

Having trouble achieving your peak performance? If you want to hit the home runs in sport, your career or relationships, you first need to unlock the secrets of the mind. Here comes the science...

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Craig Alexander leads the pack during the ride leg of the Geelong Half Ironman

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## THE SECRET SCIENCE OF **WINNING**

The experts have been saying it for years. To be a winner you just need to believe in yourself and put in the hard yards—right? Well, sort of. The answer may be more scientific than we've been led to believe. Neuroscientist and former maths geek Dr Kerry Spackman has spent years helping the world's elite improve their performance, working with everyone from Hollywood stars to world champions. He's cagey about naming names, but we know he helped turn Formula 1 driver Lewis Hamilton into the next Schumacher, and he's currently working with the New Zealand Olympic team to gear

it up for 2012. The UK-based guru is known to charge as much as £10,000 a day as a consultant to sports stars or celebrities. Spackman uses principles from neuroscience and psychology to uncover the mental blocks and rise above the limitations that hamper success. He's based his new book *The Winner's Bible* on tools he's used to train world champions. "The brain doesn't work in the way most people think it does," he says. "A lot of behaviour is actually driven by your primitive brain." In the deeper layers of the brain, known as the "limbic system" we make decisions without even being aware of it.



It's the part that controls things like hunger, sex drive, addictions and emotions. Spackman describes it like this: "If I see a pretty girl, my limbic system will say, 'go and talk to her'. My logical brain will come up with a justifiable reason for me to talk to her, saying she looks interesting. I will think I've made the decision based on logical thought, but the limbic system made the decision first and the conscious brain followed obediently."

Spackman says many people end up in a battle between the logical and emotional circuits of the brain because they try and follow a set of rules, like I mustn't eat chocolate or I must train every day. "The brain just doesn't operate that way," he says. "Rules don't work. They're too much like hard work and we don't naturally want to follow them—that's why we have rules in the first place. What we need instead are tools to change our natural desires so we don't even want to eat chocolate in the first place. Life becomes much easier and more powerful when you do this." What we naturally like and what we're attracted to are not always good for us, he argues. In his book Spackman gives an example of a successful businessman who had a girlfriend he was besotted with. But he had doubts about her sincerity. He reckoned she was a bit of a good time girl and if times got tough, he couldn't rely on her. He was so attracted to her he couldn't let go. Spackman used imagery to capture the reality of the situation, drawing parallels between the highs and lows the guy was experiencing in the relationship and a cocaine addiction. The image resonated for the businessman and he called an end to their relationship. Spackman describes the process as "emotional transformation", where you find a substitute situation that captures the emotion of an event that's causing you trouble. The Kiwi scientist is well-known in Formula 1 circles, where he began his career working with Sir Jackie Stewart and then the McLaren team, using his skills as a mathematician to devise a training program for drivers. He featured in the *Discovery* documentary *Speed Science*, about his work with F1 drivers, and he's worked with members of the All Blacks rugby team. He also successfully counselled a methamphetamine addict who quit an eight-year drug habit in just two sessions. He says he wrote *The Winner's Bible* after the motor racing champions and athletes he coached, frustrated with self-help

#### A WIN-WIN SITUATION

According to the blurb, *The Winner's Bible* contains "a comprehensive set of tools and step-by-step instructions that will allow you to rise above your natural limitations and get the very best out of every aspect of your life." The book's available now and retails for \$29.95. You can do some personality tests and find out more about the book at [www.thewinnersbible.com](http://www.thewinnersbible.com).



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books and sports psychologists, asked him for a set of tools that would cover everything they needed. "A lot of traditional sports psychology works on the logical side of the brain so it only treats you at a superficial level," he says. "It won't get you there for the long haul. Saying things like: be motivated and think of winning is not enough to sustain you. It's an incredibly unnatural level of discipline." Spackman uses more than 100 tools in the step-by-step approach outlined in his book. He says his method differs from other self-help books because it's based on how the brain actually works, and it's tailored to the individual. The cookie-cutter approach of most self-help programs is ineffective because it sets people up to fail, he says. "I don't like the simplistic nature of it, believe in this and you'll become a zillionaire. It's not true."

His book doesn't promise a quick fix but suggests dramatic change is possible. "It's not a simplistic thing. It's a whole process," he says. Most people read the book once, and go through it again putting each tool in place. One of the first steps he recommends is an independent audit of strengths and weaknesses, where trusted friends are asked to give anonymous feedback, a potentially scary prospect but one Spackman maintains is vital. Most people have something holding them back, a concept he calls "accidental hypnosis". He recalls one of his clients, a woman in her forties, who was having trouble finding the right guy, despite being attractive and having a wide social circle. Spackman had her do the independent audit, and one of the responses that came back said she had an annoying habit of talking over people. When people were halfway through their sentence she would interrupt or finish it for them. Talking with her was hard work. After probing her history, it turned out the woman had grown up with a hyper-critical mother, and consequently she felt the need to prove herself all the time. In conversation she had to prove she was so smart she knew what the other person was thinking. When she realised what was going on, Spackman says her life was transformed. Her social life improved and she met the man of her dreams.

The book has already gone to number one in Spackman's native New Zealand. He says the same principles apply whether you're an athlete, a weekend warrior or a housewife.

"It's really important to understand who you are. I've found people who've gone right through life who've never understood their own intrinsic drivers, what resonates with them." Spackman says everyone is wired differently so you have to figure out what works for you. "If you use the right tools even small interventions can have this incredibly profound effect." ■

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## WINNING WAYS

**What makes a winner? Natural talent; practice; skill; positive mental attitude? We quizzed some of Australia's most celebrated and successful sportsmen to find out how they became winners.**

### 🏊 SWIMMING BRENTON RICKARD

With a World Championship 100m breaststroke gold medal under his belt plus Olympic silver, Brenton Rickard expects to win when he lines up at the starting blocks. "A large part of the mental aspect is finding that calming energising influence before you compete." On the physical side, it's all about efficiency in the pool. "At 195 cms and 93 kilos, I'm much taller and bigger than a lot of guys I race. I use my size and power to outswim them." Rickard's strategy involves swimming as fast as he can with the minimum number of

strokes. "That's the thing that got me over the line in Rome. Some people were quicker than me. But they didn't have the right balance of speed and efficiency to start with. I was swimming as fast at the end as I was at the start," he says. While being bigger might mean he's more powerful, he also has a larger drag factor when he's in the water so has to train his body to race at a certain rate and power level. Commitment is very important if you want to be the best in the world. "I've learned that you've got to be willing to do every little thing possible to be the best. Attitude is everything."







“The good players are bounding around and trying to look fresh to psyche the other guy out.”

## 🎾 TENNIS RICHARD FROMBERG

At the peak of his career Aussie tennis ace Richard Fromberg was ranked 24 in the world and he remained in the top 100 for more than 10 years. Fromberg, now a tennis coach, says winning is as much about attitude as physical strength and fitness. “For some young players it doesn’t matter how they play, it’s whether they win or lose that matters. They’re able to lift their game without knowing it, because they want to win.” Fromberg says confidence is important, especially when you’re two sets down. “Tennis is a bit of a roller coaster, you can have streaks of winning

and losing.” But sometimes, all it takes is a couple of shots to turn a match around. “The first game of the set is one of the most important because you set the tone. If you’re two sets down and play a really good game, the play can change really quickly.” Another strategy is simply to hang in there and get the points until you wear the other guy down. “That can be a confidence boost for players.” And if you’re feeling tired, you certainly don’t show it. “The good players are bounding around and trying to look fresh to psyche the other guy out.”

## 🏏 CRICKET

### STEPHEN O’KEEFE

Staying alert is crucial during eight-hour cricket matches. All-rounder Stephen O’Keefe, a rising star of the New South Wales team, says cricket is a game of moments. “You’re out there for eight hours but you might only need to concentrate for two or three seconds in every minute.” The 23-year-old jokes around with his mates and tries to switch off outside of delivery. “I like to undo the straps of my gloves every ball, lean backwards and stand there and look around the field. Mentally when I take my gloves off it’s relaxing. It’s a way of switching off as opposed to worrying about what might happen next.” It’s important to include game-realistic scenarios in training sessions. “If you put yourself under pressure, you know you’ve got the back-up in every situation.” The key to success on the field is to stay relaxed and have faith in your ability, he says. “Mentally you go through a lot of hurdles. A lot of the time is spent being disappointed. It’s not one of those games where you’re always upbeat. But it’s important not to get too upset when things aren’t going well. You need to have mentors you can turn to when things aren’t going your way. It helps



## 🚴 TRIATHLON CRAIG ALEXANDER

Ironman Craig Alexander was in Hawaii preparing to defend his championship title when *MF* caught up with him in October. He says the long hours spent training help him prepare mentally as well as physically for the race. “You visualise yourself having a great performance. The result is out of my hands. I can’t control other

people.” While he’s out training, Alexander says he often clicks into race mode to practice how he might feel on the day. It’s about “checking all the boxes” to ensure there’s no scenario he hasn’t thought about or experienced before a race. “You can visualise having a great day but sometimes it’s about digging in and

battling.” According to Alexander, winners tend to be talented competitors with a great work ethic. “Look at Tiger Woods. He’s out on the green longer than anyone else. He works harder. That’s the common denominator. Knowing you’ve sculpted and nurtured that natural talent also gives you confidence.”



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