

INTERVIEW: DR. CHRISTIAN MARCOLLI, AUTHOR OF 'THE MELTING POINT: HOW TO STAY COOL AND SUSTAIN WORLD-CLASS BUSINESS PERFORMANCE'

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I had the good fortune to be able to discuss the key traits of high achievers with Dr. Christian Marcolli, a global performance coach. His new book is *The Melting Point: How to Stay Cool and Sustain World-Class Business Performance*, which I recently reviewed for this site. Dr. Marcolli and I discussed how superstars stay so cool in the middle of a crisis, and what it takes to stay at the top of your game, no matter what your field.

Your book has such a compelling title: *Melting Point*. Can you talk about what a melting point means?

It's the point when things begin to collapse — the critical psychological threshold we face when placed under massive stress and pressure, when we finally lose our cool. Meltdowns can happen to anyone, but they're especially devastating to business leaders, executives and corporate performers.

How are high performers different from the rest of us? Is it really something we can learn how to be, and not just natural ability?

We tend to achieve the most, and be most productive and focused, only at certain points in our careers. Things start to collapse as soon as we face an intense amount of stress and pressure. It's a real skill to be able to maintain a consistent level of performance — where we sustain our productivity as well as our physical and mental well-being, day after day, week after week, no matter what the environment.

Even when world-class performers are in a challenging situation that's intensely competitive, complex and very stressful, they're still operating at their usual high level. They're still delivering, still calm, and still taking care of their teams as well. That's what separates them from the rest of us. They deal with pressure, setbacks, disruptions and change better than those around them, and can excel consistently.

Can you talk a bit about the three keys to high performance?

According to empirical research on performance and my own experience coaching individuals and corporate clients, world-class performance does not just happen due to natural talent. Musicians, athletes, businesspeople, coaches — all have become true experts by building up their mastery with focused development. Along with that hard work there are other traits: *passion* — the fuel for the journey to success; *adaptability* — so that we can engage with and process high quality information and bring it to bear effectively on our behaviors; and finally, *coolness* — in very highly-charged, critical moments, we don't allow anxiety and nervousness to get in the way.

In terms of coolness, what are the steps we can take to achieve it — and how do we know when we have attained that higher melting point ?

My book specifically focuses on that one key factor: *staying cool*. In so much work done on performance, that's often overlooked. Raising our melting point starts with examining our work (and home) lives, and strengthening the weak spots. There are ten key behavioral patterns that will give you the concrete guidance you need to stay cool under pressure, and deliver sustained world-class business performance under massive intensity. I describe them in detail in the book.

Interesting. Can you give an example?

Absolutely. For instance: Budget your energy. Bad daily habits rob us of energy. So we lose momentum and focus, and leave the office spent. We experience a kind of exhaustion that leaves our nerves raw, and puts us at greater risk for melting down.

To raise your melting point, monitor your daily energy level by keeping a log for three or four days. Note when you're worn out, and mention what triggered it. Also note what you ate, drank, or did. Soon a pattern will emerge — and you can start swapping out potential bad habits for better ones. When good habits become routine, you don't have to expend energy making yourself do them. You create a much stronger foundation for withstanding pressures.

I was really taken with your discussion on the need to balance mental and emotional strength — how too much of one versus the other can work against us. Can you explain that?

In the today's highly competitive corporate environment, it's a given that intensity is going to happen. The danger for corporate performers is that they may stall when they aspire to climb too fast, but lack the energy and coolness to overcome daily challenges, moments of change, and additional pressure. Typically, executives love what they do, but they start to feel some pain points along with that all-consuming commitment. They may find it hard to disconnect from work, feel tired, have trouble sleeping, and suffer from impaired or dysfunctional relationships at work and at home. This can lead to a downward spiral and, inevitably, they run the risk of stalling.

It's particularly dangerous during the stages of a career where the biggest ascent takes place. I call these two career stages *obsessed* and *ready for success*. And it's quite

hard to emerge from a potential stall at either stage. It's like when an aircraft takes off and climbs too rapidly — there's no safe way to descend again. But there are ways to recognize when you're at risk of stalling, and ways to safely course correct before you wind up in a downward spin. The key is doing it without losing your enthusiasm and passion at the same time.

And what do you mean in the book by 'playfulness'? It's hard to imagine a hard-nosed, sharply ambitious CEO displaying that.

In the last stage of their development to sustainable top performance, executives make the transformation from being *ready* for success to actually *achieving* sustained success and, finally, becoming playful in their role. Essentially, they relax. They've mastered their field. They have learned to handle the pressure with both laser focus and total calm.

What does that mean? It means that they can perform with a level of sustained excellence, and remain cool and comfortable in their own skin. To the people around them, they seem to have everything under control. You invariably find them in a good mood, and laughing almost on a daily basis. They have maximized their melting point.

To learn more about Dr. Marcolli and *The Melting Point*, visit his web site