

Making a Great Performance: A step-by-step guide

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Introduction

A lot of factors that go into a performance; the moment we start to learn our craft we are developing and refining our skills in order to perform well. And although the stage, camera, or spotlight might scare us, it can also help inspire us to greatness if we have the proper preparation and mindset. I examine the many stages and steps that are involved with making a great performance- from before you even know what you want to perform, to moving onto your next performance.

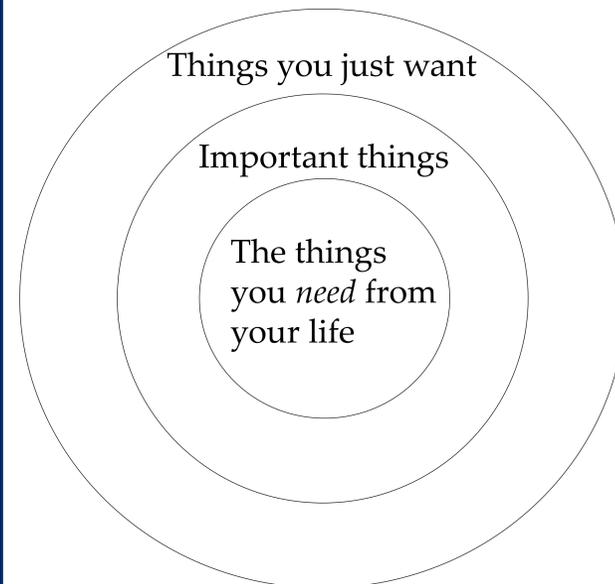
Preparation

I feel that this is the most important part of having a great performance. You can completely conquer your stage fright and have no fear up there, but without having your performance down pat it won't matter.

The absolute first thing you need to do, before you really decide on anything is figuring out what you want to do. It doesn't have to be absolute, but you want some kind of framework of goals to work off of. The method that I found the most success with is called the "bubble" method (See up and to the right) and then making a sort of outline of goals with each goal being divided into even smaller goals.

While practicing, it is important to stay positive; yelling at yourself is almost never the answer. One technique of practice that I absolutely advocate is a process where you set a goal that's attainable within the next 30-45 minutes, accomplishing it, and then taking a break of about 10 minutes. Letting your brain and body get a break and splitting up the monotony of a task is critical to continued success over longer periods of time.

"Bubble" Method



Myelin and Practice

Whenever you perform an action you send an electrical signal through your nerves from your brain to your muscles. Every time you perform a specific action, "myelin," a set of proteins, wraps around those specific nerve fibers and allows the signal to move through them faster the next time you perform that action, this is what we are actually referring to when we say "muscle memory,"



therefore *nothing can replace the time spent practicing.*

Myelin is also a living tissue and does degrade over time, especially if left unused or hurt by excessive drinking/drug use.

Performance

When you wake up on the day of your performance the first thing you should do is take a big breath, one that fills your lungs up and has your stomach sticking out, and then just sigh it all out. Remember that if you prepared well then you have what is needed to make a great performance.

As you walk towards wherever you are performing, the adrenaline starts to kick in, but this can actually be beneficial for your performance. A way of harnessing this energy that I've found useful is called "centering" (see below).

Periodically check in with yourself throughout your performance; pick specific spots where you will check yourself. You can do a quick centering in your performance, or just release tension. At this point, do not worry about mistakes, in fact, *do not even think about mistakes.* I know it may be difficult, but it is crucial to performing beautifully in the moment.

Centering

1. While standing or sitting, pick a point below eye level.
2. Mentally say the action you'll do.
3. Close your eyes and focus on breathing.
4. Scan your body for and then release tension.
5. Find your center (a little below the belly button in the middle of your abdomen).
6. Focus on your phrase from 2.
7. Open your eyes and focus your energy at the point from 1.

Reflection

The day after the performance, run through it in your mind, and evaluate how it went, see where mistakes may have happened, but also think about all the moments that went great. A piece of advice I like is to count the notes you played right, not the ones you played wrong. Evaluate yourself and determine if you did well or if you did poorly. If it wasn't a good performance, just say it out loud, you'll be surprised at how easy it is, but if it was a great performance, say that out loud too.

Take a moment and evaluate everything you gained by doing the performance, whether you "won" or not. Think about the experience and skill you gained in your chosen method of performance and of the opportunities you may gain by the performance. Remember that even if you "failed," you still gained just as much as you had the day before the performance. *The results of a performance don't diminish the work done before it.*

Find your next performance, the thing you need to do next to work towards your overarching goals. Commit to it and shift your focus to making it happen. Don't let mistakes you made in a performance haunt you and keep you from further success.

Final Remarks

Remember that these are (mostly) suggestions; they're things that work for me. What I really want you to take away from this is a toolkit that you can use throughout your whole life in order to find success in any performance you may do. Take these things with you, use them, figure out what you like, and make great performances.