

From Chapter 1—Human Nature and the Evolutionary Process

Survival of the Fittest?

Because this competitive model has dominated for so long, many people believe that we are aggressive and competitive by nature and nothing can be done to change this behavior. The idea that human nature is inherently competitive received what was taken as validation in the mid-1800s from the work of Charles Darwin. With his theory of evolution, Darwin presented a vast body of evidence that all life on Earth evolved over millions of years from a few common ancestors. This evolution occurred through a process called *natural selection*. From his research and observations, Darwin noted that possessing certain traits increased a species chance of survival; a higher percentage of animals with these traits would survive and, through procreation, pass them on genetically to the next generation.

Darwin's theory promoted the idea of the *survival of the fittest*. This term is misleading since the individuals possessing traits that increased their chances of survival had nothing to do with developing those traits. The male bird with more brightly colored feathers that made him more attractive to females did not control the amount of color in his feathers. The individual members of a species that survived dramatic climate change did not intentionally change their makeup in order to survive. It wasn't survival of the fittest so much as the good fortune of those whose traits happened to suit the demands of the time.

Beginning in the 1890s, powerful financial interests of the Western world, in order to dominate the markets, commandeered Darwin's concept in order to prove that being competitive was natural and superior to all other ways of interacting. This view became known as Social Darwinism. It's twisted logic holds that aggressive, competitive individuals are the best suited, and therefore the most deserving of survival and success in life. Thus, competition is viewed as natural and even essential to progress and development.

Dog-eat-dog competition, seen as human nature, now defines most aspects of business, politics, sports, and even popular culture. It has become a staple of popular entertainment since the early 2000s, from television shows like *Survivor*, *American Idol*, *The Apprentice*, *The Bachelor* and the slew of programs that reduce "contestants" to the level of aggressive beasts hunting and fighting for survival around the drought-ravaged watering hole.

There is no disputing the potential for highly competitive and aggressive behavior. But is competitive behavior inevitable and desirable? On the surface, this can seem to be the case. But if we look more closely, we see that competitive behavior manifests itself most frequently and intensely when there is a shortage of some necessity, like water, food, shelter, sex or, with the animal called Man, money or fame. Competitive behavior manifests itself when we are threatened or our survival is at stake, and even when there is an illusory perception of a threat. Nature reveals that when there is no shortage in the necessities for survival, there is less competitive, aggressive behavior. And both animals and man thrive best when they cooperate with one another. This is why most animals form herds, packs and flocks, and why man formed tribes, villages, towns and nations.

From Chapter 2—A Competitive Learning System

Winning Versus Learning

The competitive approach to learning is virtually universal in most aspects of education. Children find themselves in a recital or performance after taking only a few months of music or dance lessons. If children *really* know and can proficiently play or perform the material, no problem. If not, they are programming performance anxiety into their cellular memory. I know this from personal experience. From starting piano lessons at age six, to playing drums in the high school band, I was put into performances before I "knew" the material. Those experiences sowed the seeds of self-doubt, a lack of confidence and performance anxiety into my cellular memory. Academically, it's the same: Children are given material to learn, and then tested and graded before

they have learned that material. What are we *really* testing and teaching by putting children into competition prematurely? And what are children *really* learning in this way?

In this school-of-hard-knocks theory of learning, the reasoning is: “We learned the hard way; you have to learn the hard way. Life isn’t fair. Life is tough!” Maybe life is tough and not fair, but do we need to make it tougher on principle? Maybe we did learn the hard way. Do we have to make learning harder for everyone? How about discovering what may actually be the best way to learn?

The school-of-hard-knocks approach does push a small percentage of people to excel, primarily from the fear of the consequences of failure, or perhaps an overweening desire to win or to be number one. But most people fail to achieve their potential in a competitive environment. Yet this is the environment in which we continue to rear and educate our children. What are we passing on?

When learning becomes a contest, the focus shifts from learning skills to winning contests and/or, fears of losing. When being a winner is so important, it can’t help taking precedence over developing the skills necessary to excel honestly. And this is the core of the problem in our competitive culture.

From Chapter 3—Birth of a Non-competitive Model

Playing in the Zone

A big factor in my developing the non-competitive teaching system, *Effortless Tennis*, came out of my desire as a tennis player to get into and stay in the fabled state known as *the zone*. The zone is that magical place where everything comes together, and we play “out of our minds”. When we are in the zone, seemingly everything goes right and nothing goes wrong. It’s as if we can’t make a mistake. The zone is the Holy Grail of Peak Performance!

Athletes long for the zone, but only rarely attain it. Yet musicians and dancers enter the zone frequently. This is because music and dance are taught through a more non-competitive/cooperative, skills-based approach that allows greater access to the zone. Although ego does come in to play sometimes, ideally, musicians and dancers work together to create the best performance. It won’t go well if they are competing against each other while trying to perform together. The zone exists for any endeavor, be it cooking, knitting, writing, driving, managing, accounting—even living. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I have a dream” speech is a shining example of the zone.

After several experiences of accidentally getting into the zone, I began exploring this phenomenon in 1974. I wanted to know more about it so I could experience it more frequently. It was the only place to be. Tennis pro and sports psychologist Tim Gallwey’s seminal book, *The Inner Game of Tennis*, published in 1974, provided the catalyst that deepened my interest and understanding of the zone. Gallwey, a pioneer in illuminating the importance of mental and psychological skills in sports, showed that our biggest challenge to achieving success on a consistent basis lies between our ears — in our mind. In 1974 little attention had been focused on psychological development in sports. Now, sports psychology is an integral part of any training program, but until 1974 hardly anyone talked about it; you either had it or you didn’t.

The Relief of Finding a New Way

Most of my students experience a sense of physical and psychological relief, as if a huge weight has been lifted off their shoulders. We’ve all grown up in the competitive system. Many of us have endured it without enjoying it — often because it felt like a lot of pressure, we weren’t winning enough, and there was no alternative.

In Evolutionary Education, people are able, often for the first time in their lives, to relax while learning and experience what it’s like to develop skills, competence, and confidence without

the familiar conditions of being pressured, judged, or graded. But because many of us have internalized the competitive system so deeply into our cellular memory, it takes years to let go of feeling judged, and to then stop judging ourselves as we learn and grow. Slowly but surely we learn to relax and have fun, and our skills begin to improve more rapidly.

After a while, people engaged in the process of Evolutionary Education start to understand that it wasn't their lack of ability that prevented them from succeeding, but their lack of skill development.

From Chapter 4—Advantages of Non-Competitive Learning

Removing Fear as a Motivator

Part of the source of the shame inherent in “losing” within a competitive model is the fact that fear is so often used as a motivating force in childrearing, education, sports, business, and society as a whole. Winning, offered as a way to achieve self-esteem, becomes highly motivating in an atmosphere of fear, or even conditional love. Removing competition from the learning process wouldn't in itself ensure that fear isn't used as a method of motivating students or enforcing discipline. But it would, to a large degree, alleviate the tensions common to a competitive learning model, and initiate a profound shift in our culture. Finding the will and the wisdom to do this is a great challenge. Fear, used as a primary motivator throughout history, is considered to be an essential component of the learning process—or perhaps a necessary evil. Parents, teachers, and employers often use some form of fear of reprisal to motivate apparently stubborn or lazy children or employees into action.

From Chapter 6—Keys to Peak Performance

Keys to Peak Performance

The Evolutionary Education system describes ten *Keys to Peak Performance* that, if mastered, grant us consistent access to high-level play and the zone. This system is blended together from many different sources. These keys are human qualities, and also skills or abilities that can be developed with practice. Their development allows us to fulfill our potential in any area, on and off the court, field, or stage, in the office, the classroom, or the boardroom. As we develop these keys they continually enrich and enhance the quality of our lives regardless of our age, gender, beliefs, occupation, etc. Mastering these keys grounds us in the kind of abilities and self-confidence that can move mountains — and even change the world.

Great teachers have taught some and/or all of these keys for thousands of years. Both these keys and the whole learning process take on new significance once competition is removed from the equation; then we need to go back to the beginning and learn everything in a deeper, more efficient way. These keys are presented in a certain order. While I believe that joy, relaxation, and concentration belong at the top of the list, each person may experience these keys in a different order that is natural to their learning process. All these keys are essential and inter-related, and we will experience and work with them repeatedly in a continuous cycle for as long as we engage in whatever we choose. In the diagram below, they are presented in the shape of an oval to demonstrate their equal importance and inter-relatedness. As noted in Chapter 5, the keys are:

1. Joy
2. Relaxation
3. Concentration
4. Patience
5. Perseverance
6. Self-motivation
7. Accountability
8. Fitness
9. Coordination
10. Efficient skill development