

The Performance Clock – The Most Important Concept in High Performance Sport

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I often get asked, what's the difference between **sport** and **high performance sport**.

Winning is rarely about doing it once and walking away. Winning is about **Sustaining** Performance: **Sustaining** Competitiveness: about getting to the top and **Staying There**.

Lots of people, teams, coaches, athletes and companies win once – but very few are able to adopt the thinking, systems and practices that enable them to **sustain competitiveness** year after year after year.

Why is Sustainable Competitiveness so important?

No one goes from being **Uncompetitive** to **Winning**. Being **Competitive** means you can launch a winning campaign or grand final winning plan from a position of relative strength. **It is almost impossible to go from last (or near last) to first in a single year or season.**

Sporting teams – particularly football teams – are notoriously **BAD** at sustaining competitiveness. They blame **the draft**. They blame **salary caps**. They blame the **Governing body**. They blame **injuries**. They blame not having enough **money**. They blame everything except the thing that really makes the difference: **their ability to seriously commit to continuous improvement and accelerated change.**

With very few exceptions, most teams feel the need to (unnecessarily) go through the **Performance Cycle**:

Stage One: Non Competitive: The organisation is failing to perform and struggling to survive;

Stage Two: Striving For Success: A passionate person and / or motivated team ignites the desire to succeed and inspires the organisation to strive for success. The acceleration of progress comes from embracing change and learning and the commitment to turn learning into action;

Stage Three: The Right Culture: The right people and the right environment are in place and the opportunity has been created for the Club to be successful;

Stage Four: Success: The organisation gets to the top, but then, loses momentum by ceasing to change and learn at the same rate. They adopt a “secret formula” mentality, i.e. **“we know what it takes to win, therefore all we have to do is repeat what we did last year and we will keep winning”**. In the meantime the competition is accelerating their learning and performance – determined to become the next No 1;

Stage Five: The Fall: Things start to fail. Management and staff get sacked, reviews, reviews and more reviews are commissioned finally the Board is overthrown, there is public brawling and the organisation is at the brink of collapsing altogether..... and, we are back at STAGE ONE again.

I did some work with a top professional football team who was highly successful in the 1960's. Now, almost 50 years later, many of the players who starred on the field in the golden days of the club were running the Board, the Management committees, and even had a hands-on role in the coaching.

The biggest problem the club faced was that these people – with the welfare of the club in their hearts and only the best intentions, kept looking for ways of taking the club back to the 60's – because “that's the way we do it here”.

My reply was, “So your way is to fail to perform for 50 years?” After some heated discussion came the realisation that they needed to retain their proud traditions but embrace effective and meaningful change. Respect the past: but embrace the future.

Most businesses, sporting organisations and even people perform **in cycles**. There are times when they are **performing well** – and times when they are **performing poorly**.

If you keep doing what you've always done,
You'll get what you've always got or, will you?

The performance cycle of a sporting team can be compared to a **CLOCK: the Performance Clock**

At 10 o'clock, the organisation is hungry for success and changing rapidly. They are accelerating their rate of change by learning fast and by being innovative, creative and committed to success;

At 11 o'clock, the team is close to their best. They are consistently playing well, making the final series and they are continuing to strive for success. Most importantly, they have created a culture which has a high likelihood of succeeding;

At 12 o'clock – the team wins the premiership or the World Championship etc. – they are at the peak of their performance cycle

Then a funny thing happens and no matter how many times I present this concept to organisations it just keeps happening

Often when a team is at the top of its **Performance Cycle** it stops doing many of the things it was doing to make it successful.

1 o'clock and the team stops being creative and open minded. They start believing that their way is the only way and that they have the infallible secret formula for success. **This is the beginning of disaster!** The teams who have to make the **greatest commitment to change and improvement are the ones who are successful** –
why ???

Because your resistance to change is greatest when you believe you have all the answers and that's why most teams fail to repeat success!

So, what happens????? **The team starts losing.**

2 o'clock **3 o'clock** the coach gets sacked. The club starts spending money on new players, new equipment, new coaches in a frantic attempt to stop the decline in performance;

The team keeps losing.

If they are in a relegation / promotion competition, they get relegated to the next league;

4 o'clock **5 o'clock** the CEO and Management gets sacked. The organisation is in disarray;

6 o'clock. The team cannot win a game. The fans and the sponsors have deserted it. It appears that the team may never ever experience success again;

But then

7 o'clock – Someone decides things have to change. They put together a plan and find some people and money to make it happen;

8 o'clock.....9 o'clock – People start believing that things can change. New players, new coaches, new staff, new ideas.....there is enthusiasm and energy and passion in the Club;

10 o'clock and 11 o'clock – The cycle is complete and the team can look forward to a short period of success as their Performance Cycle is at its peak once more.

The reality for most sporting teams is that they spend one or two seasons at most between **10 o'clock and 12** and then often spend many many years between **1 o'clock and 6 o'clock!** **And for no reason! There is no reason for sporting organisations to spend years at the bottom of competitions.**

The aim is to create a Sustainably Successful High Performance Environment –
and to ensure your organisation is always competitive.

Winning once can be luck – sustainable competitiveness comes from good planning, good management, good vision and hard work.

Success is not a destination - success is a moving target and your aim must continually be adjusted if you want to keep it in your sights!

So the **difference** between **sport** and **high performance sport** is this ...
if you understand this post – congratulations!

You have a long career in high performance sport ahead of you.

If you **don't** understand it,
enjoy a game of golf or tennis with friends and family now and again but stay out of the pointy end of sport.
Please!