

**Being Mindful in YOUR Path to Peak Performance:
A Book Review of *Shine: Using Brain Science to Get the Best from Your Employees***

Jodi Jabs | Alpha Sigma Alpha | @jabs2002

Have you ever read something and it made a ton of light bulbs click? In other words, the process unfolds or a solution comes to light for a program or issue you or your students are facing. Those moments are borderline magical and make us feel just plain awesome. If only we could harness that magic or have tangible ways to practice the steps in achieving magic. I am going to tell you about a book that captured my attention the entire time reading it because it is so applicable to what we do on a regular basis. Edward Hallowell, MD wrote *Shine: Using Brain Science to Get the Best from Your Employees*, putting forth a theory based in neuroscience and sparked by people Dr. Hallowell worked with and felt were “underachieving.” Don’t worry, you can use his theory on how to shine in many aspects of life in and out of student affairs, not just at work.

Everyone can shine. We all have it in us, but we need to find the spark. Dr. Hallowell details five steps in the Cycle of Excellence as the framework for anyone to get on what he calls the “path to peak performance.” The five steps are outlined below, but there is a small catch – one step cannot happen without first accomplishing the step prior to it. The length of time spent in a step, and flexing up or down, is dependent on the situation in which you want to achieve peak performance. This is relatable to other programs and theories we use in higher education and fraternity/sorority life, so while it may not sound like a groundbreaking concept, it gives you a map to fine tune your path personally and professionally.

Step 1: Select

Think of this as the realm of selecting just about anything: a new position, a partner, etc. Ask yourself, and be specific in answering, the following:

- What do you like to do?
- What are you good at?
- What can you add that is of great value to the project, organization, etc.?

Even though step one may seem simple, don’t overlook it! This step is very important in getting to a place where you will ultimately Shine. If you don’t select the right job, how long will you stay? If you don’t choose the right partner, how long will you be together? Specifically, in higher education, THIS is why we focus on ‘fit’ so often on both ends of the job search.

Step 2: Connect

Let’s use some advice from our friends at PhiredUp – “people join people” – as we learn more about this step. Ask yourself these questions:

- Who are you most comfortable with in your personal life, work, etc.?
- Why do you feel connected to them?
- What does it take for you to be candid, open, and trusting of others?

Moving forward on the path to peak performance in this step is a matter of taking a relationship-focused approach. You are your best tool, so be purposeful in engaging others. A piece of advice: once you have selected the right situation, opportunity, etc., you can then feel more connected to others as well as the goal(s) of the group/office/team. Also, candy helps. As much as the personal connection is key, the environment can play a factor as well! I kept candy jars in my office when I was an on-campus professional. People were always stopping by just to get a treat, and that was my opportunity to engage with them or their excuse to engage with me. This made my connections with them stronger. I also had a unique game set up in my office. It simply was a ring and hook. Students and colleagues would stop by just to see if they could get the ring on the hook. This was another great way to connect with other people who would not normally be in my office.

Step 3: Play

Dr. Hallowell describes play as an activity that captures the imagination. Don't think of this as just having fun, but also the ability to be creative within tasks. When you can play and engage in holistic thinking it can produce a more positive mindset. Think of a time when you had to do a task with very few parameters and restrictions. How did that task look and how did you feel about doing it? If you were in an environment where you could play around, did you have a more positive experience? Now, think of a time when you were forced to do something you did not select and had no connection to. How successful were you at completing the task? What elements could have changed to allow you to be more creative? What exists in your organizational culture to allow for those creative outlets? Do you even have this built into your culture? No success can happen without having some type of play. However, Play does not always have to be in a group setting. Dr. Hallowell points out that play does require you to think a bit deeper and more independently when you are trying to reach a personal goal in the Play cycle. Overall, this step is just his way of saying, "Think outside of the box!"

Step 4: Grapple and Grow

This is the pain of gain, but this step comes naturally from play. My friend Amanda Fishman, Coordinator for Greek Affairs at Georgia Tech, introduced me to the [Backwards Brain Bicycle](#) video, so all credit goes to her for breaking down this step. To summarize, the video is about a man trying to ride a bike that turns the opposite direction than a normal bike. It took him months to learn how to ride the bike and then months to relearn how to ride a normal bike, which he thought he could do right away. Hard work pays off, but the effort is only going to go so far. So, if we have made it this far in the cycle, the real work begins and that may mean reworking the way we naturally think. Find new approaches to tasks and be intentional about finding time to connect and play to make this step in the cycle that much easier.

Step 5: Shine

You've made it! Well, sort of...there is still work to be done in this step. The goal is for every person involved to feel recognized and valued. People grow even more when success is noted and praised, especially if your team has worked through the entire cycle. It is important to

recognize not only the achievement but also the attitudes, growth, and mindset throughout the process. “Recognition is so powerful because it answers a fundamental human need, the need to feel valued for what we do” (p. 162). Recognition picks everyone up. When a person gives recognition, they will shine as well. It is important to remember the critical role of recognition and consider when you do it, how you do it, and why you do it. You will learn from mistakes and grow even more when your success is praised and noticed.

Mindfulness is the process of bringing your attention to experiences occurring in the here and now. Take what you have learned in this article and be mindful of how it can be applied to where you are now and what you are doing. You play a big role in getting to SHINE. Use these practices to find out what this all means for you and your adventure to peak performance.

“The only limits in your life are the ones you create in your mind” - (unknown)

References

Hallowell, E.M. (2011). *Shine: using brain science to get the best from your people*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

SmarterEveryDay. (2015, April 24). *The backwards brain bicycle – Smarter every day 133* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/MFzDaBzBIL0>