

Achieving More by Doing Less

By Ingrid Bacci Ph.D.

www.ingridbacci.com

Are you interested in achieving more by doing less? If you are, then by consistently applying one basic principle, you can turn a stress-filled tension-packed life into a relatively stress-less, balanced life. In doing that, you will improve your health, develop more satisfying relationships, be far more productive, and find a greater sense of fulfillment.

If you think it's a contradiction in terms to say that you can achieve more by doing less, it's not. Have you ever noticed how, in any walk of life, your performance will often improve when you stop trying so hard? You're in an important business meeting and for some reason you just *know* that things are going to work out. You let go of struggling to get your point of view across and you *trust*. Uncannily, your colleagues start asking for and listening to your opinion, and things go smoothly. Or, you're in a tennis match or out on the golf course, you play exceptionally well, and as you look back at the experience, you think to yourself, "I felt so present! I stopped thinking and everything just started flowing! It was so easy!" Or, you're talking to one of your children who is upset, and you say to yourself, "You know, instead of doing what I usually do—rushing in and trying to fix what's wrong—I'll just listen to what my child has to say." As you listen, and just *because* you are listening to your kid and not trying to fix the situation, your kid works through the problem on his own, and in the process earns valuable self-esteem as well.

In all these examples, you've achieved more by doing less. And in fact, the *peak experiences* of our lives, the moments we look back on as having a special, enchanted

quality, where we really shine—those moments typically are experiences in which *we feel like we're doing very little or nothing at all, and instead life is happening through us*. The quality of *effortlessness* is what makes peak experiences special: a lot is happening, but we're the *instrument*, not the doer.

Peak experiences are moments of *flow* or of being *in the zone*. The effortless flow quality of peak experiences is always accompanied by a sense of *profound pleasure and total clarity*. No wonder these moments are so memorable.

For most of us, peak experiences are the exception rather than the norm. We'd like to feel effortless more often, and we're fascinated by people who seem to be masters of flow, who have learned how to manifest that flow in what they do. Think of Tiger Woods, who is setting unheard of records on the golf course. Despite the enormous challenges inherent in his situation, he almost always looks composed, and his body is a picture of fluid grace. Pete Sampras, who dominated the world of professional tennis for years, was another example of flow. Even though he worked his butt off, he also played tennis from a place of extraordinary calm. It was that inner calm that made his style seem so effortless.

What distinguishes masters like these? They know that even in the face of intense demands, *deep relaxation* is the key to their success. For example, in an interview I watched several years ago, Tiger Woods described how he worked for years to achieve a lighter and lighter touch with his golf club, because that lightness, or sensitivity and delicacy of touch was the key to his extraordinary control. He focused his attention on relaxing his fingers and arms to feel more deeply and focus more effectively in order to achieve at higher levels.

Most peak performers focus, whether consciously or unconsciously, on maintaining a certain *inner state*, a state of *deep physical relaxation*, as key to their success. Effortlessness is a feeling. It's a feeling in your body, and that feeling combines deep physical relaxation with a very calm mind and pointed focus. Peak performers cultivate this feeling. They know that they cannot achieve at high levels without this feeling. They make staying in touch with this feeling priority number one.

There are two reasons why peak performance and the flow state are rare experiences for most of us. First, while most of us would like to have more flow in our lives, we have no idea how to get there. We have no idea how consciously to focus our attention on maintaining the deeply relaxed, alert state that is typical of flow. That's why both my book, *The Art of Effortless Living* (available through www.amazon.com) and the accompanying CD series *Effortless Practice* (available on www.ingridbacci.com) offer you simple, pleasurable, doable and effective techniques for teaching you how to attain greater flow.

The second reason that peak experiences tend to be rare for most of us is that we don't make effortlessness, that combination of deep relaxation and total mental focus, a conscious goal. Tiger Woods does. But we don't. Why? Because we focus too much on what we have to accomplish, and too little on how we feel inside as we go about accomplishing things. In fact, we ignore how we feel for the sake of getting the job done. Got a headache? No problem, take an aspirin and work right through it! That headache is usually the result of tension, but we'd rather dull our body's sensations and keep on working from a place of tension, than learn to let go of the tension that causes the headache, and train ourselves to approach our work from a more relaxed place. So many

of us feel wound up with everything we have to do, from the moment we get up in the morning till we get home. Why do we stay that way? We assume that that's the price we have to pay for what we have to accomplish. But the truth is, *it isn't*.

Our culture is obsessed with achieving, and tension and stress are our lifestyle of choice. Unfortunately, being on the treadmill is not a good recipe for *anything*. The more stressed we feel, the more we destroy our health, undermine our relationships, achieve at a level far below our real potential, and create lives that are full of work but lacking in creative meaning. We live by rules that generate the opposite of an effortless *and* a successful lifestyle. If you dare to stop making achievement at all costs your god, and instead commit yourself to an effortless lifestyle as the *foundation* from which you approach achieving, then you'll attain not only greater professional success but also improved health, emotionally satisfying relationships, and a rich sense of meaning. You'll be following in the footsteps of masters who know that high levels of achievement depend on high levels of inner composure, and that the secret to success is learning to make physical, mental and emotional relaxation the basis for achievement. You'll learn to practice making your inner state, how you feel inside, the most important thing, and as you do that, you'll find that success, intimacy and deeper meaning come richly into your life.

For further free information on how to empower your life, look at this website's available free articles on both stress and empowerment and check into www.ingridbacci.com on a regular basis for new articles. For systematic guidance and help in your journey, explore the books, CDs and MP3 downloads available through the website, and check dates for upcoming seminars.