



JIM MURPHY

# INNER EXCELLENCE

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## THE MENTAL TOUGHNESS MANIFESTO

From Panic to Poise: How to be Mentally Tough in Tough Times

BY JIM MURPHY

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# THE MENTAL TOUGHNESS MANIFESTO

## From Panic to Poise: How to be Mentally Tough in Tough Times

BY JIM MURPHY

After the 17th hole, French golfer Jean Van de Velde was in full control. It was the last day of the 1999 British Open, and Van de Velde was cruising to certain victory. Or so it seemed. He played the course masterfully the first three days and was on the verge of becoming the first Frenchman to win the tournament since 1907. The final hole was one he had birdied twice already—the Claret Jug was his. Then everything changed.

He began making poor decisions. He got bad bounces. His ball went in the water. Needing a mere double-bogey to win the tournament (6 shots), Van de Velde took seven shots to finally get the ball in the hole, forcing a three-way playoff. He lost. What happened?

The fact is, that meltdown could have happened to any one of us (assuming we were in his position). We all have the potential to be so filled with fear that we cannot function, let alone play golf. Likewise, the presence of unlimited confidence, poise and panache also exists within reach of all of us.

### THE STORY OF JASON MCELWAIN

As team manager for Greece Athena high school's basketball team, McElwain's role was to set up the water, get out the equipment, and provide lots of enthusiasm. McElwain has autism and he loves basketball. February 15, 2006 was Senior Night,

**“I never prayed to make a putt, I always prayed that I would react well if I missed.”**

~ *Chi Chi Rodriguez, Hall of fame golfer*

the final home game of the season. For three years McElwain provided endless waters and enthusiasm, and now, with 4:19 to go in the last game of his managerial “career,” he was summoned to enter the game.

Coach Jim Johnson hoped he might score a point. The whole student body chanted his name. His first shot missed everything completely. But his next shot, a 3-pointer, set the gym on fire. The crowd went crazy. “Hotter than a pistol,” McElwain made shot after shot, hitting six 3 pointers, including one at the buzzer and finished with 20 points, the game's high scorer. “J-Mac” became an overnight sensation, appearing on the Larry King and Oprah Winfrey shows, and meeting the president of the United States. ([Watch his inspiring video here.](#))

### WHY WE PANIC

To panic, by definition, is to lose self-control. We lose self-control because we are not present. Think about a time where you lost self-control. Often it's from anger or fear, or both. Anger is displeasure over something in the past, and fear is worry about something in the future.

We are not present because we don't know how to be, especially when desires, doubts, and other distractions arrive. Our lives have been spent learning how to add and subtract and write complete sentences, but we've never been taught how to focus in the moment.

**Full engagement in the moment is perhaps the ultimate skill.** Do you want peace? When you are fully present there are no worries or concerns. Worry is anxiety about the future. Do you want confidence? There is no doubt when fully present. Doubt is also focused on the future. Do you want joy? There is no sorrow when fully present. Sorrow reflects on pain from the past. Do you want poise? There are no distractions when fully present. “Distractions” blend into the moment.

To be fully present is to be free of worries and concerns, doubt and despair. Even desires have been replaced by passion. Desire is a future-oriented feeling, whereas passion is present. We desire what we do not have—even the desire to keep what we have is a desire to hold on to the past, and have it in the future.

So we get fearful and maybe even panic when we are focused on the past or future. That past/future focus is quite common. In fact, for most of us, it's our normal way of being. How many times in the past 24 hours have you had anxiety, frustration (which comes from unmet expectations—a desire for the future to turn out a certain way) or doubt? What about sadness, anger, or fear?

To clarify, all seven basic emotions are beneficial in some context. (Dr. Robert Vallerand identified the seven basic emotions as happiness, interest, sadness, fear, anger, guilt/embarrassment, and surprise). The idea is not to eliminate emotion, but to control and direct how we feel. Our best performances, ideas, and confidence come when we are fully present.

### CHOOSE NOT TO FALL

Daniel Ilabaca is a real-life Spiderman, only without the web-spinning. He climbs buildings without ropes or equipment, then jumps off ledges onto places without any ledges. Ilabaca does stuff only Spiderman would consider—and even he might hesitate. [You can see his amazing video here.](#)

Ilabaca is a world-class traceur (one who does Parkour), which is an athlete that can be thought of as an urban gymnast. The difference is that many of the jumps/moves/falls would result in death for most athletes. In perhaps a bit of irony, traceur Châu Belle Dinh explains that Parkour is a “type of freedom;” a “state of mind.”

What Ilabaca has learned to do, is free his mind. He's learned to feel and not think. **He's learned to be present.**

**“Confidence isn't gained over time of practice. Confidence is gained when you realize you choose your own path. You choose to fall. You choose not to fall. If you're afraid to fall you fall because you're afraid. Everything is choice.”**

~ Daniel Ilabaca, world-class traceur/free runner

## 7 Mental Toughness Keys Elite Performers Know — and You Should Too.

- 1. Poise is the result of full engagement of mind, body, and spirit.** A clear mind and unburdened heart lead to peak performance.
- 2. You are not your mind. Your mind is a part of you that you must train.** It is used to thinking what it wants, when it wants, but now you must train it. To be present. To stay positive.
- 3. You move toward what you think about.** We always attract people, events, and outcomes similar to our predominant thought patterns.
- 4. Your subconscious mind awaits your instructions.** We all have a subconscious mind that runs our lives. The subconscious has no will or emotions. It simply works to create that which we think and talk about. You are programming your beliefs every day by what you think and say.
- 5. The opponent is not the enemy.** The opponent is your “partner in the dance,” as NBA world champion Phil Jackson says. Your biggest test is not the person or team you're facing, it's the battle within. The inner world of your thoughts and feelings will always be your biggest help or greatest challenge.
- 6. The experience is the thing (not the outcome).** Our culture is totally focused on outcome, wins and losses, good or bad—continuous comparison and labeling. The elite focus on learning how to feel. They learn how to get the feelings they want and get them back when they lose them. This gives them freedom to fail—and perform.
- 7. Beauty, truth and extraordinary performance go together.** Extraordinary performance is the by-product of extraordinary experience—those sacred moments where we're caught up in the action, lost in the feeling, loving the moment. The pursuit of peak performance is best pursued by the quest to be fully present in the moment, where there is always truth and beauty.

He explains: “The adventure is not knowing what’s going to happen next. It’s accepting that you don’t have control of the future. Make the most of now. Every step I take is not calculated. When you think ahead to the future, it prevents you from being in the moment. When you’re in the moment, it allows you to do things that other people can’t understand...”

Ilabaca says he chooses to be present, and in this he chooses not to be afraid.

We all have that choice.

## **Fear is a choice.**

We choose our thoughts, and those thoughts lead to clarity or confusion, happiness or sadness, panic or poise. That choice is everything.

In fact we can trace the path of fear, and it starts with a decision. Do we choose to let our human nature take over, and see the world through our self-centered eyes, preoccupied with ourselves? Or do we focus in the moment and see the amazing opportunities that always await?

**It’s natural, of course, to be self-occupied.** In fact it’s helpful and at times imperative. We need to eat, pay the bills, watch for traffic and take care of ourselves. But it’s also problematic.

Constant thinking of ourselves amplifies our failures, or over-emphasizes our successes. Either way it leads to self-consciousness. We compare ourselves to others, and the ego kicks in and needs recognition. So we become attached to our goals.

Since we cannot fully control our goals, doubt, tension and anxiety move in. The Critic, that part

## **“The ultimate goal of karate lies not in victory or defeat but in the perfection of the character of its participants.”**

~ *Gichin Innakoshi, founder of karate*

of our mind that wants to judge everything, gains momentum. Doubts and frustration turn into fear, and possibly panic. (\*With help from the Trickster and Monkey Mind, but you can read about them later.) You may ask, how can we not see the world through our own self-centered eyes? While we will always see the world through our own eyes, we don’t always have to see it through self-occupied eyes.

In fact you’ve done it many times already. When you lose all self-consciousness and attachment, you are not preoccupied with yourself. Have you ever watched a movie or read a book and been totally caught up in the action? Have you ever played your favorite sport or musical instrument and lost track of time? Those are moments when the self has faded and the ability to feel has taken over. You felt the moment rather than analyzed it.

It’s what elite performers have learned to do.

## **So how you can you learn to feel and not think, to be fully engaged in the moment, like Ilabaca?**

You may say, “I could never have his confidence.” But, like he said, confidence is a choice. You could reply again, saying that you’d be confident too if you had his athletic ability. But is it really athletic ability that sums up what he does? If it was, then gymnasts all over the world would replicate his moves. It’s far more than physical. It’s a mindset.

## **When you change your mindset, you change your life.**

We can’t all climb tall buildings like twenty-one year old Ilabaca, but we can all think like him. We can all learn to be present. We can all be more courageous. Courage is often thought of as the ability to be fearless, or to be able to move forward despite the fear. In either case, courage handles fear. It does it because fear is focused on the future and courage is focused on the present.

## **Courage is the ability to be fully present.**

In fact it takes courage to be present, because there are so many things out of our control, and it’s difficult to let them go and trust things will work out how they should. By the same token, when I think of the future, I may have fear, so I must be present to have courage.

In order to be fully present and other-worldly courageous, it helps to have what sports psychologist Dr. Cal Botterill calls an unburdened heart and a clear mind. But how do we get it?

## **WE ALL HAVE A STORY**

Who are you? If I asked you, you might say you’re an accountant or a cab driver, a baseball player or... maybe you wouldn’t know what to say. You might tell me about your past... where you’re from, what

your childhood was like, how you were raised, your talents and skills, or perhaps even your hopes and dreams, fears and anxieties.

But who are you? Most often we think of ourselves in terms of what we've done or experiences we've had. But does that really encapsulate who you are?

If you want to become skilled at being fully present, then learn who you are. And bring that to the world. When you bring your true self to the world, and focus on that, things get a lot easier. After all, you're just being yourself.

But often during the course of our lives somewhere along the line we seem to lose our true selves. We get lost in disappointments and mistakes. We get rejected and passed over. We fail. So we seek approval and acceptance, even though we can't control it. We spend our lives trying to be someone who fits in.

**“An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.”**

*~ Martin Luther King, Jr.*

How is it going for you? **Are you your true self?** Here's an exercise for you to do:

1. Consider where your life is headed if you continue on the path you're on now. Then write your obituary. What will it say? Does it have real meaning and truth, revealing who you were put on this planet to be? What if you were to die tomorrow? What will your legacy be?

2. Now write down your obituary if you were to live completely in accordance with your values, gifts, and passion? Are the two obituaries the same? What means the most to you, so that when you look back on your life, you'll feel fulfilled?

3. **Create your CP3** (Core: Purpose/Passion/Peace). Consider the combined energy of your ultimate purpose, what you are most passionate about, and what gives you the most peace/fulfillment. That energy is your CP3, what you need to bring to the world to be your true self, your best self. Maybe you can sum it up in one word, or maybe it's several words.

My current CP3 is: Connected. Inspired. Unstoppable. Those three words, for me, at this point in time (it could change) encapsulate what gives me meaning, how I want to feel, and how I feel in the sacred moments. It's the energy I want to bring to everyone I meet, so they can feel they same way.



What I've found is that the most powerful mission is one that has a purpose beyond yourself. When you contribute to humanity, you can really connect with your true self. We were made for relationships, which is evident when you feel the power of a purpose that makes a difference in the lives of others. It doesn't have to be an orphanage in Africa. Your mission can be, as one of **Dr. Jim Loehr's** athletes decided, "to be sunshine," and to bring that to people everywhere.

### CHOOSE THE MASTERY MINDSET

Perhaps the most powerful pursuit, in order to be more present, live more courageously, and have more poise, is to seek self-mastery. Mastery is the quest for awareness, discipline, and personal growth.

Mastery, like most things in life, has a counteragent, the ego. Whereas the ego seeks status, mastery seeks wisdom; the ego seeks to win-at-all costs, and mastery seeks to win the battle within. The ego is afraid of humiliation, and mastery is willing to look foolish in order to learn and grow.

### **Having self-mastery allows us to overcome two of the most powerful obstacles we face: attachment and self-consciousness.**

The reason we have fear is because we are either self-conscious or attached to something we want but cannot control, or both.

We all have desires, and along with desires come the fear of not getting that which we want. Attachment follows, especially when we allow the ego to roam freely, unrestrained.

The ego sees every person and/or situation as a potential threat to losing what we have or want.

Remember golfer Jean Van de Velde?

Here's what he said to Sports Illustrated going into the last day of the 1999 British Open:

"It's the biggest tournament ever, and I'm a bit ahead of everybody else," he said. "What can happen? I can lose it, that's the only thing that can happen. "I can win it -- that's the other thing," he said, almost as an afterthought.

Van de Velde's human nature took over, focusing on the needs of the ego... and the biggest tournament... comparison to others... what will happen... win or lose...

Don't confuse controlling the ego with controlling your confidence. In fact quite the opposite is true. The ego is attached to the past and afraid of the future. Confidence has let go of the past and has faith in the future. Controlling your ego increases confidence, because there are no threats to defend. You can be free, to play, to perform, to be you.

You may recall Jason, "hotter than a pistol," McElwain. He focused on his teammates. After being asked if he was disappointed on being ineligible to be on the roster for the playoffs, J-Mac said, "I just want to win as a team, not individually."

You may think Van de Velde and McElwain's situations were very different. But were they really? They both were playing the sport they loved, the sport they dedicated their life to. To each of them, it was potentially the biggest moment of their lives, at least in their sporting life. Do you think McElwain wanted to succeed any less than Van de Velde? The biggest difference that I can see is that Van de

**"In true budo (Japanese martial arts) there is no enemy or opponent. True budo is to become one with the universe. Not train to become powerful or to throw down some opponent."**

~ *Morihei Ueshiba, founder of Aikido*

Velde was (naturally) thinking about himself and J-Mac was thinking about his team. Van de Velde was worried about losing his lead, J-Mac felt privileged to be on the court.

It seems that in the long run, gratitude and passion always outperform fear and desire. Gratitude and passion live in the moment, fear and desire live in the future. While desire is a powerful and essential part of high performance, it needs to be channeled into focus in the moment to have the full benefit.

## JOSHUA BELL AND THE WASHINGTON DC SUBWAY

One of the reasons we often lack courage and full engagement in the moment is because we see ourselves in the wrong context. We all have different roles we take on, perhaps as a student or teacher, father or son, athlete or executive.

Out of context, we may not recognize someone. It's because our brains need to filter information; it puts people and situations into groups in order to keep everything straight.

The same thing happens to ourselves. We feel confident in some situations and not in others, even if we are very competent and knowledgeable in that area. Perhaps we're speaking in front of people we don't know, and we get nervous. Or maybe you've been performing really well, but now you're facing an unknown opponent, or someone that's beaten you before.

Now your mind gets confused. Which are you, confident or cautious?

**Joshua Bell is a musician.** A good one. In fact he's one of the best violinists in the world. He performs in front of big audiences, and sometimes gets paid somewhere around \$1,000 a minute to play.

So the *Washington Post* wanted to try something. They wanted to see if people would recognize his talent—and the beauty of his music—if he were in an unusual context. They asked him to play in the DC subway, putting his open violin case on the floor, with several "starter" dollars in it.

So what do you think would happen? He played for one hour, on his \$3.5 million Stradivarius violin. Over 1,000 people walked by. Watch for yourself. [\(See the hidden camera video here.\)](#)

What you'll see when you watch the video, is that most people did not stop. He earned \$32.17. Yes, some people gave pennies.

The point is, in some way, we are all Joshua Bell. We all have unique, incredible talent, but often our music lays dormant within us. Or we play our music, but give in to the fear that people may not accept it, when in reality, they're the ones who are missing out.

Mental toughness is really about courage. And we can all be more courageous.

## 19 Principles of a courageous life

1. Seek love, wisdom, and courage in all that you do.
2. Love conquers fear, wisdom teaches us how to live, and courage enables us to do both.
3. Love is to lead with your heart.
4. Wisdom is to expand your vision.
5. Courage is to be fully present.
6. Seek self-awareness, self-education, and self-discipline.
7. Learn how you want to feel, live, and compete.
8. Keep a journal on your life.
9. Gratitude and humility are the cornerstones of wisdom.
10. Have a purpose that you are willing to give your life to, so when you look back on your life when you're 80, you can find the fulfillment of a life with meaning.
11. Be prepared to die, and to fully live, at a moment's notice.
12. Everything that happens to you is here to help you or teach you. Resistance creates counter-resistance. Acceptance opens the door to opportunity and learning.
13. Challenge your beliefs. We all have self-imposed limits that can be expanded with imagination and passion.
14. Be a good receiver. Abundance is there for the taking. Learn to accept what is freely given to you—and of course be thankful for it.
15. There are no problems, only judgments.
16. When we are fully present, we have no needs, no desires, and no fears. There is total freedom.
17. Self-consciousness and attachment to what we want but can't control two of the biggest obstacles we all face—both of which are past and future-oriented. (Self-consciousness is attachment to your past that is concerned about your future).
18. Learning to be fully present clears the way for inner peace and new ideas.
19. Pray not for your circumstances to change, but for the strength and courage to perceive them differently.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Now you have the choice. Do you put this article down and get back to your life, and stay on the same path you were on, or do you take action today to live the life you were meant to live.

Go to [www.innerexcellence.com](http://www.innerexcellence.com) to follow Jim's blog and get weekly ideas and inspiration to live more courageously.

**Click here to order the book *Inner Excellence* and take the next step to change your life.**

\* The Trickster is the part of your mind that whispers doubts and fears in your ears. The Monkey Mind is the endless stream of thoughts, most of which are unproductive or negative.

## NOTES

*Châu Belle Dinh explains Parkour...*  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parkour>

...it's about always just looking...  
[http://marvel.com/news/comicstories.10580.the\\_marvel\\_life~colon~\\_wfpf~apos~s\\_daniel\\_ilabaca](http://marvel.com/news/comicstories.10580.the_marvel_life~colon~_wfpf~apos~s_daniel_ilabaca)

*The adventure is not knowing: Sixty Three Productions.* YouTube video. *Choose Not to Fall.*

*As one of Dr. Jim Loehr's athletes:* Loehr, Jim, Ph.D. *The Power of Story.* New York: Simon and Schuster. 2007.

*What sports psychologist Cal Botterill calls:* Botterill, Ca, Ph.D. Private correspondence.