

Deliberate **PRACTICE**

by Dr. Michelle Cleere



Helping others overcome their performance challenges and tap into their maximum potential is Dr. Michelle's passion, mission, and promise.

As an elite performance expert, she helps top athletes, musicians, and executives in competitive fields unlock the power of the mind and create the mental toughness to be the best. Having struggled most of her life with her own performance hurdles, she is driven by not wanting others to experience the same battles.

Dr. Michelle helps her clients release performance anxiety, gain more confidence, and build resilience. With a PhD in Clinical Psychology, a Masters in Sports Psychology, and years of hands on research, she is well grounded in theory and expert knowledge. As many clients attest, their experience with Dr. Michelle is exactly what they needed and more than they expected, "It was life changing."

Her friendly energetic spirit puts her clients at ease and provides a comfort level for sensitive conversations. Dr. Michelle provides constant support through the challenging process of training the brain and makes it understandable and manageable.

You may have heard the phrase ‘deliberate practice’ before and either wondered what it meant or thought you were already doing it. I have enjoyed digging deeper into this concept and the research behind it. There are a number of good books that discuss it including *Grit*, *Bounce*, and *Outliers*. Any athlete looking for an advantage or a bigger edge in their game should understand it and then ensure mental and physical deliberate practice is part of their routine.

What is deliberate practice?

Deliberate practice is purposeful and systematic. While regular practice includes repetition, that repetition is often mindless -moving through the process just to get to the end. Deliberate practice requires focused attention and is conducted with the specific goal of improving performance.



How do you incorporate mental deliberate practice?

At the Start of Practice

- Help athletes discover what they need to warm up mentally before practice. Everyone warms up physically, but few people warm up mentally. Athletes need to realize where they perform most optimally – from a calm or pumped up mental space. Then they will know how to get their brain there so it aligns with their body. Each athlete needs a different physical warm up and they will each need a different mental warm up. Things like music, meditation, deep breathing, and/or progressive muscle relaxation can be used.
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- Allow athletes to be part of the decision-making process around what happens at practice. Communication is critical.
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- Ask athletes what one specific thing they want to work on in practice. Saying they want to work on their serve is not helpful, but if you help them focus on one small, specific thing like their ball toss that is doable. Show them ways to work on that one specific thing.

During Practice

- Help athletes develop ways to cope with the moments before a serve and between points to help them stay out of their head.
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- Give feedback that is focused on the situation not the person, that is specific, and that can be acted on. Make recommendations for improvement.
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- Allow there to be fun at each and every practice. Get creative. Fun is the #1 reason people play sports.

Post practice

- Develop a system where athletes analyze their own practices and matches.
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- Allow them to lead the conversation and answer questions about what went well, what was challenging, and what do they need to work on tomorrow.

Can talent take the place of deliberate practice?

If an athlete is talented at something, it usually means they were born with decent ability. However, if the talent they were born with is not nurtured in a deliberate way then natural talent is all they'll have. This talent will only take them so far. *In order to be great at something, they need to put in many hours of mental and physical deliberate practice to grow more consistent talent.*

Athletes don't have to have natural ability to be great at something. *They can work deliberately at it and they will improve, and their talent will grow.* It's great to have a natural talent or propensity toward something but whether they have it or don't have it, they still must put in purposeful and systematic hard work in order to be great at it.

How much time do athletes have to deliberately practice?

If you've read Grit, Bounce, or Outliers, the one thing that stands out is the concept of time spent deliberately practicing their skill in order to be great at it. While research continues on this, the consensus is it takes time. It can't be hurried. *It takes 10 years or 10,000 hours to be great at something.*

This might seem like a lot of time, but there's been a lot of research done all pointing to these numbers in Grit, Bounce, and Outliers. I think it's important that performers, parents, and coaches all understand that there's no magic pill, regardless of someone's natural talent.

Important concepts to walk away with

Parents and coaches of naturally gifted athletes need to understand

the difference between keeping a talented child motivated and pushing them to be something they aren't ready for. Remember 10 years or 10,000 hours.

In the journey to be great at something, athletes have to deliberately practice for an extended period of time. Within that practice, they must be allowed to make mistakes and deal with adversity to develop grit. Learning to deal with adversity not only helps young athletes move through challenges now, but with goals outside of sports.

Deliberate practice does not mean that you can be great at anything and everything even though you put in the hard work and effort. Your genes set limits on how far you can go. For example, you realize that you have a natural talent for basketball. You put in a lot of deliberate practice time at the number five position but are five feet tall. All the deliberate practice in the world is not going to allow you to go very far in that position when most of the others at that position are six feet and taller.

What needs to come with deliberate practice

As a coach, if you believe a child has natural talent, nurture it slowly and come up with a purposeful and systematic way to help that child learn and grow.

Support young athletes' development by encouraging them to do the thing that they love to do. It can't be about being perfect (that doesn't exist), and it can't only be about winning. Reinforce the combination of deliberate mental and physical practice.

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