

Barriers and Solutions to Performance Psychology with Dr. Bobb Neff and Mark Lerman

- [00:00](#) Hi, I'm CiCi Bellis, WTA tour player and you're listening to compete like a champion.
- [00:10](#) J: Welcome to the compete like a champion podcast. You're here with mental skill specialist, Dr. Larry Lauer and coach Johnny Parkes of USTA player development. Today's episode we're going to talk about the barriers and solutions to performance psychology with special guests Mark Lerman and Dr. Bob Neff. Welcome to the podcast guys.
- [00:31](#) B: Thanks Johnny.
- [00:32](#) J: Thanks for joining. We got a lot of brain power in the room right now.
- [00:35](#) B: It's hot in here.
- [00:38](#) J: It's going to heat up. It's going to heat up. Well guys, I mean thank you so much for joining. I mean we are essentially in the room right now have our mental performance team for USTA player development. And before we kick off with a, with some great topics, I'm sure we're going to go down many rabbit holes on, it'd be great for you guys to maybe, you know, talk about where you're, where you're at, where you're located, and what are the main sort of things that you're doing at the minute.
- [01:03](#) B: I'll go first then, great, uh, I'm Dr. Bob Neff. Um, now I'm out in Carson, California, been in Dallas part of that for 25 years. So happy to be taken on a much bigger role directly with the, the USTA and working with working with players. So it's been, it's been a blast. Awesome. What about you Mark?
- [01:20](#) M: Great, great. Mark Lehrman here. I work at the Billy Jean King national tennis center in New York and I have a unique role in that I carry a dual role as a mental performance coach as well as an assistant strength conditioning coach.
- [01:33](#) J: Awesome. Yeah. Jack of all trades over here. That's great.
- [01:36](#) M: Hopefully a master of something.
- [01:37](#) J: Yeah, no it's great cause we, I mean we've, we've talked a lot in the, we talked a lot in the past about, you know, in some of our roles we have to be also like specialist and being generalist and having a very good understanding of all areas of the game. So it's a, it's great to see that as somebody else in, in, in a kind of role that brings, it ties it all together.
- [01:54](#) L: Yeah. So this is our, our mental training team. Right. And I have our team here today, which is awesome. And you know, these guys bring their strengths to the team. Obviously you just talked about with Mark and his ability to be in the gym

and take, uh, players through sessions and connect a mental side with that very well. And Bob does the same thing. Uh, he was a coach, a player as well, so he has that experience and bring that in. So I think it equips our team to, uh, look at things in different ways and not just from a psychological side but from the physical and, and certainly from the tennis side as well. And I think it rounds our, our team out very well, which I am very excited about. And it's great to have you guys on because I think we can dig deep in some topics today that our listeners will enjoy. So.

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J: Yeah, no, absolutely. And I, you know, in, in a previous episode we talked about a myth of self control. We referenced that article and, uh, we, we got a little deep in that, you know, Mark and Bobb, we got some thoughts on that. But Larry, you, you told me an interesting story early as, uh, kind of related to self control. Uh, I think the listeners would love to hear.

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B: We're going to go there.

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L: Oh, we are going there, Bobb today. So.

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J: I think this is awesome.

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L: It's a bit, well first is a bit frightening for my weekend activities yet mind you though, this was after a two hour hard skate. Okay. Night hockey with my son.

[03:09](#)

J: No excuses.

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L: I was dog tired. So I'm laying down, the kids are about to go to bed and I'm just laying on the couch in the man cave and I start watching San Andreas. You know that movie with the Rock where he saves his daughter and well, sorry to give away the plot. But anyway, you knew that. But it was, it was interesting, right? So I'm watching that and you know, I'm, I'm watching this and uh, I have it paused because I go put my children to bed and I do talk to them before they go to bed, by the way. And then I come back up to finish the movie and it ends. And this show comes on called Temptation Island. Now, I had never seen this before and maybe Bobb and Mark watch it. I think Bobb DVRs, this show every week.

[03:47](#)

B: It's my favorite show.

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L: It's your favorite show?

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B: I've never heard of it before.

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L: It's a reality TV show I guess. But the concept interested me because I didn't watch it, but I thought it was interesting. They have this Island where they bring couples who are trying to figure out whether they should stay together or not in their relationship they bring them to the Island. But the cool caveat, I guess the

interesting one is that they also bring in 24 singles who are looking for love and they bring these people together. And so the couples are trying to stay together or are they not? And the singles are trying to find love and they're in there trying to grab a woman, a guy and you know, we leave it to your imagination from there. But, and then I thought back to this idea of self control. It's called temptation Island, but we just talked about how we're not very good at resisting temptation. So basically what they're doing is they're setting people up to ruin their relationships. Right? Because most of these people are going to do something to ruin their relationship. Is that true guys? I mean we're not very good at resisting temptation.

[04:41](#)

J: Televising it for everyone to see.

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L: Well yeah you look pretty bad.

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L: So that is a prelude into, you know, something we were discussing before this article, Resnick talking about how self control maybe is a myth. Right. And I wanted to get, you know, Bobb and Mark to chime in on this. What are your, what are your thoughts on this idea? Cause I think coaches a lot of times do believe that we should be able to control most things.

[05:06](#)

B: Well I think the biggest issue that I hear from coaches is, you know, is something innate or is it learned? I think that when we're talking about high performance and it's such a combination of these things, so it's hard to tease out, you know, you know, what do we have to have bringing in to this situation and then what are we supposed to be learning along the way. But when, when we come down to, you know, to controllables what I'm always trying to teach the players is that there's really three that we have control over once a match starts and we can decide how hard we're going to work, you know, so what kind of effort and and then strategizing, we can decide what strategy we're going to use and then if we've been preparing, then we can be controlling our emotions to a certain extent. Beyond that. I mean, the rest of it is just, you know, we're just responding and doing the best that we can in a mostly automatic way. So I think, you know, from that standpoint started from that, from the very beginning, like what do we control? Do we control how we're going to be our forehand? Not really. No, We can, we can choose what shot. Maybe. But I mean there's so much that has to be automatic and somebody, I just start with that point.

[06:05](#)

L: That's a good point. We know that performance naturally fluctuates. I think a lot of times players don't understand that. And you draw that on the board for them, how there's their average and how they fluctuate around that line. It's like, Oh yeah, okay, I get it now. But until then, I mean they know it, but they don't know it emotionally and it's helping them to see that. But Mark, when you think about this, oftentimes you hear coaches say, well she wanted it more, he wanted it more. Is that true? And is that real? Cause I argued very strongly against that last time we talked about this topic.

[06:34](#) M: I don't know if there's a clear cut answer for that.

[06:36](#) L: No, there is. I'm telling you that there is Mark, go ahead. I'm sorry

[06:41](#) M: Some people are innately more disciplined than others. We agree with that.

[06:45](#) M: Yeah. But how do we know that it's innate or if it's just been, you know, a habit over 20 years.

[06:48](#) L: Socialization.

[06:50](#) M: There's a learning component for sure. As a young child. Personally, I was not the greatest student. I learned to become a disciplined student and become an exceptional student.

[06:58](#) L: When are we going to start to see this?

[07:00](#) M: Well, I'm keeping that. Oh, you committed to yourself. I decided that this was going to be the big unveiling.

[07:03](#) L: All right. I love it.

[07:09](#) M: So the myth of self control, I think, I do think some people have an ability to control themselves better than others, but I also believe that it can be learned and it comes down to desire. How badly does somebody want something, will determine how hard they're going to work, kind of effort they're going to put into it, and ultimately what they're willing to endure along the path of hopefully achieving what it is that they want.

[07:30](#) L: But it wasn't that the point of of what the author was saying that there's passion, but then there is just the fact that human beings aren't very good at resisting temptation. Like they want something, they want to change the behavior, they want to choose to hit a different shot in the given situation. They want to stop hitting that flat forehand from behind the line. But because this is something, that urge to temptation, you know, it feels good. I want to get out of this situation quickly, it's easier. I don't want to have to run for five more balls by hitting this ball cross court. They have a lot of motivation. However, they're not changing the behavior.

[08:04](#) B: That's exactly what we have to be doing. We have to be developing habits so we don't have to be making those decisions about trying to change behavior in the last moment. We have to just rely on what we've been training. And so from a physical standpoint, that's obviously what we have to do. But then there's a mental side too of what, what decisions are we going to be making and are we going to be doing it with a lot of emotion there, which means we're going to be more rational or are we gonna just naturally calm ourselves down? Not naturally, but I mean, are we gonna be conditioning ourselves to be going to

that I need to breathe, I need to get calm first and then I need to problem solve. And if we have that, that habit in place and we're much more likely to do it. So I think that's, that's the point that I want to make is that I think we are a combination of what we've been doing consistently and that's the way that's what's going to happen when we get under pressure.

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M: Yeah, for sure. I think if we balance out learning through repetition and then learning the important habits that we're trying to teach as mental coaches, we're creating a recipe for success.

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J: What in your guys' experience, so you just saw through repetition, right? So when you ask a lot of coaches, they're trying to change a forehand or backhand the reserve, a grip, a swing path, whatever it may be. Sometimes they say, okay, it takes, we'll take three to four months, might take six months to change a grip. When you guys are working with athletes and trying to develop some mental skill habits and whether it's routines or creating the habits that end up not leading to, to being bad with temptation. Right. So we're creating those habits. How long do you guys feel that an athlete needs to take a change at different ages? Like what's your thoughts on that in terms of a timely manner?

[09:34](#)

M: I guess I'll jump in. I think that it depends. Yeah. But I have found with younger athletes, the learning curve is much shorter and the willingness to try new things and even change is much greater than with athletes that are a little bit older. Even teenagers, I'm not talking about necessarily adults, but even with teenagers, the willingness to change is quite a bit more challenging. Again, it comes back to my earlier point, if somebody wants to change, they will. I keep thinking of an old ad that ran on TV for many years where someone was trying to change something and they said, Oh, it's the easiest thing in the world to change. I've done it a thousand times.

[10:11](#)

B: It's a perfect example.

[10:12](#)

L: There you go. Yup. Yup.

[10:13](#)

M: Right.

[10:14](#)

L: That's me snacking at night. But that was the last episode.

[10:17](#)

B: So one of the things that we've been doing is we've been working with monitoring charts and the reason why we want to be doing this monitoring chart stuff is so we can be aware of what we're consistently doing. So then after the week is out, we look back and we say, okay, what have we done? Like these are the things that we've recognized are really important for us to do on a, on a regular basis. How did we do? And so to get to your question, Johnny, I, I think that it's going to be probably around the four to six week range, but I mean how consistent is somebody behaving and it during that period of time, if they're not really doing anything, then it's not going to be six weeks. It's going to be six

months or maybe never. So that's where the monitoring chart with awareness I think really ends up helping them.

[10:56](#)

J: And that's something we see do a lot with, Bobb, when we, we come out to Carson and the center there, you're out on the court doing lot lots of charts and giving the kids feedback based off that, you know, with our, with our camp structure that we have and obviously we see kids maybe once every couple months, every few months, you know, so, um, but what we are seeing with the kids that, that do apply what you guys teach them in, in the, in the classroom or maybe on court with some of these habits and mental skills that the kids that go home and continue to do it and the coaches that keep enforcing their kids to create these habits, they're the ones that come back to it, to the next camp. Uh, almost like where they left off. Like now it's become more of an automatic habit. Whereas the ones that come, it's like they know it, they go home, it might have been forgotten and then they come back again. It's like it's not starting over cause they've had the information, but it's almost like how do I get them to, to buy in to doing this on their own? I think goes back to your point there Mark like, they really want to do it, they'll do it. But there's that thing about continue to create the buy-in where we can get creative with how they buy into it and how they can take it forwards.

[11:59](#)

L: And I think one of the things about the self control, and there's two aspects. One is the person and then it's the environment and you have to look at both. And what we learned about self control is if personally it's important to you to change this behavior and you can find value in, in this change and see the consequence of that and pay attention to that when you're in that moment. That helps. Also, secondly though, creating the right environment where you're not unlike temptation Island where it's done on purpose, where you're not exposing yourself right? That urge or that need to do something differently, right? So I think you've got to look at the person and talking about, you know, how much they value this change, how important it is to them and remembering that.

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And then secondly, one of the things is that, you know, people who, who struggle maybe again with, for let's say poor decisions on the court, they talk about when they change the actually aren't really even concerned about making the other decision at some point. Right? It's like, Oh, I never thought about it. Right. You guys have that experience where when I start making the change they're like, I didn't have to worry about it.

[12:59](#)

B: Yeah. I keep going back to some of the habits that I've been trying to change. Like for example, working out in the morning, that's been a, it's been a tough one. And um, you know, the alarm clock goes off, I'm laying there and the mind starts going, yeah, you probably need to get that extra sleep. You know, you didn't get enough and you have a long day and maybe you should just stay here and not work out. So there's, and this was part of what was in the article then to this, you know, discussion back and forth and, but then after you get into a

routine, it's like the alarm clock goes off, you just get up and you're waking up. There's no, there's no argument.

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L: There's no decision to be made at that point.

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M: A lot of times we talk about the bigger picture and doing things for a greater good. To Bobb's point, I like to get my workouts in later in the day, afternoon, evening whenever, when I can. I prefer that my girlfriend is trying to include exercise into her, into her routine, which hadn't been done before and the morning is when she needs to do it, but she's not that motivated. So I put her needs ahead of my comfort and I'm getting up early in the morning. I'm not hitting snooze, we're setting the alarm earlier and I'm doing it for her, but I'm actually really enjoying those morning workouts as uncomfortable as it is.

[14:03](#)

B: I've also noticed one other thing while we're talking about workouts, I just wondering if, I'm just going to go off on a tangent here real quick. Of course we do that all the time on this podcast. So as I've been doing orange theory for the last five months and the orange theory says is this group training thing, and I was really skeptical in the beginning. My wife's like, Oh, you gotta come try it. I'm like, Oh my gosh. It's like I get in there and I'm realizing I would never have done the things that I did in there. Why did I do all that? Well, I did it for two main reasons. Number one, that there were other people around doing it as well. And I'm comparing and I'm pretty competitive, so I'm looking around thinking nobody's doing more or faster than me, you know, are they? And so that, and then, and then I'm like, OK, well the class is still going so I need to continue to work. I'm not going to walk out. I ended up doing more, I work harder and now I'm into a routine of it. Where this morning I woke up and I need to find orange theory around here in Orlando. I don't know, is there one here?

[14:52](#)

L: Yeah, there is. We're not plugging orange theory. But I mean you talk about environment, you're talking about social facilitation, right? And we know the research and that's very strong that you put yourself in a certain environment. Let's, let's say you are trying to change a habit. Let's go on with this. So working out, if you put your self around people who have this same habit, you're more likely to do that. Right? And now if we, if we work it into tennis, if there's a culture created around your group or your team where they do things in a certain way, let's say we don't, nobody slaps while we do not slap from behind the baseline and the other players are not doing it, wouldn't it theoretically mean you're probably more likely than to not slap, right? Wouldn't you agree Mark? I mean and I think that's kind of the standards you guys have tried to create in New York very clearly. There's certain things cause you're molding their habits, right? That wants the majority of kids start to do it usually then it kind of falls from there. Is that true or,

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M: Oh, it's 100% true. And we talk with the athletes as if they're a team. We use the word team, we reference examples just like that where we'll talk about when Bobb gets better, it's going to force Larry to get better. And when Larry

gets better, because Mark's competitive, he's not going to be okay with that. He's going to push himself to push to get better. And then you know what that's going to fire up Johnny and he's gonna push it in together. We're all going to get better as a team. And that's the culture that we've created.

[16:12](#) L: And I think it won't take much to fire up Johnny. But, uh, he's, in the morning he's in the gym. Trust me. So.

[16:17](#) J: I like to get in there and no one's around. Just me personally, I have some sick addiction to pain.

[16:24](#) L: But you're only doing bicep curls for like an hour.

[16:27](#) B: You're British, that's why.

[16:27](#) J: No, I'm not doing the, you know, the Venice beach muscle thing,

[16:31](#) M: That bench press, bicep curl.

[16:33](#) L: That's my favorites.

[16:34](#) B: There's a cool thing that's been happening in, in Carson and that we've been working, uh, doing this daily, daily mental practice as groups. And as people are walking by and they, they notice, Oh, we're, you know, there's a group of people in there and they, and they see who's in there and they see that they're consistently doing it. My hope is that more and more are going to just buy into it fully and they're going to feel comfortable.

[16:54](#) L: So there we go. We're talking about environment again, right Bob. So you create this normalcy about doing something. Maybe it's mindfulness, it's a breathing visualization. And then people are like, Oh, well he's doing it or she's doing it. Maybe that's because they're competitive because they don't, they don't want to be left out and they think, wow, that actually is helping that person. So, and this can be enough to, to spark behavior change.

[17:16](#) M: I have an example of that. Um, we've been doing the exact same thing in New York. The daily mental practice has been introduced and taught and reinforced and like many things, some athletes will buy in more than others. There's one that hadn't really bought in, in fact was slower to buy in on many of the different ideas and concepts and slowly started doing it and didn't tell anybody until she got comfortable with it. And on my check in each morning I went through how did it go? Did you do what? What specifically did you do? Variety of questions. And much to my surprise, I checked in with her. She said, no, I did it. And it went well. Here's why it went well. I actually stopped me in my tracks. I was thrilled and she's been now doing it every single day and it's, I don't know if it's a habit yet, but it's certainly a choice she's making and she's recognizing the benefits of it. In fact came back and even had a private

conversation recently and said, you know, this is similar to how I've approached many things and I wish I had done things a little bit earlier in my career, but I know it's not too late, so I'm going to keep going. That was, that was an amazing experience.

[18:15](#)

L: No, that's interesting because in one way we're saying it makes people people more comfortable if you have a group and it's kind of fitting into the group, right? And everybody's doing it. So I'm going to do it kind of the orange theory, the that, and then there's other people who they need to get comfortable with it first before they're going to actually do it in front of the group or admit to. So at different styles, right, of how people want to learn or, or to change a habit. And I think that's important for coaches to understand or parents to understand that, you know, you need to know the person. What's gonna move them to the change. Right. Are they someone who isn't going to want to put themselves out there even though there's a whole group doing this or are they someone who they're not gonna do this unless others are are there doing it as well. At least at first.

[18:55](#)

M: You know you brought up the idea of parenting. A lot of the athletes we work with are youth and live at home and certainly have lots of contact with their parents even if they don't. So Johnny mentioned something earlier about support from coaching staff and Larry, you had mentioned the environment earlier, but now you just brought in parenting. I think as we've talked about many times parents are the most influential people in children's lives and they, I in my opinion have to be brought into the conversation. They are the majority of the environmental context we're talking about. So for behavior change to take place, I think parents have to understand what it is we're trying to do, be brought into the fold, feel like part of the team and help to impart that behavior change and support it.

[19:39](#)

J: I absolutely agree. I mean one thing and it raised my eyes in terms of my thoughts and approach to it from, from last year with you, dr Bobb, when we came out for a couple of camps, you said, Hey, why don't we spend, you know, 30, 45 minutes with the parents. I'd like to download to them what we've gone through with the kids, taught them a little bit about, you know, how they can continue to help them. And it's a, it's now turned into now it's on the agenda where we're actually gonna spend some time with the parents and we're trying to make that uniform to cross, you know, any camp opportunity, training opportunities we have where the parents are in. And I think that's great because then you hit on like you're getting now down to the core and without, I'm going to go off on a little tangent here. I can't remember what the book is called, but it talks about different environments on how we can change behaviors in kids in high schools. And it talks about very wealthy are in Palo Alto, OS in California. And then it talks about the South side of Chicago in a very rough area of underserved kids. And, and it talked about the influence of a teacher or system of going in. And so in South side Chicago they were trying to figure out how they can prevent as many expulsions and suspensions in the schools due to behavior. And they tried to put in all these different systems and I, this is what we need to

hold the kids accountable to. This is how we're going to help him. But then there was one program that came in, again, I'm sorry, I don't know the name of it, but it actually worked with parents and going to the parents home environment and actually just seeing kind of their interactions with the child and how they do things. And then there was, and again, very informal and it was obviously agreed upon, but some very light feedback as they went along with how they kind of taught to their children and discipline their children. And I'm creating a consistency and the habits. And then in turn that actually ended up, I think it was over the course of a couple of years, suspension rates, expulsion rates actually went down because they were spending more time with the parents. But it's very, it's a, you know, that's a very time consuming and I want, I can imagine is a very expensive endeavor to do and it obviously can't be done on everyone. But it was a very interesting experiment to see that spending more time with the parents to help them. And then they, and what they found is ultimately the parents want help and guidance. You know, they don't want to be exactly told what to do, but they want help and guidance as to how they can help that child. So if we, if we go back to the, you know, take that concept and take it to the tennis side, you know, I think introducing that in our trainings, in our camps, whenever we can kind of help give guidance as to Hey, this is what we've been doing with the kids. This is helpful behaviors, helpful routines, helpful habits. Let's see if we can find ways to keep continuing to do this, not just on the tennis court, you know, or when they're at the tennis courts, but in their whole general lives. Because if they could do it outside and then essentially then becomes easier to do it on the court. Right. Or, or in the tennis environment.

[22:06](#)

B: Well, last week I just had probably at least a dozen performance team meetings with, with different parents and, and the coaches. So we, you know, we have our process of, of performance team meetings, but it's pretty cool when you include parents and you and you treat them like they're an important part of the team, which they are. And then you give them some information and we talk openly about, you know, what are the ideal roles in what's their, you know, what's their process that they're going to be engaging in when they're at home under certain circumstances. But I think education is the way to go and we don't just exclude, there are some sports that I've worked with over the years, like gymnastics. They just exclude the parents and then the parents become a problem. I think we need to be bringing them in.

[22:43](#)

J: Larry, let's, let's discuss the marshmallow test.

[22:45](#)

L: Marshmallow tests. You haven't even, you haven't even, all of them are [inaudible] tomorrow, but you couldn't, you couldn't resist.

[22:52](#)

MI: I didn't eat mine. Mine are still sitting there.

[22:54](#)

J: After your story though. I'm thinking it should be the temptation Island test now. I'll take the Marshmallows off the table.

[22:59](#) L: Are you up for Temptation Island?

[23:01](#) J: Absolutely. Well, I'd be absolutely fine. I'm not going to.

[23:03](#) L: Oh yeah. Okay. Yeah.

[23:04](#) J: I'm very, very happy with my situation. My beautiful wife at home. I'm very happy with that.

[23:10](#) M: So you possess self control?

[23:13](#) J: But yeah, talk us through it. And then let's, uh, let's discuss sort of the, the temptation urges within that test.

[23:19](#) L: Well, I mean, I think it's just this, this a classic study that was done where they had children, you know, they, they said, okay, we got this marshmallow in front of you. If you can have this marshmallow now, if you can wait, we'll give you two marshmallows later. And what they found is that most people ate the marshmallow right away. And then an interesting thing that they also found was that if the young person who was sitting there came from poverty or rapport, um, that they typically could not resist the urge to eat that marshmallow. And what does that mean? I mean, I think the connection they're making is that if some of your basic needs are not being met, that it's very hard to resist to do this behavior, right. In this case, eat the marshmallow, but again, taking it into high performance, you know, that can mean a number of different things. How do you guys relate? What I think that classic study that tells us a lot about human behavior.

[24:07](#) B: Yeah. I mean, and that and that also the few who did resist, they looked back. That was the, yeah. Right. And so maybe talk about that too. Like what they found.

[24:15](#) L: No, take us through that.

[24:16](#) B: Okay. So 10 years, 20 years, 30 years later, they kept going back to these, these kids who did resist and they look to see how they compare to the ones who didn't on things like, you know, grades and debt and, and even obesity and they were significantly better on all aspects. So, so that, that might mean, no, that's great. You know, we need to teach kids how to resist. But I think the point was kind of like, did anybody teach these kids how to resist or did they just, were they just born that way? And that is a big argument about that too.

[24:43](#) L: Well, I think one of the arguments is that in the environments created around that person, right. So I would, I would argue is not just an issue of, it could be some genetics, or predisposition, but also could be that that environmental part of it where they didn't feel that urge because a lot of their basic needs were

being taken care of. And that was one of the points being made in the, in the study.

[25:03](#)

B: It's funny, some kids say, I don't even like marshmallows. I'd have no problem with that test. So they must've like assessed at first, right before they did this and made sure everybody loves marshmallows.

[25:11](#)

L: Must have. Yeah. That to control the right because

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B: That'd be a big confounding variable if they didn't look into that.

[25:17](#)

L: Well and it's like me with chocolate, I don't like chocolate, but I ate it as a kid and I liked it then. But I decided I didn't want to eat chocolate cause I stopped all caffeine.

[25:25](#)

B: You could, you could resist that. No problem.

[25:27](#)

L: It's easy. It was easy for me. But I don't know if you, if you put song in front of me right now, like I don't need that. I don't like it. It doesn't taste good. And that was one of the points...

[25:35](#)

B: That's just strange. Well it is strange but it's, I have extreme amounts of self control. But at a point it's.

[25:41](#)

B: For things you don't like.

[25:44](#)

M: Was it learned or was it innate?

[25:44](#)

L: Oh that was learned for sure. Cause I grandma's cookies, chocolate chip cookies were good when I was a kid. But I stopped that stuff. But when you start looking at something differently, like okay, I don't want to do that, that's not me. But actually start to also see a change. So I, I think again, for the listeners thinking about this is, is never putting into box of it's all in the person or it's all on the situation. You have to look at both, right? You've got to look at both variables to determine what a person's behavior is going to be.

[26:12](#)

B: But then, you know, delayed gratification, you that it's so clear that that's correlated. And I think it's actually causal in some cases where, you know, if, if we can teach kids to delay, then that's going to directly relate to success.

[26:25](#)

L: Okay. So how do you do that? How do you teach kids to delay gratification? Because it's something that I try to do. It's not easy. And again, this study would tell you if some of their basic needs are not being met, it may be almost impossible or very difficult. But how do you, in a tennis player, how do you, you know, and what does that mean first, I mean, what are we trying delay gratification on results, rankings, points? What are we talking about here?

[26:46](#)

B: Well, maybe an easy example, I suppose it would be, you know, is, is it all about winning when you're 12 years old? Or are you gonna delay that gratification to a certain extent and learn the proper swings and you know, and do the things that are gonna help you to become great later on. So from a bigger standpoint, specifically to tennis, that would be it there. So how do you do that? Um, I'm working with one little kid who was one of the best as a 12 year old in the world and won a whole lot. And now he's realizing he's not gonna continue to win with the swings that he has. He's, he's great because he can run and he's, he's, you know, he's very fast, but you know, as he gets older, it's not gonna happen as easily for him. And so now he's going through a period where he's, he's making the swing changes and, and he's, he's learning mental toughness and he, he's, so, it's pretty cool to see that kind of, but where did that come from? I think it came from a couple of hard losses. And, and the realization that that he's got to make some changes now and then some, you know, hopefully it's hopefully some good coaching. It's a good performance team around him.

[27:46](#)

L: That's exactly it. And I think that's one of our biggest, and I'm going to come to you, Mark, one of our biggest things is you gotta you gotta suffer some adversity. You need to have that and there's gotta be good people around you and you gotta be communicating right? Mark, what do you think as you work on these teams as well, how do you, how do you think you delay gratification? How do you help young people not focus on the results, not focus on their rankings and actually do the things that's going to take to be a good player later on?

[28:11](#)

M: There are many components. I want to come right back to parent education for starters. If we can help educate the parents in terms of maybe playing some age-appropriate tournament's like Dr. Bobb was saying and get a couple wins, I think that's great. But also playing some reach tournaments where we're going to experience some loss and some difficulties, some adversity. So these young kids don't just get accustomed to winning all the time. On the other side of that, I think routines, right? We teach this through routines, through consistent behaviors, a winning attitude. When we talk about our journaling, there are three things that are always measurable in those post journal entries, those post practice, journal entries, behavior, attitude and effort. When we can teach athletes to measure those because those are within their control. I think we're managing that outcome focused behavior.

[28:58](#)

L: Such a good point Mark, because you know we try to create a process focus what you just mentioned around our training centers, but if they go home and the first question is did you win immediately you're pulled out of that focus, right? So you really do have to put an environment around the player where everyone on, I'm going to say on a team because parents are a part of the team with the juniors for sure that is bought in to the language, into the goals and the right mindset, right? This growth mindset, this focus on, you know, the routines or the process that it takes to become a great player. Later on. Uh, we don't need to win right now. We're okay. Let's not panic.

[29:34](#)

B: Well, the, the points that I want to emphasize here then is, Johnny, what you brought up earlier is that I, I do go around to tournaments and charting matches and trying to get stats back to people. Why? Because when there's an outcome, it's obvious you know what's happened. But if you don't have the outcome that you necessarily wanted, now what do you get? And most players get nothing. They don't have any idea what happened. They don't know if they're improving across time. So that's why I think it's critical for us to be doing really good charting, but then also a good tracking across time. So we can go back six months or a year and we can look to see where people were back then and now where they are now. So you know, how much easier is that going to be for people to be more process oriented when they can see the improvement that's happening?

[30:16](#)

M: I think a lot of that happens in practice as well. We were talking about competition, but in practice if as a performance team, the coaches are reinforcing correct play at the correct time, then we're building that process. I use Federer as an example as I'm sure many coaches do. When he steps inside the court, everyone knows in many cases, depending on his position, he's going to hit that inside out forehand, but very often the other player on the other side can't do anything about it because it was set up correctly. He trusted the process of creating that situation. So I try to relay that to our athletes when we're talking about process and just trusting that this is the highest percentage chance you'll have of achieving your goal regardless of using that example that Larry made before slapping that winner. Sure that feels good and some players are going to do at once and think, well that's the shot I really want to be hitting despite the higher percentage shot that's really going to win them points.

[31:09](#)

L: Yeah, I think that's a great points guys. And you know, one of the things about this is that this idea of process, right? And trusting in that and allowing that to play out and not panicking when things start to turn. But what we're really talking about is how you evaluate yourself as you perform is if you evaluate yourself around outcomes, things you don't control, you are going to experience more anxiety done. We know that, right? And if you evaluate yourself around things, you can control your processes, the things that we're talking about here, then you can have, you're still probably going to be nervous on some level, but you can be far less anxious, which you know, this is where doubt meets arousal, right? And where you start to see performance decrements, you start to see that players can actually be in a very pressurized situation and be relatively calm and being in control, but because they're focusing on the process, right? And that's not something that you can force. That's something that has to be internalized. And that's part of this conversation too, about the way you do things every single day. The habits, the way your team talks to you, what they focus on. I could want to focus on the process, but if I go to my practice and everybody's talking about how you know you need to win more, you need to start winning matches, we'll guess what it isn't about the process anymore. Right Johnny? I mean now it's all about outcome and the anxiety just spiked up again.

[32:30](#)

J: No, absolutely. And as we've been going along here, I've written down four things that, that we popped up. One was comfort. So in order to build the habits and, and some of these areas We need to be okay being uncomfortable. Absolutely no, we told about fall environment, an environment that promotes the right behaviors and environment that promotes the habits and a consistency of that understanding the athlete, the way I wrote that down is, is understanding how we get them to buy into, to doing what, what we're asking them to do or getting them to buy into observing their own behaviors and how they are either helpful or unhelpful. And then the delay of gratification, which I kind of went off a spin ball here and went, this is kind of big picture practice to have that needs our perspective and tough perspective, you need to be accepting of certain things that are going on in size. This is kind of interesting how as we've gone around there, we've talked about kind of a lot of different things that have linked back to a few different behaviors in terms of the can promote I guess be more solution orientated and creating the the good habits and creating being part of the process. I mean, right. This is all part of the process.

[33:29](#)

L: Yeah, I mean I think if you want a motivated athlete who's changing their behaviors to become a a great athlete later on that you, you have to has to be valued by them and they have to be able to see what they can become and I think also you have to create the right environment around them to allow them to resist the other urges, to go play video games to slack off on the, on the workout to, to slap on that ball. Because I don't want to have to run for five more balls and this has to be, the culture has to be set up. So again, I, I can't stress that enough to our listeners that it's not just the willpower of the person that truly is more than that and you have to think a little bit more and a complex way on how to get the behavior you're looking for.

[34:08](#)

J: Well guys, listen, this has been absolutely great. I think this is actually going to tee up our second part that we're going to get into a another time. Thank you guys for coming to join us and we know we're going to get you in again for the, for the part two and maybe go down some more rabbit holes, talking about more things that you're seeing in your environments and the experiences that you guys have gone through in terms of these barriers to performance psychology and and maybe some of the solutions that you guys have come up with in regards to those different barriers and that and obviously with with so many different, you know, you guys have got the different experiences, your different and kind of, you know, use different basis of things that you've gone through. It'd be very interesting to get your guys' thoughts on that, so great.

[34:43](#)

M&B: Thanks Johnny. Yeah, that'd be great. I look forward to it.

[34:45](#)

J: Yeah, absolutely. That's been great. That was a great discussion on today's episode of compete like a champion podcast, this has been part one of barriers and solutions to perform a psychology with our mental performance team, Dr. Larry Lauer, Dr. Bob Neff and Mark Lerman join us next time for part two where

we'll be diving into more areas around these barriers and solutions to performance or psychology.