

## THE BIG IDEAS



### The Trusting Mindset

vs. The training mindset.

### Eat Stress

Like an energy bar.

### Bill Russell & Barfing

Butterflies are good.

### Pressure & Anxiety

Know the difference.

### Ultimate Knowing

Absolute confidence.

### Positive Thinking

vs. Positive action.

### Super Pilot

Beats autopilot.

### Let It Happen

Just let it rip!

### Nuts & Geniuses

Often one before the other.

### Incredible Dreams

& Being unrealistic.



# Overachievement

The New Model for Exceptional Performance

BY JOHN ELIOT, PH.D. · PORTFOLIO HARDCOVER © 2004 · 288 PAGES

“Overachievement is aimed at people who want to maximize their potential. And to do that, I insist you throw caution at the wind, ignore the pleas of parents, coaches, spouses, and bosses to be ‘realistic.’ Realistic people do not accomplish extraordinary things because the odds of success stymie them. The best performers ignore the odds. I will show that instead of limiting themselves to what’s probable, the best will pursue the heart-pounding, exciting, really big, difference-making dreams—so long as catching them might be possible.”

~ Dr. John Eliot from *Overachievement*

If you’re into achieving greatness and love to see the hero in action—whether it’s Tiger Woods coming back for the playoff win or a great rock star performing live—you’ll love this book.

John Eliot, relative of T. S. Eliot and a long line of Harvard Presidents, is brilliant. He’s one of the world’s leading authorities on peak performers and isn’t afraid to challenge the status quo of high performance. He’s also a great writer. And, this book is an incredibly fun, inspiring read—with Eliot’s articulate and brilliantly blunt explanations of what makes the great performers perform greatly.

You’ll learn to kick the deep breathing relaxation habits during pressure situations and, instead, to eat the stress like a Power Bar. You’ll learn how to turn your cerebral cortex off like a squirrel scurrying across a high wire (who doesn’t want that, eh?! :) and a bunch of other tricks of the Overachieving trade.

As with so many of these great books, *Overachievement* is a tough one to condense into a few pages because there is SO MUCH goodness in it. So, let’s get to work!

The book has two parts: 1. The “what” of Overachievement where we get “Inside the Minds of the Overachiever”; and, 2. The “how” on “Becoming an Overachiever.”

We’ll start with the most important part of the minds of the Overachiever:

## THE TRUSTING MINDSET

“To be sure, great performers are well trained, experienced, smart, and in some cases, divinely talented. But the way their brains work during a performance is a lot more like a squirrel’s than like Einstein’s. Like squirrels, the best in every business do what they have learned to do without questioning their abilities—they flat out trust their skills, which is why we call this high-performance state of mind the ‘Trusting Mindset.’ Routine access to the Trusting Mindset is what separates great performers from the rest of the pack.”

Squirrels and tossing keys. And “Training” vs. “Trusting” Mindsets. That’s where you’ll find the keys to performing like a true rock star overachiever.

Huh?

*"Thinking is a habit, and like any other habit, it can be changed; it just takes effort and repetition."*

~ John Eliot

Seriously.

Eliot tells some great stories to bring his point home that, if you want to be an overachiever, you've got to learn to turn off that overactive cerebral cortex of yours and just think like a squirrel. :)

Imagine this: Have you ever seen a squirrel scurry across a telephone wire? What do you think it was thinking? Quick hint: It wasn't. Squirrels don't think. They just scurry.

Well, it's a little more complex than that (and Eliot goes into the cool science behind it) but the point is simple: They're not up there on the high wire thinking, *"Oh, my! This one's high. It's a little windy today. If I take a wrong step that fall's gonna hurt. OMG! It'll kill me actually. OK. Left front foot, now back right foot. Oh, Geez! This is harder than I thought it would be."* :)

Thoughts like that require a cerebral cortex. And, if you want to get into what Eliot calls the "Trusting Mindset"—the mindset of overachievers—you need to learn to turn it off and give your skills free reign, not focusing *"on anything but the target of that particular moment."*

How about this?

You ever toss your keys to a friend or spouse?

If you're anything like the students in Eliot's classes with whom he's done this little test, you can hit your friend chest high every time. No worries. You just tossed the keys, right? No worries, no stress, just see the target and toss. Welcome to the trusting mindset.

Now, imagine if all the sudden you're in the middle of your favorite basketball team's arena competing for a \$1m prize at half-time. You've got 5 other people out there and we're going to see who can most consistently hit someone in the chest with their key toss.

Eek!

With something on the line, would you still have that calm and cool approach—you know, just stepping up an casually tossing the keys like you did before, totally independent of worries about the result (the TRUSTING Mindset)? Or, would you start thinking about stuff—from what you could win or lose (!) to the fact you might look like a total idiot if you hit the guy in the knee or accidentally tossed the keys over their head? Enter what Eliot calls the TRAINING Mindset.

Guess what?

The top performers in ANY field perform in the TRUSTING Mindset.

Whether it's a brain surgeon or a basketball player, a deal maker or a golfer. They ALL "trust their swing" and focus on nothing but "the target of that particular moment."

Of course, there's a time for training in every field. And then there's the time for trusting.

As Eliot says brilliantly: *"Selling is very different from trying to be a salesman. That A you got at Business School in 'Sales & Marketing' isn't what's going to close the deal. In fact, if all you're doing is thinking about what you should do, you're going to look like a self-conscious goof and do anything but close. When you're in the middle of a deal, you've got to turn that part of your brain off and trust yourself."*

The book is all about helping us get in and live in that trusting mindset in the pressure-packed moments of our lives when our destinies are determined. Fun!

How about one more example (among MANY) to bring the point home between the "Trusting" and the "Training" Mindset?

Eliot does another experiment where he lays a 2 by 4 on the ground and asks his students to walk over it. Everyone does it perfectly. They take one step then another in perfect position on the board. No issue. (That's the Trusting Mindset).

*"Butterflies, cotton mouth, and a pounding heart make the finest performers smile—the smile of a person with an ace up their sleeves... They definitely would agree with Tiger Woods, who has often said, 'The day I'm not nervous stepping onto the first tee—that's the day I quit.'"*

~ John Eliot

Then, he raises the 2 by 4 off the ground. Eek. Enter: The “Training Mindset”—all the sudden we’re thinking about it and we take tentative, calculating steps and faltering steps.

If we want to be Overachievers, we MUST develop our Trusting Mindset.

And, we need to:

## EAT STRESS LIKE AN ENERGY BAR

**“Working on techniques to manage stress is a bit like trying to win the Indy 500 by putting a governor on the engine of your race car or swapping out a powerful V-12 for a V-4 because it offers a ‘quieter ride.’ You wouldn’t do that. Not if you were after the checkered flag. Not if you were racing star Jeff Gordon. No superstar is about to give his opponents an edge. Nor should you by trying to relax when the pressure’s on.”**

I love that.

A huge theme of the book is that we’ve got to learn to WELCOME pressure and then flow with it. NOT try to breathe ourselves onto a calm island somewhere and avoid the pressure.

As Eliot says, the pressure offers an opportunity for us to play at our edge and push just beyond it to the next edge. Avoiding the edge and floating off to a meditative island when the pressure’s on? Not so good. After awhile, rather than a means to an end, that “relaxed” state becomes the end in and of itself. Which is death to overachievement.

How about this:

## BILL RUSSELL & BARFING

**“Bill Russell is one of the great names in basketball, an all-American... the only athlete to ever win an NCAA Championship, an Olympic Gold Medal, and a professional championship all in the same year—1956... But Bill Russell had this one problem: He threw up before every game.”**

What a great line.

Eliot tells the brilliant story about the correlation between Bill Russell’s barfing and his world-class play. In brief: Russell sucked when he wasn’t so nervous that he booted before a game. He had the greatest slump of his career in 1963 when he didn’t throw up for most of the season.

Then, when entering the arena for the playoffs and seeing the crowd gathering hours before the game, his nerves kicked in and kicked his dinner out—and he went out and had the best game of the season.

Of course, we don’t need to throw up to bring our A game. We do, however need to become friends with the butterflies, learn to welcome stress, enjoy it and make it work to our advantage.

## PRESSURE & ANXIETY

**“The physical symptoms of fight-or-flight are what the human body has learned over thousands of years to operate more efficiently and at the highest level. Anxiety is a cognitive interpretation of that physical response.”**

Alright. Time for some important distinctions.

First, let’s recognize that when the pressure’s on, your body goes into an altered, higher state of performance—mobilizing your body to get it on.

Eliot walks us through a genius description of how our bodies take energy away from non-essential activities and channel it into performing at the highest level possible.

*"I have discovered that I cannot enhance anybody's performance without getting them not only to live with the butterflies that come with high-pressure jobs, but to embrace that kind of physical response, enjoy it, get into it. That's the real first ticket to being a performer who thinks exceptionally."*

~ John Eliot

We need to realize a couple things, according to Eliot:

1. “Everything that your body does to you when the pressure is on is good for performance...
2. Pressure is different from anxiety; nervousness is different from worry.”

## ULTIMATE KNOWING

“Confidence is a resolute state of mind by which you believe nothing is impossible.”

You have that kind of confidence?

Here’s to ULTIMATE KNOWING!

## POSITIVE THINKING VS. POSITIVE ACTION

“Exceptional thinkers learn to trust their consciousness. They teach themselves the power of positive *action*. They don’t stop to think about how great the act is going to be. Instead, they act.”

Nice.

Positive action. It really is a panacea.

What does the situation demand? Do it.

Don’t think about how great you’re going to do it or all the wonderful things in your life that will come as a result. (Or, even worse, all the things that might go wrong!)

Just. Do. It. :)

## PUT YOURSELF ON SUPER PILOT

“The true exceptional performer is on *super pilot*. Every single sense, every fiber of his body is brought together in what he is doing.”

Eliot provides a highly compelling description of how top performers put themselves into what some would call “Flow” or “The Zone.”

Whereas the other researchers (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in *Flow* and Jim Loehr in *The Power of Full Engagement*; see Notes on both) imply that the top performers are on “autopilot,” Eliot sees them on “super pilot”—TOTALLY engaged in the moment and *not* in some mellow, cruise control, autopilot kinda way; rather, they’re COMPLETELY tuned into the moment—channeling their stress into a heightened “super” pilot-mode of engagement.

They’re not setting goals and evaluating their performance as they go (that would be the “Training Mindset” from above).

Rather, these top performers are putting ALL of their attention on their next target.

Huge distinction. The price of the book is paid for just to get Eliot’s points on the power of concentration and being in super pilot mode!

## LET IT HAPPEN

“Great performers focus on what they are doing, and nothing else... They are able to engage in a task so completely that there is no room left for self-criticism, judgment, or doubt; to stay loose and supremely, even irrationally, self-confident... They let it happen, let it go. They couldn’t care less about the results.”

Reminds me of Krishna’s advice to Arjuna in the classic *The Bhagavad Gita* of Hinduism (see Notes). He says to his tentative warrior: “*The awakened sages call a person wise when all his*

*"I have found that the top players in every field think differently when all the marbles are on the line.*

*Great performers focus on what they are doing, and nothing else... They are able to engage in a task so completely that there is no room left for self-criticism, judgment, or doubt; to stay loose and supremely, even irrationally, self-confident; to just step up and do what they're good at, concentrating only on the simplest nature of their performance."*

~ John Eliot

*"Irreverence ran on both sides of my family... My parents brought me up to think that we could all change the world."*

~ Richard Branson

*"Anyone who strives too far from the majority or the conventional wisdom is bound to be labeled 'arrogant,' or 'a maverick,' 'a wildman,' 'weird,' or even 'crazy.'*

~ John Eliot

*undertakings are free from anxiety about results."*

Brilliant.

When you sit down to write or to negotiate a deal or to program a piece of software or to paint or to parent or to do whatever it is that you do, are you focused completely on what you are doing?

Or are you focused on the results of the action—all the ways you can slip up here or slip up there?

I know in my own experience writing these notes that there's a PROFOUND difference between the quality of my writing when I simply sit down, immerse myself in the rhythm of the book and my writing and just let it flow—trusting myself completely VS. when I sit down and worry about how it's coming together (or whether it's coming together) and all that not-so-fun stuff.

How about you?

My hunch is we share that in common.

As Dr. Eliot advises, don't worry about the results and just "... stay loose and supremely, even irrationally, self-confident... let it happen..." !!

## NUTS & GENIUSES

*"History, though, shows us that the people who end up changing the world—the great political, social, scientific, technological, artistic, even sports revolutionaries—are always nuts, until they're right, and then they're geniuses."*

Hah. Love that.

Reminds me of Apple's genius ad: *"Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The trouble-makers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules, and they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify, or vilify them. But the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do."*

Eliot tells some great stories about nuts turned geniuses—from Michael Dell who ordered a high school diploma from a newspaper ad in the third grade to Richard Branson who's rocked all kinds of boats and is now rocking intergalactic (!) flight.

How about you?

Are you crazy enough to trust yourself while the world thinks you're a little nuts?

Good. That's an essential ingredient of Overachievement. :)

So, what're your crazy dreams?

What are the REALLY big dreams? What do you get giddy about achieving when you really let yourself go? What would you dare to dream if you KNEW you were guaranteed to succeed?

Journal time! :)

If I could do anything, here's what I'd do: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*"Exceptional thinkers ignore their critics and go about their business making history."*

~ John Eliot

(Now \*know\* you can rock it and go for it. :)

## INCREDIBLE DREAMS & BEING UNREALISTIC

**"You will not do incredible things without an incredible dream."**

You may want to get the book just for the chapter on "Embracing the Last Taboo—Being as 'Unrealistic' as You Can." It's one big inspiring quote.

The essence is very simple: If we want to live a life of greatness, if we want to honor that deep drive within each of us to fully express ourselves in this precious hero's journey of ours, we MUST step outside of what's "reasonable" and dare to dream.

BIG.

And, then we need to have the courage to protect that dream from those around us who tell us to be "realistic." In fact, Eliot's tells us: **"as soon as anyone starts telling you to be 'realistic,' cross that person off your invitation list."** :)

Here's to the pursuit of our incredible dreams and having fun Overachieving in our own speical ways,



**Brian Johnson,**  
*Chief Philosopher*

### If you liked this Note, you'll probably like...

**Thus Spoke Zarathustra**

**Ralph Waldo Emerson**

**The Other 90%**

**Tony Robbins**

**The Magic of Thinking Big**

**The Power of Full Engagement**

**Flow**

### About the Author of "Overachievement"

JOHN ELIOT, PH.D.



A relative of T.S. Eliot and a long line of Harvard presidents, Dr. Eliot is an award winning professor of management, psychology, and human performance. He holds faculty appointments at Rice University, the University of Houston, the Texas Medical Center, and the SMU Cox School of Leadership. He is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Dartmouth College, and co-founder of the Milestone Group, a consulting firm providing training, assessment, and education to business executives, professional athletes, physicians, performing artists, and corporations nationwide. Dr. Eliot's clients have included, among many others: Deloitte, Accenture, Shell, SAP,... the San Antonio Spurs, the Dallas Cowboys Golf Club, the Washington Capitols, and the Chicago White Sox. (from his site where you can learn more: [OverAchievement.com](http://OverAchievement.com))

### About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson is a lover of wisdom (aka a "Philosopher") and a passionate student of life who's committed to inspiring and empowering millions of people to live their greatest lives as he studies, embodies and shares the universal truths of optimal living. He harts his job.