

Combination Code to The Zone: Achieving Effortless Excellence in the Game of Tennis

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Key Point: *The way you play tennis is a reflection of the way you feel.*

We spend so much time, energy, and money trying to perfect the fundamentals. Almost all our energy is spent exclusively on nitpicking the external aspects of our strokes, footwork, and learning how to adjust to the way our opponents play. Very little emphasis is devoted to becoming aware about the internal sensations responsible for generating your physical movement.

Truthfully, most instructors are afraid to acknowledge the emotional, feeling side of tennis, because bringing understanding about how your body responds to stimulus can get so convoluted. Ultimately, trying to bring awareness about why you become shrouded with doubt, inhibition about committing to excellence, and making the same fundamental mistakes time and time again is just plain hard to communicate.

It's really not a mystery though. You don't need to be a psychologist either. Instead of focusing on the fundamentals of the various strokes; Combination Code to The Zone concentrates on how the internal world of sensations creates the external experience you have with your opponent... and the ball itself.

Combination Code to The Zone necessitates that you have some basic understanding about how the internal stew of sensations you emit *create your external stimulus* AND physical response. This is of course the exact opposite of what we're taught, or even how commentators give life to the game when we watch tennis on television.

Key Point: *You're not reacting to external circumstances; you're animating the external circumstances from the inside – out.*

The more reference points you can create (and acknowledge) about how the circumstances playing out on the court are merely reflecting what you feel, the less seduced you'll be by the apparent.

Yeah, we definitely believe the world is happening out there, and it is... kind of.

However, it's the limiting belief that the external circumstances we perceive are somehow separate from our experience of them that compels us to compare contrasting styles of playing, or the win/loss record of two matching players. Yes, when our opponent hits the ball, he or she is generating their own power and using their unique perception to determine how and where the

ball goes. At the end of the day though, it doesn't matter what your opponent does. All the consequence in the game of tennis lies squarely inside of your body.

You are the only person who controls whether you instinctively hit the ball; having already performed the action in your mind (or imagination), while simply allowing your body to follow through. Likewise, you can see the ball coming at you and spend the majority of your vital energy reacting to your own mind; analyzing the possibilities and tensing up, all the while telling yourself to relax and "just freaking hit the ball!"

Yup, when you're getting lost in the internal narration of instructing yourself how to perform a stroke as the ball is coming to you, you're actually creating tension. Telling yourself to relax and hit the ball low to high, follow through, turn your hips and strike out front as much as possible is creating massive stress inside of your body.

Too many commands creates a form of stalemate inside of your body, making it almost impossible to exhibit any kind of fluidity or effortlessness in your stroke.

When you're on the court writing the story of your match, one stroke at a time; you're either allowing your body to perform what your muscle memory, nervous system instinctively know... or resisting your own innate *physical intelligence* by trying to control your execution with self-judgment. Please understand that these two distinctive styles of how we internally play the game of tennis are exclusive.

Key Point: *Allowing your organic physical intelligence to flourish or resisting excellence by constantly analyzing your game cannot occupy the same space and time.*

You can't endure that unrelenting stream of dialogue pulsing through your head if you want to reveal the *physical excellence* you're constantly trying to achieve. That's the elusive zone; the place where you're playing out of your mind, right?

It's actually easy to blueprint how to embody The Zone. It starts with having an understanding about why you plateau at a certain level of play, but first, let's begin to eliminate one of the biggest misconceptions of all sports: mental toughness.

Physical Intelligence: The Other Side of Mental Toughness

One of the most enduring phrases in tennis (and sports in general) is the term mental toughness. What's funny is, when you ask a coach or tennis instructor to define mental toughness, the answers are usually less than illuminating.

The way mental toughness is used in tennis commonly refers to a player who demonstrates resiliency under pressure. However, how does that make someone mentally tough? What is the mental body?

This gets kind of dicey, because most people define the mental body as *the mind*. It's an esoteric term to say the least. The mind is not the brain. In truth, nobody really knows what the mind is; although we've certainly tried to explain it with science, religion, and spirituality. We'll talk about this a little bit more in the Holographic Tennis section of this ebook, but let's delve a little deeper into what mental toughness means in tennis and how we can more easily communicate what it is.

If a player is exhibiting stubbornness to falter, he or she is demonstrating strong character. He or she is also showing an incredible display of self-confidence to keep pushing, even if the odds are mounting in their opponents favor. This isn't really so much mental toughness as it is the ability to not allow ones emotions the authority to corrupt their physical performance.

Face it; some people have much more emotional maturity than others. If you take that a step further, it's easy to surmise why some tennis players can shrug off a bad point, and others act as if the world just ended. When the authenticity of your character is revealed on the tennis court in tense moments, it forces you to dig deep and find a place for your attention to find relaxation in the midst of stress, or fall prey to your own reactive nature.

Mental toughness implies that you must be strong and resist failure. That's not really what's going on when a tennis player or any athlete for that matter transcends the moment.

In fact, resistance is the last thing happening when excellence and physical fortitude is being revealed.

It's an overly blown-out emotional reaction that creates a physical stalemate inside of your body; preventing you from hitting the ball cleanly. On the other side of the same coin, once you've learned the basic fundamentals of the strokes, the best thing you can ever do is get out of your own way and allow your body to do what it was taught.

I call this Physical Intelligence.

Physical intelligence is the effortless performance of your body. However, the only way your organic physical intelligence can have precedence over your inclination to criticize your own game is to eliminate thought from the equation altogether. The premise of this ebook is to demonstrate what that means and give you some clues as to how to take the elusive, ill-contrived mental game out of the picture.

The Plateau Effect

Most tennis players reach a certain level of performance, and rarely, if ever surpass it. I call this The Plateau Effect. It's really quite an amazing process, because most often, tennis players who plateau are usually very well versed in the various micro components of the game, but have little mastery about which they speak.

Tennis tends to elicit the mad scientist out of people who play the game. All of a sudden everyone's an expert with a strong-willed view about the game's fundamentals. It's funny too, because these are usually people who show hardly any ability to demonstrate whatever synopsis for micro-managing the strokes they're subscribing to. It's the intellectual tendency to analyze the game; and your own game in particular that creates the physical and emotional stalemate I've already mentioned; stunting your game at a very particular stage of its development.

When you intellectually analyze the incremental aspects of any given stroke, it actually creates tension and rigidity in your body, inhibiting you from performing your authentic physical movement with fluidity and excellence. It's called over thinking; a process most club players, weekend warriors, and pros alike are guilty of contemplating. Quite simply, when you scrutinize your game to the nano-degree, there's no clear neurological signal your brain and nervous system can generate to mimic any level of consistency or progression.

Key Point: *Over thinking creates physical and emotional resistance to excel and progress your game.*

Physical excellence is totally dependent upon your emotional discipline. From that perspective, the typical way tennis is taught is destined to fail amongst the majority of those who participate in the learning process. Why? Well, tennis is predominately taught to learn and execute the strokes by reactively being compelled by external stimulus, which is extremely stressful on the body.

“Watch the ball all the way to the racket face and swing from low to high.”

“Hit the ball down the line.”

“Stay on the balls of your feet.”

These are very generic commands and hard to interpret into consistent physical execution, especially when you begin to integrate the emotional aspects of your character, persona, and internal dialogue into the equation. You can't make the necessary mini-adjustments of footwork, stroke production, and creating space between you and the ball if you are in resistance to playing well by over thinking.

In other words, you'll always find a flaw in your game to obsess about when you're depending upon the external circumstances to determine how you feel, and therefore strike the ball. As long as you allow your *perceived* imperfections the power to distract you from giving your body the freedom it needs to reveal its physical intelligence and perform effortlessly, you will never excel.

I'm sure you've heard of The Fight or Flight Response, right? If you haven't, let me briefly explain what it is. Then we'll go into why it's an important aspect to whether or not your game evolves or stays stuck in the same basic level of play... regardless of how much instruction you receive or time you spend on the court.

When your body is stressed, your brain, specifically the hypothalamus gland initiates a chemical response that prepares the body to flee or fight. The sensations of stress you feel when you see the ball coming at you is a modern day version of the saber tooth tiger.

Dramatic, yes; it's true though. Your body experiences a great deal of stress when you're trying to physically negotiate how to hit the best possible stroke for the situation that you're reacting to.

In states of stress, your body's adrenal glands secrete adrenaline and cortisol. Too much of this secretion process creates adrenal burnout and puts the body in a compromised situation. Now, there are numerous consequences to someone who experiences repetitive exaggerated chemical responses to stressful situations (one of which is tunnel vision, by the way... hmmm). This is of importance to you because if your body is used to perceiving your tennis game as a threat to your well being, you'll never go beyond your present level of play until you tell a new story.

You can't effortlessly surpass previous levels of your own tennis game when your body experiences the repercussions of harmful levels of cortisol. When your brain is used to perceiving tennis as a threat to your well being, you get stuck in the internal chemical stew that inhibits you from experiencing physical genius and fluidity. Of course, you're likely unaware of this process, and instead, you place your focus on over thinking little hitches in your stroke, or how your opponent is compelling you to make mistakes you wouldn't otherwise commit.

The truth is, your body is exhausted, and whether you want to admit it or not, you've developed an unhealthy relationship between the game of tennis and your physical being. As a result of this, no matter how much new information you take in from participating in lessons, reading books, or watching the pros, you'll very likely never transcend your present overall level of play.

So what's the solution?

It's actually quite simple, but on a side note, the solution does require you to look at reality in a way that will likely make you feel uncomfortable.

Bluntly put, it doesn't matter who is hitting the ball on the other side of the court; it's always your responsibility to elicit the internal response that generates the most desired external outcome. If your response depends upon who is on the other side of the court, his or her win/loss record, the style of play he or she commands, etc., you're not actually responding at all; you're in

reaction. When you're in reaction, your body is stressed, and the fight or flight response is in full demonstration.

Key Point: *You can't view what's happening outside your body as being separate from your experience of it.*

Your body's chemical and hormonal messaging system is determined by external stimulus... *when you allow reality to relentlessly affect you.* However, if you're aware of this process, you can invert how reality appears. When you shift your attention to observe your internal sensations, the external circumstances change to match or *mirror* what you *deliberately feel*.

Are you ready to take the leap?

Click to the next page when you're ready to take your tennis game to the next level and shatter The Plateau Effect.

The Inside-Out Effect

Playing tennis *should* feel effortless. Read that again.

The more tense you are physically and emotionally when you play the game, the less control you have over the fluidity in your stroke and where/how the ball lands. When you try to control outside circumstances, on or off the court, your body tends to get rigid. A tense, rigid body is not allowing your physical intelligence the ability to be displayed. Again, like I just outlined in The Plateau Effect; when you base your reaction on external stimulus, your body is stressed and it's virtually impossible to reach your potential, much less advance your game.

The Inside-Out Effect is the process of reversing how you perceive the game of tennis.

Instead of depending upon how your opponent hits the ball onto your side of the court to determine your course of action, you program your physical body's tone by developing internal blueprinting.

The first aspect of blueprinting how your body is going to physically perform is acknowledging what you *feel*. Your feelings are the defining factor in how you stroke (strike) the ball. If you're *feeling* threatened or intimidated by your opponent, you've already jumpstarted the fight or flight response; putting your body under immediate stress. Stress equals physical tension and rigidity, which inhibits your ability to perform at your peak. If you can't perform at your peak, you can't stretch it out to break The Plateau Effect.

You don't have any need to display *mental toughness*, because when you instill the right internal blueprinting, you're never at odds with yourself. When you're calm inside of your body, you'll never appear to struggle or fight to stay alive in a match.

Let's face it; different players elicit different emotional responses. That's a fancy way of saying we all rub each other in different ways. Everyone has a tendency to bring out of each other different personality or character traits. It's not any different on the tennis court. In fact, it's actually more pronounced in a lot of ways. If you're intimidated, or even irritated by your opponent, it creates internal resistance to playing well.

Key Point: *Any time you're focusing your energy to entertain judgment about you or your opponent, you're in resistance to allowing your physical intelligence the space to shine.*

When you are in internal conflict or resistance, you're giving all the power of setting the tone of the match to your opponent. Furthermore, you spend the entirety of the match playing in reaction to the sensations you've derived from your judgment or typecasting of your opponent... and it's all happening inside of your body!

The friction you feel when you try to "read" your opponent isn't actually *reading* them at all. You're telling a story, and depending on how you write yourself in this epic; you either set

yourself up as the underdog, or you elevate yourself above your opponent. Either way, it's you animating the entire situation based upon how you intellectually stack yourself up against whomever it is you're playing.

Are you someone who believes you're great and always getting better, or do you all too easily feel disempowered?

You don't see this process though; you're too distracted analyzing your game and getting frustrated with yourself; with your body, as if it's separate from you. We end up beating ourselves up when we experience the repercussions of projecting judgment towards our opponent. We've all been there:

“Get on your freaking feet idiot!”

“Why the hell are you hitting late?!?!”

“Watch the goddamn ball. It's so freaking easy!”

“Why did you even try to hit that toss?!?!”

We all have our own unique internal (if not out loud) dialogue to beat ourselves down with when playing the game. All of this can be prevented if we acknowledge one essential truth: When you're playing tennis, nothing happens to you separate from the sensations being secreted, generated, or otherwise stimulated inside of your body. Of course, the same thing can be said about your place in reality, but I'll attempt to keep this as relevant as possible.

When you feel like your opponent is so much better than you, and he or she very well may be; you're actually inhibiting yourself from being able to take advantage of the situation. You're giving your opponent all the power, and the very best you can do is get as many balls back as possible... and maybe have a few flashes of brilliance. In contrast, if you embrace the discomfort you're feeling about perceiving yourself as inadequate in comparison to the person hitting the ball back to you; you're creating an amazing opportunity.

First of all, just the simple shift of your attention from feeling intimidated to positively engaged by the chance to experience different internal sensations, and therefore views of the ball is liberating. You are also becoming more aware of how your game is mirroring your feelings. In other words, how you internally animate the ball with your feelings determines whether you're hitting with fluidity or rigidity.

Key Point: *Every stroke is a reflection of how you feel when you hit the ball.*

If you're judging yourself for failing to adhere to some fundamental intellectual understanding of the game, you're setting yourself up to feel tense and stroke the ball poorly. Transversely, when you embrace discomfort and acknowledge it's a sign you're outside your comfort zone, each stroke has the potential to reveal new, previously unfounded possibilities. When you keep your body constantly guessing, e.g. never complacently hitting the same way again and again, you can't plateau.

You also aren't playing the game of comparing yourself to your opponent. Remember, the person standing opposite of you is inconsequential to how well you can stroke the ball back. *Nobody makes you feel anything.* Again, the external world you perceive is animated inside of your body. If you're internally animating your opponent to feel dominant over you; you can't win. Equally, if you're giving your opponent all of your energy, you're obviously giving no attention to how you feel when you hit the ball. In this scenario, the external world once again obtains supremacy over you.

Key Point: *A player who gives the external world all the power determines the level of his or her game one stroke at a time.*

Sound familiar?

However, when you reel in your power and stop telling stories about how the outside circumstances of tennis negatively affect you, your body immediately enters a state of relaxation. When you're relaxed, you allow your body to instinctively perform the functions it knows how to do. All of a sudden, all those tennis lessons begin to pay off... in a big way!

The question is what steps can you take that demonstrate how the quality of your every stroke is only as good as your connection with the feelings powering your physical body?

Firstly, you need to know what it feels like to be relaxed.

The How:

1. Start at the service line and hold the racket with your non-dominant hand.
2. Feed the ball into play. When you stroke the ball, eliminate the preparation and follow-through. You're focusing only on the contact point of the stroke; hitting the ball over the net about five times... On a side note, if it feels good, *and it does*, keep this going as long as you want.
3. Both you and your partner move back two steps and hit another five times. Repeat until you're on the baseline.
4. Now move forward, adding back into the stroke your preparation (back swing) and follow-through until you reach the service again.

5. Switch the racket into your dominant hand and repeat the exercise until you reach the baseline.
6. Once back on the baseline, you will find yourself hitting with more pace and far less muscling of the ball, if any, i.e. effortless
7. Really pay attention to how you're feeling. The more you acknowledge what relaxation feels like, the easier it'll be for you to maintain your attention there throughout your time on the court.

Why does this work?

Your brain is like a muscle. It can atrophy like a muscle too. If you don't engage your brain to exercise its neuroplasticity, it becomes complacent in maintaining unhealthy connections (neuronets). By using your non-dominant hand, you flood the opposite side of your brain with fresh blood and increase your capacity to more easily learn and allow your physical intelligence dominion over your body. The most fundamental process of creating new neuronets is by diving into discomfort.

By engaging both sides of your brain when you use your non-dominant and dominant hands, you're learning the game all over again, while drastically enlarging your capacity by creating new neuro-connections and secreting different chemical responses. This process is meditative in nature and allows you the perspective to see how impactful relaxation is in advancing the quality of your tennis game.

Speaking of relaxation; this sensation is absolutely key to unlocking the combination code to The Zone. Click to the next page to learn more!

Anatomy of the Zone

"Man often becomes what he believes himself to be. If I keep on saying to myself that I cannot do a certain thing, it is possible that I may end by really becoming incapable of doing it. On the contrary, if I shall have the belief that I can do it. I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it, even if I may not have it at the beginning." - Mahatma Gandhi

The Zone is a place of non-thought. Right there, it's actually quite easy to surmise why most people rarely, if ever experience being in The Zone. You cannot intellectualize your way into The Zone. Most tennis players are like wannabe scientists; trying to hypothesize the exact formula in every stroke to achieve excellence.

The more you try to become great, in many ways the further away you are from embodying the momentous occasion when everything comes together. Trying to get somewhere creates tension and rigidity inside of your body, because it inspires a tremendous amount of self-judgment and criticism.

How can you possibly exemplify tennis excellence when you're wasting so much energy belittling yourself?

Key Point: *The Zone doesn't exist in the mind of a self-deprecating tennis player.*

So if excellence is what you aspire to exhibit, you'll always be chasing it like a carrot dangling right in front of you for the entirety of your tennis career. An analytical mind is destined to fall prey to The Plateau Effect. Sure, you'll have glimpses of greatness, but you won't be aware of how you got there, nor will you be there very long. An analytical tennis player will always sabotage brief interludes in The Zone by saying to him or her self: "Wow, I'm in The Zone! How did I get here?" Of course, the moment you ask yourself this question, your body will almost immediately tighten up and you'll struggle to maintain the quality of play you were effortlessly demonstrating.

"So how do I get into The Zone?"

You know, it's amazing to me that so little emphasis is put upon the feeling aspect of non-judgmental playing. *The Zone is a feeling.* The best way to get into The Zone is through feeling; by exploring the sensations of stroking the ball, without an agenda or intention for the exact outcome.

No agenda?

The very essence of being goal oriented is contracting in the body. Why do you think so many tennis players choke at the most inopportune time? "Man, all I have to do is win the next three points and I'll actually beat this guy!" And as you say that, your body gets tense and your head becomes swarmed with thought noise. All of a sudden, those three points feel like a long tunnel

with no foreseeable light at the end. Really, is it any wonder how it's so easy to plateau? You reach the glass ceiling, but once you get there, the sheer discomfort makes you tense and falter.

Playing with no agenda is stroking the ball *void of intention*. You aren't hitting to get somewhere. Rather, you're immersing yourself in the sensations you experience during the stimulating instance when the ball is totally seducing your senses all through the stroke. You allow your body to organically prepare, feel the jolt of the contact point, and find acceptance in any follow through that naturally occurs.

Key Point: *You're hitting the ball for the experience of hitting the ball.*

You're not hitting the ball to find more power in your stroke, or fulfill some convoluted game plan. You're allowing your body to effortlessly demonstrate what it already instinctively knows.

Your body has way more intelligence than you.

Your body doesn't need you to tell it how to pump blood through the heart, digest food, or produce new cells. Likewise, once you've learned the basic fundamentals of a stroke, the exact nature of that stroke is in constant flux. You have to permit your body to make the organic adjustments it needs to perform in order to honor your senses. Hitting low to high for top spin isn't a set thing. The low and the high are always just a little bit different. You must acknowledge the ever-changing nature and fluctuations involved when there's an ongoing exchange of energy and will.

You can't control what your opponent does. You can only maintain your deliberate attention upon how it feels when you hit the ball. At the end of the day (or week, month, or year), the sensations you experience are different echelons of good and bad. Sometimes a stroke feels blissful, and other times it might feel downright abysmal.

Now here's the combination code to unlocking The Zone:

1. When you acknowledge what it feels like to hit an effortless stroke, where the ball penetrates deep into the other side of the court, and you exerted hardly any energy to generate awesome pace and heavy spin; really record the sensation you experience in that very instance.
2. Just like a smell can instantaneously bring you back to a particular place and time, how you remember a feeling can recreate the same magic of your strokes infinitely. Recalling a sensation in your holographic mind (*more on that in a minute*) becomes a part of your physical intelligence.
3. If you can maintain your attention on the internal sensations you experience at the point of effortless impact, and keep expanding upon that feeling by maintaining your attention there, while you're in the midst of continuing to play; you will quite literally feel yourself into The Zone. I call this The Sensation Exercise, whereby your focus isn't upon the external environment, but your internal world of feeling. The longer you can keep your

attention on the feeling of your strokes, rather than expecting a certain kind of outcome, the easier it is to literally become The Zone.

- Hit without agenda, but rather for the experience of sensation.
- The more you can maintain your attention upon the sensations of effortlessness, the easier it is to organically dissolve negative thinking. *A deliberate mind is a quiet mind.*
- The chatter in your head organically ceases to influence your body and your organic, instinctive physical intelligence is given the freedom it needs to perform at the highest level of play.
- The longer you play at your peak, the more you're expanding what was previously your glass ceiling.

The second key to unlocking The Zone is embracing discomfort. Again, discomfort is the blinking red light telling you that you're pushing the limits about what you think is possible for you to perform. Stay there. After a while, the discomfort dissipates and you plateau once more until you discover new uneasiness. This process is never ending. You never stop becoming a better tennis player, exploring different aspects of your own feelings, and watching those sensations demonstrate themselves on the court.

Remember, The Zone is a feeling. You become The Zone through embracing the feelings you experience when you strike the ball crisply and cleanly. The feelings build into an overwhelming internal state of thoughtlessness. That's The Zone!

Lastly, any sensation you feel that isn't harmonious with playing an effortless game must be accepted as an opportunity to redirect your attention. Don't attach yourself to playing poorly. Once you hit a fluid stroke, you can do it at any time by remembering and focusing upon that sensation. It's simply a matter of getting out of your own way. Feeling bad when you strike the ball usually means you're hitting with an agenda. Acknowledge your tendency to analyze your game, and remind yourself that nobody can break The Plateau Effect gauging their game shot by shot.

Tap back into the meditative energy you created by using the non-dominant hand drill from the previous chapter and instill relaxing sensations back into your body. Keep your attention upon the relaxing sensations until you hit that next effortless stroke. Once you do, record that feeling and maintain your attention there until you're in The Zone... and by the way, you won't really know you're in The Zone until the match is over and you realize how meditative the game was.

When you commit yourself to experiencing tennis by embracing the new combination code to creating The Zone; little things like hitting cross court or down the line must be redefined. Click to the next page to discover why, and what those tools are.

Holographic Tennis

What you interpret in your mind is being projected into the external world you play with by the brain. The brain interprets reality through patterns and images. The mind is the manager that influences the brain to secrete particular chemical and hormonal responses; in essence creating (or projecting) those images in your external reality. The mind is extremely holographic in nature. While the brain is a physical organ inside of your head, the mind is quite literally, everywhere.

Close your eyes (after you read this paragraph). Imagine yourself playing exactly how you idealize in your most grand tennis fantasy. Can you see it? Your forehand is flawless, effortless. Your backhand is fluid; hip rotation is faultless; so perfect that it's almost impossible for the naked eye to perceive the unforced movement. Can you see it? (Now close your eyes...)

Your body, specifically your brain responds to the stimulus in your vivid imagination (The Mind) just as much as physical reality. We give the external reality way too much credit. In truth, the external world doesn't exist without your observation of it. What?!?! Well, okay, let me get off my esoteric horse for a second and rephrase that for you: Your reality is a constant question mark; waiting for your feelings to animate the people and circumstances you observe. Your internal sensations are what bring to life and tell the story of your experience with reality.

Key Point: *Reality is really a holodeck to reflect your feelings.*

When you acknowledge that your tennis game is mirroring your most predominant feelings, The Plateau Effect is really just the observation of the same sensations over and over again. You keep bringing the same version of yourself to the table, so to speak, and therefore you demonstrate the same basic results with every stroke. However, when you apply The Sensation Exercise outlined in the previous chapter, you aren't functioning on auto-pilot or in reaction to the external circumstances playing out on the court. Rather, when you apply The Sensation Exercise, you are deliberate about what feelings get mirrored back at you in the holodeck of the tennis court.

The holographic nature of the mind stimulates the brain, which interprets images and patterns much easier than words. That's why really imagining what it feels like to play out of your mind can be so effective if you apply The Sensation Exercise and keep your attention focused internally, rather than externally. Conversely, words can inspire vivid images in the mind that the brain can tell the body to perform, again, if you feel the vibration of what you're saying.

"I enjoy stroking the ball effortlessly." What does that feel like? Can you keep your attention there, even in the midst of someone pounding the ball onto your side of the court?

"Okay, so what's the most effective way to impart how to hit a perfect stroke? Is it more effective to teach with words or with images and patterns?"

The answer is both.

However, we already have too much verbal instruction when we receive tennis lessons from a pro. The fact is that more people would feel way more inspired to move beyond their comfortable zone and into The Zone if the conventional method of tennis instruction really instilled within us the concept of effortless physical intelligence. However, conventional tennis instruction is based upon the intellectualizing of the game.

Remember, when you think about your stroke, your attention is firmly detached from acknowledging how you feel when you hit the ball. Thinking creates tension, and the very presence of intellectualizing your game is on the opposite end of where you'll discover The Zone.

In order to transcend the conventional way of teaching and playing, we need to embrace the holographic nature of the mind. Equally, we need to acknowledge the relationship between the mind and the brain to more effectively reveal our innate physical intelligence. To begin shifting from sending our bodies vague commands like hitting down the line, we need to release the limiting beliefs we have about how our bodies receive information.

Key Point: *The tennis court is a mirror.*

The images we hold in our imagination (the mind) are reflected on the tennis court.

The more we can create and hold clear images, the easier it is for our bodies to execute those commands, and see our imagination mirrored on the court.

The Holographic Tennis Drill:

1. Take six different colored cones.
2. Put one on the center hash mark, two on each corner of the baseline, and mimic the other three along the service line.
3. Standing on the opposite side of the court, familiarize yourself with hitting each shot towards a particular colored cone. For instance, blue is the center hash mark. Red is the backhand side of the baseline and green is the forehand corner.
4. As you see the color blue in the movie theater of your holographic mind, your brain programs your physical intelligence to hit towards the center of the court. Similarly, when you feel the imprinting of the color green in your holographic mind, your body's physical intelligence instinctively aims at the forehand side of the baseline.

This drill helps reprogram your brain to hit by color, rather than verbal instruction. In doing so, thought is considerably taken more out of the equation, and you're able to place more importance upon the feelings you experience when you strike the ball. It doesn't matter if you're hitting a

forehand, backhand, overhead, or volley; the results will always be the same when you allow your body to follow through on its instinctive physical intelligence.

There's also no need for you to control or think about your stroke (when you use this exercise), because your holographic mind is thoroughly seduced by holding a particular color, while allowing your brain to send the proper signals for your body to perform.

Now, if you've been playing a while, it might feel uncomfortable to retrain yourself to hit any differently than you're accustomed to. However, if you're reading this ebook, you've most likely been stuck in The Plateau Effect for the majority of your tennis career, minus the first year or so you were ingraining your permanent habits. Embrace the discomfort, because it's telling you that there's a lot to be gained by taking the above steps to refine and redefine how you and your body perceive the mirror of the tennis court.

Also, keep in mind that when you're unlearning potentially limiting instruction, you might likely feel some internal friction. The sensations of friction, in any learning or unlearning endeavor are your previous beliefs or habits being challenged. You want these sensations pulsing through your body when you push yourself to embody a different interpretation of the game.

Much of your habits are ingrained traits of your persona, not just on the tennis court, but in most, if not all areas of your life. It's of massive consequence to continuously challenge yourself to shed old beliefs about the game as you feel any friction organically come up for acknowledgement.

The way you perceive yourself also plays an enormous role in the quality of your play. Click to the next page to better understand how to cultivate a more harmonious relationship with yourself that will allow your body to perform more effortlessly.

The Way You Perceive Yourself

Okay, if you have a low opinion of your game, especially in comparison to the person hitting the ball back to you, you've already lost. Worst yet, you'll likely spend the entirety of your match or hitting exchange in huge internal friction. When you feel like you're less than capable of matching the efforts of your opponent, you're setting yourself up to experience a great deal of internal tension and friction. You're also taking away the pleasure of actually enjoying eliciting the instances you demonstrate physical greatness when you put yourself down.

After all, if you're essentially using The Sensation Exercise to perpetuate a self-defeating attitude, what's the point of acknowledging a good shot? What's the point of playing?

If you walk out onto the court feeling underwhelmed about your own game, your body isn't relaxed, but rather completely unengaged. In contrast, the sensations of experiencing overwhelm when you compare yourself to your opponent creates physical resistance to playing well. Perceiving yourself in a lowly way, no matter how much better your opponent is sabotages the entire purpose of playing the game. Bear in mind, we play for the experience of feeling sensation, one stroke at a time.

It's never about the other person playing on the court with you. Yeah, you might get a bunch of different looks at the ball, but it's where your attention is directed that determines how you allow your physical intelligence to respond. It's always you. You're either allowing your body to perform at its peak, or you're resisting your inborn physical intelligence. Resistance manifests itself as your need to control and analyze how your body performs; like it's separate from you.

Resistance to allowing your body the chance to reveal its natural physical intelligence can be:

- Judging yourself for making the same mistake.
- Judging your opponent for playing in a way that could be considered classless like throwing in moon ball after moon ball just for the sake of winning, rather than stroking the ball well.
- Verbally berating yourself, throwing your racket, or exhibiting some kind of outburst towards someone else, as if they have any control over how you're playing. (Remember, nobody makes you feel anything!)
- Focusing on environmental influences like abundant sunshine, the wind, it being too hot or too cold, etc. Any attention you may give to outside influences (that are completely beyond your control) are a major point of internal resistance to playing well. They're also great ways to blame for your lack of brilliance when you lose.
- Personality conflicts can also greatly affect your attention from being focused upon deliberate internal sensations. If you're experiencing internal friction because your opponent rubs you the wrong way, you certainly aren't focused on the feelings that will propel you into The Zone, are you?

The only reason you would bother giving any energy to the above points of resistance is illuminating a poor opinion of your own game, and maybe even you as a person. If you aren't naturally confident in your capacity to allow your physical intelligence the chance to incessantly shine, what you're really feeling are limiting beliefs about your abilities.

Essentially, you use your absent faith in the fluidity of your strokes, the clumsiness of your footwork, or the inadequate weight of your topspin as the reasons why your play suffers. In truth, there will always be a reason or a perceived physical hitch in your game that can coerce your attention to have a built-in failure mechanism. It only stands to reason that if you put your attention upon inadequacies, you will never feel content with your level of play, win or lose.

On the flip side, if you can heal your relationship with yourself, and begin right now to honor the unique qualities about who you are and how you've come to interpret the game of tennis, you will observe massive change in how your body functions on the court. You see, we all have a way of ingraining within ourselves the idea that we'll always play a certain way. Sure, there might be a little fluctuation in the quality of your play; sometimes higher, other times lower, but you'll stay inside the same basic construct.

That's a perfect demonstration of a player who pays no attention to the way he or she feels at that glorious point of contact.

However, when you pay homage to your abilities and appreciate yourself, where ever it is you are right now, change begins to organically appear in your game, and be reflected in the mirror of the tennis court.

Real change: The kind of change that makes you forget about the player you thought you were occurs when you change as a person and let go of the limiting beliefs preventing your physical intelligence the ability to thrive. More on that later, but the bottom line is, you can't become a consistently improving player until you allow yourself to appreciate every good, bad, or indifferent aspect of your present game.

Key Point: *Every stroke is born inside of your body.*

Key Point: *Change your mind, change your body, change your game.*

The process of honoring your perceived flaws, while also being grateful for the flashes of brilliance you possess is the doorway to becoming a better player. The most important aspect to be aware of in this process is; you are always becoming a better player.

- Yes, you will give yourself plenty of opportunities to acknowledge contrast in your game.
- Yes, you will hit the ball out.
- Yes, you will hit the ball into the net.

- Yes, you will falter.

The more you realize that by simply not feeding those mistakes with your attention upon the negative feelings you experience when those trip ups are made, the less they'll be a part of your tennis experience. Likewise, when you appreciate the heightened feelings you derive at an amazing point of contact, and acknowledge the effortless nature of the power you generated, it will become easier and easier to eliminate self-judgment.

Here's an exercise that will inspire you to really pay attention to how you perceive yourself when you play the game. After all, it's your relationship with yourself that determines how you'll play. It's not the weather, your opponent, or even the racket or your shoes. It's always you, 24/7:

1. When you walk out onto the court, the most important action you can make is capturing the internal essence of what it feels like to be larger than life.
2. You might imagine you're a heavyweight boxer coming into the ring to face a weaker opponent.
3. To keep it relevant for tennis, perhaps you could fantasize it's a Sunday finals at a major grand slam and you've already been playing at the top of your game for the entire two weeks getting there.
4. Really allow yourself to embody the character you give yourself. This is the epitome of Holographic Tennis!
5. As you begin warming up, give your imagination the freedom to openly explore your fantasy. Add dimension to the story. Who's in the crowd watching you? What are the commentators talking about? You know, let your fantasy become alive.
6. Allow the narration of the story about your past limitations to naturally dissolve inside your mind as your focus shifts towards the sensations you experience when you hit the ball.
7. The more you keep your attention upon your internal feelings, gradually redirecting all your energy towards only the sensations that feel good; you are in the process of becoming The Zone. (Using The Sensation Exercise)

Another huge aspect in your tennis evolution is physical fitness and overall health. To understand why, click to the next page and prepare to challenge your body in ways that will awaken and engage your physical intelligence like never before.

Your Body is a Temple

What I absolutely love about tennis is, every point, heck every stroke is an opportunity to redefine how you play the game. You're never stuck in a style of play or paradigm that doesn't feel good. It always comes back to observing the feelings that elevate your passion, and keeping your attention upon those internal sensations as your body follows suit.

However, you'll never be truly satisfied unless your body *can* follow suit. Physical fitness and the way we treat our bodies with food is a central theme for any would-be great tennis player. If your body is incapable of following the commands it receives with your attention upon positive sensations, you'll quickly get frustrated and the whole thing (your game) will fall a part.

I don't care how old you are, or what your story is. Everybody has a story, and if you want to allow your story to have power over your ability to endlessly become a better tennis player, be my guest. Enjoy your misery.

Still there?

Good.

When your body is experiencing the stress of both the fight or flight response and physical impact training; the tissues in your body inflame; your muscles, tendons, and ligaments shorten (as a protective mechanism), and the cortisol/adrenaline response exhausts you faster. Not only that, but you recover much slower, especially if you don't effectively stretch before and after pounding the court. Obviously, this commands a big role in your ability to consistently perform at a high level of play.

The physical body is made of connective tissue. This clear looking filmy substance literally surrounds just about every part of your body; all the way down to your red blood cells. John Barnes, the creator of Myofascial Release even went so far as to say that "There are no muscles. Everything is connective tissue." The distribution of blood is a major factor in keeping this tissue supple, separately functioning (in the whole), and lubricated.

When we engage in high impact exercise, like tennis, our bodies tend to contract. The contraction process, combined with the inflammation response described above creates tightness, pain (because of retaining lactic acid and other toxins), and a predisposition to injury. Contraction also decreases oxygenation; the process of pushing blood and nutrition to all the deepest crevasses in your body. Oxygenation is also the volume of blood pumping through your heart. So it stands to follow that when we participate in high impact exercise, we're diminishing the distribution of blood, which obviously has some consequences if it's not kept in check.

To quickly surmise, if your connective tissue is contracting over your muscles and blood flow is slowing down from a lack of oxygenation, your bodily response to physically perform a stroke is greatly inhibited. The emotional repercussions are frustration, anger, self-judgment, resentment, jealousy (when you opponent isn't showing signs of the same process), and feeling disparagement.

Now, the question arises: How do I condition my body to handle the high impact nature of playing tennis and excel in doing so?

Firstly, let's look at three of the most oxygenating things we can do for our bodies:

1. **Breath:** Deep, conscious breathing floods our bodies with oxygenation. Most people breathe unconsciously; very shallow. Shallow breathing is a guarded mechanism we experience in reaction to stress. You would think it would be the other way around, but alas, our decisions, conscious or not, don't always make sense... Make sure when you're feeling stressed to remind yourself to breathe deeply through your nose, and really engage yourself to push all the air out. The more you stop and consciously perform this breathing exercise, the more innate it will become!
2. **Food:** The way we create oxygenation through our diets is by eating a diverse selection of Whole Foods; rich in enzymes and all the nutrients we need to thrive. Oxygenation occurs through the assimilation of food. When we eat processed foods or red meat, our bodies struggle to digest. In fact, it can take a full day for your body to digest red meat (or a minimum of 6 to 7 hours). It actually diminishes oxygenation when we eat large amounts of heavy, and/or processed foods. All of your energy is going to digestion... What a waste.
3. **Low or non-impact exercise:** When you engage in high impact exercise, like tennis, you need to balance it out with other forms of moving your body. The two most effective forms of exercise to balance out high impact stress are swimming and rebounding (running in place, knees to belly button or above on a mini-trampoline.) These forms of exercise stimulate our red blood cells to separate from each other, grow larger, become more luminescent, and commence flowing again.

The other main element to sculpting a body capable of withstanding the high impact nature of tennis is core exercising. Your core ranges from the bottom of your ribs to the top of your knees, front and back. You should spend between 15 – 30 minutes a day working the core with different exercises. You need to vary your core training too, because doing the same exercises allows your body to plateau... if you don't employ muscle confusion (working muscles in different ways.) Pilates has become a very popular way to engage the core.

A strong core also ensures your body will maintain more length, even when subjected to high impact exercise. Specifically, your psoas muscles (your main hip flexors), which connect on either side of your lumbar spine will be more apt to maintain their length if the other core muscles are engaging. If you have a weak core, your psoas muscles tend to shorten up and exaggerate the natural curvature of your lumbar spine. This is the cause for most of the low back problems people experience, high impact exercise or not. This is also where your sciatic nerve begins, and when the spinal curvature amplifies, it gets pinched off creating pain in your low back, and sometimes in your butt, or even all the way down your leg(s).

Lastly, it's important to integrate yoga into your daily routine. You need to restore the suppleness of your muscles that become rigid and dry up from a lack of blood lubrication during high impact exercise back into a more optimal length. Holding key yoga poses that stretch your muscles is vital to helping your body recover and prepare for more tennis.

Look, there's nothing more frustrating than a body that doesn't do what you want it to. If you discipline yourself to spend an hour a day doing your low or non-impact exercise, core workouts, yoga, deep (conscious) breathing, and eating a more Whole Food diet, miraculous things will happen on the court. Your body will be much more apt to follow your holographic commands when it's vital, restored, and well nourished.

Your body is a temple.

Key Point: *The more you give to your body,
the more you'll get on the tennis court!*

You Can't Take Who You Are Right Now With You

Every stroke is an opportunity to learn, or more importantly, unlearn limiting beliefs about your perceived limitations! Every shot that instills an elevated positive sensation inside of your body is upgrading your physical intelligence. The more reference points you create that upgrades in your physical intelligence, the easier it is for you to stop thinking. Proof is in the pudding, right?

When you virtually eliminate thought from your strokes, it creates a much clearer line of communication for your brain to command your body via chemical messengers and the nervous system. When you play from this consciousness or perspective, you're literally reinventing yourself every time you swing at the ball.

When you have the physical fitness to push to your body to the maximum, and more importantly, allow for your organic physical intelligence to helm your strokes; change happens a lot faster. Who you are as a tennis player is in constant flux. This is an extremely consequential acknowledgement to make, because most players create a sort of tennis façade and get caught up playing that repetitive role.

Your body and your game are not static things. Everything about you is constantly changing. When you experience the same hitches in your strokes, it's actually going against the most fundamental law of the universe: Change is the only constant.

Of course, if you're unaccustomed to paying any attention to the way you feel when you reach that glorious contact point, it makes sense that you get lost in repetition. When you intellectualize your game, you're not allowing your organic physical intelligence the space to function. Thinking only confuses how your body receives information from the hypothalamus gland and nervous system; just to name a couple of processes.

Combination Code to The Zone tennis is about embodying the now. When you're present with the way you feel as you stroke the ball, you get to choose where your attention is persuaded. It's easy to hit a bad shot and put your attention upon it. However, it takes character, discipline, and desire to hit a bad shot, while you keep your attention on the internal sensations of feeling positive. In other words, you can't hit a bad shot and give away your power to it, or else you'll embark down a very up and down journey. When you maintain the ability to stay deliberate with your attention upon expansive, good feeling sensations, your body is always just one breath away from The Zone.

We damn ourselves in tennis purgatory when we make comments like:

“How can you be so stupid?!?!”

“Just hit through the ball you idiot!!! How hard can it possibly be to hit through the freaking ball?!?!”

“Man, I just can’t get any rhythm today.”

The words you use are an indication of where your attention lies. Attention is so much more than the apparent. Attention is what you think about, what you smell, hear, say (and how you say it), and even believe. If you have limiting beliefs that tell you there’s no way you’ll ever be any better than you are right now, tell me, what’s the use in going out there?

Key Point: *Who you are right now can’t come with you on your tennis journey because you are committing to excellence.*

The brilliance you want to embody is a constantly changing, growing, contracting, and expanding masterpiece.

There are always different sensations you can place your attention upon, and therefore physically demonstrate. You play tennis to reveal those possibilities. As the limiting beliefs you harbor become challenged, you must keep your attention upon only the sensations you enjoy seeing reflected back to you. By doing so, who you are falls away and your physical intelligence becomes upgraded the more you let go of these destructive thoughts. Who you are as a tennis player, right now, is only going to be around for as long as you play with the sensations presently seducing your attention.

Every time you walk out onto the court, you should see a big question mark. The question mark is asking you, what kind of experience do you want today? You answer with your attention; you answer by feeling yourself stroke the ball and when you get that sensation of sweetness at a particular contact point, away you go on that journey.

Key Point: *Your tennis game changes, as you change.*

For most people, this is actually a very uneasy process, because we’re taught to be so proactive by focusing an intense amount of energy on the physicality of repetitively hitting a forehand, backhand, or serve. When you integrate the perspectives from this ebook into your training, whether you’re just hitting against the wall, or taking lessons from a pro; you can allow your body to truly upgrade its physical intelligence just by being aware about how you feel and applying The Sensation Exercise.

In fact, when you are aware about sensation, and place all your energy and emphasis there, the external results will never be a surprise. The tennis court is a mirror, remember? However, if you hit a shot that sails out when you’re telling yourself you were immersed in The Zone, you might wonder how this could happen? What you’re really acknowledging is that you weren’t in The Zone at all. You were trying to sell yourself a story, all the while falling into the same traps of judging you and your opponent’s game.

Key Point: *Your results will never lie.*

You can tell any story about how you're playing that you want, but if your results are in contrast to what you say you're feeling, you're full of shit!

The Combination Code to The Zone requires that you are absolutely accountable for everything that you feel. That's how greatness is revealed on the tennis court. You will never achieve the amazing results you want unless you accept what I'm saying and really allow yourself to release all the lies creating the stream of dialogue in your head. Remember though, don't get too attached to who you think you are right now as a tennis player, because when you play from the inside-out, you're always changing. In fact, you're already different...