The purpose of this Handbook is to explain a simple, 3 step technique you can use immediately to eliminate overwhelming nerves and choking from your life as an athlete. This will help you build your confidence, become a star athlete, and win consistently under pressure in sport.

Why This Handbook?

Most athletes choke and under-perform a lot more than they should.

That was me, 19 years ago.

I’m an athlete too (in the Canadian sport of ringette, similar to hockey). When I skated on the ice, a powerful and graceful side of me came out.

Unfortunately, a dark side of me came out too. My dark side manifested in extreme confidence swings.

One week I was invincible.

The next, my confidence came crashing down. I never knew why, and it hurt me all the time. My insecurity reached its zenith at the 1991 Nationals, where we lost with one second left on the clock.

It's hard to express my despair over this game in words.

Losing hurt, but my deepest anguish came from the fact that I had choked in the biggest game of the year.

Worse, a friend of mine scored all 5 of our goals...but I wasn't happy for her. Outwardly, I pretended to be happy for her. "Well done, Shauna. Way to go."

Inwardly, I was eating my heart out. I wanted to be a leader, but I had no idea how.

My coaches and friends said things like, “You just need to believe in yourself,” and “Don’t worry about it. You’ll do better next time.”

But no matter what they said, these failures really ate me up inside. Secretly, I knew that my failures had something to do with my mental game, and not just my circumstances. I seriously considered quitting for good.
Exhausted and depressed on the plane home, I broke, letting in the fear and shame I had been shutting out for years.

That's when I got serious about mental toughness training.

Fortunately, I'm a very stubborn athlete. I was obsessed with finding the answer to the question, "What do superstar athletes and coaches know that I DON'T about mental toughness?"

I wanted REAL answers...

Not something a guy with a PhD wrote in a book.

These answers didn’t come overnight, but I had an early success that bolstered me and made me think I was onto something.

Here’s what happened.

Three weeks before my first World Championship, my coach gave me a tape and said, "Just listen to it."

It was a simple visualization audio.

Every night for three weeks I visualized playing at the Worlds before falling asleep. I don't know why, but I kept getting an image of a tie game.

And then I would score to win it for Canada.

Pretty nice daydream, hey?

I didn't think much of it at the time. Until the REAL final game, when the score was actually tied 5-5 with 1:25 left in the game.

I skated in, did a simple fake, and BAM!

Goal.

Gold medal at the Worlds.
Coincidence? Not in my mind. But I still didn't talk about it to anyone. Not even my sister, who played on the team...until the next World Championship, two years later.

Once again, the score was tied 5-5 in the final. Only this time, there was less than 30 seconds left.

I skated into the corner and picked up the ring. There was only time for one more shot.

BAM!

Goal - backhand, glove side. Another gold medal.

This time, I was sure. I was sure about the mental toughness training I had been doing. I tried to tell my teammates about it, but most of them just smiled. One of my coaches even said, "You're not going to get too into those head games, are you?"

Until the next World Championship, two years later.

Yup, you guessed it...another close score. With 5:45 left, we were down by two goals.

I looked up at the clock and thought, "We need a goal NOW." We went into their end. My linemates passed me the ring and went and set picks on Finland's defence for me.

"Do it again," their eyes were silently begging me.

Lucky for me, I had done the mental toughness training. I was ready.

And my team finally believed. I skated and weaved through the defence (thanks to those picks) and BAM!

Another goal. 6-5. Then we tied it up and won the game in overtime. Unbelievable. Three World Championship gold medals, all with a 6-5 score.

These experiences transformed my life as an athlete forever. In all, I played for Team Canada for ten years, retiring only when age forced me to.

I tell my story not to impress you. I'm pretty sure you're not a ringette player.
But I am sure that you have a Dream. And that somewhere inside you, you know your Dream is possible. But you’re getting in your own way. Your mind and your fears - they are bogging you down and crippling your potential.

**What Is Choking?**

“Choking” happens when you feel pressure and lose your confidence in competition, causing you to under-perform or lose.

We’ve all “choked” many times on a small scale; some of us have done it on an epic scale. One example that rocked the golf world was Rory McIlroy’s meltdown at the 2011 Masters.

McIlroy became the poster child for choking when, after leading the tournament from the first day to the tenth hole on Sunday, McIlroy dropped 6 shots in three successive holes before closing out with an 80 on his scorecard.

Yet while all athletes dread choking, few understand why it happens in the first place – and what to do to prevent it.

**Why Athletes Choke**

To truly reach your potential in sport and shine under pressure, you must understand why athletes choke. It took me a long time to understand the mechanics of this, but the reason we feel pressure in competition is simply this:

**FEAR**

Fear that you'll fail. Fear that you are not good enough. Fear of embarrassing or humiliating yourself. Fear of being criticized or shamed by parents and coaches. Fear of being stuck on the bench and forgotten. Fear of letting your teammates down and being an outcast on the team. Fear of never reaching your true potential, even after years of hard work.

The list of what athletes fear is endless.

**Fear Creates PRESSURE**
I’m not a psychiatrist, but it makes sense to me that if you are terrified of not being good enough or failing, you’ll put tremendous pressure on yourself to succeed all the time.

If you are afraid of making mistakes, the more you’ll pressure yourself to be perfect.

If you are afraid of being judged or rejected by teammates, coaches, or parents, you’ll put pressure on yourself to win.

**How PRESSURE Affects You**

The problem with putting PRESSURE on yourself to perform well and win is that it doesn’t work.

Now, let me be clear. There is nothing wrong with wanting to perform well and win.

They are nice. They are very nice, and wanting them will help you become the very best athlete you can be.

The problem is that you cannot control any of them. And let me emphasize this point, because it’s REALLY important.

**You cannot control performing well or winning.**

If you could control whether you’d perform well, you’d always give a peak performance.

If you could control winning, you’d always win. And if you are obsessed with something you cannot control, you will feel scared and anxious all the time.

At this point, whether we are aware of it or not, we’ve become a bundle of nerves because of both the PRESSURE and our desire to control results. Now, I’m not talking about normal, everyday nerves that happen when you compete. Nerves are completely natural. They make you alert and they activate you.
I’m talking about intense fear – the kind that makes you choke. The kind that makes your legs feel like jelly...that makes swallowing difficult...that makes you feel clumsy...that robs you of your aggressiveness.

That’s why in this Handbook, you are going to learn how to drop PRESSURE so you can eliminate choking from your life.

The reason why is that great athletes are not people who perform well under pressure. Nobody performs well under pressure.

If there was a magic button that athletes could press that would remove the pressure - and make the athlete carefree instead - all athletes would push the button.

Great athletes are people who create an internal environment for themselves in which they do not feel overwhelming pressure.

Why YOU Choke – And How To Prevent It

The way to prevent choking is to open to your fear rather than avoid it. The simple truth is if you can listen to your fear and diagnose why you are afraid, your fear will subside.

This took me years to learn because for a long time I was convinced I wasn’t supposed to have any fears about competing.

This idea was drilled into me by coaches and sport psychologists.

The books I read told me to "change the channel" of my mind any time I got scared or frustrated during competition. These authors implied that the reason I got scared was because my mind was weak.

I even had a sport psychologist tell me to put my fears into a mental Black Box and never think about them.

What a boneheaded idea.

Fear and frustration are part of competing. The faster you deal with them, the more mentally tough you will be.

The easiest way to deal with fear and frustration is to listen to them.
Most athletes are quite dismal at listening to their fears. We judge and condemn ourselves any time we are not 100% confident, positive, and happy.

Tremendous relief comes from listening to yourself, because you do not have to pretend, cover up, or stuff down your fears about competing.

You enjoy an inner relaxation that is heavenly.

And there is even more good news.

When you accept yourself in this way, it's easy to figure out WHY you are feeling stressed or frustrated.

You can DIAGNOSE why you're anxious and then PRESCRIBE a solution for it. Once you apply the solution, your fear will be cured.

**DIAGNOSE Before You PRESCRIBE**

The idea you should DIAGNOSE before you PRESCRIBE is as old as time itself. For example...

**PROBLEM:** Your motivation to practice is low.

You think you're being lazy.

But when you listen to your malaise, you DIAGNOSE that you have no idea why you lost your last major competition -- and can't face competing again until you do.

**PROBLEM:** You're terrified of choking under pressure.

You think it's because a big event is coming up.

But when listen to your performance anxiety, you DIAGNOSE that you've never competed internationally before, and you're totally unsure about what to expect.

**PROBLEM:** You get annoyed when your dad criticizes you.

You think it's because he's right, but when you listen to your fear, you DIAGNOSE that what you *really* need is unconditional support -- and he's not getting the memo.

**PROBLEM:** You're starting to doubt yourself.
You think it's because your coach is being harsh.

But when you listen to your stress, you DIAGNOSE that you secretly agree with his criticisms and want to change...but have no idea how.

You can see that diagnosing your fear is all about self-acceptance. You must be able to acknowledge our weaknesses and mistakes. This takes self-acceptance.

**The Barrier to Self-Acceptance**

The reason we find it so hard to accept ourselves is that sometimes, we are not the athlete we would like to be.

When we dislike something, we resist it--and the fears that come with it.

Consider anything you dislike about your skills, fitness, or conditioning. Is your attitude towards it one of acceptance or resistance?

You may be wondering, "What if I despise something about myself? How can I accept it?"

And, "If I accept it, am I stuck with my bad serve, poor agility, or limited defensive skills?"

The answer is No.

I am not asking you to accept an unsatisfactory situation.

I am merely asking you to accept your fears about it so you can DIAGNOSE their root cause.

The courage to accept your fears (and yourself) paves the way for mental toughness.

I know what you may be thinking. “Lisa, seriously...why can’t I just order myself to stop being afraid?”

Because trying to manipulate yourself like this will not work. It will not work because most of the time, your fear exists for a reason.

Something is happening to cause you to doubt yourself.
Maybe you’re making mistakes…maybe you’re being over-powered by an opponent… maybe your strategy is all wrong…maybe you were ill-prepared…maybe you came out flat…maybe you’re especially tired or just not feeling good in your skin today.

No matter what the reason, you’re either ill-prepared or not performing well. And this is creating deep fear inside you – choking fear.

Remember, choking fear is different from typical nerves. Nerves are normal. They are a form of excitement and they energize you. Choking fear makes you clumsy and self-conscious. It is an athlete’s worst nightmare.

During moments of choking fear, your body is saying, "Wake up! Pay attention!"

Your body is talking to you. And when someone as important as your body is talking, the right thing to do is LISTEN.

If you do, you can easily figure out why you’re scared – and what you need to do to cure your fear.

**Choking Fear Is A Symptom**

The bottom line?

Think of choking fear as a *symptom* of a deeper challenge in your event you need to face and solve.

When you act like a doctor and DIAGNOSE why you’re not performing well and then come up with a solution, you **cure your poor performance and your fear**.

In the following case studies, I ask every athlete two important questions: “**What are you afraid of?**” and “**What is your fear asking you to learn?**”

Their answers were very powerful. Check them out for yourself.

**Karen, Figure Skating**

Karen* came to see me because she had lost her motivation four months after a bad fall.
Karen said she had no confidence in her ability to win anymore. And, she was frustrated with her coach and parents, who were constantly giving her pep talks.

At first Karen scoffed when I asked her to listen to her fears about competing.

She just wanted to talk about discipline. How could she get back on track?

I persisted. I kept asking Karen to visualize a time she felt really confident when jumping. I knew this would force her fear to come to the surface.

After many tries in which she couldn't get an image, Karen made a breakthrough. She finally touched the fear in her heart about missing axels, falling, and re-injuring herself.

I asked Karen what her fear was asking her to do. It was easy for her to answer: "My timing is a mess. I don't know how long to wait before jumping. Sometimes I jump too soon or too late."

*Names have been changed.

Karen left my office determined to get her timing back.

If you don't listen to your fear and DIAGNOSE what it is asking you to do or learn, your fear will grow stronger. Your body will literally yell at you, making you anxious and even panicky.

That's why you need to be open to what your body has to say at all times.

**Joan, Tennis**

Recently I worked with Joan, a tennis player who had choked at the key moment in her doubles match.

She had no idea why.

After some probing she admitted, "Lisa I hit an overhead smash to win but the other team called it out. I was wild with anger and wanted to protest, but my doubles
partner didn't back me up. Instead of sticking to my guns I backed down. But after that, I wasn’t the game. I lost all the key points."

The reason Joan had lost her confidence?

She violated her own integrity and overrode her instincts. This weakened her terribly. To restore her confidence, Joan needs to be honest with her partner and assert herself. Otherwise her anger will eat away at her from the inside, causing her to punish herself with mistakes.

**Brandon, Badminton**

"Lisa I won the first match and was up 18-12 in the second. I just needed three points to close it out. But I got anxious. I hit the bird into the net and then out. He got momentum; I got frustrated...I ended up losing the tournament. Lisa I need more mental strength."

Can you see Brandon’s MAJOR problem?

What he’s missing?

He’s thinking about the fact that he got nervous and choked.

And he's putting himself down for choking.

He forgot to ask WHY he got so nervous.

So I asked Brandon the one question he WASN’T asking: “What was happening in this match that filled you with choking fear?”

As it turns out, Brandon's opponent is a long time rival. Brandon beat him five months ago by moving him around the court.

See, Brandon’s trademark is his quickness. He specializes in exhausting the other player, moving him around the court so he can’t get shots back.

That’s how Brandon won five months ago. But then the inevitable happened. After he lost, Brandon's rival got mad.

Then he got better.

When he saw Brandon again, he was returning Brandon’s shots. This unnerved Brandon, whose strategy hinges upon his opponent not being able
to get the bird back. He doesn’t have a great serve or disguise shots well, so this is his major way of getting points.

Here’s what you can learn from Brandon...

There’s a story behind every match, every game, and every race. There are physical, technical, and tactical REASONS why one side wins.

There aren’t many flukes in sport. That’s why it’s so sweet when you win. But Brandon forgot to dig up the story. He got upset about his fear instead.

Again...no matter what the cause of your choking fear, there’s usually a very good DIAGNOSIS -- technical, strategic, mental, or physical.

Once you know what it is, you can fix your performance issue. In Brandon’s case, he needs to stop being a one-trick pony. He needs to develop a great serve and a stellar drop shot. He also needs more patience when his opponent returns his shots.

**Nadia, Golf**

Nadia, a golfer, called me because she was suffering from ‘overwhelming nerves.’

Nadia’s nerves were so bad she couldn’t get her hands to stop shaking before important putts.

Usually when an athlete is having really intense emotions it’s because there is a build up of emotional baggage from the past.

I asked Nadia to reflect on past disappointments in golf and open up to her choking fear instead of blocking it.

Nadia was really shocked to discover that underneath her anxiety was tons of anger. This confused her. Anger? She had always associated anger with hurt. She didn’t realize she could be angry about golf failures.
Nadia finally realized she was angry about her lack of progress in recent years. She said, “Players who aren’t nearly as dedicated are playing better than me. I’m no longer considered the best golfer in my club. I am just another golfer.”

I asked Nadia to interview the two women in her club who were playing better than her and ask them why they had improved.

Both women said it was their new golf clubs – something that shocked Nadia.

Golf clubs aside, Nadia realized that her anger was keeping her from learning anything new about golf. An intense perfectionist, Nadia needed to feel totally dominant over all the other players to feel confident.

She said, “I have really been trying to protect an image of myself as being the BEST, the one who makes NO mistakes.

I dropped this and I’m getting curious about different technical elements of my game, and I’m learning a lot. For example, in my last tournament I kept missing putts. Instead of pretending I was having a good day, I asked one of the fellows here who is a really good putter for help. He told me how to deal with really fast greens.”

By listening to her fear, Nadia learned strategies about golf she never would have discovered otherwise.

Now you know the true value of fear. It’s your friend. It will tell you exactly what you need to learn to win.

**Courage to Win NEVER CHOKE AGAIN 3 Step Technique**

Here is a 3 step technique you can use to prevent choking, build your confidence, and perform your best in sport. Write down your answers to the questions below.

**Step One**

What are your WORST fears about competing? What are the mistakes or losses that terrify you? What are you most embarrassed about in your career?
Step Two

What is your fear asking you to learn as an athlete? Do you need to improve a technical skill? Fix a weakness? Address a conditioning problem? Do you need to understand the strategy of your sport better?

Step Three

What is the ONE technical, strategy, or physical improvement you could make as an athlete that would wipe your fear off the map? What do you need to be aware of in practice of training to improve it today? What goal could you set for your next competition that would make you a better athlete in this area?

Now your job is to go out and do everything possible to succeed at your goal. Here’s an example to help you. Just last week I talked to a goalie who was disappointed by his latest try-out.

GOALIE: "I really struggled in try outs - there were 12 goalies and 6 made it. I should have been able to get noticed more."

LISA: "What do you mean?"

GOALIE: "I could have covered my angles more. People have told me that all season - to make sure I'm always following the puck and not the player."
LISA: "If you DON'T follow the puck and you follow the player, what happens?"

GOALIE: "When I follow the player I'm too far back into my net - I'm almost on top of the goal line. When I follow the puck I push out and challenge."

See, here's the thing.

In competition, you'd never make a mistake intentionally.

It only happens because your AWARENESS of something is a little bit low. This happens in pressure situations because when your anxiety goes up, your awareness goes down a bit.

In my goalie's case, his awareness of where he is in the net can get low. To correct it, he needs to follow the puck.

At this point I asked him the obvious question: "Did you have a GOAL to follow the puck?"

I'm sure you can guess the answer: No.

Of course, to prevent choking, your goal has to be under your direct and immediate control – otherwise it will backfire and make you MORE nervous.

That's why you'd never set a goal to score a bunch of goals, points, or baskets or birdie holes or win sets. Instead, you set a goal that will help you do those things, but that you can control.

This works like a charm because you're not trying to accomplish something that is outside your control in try-outs. You're simply executing on a goal that you know you can accomplish. This brings out your Courageous Self because you know you can do it as long as you're committed.

**EXERCISE – SET A GOAL FOR TRY OUTS**
a. Write down the name of your next competition:
b. Write down a goal for this competition that is under your control. Examples:

Tennis
Watch what you opponent is doing (attacking the net, playing to your backhand side);
Hockey
Take the puck and drive to the net with speed.

Basketball
Keep the exact right gap between you and your check when on defense.
Volleyball
Communicate with your setter.
Golf
Keep your eye on the ball when putting.

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

Now, get out there and CRUSH your goal! You will be surprised just how relaxed and confident you are with only this goal in your mind.

This Handbook is an excellent first step in your mental toughness training for becoming a winning peak performer in your sport. To become a star athlete who can dominate any event at will, I highly recommend you check out my **Courage to Win in Sport: Perform Your Best Under Pressure System**. You can even try it out for 7 days FREE. Check it out here:

**The Courage to Win in Sport System**

Let me know what you think.

Your friend,
Lisa B.
Author and Founder, The Courage to Win