

The Inner Game of Printing

Coaching

[David Handler](#)

In 1985 I was a young sports television producer making less than \$20,000 a year. Receiving a call to work the World Championship Tennis Finals in Dallas for \$125 per day was a windfall. My role was to be the stage manager, which meant I would spend five evenings in a comfy, sound-proof booth supporting the announcers.

I also had one other important task. Positioning myself on the floor of Reunion Arena as the broadcast began each night, it was my job to prompt the two competitors onto the court during introductions. That made for great television and allowed me to meet the world's best players. By the fourth night I had gotten really good at cueing them, then racing up to the booth on the mezzanine level to get paid for watching grown men in shorts hit a yellow ball.

Then it happened. The PA announcer boomed, "Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the number one player in the world, Ivan Lendl." Polite applause. Cue in my headset from the producer. Tap Lendl on the shoulder. Lendl walks on the court. Perfect. "Please welcome," the announcer continued, "four time U.S. Open and three time Wimbledon champion, John McEnroe." Loud applause. Cue from the producer. Tap McEnroe on the shoulder. McEnroe? John? Where's McEnroe? Actually, at that moment the producer was yelling, "Where the %\$#@ is McEnroe?"

Finally, after about 30 seconds, McEnroe casually strolls out of the tunnel, looks right at me, smiles, and says, "Sorry...pee break." That was the last thing I ever did for WCT.

More than a Game

This memory came back to me recently as I read "The Inner Game of Tennis," which is interesting in itself, since I never have played a game of tennis. But that's alright, because W. Timothy Gallwey's 1973 bestseller isn't really about tennis anyway. Its theme is that all of us possess the natural ability to succeed, but our thoughts get in the way of letting it happen.

Do the Lendls, McEnroes, or Roger Federers ever look like they're thinking on the court? Concentrating? Yes. Trying too hard? No. Pick your player or sport: Tiger Woods? Peyton Manning? LeBron James? Derek Jeter? Great athletes appear effortless in their execution, which is so hard to relate to that sportscasters lean on catchphrases to describe it: "She's playing out of her mind," "He's unconscious out there."

In the moment of competition, professional athletes allow their performances to unfold...one swing, one shot, one throw at a time. In coach speak, the game "slows down" for them—effortless and thoughtless—as instinct and skill take over.

What about the rest of us, mere amateurs? (If sports aren't your bag, think about playing cards, board games, or whatever challenge you enjoy.) What's typically going on inside your head during competition? If you're like me, and the people Gallwey observed, it probably involves a continual conversation disrupting your focus.

While I never ventured onto the tennis court, I have played a lot of golf. More times than I care to admit, a good round turned bad simply because I started thinking: "Hey, I'm playing really well today." Or, "Gosh, if I just par two of the last three holes, I'll break 80." Most of the time, a double bogey, or worse, awaited me on the next tee. When too many thoughts displace natural instinct, your level of performance decreases.

Printing as a Game

So, what does all this sports talk mean for your quick printing business? In my view, it means you have a great opportunity to stop thinking and to start allowing your desires to come true. Imagine that! Here's a coach telling

you to quit worrying about the “how to” and just sit back and wait for the wealth to roll in. Toss the business plan in the trash, and use the “Field of Dreams” approach. You built it. They’ll come.

Actually, that’s not exactly what I’m suggesting. The true meaning of “The Inner Game of Printing” is it’s essential to find clarity in your intentions.

Mark Twain wrote, “I can teach anybody how to get what they want out of life. The problem is that I can’t find anybody who can tell me what they want.” That’s evident all the time as I begin working with clients. They aren’t happy with the results they’re achieving, yet when I ask what results they desire for their quick printing businesses, the typical response is, “That’s a good question.” They might toss out a sales or profit number, but when I explore further, they struggle to verbalize what they want to achieve.

Imagine children playing video games for the first time. Do they read the manual? Not mine. They just grab the controller and start pushing buttons. Their intention clearly is to have fun, and somehow kids figure out how to maneuver Scooby through the haunted house without instructions. The amazing thing is children never look like they’re thinking when playing video games—or hitting a tennis ball for the first time. They simply take what they see and do what comes naturally. Unfortunately, as adults, we study, analyze, pause, project, ponder, wait, research, consider, delay.

If that sounds like you, and you seek to change, then take a tip from John McEnroe. Forget the schedule. Answer nature’s call. Once your intentions are clear, pick up the racket and play the game. It’s an inherent ability you possess. Gallwey saw it. Athletes use it. Printers would do well to adopt it.

David Handler is the founder of Success Handler, LLC, and previously served as a senior executive at ICED. He leads clients in the quick printing industry to explore their professional and personal dreams. David overcame that embarrassing moment in Dallas and, as was his intention, spent 15 years as a sports television producer. To learn more interesting tales about professional athletes, and to unleash the inner printer in you, send an email to coach@successhandler.com or visit www.successhandler.com.