



Phil Simon, Contributor

Author, keynote speaker, professor

The Melting Point: An Interview with Dr. Christian Marcolli

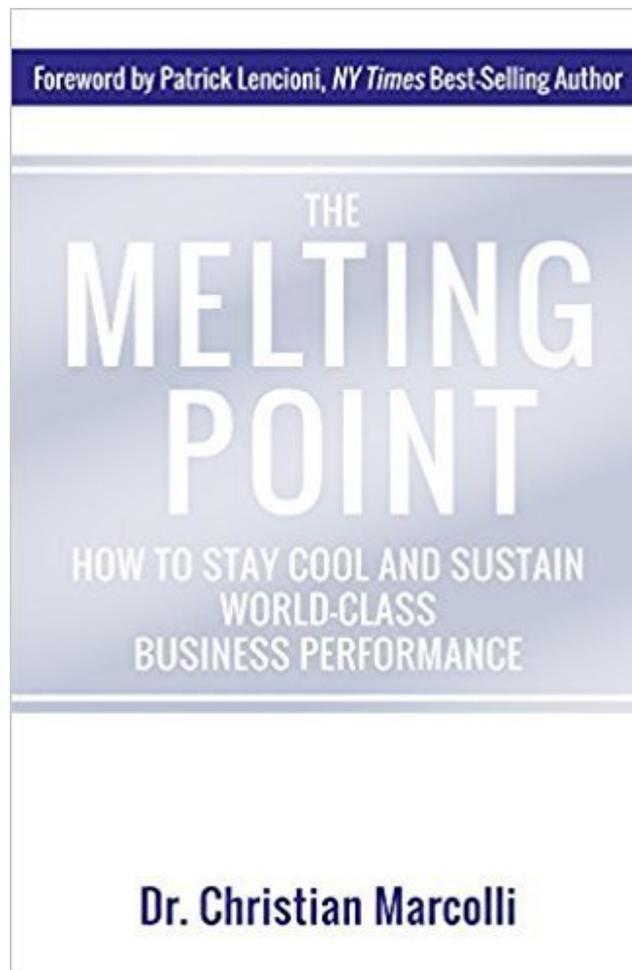
I've seen in many times before: professionals and athletes who choke under pressure. At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who embrace the stressful moments and do something majestic. (Think of LeBron James' block in game seven of the NBA finals last year.)

I was curious about what distinguishes people when career-defining moments present themselves. To this end, I recently sat down with Dr. Christian Marcolli, author of *The Melting Point: How to Stay Cool and Sustain World-Class Business Performance* and the former coach of tennis immortal Roger Federer.

The following is an excerpt of our conversation.

PS: What was your motivation for writing this book?

CM: I was thinking of business leaders, executives, corporate performers, but also ambitious managers—and how to provide them with the tools and the insights they need to raise their Melting Point. The Melting Point is that critical threshold we get to under pressure, when things start to unravel, including the quality of our performance. I've worked as an executive coach with some of the world's most successful leaders—and for all of them, the key is how they perform in tough conditions. So how do you deliver a sustainable world-class performance in those most difficult, changing conditions? Mastering one's own Melting Point is about more than overcoming challenging situations and coping with pressure. But there's another aspect to it: staying cool and performing well, but also in a playful way—in a way that conveys a sense of joy and fun. Being effective and inspiring as a leader also means you don't grit your teeth, you play—you clearly find enjoyment in the intensity of a high-pressure business environment.



[The Melting Point: How to Stay Cool and Sustain World-Class Business Performance](#)

PS: Early in his career, tennis player Roger Federer frequently lost his temper. But I can only recall his doing that only a handful of times over the past decade. Can you talk about what may have changed?

CM: The difference between the sports superstars and the many other good athletes is not necessarily natural athleticism, innate ability or even technical prowess. In addition to having an enormous passion for the sport, there are two other factors. The first is that champions are extremely adaptable. They can easily absorb new information and adapt their behavior quickly. They make fast improvements and are good at letting go of dysfunctional patterns. This enables themselves to reach new levels of performance in relatively short periods of time. The second factor is that they learn to develop an extraordinarily high Melting Point relatively early in their career. That takes dedicated focus on their mental game—and it makes an enormous difference in their success.



PS: In the book, you write about the three keys to high performance. Briefly, what are they? CM: Both empirical research and my own experience coaching individuals and corporate clients show that achieving world-class performance isn't a matter of natural ability. Whether you're an executive or an athlete, a coach or a manager, high performance is built on focused, intentional development. Essentially, hard work. But exceptional performers also convey passion for their area of achievement. Passion is what fuels their journey to success, and they need a full tank of it to make that long drive from the start to the finish. Second, they show a high degree of adaptability. They can engage with and process high quality information, and bring it to bear effectively on their behaviors. Being adaptable enables high performers to keep improving. Finally, there's the "cool" factor. When top achievers encounter difficult conditions, they keep their cool, and maintain a very high level of performance. In fact, they may even get better: they excel in very highly-charged, critical moments. They don't let anxiety and nervousness to get in the way, and they don't lose their ability to enjoy themselves either. My new book, *The Melting Point*, specifically focuses on this. Staying cool is the one critical factor for sustainable world-class performance that has been generally overlooked. But you'll see that the ability to remain cool and raise your Melting Point has profound benefits—not just for you, but everyone around you as well. It's catching. **PS: Ours is a constantly connected society. Given that, how can we unplug and take much-needed time off? Any tips here?**

CM: Absolutely. To sustain high performance we need to make sure we disconnect daily, and allow ourselves time to recharge. Think of it as replenishing your energy for upcoming performances, whatever they are: a running race, a board meeting, a big project deadline. The rituals high performers do at the end of each day help them achieve inner calm and a clear head. But another part of this is sleep: we need to get into the right frame of mind in which to experience deep and rejuvenating sleep. I recommend disconnecting from work and devices after work for at least an hour to an hour and a half. Put them away in a dedicated place, make this one of your most important principles, and only make an exception for a real business emergency. To raise your Melting Point, you need to protect your private space. Your bedroom should be associated with rest and recovery, not emails and being online. So keep those laptops out of there.