

From Chapter 1—Current Reality

Survival of the Fittest?

Because this competitive model has dominated for so long, many people believe that we are aggressive and competitive by nature and nothing can be done to change this behavior. The idea that human nature is inherently competitive received validation in the mid-1800s from the work of Charles Darwin. With his theory of evolution, Darwin presented a vast body of evidence that all life on Earth evolved over millions of years from a few common ancestors. This evolution occurred through a process called *natural selection*. From his research and observations, Darwin noted that possessing certain traits increased a species chance of survival; a higher percentage of animals with these traits would survive and, through procreation, pass them on genetically to the next generation. For example, when the climate grew significantly colder, animals with thicker fur would survive in disproportionate numbers. In a drought, animals that could survive on less water would endure.

Darwin's theory promoted the idea of the *survival of the fittest*. This term is a bit misleading since the individuals possessing traits that increased their chances of survival had nothing to do with developing those traits. The male bird with brighter colors that made him more attractive to females did not control the amount of color in his feathers. The individual members of a species that survived dramatic climate change did not intentionally change their makeup in order to survive. It wasn't survival of the fittest so much as the good fortune of those whose traits happened to suit the demands of the time.

Inevitably, supporters of a competitive worldview commandeered Darwin's concept in order to prove that being competitive was natural and superior to all other ways of interacting. This view became known as Social Darwinism. When two animals fight to the death it is easy to conclude that the winner is the stronger, more competitive animal. The twisted logic of Social Darwinism holds that aggressive, competitive individuals are the most suited, and therefore the most deserving, of survival and success in life. Thus competition is viewed as natural and even essential to our progress and development.

Dog-eat-dog competition, seen as human nature, now defines most aspects of business, politics, sports, and even popular culture. It's the new mode of popular entertainment, from TV's *Survivor*, *American Idol* and *The Apprentice*, to the slew of programs that reduce "contestants" to the level of aggressive beasts hunting and fighting for survival around the drought-ravaged watering hole. There's no disputing the potential in almost all species for highly competitive and aggressive behavior. And we human beings are an animal species. But does this prove the

inevitability or the superiority, of competitive behavior? On the surface, this can seem to be the case. But if we look more closely, we see that competitive behavior manifests most frequently and intensely when there is a shortage of some necessity, like water, food, shelter, sex or, with the animal called Man, money. Competitive behavior manifests when we are threatened or our survival is at stake, and even when there is an illusory perception of a threat. Nature reveals that when there is no shortage in the necessities of survival, there is less competitive, aggressive behavior. And both animals and man thrive best when they cooperate with one another. This is why most animals form herds, packs and flocks, and why man formed tribes, villages, towns and nations.

From Chapter 2—Beyond Competition

Winning Versus Learning

The competitive approach to learning is widespread in all aspects of education. Children find themselves in a recital or a performance after taking only a few months of music or dance lessons. If children *really* know and can proficiently play or perform the material, no problem. If not, they are programming performance anxiety into their cellular memory. I know this from personal experience. From starting piano lessons at age six, to playing drums in the band in high school, I was put into performances before I was confident of the material. Those experiences sowed the seeds of a lack of confidence, and performance anxiety. Academically, it's the same: Children are given material to learn, and then tested and graded before they have *really* learned it. What are we really testing and teaching by putting children into competition prematurely? And what are children really learning in this way?

This is the trial by fire or school-of-hard-knocks approach to learning: “We learned the hard way; you have to learn the hard way. Life isn't fair, life is tough!” Maybe life is tough. Do we need to make it tougher on principle? Maybe we did learn the hard way. Do we have to make learning harder for everyone? How about discovering what may actually be the best way to learn? The school-of-hard-knocks approach does push a small percentage of people to excel, primarily from fear of the consequences of failure, or perhaps an overweening desire to win or to be number one. But most people fail to achieve their potential in a competitive environment. Even those who succeed often pay a steep price, physically, mentally, and emotionally. Yet this

is the environment in which we continue to raise and educate our children. What are we passing on?

When learning becomes a contest, the focus shifts from learning skills to winning contests, and to fears of losing. When being a winner is so important, it can't help taking precedence over developing the skills necessary to achieve excellence. And this is a fundamental problem in our competitive culture.

From Chapter 3—Birth of a Non-Competitive Model

Playing in the Zone

A big factor in my developing the non-competitive teaching system I call *Effortless Tennis*, which draws on the principles of what I call *Effortless Learning*, came out of my desire as a tennis player to get into and stay in the fabled state known as *the zone*, that magical place where everything comes together, and we play “out of our minds”. When we are in the zone, everything goes right and nothing goes wrong. It is as if we can't make a mistake. This is “peak performance”.

Athletes generally long for the Zone, but rarely attain it. Yet musicians and dancers frequently enter the zone. This is because music and dance are taught through a more non-competitive, cooperative, skill-based approach that allows greater access to the zone. Musicians and dancers are supposed to work together. The zone exists for any endeavor, be it cooking, knitting, writing, driving, managing, accounting, even living. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s “I have a dream” speech is a shining example of the zone.

The Relief of Finding a New Way

Many people who experience learning in a non-competitive environment notice a sense of psychological relief, as if a huge weight has been lifted off their shoulders. We've all grown up in a competitive system. Many of us have endured it without enjoying it — often because it felt like a lot of pressure and we weren't winning enough.

In the Effortless Learning program, people are able, often for the first time in their lives, to relax in a learning situation and experience what it's like to develop skills, competence and

confidence without the familiar conditions of being pressured, judged or graded. But because many of us have internalized the competitive system due to our long-term immersion in it, it can take a while, sometimes years, to realize we aren't being judged, and to then stop judging ourselves as we learn and grow. Slowly but surely, we learn to relax and have fun, and our skills begin to improve at a faster rate. I have seen this happen with hundreds of people in the Effortless Tennis program.

After a while, people engaged in the process of Effortless Learning start to understand that it wasn't their laziness or lack of ability that prevented them from succeeding, but their lack of skill development. This lack of development may have occurred for several reasons: first, teachers weren't doing a good job explaining the fundamentals; second, teachers weren't giving students sufficient time and support to develop their skills before putting them into competition; third, the students put insufficient time and effort into learning the skills; and fourth, a combination of all of the above.

The Effortless Learning model addresses the above liabilities. I have seen no one fail who has stayed with the Effortless Learning process and put in the practice time. *Not one!* We need to give people encouragement and the time to learn all of the necessary skills. The last few decades have been an incredible journey for me. My experiences have completely changed how I understand and apply the learning process.

It is especially rewarding when I see people with deeply ingrained doubts about their ability to learn and succeed who really do want to learn, begin to believe and experience that it is possible for them to be good players. It shows in their eyes. It can take years between this moment of glimpsing our true potential, and actually fulfilling it. But many decide that it's worth sticking around for.

From Chapter 6—Keys to Peak Performance

Ten Keys to Peak Performance

The Effortless Learning system describes ten *Keys to Peak Performance* that, if mastered, grant us consistent access to the zone. This system is blended together from many different sources. These keys are human qualities, and also skills or abilities that can be developed with practice. Their development allows us to fulfill our potential in any area, on and off the court,

field, or stage, in the office, the classroom, the boardroom, and even the bedroom. As we develop these keys they continually enrich and enhance the quality of our lives regardless of our age, gender, beliefs, occupation, etc. Mastering these keys grounds us in the kind of abilities and self-confidence that can move mountains — and even change the world.

Great teachers have taught some or all of these keys for thousands of years. Both these keys and the whole learning process take on new significance once competition is removed; then we need to go back to the beginning and learn everything in a deeper, more efficient way. These keys are presented in a certain order. While I believe that joy, relaxation, and concentration belong at the top of the list, each person may experience these keys in a different order that is natural to their learning process. All these keys are essential and inter-related, and we will experience and work with them repeatedly in a continuous cycle for as long as we engage in our chosen activity. In the diagram below, they are presented in the shape of an oval to demonstrate their equal importance and inter-relatedness. The keys are:

1. Joy
2. Relaxation
3. Concentration
4. Patience
5. Perseverance
6. Self-motivation
7. Accountability
8. Fitness
9. Coordination
10. Efficient skill development

From the Epilogue

And In The End.....

In this book I have explored and revealed the darker aspects of a competitive system that, largely predicated on fear and scarcity, divides everyone into two narrow categories – a small fraction of winners and a majority of losers – who compete for prizes, money, prestige, and even survival. I've shown how the systematic and premature introduction of competition into the learning process subtly shifts our focus from learning and achieving proficiency in the fundamentals of a skill, to winning and losing; and how this skewed focus creates needless stress and inhibits the learning process. I've shown how competition stimulates and intensifies the fear

of losing and the hope of winning into twin forces that drive our motivation and dominate our attention. I've shown how this distorts our values and character, encourages aggressive and unethical conduct, and interferes with the development of proficiency, excellence, mastery, and human potential.

I have also shown how Effortless Learning's non-competitive/cooperative approach eliminates these negative aspects of the competitive system, greatly reducing stress and fostering deeper overall development of practical skills and all the qualities we associate with maturity, character and mastery. I've shown how Effortless Learning's dual focus on practical skill mastery and overall self-mastery facilitates our access to the zone, a state of consciousness beyond competition where we perform at our peak with seeming effortlessness. I have also demonstrated that in the right environment people can learn to play cooperatively together, with no desire to be competitive with each other, and can experience great joy in the process. For all these reasons, an Effortless Learning system facilitates our higher evolutionary development.