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## **Are You Shackled by Perfection?**

By Cary Mullen

Last week, a friend of mine, Gary Brook, asked me a strange question. His question was, “Cary, you have spent most of your life training hard with an intense focus on international ski racing – sorry for my blunt question, but why didn’t you win a World Cup earlier in your career?”

While it seems crazy to think that I could have actually achieved my goal sooner, I knew immediately that this was true. I thought about his question for a minute and replied, “Before I was able to win, I had to first understand what was holding me back from becoming a champion. There were two things and they were actually linked.

“The first was that I needed to learn to flow more and perform to the best of my abilities when it mattered most – on race day. I needed to quit trying so hard to force things on the day of a competitive event. I had to stop getting in my own way and instead enjoy the challenge.

“The second and most important thing that kept me from winning was not being aware of my beliefs that were actually holding me back.” Gary’s brow furrowed together as he interrupted me, asking, “Wait a second, how can a belief hold you back?” I told him, “Let me explain. I was surprised to discover that I had a limiting belief that everything needed to be exactly PERFECT for me to be able to win. Believe me, this little subconscious belief was a literal brick wall keeping me from victories. I had idealized ‘Winning’ to the extent that if one little thing went awry in my warm-up runs, I thought ‘I couldn’t possibly win now.’ I believed that if I wasn’t skiing perfect on every single training run that morning, then there was no way that I would win.” Gary was nodding his head now, beginning to understand how I had been shackled by perfection.

I continued to explain this belief to Gary. “First of all, the idea of ‘perfection’ is as impossible in ski racing as it is in most other areas in life. There are so many changing variables that require spur of the moment adjustments that it makes it truly impossible to be flawless. Which reminds me – our beliefs don’t need to make sense for us to still hold onto them. That belief of ‘needing to be perfect to win’ was not serving me well. I was carting around this impossible goal of being perfect – it was stressing the heck out of me!”

Gary was smiling and said “Trying to be perfect has never worked for me.” I replied “You know, the funny thing is that striving for perfection was actually good for me during training because I became more focused than my competitors were on mastering all of the individual variables that you need to win a race. On race day though, trying to be perfect was hurting my performance because I was so afraid of making a mistake. Practice makes perfect, but competing is not about perfection – it is about performing at your best. Once I became aware of this belief, I was able to look at these situations more

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objectively. I looked ahead and realized that if I continued to need everything to be 'perfect,' I was never going to win."

"I began the process of changing this belief. I realized that on race day, it didn't matter if something went wrong in the warm up or the training runs: there were only two minutes that mattered! (Because most downhill ski races take less than two minutes to complete.) Once I was able to look at this limiting belief from a new perspective. I was able to start to train myself to race freely on race day. It was truly liberating to finally free myself of this self-induced weight that I had been carrying around. The stress lifted like a piano being taken off my shoulders and I felt free and light. I was no longer restricted by my fear of making a mistake. Instead, I was energized by knowing that with all of my preparation, my best would be enough – I didn't need to try to be more than who I was. By adopting some new 'Winning Beliefs' such as 'I strive for success, rather than perfection,' I was able to accelerate up the ranks and win numerous national and international titles, including winning the World Cup in Aspen, Colorado."

Gary asked me "How about the World Cup race – did you ski perfectly then?" "No, I made a few mistakes. That's what's funny. Perfection is an impossible standard. It is a helpful ideal to strive for in practice, but an unrealistic standard in performance." I went on to tell Gary that becoming aware of the beliefs that kept me from winning in competitive sport was just the beginning. I explained, "Since then, I have discovered other beliefs that have held me back from success in other areas of my life. Take my financial goals for instance. I wanted to make more money. After examining my beliefs about money, I realized that deep down I believed that 'The more money I make, the busier I am and the more responsibility I have to manage.' Once I was aware that I believed this, I began a process of changing how I thought about money. I imagined how hard my life would be with no money at all. I began to see how my life was actually easier having more money. I started looking for proof in my own life of the opposite truth: that more money would mean a more carefree life and an easier life. For instance, I could change the oil in my car, clean my house or mow the lawn or I could pay someone to do these things and spend those hours with my kids instead. Money allows me to go on vacations and allows me to hire people to do many of the things that I don't enjoy. I formed a new 'Winning Belief' that I read each morning as part of my daily routine that 'The more money I make, the easier my life gets.' My income doubled in the next year. I am sure that there were numerous variables that impacted my success that year, but a core belief that said 'more money makes life more difficult' compared to 'the more money I make, the easier my life gets' made a significant difference in my ability to attract and accept money." Gary looked deep in thought and said, "I wonder what beliefs I'm carrying around that are holding me back?"

As I write this, I can't help but wonder which of your beliefs are keeping you from being even more successful in your life? Identifying your limiting beliefs is a technique you can use to improve all areas of your life, from finances, relationships, sales, leadership, parenting, health, fitness, sleep – virtually anything. Unless you are already achieving everything you want in life, I urge you to take a moment and look inside and ask

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yourself, What beliefs are holding me back from achieving more of the results that I want? What beliefs would help me succeed even more?

**P.S. Leave perfection to the gods and go for success!**

Conquer doubts, lunge through fears and find focus,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cary', with a stylized, flowing script.

"Olympian, World Cup champion, real estate developer and author of *HOW to WIN*, Cary Mullen was recently recognized by Successful Meetings Magazine as one of the Hottest Speakers of the Year. For Cary's winning tools or speeches, call 1-866-236-2279 or visit [www.carymullen.com](http://www.carymullen.com)."