Prepare. Perform. Learn. Return.

33 chapters. A plan for the whole performance cycle.

111 PAGES / 15 FIELD SHEETS / 52 WEEKLY PRACTICES

I The foundations of competing

01 Choose your arena
02 Know who you are beyond the result
03 Set goals that help you compete
04 Build confidence from evidence
05 Understand your performance loop

II Before the performance

06 Navigate discomfort without surrendering choice
07 Work with your nerves
08 Prepare your routine and rehearse the unexpected
09 Build more than one way forward
10 Step into the performance

III During the performance

11 Direct and redirect your attention
12 Lock in when your mind scatters
13 Let go when you are forcing it
14 Find your way through the grind
15 Learn to time travel
16 Bring controlled intensity
17 Regain composure when emotion takes over
18 Recover after a mistake

IV After the performance

19 Give the performance an ending
20 Review for learning and growth
21 Tell an honest and useful story
22 Return or move on with perspective

V Being coached and performing together

23 Take ownership of being coached
24 Give and receive useful feedback
25 Combine standards with care
26 Build belonging through real connection
27 Earn trust and repair what breaks
28 Get in sync with your people
29 Learn to decide and adapt together

VI Practice growth and the long game

30 Train the tools before you need them
31 Build consistency and allow recovery
32 Protect joy and keep exploring
33 Keep your striving tied to a worthy cause

PUT IT TO WORK

Field sheets for practice and performance
52 weekly practices + reading connections

STEVE MAGNESS

Companion to Step Into the Arena

PART III DURING THE PERFORMANCE

18 Recover after a mistake

Build a short reset that ends with doing the next useful thing.

Musician Martin Kerr developed tactics to deal with the chaos of performing. “A phone will go off, a baby starts crying, my guitar string breaks, or I’ll forget the words, and the natural reaction is to panic. You freeze thinking ‘oh no, what have I done,’ or you start thinking about how you’ve just ruined this show, and maybe your career.” Kerr’s solution? Bring himself back to the moment.

Kerr learned to perform at a farmers-market corner, a world of distractions. “There’d be generators humming, people shouting out prices, hecklers, you name it,” he told me. It was the perfect training ground for dealing with distractions and screwups. “The first thing I’ll do is close my eyes,” he said. “I don’t need to respond to most of the noise, even when I make a mistake. I need to play. If I can close my eyes and immerse myself in the song, it helps me focus on the beauty and purpose of what I’m doing.” But some things demand a response. If Kerr forgets the lyrics or a string breaks, he knows it’s not just him that lingers; it’s the audience, too. He pulls them back to the here and now with him. “I’ll often make a joke of it. Say something like, ‘So, we’re going to cut this part out of the video.’ Everyone laughs, then I know I’ve got them back with me, and we get on with it.” For Kerr, it’s straightforward: “When I can be immersed in that moment and really carried away by the song, it allows other people who are listening to do that as well.”

Create a reset ritual

When something goes wrong, we get dragged from the present, and we hesitate or lose our rhythm. I call this the post-mistake pause. You’re flowing along, then something unexpected occurs, and our brain pulls the handbrake— yanking our attention from the task and freezing us for a split second. And if we’re not careful, we can linger here. The governor, uncertain about what just happened, can spiral into threat mode. The pause becomes rumination. The rumination becomes catastrophizing. Research by psychologist Michael Inzlicht found that rituals quiet the alarm. They act as a buffer to the stress. It’s our signal to our governor: We’ve been here before. Stand down.

While many athletes use a pre-performance routine to get into the right state, fewer have a routine to follow when things go wrong. At the height of stress, we don’t want to be thinking about how to escape the spiral. We want a simple, “If…then” script for us to follow almost subconsciously. A basketball player I worked with called it his reset ritual. Whenever he missed a big shot, he’d slap his side, take a deep breath, and say a one-word cue to remind him to focus on his next job. Tiger Woods had his own version, employing the ten-step rule. After a poor shot, he could think about it for ten steps, then he had to refocus on the next shot.

The first step is identifying the situations that drag you from the present. In your pursuit, what makes you linger on what just occurred or worry about what’s to come? Then develop a quick routine that brings you back to the job at hand. While each routine will vary, the goal is simple: slow things down just a touch, bring yourself back to the present moment, and refocus on the immediate task at hand. Adding a simple cue, mantra, or directions at the end can help tie things together. You can even combine this with the quiet eye, finishing with a final gaze to block out the noise on what just happened or what’s to come. The reset ritual is your escape hatch from the prison of your own thoughts. It anchors you in the real world and redirects your focus from what could go wrong to what you can do right now. The goal is simple: to pull your focus out of your head and into the present reality by aiming the spotlight on something concrete, instead of abstract and uncertain.

FIELD SHEET 6

My reset card

Keep it short enough to remember when the arena gets loud.

Chapters 11 to 18

My common state

What state am I most likely to fall into?

Recognize

What is the earliest sign that tells me I need to reset?

Release

What breath, movement, word, or connection creates space?

Refocus

What single external cue or next action brings me back?

My backup tool

If the reliable hammer fails, what will I try next?

My one word cue

Make the next useful action unmistakable.