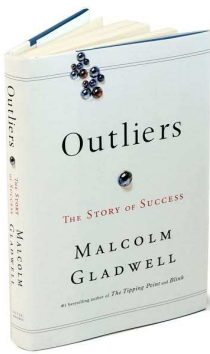


Chapter one - Fire and Ice

This book is about my emerging understanding of how Mental Toughness can be used to give you a unique and sustainable competitive advantage in any endeavour. Neuropsychologists tell us that we are all competitive by nature. They say it's one of our survival mechanisms, but being instinctively competitive does not differentiate you nor give you a competitive advantage. The Mental Toughness model in this book exposes you to an approach that can set you apart and, if applied diligently, will give you a unique and sustainable advantage.

The Matthew effect

The model that emerged from my academic research on Mental Toughness consists of seven components that can be applied selectively or cumulatively as a model for a holistic programme.



When the Mental Toughness model is applied holistically you can reap an additional benefit known as the Matthew effect. The Matthew effect is a concept gleaned from the Book of Mathew 25:29 in the Christian bible. “*For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away*” This verse was referenced in Malcolm Gladwell's book; *Outliers*. Gladwell correlates age related success in contact sports like rugby and Ice hockey with the Mathew effect. His claim is that research reveals that many boys who have birthdates in the early part of the school calendar year initially benefit from a

size advantage. This size advantage results in their initial selection into the A teams in their schools. Now they are exposed to better coaches and the cumulative effect continues until they are better represented in age related top teams.

In the Mental Toughness context the Matthew effect can be experienced because you can use the components of the Mental Toughness model to gain a cumulative advantage. In so doing, each component of the model builds on to the previous one. It can be likened to using scaffolding on a building. You access greater heights as you build on the previous level. Benefits are derived from the individual components as well as additional benefits from the synergy due to accumulation. Another synergistic benefit will also be available when your existing technical and physical abilities synergise with newly developed Mental Toughness abilities. Of course this concept applies in any situation. You simply have to get the first scaffold in place; or identify one that is already in place. I have no doubt we can all find some aspect of our lives to scaffold onto.

Note, that whilst Mental Toughness can help apparently healthy people with some chronic problems, it is not a panacea for mental illness. In addition Mental Toughness is not the only

determinant of performance and therefore success or even significance. Excellent performance, in any endeavour, is the result of a convergence of many factors including luck, often referred to as randomness. There do not seem to be any simple, one size fits all, solutions for how we should lead our lives, improve our performance or address our chronic problems. Performance is a complex subject and needs to be viewed in a systemic way. But, despite the complexity it is generally accepted that Mental Toughness is one of the most important factors that will give you a competitive advantage and help you address chronic problems. Therefore, it is an area for potential improvement. I am proposing a range of Mental Toughness components that you could use as the underpinning architecture for improving your performance and if you dig down into each of these components you will experience even more benefits. In many instances you will find that you know something or even a lot about the components I am suggesting. However, the problem is that despite knowing you are probably not doing anything or enough about it. That is why I call the programme Mental Toughness because it's not enough that you know - you need to do as well.

Some people are predisposed with, or have developed significant physical or technical abilities which help them outperform their opposition. It is my claim that these abilities are enhanced when supported with Mental Toughness. Mental Toughness itself can be predisposed as can be seen in the tendency for some very young children to be willing to delay gratification and show discipline for later reward or it can be developed. The less people are gifted with a predisposition the more they need to develop the components of Mental Toughness.

100% physical and 100% mental

So, just how much of success is mental and how much is physical or technical? There are no scientific studies that can apportion a percentage to Mental Toughness as a contributor to success. Dr Ross Tucker in *the Science of Sport* writes that the debate on the relative contributions of the mental and the physical to success in sport rages on. There is no agreement on how much each contributes. He writes; *'some got philosophical and said it was "100% mental, 100% physical" but it depends on the sport. Golf is different to athletics. Long jump probably differs from high jump, both of which differ from the marathon. Downhill skiing no doubt requires substantial parts of each, and also required different skills within each. Mental or physiological: Difficult to pin down'.*



One can logically conclude that being more mentally tough would lead to a greater competitive advantage. Just how much of an advantage is not possible to say at this point.

The outer and inner game

The aspects of physical and mental can also be described as the outer and inner game. To play the outer game well requires an understanding of the inner game i.e. how the mind works. But, the mind is affected by both external factors and internal ones like instincts, beliefs, mindsets and arousal.

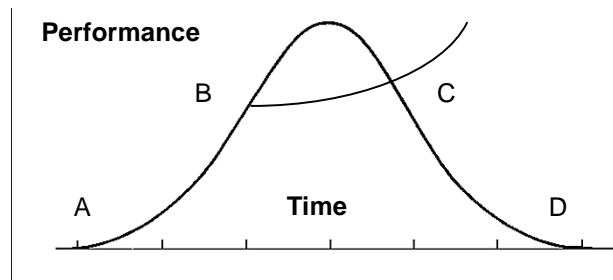
Take the demands of performing well at golf as an example. The outer game is built on the



knowledge of the game and its mechanical skills. To improve the outer game a golfer needs to increase game knowledge and develop mechanical skills through learning and experience. The inner game exists beyond the knowledge and mechanics of the game. Understanding it and developing it has a huge influence on the golfer's outer game i.e. performance. The great golfers' have formidable physical skills and game knowledge in addition they harness their mental skills as well. They understand that the outer game can only take them so far; to get further they need to improve the inner game. It is ultimately the inner game that will enable you to beat the curve.

Beating the curve

You will no doubt have heard of the bell curve. It's a useful model to represent the relationship



between performance and time. The line of the bell curve starts at point A. As we invest effort and allocate resources the curve steadily increases over time. But eventually, other forces exceed the influence of

one's own effort and resources. The curve reaches a maximum point and starts a downward journey. The concept of beating the curve means that you adapt, introduce change (renewal, innovation) while the line is still ascending and while there is upward and positive momentum. Initially, the self-enforced change will cause a loss in momentum and the performance line will plateau as we experience the learning and developmental process. This plateau sets us up for the next upward stage.

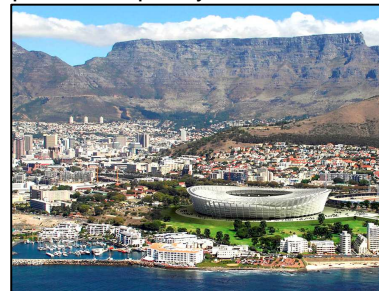
The problem, of course, is that we have been taught: *Don't fix it if it's not broken*. This is where Mental Toughness is required. It's the ability to sense the need for change, and to make the changes before you have to, at point B rather than point C. If you introduce change at this stage, you build on current success and can introduce longer term sustainability through creating a new bell curve starting at point B. Of course this will probably cause a short term loss in performance gain. Accepting this loss is another reason why you need to be mentally tough to beat the curve.

Most people will try to introduce change on the downward slope of the curve at point C. The change is driven by the fear of loss and the need to survive. However, arresting the downward momentum requires a lot more effort and far greater loss is incurred. At best we bottom out at point D before ascending – if we survive the downward curve!

Eighty percent of success is turning up

I use personal experiences, business and sport examples to illustrate and liven up the underpinning academic constructs of the Mental Toughness model. For example, you may remember the FIFA World Cup tournament staged in South Africa. Remember the catch line - *Feel it - it's here?* Well now I am afraid you need to *face it - it's gone*. However, did you go to a stadium or a fan park? If you were in Cape Town did you go on a fan walk? Or did you watch the tournament on television? Congratulations to those who fully engaged with the tournament. It was truly a memorable experience. As actor Woody Allen said: *Eighty percent of success is simply turning up*.

You will often hear the captains of losing teams claiming that they performed poorly because their team did not *'turn up'*. Clearly they do not mean turning up physically, they presumably mean that they competed but not to their full potential. Can this be happening to you? Do you turn up and only fill a seat or do you extend your presence to seeking additional value from the experience? The concept of turning up can be extended to include other role players - like spectators, who could turn up as more than just an observer but to learn as well. For example, if your viewing of the FIFA World Cup went beyond a spectator mindset, you could have picked up some valuable insights into the role of Mental Toughness as a competitive advantage.



You can imagine my excitement as evidence emerged from the FIFA World Cup games that supported or challenged my theories on Mental Toughness. The type of evidence did not matter. When you are truly committed to a scientific method, all evidence is exciting - not only that which confirms your hypotheses. I was also excited by opportunities to formulate new questions and use new ways of observing. So, if you didn't *turn up* to the South African hosted tournament, you may consider turning up for the tournaments in Brazil, Russia or Qatar and adding to your viewing enjoyment by looking for evidence of Mental Toughness or a lack of it.

An interesting outcome of the tournament hosted in South Africa - viewed through a different



mindset - is that there were two winners. Spain was the World Cup winner and South Africa was the World Admiration winner. South Africa was World Admiration winner - not for the way it played football, but for the way it hosted the tournament. You may remember the many prophets of doom who predicted that the tournament would not go ahead and, if it did, that it would be a dismal failure. But it did go ahead and it was a huge success. In particular, it demonstrated enormous reserves of spirit and a 'feel good' factor among South Africans. I, however, feel that we cannot wait for another major externally-driven event like hosting a FIFA World Cup before we demonstrate spirit and a feel good factor. South Africa's challenge, of course, is to demonstrate and apply that spirit to aspects of our lives where it is sorely needed, and do it because we can and not solely because we are hosting a World Cup event.

On the football playing front, Spain wrapped up the accolades with most of the pre-tournament favourites failing spectacularly. Did they fail because they were poor teams that lacked good players and football skills? Did France implode for reasons other than football playing ability? Why did Italy fall from grace? We all have a good idea that matters of the mind played a significant part in these teams' poor showings. Even with their star players, the performances of England, Argentina and Brazil left a lot to be desired. It sounds corny but, despite Rooney, England was ruined; despite Messi, Argentina was a mess; and despite Kaka, Brazil was...awful.

Inconsistent performances are not confined to FIFA World Cup tournaments. We all have favourite teams or sports stars that play well one week and not so well the next. We may also experience these performance inconsistencies ourselves. When we turn to our coaches to explain the inconsistencies, they will often conclude that the problem primarily lies in the mind. But, despite referring to the mind as a significant contributor to performance, very few coaches have the ability to include mental skills training and support as part of their coaching regime. Most deal with it by trying to motivate their players with a range of techniques including using slogans like *'Winning is mind over matter'*, *'Its eighty percent mental and only twenty percent physical'*, *'You need killer instinct'* and the most common is *'When the going gets tough, the tough get going'*.

My research confirms the coaches' notion that the mind is a significant component in performance. I believe you can construct a new reality for yourself; you could perform better and improve your life through becoming mentally tough. I am however amazed at how few people actually take a systematic, strategic approach to developing a full range of Mental Toughness

skills as a competitive advantage. The opportunity, it seems, lies in up skilling coaches, or us, so that they, or we, can develop Mental Toughness as part of the performance equation.

They are a bunch of sissies; hit them hard and they will lose their will to win

As an impressionable young rugby player in my early teens, these words are my first memory of anything vaguely approximating psychological strategy, and by implication Mental Toughness, in sport. Of course, these 'motivational' sentiments, espoused by a junior rugby coach, were just as easily used to berate our team after losing a match – '*you bunch of sissies!*'

My coach was probably trying to stimulate our 'killer instinct' by urging us to be more aggressive and, in this way, possibly develop a competitive advantage. Many people have had similarly formative experiences, perpetuating the belief that a 'killer instinct' is the only mental component necessary for sporting success. Studies show, in fact, that aggression and intimidation as a tactical approach (particularly if applied in isolation from other strategies) often backfire, inspiring the opposition to a winning performance. Yet, in all sporting codes and at all levels, coaches continue to use these tactics, particularly in contact sports such as rugby where domination at the point of contact is crucial. Even beyond the sporting arena, in business managers' call upon employees to tap into their own killer instincts to outdo and outmanoeuvre the opposition. Significantly, my research into the subject of Mental Toughness has demonstrated that such tactics are only effective if applied selectively within a holistic and developmental context.

If one reflects on the accomplishments of Gandhi, Mandela or Maathai, all called upon mental skills that go well beyond the use of aggression. You can include sports stars in that reflection; tennis players, golfers or cyclists, they invariably ascribe their success to a range of mental skills.

Professor Avis' five factors associated with Mental Toughness

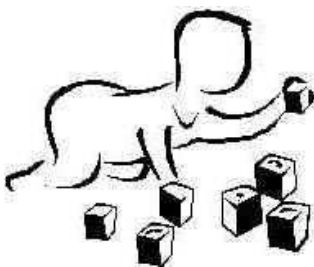
In addition to speaking and consulting on Mental Toughness, I am involved in a sport and fitness college. This involvement includes an ongoing pursuit of building relationships with other tertiary academic institutions. One of these relationship visits took me to, the now late, Professor Paul Avis at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). Paul used to play tennis for South Africa and, in no time, our conversation had migrated from academia to Mental Toughness.

He claimed that there were five factors associated with developing Mental Toughness. The first one he explained was nature i.e. our genes. He referred to Steven Pinker's book; *The Blank Slate* in which Pinker asserts that much, if not most, of what we are and what we do is a response to genetic predispositions. He explained that this may apply to Mental Toughness as well. His argument was that our species had survived generations of hardship and that the ability to manage these hardships has probably been hardwired into our genes in the same way as many instincts like the well known fight or flight response. He added with a wry smile that we have all been gifted with good Mental Toughness genes as we would not be alive if this were not the case.



I realised he was being light-hearted and it gave rise to my equally light-hearted thought on the subject. It occurred to me that humans were competitive even before they were born. A part of us was once one of millions of sperm cells in a swimming race down a dark passage competing for a single egg and we won the race. You beat all the others indicating that you, or a part of you, was competitive even before you were born. Back to Avis, who concluded that if we all share the same genetic predisposition for being mentally tough the question is: what have we done about it since then? Has the way we have been socialized enabled us to live to our full genetic potential? Have we built onto this tough base or have we eroded it?

This leads us to Paul's second factor which was nurture or sometimes referred to as socialization. Here Paul spoke about the extent to which we have had role models, mentors or experiences that gave us credible and inspiring reference points and mindsets on how to be mentally tough. He added that these were past experiences we had endured and indeed mastered that will enable us



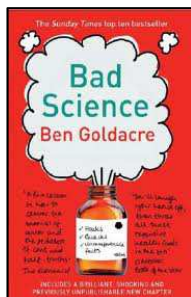
when we are faced with future hardships. He cited how Lance Armstrong seemed to have used his battle against cancer as a mental reference point to provide relativity to a sporting challenge like cycling up the steep Alpine mountain passes of the Tour de France. He added that Armstrong obviously felt that a short-lived, physical challenge, like cycling against strong competitors up a steep mountain, was nothing like his battle with cancer. Boxing provides another example of reference points, simply put; for boxers a punch on the nose hurts less because they are used to it.

The third factor was nutrition. Paul explained that people should eat for their brain as well as their body. He added that there were many research studies linking the importance of healthy nutrition to enhancing brain function. But warned that many studies claiming brain related improvements based on eating certain foods or supplements fell into a pseudo science category. My recollection of this part of the discussion was Avis' expansion on the issue of nutraceuticals and in particular supplements and vitamins. He called these powders, pills and potions and referred to their mostly mythical benefits, claiming that there is no need for most people to take supplements including vitamin supplements. For high performance athletes needing increased muscle mass creatine seemed to be the only supplement that has been shown to promote moderate improvements in performance and, of course, this was restricted to certain types of people and certain types of performance.

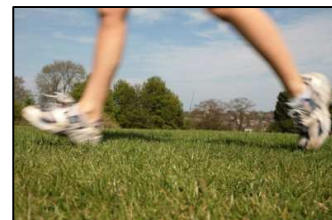


He expanded by referring to our brain chemistry and how other substances could limit optimal brain function and, consequently, our Mental Toughness. Here he specifically mentioned the potential harm associated with opiates and drugs prescribed for depression.

My view is that we should be extremely careful before we consume substances that claim to improve brain function and that supplementation needs a lot closer scrutiny. Most of us can get the energy and brain nourishment we need from good balanced eating i.e. considered portions of vegetables, salads, fruit, lean meat, nuts and seeds. If you still feel you need to supplement, see a registered dietician first and undergo a thorough assessment. Otherwise, if you do supplement, you may only be producing very expensive urine. An additional concern with supplementation is that it results in a *licensing effect* where the user feels justified in indulging in poor consumption because they have a so called healthy supplementation regime. If you are interested in reading how the scientific process has been manipulated and distorted, I suggest Ben Goldacre's book *Bad Science*.



Paul's fourth factor was physical conditioning - or what is commonly known as being fit. He referred to the old adage of a sound mind in a sound body. In expanding on this he made reference to research on the link between aerobic exercise and brain function. The research reviewed in *Neuromolecular Medicine* suggests that physical exercise can promote Neurogenesis in the hippocampus - an



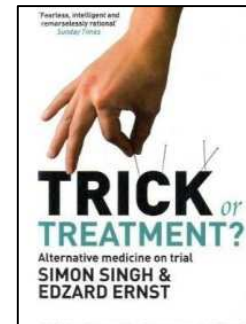
area of the brain thought to be important in memory and learning. Current evidence indicates that exercise boosting cognitive function is head-and-shoulders above that for brain training, drugs, nutritional supplements and meditation.

He argued that poor nutrition and a sedentary lifestyle negatively affected levels of Mental Toughness. He added that people who did not eat healthily and exercise regularly, might just as well be auditioning for the movie *Dumb and Dumber*.

The fifth factor culled from this discussion was the role of anxiety. Paul explained that chronic levels of what he called threat anxiety and the negative stress associated with this sustained condition, had debilitating effects on mental performance. He said we cope better with anxiety that we perceive as competitive as compared with anxiety that we perceive as threatening. He added *if the opponent inside your head has become more daunting than the one outside, then you are struggling with chronic threat anxiety.*



The conversation concluded with Paul claiming that Mental Toughness was a language spoken by many but understood by few. He said people made outrageous and unsubstantiated claims about the subject and included himself in this category. He then set me a challenge - to study the subject formally at PhD level under his academic supervision. He added that, once qualified, I could claim to be an expert on Mental Toughness but my assertions would be grounded in research. He concluded with a wry smile that I could say *“Trust me, I’m a doctor”*. It took four years for me to qualify, but I still don’t feel like an expert. However, I feel I have moved on from being a well informed amateur to having a deeper understanding of the subject. On the subject of doctors you may want to check out Simon Singh’s book *Trick or Treatment* to discover how widely abused that title seems to be.



The mind signals fatigue before the muscles

Someone who is an expert, in exercise science that is, is UCT's Professor Tim Noakes. During my four years of study I was inspired by a talk given by Noakes, who claimed that *the mind, not the muscles, regulates fatigue*, a claim evidenced by research done at the Sport Science Institute of South Africa. The outcomes of the research indicated that the brain is the governor of fatigue, even though the muscles are the final arbitrator. The internet site UCT Open Content writes about Noakes' research as follows: *'In the past Prof. Tim Noakes was convinced that physiology could*

explain performance. After 38 years of studying the human body, he now believes that the mind and the role of self-belief are crucial factors in human athletic feats'.

My understanding is that the signal an athlete receives from the brain that the muscles are fatigued, is misleading because it is based on a mental estimation of reserves. I feel that this misleading signal can be likened to the signal one gets from the fuel gauge in a motor vehicle. A warning light comes on indicating that the fuel level is on reserve, but it's *not* empty. In the same way, when athletes receive the signal they tend to interpret it as a sign that the muscle's energy is depleted when, in fact, reserve energy remains.



Before hearing about Noakes' research on the mental signals that govern or regulate muscle fatigue, I had reviewed a wealth of academic and commercial literature on misleading mental signals and their role in limiting aspects of performance. By extension, I believed that Noakes' research could apply to these signals as well. Significantly, it occurred to me that many of us could experience better outcomes in our lives if we simply interpreted the signals with greater accuracy. For example - if in negotiations, we maintained our bargaining position a little longer or, if in relationships, we maintained our composure a little longer, the outcomes might be more favourable than initially anticipated. We may also become more successful financially if we embraced more risk.

It seems that these signals often have their origins in acquired, but unconscious, beliefs. These beliefs appear to stem from the same sources referred to by Paul Avis - our genes and our socialization. Through our genetic material, we may inherit safety reserves that are hard-wired into our brains to keep us out of harm's way. But it seems these reserves go beyond the call of duty; they also strongly regulate our ability to take risks and manage pressure. Secondly, we seem to 'inherit' limiting beliefs from the environment in which we were socialised. We acquire a strong and pervasive sense of limitations set by cultural conservatism, social norms, taboos, the expectations and behaviour of family, peers and mentors. These beliefs are then reinforced by our habitual behaviour, and that of the people around us, perpetuating a cycle in which these limitations are naturalised. In short, one of the ways to become mentally tough is to learn to become aware of these signals and, when necessary, to override them.

What is Mental Toughness?

Therefore, what is Mental Toughness? It certainly goes beyond the notion of intimidating the opposition by branding them as *a bunch of sissies*, yet many people never go beyond this simplistic level of accessing and expressing aggression. Mental Toughness, I would argue, is

best defined as *the ability to manage your mind so that it directs your energy to the right place, at the right time and for the right reason - so that you give your best performance consistently, regardless of what is going on within and around you.* People who are developing their Mental Toughness acknowledge, embrace and consistently pursue the vast potential that exists simply because they are alive. They know that failure in a task is a better result than not trying to succeed.

During one of my stints as part of the management team of the Springbok Rugby team, the defence coach, Les Kiss, summed up his defence philosophy as being able to deal with anything that confronts you. I believe this philosophy is applicable to Mental Toughness. Whatever your role, whether you are a manager, worker, sportsperson, coach, teacher, student, parent or child, you need the mental ability to deal with anything that confronts you. Clearly, Mental Toughness is thus an asset not only on the sports field, but in any other form of human endeavour as well.

The fitness analogy

A useful analogy for developing Mental Toughness is that of a fitness regime. In a fitness regime your aim is to become physically fit and to develop physical muscle. In a Mental Toughness regime your aim is to become mentally fit and to develop mental muscle. You may want to consider the process of developing Mental Toughness as a fitness regime for your mind. In fact, mental and physical fitness may be closer than a mere analogy; they may actually overlap. From my own experience, I have seen how building physical strength provides one of the building blocks of mental strength. Of course, the converse is also true; if you develop your mental strength, it will in all likelihood encourage you to build physical strength as well. Thus the two regimes can be complementary. Many of you will know from past fitness training regimes, that you lost fitness when you stopped training. Well, I'm afraid the same is true of your mental conditioning programme; when you stop practicing for Mental Toughness you lose mental muscle as well. Thinking about Mental Toughness in the same way as physical fitness, provides a helpful framework for getting started.



Can Mental Toughness be developed?

Mind and body form one interlinked system; the body responds to instructions from the mind. In simple terms, if people believe that they can improve their Mental Toughness, of course they can. The opposite will occur if they believe they cannot learn to be mentally tough – their bodies will be limited by their mind's conditions. People often believe that leaders and achievers are 'born' with

the necessary skills for success and that these skills cannot be taught or learnt. These claims are seemingly not accurate. Certainly some people have greater natural inclination towards leadership or Mental Toughness, but everyone can learn at least some of the skills, enabling them to improve their performance to some extent. By the way, if you choose not to develop your mental skills, the likelihood is that your mental capacity will wane in the same way as your body does when you chose not to exercise.

There are many interventions available that help with developing the various components that lead to Mental Toughness. Programmes focused on stress management, Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), emotional intelligence and team-building can all contribute to the development of Mental Toughness. Individually, however, they do not provide sufficient input to deliver the holistic outcome of Mental Toughness as a unique competitive advantage. It requires a fully integrated approach. People who have developed Mental Toughness will, as a spin-off, be able to manage stress better, re-programme their limitations, work more wisely in social and emotional situations, and interact better in a team.

Camp Staaldraad

Culture and socialisation will affect the implementation of a mental skills development programme. An unfortunate example is the Camp Staaldraad intervention for the 2003 Springbok rugby team. It was implemented as a part of their preparation for the Rugby World Cup. Obviously this intervention was intended as a mental skills development programme. However, the programme used was imported from a pre-democratic South African military context and failed dismally because it disregarded the Springbok team's current cultural dynamic. In addition, the content did not adhere to psychologically acceptable principles, nor did it conform to generally acceptable ethics and values.



The Staaldraad intervention created negative publicity and undervalued mental skills development programmes in sport and business. When introducing mental skills development, the challenge is to ensure that sport administrators or business executives understand that such development needs to be specific. Simply using a generic team-building or psychological skills programme to develop Mental Toughness could be compared with using a fitness training regime of running up mountains to improve a sprinter's speed development. It may improve the athlete's speed, but the results depend on a myriad of factors: which athlete is training, the event for which the athlete is training, on which mountain, at what time in the periodisation of training and in what

weather? Programmes need to be holistic, long-term and specifically geared to their context and the individual.

The recommendation is to take a more encompassing approach to developing Mental Toughness, with Mental Toughness held in the mind as a sum of many parts. You are unlikely to gain a sustainable competitive advantage through Mental Toughness by concentrating exclusively on one of its parts. Many people mistake a part of Mental Toughness, like aggression, for the whole. They reiterate the same obvious things in the hope that it will make a difference through sheer repetition, instead of taking a holistic approach and accepting that they need to embark on a process of learning. There is a large gap between *talking a good game* and *playing a good game*. Ultimately, for a Mental Toughness competitive advantage to exist there needs to be alignment between saying something and doing it.

The recommended approach is to embrace all seven components of Mental Toughness - aiming to do each one better. This approach eliminates many mistakes, and possible ridicule, because of inappropriate or zealous application of the more obvious components of Mental Toughness. Benefits grow synergistically; they start to feed off each other and grow exponentially.

What about team improvement?

Given that very few people operate in isolation - if Mental Toughness can improve individual performance, what about team performance? Imagine the accumulated benefit if an entire team decided to develop mental toughness? Assume that, to achieve results, a person operates with fourteen others in a team. What would the improvement be if each member of the fifteen-strong team improved their Mental Toughness ability by ten percent? There is a potential improvement of at least 150%. This is without the exponential benefits of synergy and spirit development that will be derived when the team members individually and collectively sense that they are improving.

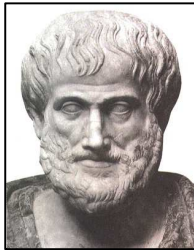


Desire is the starting point for achievement

Before we look at the model for developing Mental Toughness, I would like you to consider the role of desire in kick-starting your Mental Toughness process. You can start by reflecting on how your desire is influenced by your beliefs about success or significance. Do you have deeply rooted beliefs about people who are successful and don't deserve it? Could your belief system be overwhelmed by conspiracy theories about being manipulated by the system or dominated by memes about the filthy rich? Have these created associated feelings of guilt around being successful?

In addition, have you clearly defined what success means to you or alternatively what you regard as significant for you? Do you *really* want to be successful? If so, do you want a sustainable competitive advantage to help you become successful? When the pressure is on, when the going gets tough, do you have the reserves of desire and passion that will enable you to make sacrifices, be patient, and keep trying? This is important because without the requisite desire for success you simply won't take on the work associated with success. It's not uncommon to come across people who do not have the desire to be successful. Many of these would rather have circular arguments about success and debate the meaning of success rather than pursue success or significance in their various guises.

It was the great Greek philosopher Aristotle who claimed that desire is the starting point for all



achievement. Simple, perhaps, but profound: it is obvious that you are unlikely to achieve a result if you don't think the process in which you need to engage to produce that result is worth the effort. Many people are driven by an outcome like winning a gold medal or making a million but they let go of their dreams when the reality of the work required to achieve the outcome and the sacrifices associated with it becomes their reality.

Desire awakens us from inertia and set us on the path to a tangible result; it instils in us a competitive edge, the 'will to win'. The lack of desire you feel may be the most significant obstacle to developing any result, including developing Mental Toughness. If you are not able to access the requisite desire but would like to develop these feelings, a good place to start is to realise that you already have instinctive feelings of desire.

Suffice to say humans are instinctively working towards results albeit consciously or unconsciously determined. The hazard implicit with working towards unconsciously determined results is that they may be associated with any number of inputs ranging from negative past experiences, media personalities, Gurus, top sports people or any other influential force that we may be vulnerable to at any moment.

I could conjure up a fairly substantial list of instinctive desires, but the following will do to make the point. When you are hungry you get in touch with a desire for food. When lonely you get in touch with desire for company. Sexual attraction also generates significant desire. It's not important to unpack the psycho dynamics of these desires but it is important to realise that we all have instinctive desires in abundance. The problem is not a lack of desire it's a matter of getting

in touch with it and transmuting it into motivation that serves us. A significant body of literature is available on transmutation of motivation.

But your genes are not your only source of desire. You may recall experiencing – and expressing desire – after being inspired by a book or magazine article, a movie or event. It is these motivating feelings that you need to access and bring into your present circumstances if you are lacking the desire to kick-start your mental muscle building process.

A passion for helping others through washing cars

For me, one of the most salient examples of someone who transmuted latent desire into passion and then into tangible outcomes, is Pieter De Bruyn, a homeless man I met several years ago. Early one Sunday morning, I was summoned to the back gate by a melodious voice asking to wash my car. Wanting to provide employment, I made the arrangements with Pieter, who at the time, was squatting in the mountains nearby and unemployed. He was followed by an entourage of assistants brandishing various items that vaguely resembled cleaning materials. The problem was, however, that they were all completely drunk. Explaining to Pieter that he could come back and wash my car when he was less inebriated, he became a weekly fixture. However, I constantly had to go through the same process of asking him to return when he was sober, and my partner often counselled him about the dangers of alcoholism and encouraged him to seek treatment.

One day, during one of his sober car wash visits, Pieter had an epileptic seizure and I had to take him to the local hospital and make arrangements for his care. Soon after his discharge Pieter made a car-wash comeback, but this time he stayed sober, realising through counselling that his choice was to stay sober and alive, or drink and die. I began to refer his services to friends and corporates, and our discussions became less about alcohol and more about business opportunities. A few weeks later, Pieter exclaimed, “*You know, when I left your home last time and was walking to the railway station, I saw all these cars parked on the side of the main road. But after a while I did not see cars; I saw opportunities to wash cars!*”



Following this revelation Pieter launched the business *Peter Carwash* which, soon after, worked on four sites and employed several homeless people. Due to his success he bought a Bed and Breakfast establishment for his mother, appeared in both television and radio advertisements, and was the subject of a BBC documentary. During my two-year MBA at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business – also one of Pieter's carwash sites – I met up with him periodically. On one occasion he was asked to talk to my class about entrepreneurship. His story

was lively and engaging, but most of all he attributed his business success to '*desire and passion*'. "You must love what you are doing!" he said resoundingly. Pieter's desire to be sustainable and to help others through employment resulted in a successful car washing enterprise.

The human polar bear

An example of someone, who desired success and used Mental Toughness to develop a unique competitive advantage, is Lewis Pugh. I met Lewis as a school boy when he decided to join the Clifton Surf Lifesaving Club where I was captain at the time. Extremely driven and hungry for competitive success, Lewis trained hard and showed extraordinary willingness to go the extra mile. However, no amount of training was going to be enough to make Lewis a serious contender in competitive surf lifesaving where the top swimming competitors were usually of Olympic standard. This did not seem to deter Lewis, however, who was always willing to train more and help with training others. It also soon became apparent that Lewis was willing to spend more time in the bitterly cold Atlantic Ocean than any of his peers. I suspect it was when Lewis discovered that he could differentiate himself from others on this count, that he developed and fostered the unique ability to endure cold water conditions. Eventually this led to international fame as an environmentalist and earned him the nickname of 'human polar bear'.



The role of desire in Mental Toughness cannot be underestimated. You may even say intense desire creates its own talent and opportunities.

Mental Toughness is seldom developed in isolation of other competencies

Lewis' example brings me, however, to a word of caution: Mental Toughness is seldom developed in isolation of other competencies. Part of the process of developing Mental Toughness involves assessing your overall competency needs, and developing holistically. Once you have these competencies, your confidence levels rise and the potential for Mental Toughness development is enhanced.

I recall a junior tug-of-war team from my son's schooldays who were extremely motivated to do



well at an inter house tournament. However, the opposition teams were bigger and stronger and I doubted whether any amount of determination or spirit would have been sufficient to win against the physical odds they faced. Of course, if you have tried the sport, you will know that winning tug-of-war isn't simply

about size and strength; it requires an enormous amount of mental strength as well. But, in the

absence of size and strength, you are unlikely to dominate simply on mental strength. You need to develop holistically. They did not win.

What emerged from the research?

Life is complex, and matters of the mind are particularly complex. Mental Toughness is a matter of the mind. My doctoral thesis focussed on the Springbok rugby team and factors that affected players' Mental Toughness. One of the conclusions was a parsimonious list of seven components that collectively contributed to Mental Toughness. These components are: Concentration, Composure, Controlled Aggression, Confidence, Calculated Risks, Competence and Commitment. Note that these components represent the conclusions from my research. It is therefore one way, probably out of many other ways, to address the subject of Mental Toughness. The way I am suggesting, at this point, is the use of these seven components as the underlying architecture for developing your Mental Toughness.



My colleague Ross Tucker writes: *In science there are no absolute truths or conclusions. The "truth", that final conclusion, is always a moving target as we develop new methods and design more elegant scientific models to explain what we observe. We cannot reduce anything down to one point, but the models we develop try to connect the many points that exist.*

A feature of mentally tough people is that they make difficult things seem easy for themselves, and they make easy things seem difficult for their competitors. By reducing Mental Toughness to seven components, I have made it seem easy for me and for you. Your challenge is to work towards mastering Mental Toughness by digging down into the complexity of each component. Then you can make it difficult for your competitors. The journey towards the mastery of Mental Toughness can now become one of your goals. I say journey, because Mental Toughness is a journey and not a destination.

Fire and ice

The seven components can be represented by a metaphor that I have come to believe is central to Mental Toughness: *fire and ice*. For me, it's crucial for the understanding of Mental Toughness to embrace the seemingly paradoxical relationship between fire and ice. People who are mentally tough have fire in the belly and ice in the brain. They combine a gut-felt enthusiasm and drive to achieve with a clear and calm cognitive demeanour. The *fire* component is associated with qualities of heat, power and assertiveness; on the other hand, *ice* is associated with the



qualities of cold, patience and unflinchingness. In the image of fire and ice, two seemingly opposite truths are bound together into a new truth - a new set of conditions where intensity and calm enable success. However, while fire and ice can thus be mutually reinforcing, they can also short-circuit each other if they are not held in balance: fire melts the ice which in turn douses the flames.

The components described in the following seven chapters have a sequential logic. When embarking on developing your unique Mental Toughness competitive advantage, you will be best served if you start with number one and work your way through to number seven. You will no doubt notice that each component starts with the letter C. I admit to using a little licence when selecting the seven words, as this will make them easier to remember and internalise.