

THE BIG IDEAS

Self-Awareness

Virtue #1.

Discipline

Case study #1.

Discipline

Case study #2.

The Comparison Game

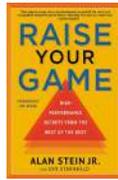
You will always lose.

Coach

Five virtues of.

One More Rep

Up Hell on the Hill.



Raise Your Game

High-Performance Secrets from the Best of the Best

BY ALAN STEIN JR. · CENTER STREET © 2019 · 304 PAGES

“I’ve spent the past fifteen-plus years working with the highest-performing athletes on the planet. I now teach people how to utilize the same strategies in business and life that elite players and teams use to perform at a world-class level. My goal for this book is simple—to educate and inspire readers to take immediate action to improve their mind-set, habits, and value. ...

When it comes to improving performance—in any area of life—the most basic and effective strategy is to close *performance gaps*. These are the gaps between what we know we are supposed to do and what we actually do. Everyone has performance gaps, but the world’s highest performers and achievers have found ways to eliminate or reduce them in the most important areas.

We live in the information age. Thanks to technology, we can find quality information on just about anything in a matter of seconds. Not knowing something is hardly ever the reason our performance suffers. The reason we get stuck, frustrated, and exhausted is not from lack of knowing—it’s from lack of doing. This book will help motivate, inspire, and guide you to start closing your most pressing performance gaps.”

~ Alan Stein Jr. from *Raise Your Game*

Alan Stein is a peak-performance coach who was immersed in the basketball world for fifteen years and now applies that wisdom to the broader game of life.

I happened to catch a little message from him on one of my *very* rare trips to Twitter. He told me about his new book. I got it. And, here we are! (We also enjoyed a great chat.)

I’m a huge fan of peak performance books, especially those with sports themes so I enjoyed this book. (Get a copy [here](#).)

It’s broken down into three parts, capturing the various roles we play in life and work: Part I: Player, Part II: Coach and Part III: Team. Each section features a set of five core virtues we need to master and integrate across each domain.

Of course, it’s packed with Big Ideas. And, of course, I’m excited to share a few of my favorites we can apply to our lives TODAY so let’s jump straight in!

SELF-AWARENESS

“Self-awareness is like the arrow on the Google map—you start there, figuring out where you are. Then it’s about the commitment to do what needs to be done to get you where you want to be. ‘The best performers observe themselves closely,’ business journalist Geoff Colvin wrote in *Talent Is Overrated: What Really Separates World-Class Performers from Everyone Else*. In the book, Colvin looked at what distinguishes top performers in all arenas and found, “They are in effect able to step outside themselves, monitor what is happening in their own mind, and

“ Learning how to control the controllables is imperative to maximizing performance. When you get distracted by things you don’t control, your performance suffers. We have limited energy, attention, and resources—so put them where they can actually make a difference.”

~ Alan Stein Jr.

"Don't worry about them. Let them worry about you."

~ John Wooden

ask how it's going. . . . Top performers do this much more systematically than others do; it's an established part of their routine.'

I've given many corporate talks around the country, and I would argue that most people are sleepwalking through their work routine or, at the very least, comfortably on autopilot. Be honest: How often do you take this kind of inventory of yourself? Is it a daily habit? If not, ask yourself how you can make it one. It will be a game-changing decision and will lead to growth on a variety of different levels."

Welcome to chapter #1 on Self-Awareness.

Alan tells us that THIS is the #1 virtue we need to master if we want a shot at raising our game.

KNOW THYSELF!

He offers this little quiz right after that passage above.

1. What do you do really well?
2. What do you need to improve on?
3. What is your plan for addressing #2?

Well...

What do you do really well? What can use a little work? What's one thing you can do to Optimize?

P.S. Alan shares this BRILLIANT quote from Tony Schwartz: "We can't change what we don't notice."

P.P.S. When I read the Google map metaphor, I thought of Michael Hyatt and Daniel Harkavy's [Living Forward](#). Their book/philosophy is based on approaching life like a GPS system. They offer their own three questions and tell us: "The same is true when it comes to your Life Plan. It is the result of answering three powerful questions. Let's consider them one at a time.

"Well-rounded is overrated. Use your self-awareness to double down on what you do best. Find the one thing you do better than anyone else and continue to pour into that."

~ Alan Stein Jr.

Question 1: How do I want to be remembered? In planning anything, the best place to begin is at the end. What outcome do you want? How do you want the story to end? How do you want to be remembered when you are gone? ...

Question 2: What matters most? Maybe you have never given yourself permission to ask this question.... what's important to you? What matters most in your life? This is a question about priorities. No one else can decide what they are for you.

Question 3: How can I get from here to where I want to be? If you are going to improve your life and realize your potential, you will have to figure out where you are now; where you want to be; and how you get from one to the other."

DISCIPLINE: CASE STUDY 1

"To be disciplined is to carry incredibly high standards for yourself. It's making those lofty standards your baseline, meeting them, and then trying to exceed them."

That's from Chapter #3 on Discipline.

(Note: Our first virtue in Part I was Self-Awareness. The second was Passion. Third was Discipline. Then Coachability and Confidence.)

Alan makes his point about the importance of discipline by telling us a story about Steph Curry. If you follow basketball at all, you know who Steph Curry is—one of the all-time great shooters, two-time MVP, etc. etc.

But... Once upon a time, very few people knew who Steph Curry was.

"Discipline is easy. Sustained, consistent discipline is hard."

~ Jesse Itzler

When Steph was a rising sophomore at a tiny college, Alan worked at a skills camp with him. And, he was BLOWN AWAY by his work ethic.

Guess who showed up at the gym first every morning? And worked the hardest on every single play? Yep. Steph. Alan says he was captivated. In *"awe at his standard of excellence."*

Was he doing all that to impress someone? Nope. There was no one there to impress!! As Alan says, *"He was building a monster. Just nobody knew it yet."*

Fast-forward and that discipline has paid dividends.

The theme reminds me of another world-champion: Josh Waitzkin. In [The Art of Learning](#), he gives us a tour of his world-champion training camp and echoes Alan's wisdom when he tells us about making our prior BEST our new BASELINE.

Here's how he puts it: *"I want to use that experience as a new baseline for my everyday capabilities. In other words, now that I have seen what real focus is all about, I want to get there all the time... So a deep mastery of performance psychology involves the internal creation of inspiring conditions."*

P.S. Another way Alan describes the building of champions via astonishing discipline is via a friend of his who called that ferocious work ethic *"unseen hours. It refers to all the time and effort the public doesn't see that lays the foundation to the success they do see."*

Reminds me of Jim Afremow's visions of a champion in [The Champion's Mind](#) where he tells us: *"My favorite description of what excellence in the sports world looks like comes from Anson Dorrance, the legendary University of North Carolina women's soccer coach. He was driving to work early one morning, and as he passed a deserted field, he noticed one of his players off in the distance doing extra training by herself. He kept driving, but he later left a note in her locker: 'The vision of a champion is someone who is bent over, drenched in sweat, at the point of exhaustion when no one else is watching.' The young woman, Mia Hamm, would go on to become one of the greatest players in the history of the sport."*

Having a big dream—and a clear vision of what you will look like while pursuing competitive excellence—always inspires greatness. What is your dream goal? What does excellence in your game look like when you are fully dialed in and passionately pursuing your dream—becoming the best you can be in your sport? Make the description vivid and powerful enough to give you that burst of adrenaline when you need it, a burst that can only come from connecting completely with your heart's true desire."

P.P.S. Any time I read about the importance of having high standards, I think of John Gottman's wisdom. Recall: He's the guy who can predict whether a couple will divorce after watching and listening to them for just fifteen minutes. <- Wow.

"We can't change what we don't notice."

~ Tony Schwartz

In [The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work](#), he tells us: *"Couples who are demanding in their marriage are more likely to have deeply satisfying unions than those who lower their expectations."*

How are YOUR standards? Let's hit them.

And make them our new baseline as we spiral up to the next-best version of ourselves!

DISCIPLINE: CASE STUDY 2

"For forty-five minutes I was shocked. For forty-five minutes I watched the best player in the world do the most basic drills.

I watched the best player on the planet do basic ball-handling drills.

I watched the best player on the planet do basic footwork.

*"Control the controllables.
Don't focus on the outcome,
focus on the process."*

~ Alan Stein Jr.

I watched the best player on the planet do basic offensive moves.

Granted, he did everything with surgical precision and super-hero intensity, but the stuff he was doing was so simple. I couldn't believe it.

Later that day I went over to him. 'Thanks again,' I said, 'I really enjoyed watching your workout this morning.'

'No problem,' Kobe replied.

Then I hesitated, not wanting to sound rude—or worse—condescending. 'You're the best player in the world. Why do such basic stuff?'

He flashed that gleaming smile of his. 'Why do you think I'm the best player in the game?' he asked. 'Because I never get bored with the basics.'

He knew that if his footwork was not razor sharp, then the rest of the move would never be as good as it could be. And he knew that the only way to do that was through sheer repetition. Kobe had such an understanding of building things step by step, brick by brick; he worshipped on the altar of basics. If someone at Kobe's level needs to commit hours to practicing the fundamentals, then so do all of us. Kobe taught me a pivotal lesson that morning. The basics are *simple*, but not *easy*. If they were easy, everyone would do them."

That wonderful story, as you may have guessed, is *also* from the chapter on discipline.

Here's the best part of that whole story. Nike flew Alan out to LA to work the first-ever Kobe Bryant Skills Academy. At the time, Kobe was the best in the world. Alan asked Kobe if he could watch him work out.

As he says, *"That's how it is in my business. Everyone can see the game, but to really learn the secrets, you have to watch the practice. It's the difference between buying Jay-Z's album and sitting in the studio watching him write and record one."*

So... Alan asked Kobe if he can watch his workout. Kobe says: *"Sure. I'm going at four."* "But don't we have a camp session at three thirty tomorrow afternoon?" Alan asked. *"I know,"* he replied. *"I'm working out at four a.m."* <- :)

Then what did Kobe do? He ruthlessly HAMMERED his fundamentals. Of course, this reminds me of a BUNCH of wisdom we talk about all the time. (Have I mentioned how important consistency on the fundamentals is? ;)

In [The Creativity Habit](#), Twyla Tharp says: *"The great ones never take fundamentals for granted."*

In [Spiritual Economics](#), Eric Butterworth tells us: *"Ask the great athlete or the concert pianist or the successful actor if they arrived at the place where they need no further practice. They will tell you that the higher you climb in proficiency and public acceptance, the greater the need for practice."*

*"Put all your eggs in one
basket, and watch that
basket."*

~ Andrew Carnegie

Jim Rohn calls it ["The Two Easies."](#) In [Leading an Inspired Life](#) he tells us: *"It all comes down to a philosophical phrase: the things that are easy to do are also easy not to do. That's the difference between success and failure, between daydreams and ambitions."*

James Clear has some great wisdom on the importance of process in [Atomic Habits](#). Like this: *"The purpose of setting goals is to win the game. The purpose of building systems is to continue playing the game. True long-term thinking is goal-less thinking. It's not about any single accomplishment. It is about the cycle of endless refinement to continuous improvement. Ultimately, it is your commitment to the process that will determine your progress."*

Back to you. How are YOUR fundamentals? How can you step it up a notch or three?

"True leaders are magnetic; people want to follow them because they're attracted to the vision that the leader embodies. People have to believe in the who before they follow the what."

~ Alan Stein, Jr.

YOU WILL ALWAYS LOSE THE COMPARISON GAME

"My friend Paul Bioncardi of ESPN loves to say, 'You will always lose the Comparison Game.' Why is that? Because it's rigged. It has no function besides enlarging self-doubt. I'm typing this chapter on board a flight to South Dakota. Among the 250 passengers on this plane, I can quickly find someone better looking, funnier, more successful, taller, more muscular, smarter. It won't take long to find someone who scores higher than me on almost any metric.

If I use these people as my measuring stick—to determine my self-worth and value—I will always lose."

Self-Comparison. It's toxic if we want to cultivate virtue #5: Confidence.

A key aspect of cultivating a strong sense of trust in ourselves?

QUIT COMPARING!!

Science, of course, agrees.

Let's invite Sonja Lyubomirsky in (yet again!) to share her wisdom on the topic. In [The How of Happiness](#) she tells us: "We found that the happiest people take pleasure in other people's successes and show concern in the face of others' failures. A completely different portrait, however, has emerged of a typical unhappy person—namely, as someone who is deflated rather than delighted about his peers' accomplishments and triumphs and who is relieved rather than sympathetic in the face of his peers' failures and undoings."

So...

The next time you feel tempted to negatively compare yourself, consider recalling this wisdom and, rather than focus on your (supposed) deficiencies, celebrate the other person's awesome.

P.S. Faulkner's advice seems relevant here as well: "Don't bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself."

COACH

"If you are a *coach*—you need to make a commitment to being a leader. That title is not just handed to you because you hire and fire, have the biggest paycheck, and make the final decisions. True leaders have a **vision** for where their group is going and have developed a **culture** that makes everyone want to work together to get there. They have **character** and are committed to **servicing** and **empowering** every member of the team. Above all, they care: about whom they're working with and what they're doing. It is only then that they have earned the title of leader."

Welcome to the introduction to Part II: Coach.

Want to be a Coach? Embody these five virtues: Vision + Culture + Servant + Character + Empowerment. Each of those qualities has its own chapter.

For now, let's go with the most important quality: LOVE.

Here's how [The Leadership Challenge](#) guys put it: "Of all the things that sustain a leader over time, love is the most lasting. It's hard to imagine leaders getting up day after day, putting in the long hours and hard work it takes to get extraordinary things done, without having their hearts in it. The best-kept secret of successful leaders is love: staying in love with leading, with the people who do the work, with what their organizations produce, and with those who honor the organization by using its products and services.

Leadership is not an affair of the head. Leadership is an affair of the heart."

P.S. Alan shares this gem from Tony Hsieh (founder/CEO of Zappos) in this section: "Chase the vision, not the money."

"View life as a series of privileges, not obligations. Change your 'have to's' to 'get to's.' I didn't have to climb a mountain. I got to climb a mountain."

~ Alan Stein, Jr.

"If you do not change your direction, you will end up exactly where you are headed."

~ Chinese Proverb

ONE MORE REP

"When Wojo came up alongside me, I asked him, 'How many more reps do you have?'"

'One rep.'

'Wait, what?' I asked. 'One?' There was no way this guy only had one rep. I was almost pissed off.

But then he said, 'Yep. Just one more rep. *Thirty more times.*'

I smiled because it was the perfect attitude. It was a lesson in living present, in focusing on the single step, in blocking out everything else and zeroing in on only what needed to be done.

As you look out on your own personal and professional landscape, I hope you have the courage and determination to take that first single step. Have belief in yourself, in your coach, and in your team, and I know you will make it to the next one."

Those are the final words of the book.

Quick context: Alan and Wojo (Steve Wojciechowski: a former Duke basketball player and current head coach at Marquette) are participating in something called "Hell on the Hill."

-> "Organized by Jesse Itzler, the event required that we run up and down an eighty-yard hill, on a slope that averaged a forty-degree angle, 100 times. In total, it came out to over eight miles."

Yep. That sounds like Hell on a Hill. Alan hit a wall on the 70th or so time up. He nearly quit. Then he runs alongside Wojo who told him he had only one more rep. THIRTY MORE TIMES. <- Brilliant.

Are you currently running up any hills that might feel like an endless hell? Break it down. Focus on the next rep. Get to the next telephone pole.

Let's do this. It's time to raise our games and give the world all we've got. One rep at a time!

B

Brian Johnson,
Lover of Wisdom

If you liked this Note, you'll probably like...

[How Champions Think](#)

[Relentless](#)

[The Mindful Athlete](#)

[The Hoops Whisperer](#)

[The Champion's Mind](#)

[The Slight Edge](#)

[Atomic Habits](#)

[Coaching the Mental Game](#)

About the Author of "Raise Your Game"

ALAN STEIN JR.



ALAN STEIN JR. is a corporate performance coach and world-renowned speaker. He spent more than fifteen years working with the highest-performing basketball players on the planet. Alan teaches how the same strategies that elite athletes use to perform at a world-class level can be utilized in business to build a winning culture. He is an amicably divorced father of twin sons (Luke and Jack) and a daughter (Lyla) and lives just outside of Washington, DC.

About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives so they can actualize their potential as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + practical tools. Learn more and optimize your life at optimize.me.