

# Tim Gallwey

And Michael Mendizza

M: What is the inner game?

T: If you have external skills but have enough fear and doubt that you can't express them or express them in moments of pressure, they don't do you much good. The inner game is overcoming inner obstacles that stand in the way of a person discovering and expressing their capabilities, themselves. The outer game has to do with overcoming external obstacles to reach an external goal. The inner game and outer game are related.

When the Inner Game of Tennis was published in 1974, athletes didn't talk much about the mental side of things except for some rare examples. Sports psychology was not a field that people went into. Eastern European nations were dabbling in it and using it with their Olympic athletes. Since then, there has been more interest. People are expressing different points of view about the optimal mindset for excellence in sports, learning, physical conditioning, and mental conditioning.

M: What was the inspiration that pointed to the inner game?

T: I was an educator and went to graduate school to study change and higher education. Basically, I found out it didn't change. So, my career was in question. I took a year off and started teaching tennis. I'd been well taught in the traditional school, where to put the feet, the racket, etc. There was a particular lesson where I turned a corner. It was with a man who had a well-known bad habit, a high back swing that is not easy to change. He cut down on the ball instead of hitting up. I was tired and a little bored so I was just tossing balls.

Then a strange thing happened. His racket began to lower before I did any teaching. My reaction to seeing this was a conversation in my head. "Darn, I missed my chance." The chance I missed was to be the one that taught him to do that so that I would get the credit. The next second the inner game started. I asked myself the question, "I wonder what would happen if I were more committed to learning than I was to teaching?" I started being interested in how students learn not how well I can teach. This led me to wonder what's going on inside their heads when the balls are coming. It became obvious that a lot is going on, a lot of instructions, a lot of judgments, a lot of worries and concerns, which is not the kind of environment that produces either learning or excellence in performance.

Even at that time, everybody knew that when top athletes were asked what's going on in your mind during moments of peak performance, they said, not much. If anything, they say, "I don't think about it until it's over." I realized that the student's mind was concerned and worried about being judged right or wrong.

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The idea of doing it right was initiated by myself. I understood that I contributing a great deal to what was getting in the student's way. I wondered how much I could allow the student to learn with me teaching as little as possible. I never dreamed that the answer to that question was a great deal. Without technical instructions, I could teach students, who have never played before, how to play tennis in twenty minutes. They would play the game and have rallies of ten or fifteen balls and would never go through the frustrations and self-condemnations and judgments of other students. This person would look like he has played for six months.

M: We have instruction and we have modeling. How do these two fit into your paradigm of the inner game?

T: First we have a tradition in instruction, using formulas to picture the desired outcome and second we have models, people who embody the desired outcome. The second is better than the first and both, as they tend to be used, seem to undermine the individual's confidence. The message communicated is that there is some external form, whether it's in a formula or the way another person is that you should be like, like fitting something into a mold.

There is another view, that how a person grows, what they will become, is already within and it grows more like a plant or a tree, which one would never want to force into a particular model. This view has been missing from our educational system for a long time.

Formula instruction tend to carry a fear of being judged. The right way to do it is recognized from an external source. The parent or coach tells you when you did it right and when you didn't do it right. Modeling is better because it's a visual picture, but it's usually misused. A beginner tennis player or athlete in any field is told to look at the best and do it like that. That would be like telling an acorn to do it like an oak tree. Acorns shouldn't do it like an oak tree. An acorn should do it like the first stages of an oak tree and not do actually what the advanced oak tree does yet. Learning is an evolutionary thing, a process.

Many average golfers think that they have to swing the club the way the professional does, but the professional didn't swing it that way to begin with. Often this part is missing; the natural evolution of learning. A more serious issue is the subtle undermining of a person's faith in their own natural learning process and an increasing faith that they, out there, know what's best. Rightfully used however, modeling and formulas can be useful if they're not used to replace the student innate learning process, then they can be aides to that student in any sport or skill.

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M: with parenting, education and coaching as it is, how is it that any of us develop a true sense of self-confidence?

T: Can an individual in a culture that undermines self-confidence find a way through it?" I think the answer is yes. But probably only with the aid of some other person, probably an adult, a coach, a teacher, or a parent who has seen through the "games that are being played" in the name of education and excellence in sports. This adult who has seen through the myth can create a context or an environment that can help the child understand that there is an alternative and can help the child as he or she grows, to see through the myth themselves.

I'm reminded by an interview with Jennifer Capriotti at 15 years old. At the time she was already a very good player and was beginning to play against some of the world's best players in tournaments. While being interviewed by the press, they asked her if she got nervous when she was playing Steffi Graf or Martina. She said, "no, I don't get nervous." The press couldn't believe that. So they asked again. "You're playing the great players of the world." She said, "yes, it's a privilege. I don't often get to play against people that much better than me and I get to do that here. It's nothing to be scared about. It's something to be desired." Still the press didn't believe her. "You're playing against them, in tournaments with TV cameras are on you, and the crowd is there, admit it, you must feel the pressure. You must feel nervous." Jennifer just looked at them with a great deal of innocence and said, no, I don't, and I don't see why if I did why I would.

I don't think I'd ever heard that coming out of a tennis player's mouth of any age and I recognized it as healthy. I also remembered noting I wonder how long she can last and stand up against the various kinds of social pressures that are going to be on someone with that kind of talent? It wasn't too long, but it showed for some time that it was possible. Maybe if someone had been with her to guide her through that, it could have lasted even longer.

M: You wrote the inner game almost twenty years ago and have been looking at these issues for a long time.

T: The basic issues of the inner game haven't changed other than by degree. When I was fifteen and ranked seventh in the country never once did it occur to me that I might earn money doing this. The trophy was good enough. I remember being in conflict when my coach told me, Tim I'm not sure you have the killer instinct. I knew he thought that was a bad thing. The way he phrased it created a conflict that stayed with me. I remember beating a player who was eighteen and I was fifteen. We were playing in the eighteen and under tournament and I was playing well, I guess the pressure was off and he wasn't playing so well because

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the pressure was on. It was much more humiliating for him to lose than it was for me and I happened to win. My dad came out of the stand and slapped me on the back and said that a boy Tim, you killed him. Followed by my mother coming out of the stands and saying poor Bobby Smith, he must feel terrible and there it was, the idea that something really got lost, in a tennis match.

It is not unusual to go to a golf course like Pebble Beach and have surgeons who do very delicate surgery on human brains literally shaking over a five-foot downhill putt. If you ask them why, they'll say well this is a very difficult putt, it's downhill, it's breaking. What happens if you miss? Then he gets a little bit less certain and says well, my score you know, I'll get a double bogie, or I'll get a bogie, or my handicap will change or I'll lose my \$5.00 bet. How much did you pay to play on the course? Well \$250.00. Why is the hand shaking?

If you probe and probe it gets down to "how I feel about myself." If I miss that putt that I know I'm capable of making, I'm not going to feel very good about myself. My self-esteem is going to go down a notch, which is something that makes the surgeon nervous. Evidently his self-esteem isn't at stake when he's doing the brain surgery because his hand doesn't tremble. It's no different than the experience almost everybody has playing games where they feel something's at stake and they don't quite know what.

I ask businessmen, is golf a pressure filled game? Yes. It is. Tell me where's the pressure? I've read the rules of golf and it says you hit a ball with a stick until it goes into a hole and you count the number of times you've swung and add them up and put them on a score card. The question is, is there pressure in golf? The pressure does not exist in the game. It is absolutely not necessary to have pressure and yet there is almost universal pressure experienced by people playing it.

I think this is an important distinction to make, that the game or the sport itself is not the thing that's causing the heightened inner obstacles of doubt and pressure, but what I call the game going on while people are playing the game. The importance of seeing that distinction is then you can still allow yourself to enjoy the game of golf or tennis if you realize that you do not have to play the game that's causing the doubts and the fear and the self-esteem being on the line.

M: We all seem to suffer from the same problem, a myth. The culture is based on comparison and contests are held to insure that everyone is trapped in the net. What would help a young person moving into that culture, who is confronting and dealing with those kinds of pressures, see through them?

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T: The goal for me is to create individuals who are truly independent. We live in a land that was born with the idea of independence, but I'm not sure we have gained much independence from the way we think. In some areas, such as college, you're required to criticize various traditional thought patterns. The unhidden, unwritten culture of the university itself is rarely criticized.

I think it's just something every individual has to learn, usually with the help of someone else who has learned it, who is, to an extent, free. I've heard Michael Jordan speak a few times, strongly expressing, I do this for the fun. I do this for the enjoyment. People then say poo-poo and say he's doing it for the money and the fame. I look at him and I say he takes advantage of those things. He doesn't turn down the money, but it looks to me like he's having fun. Then people think, maybe it's just fun if you're the best. But a lot of people who are the best in their sports aren't having that much fun. I think those priorities have to get set very early.

M: When we're really learning something, do we have those internal handicaps going on, or does learning literally play into another state that's free of this self-doubt? Is there an inner game while we're really playing, or only when the state of real play has stopped?

T: If you watch a child build a castle, he or she is not dismayed when it falls down. They just start building again. Something inside knows the point wasn't to have accomplished the building, but to have fun building it and to discover what was learned in the process, which can't be articulated at that moment. This kind of play gets eroded in our organized system of education. It is still there in nursery school. In kindergarten there is a little less. By first and second grade play is really a waste of time. We have recess between the important things.

My job is helping managers learn and not learn from training courses, but to learn from everyday experience. Corporation still think of work as something they do and that learning is something that happens in training sessions or in business school. They rob themselves of the best seminar in town, which is the eight or fourteen-hour day of actual relationships and interactions they experience each day. They think of themselves as doers, performers. What they miss is the fact that it doesn't take any more time to learn while they are performing.

As a beginning tennis pro, when you ask what people want to learn playing tennis or playing golf, they want forehands, backhands, serves, volleys, and strategy, that's it. I always thought there are more important things to learn while you're learning tennis like focus of attention, concentration, and confidence. Why are those more important? Because you can use them on the court and off the

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court. There's much more leverage. Where are you going to use a backhand in everyday life? Something as obvious as that is missing. It's not valued. You don't come home saying, "I really took a step in my ability to focus attention." Even those who do, perhaps great tennis players, don't use the same attention off the court, and yet they have that capability.

When people talk about results, they mean what did you produce? That's only one-third of the results of work. The other third is what did you learn while you were doing what you were doing and another third is how much did you enjoy doing whatever you were doing? Your time and your life, is that a result or not? Were you somewhere between misery and ecstasy? Yes I was somewhere. Did you evolve or devolve while you were doing it? These are built into our DNA. The question is, does the culture, the coach, the parent, or whoever is holding the context for these things, create this richer learning experience or do we just fall into whatever the cultural context happens to be?

M: With this in mind, what direction is the field of athletics is going? Do you feel it's healthy, especially for kids?

T: Obviously, the advent of media exploitation of athletics (I don't mean that in a bad way, just using it as entertainment programming) has raised the financial stakes of all those sports, which are currently deemed worthy of our attention. Salaries have skyrocketed. These salaries create ambitions and pressures.

I think one of the unhealthy things it creates is hundreds of thousands of individuals who dream that they could be earning in the millions, doing something they enjoyed like their sport when only five of them are going to. Yet, that's not readily apparent. Everyone dreams of going to Hollywood. Very few are able to do that. In trying to be one of these very few, people may fail to develop other skills and capabilities that are needed to provide a roof, a shelter, a family life, etc. It can be so compelling.

I talked to a lady yesterday whose daughter was training for the Olympic figure skating competitions. Her struggle is the same for all the people competing with her daughter. Mothers wake up at 4:00am to drive the daughter to practice from 4:00am to 8:00am so they can go to school and then there's more practice after school and everybody has to be there at every event. The whole family is totally organized around that one possibility. The other children are ignored, but they think, that's okay for us to be ignored because Susie has to win the Olympics and that's what we're doing as a family.

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Where athletics is going is probably still in that direction, but the real question is where will our understanding go? Will we wake up or not? I don't want to make it sound too dramatic but it really is a game.

It's great if some people can make some money that way, but it's not great to think that I'm a better person if I can. It's not great to think I'm not such a good person if I miss some tennis shots and strike out in pressure situations, that I form my identity around that.

When you say it that way, it's not hard for people to understand, but there's something important behind it. If I make self-worth the prize of doing well, I may not recognize that the fear of not doing well is going to make me fear the loss of self-worth. This is going to create fears that keep me from performing at my best, whether it's in academics or in sports.

The motivation, you see, is the thing I want to trade. The motivation they can get out of people by the fundamental illusion that how well you do has anything to do with your self-worth. I play with this and tell people, "if you want to get rid of the fear that goes with trying to prove your worth and the only person who can tell you that you won or lost the self-esteem game is you, then why not just declare yourself the winner now."

But they say, well how can I because...and I say if you want to base it on something, you can base it on the fact that you were breathing and that as long as you're breathing, then you've won the self-worth game. Because whatever is allowing me to breathe thinks it's okay for me to be here, so I win.

But don't base self-worth or being a good person because I'm smart, or because I have a certain amount in the bank, or a good family, because it will always be threatened.

To me the challenge for any coach is to help kids, adults, and parents see through the invented meanings that have been attributed to winning and losing. Then create a meaning with the player that makes more sense, that will allow them to benefit and be committed to the sport without getting involved in the false hopes and false failures. That's quite a challenge, but it's no different from the challenge we have in education or in business.

To me, those coaches who take that on not only stand to enjoy their job more but will bring a dignity to the profession that doesn't exist. Just to teach forehands and backhands is not as meaningful you could say as building character and even that may be second to helping a person really see through false hope and true hope, false failure and true failure. See through culture and be an individual. To be able to play their own game while others are playing theirs, without having

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to judge theirs. I believe that sports, whichever they are, have a great opportunity for that.

M: What are the obstacles that prevent us from taking on this challenge?

T: The initial barrier is that western culture is focused only on the outer game. Recently the inner game has become legitimate. I don't mean my inner game, but the inner game. Maslow, Rodgers and others in humanistic psychology made it legitimate for well people to be interested in their personal growth and development. A large part of the country thinks that's just what Californians do.

If you're looking for a doorway, you will have to find one acceptable to the culture. I found an easier doorway in business than I did in education. In business I could demonstrate and literally prove that they would end up with better performance and that's something they were interested in actually more than the educators. Educators didn't feel they had as much to gain from better performance as the business community.

M: Why was it more difficult for the academic community to apply this insight?

T: The business community has to increase profits. If there was a better way of learning, if coaching actually could heighten performance, they had something to gain. The benefits are less clear to the academic mind. Even with evidence, such as people like John Holt and Jaime Escolantie, who achieved great success in teaching calculus in Los Angeles schools to students who weren't doing well in algebra. He made a huge quantum leap in a commitment to excellence and to learning in that particular field and it became nationally known. No one could say they didn't know it happened, and it happened repeatedly, some thirteen years. I asked him if they had been beating his doors down to learn from him and learn how to replicate this because everyone knows that are behind in math and science. He said no. It's embarrassing for the other educators what Jaime did. I embarrassed golf pros and tennis pros. They did not like what I was doing. It was little threatening.

M: What is it about your work that runs so counter to the general momentum of the culture?

T: The question is, what stands in the way of natural learning and developing the individual as an individual? What stands in the way of even knowing oneself? What makes it so difficult? Often we say there are a lot of traditions in the way and that's true.

Much of corporate America is stepping back and examining their own culture and trying to learn how to make changes. Not many other professions are

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making that effort. Even those corporations who do make that effort, 90% fail because the leaders who see the value in doing this will not change themselves. So the question, what's so hard in the culture, is better asked, what's so hard in us?

Here's a specific example, an attorney, who came for a tennis lesson when I was first developing the inner game, wanted a more powerful serve. When I asked him how powerful his serve was right now, he said, there's no power in it at all. I told him I'd never seen a serve without power and asked him to show me? He was a short guy, very stocky and strong. When he served, every muscle in his body tightened to try to produce power and of course the ball came as close as possible to having no power, but I pointed out it did move.

In about twenty minutes, using some inner game methods, he was totally loosened up and had fluid, powerful serves that knocked tennis ball cans off the court. It was one of the biggest quantum leaps in a short time that I'd seen. The only thing that was strange is he didn't seem particularly pleased, leaving the court without really saying thank you. Three minutes after he had left, he came back and asked for a lesson on his backhand. This was very strange to me.

He came back the next week and I said before getting to work on your backhand, let's see how your serve has done over the week. With no resistance, he gets up and there was the same tight grimacing ineffectual serves. He served six balls like that. I said, what happened to that other serve you discovered last week? He clearly had forgotten it. He said these exact words, Tim, I need to be candid with you. I really didn't like that serve very much. I didn't feel I knew what I was doing. This serve may not be so powerful. It may not be so accurate but at least I know what I'm doing.

What makes it hard for us and for him is the part of us that can do our best. We don't know how we do it and we, for whom doing well is so important, want to know how we do it and want to feel in control. That alone will give us the security. That intelligence that does it really cannot be controlled by a conceptual mind that thinks it can learn how to do it. We can develop lots of information about how to do things, but we can't figure out how to go from that information back to the doing. Books are filled with how to hit a golf ball, and if we knew how to go from the book to the doing, everybody would be playing great golf, but we don't. Maybe you can't go that way. Perhaps we must go from the doing of it to the explanation and the concept and maybe those concepts can help you, but you have to trust. Trust is something that human beings aren't terribly fond of. This trust in our innate intelligence and capacity is significantly undermined by culture.

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M: One could say that we have an increasingly unsafe culture. The culture is growing less secure, so it is increasingly difficult to trust.

T: That's what I meant by cultures undermining the trust. They undermine it by saying what's right is out there. What you want is all out there and who you are is really all out there. Then there's the fear that you may or may not get it, or you may or may not be as good as you're suppose to be. Those are very heavy fields that you have to prove something. The phrase that I used to hear a lot, "make something of yourself," imply that you're not something.

I'm very familiar with doubt and maybe the most serious level is ignorance, but a little bit after that is doubt in myself. Then from doubt comes fear of failure and fear of those circumstances that might show that maybe I'm not okay or not worth being here. Those are very heavy fears, dominated by judgment of good and bad, which are the primary educational tools used by the culture. That's a good way to do it. That's a bad way to do it. Those words are associated ultimately with eternal punishments, not just the consequences of the actions.

So there's plenty of fear floating around to make a person nervous which then becomes self-fulfilling. The fear creates doubt, the lack of confidence in the fear interfere with whatever capability is there. Look, see how many shots I missed. I don't know why. I guess I am bad, and that self-fulfilling cycle goes round and round. We've got to create pockets. Ultimately the individual has to do it him or herself, but if he or she wants to and is lucky enough to be around someone, a good coach or a good parent who can protect them against the forces of culture, a great service has been done.

Even in management it's the same thing. Maybe you're not going to change the corporate culture overnight, but any manager working with his team can create a pocket of culture that is safe enough for a person to take the kinds of risks that trust requires.

To really learn, two fundamental things are required: first is safety and next is challenge. If you have all challenge and no safety, you get stress and interference. If you have all safety and no challenge, you get boredom and no effort. The rule is, make it as safe as possible, safety comes first. Mother acceptance actually comes first, then father and then challenge comes next. There is a direct equation between inner safety and outer challenge. If it's really safe, you can meet very high challenges and not suffer as a result of your performance, your score. In my experience safety can be established in a matter of minutes. To sustain that safety and to allow that person to create it for him or herself, that takes ongoing effort. This isn't just an idea; it's something you have to do over and over again and that usually takes support.

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M: You mentioned techniques or tools that you have developed to help someone step into the inner game.

T: There is context, and there are tools. A context is something created in conversation between a person the coach, parent or mentor. This conversation centers on why I'm playing and what it means to win or lose or play badly or well. I don't call that a tool.

The basic inner game tools have to do with focus of attention. We found that if you told students to watch a ball, they'd still be tight. But if you told them to watch the pattern made by the seams of the ball, that focus was subtle enough they couldn't do it without letting go of some of the other mental activity. We would ask them to say bounce when the ball bounces, hit when it hits the racket and they would get somewhat focused and entranced in the rhythm which was a more interesting focus than just watching the ball. So the more compelling the focus, the easier it is for students to let go of the various structures of interference that may be plaguing them.

In the trust realm, one of the simplest tools I call "if." A person would tell me, I remember hitting a very defensive backhand like this. I said, if it weren't defensive, how would you hit it? He said, well, like this, and almost immediately he started hitting aggressive, forceful volleys. How would I ski this hill if I were aggressive? How would I hit this ball if I were confident? I've convinced myself I'm not something, but somehow self number one doesn't understand "if." If I weren't that way, how would I be? There are ways to bring out qualities that people think they're not.

The third method has to do with commitment or choice. Much of this is context, allowing the individual choice, and recognizing that I as coach am helping him get where he or she is going. I tell students that coach comes from the old ancient English word "coach," which was a vehicle, a carriage that took royalty or very important people from where they were to where they wanted to go. That's really what a coach is. He tries to create a vehicle that will help you get where you're going, not where the coach wants you to go. It's helping people to see where they want to go.

All of this is so simple and does not take great intelligence to understand. The barrier is then being willing to say; maybe I don't know something. The simplicity is a bit confronting to the part of the adult mind that wants to put on the air that they're grown up, that they know what they're doing, where they're going, and what it's all about. Let's confront it.

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I taught a banker once who was just trying too hard. I got him to not try hard and he played so well. He sat down on the court and started giggling. He said, I'm the youngest banker to reach Vice President and I've done it the way I played tennis and now I'm realizing, it's funny to me, how much easier it would have been. At stake is a person's doubt in his or her own effort. I've put all this into being somebody, so somebody else will say I am someone. The process is discovering all the resistance, and letting go of that so we can enjoy the process, not I will be someone if I win or lose.

M: You mentioned John Holt. What inspired about his views of learning?

T: The true nature of the educational beast revealed itself when Holt became a best selling author. Here we have an educator who in demand. The educational community started inviting him to all their speaking venues and for a couple of years that's almost all he did, thinking that he was going to have an impact. After two years nobody wanted to hear him anymore because they had heard him once and think they know everything he has to say. His whole economic foundation was cut out from under him and he moved into the then revolutionary state of home schooling.

Who's going to make the change? You can't expect the administrators to change. You can't expect the book publishers to change. The book publishers are controlled by state boards and panel committees. The teachers are controlled by the administrators. The only group who can bring about this change is the kids, but without someone there who has changed themselves, as I said, before, some adult who has seen through the false hopes and false failures attributed to winning and losing, the children have little hope of changing education. The system is set up to keep them so busy resisting the assaults on their integrity that they have little energy or attention left to do anything for education.

Touch The Future Interview With

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Tim Gallwey attended Harvard University where he majored in English Literature and captained the tennis team. He served as an officer in the US Navy and was one of the founders of a liberal arts college in the Midwest. Starting in the mid 1970's Tim Gallwey produced a series of best selling books, which set forth a new methodology for the development of personal and professional excellence in a variety of fields. For the last twenty years Gallwey has been introducing the Inner Game approach to corporations looking for better ways to manage change. Through lectures, consulting, and seminars, his focus has been directed at three targets, 1) helping all individuals in a company learn how to learn, and think for themselves, 2) helping managers learn how to coach, 3) helping leaders learn to create "learning organizations." His long-term clients have included AT&T, IBM, Arco, Anheuser Busch, Apple Computer, and The Coca-Cola Company. His newest professional interest is helping people who work in teams to learn how to work together more effectively.