

Balance of the Growth Mindset and “Loving the Plateau”

Camille Powell

University of Western States

COUN 6210/7410 Psychology of Performance Excellence

Dr. Matthew Condie & Dr. Cari DeCandia

Introduction

It is important to teach athletes and performers the balance between a growth mindset and “loving the plateau” (Leonardo,1991; Preston, 2020). The growth mindset serves as motivational energy that drives the individuals to overcome obstacles, push through challenges, and expansion towards excellence, whereas the plateau is the natural part of that progression where little noticeable change occurs (Leonardo,1991; Preston, 2020). The plateau, if viewed with perspective, can serve as an opportunity to relish in the growth and appreciate the progress to boost the athletes and performers confidence and self-efficacy (Leonardo,1991; Preston, 2020; Biswas-Diener, 2010; Burton & Raedeke, 2008). Helping athletes and performers to develop a self-awareness of the natural progression between the growth-mindset and plateau, for them personally, and the tools to self-regulate and self-manage to know when to push and when to be at peace, in a balance between the growth and plateau, minimizes feelings of dissatisfaction and dysregulation from constantly chasing that growth and expansion that naturally ebbs and flows (Leonardo,1991; Preston, 2020; Biswas-Diener, 2010; Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

Balancing the Growth Mindset and Loving the Plateau

According to Leonard (1991), “Goals and contingencies...are important. But they exist in the future and the past, beyond the pale of the sensory realm. Practice, the path of mastery, exists only in the present...in the plateau” (Leonard, 1991, p. 48-49). Helping athletes and performers to understand the value in the balance between pushing for growth and working patiently through those plateaus, which are inevitable and ever enduring, provides athletes and performers with the perspective that plateaus reward them, to enjoy their progress and that it does not mean that they

are not still growing (Leonardo,1991; Preston, 2020; Biswas-Diener, 2010; Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

When athletes and performers can increase their self-awareness around the balance of the growth mindset and loving the plateau, the athletes and performers can have the opportunity to recognize when they are resistant to being at peace with the plateau or when they are accepting of the plateau. After the athletes and performers gain more self-awareness around their resistance or acceptance, then they can start to incorporate more self-regulation and self-management strategies (Preston, 2020; Verywell Mind, 2020). According to Verywell mind (2020), self-regulation involves controlling one's behavior, emotions, and thoughts in the pursuit of long-term goals by managing disruptive emotions and impulses. Additionally, according to Preston (2020), “self-management is about finding the self-control and mastery needed to take control of one's work (e.g., to manage one's time, workflow, and communication) (Preston, 2020). Helping the athletes and performers to understand the value of using different self-regulation and self-management strategies will help them to regulate their energy and efforts as they pursue growth and appreciate the plateau.

Different mindfulness techniques, breathing exercises, relaxation, and energy regulation strategies, can help the athletes to self-regulate, self-manage, and bring the athletes and performers to the present moment, to enjoy the here and now, on the plateau as well as to maximize their growth when they are experiencing that growth (Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Mindfulness, n.d.; Mindfulness & Breath, n.d.). “If we are right here, right now, that gives us the best chance to bring everything that we have to the moment...If we are present, we can recognize the next best step...” (Carroll & Gervais, 2016). When individuals are self-aware, they can better self-regulate and self-manage (Preston, 2020; Biswas-Diener, 2010; Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

It is also important to stay on the plateaus during growth for as long as needed, as the perils of getting ahead of oneself can result in injury (Leonard, 1991). Increasing self-awareness, such as through mindfulness techniques, can help the athletes and performers to recognize more clearly when it is time to push and when it is time to be patient with that self-regulation to avoid injury (Leonard, 1991; Preston, 2020). Further, as mentioned in Leonard (1991), “there is great value in recognizing that people who achieve great things in their work, are dedicated to the process as well as the product...they are people who love the plateau. Life for these people is especially vivid and satisfying” (Leonard, 1991, p. 44). By sharing the values of being on the plateau and how that also aligns with growth, it supports the athletes in developing the value between chasing their growth and being patient on the plateau, to hopefully experience that same vividness and satisfaction (Leonard, 1991; Biswas-Diener, 2010; Seligman, 2004).

Further, being in a state of open acceptance on the plateau can align with performance excellence with respect for the flow state (Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Leonard, 1991). During the plateau, the experience of being on the plateau with open acceptance can be autotelic and enjoyable in and of itself, as with the experience of flow, the activity is enjoyable in and of itself (Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Leonard, 1991; Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). For example, during the plateau an individual has reached their current peak, and flow is experienced when experience level matches the challenges of the situation (i.e., peak performance) (Williams & Krane, 2015). With this perspective, the path of growth and that pursuit of performance excellence and mastery is covered with plateaus where there is opportunity to experience flow (Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Leonard, 1991; Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

“To love the plateau is to love the eternal now, to enjoy the inevitable spurts of progress and fruits of accomplishment, then serenely accept the new plateau that waits just beyond them.

To love the plateau is to love what is most essential and enduring in your life” (Leonard, 1991). Educating the athletes and performers on the natural progression of growth and the inevitable plateaus, the value of self-awareness, the best self-regulation and self-management techniques to maintain that peace, as they push during growth and are patient in practice during the plateaus, the athletes and performers can more successfully achieve that balance between “loving the plateau” and performance excellence (Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Leonard, 1991; Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Williams & Krane, 2015).

References

- Biswas-Diener, R. (2010). *Practicing positive psychology coaching: Assessment, activities and strategies for success*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. ISBN-13: 978-0470536766
- Burton, D. & Raedeke, T. D. (2008). *Sport psychology for coaches*. Human Kinetics. ISBN: 978-0-7360-3986-4
- Leonard, G. (1991). *Mastery: The keys to success and long-term fulfillment*. Plume.
- Preston, C. (2020). *Self-Management*. Merriam-Webster. Retrieved from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/self-management>
- Seligman, M. (2004). The new era of positive psychology. [TED Conferences]. Retrieved from: https://www.ted.com/talks/martin_seligman_the_new_era_of_positive_psychology
- Very Well Mind. (2020). How to Develop and Practice Self-Regulation. Retrieved from: <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-you-can-practice-self-regulation-4163536>
- Williams, J. M. & Kane, V. (2015). *Applied sport psychology: Personal growth to peak performance*. (7th edi). McGraw-Hill edu. ISBN: 978-0-07-802270-8