



HIGH PERFORMING PEOPLE  
COMMITMENT

# How to use this resource

We are really pleased to provide you with this resource on the topic of Commitment.

It sits as part of the **High Performing People Framework** and aims to provide some useful information on one of the framework's 13 identified characteristics. A resource will be available for each characteristic.

**The recommendation is to use this resource to help you to understand the key theories that underpin Commitment and to provide you with practical recommendations as to how to apply the theories.**

The resource isn't designed to be directly used by athletes, but instead to be used by the coach, to think about how the information might be best applied with the specific group they coach based on their age, experience, and unique characteristics. If you have access to a performance psychologist then involving them in the conversation would be beneficial.

Enjoy the resource; we hope it stimulates some new ideas and, most importantly, actions.

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[Click to read about the High Performing People framework](#)





**“Commitment** means following a plan even when you don’t feel like it that day.”

# Starting point

## WHAT DOES COMMITMENT LOOK LIKE?

- Sufficiently conscientious, has a strong work ethic and values, knows what it takes to succeed and is prepared to do what it takes.
- Demonstrates persistence in achieving their goals, despite obstacles, over an extended period of time.

When you are serious about undertaking something, you need to start by checking that you have a real possibility of achieving what you are setting out to do (your purpose). There is no point in starting if you have not thought through whether you will be able to commit to the challenge.

It is important that you consider whether you emotionally and logically want to do it. It will not work if only one part of you decides to commit to the challenge.

There is no point in being successful if you are not happy, and vice versa, so you need a balance.

Having clarity on your purpose is a really important element to understand what success looks like for you. Take a look at the available Purpose resource for more information on this.

It is also important to recognise that our expectation about what commitment looks like varies depending on the age of an athlete and their experience in the sport. Commitment for someone new to the sport might be turning up to training sessions with the purpose of enjoying them.

### COACH ACTION

Establish WHY an achievement would mean something to an athlete.

"Why would this make you happy / inspired / what would it do for you?"

# Motivation v. commitment

## MOTIVATION

- Motivation is emotionally driven. It is a feeling.
- Motivation generally happens when there is a great reward to gain or when you are suffering so badly that you want things to change.
- Motivation is helpful to drive us on, as it can bring added enthusiasm, but it is not essential to success.
- It is unrealistic to expect to feel motivated every day, no matter what you are doing.
- The problem with motivation is that it works on feelings from the “chimp brain” and these can shift very quickly.

## COMMITMENT

- Commitment, on the other hand, is a rational choice and does not depend on feelings.
- It requires exploring facts and information which are combined with logic to rationalise the benefits of doing something.
- Commitment means following a plan even if you don’t feel like it that day.
- For example, a surgeon can’t say halfway through an operation, ‘Do you know, I just don’t feel motivated to finish this, so I’ll stop now!’ Motivation doesn’t matter; it is commitment that will finish the operation.

**Learning how to act in line with your best interests even when motivation is absent is a critical skill.** It enables us to develop the capacity to do what we need to do, even when a part of us doesn’t feel like it.

An important element of commitment is to understand our own values as these can guide our behaviour.

# Motivation

## TYPES OF MOTIVATION

There are different types of motivation, each with strengths and weaknesses.

**Intrinsic motivation:** engaging in behaviour because it is personally rewarding (e.g. fun, learning)

**Extrinsic motivation:** engaging in behaviour for external rewards or punishments (e.g. for the medal/trophy)

**Ego-orientated motivation:** engaging in behaviour which motivates us through demonstrating greater ability than others (e.g. winning, or doing a task with less effort)

**Task-orientated motivation:** engaging in behaviour which motivates us through demonstrating greater ability than our previous attempts (e.g. doing a task that we were unsuccessful at previously, learning something new).

All of these can be beneficial and research would support that it is a combination of different motivations that seems to have the most positive effect on our thoughts, feelings and behaviours.





# Values

Professor Steve Peters suggests that the word value can be used in two distinct ways:

1. **'Value' is something used to describe things that are important or valuable to you** (e.g. having fun, being content, car, family.)
2. **'Value' means what the right thing to do is, morally or ethically** (e.g. respect for others, justice, compassion, working hard, honesty.)

The first list are the things that are likely to make us feel secure and happy, whilst the second list form a moral code to our behaviour and are based on society and personal beliefs.

What these values represent is a way of knowing that we are doing the right thing. All of them are judgement based and give us a moral compass. They are measured by behaviours we display and actions that we take.

When we act upon our morals we create peace of mind as we know we have done the right thing.

If you don't live by your values then it is likely to lead to inner conflict. This will lead to a restless and uneasy mind.

## ACTIVITY

Take time to work out your values. A value is a moral code to let you know you are doing the right thing. Values lead to behaviours.

Remember that the list will only work for you if you make sure you implement it.

### Questions that might help to identify your values are:

1. What kind of person would you most like to be?
2. What do you want to stand for?
3. What do you want your efforts to represent?
4. What contribution do you want to make?
5. What qualities or attitudes do you want to bring to this area of your life?

# Commitment to action

We now know that we cannot rely on motivation to always be there. It comes and goes. And there will always be things that we will never feel like doing. How do we make those happen, even when a part of us would prefer not to?

Feelings are often accompanied by urges. Those urges are suggestions, nudges, persuasions telling us to try this or that to relieve the discomfort that we feel or to seek the reward that we anticipate. While those urges can be powerful, we don't have to do what they say.

**The opposite-action skill is the deliberate attempt to take an action that is the opposite of what the emotion is telling you to do.** Often our understanding of our values helps with this.

"What action would I take in this moment which aligns with my values?"

Values are judgement calls that you have made and reflect moral and ethical principles that you intend to guide your behaviour in situations.

What values represent is a way of knowing that we are doing the right thing. They are all measured by behaviours we display and actions that we take.

## ACTIVITY

Think about seeing how long you can keep a polo mint in your mouth.

The urge to crunch the mint keeps going up and can feel almost undeniable over time.

It demands intense concentration and focus. As soon as you get distracted and let your guard down, your brain would take over on autopilot for you and the mint would be history.

If you spend time noticing the experience, you can create a gap between the urge and the action.

Simply by paying attention, you get to choose whether you go with the urge or against it.



# Commitment screening

In order to assess your commitment in a structured way, use the 'commitment screen', which is a list of questions to answer. The screen is composed of two aspects.

The first aspect is working out what you will need to do the job. The second aspect is preparing solutions to overcome anything that might stop you from succeeding.

## FIRST ASPECT: WHAT IS NEEDED FOR THE JOB?

We can break these down into three types:

**Essential** – these are the things that are critical for the venture to succeed. Essentials are both physical and emotional in nature and this is where it is worth doing two lists. The first is for logically and the second list is for you emotionally. The logical covers the practicalities and truths and the emotional covers the feelings and emotional skills needed.

**Significant** – these are the things that will definitely have an influence on the final outcome and therefore must be considered.

**Desirable** – these are the things that may or may not help but they will make things more comfortable.





# Commitment screening

## SECOND ASPECT: WHERE ARE THE CHALLENGES YOU MIGHT FACE?

We can break these down into three types:

**Hurdles** – these are the things there is just no getting around and you have to jump them.

There are always unpleasant or difficult things that you have to do in anything you undertake. Your job is to work out what these are and then have a coping strategy to deal with them.

There are no choices here, so you have to learn how to jump these hurdles. (e.g. if you want to get stronger, you have to do strength training).

**Barriers** – these are things you can get around with good planning.

This doesn't mean ignoring the difficulty, it means dealing with it by removing it. (e.g you have coursework due at the same time as a regatta. You can plan to complete the coursework ahead of time so that it doesn't impact your ability to compete at the regatta.) So it is very important to recognise the difference and then remove the barrier.

**Pitfalls:** these are areas that could easily be your downfall if you are not looking out for them (e.g. letting yourself become emotionally exhausted.)



# Commitment screening

Here are questions you can answer as you go through commitment screening:

## ACTIVITY

### Is it really a dream?

- How important is this to you logically and emotionally?
- Do you logically and emotionally really want to achieve it?
- What are the benefits of achieving your dream?
- Are the benefits worth having, compared to the cost of getting there?

### The plans and requirements to fulfil the dream

- What plans have you made to achieve this?
- What have you tried in the past?
- If it failed in the past, why was this?
- What are you going to do that is different this time?
- What new strategies have you got for the future?
- What worked in the past?
- Have you made sure that your plans are watertight by letting someone else check them with you?
- What are the essential, significant and desirable requirements for you logically and emotionally for the plan to work?
- Have you got the essentials in place BEFORE you start?





# Commitment screening

Here are questions you can answer as you go through commitment screening:

## ACTIVITY

### Hurdles, barriers, and pitfalls

- Have you made a list of the hurdles you have to jump?
- Have you got a strategy to jump each hurdle?
- What will you have to sacrifice?
- What are your plans for dealing with the downsides?
- What stress will you face in trying to achieve this dream?
- What barriers do you think you will have to get round or negotiate on?
- What are your plans to avoid or get round each barrier?
- What pitfalls might you need to avoid?
- How will you recognise the pitfalls as you approach them?
- If you failed to reach your dream how would you feel and how will you deal with this?

# Commitment screening

Here are questions you can answer as you go through commitment screening:

## ACTIVITY

### What will keep you going when you face problems?

- How will you deal with failing to meet a goal or target?
- Who have you got to help you deal with issues/problems you might face?
- Is this person clear on why and how they can help you?
- How will you measure progress?
- How willing are you to learn new strategies?
- How willing are you to change your approach?

### If you find yourself wanting to give up your dream, ask yourself the following:

- Why do you want to give up?
- Can you change anything before you give up?
- Can you find a different approach?
- Who have you talked it through with?
- What are the advantages to giving up your dreams?
- What are the disadvantages to giving up the dream?
- What plans have you got for when you stop working towards the dream?





# Commitment screening

Here are questions you can answer as you go through commitment screening:

## ACTIVITY

**Some suggestions to help you to stay committed to a plan:**

- Be realistic with your resources – money and time are not elastic.
- Time management is a skill worth learning.
- Work effectively, not just efficiently.
- Prioritise what you need to do and don't allow yourself to get distracted.
- Doing one thing at a time, where possible, is the way to give it full attention.
- Avoid negative people or at least let them know what they are doing (nicely), and if they can't stop, don't involve them.
- Actively listen to advice and where necessary seek it out.
- Indecision is the best energy sapper, so once you have the information, make the decision and follow it through.



# Monitoring and accountability

**Commitment screening also allows for monitoring and an increased level of accountability.**

We're basically talking about "underpinning qualities" we are looking to develop. Breaking it down to everything that could have an influence on someone achieving their purpose

Without this, athletes can often lack a real direction. They need to know exactly where they're going and what needs to be addressed (as well as why) in order to keep on pushing/keeping up the hard work,

I also find it helpful for them to outline what "Gold Medal Winning Standard" would look like/be in each of the qualities to help give them further guidance/something to aspire towards. This can then also provide a further element to their monthly reviewing in relation to getting nearer to that "Gold Medal" level.

What this looks like varies for the age of the athletes. It is also very logic based. Their emotions will need constant nurturing, rewarding (i.e. praising of effort and reminding of progress made) and reassuring that there will be a reward at the end if we keep on pushing, it's just not possible yet!





# Commitment to a race plan

## 1. A plan that has been agreed to and not just dictated!

On a race day we want an athlete to commit to their race plan. To do this there are three main things for us to consider:

1. Unless a plan has been agreed to, people will never fully buy in and commit (i.e. they will likely hesitate.)
  - They will therefore never stick to the plan because emotionally they won't settle down
  - This can all be mitigated if we make sure that the athlete is happy and has had a say in the creation of the plan
2. There is a difference between not committing and not being confident. Our confidence is based on our ability to "give our best" (under the constraints.)
3. **Crucially, recognise the fine line between the "theoretical best plan" and the "athlete's preferred plan"**
  - It doesn't matter how good the plan that you make is, unless they 100% believe that it is the best for them and that they can do/execute it, they will emotionally pull out



# Commitment to a race plan

## 2. A plan that we are emotionally on board with

This means the level/source of risk is minimal or the reward is strong enough.

Emotionally we are always on the look out for the percentage chance of risk in a situation. If there is even 1% risk, we won't want to do it!

So, we can summarise this by understanding that emotionally we will look for risk and will refuse to accept it. Hence the importance of considering the truth as well!

- How big is the perceived risk?
- Is this the same as the actual reality of the size of the risk?
- Emotionally we will often be very sneaky and clever, and will twist it into thinking that the risk is bigger than it actually is. It's important to get the facts and statistics!
- In other words, prove the difference: weigh up the size/likelihood of risk against the size/likelihood of reward of the different options.

### The "crossing the road" analogy:

You all crossed the road this morning because there was a relatively small risk.

If there was a known maniac on the road, you might think twice.

All of our athletes have been "hit by cars" during their career which have scarred them.

We have to find out is that risk still looming for them?



# Commitment to a race plan

## 3. Motor programmes are well developed

The plan should be understood and specific, don't assume knowledge or confidence.

We must try to create a culture of "No Assumptions" within our staff when it comes to creating plans and instructions for athletes.

Motor programmes need clear specific instructions: not too much information or complexity, just real clarity and specificity. Therefore, if we are using words as cues, does the athlete know **exactly** what these mean? I.e. do they know what the **exact** plan/intended action is at certain points?

**Test them: if they can't tell you immediately, they have no chance of being able to execute it under pressure!**

### How to programme this best:

1. **Practice** it, once the exact response has been clarified
2. **Test** it under pressure, with consequences
3. Take it to **competition**

Sudden death points: does the athlete know the exact plan?

Autopilot it: it's not the 'wrong' decision that often kills you, it's usually hesitating that does.

