observing your own conditioned thoughts, habits and identities in the face of these challenges, you recognize what is serving your performance and what might be holding you back.

**Didactic Topics** Each section of this course offers just enough science and information to help you build a conceptual framework around mindfulness and ideally inspire you to practice. The emphasis of mPEAK is less on learning about mindfulness and more on actually being mindful.

**Journal Exercises** The workbook provides dedicated pages to reflect on your past experiences with various performance related topics. Journaling itself can be a mindfulness practice of observing and recording thoughts and feelings onto paper.

**Dyads/ Triads** Sharing your experience is an important part of deepening your awareness of yourself in relation to others. You are encouraged to connect with authenticity and vulnerability with as many other participants as possible. Participants often say they learn as much from the others sharing as from the course content.

**Group Coaching and Discussion** After each experiential exercise or formal practice, an invitation is offered for discussion and coaching around challenges or insights that may have come up. Coaching is a process of inquiry intended to deepen self-awareness and personalize strategies to integrate mindfulness into areas of life and performance. Even though only a few participants are coached after each activity, everyone can benefit from these interactions.

**Operationalized Mindfulness Practices** Sometimes referred to as “Informal Mindfulness Practices”, these are short, on the spot practices intended to integrate mindfulness into everyday life and performance activities. These are offered as home practices at the end of each section.





# PERFORMANCE STORY

Stress is initially felt as a physical sensation in the body but is quickly narrated by the mind, which interprets the challenging experience based on a collection of questionable assumptions. The brain is wired to make meaning of everything that happens and the meaning it makes will impact your performance and well-being. This section we'll explore the way your mind's "stories" effect your resilience. Mindfulness and positive psychology practices will be suggested to help you notice and either shifting or drop the stories.



# EXERCISE: AMBIGUOUS SCENARIOS

The intention of this exercise is to help you recognize your own tendency and style of meaning making around a hypothetical performance related event (feedback) and life event (walking down the street). You'll try on two scenarios as if it were happening to you and notice how you "narrate" these events.

### **Scenario 1: Performance Feedback**

*What was the story you made up about this scenario?*

### **Scenario 2: Walking Down the Street**

*What was the story you made up about this scenario?*



## TOPIC:

## MAKING MEANING

*Three umpires are sitting in a bar, sharing a beer together. They begin talking about their job and the difficulties they face in calling balls and strikes. The first umpire states quite confidently, "There's balls and there's strikes, and I call them as they are!" The second umpire, with a slight look of disapproval, says, "No, no, no, there's balls and there's strikes, and I call them as I seem 'em." The third umpire says, "You know, you're both wrong. There's balls and there's strikes, and they ain't nothin' till I call 'em."*

What this short story is suggesting is that nothing exists until we perceive, label, and interpret it. The first umpire claims we perceive the world objectively, as it actually exists. The second umpire claims we subjectively interpret the world that exists. The third claims we construct the world through our perception of it.

One of the capacities that separates humans from animals is that we have brains that can construct elaborate "stories": theories and explanations about what is happening in the world and why. According to the research of Robert Burton, our brains are rewarded with dopamine for making coherent meaning out of complex events, even if the explanation is incomplete or wrong. The brain, hungry for its pattern-recognizing reward, overlooks contradictory or conflicting information and is compelled to take incomplete stories and run with them.

These stories are experienced as a voice in our head narrating each moment of your life analogous to a sportscaster calling the shots of a game. The limitation of our story telling capacity is that we interpret life and "performance events" through a lens that is conditioned by beliefs formed around past experiences. The story you tell is not an absolute truth but subjective projections of your fears, expectations, hopes, desires and assumptions about the way people are and the way the world works. In this section, we'll bring mindful attention to the kinds of stories you tell and notice the impact they have on your well-being and performance.

*We don't see the world as it is, we see the world as we are.*

Anonymous



# TOPIC: EXPLANATORY STYLE

Different people have different modes and styles of story telling. For instance, some people are more prone to making simple versus complex stories and some people tell themselves more optimistic stories than pessimistic ones. Psychologists have found some people have a relatively high tolerance for ambiguity where others try desperately to find the meaning in everything that happens. Positive Psychologists refer to our unique story telling capacity as our "Explanatory Style", which is defined as "a psychological attribute that indicates how people explain to themselves why they experience a particular event, either positive or negative."

There are three main components involved in our explanatory style that are categorized as: Personal, Permanent and Pervasive. A "Pessimistic Explanatory Style" is when someone tends to tell stories about the causes of adverse, "Off PEAK" events as being personal, ("This is all my fault"), pervasive, ("This affects absolutely everything"), and permanent ("This isn't changeable"). An "Optimistic Explanatory Style" is when someone generally tends to blame others or acts of nature for negative, "Off PEAK" events and who also believe that such events will end soon without impacting too many other aspects of their lives.

*Essentially, all optimism strategies involve the exercise of construing the world with a more positive and charitable perspective, and many entail considering the silver lining in the cloud, identifying the door that opens as a result of one that has closed. It takes hard work and a great deal of practice to accomplish effectively, but if you can persist at these strategies until they become habitual, the benefits could be immense. Some optimists may be born that way, but scores of optimists are made with practice. - Sonja Lyubomirsky, The How of Happiness*

The stories we tell can have a direct impact on our performance. This is highlighted by research done by Psychologist Martin Seligman who asked swimmers to swim their best stroke and then told them their times were slightly slower than they actually were. When they swam again, swimmers with an optimistic self-explanatory style swam at approximately the same speed, whereas swimmers with a pessimistic self-explanatory style swam more slowly. When things are going well and our team is winning, for example—no difference in motivation or performance exists between optimists and pessimists. But when things are falling apart—when the team on which we're playing is losing—pessimists often stop trying.

Another lens to interpret life's challenges through is explained by Carol Dweck in her work on "Mindset". The basis of her popular research is quite simple: A "fixed mindset" assumes that your abilities are innate and unchallengeable, while a "growth mindset" is the belief that you can improve through practice and hard work. When someone has a fixed mindset, they're telling a story that the amount of talent they have now is all they'll ever have. With this story, their self-worth is on the line every time they perform so failure is something to avoid at all costs. With a growth mindset, they embrace challenging opportunities because they're telling a story that they can only reach their highest potential by consistently playing at their edges and that the only way to fail is not going for it and learning from the experience. Dweck reminds us that we have a choice around the story we tell, "Mindsets are just beliefs. They're powerful beliefs, but they're just something in your mind, and you can change your mind."





# TOPIC: BENEFITS/COSTS OF PERFORMANCE STORIES

Our story telling capacity has its benefits towards resilience. From an evolutionary perspective, uncertainty was perceived as bad for survival, so we've become extremely proficient at explaining life's greatest mysteries. The better we can understand and justify our past challenging events such as relationship breakups, business failures, losing streaks or medical problems, the faster we can recover from them.

Stories are also an attempt at preparing us for situations in the unknowable future. By learning the rules of life and mentally simulating outcomes in the service of decision-making, brains can play out events without the risk of attempting them in reality.

But story telling comes at a cost.

1. *Stories are often not true. We rarely have enough data or a broad enough perspective to know what really happened so we end up taking huge leaps in our narratives. This can result in making bad decisions based on false assumptions.*
2. *Old stories recreate old experiences. Projecting past stories onto a present moment can keep you stuck at an old level of performance rather than allowing you to see new possibilities and opportunities.*
3. *Stories separate you from reality. When you're caught up in the interpretation of what is happening, you'll often miss the richness of directly experiencing the moment through your senses.*
4. *Stories keep you stuck in your head. There is a saying, "what you can feel you can heal". Rather than fully feeling and processing a difficult emotion, many people stay stuck in a mental justification or rationalization of the difficulty, which can postpone the recovery process.*

*Reality is so much more delicious than our concept of it*  
- Jud Brewer



# EXERCISE: PAPER CLIP COMPETITION

### **Competition #1**

This exercise offers an experience of competing against the clock, other people and your own expectations. The instructions are to notice how the competition may evoke a “performance story” about your abilities compared to others. You may also observe how your story may have impacted your performance experience and outcome.

### **Competition #2**

This exercise will offer an experience of competing on a team against other teams while engaging in a task that requires focus and dexterity. Notice how the competition may evoke a “performance story” about your abilities as well as others on your team. You may also observe how your story may have impacted your performance experience and ultimately your teams outcome.

*What stories did you notice during the competitions?*

*How did you work with these stories once you noticed them?*

*How did giving attention to your mental stories impact your ability to perform (focus on the task at hand?)*

*What insights does this exercise offer about your real life competition and performance?*



## TOPIC: MINDFULNESS OF STORY

Stories only become a problem when we're caught up in them, without knowing we're even telling them. With mindfulness our stories can be seen for what they are –just a bunch of thoughts attempting to interpret a situation. This awareness moves a story from the subconscious to the conscious; taking away its power and allowing it to be evaluated with discernment. When a story is recognized as being unhelpful, it can simply be dropped or changed. In this section we'll primarily focus "cognitive reappraisal" –shifting stories or re-telling them in a way that decreases stress and motivates our performance. In the next module on "Flow", we'll experiment with dropping stories all together, living in the direct experience of what is happening, rather than the interpretation of it. Below are some practices to help you notice and take a few steps back from your stories.

**Disputing Beliefs** When you suspect you're caught up in an "off-peak performance story", pause and ask yourself, "is it really true?" Look for evidence that supports and contradicts the story. Try building a case for the falseness of the limiting story.

**I don't know** Rather than jump to a conclusion, allow the mind to rest in the mystery of not knowing. The next time you catch yourself making up meaning just so you can maintain the illusion of certainty, pause and admit to yourself that you don't actually know yet, and that it's okay.

**Fake News!** This is a humorous mental label you can say to yourself the moment you catch yourself collecting incomplete data and making up reasons for something you don't fully understand.

**Mind Reading** The ability to predict the thoughts, emotions and intentions of others is called "Theory of Mind". Unfortunately humans are not as good at this as we'd like to believe. Psychologists are poor at predicting violence or suicide risk in their own patients and trained cops, lawyers and judges can't detect lies with much better accuracy than chance. When you catch yourself interpreting a vague email from a colleague or the facial expression of someone at a meeting, pause and say to yourself, "mind reading". Then try asking them.

**Own your story** Once you've caught yourself telling a story that involves another person, pause and try starting a conversation with "the story I'm telling is \_\_\_\_\_. How does that land for you?" Verifying your story with the source takes away all ambiguity.



## Performance Story

*How you think and how you act can transform your experience of stress. When you choose to view your stress response as helpful, you create the biology of courage. And when you choose to connect with others under stress, you can create resilience.*

Kelly McGonigal

Research at University of Wisconsin-Madison on 29,000 people over 8 years discovered that your story about your stress impacts your health far more than the stress itself. In fact, people with a positive view of stress lived many years longer than those with a negative view of stress. The research found that if you think of stress as always bad for you, then your prediction will likely come true. But, if you think of stress as a challenge that is positive, energizing and will get you into action, then that will come true.

Consider another study that showed how people's beliefs about aging might contribute more to their health than the physiological factors doctors typically focus on. In a 20 year longitudinal studying of a group of 650 people lead by Becca Levy found that those who told a positive story about the aging process lived, on average, seven and a half years longer than those who were negative about it. To put that in perspective, improving cholesterol and blood pressure typically improves life span by four years and exercising, maintaining healthy weight and refraining from smoking will add only one to three.

At the heart of changing your story is something called "Cognitive Reappraisal". As the name implies, it is a psychological self-regulation strategy that involves reinterpreting the meaning of an emotional stimulus in a way that is more optimistic and beneficial. Michael Jordan is a great example of this when he said, "I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty six times I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed." Rather than telling the story that failure is unacceptable and that he's an embarrassment to his team, he's chosen a "Growth Mindset" story that his failure is what makes him succeed.

## EXERCISE: PERFORMANCE STORY SHIFTING

Identify a challenging situation and the "Off-Peak Performance Story" that you're currently telling about it. Brainstorm other ways of positively reappraising the story. "Try on" the different stories to feel which resonates as most true. After choosing your new story, solidify the story by taking new actions that align with it.

*Reflect on a challenge you are currently facing. What is the performance story you are telling about it?*

*Brainstorm Alternative Performance Stories*

*Resonance (1-10)*

*Choose a New Performance Story*

*Integration/Action Plan*



# FORMAL PRACTICE: WALKING MEDITATION

*The intention of walking meditation is to learn to be mindfully aware as you engage in the natural movement of walking. This practice is done by walking at a slow and deliberate pace; back and forth, indoors or out, about ten to thirty paces in length. Begin by standing at one end of your walking path with your feet firmly planted on the ground. Let your hands rest easily by your sides or folded in front or back of your torso. Open your senses to see and feel into your surroundings. After a minute, bring your attention back to focus on the body. Center yourself, and feel how your body is standing on the earth. Feel the pressure on the bottoms of your feet and the other natural sensations of standing. Let yourself be present and alert as you begin taking natural steps. As with the body scan practice, your attention will wander away many times. As soon as you notice this, acknowledge it, and then return to feeling the next step. You'll likely have to do this many times during each practice.*



## JOURNAL: WALKING MEDITATION

*What was your experience with walking in this way?*

*How did slowing down impact your state of mind?*

*What insights from this practice could be integrated into your area of performance?*

