

GESU Institut / Lindengasse 56/18-19 / 1070 Vienna

# Mental Coaching in Motorsports

*How can mental coaching enhance  
the performance of a racing team?*

## Diploma Thesis

as part of the training to become a certified mental coach

submitted to the  
*GESU Institut*

submitted by  
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## **1. Introduction – Motorsports as High-Performance Sports**

Motorsports are all about precision: precision in the development of sophisticated technical components as well as precision in the methods used by engineers, technicians, and mechanics at the racetrack. Ideally, communication and processes should run like two perfectly coordinated cogwheels.

However, motorsports are also always pure passion. For the fans, who motivate their teams with all their might. For the mechanic, whose heartbeat is as fast as the rotations of the engine he developed. For the driver, who sinks to his knees in despair after losing a race. The whole team is close to tears whether they win or lose.

Achieving the best time, driving the optimal racing line, and being better than the competition are an incentive to every racer and his team. Of course, such ambitious goals can only be achieved with a lot of training, the best materials, and a well-functioning team.

In the end, it is often milliseconds that determine the winner. The difference between victory and defeat is very slim: It comes down to minute details such as the speed and angle at which a driver approaches a corner or the carefully calculated combustion process which maximises engine performance. The smallest units of measurement count towards the big picture: precision in all areas.

It is this precision which has always fascinated me the most about motorsports. Carefully crafted, high-quality components that are developed with passion, state-of-the-art technology, materials that you cannot find anywhere else as well as software and simulation programmes beyond anyone's imagination – these are the things that made me want to experience the motorsports world as a technician.

But when I accepted my position as a race engineer at a young age, I subconsciously changed. To me, it was clear that I now had to know everything about setting up cars; and thus, I behaved accordingly. I presented myself as an expert even though I was still very inexperienced in the operation of a racing vehicle. I put a lot of pressure on myself to have an answer to any question or problem. Naturally, many of my opinions were incorrect. Nevertheless, I held on to my point of view because I saw myself in the role of the “all-knowing” and wanted to live up to my

new position. My team leader consistently challenged and encouraged me which usually put me under a lot of pressure.

This resulted in the following: When there were disagreements with my team, I asserted my opinion not only through the use of my knowledge, but also through loud discussions and ego-driven behaviour. I sometimes passed on the pressure that was put on me in a harsh manner. Consequently, the entire team, including me, closed themselves off more and more, retreating into a kind of comfort zone. I no longer had the team as support or fellow creative minds at my side, but rather they now existed as subordinate staff who I managed.

After more than 20 years in this field, I am now able to give good personal insight into the world of motorsports. My areas of work include engine application, data engineering, performance engineering, vehicle engineering as well as positions such as pit crew leader and Head of Testing Trackside.

*The car is undriveable.* How many times have I heard a driver say this over the team radio? This often caused panic among my team members, or at the very least made such a feeling palpable in the air. Conviction and confidence usually kept me from losing my nerve and rebuilding the entire racing vehicle despite such very harsh radio messages.

In my opinion, mental coaching is one of the most important components of leadership in motorsports. Unfortunately, however, I have noticed that while all areas in motorsports are constantly being updated with the latest technology, an “old mindset” continues to be upheld when it comes to the mental aspects. This is what prompted me to write this diploma thesis as part of my training to become a certified mental coach. The aim of this work is to delve into the complicated world of psychological demands in motorsports and to show how mental ability can be fostered to counteract the effects of stress and pressure, making it possible to achieve top performance.

### **a) Job Description: Race Engineer (RE)**

The primary role of an RE is to take full technical responsibility as well as to oversee the performance of the racing vehicle. This includes the management of pre- and post-event preparation, racing vehicle management, and managing or acting as the point of contact for the assigned driver, the engineering team, and the mechanics team. He is therefore the first link between the driver and the team. To fulfil this task, he must have detailed technical knowledge of the entire racing vehicle as well as an understanding of all relevant regulations. The prerequisites for becoming an RE include leadership skills, driver coaching, data/performance analysis using complex software programmes, time management, attention to detail, and the ability to keep track of a race. Ongoing pre- and post-event reports, failure analysis, tyre management as well as set-up and set-down checks are also characteristic parts of the job description. The position of an RE is one of the most wide-ranging and demanding jobs in motorsports.

## **2. What Is Mental Toughness?**

One definition would be that mental toughness is the ability to observe, assess, and control the mind. Or, as it is also taught at the GESU Institut:

“Mental training [...] means, among other things, changing the culture of thinking in such a way that the experience can become more peaceful and joyful. Working in a resource-oriented manner and activating hidden but existing potentials are among the main goals of mental training.” (GESU Institut, Training Documents, Dipl. Mental Coach 2023)

It could also be interpreted as a complete devotion to the moment and the act of learning how to be relaxed and efficient. Or, as Antje Heimsoeth (AH) describes it:

“In my view, mental toughness is first and foremost a positive attitude towards life.” (AH – 111 Mental Hacks, 2022, p. 1)

The term “mental” is derived from the Latin word “mens” = mind and means the following: “of or relating to the mind or specifically the total emotional and intellectual response of an individual to external reality.” (<https://en.wiktionary.org>)

Especially in motorsports, there are always situations during race weekends that demand calmness as well as a clear head and full concentration. Another quote by AH sums it up perfectly:

“Mental toughness is achieved through harmony between being and doing, between desire and reality, between wanting and taking action. Those who are mentally and emotionally strong can fully exploit their performance spectrum regardless of all adversities.” (AH – 111 Mental Hacks, 2022, p. 7)

“Mental toughness means the ability to consistently perform towards the upper range of your talent and skill regardless of adversity and internal or external disruptive factors.” (James Loehr – Persönliche Bestform durch Mental-Training für Sport, Beruf und Ausbildung, 1991, p. 54)

In today's motorsports world, which is characterised by numerous requirements as well as constant change, this potential for knowledge plays a decisive role not only in achieving success, but also in forming a stable team.

### **3. Why Is Mental Training Neglected in Motorsports?**

In general, the focus lies on physical fitness. Mental training may be neglected because physical health is more often talked about on account of how easily visible it is. There is usually more discussion and evaluation of physical toughness; however, mental toughness is at very least just as important. Motorsports are not only a test of physical ability and mechanical engineering, but they are also a battle of the mind.

Behind the wheel, drivers face a unique set of mental challenges that can significantly impact their performance on the racetrack. From coping with high-pressure situations to maintaining concentration and dealing with intense emotions, the psychology of motorsports plays a crucial role in ensuring success.

As a motorsport technician, whether you enter the field directly after graduating from higher education or after completing vocational training, you will immediately take on challenging tasks as a development engineer, race mechanic, controller or another exciting role following an individually tailored induction.

It is common to take on management or team leadership roles at a young age. It does not matter whether you are a tyre technician, a mechanic, a technician, or an

engineer – responsibility must be assumed in all areas. Independent work is a prerequisite. Exposure to high pressure is a constant companion.

#### **4. Who Needs Mental Training in Motorsports?**

A lot of people only seek out the help of a mental coach when they have a problem they want to solve; however, an awareness of mental coaching should be present throughout the entire organisation or racing team. Mental coaching is not only directed at healthy top athletes and top racing drivers who do not have a problem. Rather, it can prove helpful to anyone who wants to further optimise the performance of their brain.

Mental training is designed for the whole team. We can only perform well if we are also mentally strong. This means, among other things, being stable, calm, self-assured, focused, confident, goal-oriented, and aware of our strengths and abilities. This applies to the driver and his engineer as well as to the tyre technician or the pit crew.

#### **5. Strengthening the Understanding of Mental Coaching in the Racing Team**

Change is the prerequisite for improvement:

“For miracles one must pray, but for change one must work.” Thomas Aquinas (aphorismen.de)

“We live in a time of rapid change. No generation before us has produced so many technological innovations in such a short time.

Change is taking place on many different levels, from climate change to societal changes to our way of working. And the rampant spread of the coronavirus has been forcing us to make further changes in our everyday lives since 2020.

For many people, change is difficult. Everyone deals with it differently, because we are individuals with different needs, values, and motives. Whether we can cope well with change and benefit from it or whether we see it primarily as a threat to be kept at bay, depends on – you guessed it – our inner attitude. To persist or to change? Both have consequences for us. By

rejecting change, many believe that they can preserve the way of life they are familiar with. But that is a fallacy. When change comes knocking at the door, it does not help to cover your ears. It will simply make itself at home on your doormat, stubbornly waiting until you let it in. If you do not, it will eventually just break down the door once time has run out. It is important to realise that no matter what we decide – whether we welcome change or try to ignore it – there are consequences for us. To be aware of them helps us to deduce what will truly serve us in a situation where change is ‘looming’. Ask yourself the same questions one would ask in a cost-benefit analysis.” (AH – 111 Mental Hacks, 2022, p. 7)

Top athletes embody an impressive mentality in that they perceive change as an opportunity. They set new goals and work in a process-oriented manner. Instead of complaining about the challenges they face in training, they look at change from a new perspective and actively seek support to successfully achieve their goals. They know that success can only be replicated through continuous development. You can grow your happiness best when you show a willingness to change – and that is true not only in sports, but also in your professional and private life.

With this in mind, the management, the team principal, and the owners of a racing team should ideally endorse and support mental coaching. The following objectives, which are pursued through mental coaching, should be communicated by the mental coach to strengthen understanding within the team:

**a) Counteracting Turnover – Creating a Satisfied, Happy and Self-Confident Team**

Through mental coaching, team leaders and colleagues can learn how to acknowledge and appreciate the achievements and contributions of team members. This helps to increase motivation as well as satisfaction and promotes a positive work environment.

Mental coaching can help to build a satisfied and happy team, thus counteracting staff turnover. It is important that coaching is provided on an ongoing basis and tailored to the needs of the team to bring about long-term positive change.

I consider a happy team to be one in which employees carry out their work with enthusiasm, accept reality, and actively shape their future to stay on the right

track. As long as employees follow this path, they have the opportunity to experience happiness and joy.

Mental coaching can help to promote an open and supportive communication culture within a team. Team members can learn to communicate effectively with each other, approach conflicts in a constructive manner as well as give and accept feedback in a positive way.

Every team member is unique and has different needs. Through individual coaching, mental training can address the personal goals, motivations, and challenges of each person. In the long term, this can help to increase team members' satisfaction and strengthen their commitment to the team.

**b) Improving Self-Image/Self-Worth/Self-Confidence**  
**– Self-Knowledge**

“Many of the best racing drivers in the world are characterised by a high level of self-knowledge. The best racers can assess themselves very well and always strive to learn as much as possible about themselves. Only those who can assess themselves very well will also perform optimally in stressful situations. That is the crucial factor.” Dr. Ricardo Ceccarelli (<https://www.motorsport-total.com/>)

“The cornerstone of knowing and aligning thyself is mindfulness. Even if you have no other practice than mindfulness alone, you will, over time, create the level of self-awareness you need to find alignment.” (Search Inside Yourself – Chade-Meng Tan, 2012, p. 141)

Chade-Meng Tang describes the importance of mindfulness as a central component of self-knowledge and self-alignment. Mindfulness refers to the conscious and non-judgemental observation and perception of the present moment, including your own thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surroundings. Engaging intensively in the practice of mindfulness can lead to a deeper understanding of yourself. Through regular mindfulness practice, your awareness of yourself grows. You become more sensitive to your own inner processes and can better recognise how you react to different situations and challenges.

“Use your trained attention to create a high-resolution perception of your own cognitive and emotive processes. With that, you become able to observe your thought stream and the process of emotion with high clarity, and to do so objectively from a third-person perspective. Once you can do that, you create the type of deep self-knowledge that eventually enables self-mastery.” (Search Inside Yourself – Chade-Meng Tan, 2012, p. 14)

Through the continuous practice of mindfulness, you train your attention. Over time, you will reach a deep level of self-awareness, which is essential for a meaningful and purposeful way of life.

Mindfulness refers to a state of presence of mind in which a person experiences the present state of their immediate environment, body, and mind in a wide-awake state. They do so without being distracted by streams of thoughts, memories, fantasies, or strong emotions. They do not let themselves think about such things or evaluate their perceptions. Mindfulness can be specifically strengthened through breathing exercises and meditation or yoga, among other things. It helps the whole team to cope with stress, create mental clarity, and increase their general well-being. With the ability to find a sense of calm, drivers and engineers can stay on top of things in the midst of a chaotic race.

“I believe if you have the ability to focus strongly on something then you have the ability to gain from it.” Ayrton Senna (<https://archive.org>)

Emotional intelligence is an important factor, particularly in motorsports. The aim of emotional intelligence is to observe and explore your inner self as well as to recognise your own emotions and their effects.

### **c) Discovering, Promoting, and Increasing Competence, Skill and Resilience**

I was very ambitious and rarely satisfied. I can still see these same traits in many motorsport racers today. They may not feel and act this way towards others, but they do so towards themselves (e.g., regarding their performance during a pit stop). Successes are quickly brushed aside. Goals are set extremely high and, once achieved, they are simply set even higher.

*Be damn proud of yourself!* Mental coaching focuses on the things you can be proud of. It emphasises all your successes in different areas, which strengthens your abilities and increases your resilience.

Resilience is becoming increasingly important, particularly in motorsports. In fact, it is crucial for success.

“The term resilience is originally derived from the Latin ‘resilere’. In German, this means ‘to rebound, to bounce back’. In physics, scientists describe a material as resilient if it returns to its original shape after being subjected to extreme external pressure.” (<http://www.ardalpha.de>)

In mental coaching, resilience refers to a person's ability to better deal with challenges and crises. The strength of our resilience can vary from moment to moment and depends on what resources are available to us. Without resilience, we tend to succumb to fear and engage in survivalist behaviours rather than being our best selves, which are kinder and more compassionate. On the other hand, when we focus on developing greater mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual resilience, we can survive difficult times, thrive, and grow as individuals.

Even if you would not necessarily consider Rocky Balboa, the boxing film hero from the 1980s, to be a prime example of mental toughness, he gets to the heart of a crucial aspect of mental toughness and resilience in a conversation with his son:

“The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows. It's a very mean and nasty place, and I don't care how tough you are, it will beat you to your knees and keep you there permanently if you let it. You, me, or nobody is gonna hit as hard as life. But it ain't about how hard you hit. It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. How much you can take and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done!” Excerpt from the 2006 movie Rocky Balboa (<https://www.imdb.com>).

This ability can be learned and is strengthened through mental coaching.

#### **d) Activating Existing Potential**

Existing potentials are discovered in mental training by being resource-oriented and taking personal responsibility. The latter means taking responsibility for your

thoughts, actions, and the resulting effects. This requires clear awareness of yourself: Who am I? What do I want? How do I come across?

“Everyone prefers to criticise other people's faults rather than their own.”  
Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (<https://www.aphorismen.de>)

“Personal responsibility means acknowledging your own mistakes: How do you deal with mistakes that you have made? Do you try to cover them up, deny them or blame others? You are not alone in this. It is common to avoid taking responsibility. You do not want any shadows to fall on your own light. But you are trying to shine with something that is lacklustre. It does not earn you admiration, but rather disappointment and rejection. This puts a strain on both professional and private relationships. Personal responsibility also means taking responsibility for your own mistakes, acknowledging them, and learning from them.” (AH – 111 Mental Hacks, 2022, p. 78)

Awareness of personal responsibility is activated through targeted mental coaching. Team members recognise their strengths and weaknesses and handle them with honesty.

“We all have our strengths and weaknesses. Many of us spend ages trying to iron out our flaws. If you fix your weaknesses, you become mediocre at best. If you improve your strengths, you become unique. And if you are not like the others, rest assured: There are already enough others! People keep asking me why I left the hospital for the stage. My strength and my quirk is creativity. That means not doing everything according to plan, improvising, always putting things together in unexpected new ways. That's not ideal in a hospital. And I love to formulate freely, to write poetry, to play with language. That is also not ideal when writing medical reports and prescriptions. On stage, I use much more of what I am, what I know, what I can do and what I have to give. I have more fun, and others have more fun with me. When I perform live, I am in my element, in flow!

People rarely change completely and fundamentally. If you were born a penguin, even seven years of psychotherapy will not turn you into a giraffe. So do not dwell on it for long: Don't stay in the steppe as a penguin. Take small steps and find your water. And then: Jump! And swim! Then you will know

what it is like to be in your element.” Dr Eckhart von Hirschhausen – Das Pinguin-Prinzip (<https://www.hirschhausen.com>)

This excerpt from “Das Pinguin-Prinzip” (which means *The Penguin Principle*) by Dr Eckhart von Hirschhausen conveys some important ideas about individual strengths, weaknesses, and self-development. The following is an explanation of the key ideas:

- Everyone has strengths and weaknesses: Each individual has unique qualities and areas in which they are particularly good (strengths) as well as areas in which they are less good (weaknesses).
- Striving for perfection: To achieve perfection, a lot of people tend to focus on improving their weaknesses. However, constantly striving for perfection in every respect can lead to becoming merely average in various areas.
- Strengthening strengths: The lesson here is that it can be more effective to focus on your strengths and develop them further. This allows you to become a unique person and excel in these areas.
- Creating uniqueness: By building on your strengths and focusing on what you are really good at, you can stand out from others, create a unique identity, and make great contributions.
- Authenticity: Dr von Hirschhausen mentions that you should not force yourself to conform to others. It is important to remain true to yourself. Do not pretend to be someone you are not to fulfil the expectations of others.
- Creativity and individuality: The author shares his personal experience of how his creativity and desire to improvise did not align with his job requirements at the hospital. Instead, he was able to fully develop his creative talents and express himself authentically on stage.
- Self-acceptance: The penguin and giraffe metaphor makes it clear that fundamental changes to your own nature are difficult to achieve. Instead of getting angry or despairing about it, you should learn to accept your personality traits and make the best of them.
- Small steps: Following the advice to take small steps and continuously grow is essential to bring about positive changes in life.

- Being in your element: By focusing on your strengths and being active in any associated areas, you can achieve the so-called “flow state”, which is a mental state of increased productivity and satisfaction.

In summary, the excerpt emphasises the importance of self-acceptance as well as focusing on individual strengths and developing an authentic and unique personality in order to lead a fulfilling life.

### **e) Learning How to Be Relaxed and Efficient**

Stress, tension, anger, annoyance, and frustration are not unfamiliar occurrences during a busy race weekend. It is common knowledge that constant stress and tension are not good for the body and that periods of relaxation are needed for regeneration.

Stress is a part of racing. In the face of rapidly changing conditions during race weekends (such as weather conditions or technical failures of the racing car), it is important to know how to deal with stress. Mental training teaches you to accept and reduce stress so as not to lose your balance. In addition to confidence, the ability to remain calm under pressure is therefore one of the most important skills required for various roles in motorsports. Consciously engaging with your emotions and remaining calm under pressure directly impacts performance.

“Most of us are familiar with the eternal lament about stress. Too much work, too many worries, too much pressure, too little time for family and yourself – the list could easily go on for pages. Stress also shapes our language use: we are ‘stressed’, find something ‘stressful’, think someone is causing us stress. Stress, the great enemy of serenity, contentment, health, enjoyment of work, and happiness. But is that really the case? Stress and a healthy life full of contentment are not, in fact, mutually exclusive. On the contrary: It is time to appreciate stress reactions as extraordinary feats of the body that we should welcome with a consciously positive attitude instead of condemnation.” (AH – 111 Mental Hacks, 2022, p. 206)

A lot of problems, fears, and insecurities are caused by shallow and rapid breathing or holding your breath – a fashionable condition in today’s society. Usually, you do not even notice it yourself.

Mental coaching incorporates special relaxation exercises which are further built upon throughout the coaching process. Meditation exercises, yoga, and breathing techniques are used to increase self-awareness and to give you the ability to recognise earlier when your own “tank” is empty.



Source: [www.istockphoto.com](http://www.istockphoto.com)

Actual breaks are usually only taken once the tank is almost empty and stress levels are at their highest. Regular breaks are important and promote both health and productivity.

#### **f) New Mindset → Promoting the Ability to See the Big Picture**

“The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” Albert Einstein (<https://www.quotes.wiki>)

If there is one thing that pretty much all authors of self-help books, renowned business coaches, and spiritual mindfulness gurus alike can agree on, it is that change starts in the mind. Everything changes when the starting conditions change. Everything changes when your way of thinking changes.

In motorsports, you are regularly faced with new challenges and tasks. These obstacles can be overcome more easily with professional expertise, courage, will, free development of your personality, and a positive attitude.

Your entire perception and therefore your personal reality is influenced by the mindset with which you navigate the world. Mental coaching consciously works towards a mindset that provides fulfilment, courage, and strength. Entrenched beliefs and “ego behaviour” are discarded, and a healthier, more positive, and more flexible attitude towards yourself is developed.

“Mindset is everything. You can change your whole life by simply changing your mindset. How you view life and situations will determine the outcome. A positive mindset is a choice – arguably the most important choice you will ever make in your life. Your mindset should be a collection of optimistic rather than negative or pessimistic attitudes, no matter how bad a conflict may seem. When you approach a conflict with this new mindset, it will make all the difference. There was a time in my life when people and life challenges brought me down. To relive that time is out of the question for me. I can either choose to be angry and negative and see things in a cynical and gloomy way or remain confident, take it for what it is and make the best of everything. There is almost always light at the end of the tunnel, no matter how dark things may seem. Choose happiness, experience new things, get ‘crazy and wild’, and be exceptional!!!” (AH – 111 Mental Hacks, 2022, p. 88)

In motorsports, and in life in general, it takes professional expertise, courage, will, free development of your personality as well as a positive attitude to overcome challenges.

Your own perception and reality are strongly influenced by your mindset. Mental coaching is used to work on a fulfilling, courageous, and strong mindset. This involves overcoming entrenched beliefs and negative behaviour as well as developing a healthier and more positive attitude.

Mindset is crucial. It can change your entire life by simply changing your attitude. A positive mindset is a conscious choice and has a big impact on outcomes. A new mindset enables a different view of conflicts and makes a difference in how they are resolved.

## **g) Improving Team Performance Through Solidarity and Trust**

“Even in the prenatal phase, two basic needs are of particular importance for the growing human being: connectedness and autonomy.

- Connectedness in the sense of belonging / an intensive relationship
- Autonomy in the sense of the freedom to develop through subjective experiences that can be approached with enthusiasm and a childlike spirit of discovery” Toni Zupanjac (<https://www.mit-menschen.at>)

The sense of solidarity in a racing team is realised on an almost subconscious level. Wearing standardised team clothing shows clear identification and strengthens cohesion. Particularly in racing, successes and defeats are experienced as a team over short periods of time. This “team spirit” – this solidarity within a large family – certainly attracts many people to motorsports.

When it comes to motorsports, there is always further development, innovation, and new technologies. In no other professional field have I been able to experience such free development opportunities or fulfil my spirit of discovery better than in racing. New ideas and innovations are in demand in all areas – be it in the constant further development of the racing vehicle, in software and analysis programmes or in the simple technical implementation of equipment that makes life easier for everyone.

Performance should also be strengthened through trust. When employees close themselves off and do not allow closeness, they often tend to hide mistakes, insecurities, and weaknesses. This leads to a lack of openness, which in turn prevents mutual trust from developing. Without this trust, employees are reluctant to ask their colleagues for help. Instead, everyone concentrates on concealing their own weaknesses so as not to be vulnerable to possible exploitation by others.

These conclusions illustrate how essential it is to cultivate connectedness, openness, and trust. This fosters successful and productive team dynamics that can be realised through mental coaching.

Maintaining the freedom to develop is a challenge and requires insight. Team leaders in particular find it difficult to encourage the team's spirit of discovery. Their own desire to implement ideas is overemphasised. Sometimes they even steal ideas from employees and sell them as their own. *Many roads lead to Rome ...* When you

are faced with a problem, you ought not to focus on your own ego. Instead, you should pursue all possible solutions. Cohesion and team spirit must be strengthened. Creativity should be supported at all times, even if you believe that the direction a team member is taking is the wrong one. Henry Ford gets to the heart of the matter with this quote:

“Coming together is the beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.” Henry Ford (<https://www.goodreads.com>)

### Why teams perform:

(GESU Institut, Training Documents, Dipl. Mental Coach 2023):

- Mistakes are welcome – developing solutions together
- Defining common goals – highlighting positive sub-goals
- Communication at eye level using valuable interaction
- Psychological safety – Can I speak my mind without negative consequences?
- Opinions should always be heard and respected, even if they are not implemented.

### “Mistakes are like guardrails on the road to success

In our performance-oriented society, we often see mistakes as a flaw and defeats as personal failures. We always strive for perfection; however, allowing yourself to make mistakes is part of further development! Failures are the teachers of success. A Jewish proverb reads: ‘Almost every success is based on a previous failure.’ Without mistakes, we would not pause to consider whether there are alternative or, in other words, better ways of thinking, behaving, and approaching our concerns. Mistakes are like guardrails on the road to success. They keep us from straying from the path, instead shaking us awake when we are in danger of drifting off course. Mental toughness therefore also means facing up to our own mistakes. We should use a mirror, not binoculars, to look at our mistakes. This means not denying mistakes and blaming them on others or unfortunate circumstances. Instead, we should acknowledge them and come to terms with them. Because they tell us where we stand and where there is room for improvement. In them lies the answer to how we can get back on the road to success.” (AH – 111 Mental Hacks, 2022, p. 69)

“The only real mistake is the one from which we learn nothing.” Henry Ford  
(<https://www.goodreads.com>)

Mistakes are not only acceptable, but also an essential part of a team's growth and development. Every mistake is an opportunity to learn from past experiences and to continuously improve.

Being able to express your opinion without fear of negative consequences encourages openness and dialog within the team. This openness leads to a better understanding of the viewpoints of all team members and enables more effective problem solving.

In the world of motorsports, which strives for perfection, the aforementioned principles remind us that mistakes are not inevitable setbacks, but rather milestones on the road to success. By viewing mistakes as guardrails that keep us on track and encourage continuous improvement, we can ensure that our team realises its full potential and achieves excellence together.

## **6. Goal vs. Vision → Dedication to the Moment**

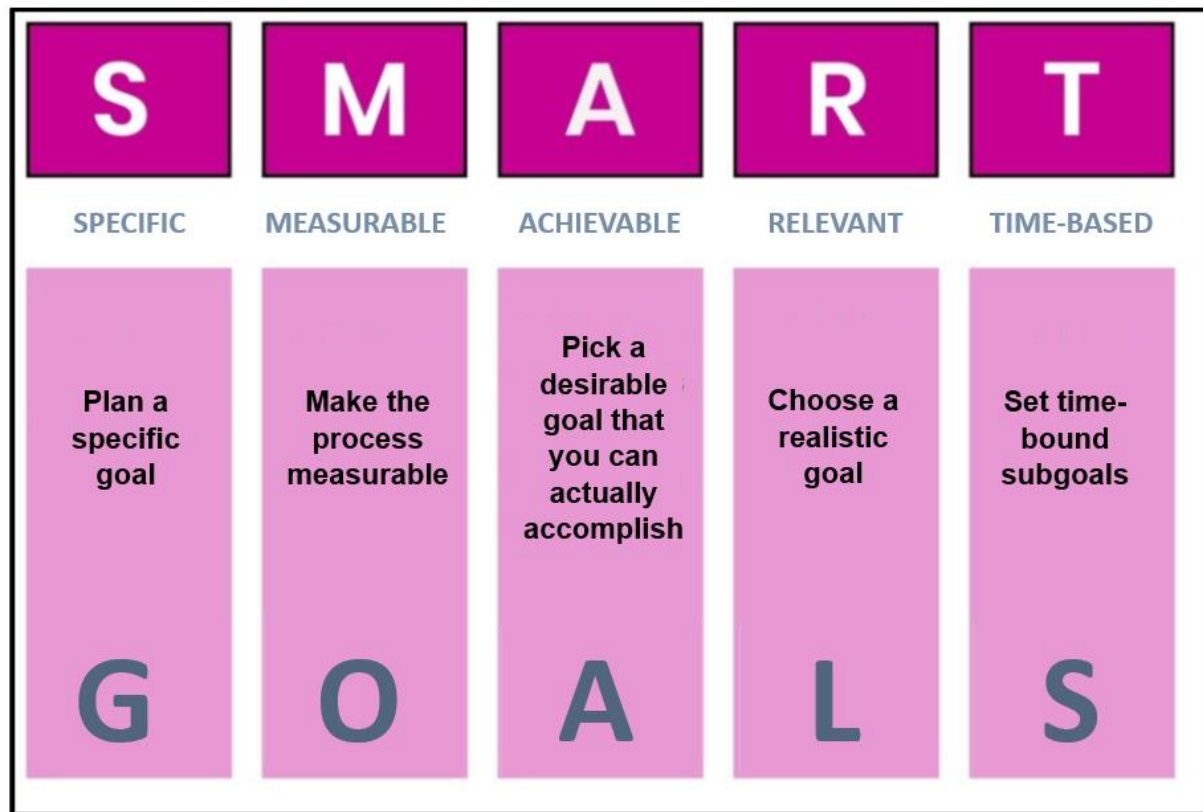
Defining common goals and emphasising positive sub-goals promotes motivation and a sense of fulfilment in addition to team alignment. Communication at eye level and valuable interactions with one another help to create an atmosphere in which ideas and opinions can be freely exchanged.

Setting goals that focus attention, motivation, and effort is another important strategy. These goals can be short-term, such as improving lap times, or long-term, such as winning the championship title.

“Goals should increase well-being. Using your own strengths and making personal contributions to a greater whole are goals that make you happy in the long term. Wealth, social recognition, power, and influence as well as external attractiveness are goals that make people less happy in the long term.”  
(GESU Institut, Training Documents, Dipl. Mental Coach 2023)

Team leaders/principals communicating and focusing on the fact that winning the championship raises the status (*Then we will be somebody.*) would be the wrong approach. A goal should not be based on how attractive the result is. Rather, it

should be chosen based on how willing you are to create the process required to achieve said goal. Mental coaching involves working towards specific behaviour when defining goals or sub-goals. One of the tools used to do this is the SMART model.



Source: GESU Documents

If no one feels responsible, goals are pursued carelessly at best. Instead of pursuing a common goal, everyone is ultimately only concerned with their personal benefit – from purely image-driven behaviour to individual enrichment. Personal goals are prioritised over common goals. My salary, my position, my ego – everything becomes/is more important than the success of the team. In any case, commitment to the end product and enjoyment of the work are lost.

Ideally, all team members should feel valued. This way, nobody feels marginalised. It also promotes a one-for-all, all-for-one mentality whereby the team sees itself as a united force.

### a) Success vs. Process Orientation

In motorsports, work is very success-orientated. You become dependent on the result, so to speak. This misalignment tends to focus on the future and devalues the

present, which can lead to a state of unhappiness. The means to an end takes centre stage.

Process-orientated work focuses on the moment. Doing something for the sake of doing it is the driving force, bringing joy and fulfilment. You fall in love with the path towards your goal.

“Be it in sports or in business, we may only achieve optimum performance if we focus our thoughts entirely on the moment, i.e., on what we are currently doing. ‘Do what you do’, says a Chinese proverb. What sounds easy is not always so easily realised in practice. This is because we either mentally dwell on past actions that have a thematic connection to the current action (‘I hope this doesn't happen again ...’, ‘Back then, hadn't I first done this and then that?’) or we think about the future consequences of our action (‘How will XY react if I do this or that?’, ‘Will the others follow suit?’). Furthermore, most of our inner dialogue, around 85%, is negative – taking the form of impatience, excessive self-criticism, and insults. The more negative our inner dialogue, the worse the result of the subsequent action.” (AH – 111 Mental Hacks, 2022, p.101)

### **b) Awareness of the Here and Now**

“There are only two days in the year that nothing can be done. One is called Yesterday and the other is called Tomorrow. Today is the right day to Love, Believe, Do and mostly Live.” Dalai Lama (<https://www.goodreads.com>)

“‘I just thought shot by shot,’ said biathlete Eric Lesser after winning gold at this year's World Championships (sport1.de). Although never before having won the World Cup and despite the high expectations of those around him, he remained absolutely calm during shooting and consequently made no mistakes. This ability to focus at the decisive moment put him on the podium. If he had thought during his last shooting round, ‘I hope I don't falter now. The German biathlon men have been waiting four years for a title win!’, he would probably have been denied victory once more. If we are afraid, if we fear that our past will once again become the present, we are already thinking about the future (‘I'm sure I won't succeed yet again ...’). If we remain mentally in the

past during situations where our maximum performance is required, or if our thoughts run ahead of us, we lose concentration. As a result, we run the risk of making mistakes, weakening ourselves with our thinking. However, those who manage to stay in the here and now, regardless of internal and external disruptive factors, not only reduce their anxiety, but also focus their energy on the moment and thus fully exploit their potential. Controlling our inner dialog is the key to success.” (AH – 111 Mental Hacks, 2022, p. 101)

Controlling your inner dialog (thoughts) and consciously staying in the present moment are key components of success and peak performance. By minimizing anxiety and distractions and directing your full energy to the present moment, individual potential can be better realised. Mental coaching helps to increase personal performance and overcome obstacles. It also promotes well-being by strengthening mindfulness, positive thought patterns and conscious self-control.

### **c) Success vs. Failure**

“I’ve missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I’ve been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”  
Michael Jordan (<https://www.forbes.com>)

Only those who have already experienced failure can become more successful. In motorsports, a team is measured by its successes. What really counts is winning. Every time you finish second, you can grow from that defeat if you deal with it properly. The words of Michael Jordan, one of the greatest athletes of all time, make it clear that failure and setbacks are inextricably linked to success. The willingness to learn from mistakes without being discouraged by them is a key part of the path to success. In sports, as in life, success and failure are powerful emotional experiences that can influence the way we think and act. The way in which we deal with these experiences has a decisive influence on our personal development and our ability to achieve our goals.

“Success and failure are emotional experiences. These emotions can give rise to grasping and aversion, which can hold us back and hamper our ability to achieve our goals.” (Search Inside Yourself – Chade-Meng Tan, 2012, p. 150)

“Celebrating successes not only promotes a sense of unity within a team or department, but also serves as motivation for further successes for all of us. Moreover, remembering past successes helps us to cope with failures. So whether it is in sports or in the workplace, it is worth savouring successes, consciously taking them in with all your senses and storing them away or even documenting them in a success diary. When ski cross athlete Daniela Maier won the bronze medal in the 2022 Beijing Olympics, she commented on the surprising result: ‘I try to soak up the moments in the here and now, savouring them.’ Because the power of these images, these memories, is great. Simply visualising such moments later on, conjuring them up in our mind's eye, triggers positive feelings in our body and the desire to repeat them. It motivates us. On the eve of the Swedish women’s biathlon relay team winning gold in Beijing, their coach showed them a video of their previous successes. Use the images of your successes – and those of your team in the workplace – as a reminder. Compile them in a video or picture gallery on your mobile phone or tablet with emotional background music or physically on a pinboard for all to see, where every employee or family member can hang a picture of a success. The wall above the hotel bed of cross-country skier and biathlete Denise Hermann at the Beijing 2022 Olympics was hung with pictures of medal winners from previous years. By her own admission, this gave her ‘good vibes’.” (AH – 111 Mental Hacks, 2022, p. 145)

Celebrating and consciously recognising successes not only strengthens a racing team's sense of unity, but also acts as an incentive for future successes. Remembering past successes can help you get through difficult times and overcome failures. The power of images and memories can evoke positive emotions and fuel the desire for further successes.

The practices of mental coaching, such as consciously celebrating successes, visualising positive moments, and using memories as a source of motivation, can be extremely effective for the entire racing team.

## **7. Concrete Examples of Team Members Who Have Been Mentally Coached**

In the course of my professional career as a specialist, I was faced with a variety of occasions that pointed to mental challenges and weaknesses. In my role as head of the pitstop crew, I repeatedly noticed patterns of egocentric behaviour. Power struggles and the pursuit of personal gain manifested themselves within the crew, which appears to be a widespread behavioural pattern. The media presence in motorsports regularly puts us in the public eye, causing us to want to present ourselves accordingly. The mind tends to focus less on current events and more on the presentation of one's "self" on television. This reduces concentration on the essentials.

The use of mental coaching serves to curb this behavioural pattern and refocus attention on the actual task at hand.

In one specific case, providing mental coaching to the pit crew led to remarkable changes. Through targeted mental training, the team members were able to anchor themselves better in the here and now. Negative thoughts and any resulting pressure were successfully tuned out. The focus was completely directed towards the tasks of the pit stop. The result of this approach was impressively confident, consistently fast pit stops. This improvement in performance took the team to the top of the pit stop championship and was instrumental in winning the drivers' championship title.

A significant incident occurred at the 2021 Azerbaijan Grand Prix when Lewis Hamilton left the track immediately after the start of the race. At the time, the Mercedes GP team was using a special function, the so-called "magic button", which had to be deactivated by the driver once the race had started. However, this step was neglected, which ultimately led to the retirement. This shows that the focus was not on the current situation, but that the mind was focussed on other aspects. This example illustrates that mental toughness can flag even in experienced and resilient individuals and must be continuously trained.

It was common for my drivers to be deeply frustrated after losing a race. Their thoughts dwelled too long on the defeat and the lost podium place, which put a strain on the entire team and hindered progress when it came to improving the vehicle. There was too much dwelling on the past and the lost points, which proved to be

extremely detrimental for any upcoming race. One of my drivers, who had been mentally trained over many years, coped much better with defeats and was able to put them behind him more quickly. He had the ability to refocus on his passion of driving at every race. This driver was consistently a strong contender for the championship title and was able to achieve numerous victories.

In the immediate aftermath of a lost race, I have seen team principals instantly question the possibility of losing a championship. In moments like these, a goal-orientated perspective would be not to think about the championship first and foremost, but to concentrate on the upcoming race. With the help of mental training, all team members are relieved of an overly future-orientated focus and can concentrate on the task at hand.

## **8. Conclusion/Summary**

Mental coaching should serve as a guiding principle for the entire team. As Mahatma Gandhi once said:

“You must be the change you want to see in the world.”  
(<https://www.brainyquote.com>)

By embracing mental coaching and seeing change as an opportunity, a racing team can reach new levels of performance and grow collectively as a strong and success-orientated team.

Mental coaching uses targeted methods and approaches to promote and strengthen the aspects described above. Overall, mental coaching helps to strengthen the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects of a person in order to achieve a better summary of information, challenges or goals. It helps to develop clear thinking patterns, reduce stress, and promote the ability to make rational and effective decisions.

Mental coaching encourages employees to embrace and actively integrate mental coaching into their work practices so that they can be successful both as a team and as individual.

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Walchsee, 14 September 2023



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