

# Success Beyond Your Imagination

Dr. Robert Puff

What do you think of when you hear the phrase “*in the zone*”? Maybe it reminds you of a balanced diet/lifestyle. Perhaps you think of the underdog on one of those talent shows, the one who—at the last round—comes to the stage with a different air about them, a strange elevated confidence, and gives a winning performance that comes seemingly out of nowhere. Or maybe you think of a world-class athlete in peak performance, undistracted and unaffected by outside influences...flowing with absolute clarity and confidence toward undeniable victory. All of the above are accurate.

But what if your professional life was marked by that kind of excellence? What if every day on the job—whether you’re a freelancer with a few clients, an entrepreneur with an upstart or a CEO with a large corporation—you felt what you *do* flow naturally from who you *are* and what you *know*? How different would you feel about yourself and your work if you could enjoy each day in that state? The plain truth is, you can!

In fact, you probably have experienced that feeling more times in your life than you realize. Yes, you have been *in the zone*. Maybe you had a deliverable date for presentation for your company; you stayed up all night, beating all odds, acing the whole thing and wowing everyone in the room. Then again, perhaps on a commute that you make almost habitually, you finally arrived at your destination and realized you could hardly recall the trip itself, but you

managed to problem solve or plan a huge corporate event in the process. Or it could be that it was a longer event, a would-be stressful life change or the like. Looking back now, maybe you marvel at how you seemed to flow right through it and everything fell in place. Yes, you were *in the zone*. That is, you were somehow, simply *one* with yourself and your circumstances. Your mind in its most natural state took over—or maybe your ego surrendered to it—and you flowed with your highest potential.

Makes you feel great just thinking about it, doesn't it? What if you could purposefully create that state of mind and place yourself in it at will? That's right. Your state of mind can be a conscious decision. People at the tops of their fields live by this fact. Well, you can, too. But first you need to understand your various states of mind. Only then can you create your unique best life—in your career and beyond—and intentionally spend more time *in the zone*.

My name is Dr. Robert Puff. I have been helping people realize the truth in the idea that they can achieve and tap into that mind set at will for over twenty years. As a clinical psychologist, I have worked with children and adults alike. My focus here, though, is on you learning to use the tools at your disposal to create the ideal state of mind that can help you to create your ideal self in your ideal career. Congratulations on taking a crucial step to creating your own personal Zone Mind!

### **One Brain, Several Minds**

It really is a wonder that our single brains can lead us down so many disparate and frequently conflicting paths. In the course of our daily lives, we get so many mixed messages

from ourselves (not to mention other people and outside influences), it's sometimes a wonder we manage to get anything done at all.

When we come into the world, our minds are without preconceptions. We cry and sleep and eat by instinct, pure and simple. Before we are 3-years old, though, we start to voice our likes and dislikes. We know when we want something simply because we like it, not because we need it to survive.

Enter what I call the "Egoic Mind". Yes, the root word there is ego. The Egoic Mind tells us that we are never quite satisfied. We want more. We want something different. We are never quite good enough, sure enough, happy enough. You get the picture. From this mind stems the commentary that goes on within each and every one of us. In this state of mind, we become preoccupied with the doing of things and with judging our performance and the performance of others. In essence, in this state, the focus is on *doing* rather than *being*.

Fortunately, the Egoic Mind actually paves the way for the Learning, Natural Mind. Our discontent does propel us to do more, learn more, accomplish more...and that's ultimately a good thing. We are using this state of mind when we take on a new task or skill. It brought you from high school, to specialized training or college and then into your current field. You use it every time you are given a new task, a new project or even a whole new position in your career path. Focus and concentration would not be possible were it not for this function of our brains.

The Learning, Natural Mind has most likely been the source of some of your greatest accomplishments, some of the things of which you are most proud. Chances are, you credit your career up to this point to the processes, facts and theories that you have learned, whether

objectively in classrooms or boardrooms or subjectively in the nuances of personal and professional relationships.

The key here is balance. If you haven't realized it before now in your life, pause and take note of this fact: the Learning, Natural Mind is simply a tool for you to use. Too many people make the opposite true. That is, they become victims of unending, unyielding desires to constantly push and achieve...and the endless loop of chatter in their minds that tells them they must do this or that and that they're never doing any of it quite good enough. Don't get me wrong. Learning and growing and changing and evolving are beautiful things. However, it's being able to internalize our learning and let it flow through us that brings us into our most happy and most successful states.

When we simply experience what we achieve in our Learning, Natural Minds, we flow with our lives. Many people call this "living in the now". Whatever you choose to call it, in that state, what we are *doing* is in harmony with who we are *being*.

In simple terms, then, when we can lose the endless commentary of the Egoic Mind and keep in balance the restless nature of the Natural, Learning Mind, we can move closer to our most prosperous, successful and productive state. That is, we can experience the unique joy offered only by living in the now. Ask yourself these questions:

- If you have goals, how much time do you spend criticizing yourself for not being closer to them or not having reached them already?
- If you do not have your own specific goals, how much energy do you waste worrying about what you feel "others" think you should be doing instead of just doing what you know you do well?

- If you have achieved some or most of your aims, how much time and energy do you spend still telling yourself you should do more and do it better...and worrying about losing what you have accomplished?

Herein lies the battle of your Egoic Mind. When you can simply focus on doing what you do, sowing what you know and being who you are, you will be living in your Zone Mind.

### **Stop the Chatter**

Achieving the ultimate state of mind sounds great in theory, right? Yes, it's actually *achieving* the peaceful, focused and productive state of the Zone Mind that's the challenge. You're probably thinking, "If I've been listening to and creating the commentary in my Egoic Mind for longer than I can even remember, how do I undo years of conditioning and improve my professional life?" Okay, maybe you weren't thinking that, but it's the essential question we have to address to move on. So, I'll answer it for you!

Part of the answer is in the question itself. It may sound like I'm speaking in riddles, but it's much simpler than it seems, so bear with me here. The endless chatter of your mind is just plain old conditioning. Consider it your default setting—and know that defaults can always be reset! Up until this point, when you haven't reached a milestone, haven't met or exceed your quarterly projections, haven't increased your own personal sales goals, haven't gotten the promotion or account you felt was yours, how have you handled it? Or maybe you have blown your fiscal budget, mismanaged your department or just simply not quite been the employee or the CEO you have wanted to be...and known you can be. It doesn't matter what your position is or if you have been steeped in your career for three years or thirty years. It also doesn't matter if

you are in charge of yourself and your cubicle or yourself and an international corporation, your instinctual reaction is likely the same...because you have been conditioned for it.

The bottom line is, as human beings, when we don't do, don't think and don't achieve what we want to or what we think we should, the chatter begins. We ask ourselves, *why didn't I meet my \_\_\_\_\_ goal? Why did I fail? What's wrong with me? How come \_\_\_\_\_ is better at \_\_\_\_\_ than I am? What can I do differently?* We berate and beat ourselves up, asking ourselves grown-up versions of the same questions we asked ourselves as kids on the playground. The list goes on and on. On the surface, these questions seem valid, right? It's natural to examine ourselves, to take account of what we can do differently to be better. The problem is that we frequently end up chasing our own tails, so to speak, with this kind of chatter. One question leads to another...and to another...and so on.

It's time now to realize that the way you respond to what you consider your shortcomings or even "failures" is simply conditioning. It's just the way you've always done things. Now, though, you are ready to begin a whole new way of thinking and you are gathering the tools that will enable you to do so. By reading this e-book, you are taking the first step in re-conditioning yourself. You are about to start creating a whole new set of responses for yourself...responses that will pave the way for you to spend more and more time in your Zone Mind and more time doing what you do best!

## What Exactly is The Zone Mind and How Do I Create It?

That's a good question, right? While we touched on it in an earlier section, it certainly deserves much more explanation. The Zone Mind is where we do our best living, create our greatest successes and experience our fullest joys. As such, it deserves each and every bit of intention that it takes to create it.

It's probably best to start by thinking of some examples. Now, maybe you're not a world class dancer (in fact, maybe you feel like you have two left feet most of the time when you're on the dance floor), but think of Fred Astaire for a moment. Or if he's beyond a generation that you can relate to, think of a jazz/hip hop or break dancer that you've seen. Or maybe you have seen a Cirque du Soliel show and marveled at the dancers. When they are moving fluidly and seamlessly and, frankly, doing things with their bodies that make you stare in amazement at what the human body can achieve, do you think that they are *thinking* their way through it all? Do you imagine that their minds are full of chatter, talking themselves through where to put their hands and feet, how to move their hips, when to exhale and when to inhale for the maximum push for the upcoming move?

Well, I've never spoken with one of them, but I can guarantee that's not the case. If they were busy thinking about what they were doing, they wouldn't do it nearly as well, because the energy that it requires to critique, question and direct oneself detracts from the energy available to simply put in to the activity or skill itself. And when a person is well-trained, they have already gone through investing all of that energy. Naturally, they no doubt have moments of running over routines and little moments of self-talk before they perform, but all-in-all, they simply do it. How do they do it? Dancers of that caliber are simply well-trained, trained to the

point that they *are* what they *do*. They train to the point that their skill becomes second nature. It's no longer something outside of themselves that they aspire to. They internalize the given skill and it becomes an integral part of them.

It's the same with top athletes in any field. Bryon Scott, of the Los Angeles Lakers, said that when he finds himself in the Zone, "All you can hear is this little voice inside you, telling you 'Shoot' every time you touch the ball, because you know it's going in. Nobody outside can penetrate this world and the person guarding you wishes he wasn't... . I could shoot blindfolded from half court over my head and it would go in." How do you explain and achieve this kind of absolute clarity? You don't really. You simply hone your talent—whatever it may be—until it becomes a part of you.

People who reach the level that Byron Scott is talking about do so by repeating and practicing their skills day by day. They "suit up and show up," so to speak. Scott didn't just walk on to a court and shoot that way the first time (or the first 100 times) he tried. Now, though, every thing about him is a reflection of what he does: his muscles are formed to support each and every nuance of movement expected of them and his brain anticipates his own actions and those of his teammates and opponents almost subconsciously. That doesn't happen without training.

It's the same in the business world. How do some people know how to walk into a meeting, sway opinion in their favor, make their case seamlessly and walk away with a signed deal? Practice and experience. Those two things breed confidence, which puts you at ease. Then knowing how to stop the mind chatter when it does arise, gives you that much more of an edge. Most of us are not born as prodigies. That is, we seldom absolutely excel at the level of

genius without applying ourselves over a period of time. But, we are born with certain affinities and innate talents. It's nurturing those talents, skills and interests that make them become veritable extensions of who we are.

Here's the *ironic* thing about it; the harder you *try* the less likely you are to achieve it, whatever your "it" might be. Again, it's your thoughts that get in the way when you are *trying* to do something. And here's the *beautiful* thing about it; anyone can achieve the clarity of the Zone Mind! And it's that much easier when you are simply doing what you love to do.

While discussions of The Zone occur most frequently around topics of athletics and athletes, the plain and simple truth is that you have experienced moments of being *in the zone* in your life already. And now you can create the Zone Mind for yourself and experience that mindset to achieve excellence in your own profession. All of the mind chatter and self-talk in the world, though, won't get you there. What will get you there is simply investing in yourself. Take the training you need to take. Attend your seminars. Put your aims in writing and take the steps you need to achieve them. Decide that you are going to reach over a million dollars in sales this quarter, that you are going to make a time-management plan, that you are going to take your business from two employees to ten, that you are going to better lead your team—or whatever your individual plan might be—and set out your plan of action. Maybe you need to hire an executive coach for yourself and/or for your team. Do it. And then get quiet!

That's right. Get quiet. And I don't mean get quiet once you have achieved a level of excellence in your career. It's getting quiet at every step of the way that makes room for the Zone Mind and the benefits it will bring to your professional goals. If you still need to be convinced, consider Albert Einstein, one of the undisputed greatest minds to have ever existed. While he

spent immense amounts of his time steeped in his work, he also devoted a good deal of it to intentional silence. He credits many of his greatest thoughts and discoveries to insights he received from seemingly out of nowhere while taking solitary walks around the campus of Princeton University. He is quoted as saying that he made his greatest discoveries in silent moments away from the lab.

I, too, had the pleasure of attending Princeton while in graduate school. While the collective experience was invigorating, empowering and sometimes joyfully exhausting, some of my fondest memories are of my own walks around the campus. In fact, to this day I enjoy the solitude and freedom I find in the routine of walking. For nearly twenty years now, I have taken the same mile-long walk during my lunch break. You might assume it's become rote and boring after so long, but with the intentional quieting of my mind, I always see something new and enjoy fresh perspectives on my life and my work. If I have taken on a new corporate client, I always have new insights on how to best serve them...not because I'm consciously thinking about it, but rather because I give my mind the room to receive or create the solution.

We get in our own way. Our minds are incredible organisms, with the ability to process thousands of "bytes" of information per second. We can, without conscious effort, calculate nuances in tone of voice while inferring their meaning and note variations in 15 million different colors. Even the simple act of crossing the road involves making about 3000 calculations per second. So, if you think you have to always be "on" in order to succeed, it's time to change your perspective. Your mind is always hard at work!

In fact, I challenge you to get out of your own way. Most of us have an incredibly hard time not voicing our thoughts, opinions, challenges, etc., especially when we have reached a

certain level of success and responsibility. However, it is those very things that will be nourished by our silence. An entire weekend or even a formal retreat is probably too much to ask right off the bat. But start with whatever you think might be manageable for you. Is it 5 minutes? 10 minutes? Perhaps you could manage 15 minutes or even work your way quickly up to an hour. Do what is natural for you, be it walking, hiking, running or simply sitting. Don't set out to *do* or *accomplish* anything. Just be silent and allow the magic of the potential to your own mind to interact with whatever comes its way. You'll be amazed at what you learn by simply being present and not imposing your own thoughts on the given moment. Give what *is* the freedom to *become* what it may in your life and relish the ways in which you can implement it—whatever it may be—into your day to day work life.

### **What the Zone Mind Can Do for You as an Individual Professional**

What if you could, starting tomorrow, enter the workday with a clear mind? Imagine for a moment how different you would feel if you sat down at the keyboard, stood up to lead your team in a strategy meeting or brainstormed over your next marketing campaign without questioning yourself gut reactions, second-guessing your next statement or editing yourself before responding with what you know to be true. What if you could walk into your office, your warehouse, your ranch, your retail store, your...whatever...simply knowing you are the best you can be, period?

Several years ago, I worked with the marketing department in a very large corporation. One woman, (we'll call her Ann) an account executive who was new to the company, really

reached out to me, confiding in me her employment history, her long-term goals and her strengths and challenges (as she perceived them). She told me that her biggest fear was not being able to stay organized or on task enough to see any given campaign to fruition. This feeling nagged her unrealistically despite the fact that she had made her way through a succession of positions over the last twenty years, each with greater success and more financial rewards than the one before.

However, over the previous 18-months, after beginning this new position that was something greater than she had ever believed she could accomplish, Ann had not secured the volume or kind of clients that she always had in the past. She was off-her-game, as she said. Caught in a vicious circle, the more “failures” she experienced, the more she feared failing and the more she did, indeed, fail. At the heart of it all, was the endless chatter, the language of the Egoic mind, at a steady hum beneath her deceptively cool and confident exterior.

In my work with her department and some one-on-one sessions with Ann, she was able to see the endless loop of commentary going on in her brain. What took some time for her to see was a whole other, deeper layer of what was going on in her mind. When she talked about herself, what she was really talking about was her training, her experience, her resume, as it were. When I asked her to talk about herself and her goals as a *person*, she couldn't meld the two; that is, she thought of her professional self as separate from the rest of herself. What she began to slowly realize is a universal lesson.

Being in your Zone Mind means considering yourself as a *whole, integrated person*. You can't compartmentalize the things that make you you. When Ann shifted her focus from all of the external things that made her an “account executive” to the internal things that made her

good at her job, she began to secure new accounts again. Instead of thinking about all of the things she needed to do and say to “win” accounts, she put her focus on what made her a winner already, the things she was already well-trained to do. Her superiors were thrilled and within nine months, she received yet another promotion...and put herself on the map with the company!

Being the best professional you can be means being the best *person* you can be. When I come in to a company of 5 or 500 (or more) to work with the employees—everyone from the executives to the sales force to the office staff—my intentions are not just to help them make more money. I am there to help them learn to do their jobs optimally, across the board. In turn, of course, they make more money, but that’s not the initial aim. Making more money (like shooting more baskets or winning more races or devising an ace of a marketing plan) flows naturally from doing what you do best and keeping your focus there.

### **What the Zone Mind Can Do for Corporate Culture**

Naturally, the better you are at your job, the better your company will be. That’s a given. Again, though, we’re not talking just about numbers. The numbers are important...that’s why they are called the “bottom line”. But the bottom line will crumble beneath your feet and beneath the foundation of your company without a solid corporate culture.

Time and again I have had the joy of witnessing what happens in a company when the people who make up that business start letting themselves be lead by their Zone Minds. I use three different approaches, depending on the needs of the company: one on one phone calls; talks/lectures to various departments or entire companies; an entire day or several days on-site

working with individuals or groups. As I talk to people about the simplicity of stopping the chatter and simply getting into the flow of what they know they have been well-trained to do, I can always see looks of curiosity and relief on the faces around me. After putting in to practice the principles I've outlined here, my clients, without fail, express their amazement at how something so profound but accessible has changed their productivity and confidence.

In one case, I was working with a high-end limousine sales company. One of the associates, in particular, (let's call him John) had his mind set on increasing his own personal sales by nearly \$1 million for the upcoming year. After the time that I spent with the company, he was able to stop being preoccupied by things like, "Am I saying the right thing to make this sale?", "If I don't make *this* sale...then I'll be behind in reaching my goal by 'x' number of dollars," and "What if I keep falling behind and don't make the commissions..." The list went on and on.

Naturally, John was able to quiet his mind and, in the long run, achieve his sales goals. What John and the rest of his company didn't realize was the incredible amount of stress that was relieved in the process. While the whole company got on board with this new way of thinking, spending more time in the zone and enjoying the most obvious fruits of their labors, John, in particular, put his Zone Mind into practice. When his sales skyrocketed past those of the rest of sales team, people couldn't help but take note and start really listening to and observing his new ease and enthusiasm for with his work. Long story short, he was an inspiration to the entire company. Along with better sales and a rapidly expanding bottom line, the corporation enjoyed better work attendance and better morale. With the increased productivity, it rewarded the entire division with huge end-of-year bonuses.

In talking with the CEO in the aftermath, he said something very interesting. “In light of these recent improvements, I expect my sales team will be with me for a long time to come.” So, not only does getting into the Zone Mind help individual professionals, it also improves corporate culture. People feel better about themselves, about their performance and about their peers. Without the stress of constantly feeling like you’re either under-performing or at risk for doing so, you improve your own morale, that of your workplace...and you improve your personal health and longevity, too. You couldn’t ask for a more winning combination!

### **Change Your Responses, Change Your Mind...Literally**

So, you know now what the Zone Mind is and what it can do for you. What do you do, though, when the chatter and commentary start again...because you’re only human and it’s bound to happen from time to time, right? Right. In practical terms, you have three options for handling the chatter of the Egoic Mind when it rears its ugly head. The more you become aware of the chatter that you engage in, the more you’ll realize how much time you have spent listening to it and, when it comes right down to it, letting it hold you back from your achieving all you are really capable of! The more time you spend consciously creating the Zone Mind, the less effort it will take to put yourself there. It can even become your new default setting. Still, it’s human nature to fall prey to the chatter from time to time. When it does arise, rest assured that you have recourse.

The first option is something I wouldn’t recommend. And the fact that you are spending time with this e-book means that you are ready to stop doing it. That is, until we learn to do

otherwise, most of us simply **go with it**. As discussed, we listen to ourselves question, scorn and rebuke ourselves over and over again. The problem with this is that the focus remains on the shortcoming or “failure”. Not a good idea. Like the saying goes, if you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you’ve always gotten. You are ready for more.

You will, undoubtedly, go with it and entertain your worrisome thoughts now and then. The key is remembering that you can choose how long you choose to worry about your board meeting, your review, the sum of your retirement fund or the legacy of your life’s work. You can choose 5 minutes, 5 hours or 5 decades.

The second option is to **suppress it**. Many times, when we become aware that we need to change a behavior, when it comes up again, we tell ourselves, *I shouldn’t do that, I need to stop thinking that, I need to think about something else...* So it goes in our heads. Ironically, though, when you try to suppress something, you actually give it power. Think about it; what happens when you try to hold someone down? They fight back, try to get up, right? It’s the same thing with the energy of your thoughts. The energy remains with and actually feeds the negative thoughts and the behavior behind it.

It’s so easy to fall into this pattern. Thinking that you are helping yourself by suppressing your thoughts is false security. Remember that it’s simply your old default setting. And then...let it go.

So if you can’t go with it and you can’t suppress it, what can you do? You can simply **witness it**. That’s right, when you are doing what you do and being what you know, letting it all flow through you and the chatter begins, simply acknowledge the thought. Recognize it as

chatter. After a while, you'll be able to see that those negative thoughts are not a threat to your Zone Mind...or don't have to be, anyway. Remember that they are simply a result of your conditioning. And you are in a constant state of improving, changing, evolving...and re-conditioning yourself.

Just as there are things outside of you that are best simply acknowledged and let go, so it is with your Egoic mind chatter. The thoughts will come. You are only human, after all...albeit an evolving, present and conscious human. When they do, take your own power back and simply see them for what they are and then occupy your mind with something worthwhile. That is, joyfully set about doing the work you have trained yourself to do well and let it be an extension of you.

### **A Challenge**

#### **Extend the Boundaries of Your Zone...and Positively Influence Others**

Clearly, living your life in your Zone Mind will benefit you at work. What happens, though, when you start the work day feeling completely present? What happens when you spend the day feeling positive about your productivity and your interactions with other people? What happens when you leave your place of work absolutely knowing that you have done and been your best? What happens is that you are free to then go home and into the other areas of your life feeling positive, present, available and in-the-moment. You will want to be with the people who give real value to your life...and they will want to be with you.

The rest of your life will be that much more enjoyable—and stress free—because of the time you have spent in your Zone Mind. And you will have the energy and the presence of mind to bring that state into the other areas of your life. You can bet that people will take note of the in-the-moment presence you have and it will inspire them to live the same sort of life, without you ever saying a word! But don't let that stop you from sharing what you know about living your most joyous and productive life in your Zone Mind. The life lessons we share with one another give value to our time here on Earth and create an exponential ripple effect of influence. Thank you for letting me share these lessons with you and I look forward to hearing your own success stories!

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