

Refining Performance



Refining performance is something we all do all of the time; however, understanding how we do this is crucial for anyone who wants to achieve their peak performance, or to fully recover from a stroke or traumatic brain injury



We can define refined performance as: honing or improving upon performance, where impurities or unwanted elements have been removed and everything else upon has been improved upon to a point of precision.

My work has me working with a wide variety of people:

- kids who struggle in school or with developmental issues
- kids who have cognitive issues as a result of traumatic brain injury or other injuries or illnesses

- adults who have suffered historically struggled with the same issues kids struggle with
- adults who have suffered a traumatic brain injury, stroke, who have dementia or who have cognitive issues because of any other reason
- athletes and other high achievers, who are looking for a way to get the edge over their competition

Before I do anything with anyone, I need to determine where they are at and this is where a solid understanding of visual perceptual performance is incredibly useful. That understanding of visual perceptual performance allows me to go to the core of anyone's performance and quickly see if and where it has broken down and, to then, correct any issues and then refine performance.

Fundamentally, we have to have such a process in place, regardless of who I am working with. It should be very apparent that attempting to improve upon someone's performance, without knowing what their core levels are, is an absolute fool's game. However, the reality is that most of what is done in this world on remediating and refining performance only ever amounts to swanning around on the surface of the pond, with no understanding of what exists below the surface. And yet, when we do go beyond contemporary practices we suddenly find a vast capacity to transform the performance of most people, and with that, to transform lives as well.

We are all constantly refining performance

Since the day we were born, we have all been refining our performance. Even those who struggle developmentally are still refining our performance. If we weren't, we would never develop the capacity to do anything at all and would remain in a static never-evolving space. However, the question is not about whether or not we are refining our performance, but rather, it is a matter of how we do this, and what stands in the way of our doing this and becoming masters in our life.

For me, it's always been about how we do what we do and what can and does go wrong, but I just happen to have looked beneath the surface of the pond and now understand human performance in a much deeper way. This allows to me to work with my clients on a level which is entirely new to most and achieve outcomes that are transformative.

The core of our performance lies hidden away from most of us. When we look out on the world or look at someone performing a task, I call this the 'front loaded' perspective, because we never get to see beyond the surface of what we are observing, from this perspective. This is very much like starting down the barrel of a gun, to find out how a bullet is being fired; but finding that the bullet is in the way. However, once our perspective has shifted and changed, we are able to see into the more subtle realms of performance and then, we not only realise the

futility of what we were attempting to do, we also realise most of what we thought was so real was only ever an appearance of the deeper and more subtle things we are now seeing.

In order to facilitate a shift in perspective, I often ask people to look to their experience of doing something, and to see if they can work out how they are actually doing it. I'm actually being a bit duplicitous in suggesting people attempt to find their answers in doing this, because we aren't actually able to do this from this perspective. Even when I look to my experience of performing a task, I can't see how it is being generated or performed. But this exercise does highlight one habitual tendency – when we don't know something, we will think the answers up.

If we are honest when we perform this exercise, our answer will be, "I have no idea how I am doing this." But it is far more common, upon coming up empty, for people to jump into their minds and begin an intellectual analysis of the task at hand. However, such analysis only ever leads into conceptual task performance, where we are thinking our way through a task. In doing this, we lose the harmonious, spontaneous and fluid performance that is inherent within integrated task performance – just try thinking your way through walking and you will see what I mean. Such analysis may be useful if we only ever want to glance fleetingly at human performance, but if we actually want to understand how we do what we do, it's a complete and utter waste of time.

However, our world has a love affair with intellectual analysis and the world of ideas it generates. The world is full of such stuff and a staggering number of myths and fantasies that most of us believe with absolute certainty. It seems that most of us are quite happy to believe what others tell us, often because it sounds so great, without ever questioning it or looking outside the box. Simply looking at what we are doing and realising that we have no idea how we are doing it, is a fantastic place to begin. And, resisting the temptation to imagine or think the answers up is also a truly useful thing to do. As soon as we accept that we simply do not have the answers we seek, we can begin going beyond the maddening crowd, and discover that the reality of what is actually going on here is far more interesting and profound, than anything any of us could ever think up or imagine, regardless of how much 'research' went into it.

Practice, on its own, is never enough

Have you ever had the experience of attempting to do something and discovering that you just could not do it? Most of us have probably had such an experience. Maybe it was playing the piano, where we found we could bang a few keys, but our 'playing' was never going to amount to anything, regardless of how much we practiced.

This belief in practice is a great example of how we can believe in something without question, yet all the while considering it to be real, actual and true. This

belief in belief is very widespread and insidious. I recall listening to a radio interview on the topic of healing the brain after stroke or traumatic brain injury, which demonstrated how unquestioned belief is so often passed off as fact.

Now, there is no doubt about it that medicine has made great progress in healing brain trauma and minimising the impact of things such as scaring. However, when the interviewer asked the neuroscientist what a person would have to do, in order to regain function after the brain had been healed, his response that they would just have to practice, just as he did if he wanted to improve upon something in his life.

The reality is that such ideas have absolutely no validity and, if they did, we would not have legions of kids struggling in school and not improving, or the countless adults with stroke or traumatic brain injury, who do not improve upon their performance, regardless of how much 'practice' they do. Ultimately, I know there is a massive gap between what the neuroscientists are doing and the understanding of when our functionality arises from; and that gap is going to continue to remain, as long as this superficial perspective is maintained, and we continue to unquestioningly believe what others tell us – especially those who seem to be really intelligent or who have lots of letters after their names.

The reality is this: if we cannot do something, no amount of practice is ever going to change this; and, it is not until we begin to understand functional performance, what this is and where it arises from, that we will stop torturing people by expecting them to do the impossible.

Our ability to do anything at all always comes down to our functional capacity and we must determine this in a meaningful way, in order to find the point where the client is at and we can begin working with them. If we do not do this we will only ever be working with that person from an arbitrary place, usually one where we have assumed, despite all appearances to the contrary, they should be able to perform. Really, it is no wonder that one of the largest demographics in our prisons is people who struggled in school. These practices can and do immeasurable psychological and emotional harm.

Fundamentally, it doesn't matter how we want to rationalise current practices in education and in rehab around the world, they are incredibly 'front loaded' and they get the limited results they do, because of this. In order to refine performance, we must go beyond current practices and understand the origins of human performance.

Core Performance

How we generate our performance is a truly remarkable process and, if we think about it, it has to be a pretty simple or easy thing to do, because babies can do it.

However, we need to have some fundamental and basic skills, abilities and processes in place in order to A.) Perform; and, B.) Improve upon that performance and refine it.

My moment of realisation in 1996, opened up a whole new world to me. Not only did I realise that rehab therapies had totally missed the mark in identifying where any client was at, it was also obvious to me that the complexity or difficulty of a task was entirely dependent upon how much information it contained.

When I talk about information I am usually talking about sensory information and sensory information is the stuff our worldview is comprised of. We need to be able to take in all information available to us, and to make sense of it and this is important because any and all performance we generate in this world is generated on the basis of what we have perceived. If there is information missing from what is perceived, there will be gaps in our worldview and, those exact same gaps will show up in our task performance.

It is because of this that it is possible to look at someone's task performance and understand what is going on for them, but we cannot do this to any useful degree unless we understand how we make sense of the world and generate that worldview. The relationship between perception and performance is intensely intimate and entirely reciprocal. Whatever skills, abilities and processes we are utilising to create our worldview and are also being utilised reciprocally, to generate any and all actions in the world.

Not the contemporary understanding of human performance would have us believe that we have 6 areas of performance – neurological, cognitive, physiological, psychological, social and emotional - and that we have different skills abilities and processes contained within each of these areas. But this is not actually true. All performance arises from the exact same point and the exact same skills, abilities and processes are utilised in absolutely everything that we do and are scaffolded together throughout absolutely everything we ever do. However, we must truly understand the layering or scaffolding affect inherent within our performance, in order to begin to understand the magnitude of what is going on here.

Within our performance exist patterns, upon patterns, upon patterns of performance.

When we act in or on the world, this always occurs on the basis of what we have perceived ie: action occurs in response to perception. Perception is the process by which we:

- Engage with a field of undifferentiated sensory information
- Form inter-relationships or connections between the individual pieces of sensory information we have received via our senses
- Causing patterns of information to coalesce or come together as the objects we perceive and name.

The naming of objects is not a part of perception, it is a function of mind and this marks a point of demarcation between, what is our experience of life (which we perceive), and what we think about our experience.

Perception is experiential and, it is critical that we remain in these experiential states (rather than jumping to mind) and to remain aware as we do so, if we want to refine our performance to the greatest degree.

Our performance is also generated and refined as an experience, and it has a deeply intimate and reciprocal relationship to perception. However, **performance cannot be refined independently of perception; it can only be refined by refining perception**, because action follows occurs as a consequence of perception.

AND **perception cannot be refined independently of performance**, because our performance (actions in and on the world) changes the landscape of our perceptions.

In perception: we are taking sensory information in, processing it (forming inter-relationships) and integrating it (forming patterns of information.)

In performance: we are generating integrated patterns of task performance (by forming inter-relationships and constructing patterns of performance) and enacting them in and on the world.

As the information in our environment changes, it must be perceived so that we can respond to it appropriately, consequently an ongoing chain of performance is established, of perception leading to action or performance, which impacts on perception, which impacts on performance.

All refined performance is by nature integrated performance and is spontaneous, instantaneous and highly accurate, efficient and effective and occurs without us ever thinking about it. However, the very thing that has the greatest capacity to disrupt our performance is our mind and its incessant thinking. Developing the means of co-existing with mind and thought, without resisting or going to war with it, is crucial in truly refining performance

The following is an outline of the interplay which exists between perception and performance and how this impacts on the results we achieve.

The quality of our performance is entirely dependent upon the volume of sensory information we can process and integrate in any one moment. The more complex

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or demanding a task is, the more sensory information it contains.

Any sensory information left out of our perceptual performance will be left out of any and all task performance, with our overall performance diminishing as a consequence.

Any diminishment in perceiving will equate with a diminishment in performance.

CONVERSELY,

Any refinement in perception equates with a refinement in performance.

The more sensory information we can effectively and efficiently process, the more effective and efficient our performance becomes.

The level of our performance and its refinement comes down to the volume of sensory information we can process in any one moment. Any disruption in perception, regardless of cause, will always result in a decline in performance. It's really very simple, if you can increase the volume of sensory loading you can deal with in any moment, whilst remaining aware, calm, attentive, open and allowing, then performance will improve relative to this. There are two aspects required to do this:

1. Ensuring the core skills of both perceptual performance and integrated task performance are intact and fully functional.
2. Increasing the capacity to process large volumes of sensory information, and developing the capacity to remain aware, calm, attentive, open and allowing at all times ie; allowing our innate capacities to do what they do best and getting ourselves out of the way.

It is only by engaging with our performance at the subtle level it arises from that we can begin to understand how we do what we do and to modify this. All that science and research can never replace our own awareness of our own experience, and we see this in the truly great performers – calm, relaxed, intensely focused and aware.

In working at these subtle levels, the role of coach, trainer or specialist is to keep us on track, assisting us to be aware of our



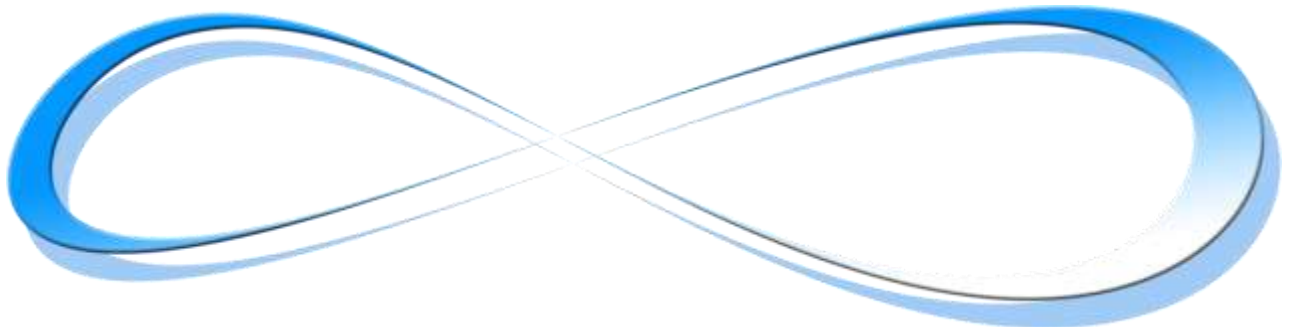
blind spots, when we are avoiding something, when we can change or improve upon something, and providing the means of addressing these things as they

arise. However, I work with a lot of people, who have are attempting to manage, control, contain or avoid their experiences and it is obvious this doesn't work for them. It may have worked in the beginning but, ultimately, it is the same as blocking up the safety release valve on a gas tank; the pressure is only going to keep on building until it makes itself known in no uncertain circumstances, usually disrupting our performance at the very moment we don't want this to happen.

While the core of our performance may reside within our perceptual performance, our psychological and emotional status has the greatest capacity to disrupt it all, before anything else ever does and it becomes incredibly important to understand how the dynamic of our humanness is actually formed, so we can address these issues at their inception.

I am acutely aware that diminishment in physical performance often occurs, because we are attempting to bypass the consequence of a psychological or emotional pattern held in the body. These patterns result in contractions and constrictions, meaning the full physical capacity cannot be accessed or utilised. It also means that injuries are far more likely to occur in these areas. I've seen the consequences of clients attempting to avoid their inner states in most areas of life. Those that do the best in improving upon performance are the ones who can become as Zen Masters. Awareness is the key; become aware of what you are doing and how, and what is disrupting performance

Do this at a very subtle level, and change is inevitable.



Reciprocity, Perception and Performance

Our performance exists in chains. All chains have an origin (in perceptual performance), are comprised of various links and express themselves in the world by way of the actions we perform. That performance we see is the consequence of an emergent process, arising from the point at which we are perceiving this world and everything in it, and cumulating in the actions we take as a result.

What we are seeing in the performance of those everyday tasks, is the consequence of layer upon layer upon layer of sensory information, interwoven with some very specific skills, abilities and processes, scaffolded together as our task performance. Added to this, is the reality that everything we do right now is



consequence of absolutely everything we have ever performed previously and how we have refined this.

Our task performance is the cumulation of what we perceive, interwoven with the refinement of every movement and action we have generated from the moment of birth and beyond.



Walking and running began with the first kick of our leg, as a foetus in the womb and it has never left us; it was only ever added to. Walking or running did not occur in isolation, nor are they just a simple action. They are the consequence of considerable refinement of performance over time, scaffolded together to a phenomenal amount of sensory information and experience.

Our performance is constructed of fractals, layer upon layer of different levels of performance; and, permeating throughout all these levels, are the same fundamental skills, abilities and process. The origin of our performance is always the same, it does not change over time. The only variance is the faculty of performance, through which the end result is expressed eg; running, talking, writing, skiing, etc.

The most primary of these skills remains the ability to form inter-relationships between pieces of sensory information. It allows us to construct the objects we perceive and it allows us to make sense of this relative world of ours ie: how objects relate to one another, distance, orientation, speed, height, etc.

The natural consequence of forming inter-relationships is that patterns of information then coalesce out of an undifferentiated sensory soup. The world we see is the consequence of the patterns within patterns within patterns within patterns we have constructed. Just look at the trees in the distance. As we move closer we begin to discern individual tree tops. The closer we get, the more defined the patterns become and we can identify trunks, branches, leaves and flowers. Without our capacity to form inter-relationships none of this would happen.

In everything we do and every action we take, there is a very clear process involved:

- We are taking sensory information,
- processing it (forming inter-relationships) and,
- constructing patterns out of it (integrating that information and perceiving objects)
- and then acting upon this.

All actions we ever perform also require:

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- the formation of inter-relationships,
- allowing the patterns of movements to coalesce
- allowing the action to be performed

Perception and performance are so intimately linked that it is impossible to separate them, and yet, one comprises of processing sensory information coming in, and the other is all about generating integrated task performance going out.

Refinement becomes the process of improving upon those processes of perception and performance, and on increasing the capacity of those processes to deal with very high volumes of sensory information, without collapsing under the loading.

The only difference between the elite athlete and their capacity to deal with sensory loading, and the child struggling at school and their capacity, is whether or not the basic skill structure is intact and fully functional. When the basic perceptual capacity is damaged, the capacity to deal with sensory loading is naturally diminished and we go into sensory overload. However, the athlete who becomes overwhelmed in moments of high sensory loading is also going into sensory overload; and it is not just sensory information that can do this but all felt experiences including pain and our psychological and emotional responses.



Ultimately, the refinement of performance involves sending clients into a controlled degree of sensory overload. Perceptual performance must be challenged enough to require it to respond and adapt. If a client does not come out of a session feeling like their brain has been in a blender, they have not been challenged enough.

Because our focus is on the client becoming aware of what is going on in every moment of their performance, there is an inherent requirement that they are also aware of their psychological and emotional states at all times, and are able to apply some specific techniques when their responses are provoked. Everything must be working in harmony, because of that potential that our psychological and emotional state will send us into sensory overload. We need to understand how crucial it is to be aware of all felt experiences at all times, no matter how much we may not like them, and understand exactly how they disrupt our performance.

In the end, it doesn't matter who I am working with, it is all about refining performance with everyone. We begin by ensuring the mechanisms by which we process and integrate sensory information, and by which we generate integrated task performance, are intact; and we then go on to challenging these systems in

ways that increase the capacity to process high volumes of sensory information, while performance increases at the same time.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter who you are, what went wrong for you or how long ago this happened. [The Visual Perceptual Therapy](#) is available all around the world via Skype and it allows us to improve upon the performance of just about everyone; and to do so very quickly. If you have a neurological cognitive based disorder and are wondering if something can be done to improve upon your performance, the first step is to book an appointment for an initial consultation. These consultations also occur via Skype and allow us to discuss your situation fully and advise you appropriately.

You can make an appointment here

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*Welcome to my world, the world of visual perceptual
performance*

*Natoya Rose
Occupational Therapist*

