

# A Quiet Mind: The Key to Musical Performance

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## Introduction

In this day and age, many people believe they can multitask; we always want to accomplish many things at once. Musicians often try to multitask while practicing their instruments. They think about breathing, articulation, jaw movement, finger technique, and more. However, research has proven that multitasking is impossible and actually decreases our efficiency. Practicing with a “quiet mind” will lead to peak performance and avoid the detrimental effects of trying to concentrate on many things at once. Of course, the questions are: What constitutes a quiet mind, and how does one attain this mental state?

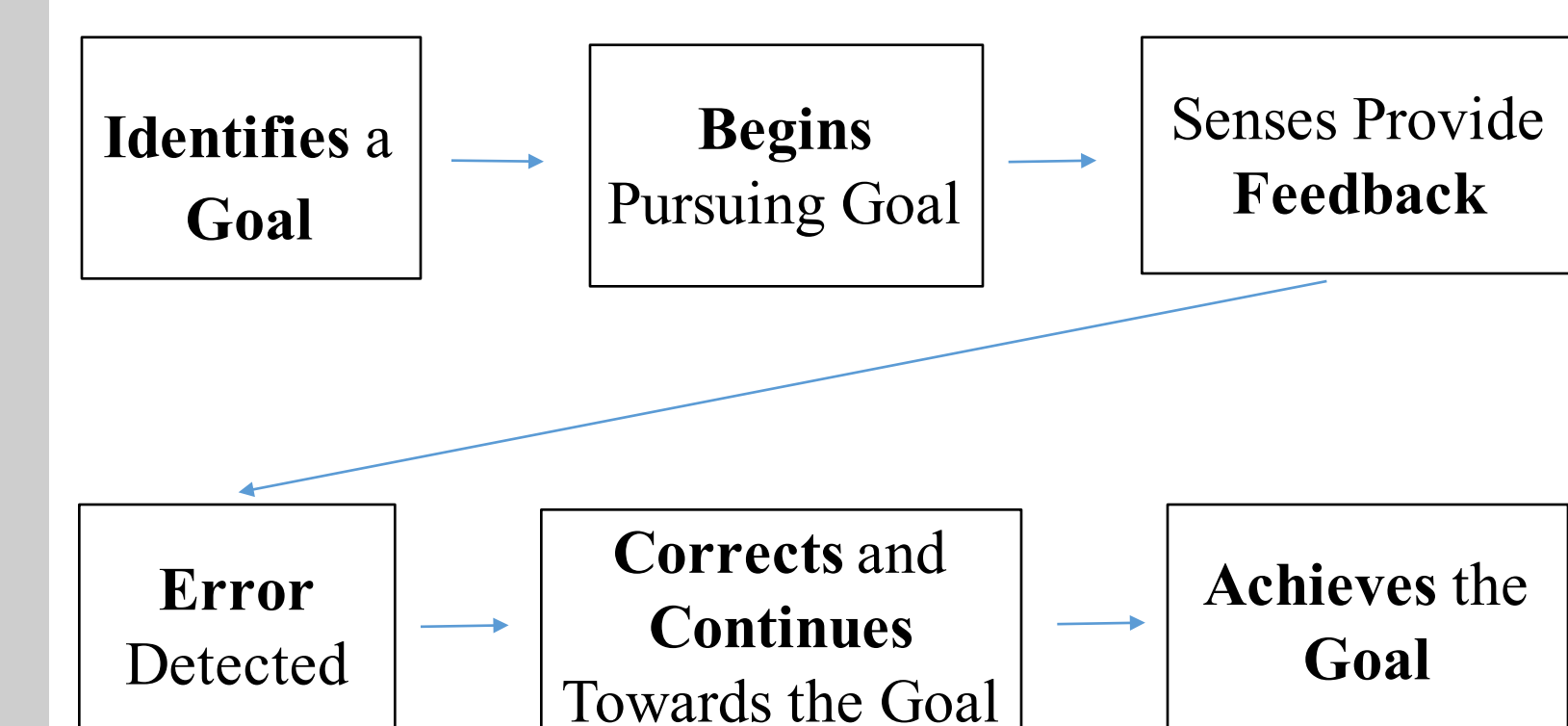
## Literature Review

### Psycho-Cybernetics

By Maxwell Maltz

- Psycho-Cybernetics: the subconscious is a goal-achieving mechanism steered by one’s conscious mind
- The conscious mind feeds mental pictures to the subconscious as goals which it works to achieve

A Diagram of How the Nervous System Automatically Functions, According to Maltz



## Literature Review (Cont.)

### The Inner Game of Tennis

By W. Timothy Gallwey

- Self 1 (conscious mind) vs. Self 2 (subconscious)
- Trust Self 2 and let the body complete the swing
- Only focus on the tennis ball



Roger Federer, professional tennis player, with eyes glued to the ball

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### Zen in the Art of Archery

By Eugen Herrigel

- Never think about *how* to draw the bow
- Only focus on breathing

### Peace is Every Step

By Thich Nhat Hanh

- Conscious breathing in everyday life
- Staying in the present

### The Organized Mind

By Daniel J. Levitin

- Attention is most important mental resource
- Multitasking is the enemy of attention
- Use external organization systems to clear the mind of tasks

## Quieting the Mind Using Connections in the Literature

- **Musicians must possess a mental version of their goal sound**

“For imagination sets the goal ‘picture’ which our automatic mechanism works on. We act, or fail to act, not because of ‘will,’ as is so commonly believed, but because of imagination” (Maltz, 31).

“Getting it together mentally involves...learning how to get the clearest possible picture of your desired outcomes...”(Gallwey, 13).

- **Musicians must think less about how to play the instrument**

“That’s just the trouble, you make an effort to think about it. Concentrate entirely on your breathing, as if you had nothing else to do!” (Herrigel, 40).

“Multitasking is the enemy of a focused attentional system” (Levitin, 16).

“The businessman...is thinking in the back of his mind of all the things he *should* accomplish today, or perhaps this week, and unconsciously trying mentally to accomplish them all at once. The habit is particularly insidious...”(Maltz, 89).

“No one knows [how many muscles are needed to hit a fast serve], but if the conscious mind *thinks* it does and tries to control those muscles, it will inevitably use muscles that aren’t needed” (Gallwey, 37).

“Of course, thinking is important, but quite a lot of our thinking is useless” (Hanh, 11).

- **Musicians must let their bodies do the work**

“...stop trying to ‘do it’ by strain and effort, picture to yourself the target you really want to hit, and ‘let’ your creative success mechanism take over” (Maltz, 41).

“Trusting your body in tennis means *letting* your body hit the ball. The key word is *let*. You trust in the competence of your body and its brain, and you *let* it swing the racket” (Gallwey, 36).

“By letting go of yourself, leaving yourself and everything yours behind so decisively that nothing more is left of you but a purposeless tension” (Hanh, 52).

- **Musicians must stay in the present moment**

“Consciously practice the habit of ‘taking no anxious thought for tomorrow,’ by *giving all your attention to the present moment*” (Maltz, 86).

“Mastery in ink painting is only attained when the hand, exercising perfect control over technique, executes what hovers before the mind’s eye at the same moment when the mind begins to form it...” (Herrigel, 104).

“Our appointment with life is in the present moment” (Hanh, 10).

“These highly successful persons...have many of the daily distractions of life handled for them, allowing them to devote all of their attention to what is immediately before them” (Levitin, 9).

- **Musicians must learn to relax in order to focus**

“...process of concentration by relaxing our bodies” (Herrigel, 90).

“‘In’ and ‘Out’...As you practice, your breath will become peaceful and gentle, and your mind and body will also become peaceful and gentle” (Hanh, 7).

## Conclusions

- Sound created on one’s instrument is a direct result of aural imagination
- Focus only on the goal sound, and hear it as vividly and as accurately as possible in one’s mind
- Think in the moment and play in the moment
- Be aware of the physicality of playing, but do not focus on it
- Focus is a result of a quiet mind

## Further Discussion

- Balancing teaching how to play an instrument vs. how to play music for a middle school band director
- Altering music education curriculum to encourage personal excellence on one’s primary instrument vs. learning pedagogy of other instruments



Corinth Lewis conducting the Hewitt-Trussville Middle School Band in Trussville, AL  
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