



MASTERMIND

MENTAL TRAINING
FOR CLIMBERS

JERRY MOFFATT

FOREWORD BY CHRIS SHARMA





MASTERMIND

Jerry Moffatt

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ON YOUR
WAY

GO!

FOREWORD

When I was a young climber in the early 1990s, Jerry inspired me in so many ways. His boulder problem in Yosemite, *Dominator*, was the standard by which everything else was measured, and it opened my eyes to how cool bouldering is and the level of difficulty that can be achieved in just a few moves.

I remember bouldering in Camp 4 with Ron Kauk, the king of foot-work. Ron was telling me how Jerry was always urging him to ‘forget the feet’ and campus things. Years later I definitely still subscribe to the ‘forget the feet’ philosophy!

Beyond his hard sends, Jerry’s playful attitude really inspired me to have fun with my climbing. When I was 21, I had the rare opportunity to do a road trip with Jerry, Malcolm Smith and Marius Morstad. I remember being really impressed by Jerry’s honed veteran experience, as he watched us for an hour trying a boulder in Rocky Mountain National Park before he then proceeded to flash it. I had a great time on that trip with those guys.

As I’ve got more experience, I know how important the psychological side of climbing is, and so Jerry’s book can really help you to build your confidence, deal with pressure and improve your climbing.

So, thanks Jerry! *Mastermind* is a great book, and you should be really proud of how much you’ve influenced climbing, and in the way you did it.

Chris Sharma

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the climbers who contributed to this book and everyone who racked their brains to make this book even better, most notably Professor Lew Hardy and Dr Noel Craine. Thanks to Hannes Huch, and Marion Hett, queen of graphic design, who made every page in this book into pure eye candy.



Chris and Jerry
© Jerry Moffatt

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'HARD WORK BEATS TALENT WHEN

TALENT DOESN'T WORK HARD.'

INTRO

As a child, I was competitive and wanted to do well and prove myself. At school, my achievements were not good – I am dyslexic and my reading and writing were bad. What’s more, I also struggled with numbers. I was bottom of the class in all subjects even though I was trying my hardest. At the age of eleven, I couldn’t read or write, and I had very low self-esteem and self-worth.

I passionately wanted to prove to myself and others that I was good at something. My school report at the age of seven said ‘Jeremy is now pathetically anxious to succeed.’ Thankfully, I was good at sports and I felt this was the area where I could do well and prove myself. This is where I got my real drive from. To some extent, it remains with me today.

I started climbing when I was fifteen and left school at seventeen with a few low-grade exam results. I went on a pursuit to become the best climber I could possibly be, fuelled by raw competitive drive and a desire to prove myself.

When I started climbing, it was all about strength, power and climbing all day, every day. As I matured, I grew to understand that there is more to climbing than the purely physical.

Despite the importance of strength, fitness, flexibility and movement, climbing is at its core a mind game. Sport is to do what your brain wants.

In climbing, there is no crowd to cheer you on. It’s just you against the rock. It’s a battle of holding it together when you’re pumped out of your brain, slapping for the next move or the top.

I was mentally strong in my climbing until I did my first competition when the pressures and performance area were completely different to anything I had been used to. I underperformed and then I became fascinated with the process of mind and mental control, dealing with the pressure of performing at, and beyond, what you think are your limits. I realised that understanding how to make my

mind work best under such intense pressure was the key to a winning performance. The difficulty was that information about sports psychology and the mental side of sports was hard to access before the days of the internet.

In *Mastermind*, I will share with you the different mental skills needed and used by climbers who have achieved great success over the past thirty years.

There are insights from a host of great climbers, the best in the world at this time, as well as my own thinking and research plus some academic insights from Professor Lew Hardy. Lew is Professor of Human Performance at Bangor University which has a worldwide reputation for research into elite performance. Lew is also an international mountain guide so totally understands climbing, and his work on sport psychology is world-renowned.

Bruce Lee has always been an inspiration to me. He said that there are three keys to success: persistence, persistence and persistence.

**THREE KEYS TO
SUCCESS: PERSISTENCE,
PERSISTENCE
AND PERSISTENCE.**



Progress is made in small steps and takes hard work. Putting in the right work on the mental side of your climbing will help you achieve your goals. The ideas outlined in this book will provide a framework to help you improve and hopefully get more fun out of your climbing.

My intention is that you will use this book like a guidebook. Get a pen out, underline what you like and think about what applies to you. You will need to experiment and see what works best. Use it actively and re-read it on a regular basis to make sure you keep working on the right things.

Ultimately, I hope that this book will help you get more success and enjoyment from your climbing, whether you are new to the sport or a professional.



JERRY MOFFATT + BORN 1963 + BEST CLIMBER OF THE 1980s + BE IT HARD ROUTES, TOUGH BOULDER PROBLEMS, ON-SIGHTS OR COMPETITIONS: NO ONE COULD BEAT HIS ALL-ROUND PERFORMANCE



Jerry on
*Le Spectre de
Surmutant*
(F8b+)

© Heinz Zak

EMPTY CUP



**‘MOVING,
BE LIKE
WATER.
STILL,
BE LIKE
A MIRROR.
RESPOND,
LIKE AN
ECHO.’**



THE USEFULNESS OF
A CUP IS ITS
EMPTYNESS

EMPTY IT
SO IT MIGHT BE
FILLED

!

MIND CONTROL

Need for mind control:

When I talk about mind control, I mean the psychology of putting your mind and thoughts in the optimum place for a perfect performance.

A few times a year, things will occur that are really important and potentially challenging for you. It might be a job interview, speaking in front of a large audience or you're trying to redpoint a route you've been working on for a long time. Your head might be spinning with stress, maybe you didn't sleep well thinking about your project. This is when you need to know about mind control.

I would like to tell you my personal experience of why I sought to find out and desperately needed to know how my mind was working.

I never really had a problem climbing on the crags. I have always been strong mentally whether redpointing, bouldering or on-sighting. I loved the fact that if you fell off, for the most part, you could just try again. If I got frustrated, the anger would sometimes help to get me up a route. I knew I would always give one hundred per cent. There have been times when I have been climbing and people have been shouting up to encourage me. I used to think there is nothing you could say to make me pull any harder or give it more, absolutely nothing. I loved giving it everything I had. That's what climbing was to me.

In the late 1980s, competitions came along. I went to my first competition with an excellent track record on crags, feeling strong and confident. However, when I pulled on to the competition wall I found I had different thoughts in my head. Firstly, I didn't like climbing on plastic holds. This was an era before indoor walls became popular and I was inexperienced both climbing indoors and competing. Secondly, I didn't like being told exactly when I had to climb and I didn't like having an audience. I didn't want to fall off low down and I had a fear of failure. In short, so many things concerned me that I was unable to focus on my climbing.

I didn't perform as well as I wanted in my first competitions. I think I got a third place in a big competition and a first in a small one. Not all the best climbers were at the small one so to me it didn't really count. I incorrectly analysed where I thought my problems lay.

I trained harder, got stronger fingers, more power, got more consistent outside and lost weight.

In 1989, there was a big competition in Munich. I was living in Germany at the time and climbing well. I believed my performances on the rock should see me get a great result. I was already strong. The week before the competition I went on a low-carbohydrate/salt diet, getting my weight down to sixty-one kilograms (my natural weight now is seventy-five kilograms). The big day arrived and I climbed so badly on the first route. It was way beneath the grade I would normally on-sight easily. I was frustrated and angry with myself. Somehow, I got through to the semi-final, but only just. The next route was better for me, a delicate slab up to a big overhang. I had loved slab climbing on granite crags in America and also loved overhangs as it suited my bouldering strengths.

I qualified first on this. 'Thank heavens,' I thought to myself. I had now beaten all the other top competitors once, I just needed to do it again in the final. In the final, I walked out in front of the crowd not really knowing what or how I should be thinking; I had no point of focus. There was a delicate slab arête up to an overhang. I started up the slab. A couple of metres off the ground I was crimping hard on an edge looking up wondering what to do. The next thing my foot popped and I was hanging on the rope. I was absolutely devastated and went straight to the bar and drank beer as quick as I could. I took my performance really badly and barely slept for a week.

Looking back, I could not have handled the situation worse as I thought about my failure again and again. I was reinforcing the negative, telling myself things like 'I can't perform in competitions, I'll never win, I don't like performing in front of the crowd, what a waste of all that hard work and training, I am rubbish.'

Later, when I had calmed down, I reflected on my performance. It was obvious to me I should not compete again without trying to sort my mind out. I spoke to my parents, who said they had just read an article in the newspaper about a girl whose sport was archery. The girl had read a book on mental training and after reading the book went on to win consistently. We managed to contact her through

the newspaper and obtain the book, *With Winning In Mind* by Lanny Bassham, an Olympic gold medallist in rifle shooting.

I had only one month to prepare for the next competition which was to be the first ever World Cup event. It was to be held in Leeds, England. Competitions in England at the time were not popular and had bad publicity. The older, more traditional climbers saw them as a threat to their sport because the early competitions had been set on normal crags. They thought that in the future the cliffs would be closed to hold competitions. Artificial climbing walls were very much in their infancy. It was my goal to win that Leeds competition. I wanted to prove competitions were a good thing and that British climbers could compete amongst the best in the world.

I knew that to climb better in competitions I needed a stronger mind for those situations.

**‘MIND CONTROL
STARTS WITH A
DECISION.’**

JERRY MOFFATT



I threw myself head-long into Lanny Bassham's book, reading it daily, writing notes and doing as he suggested.

By the time the competition came along my head was in a different place. I didn't hope to win in Leeds; in my head I knew I was going to take the competition by the scruff of the neck and win, no matter what the cost. Simon Nadin, Didier Raboutou and I all touched the same holds high up in the final, so it ended up going to a super final.



Jerry winning the first World Cup event, in Leeds, 1989

© Ian Smith

I had everything rehearsed, visualised and was prepared for every eventuality. I knew I was going to win. It was my time, my competition. I then went out, completed the route and won.

I am absolutely sure that if I had not read Lanny's book I would not have won. I competed for about another year, consistently winning and ranking number one in the world in ASCI rankings.

When you consider it, in all sports nearly all the winning is done by a tiny percentage of the people competing. The same people win again and again. What's the reason for this? It's the way they think. They are confident, they have prepared well and they believe they will win. Mind control starts with a decision. For people who succeed that decision is: I'm going to be victorious and get it done. The exciting thing is that this mindset can help someone improve their performance and exceed their expectations whatever their realistic level of performance.

The same mindset that helps a 9a climber perform well can also help someone on their first 6b.

To become better at something you need education in the thing you are trying to get good at. I started my climbing career in the 1970s and since then I have met and talked to the very best climbers worldwide and some world champions in other sports. I have asked the questions and importantly listened to their insights to get that education to better myself.

In 1981, at the age of nineteen, I travelled to America which then had the hardest climbs in the world. I spent some of that winter climbing with John Bachar who was probably the best US climber at the time. I learnt a lot from him and started to lay down some of the foundations for my climbing career. I had never heard of stretching, warming up, rest days and eating well. I just figured the more I climbed, the better I would get, which had worked pretty well up to a point.

Throughout my career, I have done a lot of reading about training, diet and bodybuilding, which I found helpful for weight training. *Education of a Bodybuilder* by Arnold Schwarzenegger had just come out. Much later on in 1990, when I was back in the UK, I built a training board in my cellar in Sheffield. I framed some pictures of Schwarzenegger pumping weights, pushing through the pain barrier. Also in that picture was a quote from Arnie: 'I knew I was a winner. I knew I was destined for great things. People will say that kind of thinking is totally immodest. I agree. Modesty is not a word that applies to me in any way. I hope it never will.'

From a totally different angle, I enjoyed books on Zen, mind control and the writings of Bruce Lee who said: 'Become what you think. What you think largely determines what you will ultimately become.'

**'WHAT YOU THINK
LARGELY DETERMINES
WHAT YOU WILL
ULTIMATELY BECOME.'**

BRUCE LEE



For me, this is a key thought.

I have interviewed a few world champions and some great climbers in the research for this book. Common thoughts run in the minds of these people. In basic terms, if you don't think you are going to do well, then it's quite probable that you are not going to do well. You might, but there is less chance of it. Be confident and just focus on climbing and having fun. If you can convince your mind that you are sure you can do it, then you have the best chance of succeeding.



SUCCESS

One definition of success could be winning. On the other hand a winning performance doesn't necessarily mean a win or top-out, or even completing a boulder problem.

For me success and a winning performance is achieving a standard you've not previously reached. Success rarely happens overnight, it is made with small steps.

You need to have a target. If you don't have a target or something to aim at, it's going to be hard to hit it.

In my experience, the most successful sportsman or woman turns out to be the one who works the hardest. People say, 'He was a natural,' then they say, 'He was always the first to start training and the last to finish.' It's hard to tell how natural someone is if they're just training way more than anyone else.

Here's how we learn the skills to succeed:

In the brain, we have two sets of neural networks that process reward and punishment. Reward would be a nice thing, punishment would be a bad thing.

All animals have these two sets of neural networks, not just humans.

That is how it is possible to train animals using reward and punishment. In normal conditions, for humans the reward/punishment networks are quite balanced. However, some people are extremely punishment-sensitive and not very reward-sensitive and vice versa. Somebody who is susceptible to reward and not punishment would respond very differently to somebody the other way round.

For example, if you're susceptible to reward then you would be highly optimistic, impulsive, confident and probably wouldn't see problems. Because you don't see problems you think to yourself, 'I can do this. Nothing can stop me.' You only see the reward of doing

**‘HE WHO KNOWS
OTHERS IS WISE, HE
WHO KNOWS HIMSELF
IS ENLIGHTENED.’**



the thing and not the downside. You just want the reward as quick as possible.

If you are punishment-sensitive, all you would see is threats (a threat would be something that will inhibit your performance – a risk/hazard/danger). In such cases, you’re not likely to be very confident; you see threats in every situation. You are likely to be cautious because all you see is a lot of things that could go wrong, not the reward.

In high-level performance, there is a lot of evidence that being punishment-sensitive is not a bad thing and potentially it’s quite good.

Psychologists’ best guess is that high-level performers have a burning desire caused by something earlier in their life which is locked away in the unconscious. They are extremely determined and committed people and do everything they can to succeed. They are just so determined that they will pick problems up early and deal with them. They can learn to identify and control these threats (distractions and things that can inhibit your performance) and put them in the right order, dealing with the most important ones first. This is a highly productive strategy.

In high-level performance, you have to see the threats or you are going to make terrible mistakes. The punishment-sensitive individual naturally picks up threatening images early and learns the skills to deal with them. The reward-sensitive individual needs to make a conscious effort to pick up the threats earlier. Once the threats have been identified, the skills needed to tackle and overcome them are the same.

The skills include confidence, concentration, visualisation, goal setting and planning. Learning them will undoubtedly enhance your ability, especially under pressure.

Keep an open mind. No one, however great, is beyond learning more. When striving for a goal, there is no point at which there is nothing left to learn. You need to be ready to learn, keep moving forward, refuse to lose, don't quit, take your time with quiet contemplation and find a way to succeed.



ARISTOTLE



**‘KNOWING YOURSELF
IS THE BEGINNING
OF ALL WISDOM.’**

**‘THE PRICE OF
SUCCESS.**

**HE WHO WANTS
TO SUCCEED
SHOULD LEARN
HOW TO FIGHT,
AND TO SUFFER.
YOU CAN REQUIRE
A LOT IN LIFE,
IF YOU ARE
PREPARED TO
GIVE UP
A LOT TO GET IT.’**

BRUCE LEE

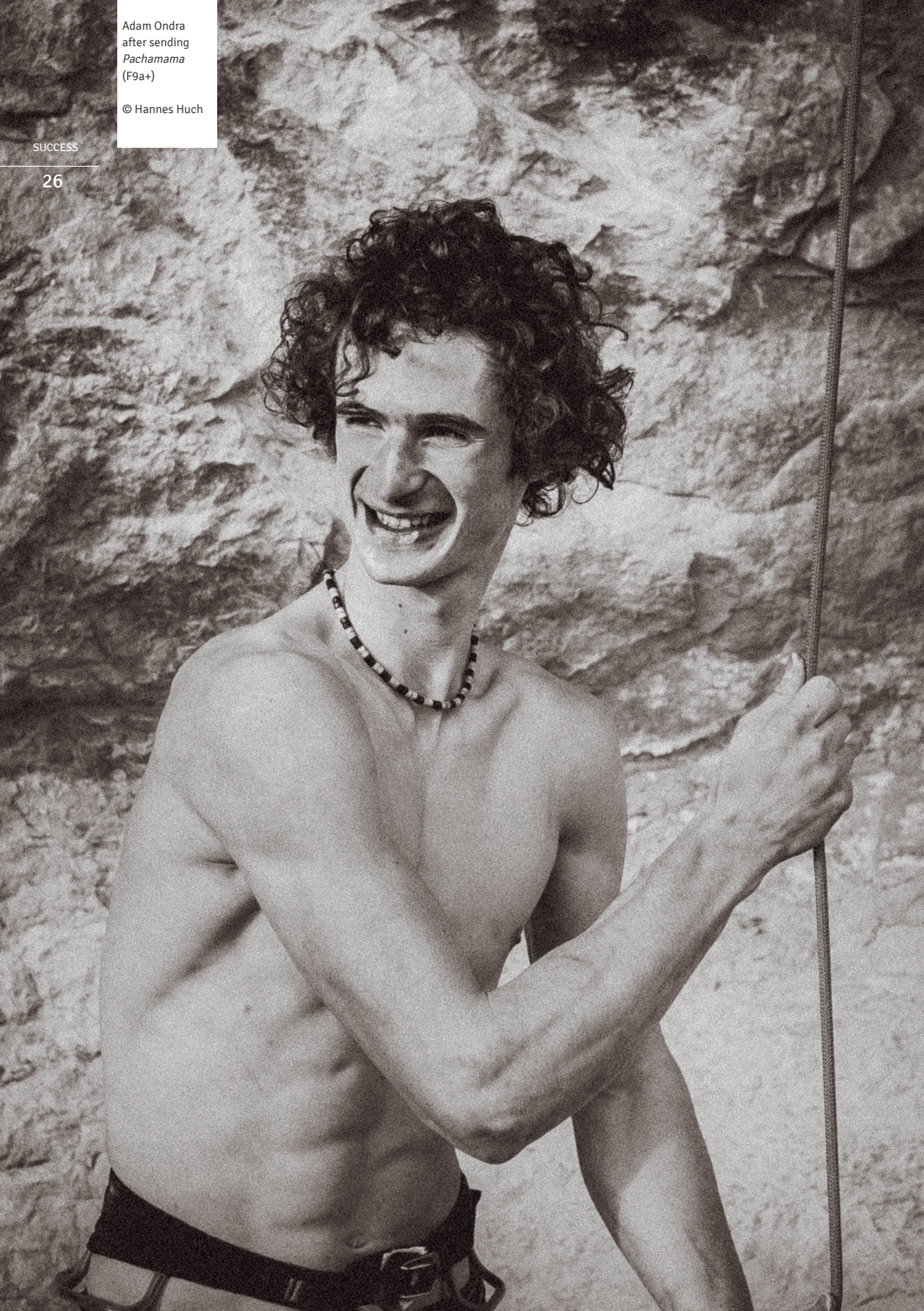


Adam Ondra
after sending
Pachamama
(F9a+)

© Hannes Huch

SUCCESS

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‘For success, the mindset is most important. In my case I was super lucky to be talented, to have the support of my family, my parents driving me to the crag every weekend, and my training facilities were pretty good. I grew up in a positive environment. I was so positive about climbing it never felt like a sacrifice. I had my dream, to be a professional climber and be successful from when I was around seven or eight. I had so much fun on the way to getting there, even if I had failed to be what I wanted to be it wouldn’t have been a waste of time. I wasn’t sacrificing anything. I trained hard even when I was a little kid, but for me it was more fun going climbing. Training is like work, and climbing, that is a beautiful thing and something you love.’

ADAM ONDRA

