

The Inner Game

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2017 William Adam Trumpet Festival
July 27 – 30, 2017
University of Oklahoma
Norman, Oklahoma

What is the Inner Game?

The primary discovery of the Inner Game is that, especially in our culture of achievement-oriented activities, human beings significantly get in their own way.

The point of the Inner Game of sports or music is always the same – to reduce mental interferences that inhibit the full expression of human potential.

People “play” sports and “play” music,
yet both involve hard work and discipline.

Both are forms of self-expression which
require a balance of spontaneity and
structure, technique and inspiration.

Both are also commonly performed in front of an
audience and provide an opportunity for sharing the
enjoyment of excellence, as well as the experience of
pressure, fears, and the excitement of ego
involvement.

Gallwey goes on to say whether we are playing sports or playing a musical instrument, and in everything we do, there are two games being played.

An outer game and an inner game

The outer game is where we overcome external obstacles to achieve an external goal.

Mastering this game is the subject of many books and YouTube videos regarding how to do this or how to do that.

In trumpet, this outer game may include overcoming that difficult technical section, making it through a long phrase, or just playing consistently well.

The inner game is the game that takes place in the mind of the player, and it is played against such obstacles as lapses in concentration, performance anxiety (nervousness), self-doubt and self-condemnation. In short, it is played to overcome all habits of mind which inhibit excellence in performance.

In other words, these internal obstacles are the ones that interfere most with our performance and keep us from experiencing our full potential.

Players of the Inner Game find that when they focus on eliminating this external interference, their outer game performance automatically comes closer to their potential.

Inhibiting attitudes and tendencies-such as anxiety, fear of failure, and self-doubt-make us feel stressful, and our muscles respond by tightening up. They also distract and scatter our attention.

In Inner Game terms, the kind of mental static that interferes with our natural ability is known as “self-interference”.

INNER GAME BASICS 1:

The Performance Equation

$$P = p - i$$

Performance equals potential minus
interference

In this equation, P refers to Performance, which we define as the result we achieve; what we actually wind up feeling, achieving, and learning.

Similarly, *p* stands for potential, defined as our innate ability; what we are naturally capable of.

And *i* means interference; our capacity to get in our own way.

Most people try to improve their performance (P) by increasing their potential (p) through practicing and learning new techniques.

THE STUMBLING BLOCK:

SELF INTERFERENCE

Remember the Worst Moment?

I want you to go back for a moment and take a look at the most painful and unpleasant musical experience you ever had. Even if it happened years ago, you may still have a very vivid picture of what happened.

Remember the Best Moment?

And now I want you to go back for a moment and take a look at the best musical experience you ever had.

Can you remember it? How much can you recall about this?

Or is it possible that you were so involved in what you were doing that your mind wasn't able to comment on it. You can't recall details other than remembering it was a "good" memory.

THE LESSON

What can we learn from this?

Isn't it reasonable to think that our performance would improve tremendously if we could eliminate that critical voice altogether?

INNER GAME BASICS 2:

The Discovery of the two selves

Self 1 and Self 2

Gallwey explains in “The Inner Game of Golf” his “breakthrough” with understanding the problem of control of mind and body came when, as a tennis instructor, he became aware of a constant commentary going on inside his head as he played.

As he began to take a closer look at the thoughts going through his mind during a tennis match, he found himself asking, “Whom am I talking to, and who is doing the talking? One was playing tennis; the other was telling him how.

Gallwey refers to the voice that’s doing the talking as SELF 1, and the person spoken to as SELF 2.

Self 1 , the one who thought he knew all about how to play was supervising **Self 2**, the one that had to hit the ball. In fact, **Self 1** not only gave **Self 2** instructions, but criticized him for past errors, warned him of probable future ones, and lectured him whenever he made a mistake.

It was easy to see that the primary feeling in the relationship between these two selves was mistrust. **Self 1** didn't trust **Self 2** to hit the ball, and, precisely to the extent that he lacked trust, he would try to force **Self 2** to conform to his verbal instructions.

He noticed that when he had more confidence in his ability to hit a shot, there was a corresponding decrease in instructions from **Self 1** and that **Self 2** would perform amazingly well.

To perform our best, we must quiet Self 1 interference and let Self 2 do what it knows how to do.

Every time we succeed in blocking out Self 1 and allow Self 2 do 'its' thing, we will get better results.

By the way, Self 2 loves visual images.

Gallwey mentions the phrase;
“Relaxed Concentration” and calls this
the “MASTER SKILL” of the Inner Game.

Inner Game techniques can reduce the effects of
self-interference and guide us toward an ideal state of being.
This state of being makes it easier for us to perform at our
potential by rousing our interest, increasing our awareness,
and teaching us to discover and trust our
built-in resources and abilities.

It is a state in which we are alert,
relaxed, responsive, and focused.

What is relaxed concentration?

It is simply the capacity to focus totally.
It is truly being conscious and free of
fear, doubt, and confusion.

The challenge of the Inner Game is for us to
bypass the critical interference of Self 1 and
unleash the natural power and grace of Self 2.

It is impossible to learn much about concentration without practicing it, and it is not until we start practicing it that we become aware of what it is, what its benefits are, and, perhaps, how un-concentrated we have been.

Can relaxed concentration be taught? Gallwey doesn't think so, but also believes that it can be learned through practice.

Relaxed concentration cannot be forced. It occurs naturally and takes a *small but constant* effort to keep conscious and present enough to our immediate experience so that we don't get pulled away. It requires nonjudgmental recognition when we do get distracted, followed by a gentle return to focus.

We can't make relaxed concentration happen any more than we can make sleep happen. It occurs when we allow – not force – our self to become interested in each moment of our life.

Quieting the mind is the first step in concentration!

Three essential characteristics of relaxed concentration:

- (1) heightened awareness or perception
- (2) strong and undivided desire or choice
- (3) heightened trust in potential and
an absence of self-doubt

Quieting the mind is the first step in concentration!

So... in playing the trumpet,
what is the goal?

What do we focus on?

The best way to quiet the mind is not to tell it to “shut up” or argue with it, but to keep our minds in a single thought.

That thought is the thought of the most beautiful sound we can imagine.

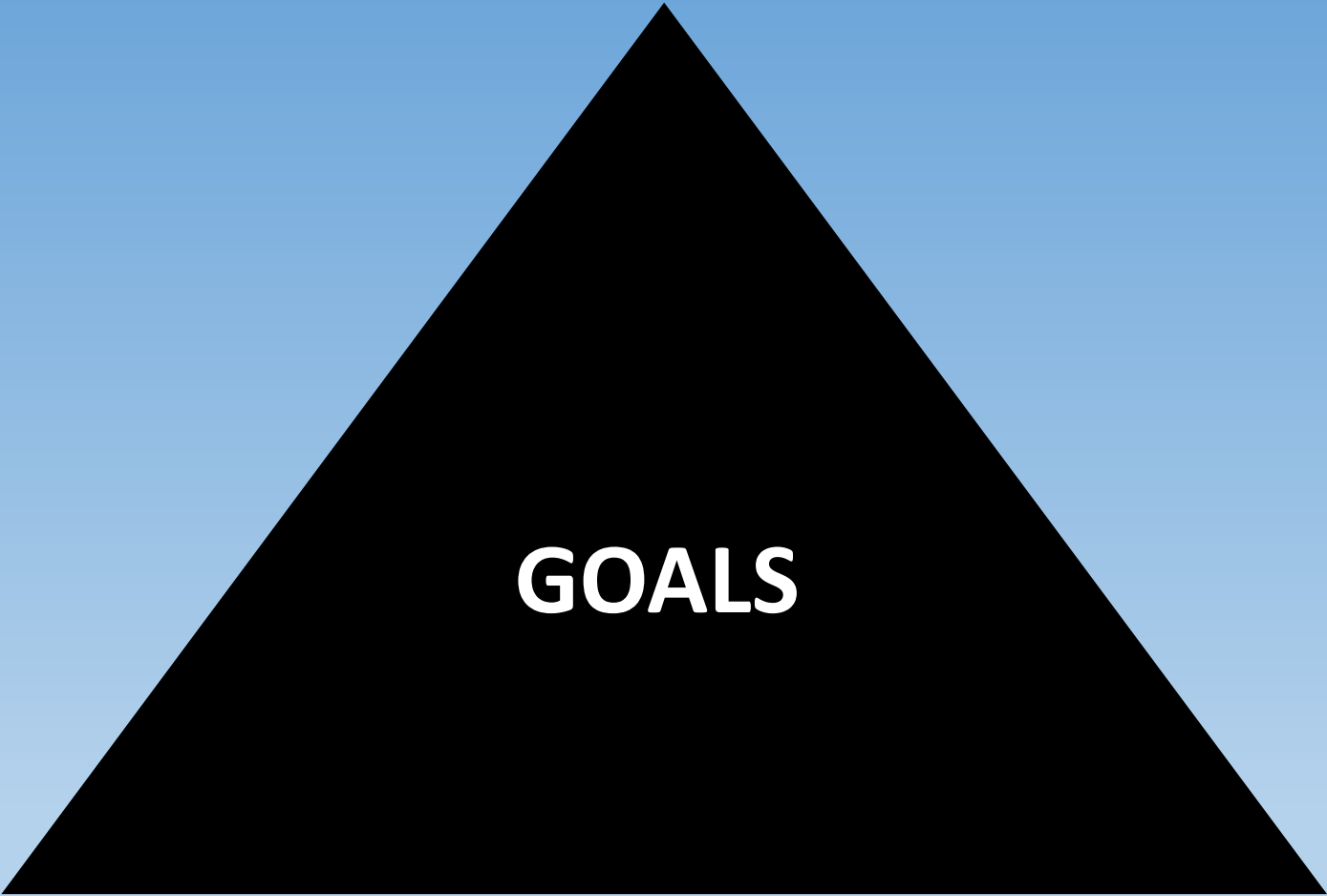
Focusing on a single thought; our beautiful sound allows what is going to happen to us, happen without conscious thought and allows us to accomplish the task at hand.

When our mind is thinking of the sound, we have no time to allow Self 1 interference with judgment or “to give instructions” to Self 2.

INNER GAME BASICS 3:

The P.E.L. Triangle

Performance (Achievement)



Experience

Learning

Performance (Achievement)



GOALS

Experience

Learning

In goal-oriented activities such as playing a musical instrument or sports, we commonly place all the importance on how well we succeed in terms of our outer goal – achievement. When the outer game of performance is balanced by the Inner Game goals of experience and learning, we are more likely to succeed in each of the these three areas.

Performance (Achievement)



GOALS

Experience

Learning

In order for us to reap the full benefits of anything we are doing, it is important for us to be aware of:

- the quality of our experience while we are doing it.
- what we are learning as we do it
- how close we are coming to achieving our goals.

INNER GAME BASICS 4:

Awareness, Will, and Trust

Awareness is the first Inner Game skill, and in many ways the most fundamental.

When we are simply aware, without judgement, of the degree to which the outcome of our acts matches our intention, a natural learning takes place. This is the way we learned to walk, after all!

But when our judgements come into play, we usually try to figure out “what went wrong” and then overcompensate for our errors. This often causes us to tighten our muscles and increase our overall body tension. We “try” too hard, and this produces more errors the next time around.

Awareness, then, means simple awareness of what is happening, before the “rush to judgement” take place.

Will is the second Inner Game skill. Gallwey defines will as both the direction and the intensity of our intention. In other words, it is will that sets a goal, moves directly toward it, and then resets its sights to come closer to accomplishing the goal next time around.

Will works through trial and error. It uses feedback that awareness gives to improve its aim. In musical terms, we make use of will skills to decide what we want to play and how to play it, and in gradually shaping our performance closer to the ideal.

Trust is the third of the Inner Game skills, and goes hand in hand with the other two. It takes **trust** to allow simple awareness to take place, without immediately bombarding ourselves with criticisms and judgements. It takes **trust** to explore the **will's** trial-and-error approach.

Above all, it takes **trust** in our inner resources for us to tap into them and so perform our best.

The secret of playing the Inner Game is to develop these three skills and to balance them. As with performance, experience, and learning, these three skills can be represented as a triangle;

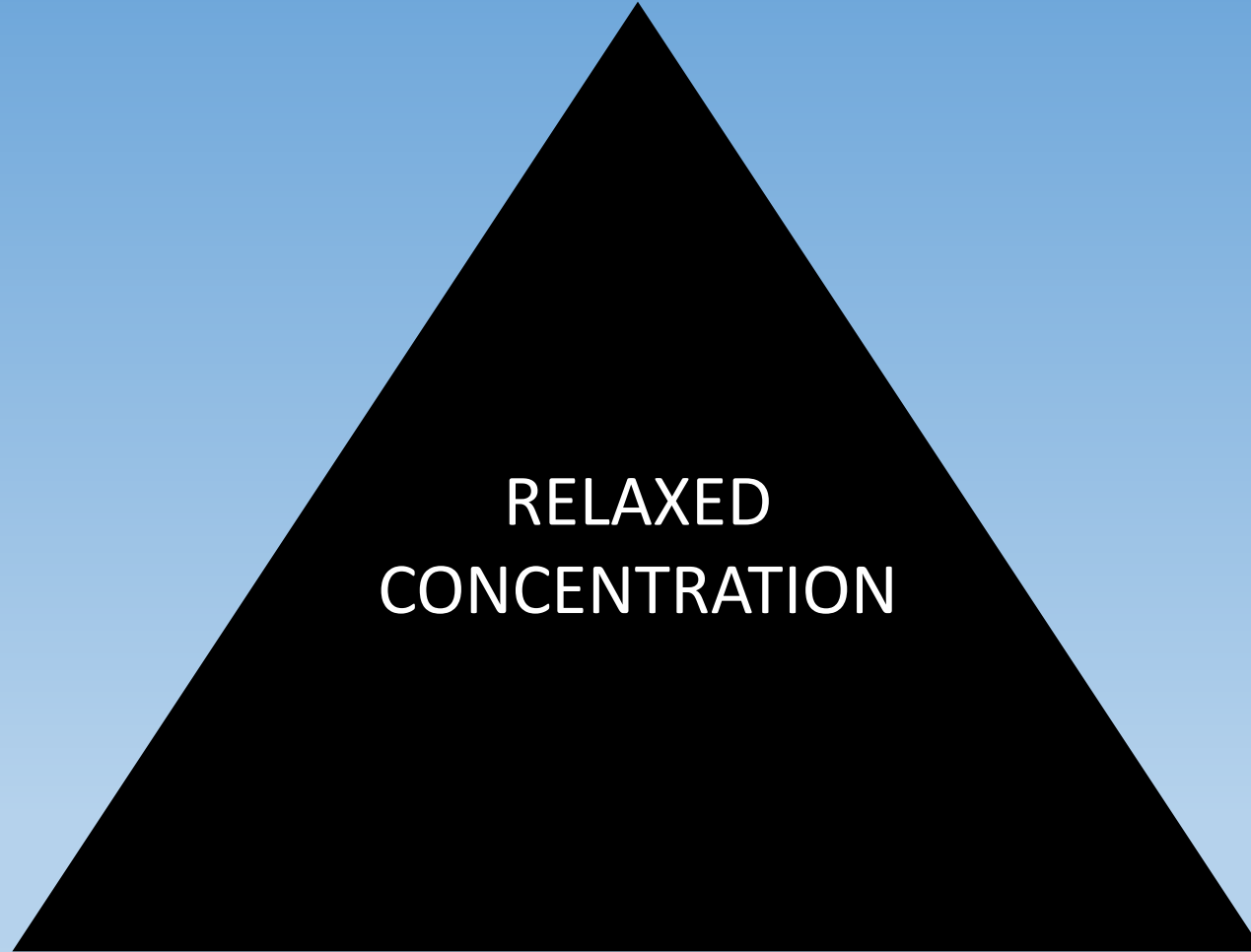
The A.W.T. triangle.

Will (including goal clarity)

**RELAXED
CONCENTRATION**

Awareness

Trust



Each time we play the Inner Game, we increase our skills a little more in each area. This in turn will result in improved outer game performance, heightened learning, and greater enjoyment. A balance of all three skills will lead us into the state of RELAXED CONCENTRATION that we discussed earlier.

If we want to perform successfully, we need to keep Self 1 occupied, so that its tendency to doubt doesn't get a chance to bother us.

Applying the Inner Game to Mr.
Adam's approach to the trumpet.

AWARENESS

Mr. Adam taught us that trumpet playing is 90% mental, 9% physical and 1% of all the other stuff that we should not be thinking about!

We are *AWARE* of the lips, fingers, etc., but our mind should be totally focused on Sound.

Gallwey and Green mention in the Inner Game of Music:

Whenever we are playing, and we notice we're in a "trying state", stop trying, and focus our awareness on a single element.....

Trying allows doubt and anxiety to create interference patterns, blocks our natural awareness, and produces tension in our body. When the task that we have set ourselves is easy, on the other hand, Self 1 has no room to doubt our ability to perform it, and this kind of overtrying doesn't take place.

Why did Mr. Adam have us play things
so slow when we were first working
on a piece of music?

Gallwey refers to this approach as “the Doctrine of the Easy.” When we are confronted with a difficult task, we can break it down into a series of patterns that are easy and familiar. Instead of dealing with the usual doubts and fears, we can then trust Self 2 to accomplish the task without interference.

SOUND

Focusing on the sound of our playing will help to reduce Self 1 small talk, and make us less likely to be distracted by other sounds in the environment. It will also help to decrease any physical stress we may be feeling and to relax our muscles.

The single most common physical cause of error in trumpet playing is overtightness; or isometric muscle activity.

In an effort of playing with more power is responsible for more chipped notes and notes “fizzling” out. We try too hard!

Mr. Adam would always tell us; “Strength is our weakness; weakness is our strength.”

When belief in technique becomes stronger than belief in our fundamental abilities, there will inevitably be loss in both confidence and performance.

By the way, what are the 5 fundamentals of trumpet playing that we must work on daily?

SOUND
FINGERS
FLEXIBILITY
TONGUING
RANGE

And most importantly, applying these
fundamentals to MUSIC!

Precision in producing the most beautiful sound is as much a state of mind as it is a technical accomplishment.

One of the ways I find the state of mind that produces the end result without mental interference is to imagine the sound being blown through the eye of a needle.

As a result, interesting things happen.

The sound becomes more “upfront”,
the acceleration of the breath

increases, and before long, the color

and timbre of the sound blossoms

with tremendous ease. All from the

imagined thought of “blowing through

the eye of a needle”.

Gallwey mentions the following. (I have replaced the words “tennis and golf” for trumpet).

The development of trumpet playing can either be daunting and frustrating or relatively easy and natural process. We have a choice! If we give the control to Self 1 by trying to impose all the should and shouldn'ts, do's and don'ts, we will travel the path of complexity.

If, on the other hand, we can find our way to the natural learning process that we in fact already have, then the continuous improvement of our playing can be simple and enjoyable.

It is impossible to really concentrate on playing the trumpet when our head is filled with scores of instructions. It is next to impossible to play well when the emotions are involved in the fear of failure.

The key to success is a relaxed mind, faith, and the effort to surrender to Self 2. Trust in Self 2 means we expect to play the notes correctly, even more so after we falter.

Why?

Because it's the nature of Self 2 to learn from experience, and it will if we don't let doubt and Self 1 control get in its way.

In conclusion, to gain clarity on the mental problems of trumpet playing we introduced the concept of Self 1 and Self 2.

Self 1 was the name given to the conscious ego-mind which likes to tell Self 2, the body and unconscious computerlike mind, how to play.

The key to spontaneous, high-level trumpet playing is in resolving the lack of harmony which usually exists between these two selves.

This requires the learning of several inner skills, chiefly the art of ***letting go of self-judgements***, letting Self 2 do the hitting, recognizing and trusting the natural learning process, and above all gaining some practical experience in the art of concentration.

When a trumpet player comes to recognize, for instance, that learning to concentrate may be more valuable to him, they shift from being primarily a player of the outer game to being a player of the Inner Game.

Then, instead of learning concentration to improve our playing, we PRACTICE DAILY to improve concentration. This represents a crucial shift in values from the outer to the inner. Only when this shift occurs within a player does he free himself of the anxieties and frustrations involved in being overly dependent on the results of the external game.

Only then does he have the change to go beyond and reach a new awareness of potential.

I believe this is what Mr. Adam referred as being “mentally free”.

It has been a privilege to speak with you today regarding The Inner Game

Greg Wing