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Dreaming of the Matrix and performance psychology.

The influence of Hollywood and other film companies is often to produce films which are exciting to watch, full of action, and heart pounding unrealistic scenes but have no other intrinsic value. From a purely generic point of view this movie may also fall into this category. But from a psychological point of view there is much to be learned from the Matrix. When we think of performance and how the mind affects our bodies this is a perfect example about our belief system and how it can change.

A brief summary of this science fiction film, if you don't remember, indicates that the human race is systematically being taken over by a cyber- universe which is taking control of every aspect of our existence. It depicts a dystopian future in which reality as perceived by most humans is actually a simulated reality called "the Matrix", created by sentient machines to subdue the human population, while their bodies' heat and electrical activity are used as an energy source. Neo; a computer programmer discovers the reality of this situation and is then drawn into this cyber world as an activist to fight this human domination.

While this science fiction portrayal of a cyber-takeover was pretty far out there for a 1999 movie, the psychology behind this battle was right on when it comes to human behavior and performance expectations. Morpheus, the leader of a human rebellion against this cyber takeover, recruits Neo, who he feels is the "One", or the "Chosen One". Neo becomes part of the rebellion and discovers that the physical realities of this new world can be bent, if he can just make his mind believe. Human abilities become super human. The problem with Neo is his mind is at first unable to believe what his body is capable of doing and fear locks him up during his training. Remember when Morpheus jumps from one building to another, but Neo can't seem to make himself believe it is possible? He jumps, consumed with fear, and falls short. He falls short because fear has decreased his physical response mechanism

causing him to tighten, rather than jump with a relaxed confident body.

While the mind and body are separate, they are connected. The mind is a very strong human mechanism. So strong that just thinking about an activity will create the proper muscles to fire without ever raising a finger to do it. So strong is the mind that the body cannot detect the difference of actually performing a skill or just thinking about performing that same skill.

Therefore a distracted mind creates a hesitant body. Often our background, how we were raised has an effect here as well. When we perform we don't want to let others down; parents, teammates etc. so our mind tells us how important this performance is, or that if we don't succeed there will be more negative ramifications to follow so we back off, become careful, we don't let our body loose to perform the skills as we have trained it too. Thoughts or actions that could be seen as risky are put away for a more conservative approach so that minimal damage occurs. The problem with this kind of thinking is that the opposite effect is most often the result, performance declines! GO FOR IT! And let the chips fall where they may.

Neo is a tough sell; he is unsure of these mind bending possibilities, therefore he hesitates over and over again. As he continues to train he begins to see what is possible and that he too, can achieve some of these out of body experiences and perform super human skills well. But at a major point in the movie Neo is faced with the enemy staring him down in a narrow hallway where he is shot, and presumed dead. His body can die in this world if he lets it, but he recognizes his power to overcome and rises back to his feet. Another flurry of bullets comes streaking his way only to be stopped in mid-air at the raising of his hand, and fall harmlessly to the floor. Neo now knows what kind of power he has over this cyber-world and the villains he faces. No more fear, Neo knows he is the chosen one.

Previous thoughts of failure disappear, only confidence shows through as he battles the obstacles in front of him. The legend of Neo is about overcoming self-limiting beliefs and letting your physical talent flow freely, un-interrupted, confident, and powerful, against all challengers. Does that mean you will always win, no, but knowing you are capable will always keep you in the "now", performing to the best of your ability.