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METRO PLUS
Being in the zone

 **Kalyan Ashok** FEBRUARY 16, 2018 00:00 IST
UPDATED: FEBRUARY 16, 2018 04:19 IST

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A tested formula Krishna Kumar with Boris BeckerSpecial Arrangement

Sports psychologist and tennis coach Krishna Kumar talks about how to excel under pressure

If there is distinct quality that differentiates tennis icons, Rod Laver, Boris Becker and Roger Federer, from other players, it is their ability to constantly achieve peak performance under pressure. This is a common thread that sets them apart from the rest. How they achieved that quality creates an interest. "The key lies in that winning factor called 'self awareness,'" reveals sports psychologist, ace tennis coach and Corporate Leadership Mentor, M Krishna Kumar, the founder-director of Kinesis Tennis Academy and a renowned USPTR coach.

He is also the founder-director of Intrad Shool of Executive Coaching (ISEC) and, till recently, was the first person outside North America to head the prestigious International Association of Coaching (IAC) as their global president.

He has trained several sports persons and scores of corporate leaders by applying his model of 'self awareness'. "Developing it is not a new concept. Billie Jean King, the former US and Wimbledon women's champion, came to the same conclusion years ago when she stated that self-awareness is the key to being a champion," reveals Krishna. "One thing I learned from the high-pressure sports field is we can achieve amazing performances in a short time frame by learning how to handle distractions and managing our emotions."

What exactly is self awareness and how does one attain it? Krishna says, "Awareness starts with understanding ourselves. It is being completely in the moment and connected with yourself, surroundings and people with whom you are interacting. I devised a model, called AWARE, which translates to the five phases – awake (A), will power (W), action (A), reflection (E) and engage (E). These five components, when blended, lead us to that state of self-awareness."

He then explains that the 'awake-phase' helps us identify the multiple levels of awareness. While in this phase, we may face distractions, which need to be overcome using our second element called 'will power'. Champions are adept at exerting their will power to shut out distractions."

"We have numerous instances where distraction has caused ugly situations like the one faced by French footballer, Zinedine Zidane, during the 2010 World Cup. When provoked by a rival player, the usually calm Zidane head-butted him and was suspended from the match. That is a perfect example of how a distraction can destroy self-awareness even for a champion," he adds.

Krishna then mentions that action and reflection go hand-in-hand. "While will power gets us back on track, to select the course of action, requires us to simultaneously reflect on how well you are presently doing and take corrective steps by making the right decision."

Engagement, he explains, is the fifth phase of the model, wherein, a champion player exhibits his mental strength and remains at the peak level longer than others. It is a state Krishna terms as being in the 'zone' and or in 'the flow state'. "The mental strength to achieve it comes with focus, which again is a combination of total attention and concentration. This is the culmination of self awareness that gives a winning edge," explains the coach.

"While the sports arena acts like a mini lab, offering stark visibility within a short period, the AWARE model can also be extended to others areas like business, theatre or music, as the goal remains the same – to perform at peak levels. A champion remains a champion in any field he chooses, for he has mastered the inner core of self-awareness," concludes Krishna.

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