

*MATTHEW L. DAVIDSON AND VLADIMIR T. KHMELKOV*

***EXCELLENCE WITH INTEGRITY:  
THE OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE APPROACH***



Copyright © 2016 by Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D. and Vladimir T. Khmelkov, Ph.D.

Institute for Excellence & Ethics (IEE)



216 Fayette Street, Suite 1

Manlius, NY 13104

Phone: 315-692-8054

Fax: 315-692-8091

e-mail: [info@excellenceandethics.org](mailto:info@excellenceandethics.org)

[www.excellenceandethics.org](http://www.excellenceandethics.org)

Excellence with Integrity™, Optimal Performance™, and Culture of Excellence & Ethics Assessment® are trademarks of the Institute for Excellence & Ethics.

## EXCELLENCE WITH INTEGRITY INTRODUCTION

### THE VISION OF *EXCELLENCE WITH INTEGRITY*

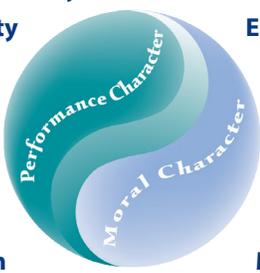
At the Institute for Excellence & Ethics (IEE) we believe that performance matters, that winning matters, and that excellence matters. But we believe that these do not need to be achieved at the expense of one’s integrity, or in a way that does damage to oneself or others. The IEE vision of *Excellence with Integrity* is both the means and the end-goal. It speaks to what we do NOT want: lying, cheating, stealing, unethical, illegal, or unhealthy behaviors. It also speaks of what we DO want: growth, improvement, success, achievement, balance, joy, and harmony.

*Excellence with Integrity* is built on the power of character contained in BOTH our performance character and moral character. We define *performance character* as the values in action that enable us to achieve our performance goals—like perseverance, work ethic, positive attitude, grit and toughness. We define *moral character* as the values in action needed for successful relationships and ethical behavior—like integrity, trust, respect, and responsibility.

**EXCELLENCE WITH INTEGRITY™**

**PERFORMANCE CHARACTER AND MORAL CHARACTER COMPETENCIES**

	Adaptability	Caring	
	Ambition	Civility	Citizenship
	Craftsmanship	Confidence	Courage
	Critical Thinking	Collaboration	Cooperation
	Dependability	Creativity	Emotional Intelligence
	Diligence	Curiosity	Empathy
	Drive	Determination	Forgiveness
	Effort	Entrepreneurship	Friendliness
	Enthusiasm	Endurance	Graciousness
	Grit	Imagination	Generosity
		Initiative	Gratitude
		Justice	Honesty
			Honor
			Hope
			Humility
			Integrity
			Loyalty
			Kindness
			Love
			Moderation
			Mercy
			Patience
			Peacefulness
			Resilience
			Resourcefulness
			Responsibility
			Respect
			Self-Awareness
			Thrift
			Self-Control
			Sensitivity
			Service
			Truthfulness
			Trustworthiness
			Work Ethic
			Wisdom



© 2016 Institute for Excellence & Ethics (IEE)
Adapted from Lickona & Davidson (2005).
www.excellenceandethics.org

BOTH moral and performance character are needed for optimal performance. It is at the intersection of moral and performance character that the secret ingredient for optimal performance is found, or what we call **Excellence with Integrity**. This means that we don't lie, cheat, steal, harm ourselves or others in the pursuit of our goals. It also means that we strive for the right relationship between our achievement and goal-driven self, and our spiritual, service and relationship selves.

**Excellence with Integrity** is about working hard and smart, effectively managing emotions and energy, and maintaining the right perspective. It is about pushing ourselves but doing so in a centered, healthy, sustainable way. It is about harmony between our drive for achievement and our need for relationships. It is the synergy between our fundamental need for both doing and being. It is about the joyful, fearless pursuit of excellence in a peaceful and centered way. In essence, **Excellence with Integrity** is all about finding optimal synergy between our moral and performance character as we live it out amid the challenges of the real world.

## THE OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE APPROACH TO ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE WITH INTEGRITY

Thousands of years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle argued that “virtue is the mean between excess and deficiency.” This age-old wisdom matters to us today because we would argue that when it comes to achieving **Excellence with Integrity** it is all about finding *the middle ground between too much and too little*.



Once you have identified the moral and performance character values that animate your vision, captivate your attention, and motivate your actions, what then must be determined is what exactly optimal looks like in action, in your context, in most common circumstances faced. Achieving **Excellence with Integrity** through the **Optimal Performance Approach** is all about putting your values in action to the right degree for the circumstances and the expectations. Achieving **Excellence with Integrity** is about right relationship—with ourselves, with our teammates, and with our circumstances. Achieving **Excellence with Integrity** is all about choosing the better, choosing that which leads to positive outcomes in both the short and long term, for each individual, and for the team or group they're a part of.

In the real world putting our values into action defies any one perfect response. What's the right amount or type of communication, honesty, courage, toughness? The answer, of course, is that it depends. Finding optimal is all about the process of establishing high expectations that are also aligned with the circumstances as well as differences in knowledge, ability,

and sensibility. That's why we argue: **forget perfect, find optimal**. What's acceptable, what's unacceptable? In most situations, the answer is: it depends. Optimal can—and must be defined—but it is done so by the teams and organizations and their leaders. (It is important to point out that we are not talking about moral absolutes like lying, cheating, stealing, or harming others, where right isn't situationally defined.)

On the continuum from inadequate to optimal, it is essential to define what optimal looks, sounds, and feels like for **your expectations**, for **the circumstances**, and given each person's **capabilities and sensibilities**. When our performance is inadequate it is not that we are a bad person, but that our performance simply wasn't good enough. When our performance was close to ideal it is not that we are perfect, it is simply that, all things considered, our performance was just about right for the situation and the expectations. Finding optimal is a continuous, ongoing, never-ending process. Individuals who consistently find optimal are those we might consider to be "high-character, high-performance individuals"—they have the habit of putting values in action to the right degree in the circumstances they face.

## OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND PRACTICES

In the book, *Switch: How to change things when change is hard*, one of the main arguments of authors Chip and Dan Heath is that "**what looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity about what to do better or do differently.**" Too often we simply assume that people are resistant, unwilling or unable to make changes in their behaviors. When in fact change is more likely to occur when there is clarity about what to do differently or better. What individuals need is the *what* and the *how*: WHAT should I do differently or better? HOW do I learn to implement this habit or skill amid the real world challenges and circumstances I face?

This is where the IEE optimal performance indicators come in: these provide the clarity regarding what the vision and values look, sound, and feel like in action; they provide clarity about "**what to do better or differently.**" **Optimal Performance Indicators** provide the clarity about what to do better or differently. They represent a group's desired values broken down, defined, refined, and contextualized for particular circumstances and individual capabilities and sensibilities. **Optimal Performance Practices** define optimal expectations for coaches, mentors, and leaders.

Since the factors and conditions for human performance are continuously changing, the quest for optimal performance is ongoing and never-ending—for mentors and mentees. Consider how the performance capacity of human beings is continuously changing. Even if we are talking about the "same person," in any given time period they are getting stronger (or weaker), on any given day they are more or less focused, hungry, tired, or anxious. Some days we are healthy, strong, patient, and focused. Other days we are tired, sad, mad, scared, and frustrated. And, just as human capacity is constantly changing and fluctuating, so too are the circumstances or conditions for performance. Expectations change, pressures grow (or diminish), leadership style and strategy changes—all of which impacts optimal performance. Thus, whether we are talking about time management, honesty, hard work,

toughness, leadership, communication—or any other value—what defines optimal will continuously change.

In any and every situation, we must learn the habit of finding optimal. This isn't easy and requires effective coaches and mentors because finding optimal is often not simply choosing between good and bad options, but rather choosing the better course between two good things. For example, working hard, but to the right degree for the circumstances; communicating the truth, but doing so in a way that is right for circumstances and persons involved. Thus, achieving optimal is an imperfect art, and one that is never-ending.

No performer in any environment we have worked with has EVER gotten so good at this process that they no longer miss the mark or fall short. Mastery simply doesn't happen. People can master the mindset, process, or approach for finding optimal, but nobody we've ever worked with has mastered the skill of things like time management, communication, stress and energy management, self-awareness, work ethic, life balance, etc. These are not things that you master and then move on. The real world implementation of these skills defies mastery. And, thus, our mantra: ***Forget perfect, find optimal.*** We must continuously seek new knowledge and new ways of being that get us closer to optimal. Falling short of optimal around any of your indicators is not an indication that you have "bad people" or a "bad group". Rather, falling short of optimal usually means that you have high standards, limited resources, and ever-changing circumstances.

## COACHING FOR OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE

The vision of *Excellence with Integrity* requires individuals who have self-awareness, perseverance, flexibility, and a relentless commitment to continuous improvement. It also requires the support and challenge of coaches and mentors. We like to think about people pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps, but most often human excellence occurs in the context of a supportive community, and under the guidance of qualified coaches or mentors. Elite performers almost always have trusted coaches to guide them. Similarly, there is a reason that most self-help programs and approaches draw heavily on the support of others. Even the most driven, most disciplined, most honest person has blind spots and weak moments.

Optimal performance requires participants who are *coachable*, and mentors who embrace their role as coach. Coaching for optimal performance is so essential because the quest for achieving *Excellence with Integrity* is a never-ending, dynamic, and difficult process. In our experience even those with great natural ability and capacity require coaching to maximize their potential. In more than 20 years of applied work we simply have no evidence that individuals are born with optimal performance giftedness or simply mature into optimal performers. They must be coached, and they must be committed to a process of continuous improvement. And while it's somewhat of an art to find the right approach for the circumstances and individuals, there is also a research-based best practice science to shaping optimal performance habits.

Drawn from extensive research and applied practice, IEE’s *Coaching for Optimal Performance* process lays out four essential practices that together lead to achieving optimal performance goals: Communication, Habit, Accountability and Mindset. Implemented together, these practices create an interactive synergy that leads to consistent optimal performance.



Finding optimal using these practices occurs within a specific context and set of circumstances. Optimal isn’t the same thing everywhere and for everyone. Thus, coaching for optimal performance is informed by and determined relative to:

- the unique organizational mission and values,
- the team’s specific goals and objectives,
- the capabilities and sensibilities of team members, and
- the ever-changing day-to-day circumstances faced.

## OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE COACHING—FOR CHARACTER AND CULTURE

Many people tell us that they may not have used these words, but these four practices—COMMUNICATION, HABITS, ACCOUNTABILITY, MINDSET—are familiar. The process is obviously more dynamic—and more complex—when implemented, but generally it seems familiar and intuitive.

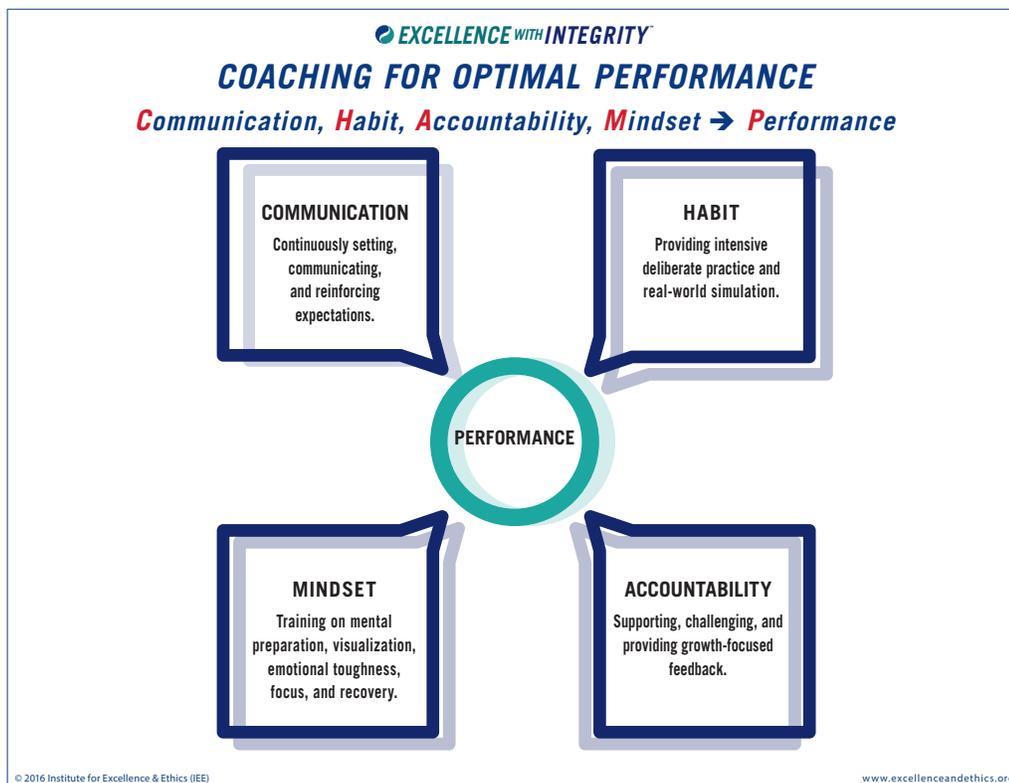
Here’s what’s essential about the use of this coaching approach: it’s *applying* these coaching practices to the CHARACTER and CULTURE needed for optimal performance within your core mission. Whatever your core mission (educating young people, winning games, or running a successful business), focus on Communication, Habits, Accountability, and Mindset NEEDED FOR it. No matter the setting or goals, our experience shows that there is always a character and culture component that acts as the catalyst for the core mission. So the key is to focus

on the values and skills that are missing, or need to be developed to a higher degree, which could be toughness, communication, time management, stress management, focus, leadership, conflict management, or any host of others.

Whether it is toughness, communication, leadership, integrity, or responsibility, coaches and leaders desperately need rigorous, real-world knowledge and tools. IEE’s *Excellence with Integrity™* Tools and Strategies help ensure that coaches and leaders have the know-how to coach up these character and culture skills with confidence and consistency. Together, technical expertise along with character and culture expertise is the winning combination that ensures *Excellence with Integrity*.

## THE CHAMP PROCESS

For shorthand we often refer to the IEE Optimal Performance Coaching process simply as the “CHAMP” Approach: **C**ommunication, **H**abit, **A**ccountability and **M**indset leading to Optimal Performance.



## SETTING AND COMMUNICATION OF CLEAR EXPECTATIONS (COMMUNICATION)

A famous quote says, “Communication works for those who work at it.” Coaching for optimal performance requires setting, communicating, and reinforcing clear optimal performance expectations. And, it’s a never-ending process. Communication for optimal performance includes the following elements:

- 1) **Identifying the needed value, skill, or competency.** Whatever your core mission and goal, there are essential values, skills, or competencies NEEDED FOR optimal performance. The first step is identifying the essential one(s) that are missing altogether or need to be developed to a higher degree to achieve core mission and objectives.
- 2) **Setting clear optimal performance expectations.** Translate the targeted goal or value into concise, clear, concrete *do this, not that*-type action statements that make it clear what the expected behavior looks, sounds and feels like.
- 3) **Contextualizing expectations for the specific situation, event or circumstances:** clarify the behavior indicators for the current or upcoming circumstances.
- 4) **Clarifying expectation for particular roles.** It's essential to clarify the above behavior indicators for the particular individuals on your team, based on their current role within the team and their particular capabilities/sensibilities.
- 5) **Continuously clarifying, contextualizing, reiterating and adjusting expectations as needed.** These steps must be engaged in continuously, not simply at the outset or conclusion of a season, year, or other long-term cycle.

Whatever value, skill or practice you have identified as essential—toughness, confidence, integrity, etc.—optimal performance development begins with establishing shared expectations *for the group* and *for each individual* (for your role on the team, for a new team member, a veteran team member, the team leader, etc.). This means being specific and concrete when clarifying expectations around *the most common circumstances currently faced by the group* (not in general, but for *this* time period, for *this* group, for *this* setting or situation, etc.).

If, for example, a core value of your team/organization is honesty, identifying it as such is a good starting point. But it's not enough. This value must always be contextualized within your current circumstances and performance expectations. Honesty, for example, isn't one set of expectations; it's actually many different applications. Optimal performance requires clearly setting and communicating important big picture expectations (overall for the organization or program, for this year, etc). It also requires setting and communicating urgent, mission critical expectations (for today, for this game, for this situation).

Contextualizing for the circumstances is essential because what honesty (or any other value needed for optimal performance) looks like when we're under the pressure of the current situation, is likely different than how we might define what it looks, sounds, and feels like in a big picture view of it. Contextualizing in terms of the most current understanding of our current and desired state, is the core of setting and communicating clear expectations for optimal performance.

## HABIT DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TARGETED PRACTICE (HABIT)

Habit is formed not so much by knowledge about a skill, as it is by an experience of a targeted skill. Habit is achieved through targeted practice, or what the expertise literature refers to as “deliberate”, practice.

Habits are formed from the creation of intense and intentional real-world practice simulations. These simulations begin, as we have argued previously, with clarity of expectations—crystal clear models of what the skills and values look like optimally implemented for the current circumstances and expectations. Deliberate practice is often accompanied by mental training and preparation, the mindset development that visualizes what one can expect and a plan for response. But then one must engage in practice simulations that are equal to, or greater than what one is likely to face in the real world. This practice must be monitored and mentees must be given timely, growth-focused feedback that includes praise and polish (e.g., “this was good because...this could be better by doing... or not doing...”).

The development of habit through targeted practice comes from concentrating on growth and improvement of our existing skills, but also by focusing on adding new skills and developing deficient ones. It comes from practicing not only the things we like, but also the things that don’t come easily and that we’re not good at. Habits are formed through intense and intentional practice that is more challenging than the “real” challenge. This requires that we deliberately design and monitor the quality of our practice. Habits are formed through consistent and persistent practice done over time.

To summarize, optimal performance coaching for HABIT includes the following:

- 1) **Engaging in deliberate practice of essential skills.** Whatever those skills might be (i.e., honesty, toughness, communication, stress management, etc.), knowledge about them isn’t enough. It takes deliberate practice.
- 2) **Intentionally creating real-world practice simulations.** For a habit to be formed the practice of the skills must be as close as possible to what will be faced in reality.
- 3) **Increasing intensity of deliberate practice.** Keeping score, keeping time, tracking progress—monitoring growth is essential.

## (ACCOUNTABILITY) THROUGH SUPPORT AND CHALLENGE

Expectations have been set. Conditions for deliberate practice simulation have been established. Now come the support and challenge needed to ensure that expectations are met—and course correction when they are not. Accountability through support and challenge is one of the hallmarks of effective coaching for optimal performance. Clearly, great performers in every walk of life hold themselves accountable for meeting their standards and goals. But at some point all great performers require the support and challenge of others—especially around those areas where we struggle.

Accountability isn't simply someone making sure you do what you said you would, but in the ideal it also involves teaching, correcting, and inspiring. Accountability coaches balance honesty and respect in a way that pushes you and leaves no question about where you stand, but without embarrassing, insulting, or demotivating. Accountability through support and challenge not only points out what you've done wrong, but provides the "do better-do differently" feedback that is specific, tactical, and replicable.

Accountability through a 180-360 feedback process promotes honest self-reflection and ensures that the individual leaves with a sense of what to do better or differently to more optimally meet the standards. The danger of isolated self-evaluation can be over-estimating our strengths; however, it can also be underestimating our strengths and over-playing our weaknesses. Goal partners, accountability pairs, small groups, and the like are needed to create a culture of trust and truth where self-evaluation is healthy and constructive.

Optimal performance requires clarity about what to do, how to do it, along with chances to practice doing it—and a deep understanding of WHY the new and different way is the better way. Why? Why should I do it that way? When I know what to do, I have practised how to do it, and I understand why to do it, then I can instinctively react when faced with a similar situation. Accountability requires both challenge ("that's not good enough") and support ("here's what you need to do better or differently").

To summarize, optimal Performance coaching for ACCOUNTABILITY includes the following:

- 1) **Providing support and challenge on the development of essential skills.**
- 2) **Providing constructive criticism and "do better-do differently" feedback that is specific, tactical and replicable.** Accountability isn't simply punishment. Creating a culture of continuous improvement through constructive criticism and coachability is all about the feedback for growth needed to improve.
- 3) **Using performance data for accountability, teaching, correcting, and inspiring growth.** Real performance data is essential. It provides the path to growth and improvement towards individual and collective potential.

## MENTAL PREPARATION AND MINDSET FORMATION (MINDSET)

Mindset is all about the mental preparation practices designed to develop focused, tough-minded individuals who understand and accept that reaching our shared goals will not be a straight line. Mental preparation practices are designed to emotionally visualize likely situations, to frame and reframe mistakes and missteps, and to focus on controlling what's controllable—and letting go of what's not within our control.

In her book, *Mindset*, Carol Dweck presents the research on the importance of having "growth-mindset" for thriving in every aspect of human development and performance. A growth-mindset is a way of viewing new challenges, seeing them as opportunities to learn, grow, and improve. If we have a growth-mindset we believe that in and through any

new, different, or difficult situation, we can learn, grow, and improve in a way that leaves us stronger and wiser, with new skills and strength of character than we would ever have developed without the experience.

Dweck shows in her research how the “growth-mindset” differs from a “fixed-mindset.” It’s the fixed-mindset that causes most of our fear and anxiety. A fixed-mindset is one where you tell yourself that you can’t do it, because you don’t have what it takes. With a fixed-mindset you tell yourself: “Some people are born with the ability to do this, but not me.” With a fixed-mindset you come to think that your potential for learning and improvement is fixed, set, and therefore you are not able to grow, change, and improve.

Mindset is essential for optimal performance because nobody is going to achieve perfect mastery. In essence optimal performance approach is all about growing, learning, improving, failing faster, and making adjustments in pursuit of optimal. Expectations have been set for the circumstances, for the goals, and for the various roles of team members. Only rarely in the real world do things go as planned. Thus, the mindset for optimal performance is one of visualizing prior to entering the situation, and preparing mentally to make the adjustment, to grow and let go, to focus on what’s in our control.

A growth mindset approach is also strengthened and enhanced by emotional toughness. Author Jim Loehr describes the importance of emotional toughness indicators like *emotional flexibility*, *emotional responsiveness*, *emotional resiliency*, and *emotional strength*, which contribute to the overall mindset needed for optimal performance. These emotional toughness indicators include being aware of our emotions and choosing positive responses, being able to take a punch emotionally and bounce back quickly, and using past experiences to develop high tolerance for hard times, tough situations, and difficult odds.

Our goal as optimal performance coaches should be to use the experiences and challenges of everyday living to stretch and strengthen the muscles needed for the challenges faced, and as preparation for the ones we face in the future. We’re looking to stretch and push those we coach just enough: too much and you get injury, too little and you get weakness. You’re a strength coach, using every single experience of life to develop inner strength and capacity they need to survive and thrive.

To summarize, optimal performance coaching for MINDSET includes the following:

- 1) **Developing a *forget perfect-find optimal, grow-and-let-go* growth mindset.** Optimal performance is all about growth, improvement, and the pursuit of our goals and expectations.
- 2) **Visualizing situation response scenarios.** Coaches prepare athletes/mentees mentally on what they will face and how to respond, to visualize success and response to failure and setback.
- 3) **Continuously refocusing on controllables, reframing challenges, and emphasizing quick recovery.** Mindset development focuses and refocuses continuously, seeking to efficiently manage emotions, energy, and failure.

## CONCLUSION

Whether you're a coach, an educator, parent, supervisor or CEO coaching for optimal performance is an essential skill set. Coaching for optimal performance requires Clear Expectations, Mental Preparation, Deliberate Practice, and Support and Challenge—***Communication, Mindset, Habit, and Accountability***, which together lead to ***Optimal Performance***.



***EXCELLENCE with INTEGRITY™***  
***THE OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE™ APPROACH***

## Institute for Excellence & Ethics

216 Fayette St, Suite 1, Manlius NY, 13104 • Phone: 315.692.8054 • Fax: 315.692.8091  
[www.excellenceandethics.org](http://www.excellenceandethics.org)

Excellence with Integrity™, Optimal Performance™,  
and Culture of Excellence & Ethics Assessment® are trademarks of the Institute for Excellence & Ethics (IEE).