Personal Performance Enhancement Project – Final

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Introduction

Focusing on basic skills while one's physiology may increase significantly is a challenge an athlete often faces (Williams & Krane, 2021). Greenspan and Feltz (1989) studied the potential effects of psychological interventions with athletes in competitive situations. Through this project, I set out to become more aware of my own ideal performance state and routine behaviors. By focusing on enhancing my self-confidence, I hope to provide a foundational structure and consistent framework of different mental skills that I can use for my future sport and performance psychology clients. In the following paper, I break down what confidence has meant to me throughout my life and why I have decided to use this project to enhance my confidence. I touch on psychological interventions (self-talk, goal-setting, focus and concentration, stress-management, imagery, and mindfulness) and learn about the importance of awareness in an effort to achieve peak performance.

Confidence

According to Cox et al. (2010), self-confidence is a person's perceived ability to accomplish a certain level of performance, while self-efficacy is a person's belief that they can execute a bah Igor required to produce a certain outcome successfully. Even the most naturally confident athlete is subject to experiencing low self-confidence at times (Cox et al., 2010). Vealey et al. (1998) presented a sport-confidence model that included nine suggestions for sources of confidence, for example, one of them being physical and mental preparation. Williams and Krane (2021) explore the concept of confidence in sport and state that self-enhancing thinking is likely to lead to enabling feelings and good performance, while inappropriate or misguided thinking is likely to lead to negative feelings and poor performance. In the 1980's, applied sport psychology interventions led to increased consulting with athletes and recognition of important professional issues (Vealey, 2006).

My Confidence History

Viewing confidence as a learned skill rather than as a naturally inherited trait is something I am working on. I want to make positive improvements on my self-confidence, particularly within the fire service, my family, and my relationship with my girlfriend. This area is important to me because I am often too critical of myself which leads to a tainted perspective of reality and sometimes causes me to act in unhealthy or unproductive ways. Building on my confidence would mean that I would feel more comfortable in my mind, my body, and in my environments.

Growing up, I often felt that I had to fit a specific mold of behavior. My mother emigrated from the Philippines in 1983 and began working as a registered nurse in Queens, New York City. My father left the Philippines shortly after and started a life in California. My parents met in NYC and had my two older sisters and me. Tagalog was my first language, so I felt pressure at school to keep up with the other kids in my class and speak English well because if I pronounced something incorrectly, I would be made fun of. A big part of my identity felt lost over time as Filipino customs were being practiced at home but were being suppressed when I was with friends or at school. Even when we would visit family in the Philippines, I felt like I did not belong because they did not see me as Filipino, but they saw me as a rich American (which we were very far from). The constant sense of not belonging definitely contributed to my lack of self-confidence. Around this time, between the ages of five and ten, I really dove deep into basketball and playing the piano. These two arenas felt more like home than anywhere else because all I did was practice, and I knew it felt right. I loved being one of the starting five in my basketball team up until the eighth grade, and I loved performing piano solos at recitals. I never seemed intimidated by large crowds of strangers watching, but I was more intimidated by what my peers would think of me or whether my parents approved of me or not.

In my freshman year of high school, I made the cut for the women's junior varsity basketball team after two long days of try-outs, but not as an official player. I made it to the team as the assistant manager. I was not allowed to have my own jersey, sports number, or play during games, but I was allowed to practice with them. My role was to keep track of the scores on game day. I constantly questioned my worth on this team because everyone else on the team did not look like me. I decided to take my basketball career outside of my high school and played for a Filipino traveling league instead, where I played as a starter again with girls alongside me who were the starters of their high school teams. I knew my ability to play basketball was there, but I always wondered who I could have been if that coach had just let me play on the team and given me a chance rather than be the ball girl. Would I have gone to play basketball in college? I was put into performing arts classes and in pageant competitions in high school as well. I felt more confident playing a studied role. I knew I had to walk a certain way, say certain things, and act out at appropriate times. Everything was carefully executed, similar to basketball and piano. I knew what others expected of me.

Being gay also contributed to my lack of self-confidence. I felt I was not allowed to take up space already as a woman, as a first-generation Filipino American, as a lesbian. I decided to pursue film production in undergrad. My confidence was at a sky high because I was able to express myself creatively in mixed media. I was passionate about the filmmaking process and all the greats who have contributed to the field. When my father passed away suddenly at the age of fifty-five right after I graduated from undergrad, gears suddenly changed for me. Although I was happy to be working for a film and television union as a lighting technician, I felt I was called to a deeper form of service. Signing up for the FDNY was a daunting task, but I felt like my life experiences brought me to a place where becoming a firefighter would make sense. As an

electrician in the motion picture industry, I often found myself surrounded by predominantly male crews. I felt confident in my abilities because each crew I worked with complimented my work ethic and would ask me to stay on their shows.

Joining the fire department has been one of the most challenging things I have ever faced. I think that building on my self-confidence at home with my partner and with my family can lead to tremendous positive effects for how I operate at the firehouse. I often find myself making stupid mistakes because I am way too into my head, thinking what if I cannot do my job? That is what most people expect of me, to fail as a woman firefighter. Early on in the fire academy, a drill instructor told me I would be the reason why his wife would be a widow, because I do not belong here, and I am a death threat. When I worry too much about what people think of me, I tend to think far in advance, almost as if I were a time traveler, and play out different consequences in my head. I end up picking the decision that someone else may want as opposed to what I think is best or what I want. For example, as I force open a door to get into a fire apartment, it is likely that I will be thinking about who may be watching me and what they are thinking about my performance. I hope that my work towards more positive and strengthened self-confidence, I can be better at believing in myself, my abilities, my decision making, and my work. I want to feel empowered every day and not rely on others' beliefs and opinions to affect my self-esteem. I hope to one day not carry around this burden of feeling like an imposter as though I am not worthy of living a life that is successful and the way I want it. I hope to build on affirmation setting, focusing my attention on tasks, and feel confident in who I am.

Self-Talk

Williams and Krane (2021) explore the relationship between thoughts and confidence by suggesting that positive self-talk or how we think about ourselves is key in influencing confidence, feelings, and ultimately performance. Self-talk is a common coping strategy in elite

athletes (Gould et al., 1993). Beginning to understand how my mind works and noting what thoughts come up throughout the day or before, during, and after an event is an important first step. Developing a stronger sense of honest self-awareness can aid in connecting the dots between what one thinks, how these thoughts affect one's feelings and actions, and how the mind can be more disciplined (Williams & Krane, 2021). Research in the William and Krane (2021) text has demonstrated that positive self-talk interventions have enhanced self-confidence and have shown an improvement in performance among elite athletes.

Implementation of Self-Talk

Using the self-talk script development form, I was able to identify the seven purposes for script development in order to direct my attention towards why I want to work on my self-talk to begin with. The second section of this form allowed me to create my own sentences and belief statements that I could refer back to or say out loud to myself on a daily basis. The way I approached my script development was using countering, which is termed as your internal dialogue that uses facts and reasons to refute the underlying assumptions and beliefs of negative thinking (Williams & Krane, 2021). My final personal conclusion phrase or "script" is as follows:

I know myself. I forgive myself. I trust myself. I love myself. I do not have to believe every single thought that comes up in my mind. I trust myself and my abilities. Positive self-talk is a practice and is ever changing. I will always try to give my absolute best. My best when I am sick may look different than my best when I am not sick. My best can change every day, but what matters is I try to commit to being the best person I can be in every present moment that I can.

"Pressure is a privilege." Every challenge is an opportunity to grow and become a better person. No one is immune to the human experience. We all make mistakes. I can only take responsibility for myself and my own actions. Life is often unfair. I will concentrate on the things

I can control and on doing my best in those situations. Persistence and problem-solving pays off. I accept what I cannot control. I cannot control other people's opinions of me or how the people around me act. I cannot control my given circumstances or how quickly I learn skills. I CAN control my effort level, attitude, mood, and performance. I will concentrate on what I can control. All failure is surmountable with enough time, patience, hard work, and critical thinking. I am responsible for my own success.

I am valued by my peers for my consistency, persistence, and ability to keep composure. I am a thoughtful and considerate person who allows others to feel seen and understood. I am reliable and communicate openly which encourages others to trust and confide in me. I take care of my body by being intentional about what I eat, how often I rest, and getting enough sunshine daily. I am respected for my work because I am committed to knowing my tools and my job. I feel confident in my body, in my ability to regulate my emotions, and in my mental health because I prioritize mobility, strength training, meditation, and journaling. Failure makes me stronger by helping me identify areas of improvement. All of my hard work is preparing for something bigger and will pay off. I handle criticism well and am not too harsh on myself. I get a little better every day in practice, moving a step closer to becoming the best person I can be. I study and understand the different tools we have on the rig, the different building types, and know my standard operating procedures to handle calls. I take great pride in my work ethic, and it is a great source of confidence when encountering adversity. I know myself. I forgive myself. I trust myself. I love myself.

Figure 1

Smart Talk General Script Development Form

Smart Talk General Script Development Form – Joanne Mariano 01/25/2024

Introductory Statement:

"Pressure is a privilege." In order to stand firm and encourage myself within my own mind, it is important to know who I am. It is hard for me to accept compliments or positive feedback at times because I do not believe that there is anything good in me. By focusing on the positive successes I have experienced and reflecting on what people close to me have ever said positively about me, I can begin to reframe a positive belief system around who I am and what I am capable of accomplishing. I must seek and build this positive foundation within myself. It is a practice, and it is okay to take my time in doing it.

Purpose #1: Remind yourself of your assets, strengths, and desirable personal qualities.

Specific Thoughts:

1. I am valued by my peers for my consistency, persistence, and ability to keep composure.
2. I am a thoughtful and considerate person who allows others to feel seen and understood.
3. I am reliable and communicate openly which encourages others to trust and confide in me.

Purpose #2: Establish priorities and goals as well as action plans for how to achieve them.

Specific Thoughts:

1. I take care of my body by being intentional about what I eat, how often I rest, and getting enough sunshine daily.
2. I am respected for my work because I am committed to knowing my tools and my job.
3. I feel confident in my body, in my ability to regulate my emotions, and in my mental health because I prioritize mobility and strength training, meditation, and counseling.

Purpose #3: Recall past successes, particularly in similar situations or when overcoming obstacles, failure, or adversity.

Specific Thoughts:

1. Failure makes me stronger by helping me identify areas of improvement.
2. All of my hard work is preparing me for something bigger and will pay off.
3. I handle criticism well and am not too harsh on myself.

Purpose #4: Emphasize the quantity and quality of your preparation.

Specific Thoughts:

1. I get a little better every day in practice, moving a step closer to becoming the best performer I can be.
2. I study and understand the different tools we have on the rig, the different building types, and know my standard operating procedures to handle calls.
3. I take great pride in my work ethic and it's a great source of confidence when encountering adversity.

Purpose #5: Appraise all situations as challenges rather than obstacles and implement effective problem-solving strategies.

Specific Thoughts:

1. No one is immune to the human experience. We all make mistakes.
2. Every challenge is an opportunity to grow and become a better person.
3. "Pressure is a privilege." – Billie Jean King.

Purpose #6: Reframe negative thoughts.

Specific Thoughts:

1. I can only take responsibility for myself and my own actions.
2. Life is often unfair. I'll concentrate on the things I can control and on doing my best in those situations. Persistence and problem-solving pays off.
3. I accept what I can't control. I can't control other people's opinions of me or how my teammates play. I can't control my given ability or how quickly I learn skills. I can't control the officiating. I CAN control my effort level, attitude, mood, and performance. I'll concentrate on what I can control.

Purpose #7: Attribute success to hard work and improving ability; attribute failure to something controllable (the need to work harder, improve mental prep, or develop skills more fully).

Specific Thoughts:

1. All failure is surmountable with enough time, patience, hard work, and problem-solving.
2. When confronted with failure, I focus on the things I can control such as trying harder, getting better prepared mentally, developing my skills more fully, or trusting the abilities I've worked so hard to build.
3. I am responsible for my own success – my hard work and effort have paid off.

Conclusion Phrase, Statement:

I know myself. I forgive myself. I trust myself. I love myself. I do not have to believe every single thought that comes up in my mind. I trust myself and my abilities. Positive self-talk is a practice and is ever changing. I will always try to give my absolute best. My best when I am sick may look different than my best when I am not sick. My best can change every day, but what matters is I try to commit to being the best person I can be in every present moment that I can.

"Pressure is a privilege." Every challenge is an opportunity to grow and become a better person. No one is immune to the human experience. We all make mistakes. I can only take responsibility for myself and my own actions. Life is often unfair. I will concentrate on the things I can control and on doing my best in those situations. Persistence and problem-solving pays off. I accept what I cannot control. I cannot control other people's opinions of me or how the people around me act. I cannot control my given circumstances or how quickly I learn skills. I CAN control my effort level, attitude, mood, and performance. I will concentrate on what I can control. All failure is surmountable with enough time, patience, hard work, and critical thinking. I am responsible for my own success.

I am valued by my peers for my consistency, persistence, and ability to keep composure. I am a thoughtful and considerate person who allows others to feel seen and understood. I am reliable and communicate openly which encourages others to trust and confide in me. I take care of my body by being intentional about what I eat, how often I rest, and getting enough sunshine daily. I am respected for my work because I am committed to knowing my tools and my job. I feel confident in my body, in my ability to regulate my emotions, and in my mental health because I prioritize mobility, strength training, meditation, and journaling. Failure makes me stronger by helping me identify areas of improvement. All of my hard work is preparing for something bigger and will pay off. I handle criticism well and am not too harsh on myself. I get a little better every day in practice, moving a step closer to becoming the best person I can be. I study and understand the different tools we have on the rig, the different building types, and know my standard operating procedures to handle calls. I take great pride in my work ethic, and it is a great source of confidence when encountering adversity. I know myself. I forgive myself. I trust myself. I love myself.

Assessment of Self-Talk Implementation

One strategy I experimented with was exercise one from page 292 in the Williams and Krane (2021) text. A self-talk log is a technique that allows a person to monitor and analyze thought and behavior patterns in practice (Williams & Krane, 2021). For one full 24-hour tour that I worked, I followed the exercise and recorded the self-talk that went on in my head during any specific runs. For any major fire runs, I created a Google Doc form to fill out which included the address, timestamp, and any pertinent information such as where the fire location or emergency was, what I did, and what the result was. I also included data that was recorded on my Whoop app in regard to my heart rate and breathing.

Example One – Fire in a Non-Fireproof Multiple Dwelling (NFPMD)

- Position: Ladder Company 136 – Outside Vent Firefighter.
- Assignment on the ticket: Second due ladder company.
- Type of run on the ticket: Caller states fire on the second floor of a three-story NFPMD.
- Assignment upon arrival: First due ladder company.
- Size-up upon arrival (what did I see): Heavy smoke pushing from the second-floor windows. Window bars present. Building is attached on both sides. Alleyway on the left side, two buildings down.
- What my task is: Get to the rear, provide horizontal ventilation for the inside teams operating on the fire floor. Share information via radio about what exists in the rear.
- What I did: Grabbed a 24’ portable ladder, halligan hook, halligan, and 6” blade angle grinder. Carried tools to the alleyway. Noticed a large gate with substantial lock and chain. Cut the chain. Made entry to the rear of the neighboring building but realized I had no access to the rear of the main fire building. Made a transmission that I would be

delayed to the rear because there was no clear access from the left side alley. Made my way to the right side of the building and tried to gain access from that side. No shot. Went back to the fire building, gained access through the first floor into the rear. Continued to vent and search for victims.

- Self-talk that occurred:

  -Before: on the rig, I told myself I got this. I played out the tools I needed and what my potential plan would be. I was confident and felt ready.

  -During: oh shit, we are first due, we are not second due. People are waving us in. I need to get to the alley. Fuck, the gate has a lock. My angle grinder is taking too long to cut. I'm taking forever. Okay, it's open thank God. Fuck, I can't get to the fire building, there's a wall. I need to tell them, but they're gonna think I don't know what I'm doing. I'm delayed. I'm in trouble.

  -After: I could have done better. I acted based on the information and resources I had available in that moment. I did my absolute best.

Personal Reflection on Self-Talk Logging and Script Development

I think that creating a script has been very helpful in reaffirming my goals of wanting to know who I am and why I believe I am that way. Being able to hand write that personal script, carry it with me, and read it at least once or twice a day helps me to slowly change my behavior based on what the phrase tells me. For example, because in my script I believe I take care of my body by being intentional about how I eat, how I recover, and how often I journal, I make it a priority to think about those habits throughout the day. I become more willing to not eat that extra cup of ice cream at the end of dinner.

Logging my self-talk has been helpful in signaling to me how often I am actually talking to myself in my head and what those kinds of thoughts are. Logging the self-talk allows me to critically see how sometimes my thoughts are actually irrational and detrimental to my performance and behaviors.

Potential Adjustments for Future Impacts

Hopefully I can begin to gather more information and data about my daily thoughts, feelings, and behavior. If I pretty much treat my situation as a research project, I can have real proof as to why the things I think of impact my performance and how. I want to be able to identify these thoughts in real-time and create better habits at changing those thoughts to be more positive and encouraging.

Goal-Setting

Locke and Latham (2002) formulated the mechanistic theory which aims to explain how goals can influence performance in four different ways. Goals direct a performer's attention and action to the importance of a task (Williams & Krane, 2021). By setting goals, performers also begin to mobilize their efforts. Goals can be useful in increasing immediate effort and persistence. Performers can also use goal-setting to develop and employ new learning strategies.

Implementation of Goal-Setting Techniques

I started out by filling out the goal-setting worksheet provided in our modules. I felt that the first step in defining my dream was too broad for me. My main overarching goal seemed to be wanting to retire from the fire service with no severe injuries, with a respected reputation, and feeling proud of myself and healthy. I had to break this "dream" down into more tangible perspectives such as thinking about how exactly I can prevent being severely injured or death in a career in which people have died, even after they did everything correctly and performed their job well. I focused on the things that I could control which are how I recover when I am off duty,

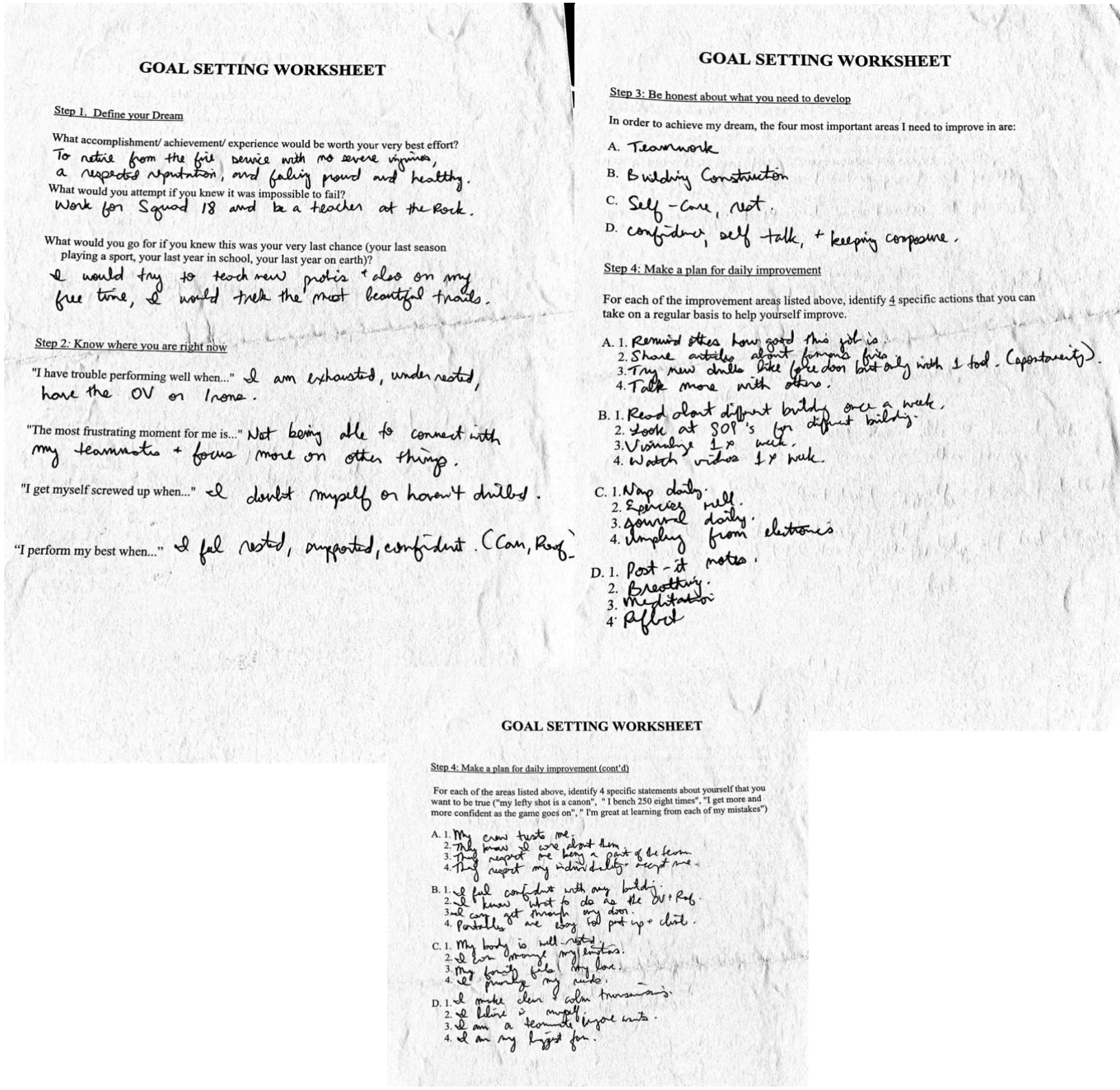
particularly optimizing my sleep, going to saunas, receiving cupping and massage therapy, attending mental health counseling, and connecting with friends, family, and nature. Another thing I can control is how well and how often I drill, both by myself and with the other people at my firehouse. By knowing my job and performing these tasks effectively, I can both be respected in the long run as well as do my best to prevent severe injuries or any death. The second step of the worksheet focused my attention onto what I am currently experiencing, such as feelings of exhaustion, isolation or lack of relatedness to my peers, as well as self-doubt and a lack of self-confidence. Knowing these helped me to concentrate on four areas: teamwork, building construction, self-care, and confidence. In order to carry out this overall goal, the worksheet allowed me to create my own plan for daily improvement.

Actionable Steps for Daily Improvement

A. Teamwork: Remind others how great our job is and why. Share articles and videos with others about famous fires and cool stories about weird runs. Try new team building drills, spontaneous and different. Talk more with others about things unrelated to firefighting (more personal).
B. Building Construction: Read about different building types and their tactics once a week. Watch a new video about tactics for that building. Visualize my own role for that building type for different positions. Learn about previous success and failure stories.
C. Self-Care: Nap. Go to Muay Thai or Jiu Jitsu twice a week. Journal weekly. Unplug from electronics.
D. Confidence: Post-it notes. Breathing. Meditation. Reflection.

Figure 2

Goal Setting Worksheet



GOAL SETTING WORKSHEET

Step 1. Define your Dream

What accomplishment/ achievement/ experience would be worth your very best effort?
To retire from the fire service with no severe injuries, a respected reputation, and feeling proud and healthy.
What would you attempt if you knew it was impossible to fail?
Work for Squad 18 and be a teacher at the Rock.

What would you go for if you knew this was your very last chance (your last season playing a sport, your last year in school, your last year on earth)?
I would try to teach new pratis + also on my free time, I would trek the most beautiful trails.

Step 2: Know where you are right now

"I have trouble performing well when..." I am exhausted, under rested, have the OV or I none.

"The most frustrating moment for me is..." Not being able to connect with my teammates + focus more on other things.

"I get myself screwed up when..." I doubt myself or haven't drilled.

"I perform my best when..." I fel rested, supported, confident. (Can, Rod)

GOAL SETTING WORKSHEET

Step 3: Be honest about what you need to develop

In order to achieve my dream, the four most important areas I need to improve in are:

A. Teamwork
B. Building Construction
C. Self-Care, rest.
D. confidence, self talk, + keeping composure.

Step 4: Make a plan for daily improvement

For each of the improvement areas listed above, identify 4 specific actions that you can take on a regular basis to help yourself improve.

A. 1. Remind others how good this job is.
2. Share articles about famous fires
3. Try new drills like (fake door but only with 1 tool. (Opportunity).
4. Talk more with others.

B. 1. Read about diffent buildg once a week.
2. Look at SOP's for diffent buildg.
3. Visualize 1 x week.
4. Watch videos 1 x wek.

C. 1. Nap daily.
2. Exercise well.
3. Journal daily.
4. Unplug from electronics

D. 1. Post-it notes.
2. Breathing.
3. Meditation
4. Afford

GOAL SETTING WORKSHEET

Step 4: Make a plan for daily improvement (cont'd)

For each of the areas listed above, identify 4 specific statements about yourself that you want to be true ("my lefty shot is a canon", " I bench 250 eight times", "I get more and more confident as the game goes on", " I'm great at learning from each of my mistakes")

A. 1. My crew trusts me.
2. They know I care about them.
3. They respect me being a part of the team
4. They respect my individuality, except me.

B. 1. I fel confident with any buildg.
2. I know what to do as the OV + Rod.
3. I can get through any door.
4. Pentalks are easy to put up + climb.

C. 1. My body is well-rested.
2. I can manage my emotions.
3. My family feels my love.
4. I'm putting my rules.

D. 1. I make clear + calm transmissions.
2. I believe in myself + my crew.
3. I am a teammate + pose wants.
4. I am my biggest fan.

Assessment of Goal-Setting Worksheet

One example of a strategy for teamwork that I attempted was gathering all the junior members together (anyone with less than five years on the job) and creating a fun, competitive drill. The drill was to get fully dressed up in your bunker gear, force an outward opening metal door with metal jamb, but only with a halligan tool. Then, force an inward opening metal door with metal jamb, but only with a halligan tool. Lastly, lights are shut off and you must mask up or don your Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA). The whole drill will be timed, and the drill is complete once you secure your chin strap and are breathing in oxygen. It was fun to get everyone's heart rate going and see how nervous everyone would get when they knew it was their turn. There were many added stressors to this drill: everyone is watching, you are timed, and you are only allowed one tool. Doing this encouraged other members with eight to ten years on the job to join in and participate. I definitely felt closer with the guys and was confident about my performance and ability to maintain composed throughout.

Personal Reflection on Goal-Setting

I think that the goal-setting worksheet does a great job in providing an early direction towards setting up a foundation for what specific goals are to be attained, but I would like to see a worksheet that incorporates more of the SMART goal-setting techniques: Specific, Measurable, Attainable/Action-oriented, Realistic, and Timely (HumberEDU, 2017). As far as the impacts of this goal-setting technique, so far, it has shown to be useful in team building and helping me focus my attention, mobilize my efforts, encouraged persistence, and helped me think of learning strategies, particularly what does not work and what does work for me.

Potential Adjustments for Future Impacts

I will say that I may need to focus on one main area at a time because I felt overwhelmed thinking about all the things I needed to implement on a daily basis after filling out the

worksheet. I also want to try to focus on creating a SMART goal-setting worksheet (HumberEDU, 2017). I want to start with the goals that I feel the least confident with such as focusing on the Outside Vent position as opposed to the Roof, Can, Forcible Entry, Nozzle, Back Up, or Control positions.

Focus and Concentration Strategies:

According to Williams and Krane (2021), effective concentration is being able to focus on the right things at the right time and in the right way. Total immersion in the present is considered the best form of concentration (Williams & Krane, 2021). The ability to shift attention depending on the changing performance demands is another factor in effective concentration.

Implementation of Concentration Strategies

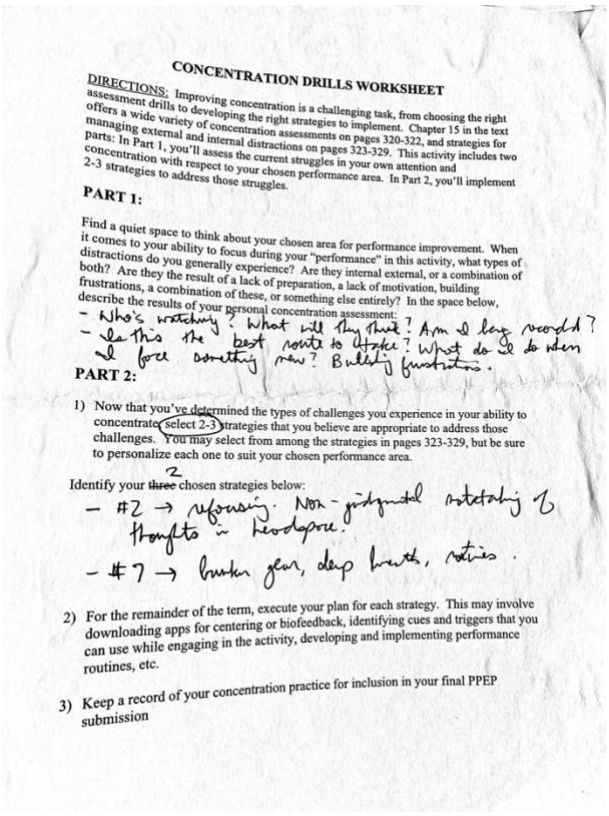
After completing the concentration drills worksheet provided in our modules, I was able to think about the most common reasons for my lack of concentration while on the fire ground. I think most of my distractions come from both internal and external sources: negative self-talk or doubt coming from a sense of fear of the unknown, not knowing which route is the best route to take, wondering if my decision will ultimately help someone or hurt someone, worrying about what others are thinking of me in the moment whether that is a fellow firefighter or a civilian on the street recording me to post online, and the building of frustrations when things do not necessarily go my way. I have decided to focus on two concentration strategies that felt most appropriate to me.

Strategy seven in the Williams and Krane (2021) text involves developing pre-performance and performance protocols. Certain routines I do help to cue both my body and mind. Because I set up my bunker gear the exact same way every time I get out of them, when the time comes for a call, I am able to smoothly follow my routine and get dressed in a fast and

calming manner that allows me to feel prepared for the call as well as grounds me to take a deep breath and slow down even when my heart is racing. When something begins to feel out of control, I often will tap my gloved hands together just so I can remind myself to be in the present moment and take a deep breath to reset. Strategy six, increasing focusing and refocusing skills, is something I have been working on while off-duty (Williams & Krane, 2021). I find that by utilizing apps such as Headspace, I am able to practice gently holding my attention on something and noticing when my mind wanders. I allow my mind to do whatever it naturally wants to do and try my best to not judge whatever thought comes up, but rather gently bring my focus back to my breath. Doing these refocusing techniques build my confidence in reminding me that I can do this even in real time when I am not using Headspace (Williams & Krane, 2021).

Figure 3

Concentration Drills Worksheet



CONCENTRATION DRILLS WORKSHEET

DIRECTIONS: Improving concentration is a challenging task, from choosing the right assessment drills to developing the right strategies to implement. Chapter 15 in the text offers a wide variety of concentration assessments on pages 320-322, and strategies for managing external and internal distractions on pages 323-329. This activity includes two parts: In Part 1, you'll assess the current struggles in your own attention and concentration with respect to your chosen performance area. In Part 2, you'll implement 2-3 strategies to address those struggles.

PART 1:

Find a quiet space to think about your chosen area for performance improvement. When it comes to your ability to focus during your "performance" in this activity, what types of distractions do you generally experience? Are they internal external, or a combination of both? Are they the result of a lack of preparation, a lack of motivation, building frustrations, a combination of these, or something else entirely? In the space below, describe the results of your personal concentration assessment:

- Who's watching? What will they think? Am I being recorded?
- Is this the best route to take? What do I do when I face something new? Building frustrations.

PART 2:

1) Now that you've determined the types of challenges you experience in your ability to concentrate, select 2-3 strategies that you believe are appropriate to address those challenges. You may select from among the strategies in pages 323-329, but be sure to personalize each one to suit your chosen performance area.

Identify your ~~three~~ 2 chosen strategies below:

- #2 → refocusing. Non-judgmental noticing of thoughts in Headspace.
- #7 → breathing, deep breaths, routines.

2) For the remainder of the term, execute your plan for each strategy. This may involve downloading apps for centering or biofeedback, identifying cues and triggers that you can use while engaging in the activity, developing and implementing performance routines, etc.

3) Keep a record of your concentration practice for inclusion in your final PPEP submission

Assessment of Concentration Worksheet

One example of how my concentration actually faltered due to my routine being disrupted was when I was on the rig on the way to a run, and my waist strap buckle for my SCBA was stuck in between my seat and the side of the door, I slowly began to become frazzled and felt behind, but I took a deep breath and reminded myself that it would be easier to try to free up the buckle if I was calm rather than freak out and yank it out. Slowing down and taking a deep breath helped me get back to my routine which helped me to refocus on the task which was to get ready to plan what I needed to do once I got off the rig.

Another example was a call we received at 0145 hours to go to the hospital emergency room and cut off a ring off of someone's finger. My crew and I followed our protocol, business as usual. One of the more senior guys asked me if I was sure I was comfortable doing the cutting and had asked me if I had ever done it before. I whispered that I was definitely ready and that I have done it before. Saying that to him reminded me that I felt prepared but simultaneously worried me because I had only done it once before but have done it many times in my head through visualization. Cutting a ring off of a patient's swollen finger requires a great amount of precision and focus. Even with everyone else watching me and the patient yelling in pain, I was able to focus solely on the cut, making sure my hands were still and that my body was balanced, focusing on just my breath and the movement of the blade. We successfully completed the task, and I felt very present.

Personal Reflection on Concentration Strategies

So far, building a routine and working on refocusing has been very helpful for me. I would say that I often still have a hard time focusing in general, but when it comes to a given task and my adrenaline is high, I seem to be able to focus better. I want to get to a point where I do not automatically go into tunnel vision and auditory exclusion. I want to get to a place where

even while I am multitasking and making decisions on the fly, I can still take in and process other information such as details about a building or hearing pertinent transmissions. I hope to get to a point where I am just relying on kinesthetic sense and can feel more in the zone (Williams & Krane, 2021).

Potential Adjustments for Future Impacts

I would like to spend more time exploring concentration techniques and less time scrolling through my phone. I think the more stimulated I am by external factors such as sounds and lights on my off-time, the more I feel like I have a hard time processing things. Yet on the fire ground, I feel laser-focused and am able to disregard the lights and noises. I think I would need to be more intentional about setting up routines outside of work as well as setting aside time to do Headspace while at work, not just when I am at home. What can also help is logging what I noticed during a run and also logging what I learned to be true and other potential things I could have done differently after that same run.

Stress-Management

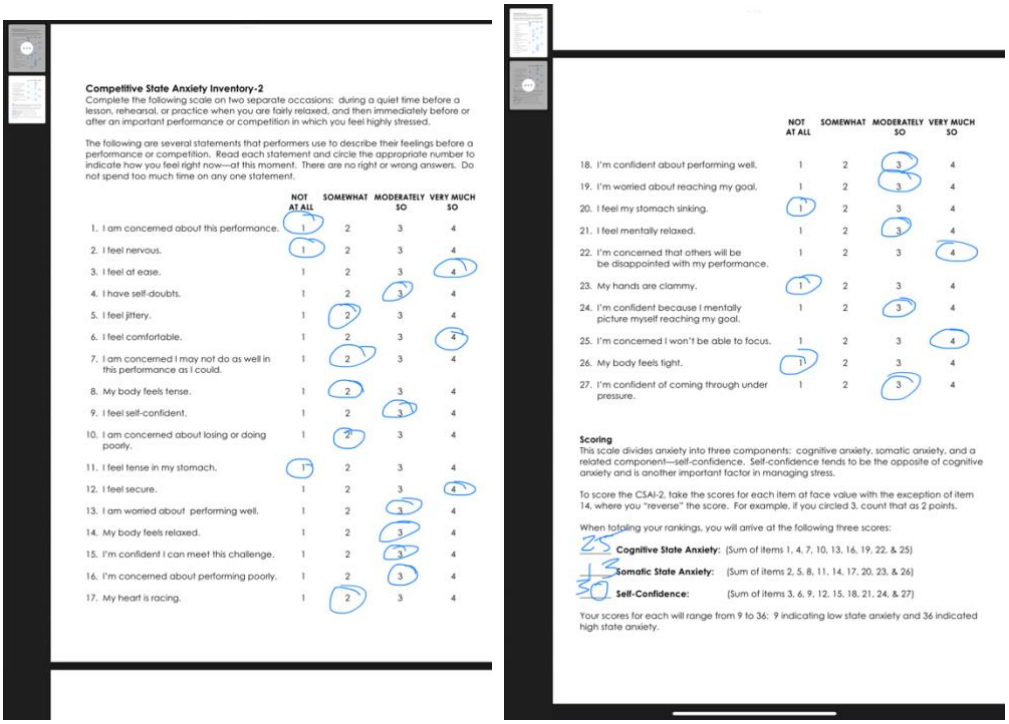
Being "on the right side of the curve" is a phrase that seems to have grown in popularity amongst us members within the FDNY. Williams and Krane (2021) inform readers of different anxiety and performance theories, and although this early arousal-based approach may be characterized as being too simplistic in explaining the stress-performance relationship, the Yerkes-Dodson inverted-U hypothesis appears to be the theory that makes the most sense to me in relation to the fire service. In the inverted-U relationship between arousal and performance, more emotional arousal can result in progressive performance gains up to an optimal level of performance, but anything below or beyond that level may result in poor performance (Williams & Krane, 2021).

Competitive State Anxiety Inventory 2R (Cox et. al., 2003)

Upon completion of this assessment, my total score for cognitive state anxiety was a 25. My somatic state anxiety sum was thirteen. Lastly, my self-confidence score was 30. I found this to be valuable information because my highest scoring questions dealt with feeling secure and confident within myself. Typically, I feel that I lack self-confidence, but it appeared while doing this questionnaire that maybe the things I have been working on the last two weeks have been helpful in building my self-confidence. One thing to note is that I completed this questionnaire while in the comfort of my own home. I would say that I would need to retest this questionnaire again right before I enter the firehouse for a shift and directly after I finish and go home. I think being able to do this in my quiet time at home helps reaffirm my capabilities and strengthens my self-confidence by reframing the truth about who I am, whereas if I were to do this before and after a shift, I can almost guarantee that my body and mind would feel otherwise. I filled out this questionnaire based on a regular day at work. I would like to fill these out again for specific positions, specific shifts (day vs. night), and specific building types or call types.

Figure 4

Anxiety Inventory



Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2

Complete the following scale on two separate occasions: during a quiet time before a lesson, rehearsal, or practice when you are fairly relaxed, and then immediately before or after an important performance or competition in which you feel highly stressed.

The following are several statements that performers use to describe their feelings before a performance or competition. Read each statement and circle the appropriate number to indicate how you feel right now—at this moment. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement.

	NOT AT ALL	SOMEWHAT	MODERATELY SO	VERY MUCH SO
1. I am concerned about this performance.	1	2	3	4
2. I feel nervous.	1	2	3	4
3. I feel at ease.	1	2	3	4
4. I have self-doubts.	1	2	3	4
5. I feel jittery.	1	2	3	4
6. I feel comfortable.	1	2	3	4
7. I am concerned I may not do as well in this performance as I could.	1	2	3	4
8. My body feels tense.	1	2	3	4
9. I feel self-confident.	1	2	3	4
10. I am concerned about losing or doing poorly.	1	2	3	4
11. I feel tense in my stomach.	1	2	3	4
12. I feel secure.	1	2	3	4
13. I am worried about performing well.	1	2	3	4
14. My body feels relaxed.	1	2	3	4
15. I'm confident I can meet this challenge.	1	2	3	4
16. I'm concerned about performing poorly.	1	2	3	4
17. My heart is racing.	1	2	3	4
18. I'm confident about performing well.	1	2	3	4
19. I'm worried about reaching my goal.	1	2	3	4
20. I feel my stomach sinking.	1	2	3	4
21. I feel mentally relaxed.	1	2	3	4
22. I'm concerned that others will be disappointed with my performance.	1	2	3	4
23. My hands are clammy.	1	2	3	4
24. I'm confident because I mentally picture myself reaching my goal.	1	2	3	4
25. I'm concerned I won't be able to focus.	1	2	3	4
26. My body feels tight.	1	2	3	4
27. I'm confident of coming through under pressure.	1	2	3	4

Scoring

This scale divides anxiety into three components: cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety, and a related component—self-confidence. Self-confidence tends to be the opposite of cognitive anxiety and is another important factor in managing stress.

To score the CSAI-2, take the scores for each item at face value with the exception of item 14, where you "reverse" the score. For example, if you circled 3, count that as 2 points.

When totaling your rankings, you will arrive at the following three scores:

25 **Cognitive State Anxiety:** (Sum of items 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, 22, & 25)

13 **Somatic State Anxiety:** (Sum of items 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, & 26)

30 **Self-Confidence:** (Sum of items 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 24, & 27)

Your scores for each will range from 9 to 36: 9 indicating low state anxiety and 36 indicated high state anxiety.

Implementation of Breathing and Stress Inoculation Training

I believe it is important to consider the external factors that can affect a firefighter's performance: time of day, proximity to a call (determining how much time a member has to prepare both strategically and mentally prior to arrival), sleep performance and its effect on hormone levels ultimately affecting arousal and emotional regulation, and personal stress levels (being able to separate work from what goes on at home. For example, a firefighter who just had an argument with their partner at home walks through the firehouse doors at the start of their shift and may already be past optimal arousal because they are distracted and upset. A call can come in for a novel operation such as cutting a ring off a panicking elderly man's swollen and bleeding finger. In order to optimally cut the ring with our handheld rotary power tool, the operator must be aroused enough to focus and handle the tool with precision and not harm the patient yet must be calm enough to hold the tool firmly while in motion.

Williams and Krane (2021) suggest that muscles are set up in pairs, with one designed to counter the activity of the other. When anxiety takes place, muscles tighten and shorten, forcing the opposing muscle to tense up to keep that segment of the body in place. This hinders athletes from performing with appropriate coordination and skill execution (Williams & Krane, 2021). For this reason, I have decided to implement muscle-to-mind relaxation interventions such as breathing to reduce physiological arousal and the intensity of competition anxiety symptoms.

In order to tackle relaxation while on duty, I have been trying to consciously take 3 diaphragmatic breaths or tell myself, "Big belly like Santa Claus," to make sure I am breathing deeply and not into my chest or shoulders. I also try to incorporate box breathing while riding on the rig en route to a response. Stress inoculation drills have also been implemented. One example is forcible entry. I force the door with no gear on, then it moves all the way up to forcing the door on a timer with full gear, on air, and no vision.

Assessment of Breathing and Stress Inoculation Implementation

One way to test and practice breathing has been after Muay Thai class or a session at the gym. When my heart rate is really high, I try to control it and slow it down with diaphragmatic breathing. Doing this helps my body to relax which in turn helps my mind relax because I remember I have the power to help control and slow down my heart rate and breathing whenever I can. It has been particularly helpful when I am breathing with my Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA). Stress inoculation training has been useful in building confidence and building muscle memory reps. The approach has helped combine imagery, self-talk, and relaxation (Williams & Krane, 2021).

Personal Reflection on Breathing and Stress Inoculation Training

Stress inoculation drills and breathing have been useful in improving my ability to relax on-the-spot and deal with anxiety. I would say that my body feels more connected and less tense after a breathing session. I have also begun to tape my mouth overnight because I have a tendency to sleep with my mouth open. I have noticed that taking a big, deep breath has helped me to refocus my attention and have a better handle of my hands and motor skills rather than fumbling with tools and hyperventilating.

Potential Adjustments for Future Impacts

I think it would be useful if there were better ways to record actual effects of what is happening to my body when doing relaxation techniques. Maybe I can begin to time and record breathing exercises better utilizing my Whoop data to track my heart rate and how it differs during these drills. Another option is to record these drills via video and compare dexterity and performance at different levels.

Imagery

According to Williams and Krane (2021), neuroimaging techniques reveal that imagery activates the same areas and processes in the brain as when the movement being imagined is actually executed, which is termed functional equivalence. Schack (2012) studies basic action concepts (BACs) and refer to them as cognitive "chunks" of body postures and movement that are the building blocks of the skill in the brain's memory. Athletes must imagine intense and perfect behavioral, mental, and physiological responses to different competitive challenges and be very intentional.

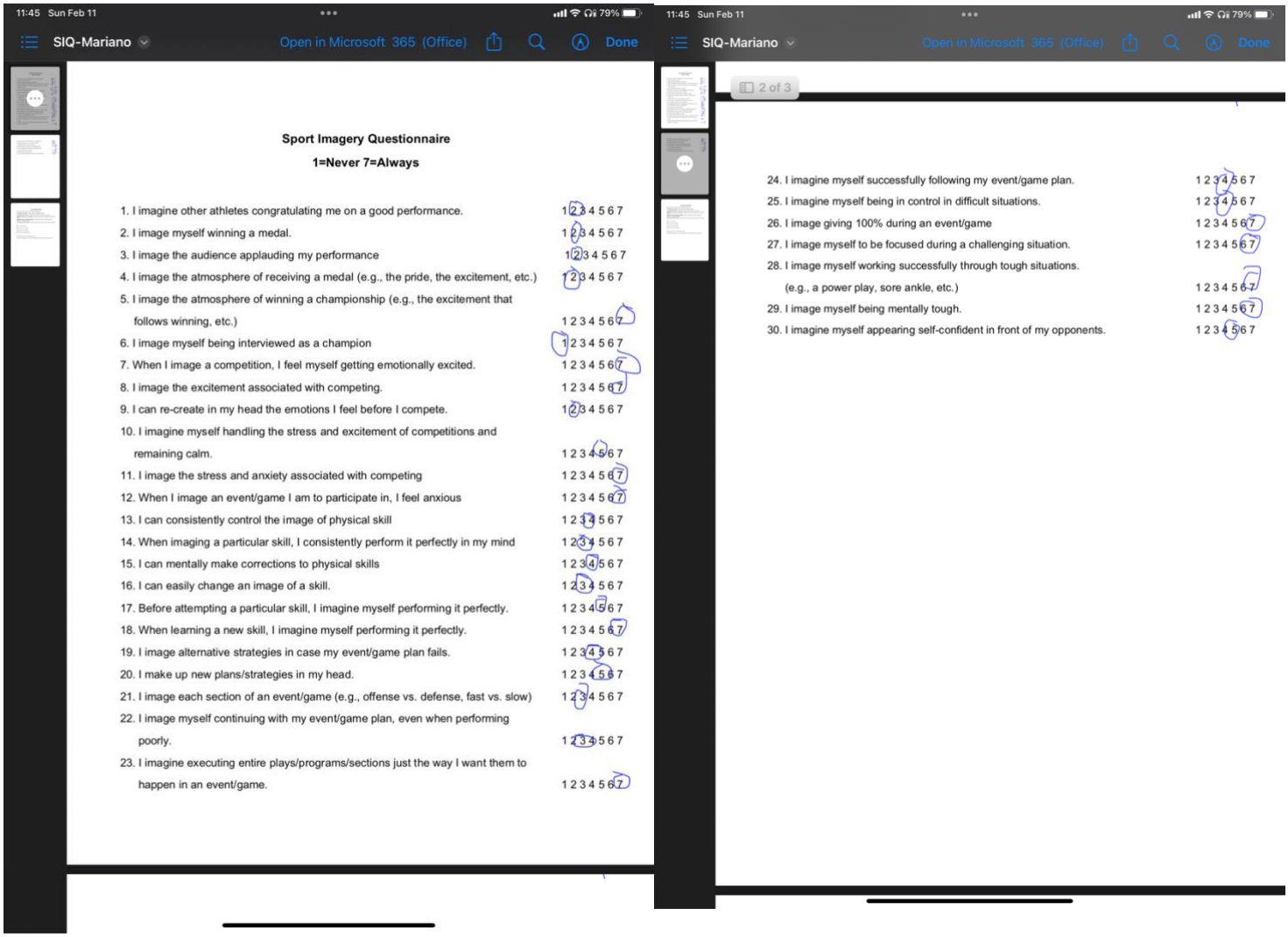
Sport Imagery Questionnaire (Hall et. al., 1998)

My overall scores for this questionnaire were somewhat surprising to me. My highest sum was for motivational general mastery (MG-M) at a total of 37. This made sense to me because this category is representative of effective coping and confidence in challenging situations. I filled this out while in the comfort of my own home with ample time separated from the end or beginning of a shift. Although I am looking to work on my lack of self-confidence, what I do feel I am most confident in about myself is my ability to effectively cope with challenges I am unprepared for or am scared of. Next, I scored a 35 in motivational general arousal (MG-A), which is related to arousal, relaxation, and competitive anxiety. I feel that I am able to effectively tune into what my body's responses often can be when I am in a particular situation. I have been able to utilize visualization as a key tool in helping me identify how my body responds to different runs and stimuli. Because of this, I have been better able to identify them when they occur while on a run on duty, so I can build off of that and incorporate calming techniques. Cognitive general presented the next highest score of 28, which relates to competitive strategies. My sum for cognitive specific, which is directed toward skill

development or production, was 26. Lastly, motivational specific was a total of 16, and this represents specific goals and goal-oriented behavior.

Figure 5

Sport Imagery Questionnaire



Sport Imagery Questionnaire

1=Never 7=Always

1. I imagine other athletes congratulating me on a good performance. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. I image myself winning a medal. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. I image the audience applauding my performance 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. I image the atmosphere of receiving a medal (e.g., the pride, the excitement, etc.) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. I image the atmosphere of winning a championship (e.g., the excitement that follows winning, etc.) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. I image myself being interviewed as a champion 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. When I image a competition, I feel myself getting emotionally excited. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. I image the excitement associated with competing. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9. I can re-create in my head the emotions I feel before I compete. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10. I imagine myself handling the stress and excitement of competitions and remaining calm. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11. I image the stress and anxiety associated with competing 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12. When I image an event/game I am to participate in, I feel anxious 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13. I can consistently control the image of physical skill 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
14. When imaging a particular skill, I consistently perform it perfectly in my mind 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
15. I can mentally make corrections to physical skills 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
16. I can easily change an image of a skill. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
17. Before attempting a particular skill, I imagine myself performing it perfectly. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
18. When learning a new skill, I imagine myself performing it perfectly. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
19. I image alternative strategies in case my event/game plan fails. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
20. I make up new plans/strategies in my head. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
21. I image each section of an event/game (e.g., offense vs. defense, fast vs. slow) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
22. I image myself continuing with my event/game plan, even when performing poorly. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
23. I imagine executing entire plays/programs/sections just the way I want them to happen in an event/game. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
24. I imagine myself successfully following my event/game plan. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
25. I imagine myself being in control in difficult situations. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
26. I image giving 100% during an event/game 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
27. I image myself to be focused during a challenging situation. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
28. I image myself working successfully through tough situations. (e.g., a power play, sore ankle, etc.) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
29. I image myself being mentally tough. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
30. I imagine myself appearing self-confident in front of my opponents. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Assessment of Imagery Skills

Because of the uncertainty firefighters constantly face, I think that the theory of imagery as re-creating or creating in the Williams and Krane (2021) text is the most relevant when discussing with future clients. Firefighting is a field in which people may operate without sight,

but imagery can be extremely beneficial towards helping members prepare for moments they have never encountered. It can help firefighters create a personal slide deck or highlight film to refer to so that when their cognitive anxiety hits, they can lean on their mentally rehearsed reps of that action to perform well. Being able to intentionally sit down in silence, imagine myself in first-person perspective in my mind, and practice forcing a door into a home and consider any obstacles I may face and all the pathways to complete the task has been helpful in allowing me to feel more confident when I do force open a door in the moment because it looks and feels familiar to my mental imagery performance. Trying to look at a picture of a lemon on a digital screen and using imagery also showed as effective because focusing on the lemon in my mind made my mouth water and taste the sourness of the lemon even if it was just a photo on a computer.

Personal Reflection on Imagery Skills

Imagery has been very useful in handling the Outside Vent (OV) position. The OV position is one of the most challenging positions in the fire service because one little transmission can make or break the approach. It is hard to build confidence when not as many fires are occurring as they used to, but creating a mental slide deck has been very successful in helping me to do mental reps and prepare in a productive way.

Potential Adjustments for Future Impacts

I think I will have to fill out the questionnaires again for every different position that I am assigned for a tour. I often find it challenging to tap into the things I may be hearing, smelling, and tasting when going through imagery drills in my mind in first-person. I can see and feel the actions of breaking a door open for example, but my other senses fall behind in my imagery. I think this may be due to my tendency to experience auditory exclusion.

Mindfulness

According to Williams and Krane (2021), mindfulness may be described as deliberate compassionate awareness of present-moment thoughts, feelings, body sensations, and the environment. Wegner and Erber (1992) explain that attempting to control or suppress undesirable thoughts can make them ironically very accessible under stress. High performance in sport is concluded to require mindful awareness of task-relevant external cues; nonjudgmental and non reactive awareness of internal thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations, and clarification of values paired with values-based behavior (Gardner & Moore, 2004).

Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (Baer et. al., 2006)

Upon completion of this assessment, my total scores from highest to lowest are as follows: observe (39), act with awareness (30), describe (26), non-judging (21), and non-reactivity (14). I found this to be valuable information because my highest scoring questions dealt with having an attentiveness to internal and external stimuli, which is an important feature of openness to experience (Baer et. al., 2006). I can confidently say I would generally consider myself open. I think openness stems from my upbringing in that I often felt excluded or unaccepted whether it was because I did not look like my other classmates, came out as queer while attending Catholic high school, or because I was the youngest in my family. I felt I did not always get a chance to explain or defend myself growing up, so I vowed to stay open towards what any other person around me may be going through because I knew I did not always get a chance to say my truths.

Acting with awareness was my next highest score which, according to Baer et. al. (2006), measured my attention to my current activities and ability to avoid automatic pilot. I would say this makes sense because doing several years of mental health counseling both individually and in group settings has helped me become more aware of the present moment. Dealing with

complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD) has encouraged me to think differently about my mind-body connection. Describe was next, which focused on my emotional intelligence and alexithymia, or ability to recognize and label emotional states (Baer et. al., 2006). The final two scores I ranked lowest in were non-judging and non-reactivity. Non-judging spoke to my thought suppression and difficulties in emotion regulation, while non-reactivity was centered on experiential avoidance and self-compassion. This makes sense to me because I do struggle with my inner self-talk and find it hard to not react to a strong emotion or practice self-compassion.

Overall, I would say that filling out this questionnaire has raised many questions within my own mind and encourages me to be more mindful of how I think and behave on a daily basis. Scoring was a fun experience because the "reverse" scoring system caught me off guard. I hope to retake this questionnaire at the end of the term and score higher on non-judging and non-reactivity.

Assessment of Mindfulness Skills

Using applications such as Headspace for weekly meditations has helped to increase my awareness, sense of control, focus, coping skills. On the other hand, I notice that mindfulness skills can help to decrease stress and improve my emotion regulation. I think something that is interesting to note is that my firehouse has undergone a huge transition in the last four weeks. We were forced to move from our original firehouse built in the 1800's to a set of trailers that were built for us on a high school track and field a few minutes away. I have been noticing my stress levels more often and almost force myself to set aside time for meditation when I can simply because I need to reset a lot more lately.

Personal Reflection on Mindfulness Strategies

So far, practicing mindfulness has been challenging. I often struggle with non-judgment towards myself. Incorporating mindfulness skills has encouraged me to learn how to separate my

feelings from what is factually occurring, and in doing so, be able to revisit tricky memories from my past and learn to forgive myself for mistakes I have made. I am learning to become more compassionate towards myself. Making space in my day is also one of my challenges.

Potential Adjustments for Future Impacts

I would like to be more deliberate and stricter with setting aside time to practice mindfulness skills. I would like to learn more about the Mindful Sport Performance Enhancement (MSPE) approach (Williams & Krane, 2021). MSPE can be delivered in either a group or individual format. These exercises range from sitting or walking meditations, mindful body scans, and yoga-like movements. Our job is truly a somatic experience in that almost everything we do involves some form of stress (emotional stress, bunker gear, physical exertion).

Impacts on Early Professional Philosophy

By testing out these specific performance enhancement interventions over the course of the term, I was definitely able to see myself through a different lens. I learned a significant amount of new information about common patterns that typically occur physiologically and psychologically in me depending on the task at hand. I think there were many variables at play within my project such as time of day, amount of recovery or sleep the night before, dehydration, emotional stress outside of sport/work, and even weather.

I believe the nature of performance enhancement interventions are useful in applied practice, and can be helpful in aiding athletes improve their awareness and, ultimately, performance. I did find myself feeling overwhelmed at times because I was introducing different habits into my daily life and sometimes it felt a little too forced. The questionnaires were interesting, but I think there needs to be a way to incorporate more empirical data. I would definitely consider using the different theories and interventions I have learned about this term with my future clients, but I think I would do it in a way that is more catered to them. I would

want to focus on getting a deeper understanding of who they are and why they feel they need to consult with a sport and performance psychology practitioner. I would ask them questions about their background such as sociocultural factors. I feel that after doing this project, I have come to believe that the applied practice of sport and performance psychology requires a great deal of commitment, time, patience, and collaboration, not only with the client, but with their families, teams, and other professionals and peers who I can turn to when I am faced with complex situations.

I would like to continue to learn about the different rules about informed consent and how they differ for secondary school adolescents just in case I decide to work with that age group in the future. I find that gathering biometric data such as my Google Doc for fire duty would be critical in expanding the information collected aside from questionnaires. I would also like to incorporate recording videos or audio such as maybe an audio recording of someone's performance during a fire run (how often they sped up their breathing or practiced a tactical breath once on limited air supply). I feel that creating an applied practice for a client will take hard work and trial and error to see what best suits them and their needs. Keeping a performance journal and having a mental health counseling practice may also aid my future clients. All in all, it is imperative for me to continue practicing these techniques on my own so that I can really understand what it takes to bring change and improvement to one's performance before I can teach it to anyone else. I would need to narrow down which groups of people I should work with.

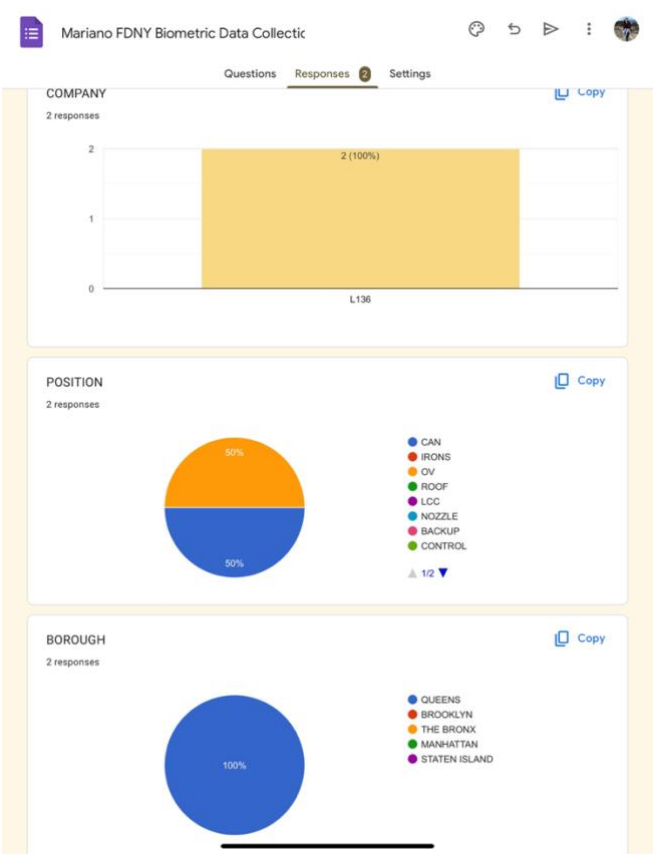
Conclusion

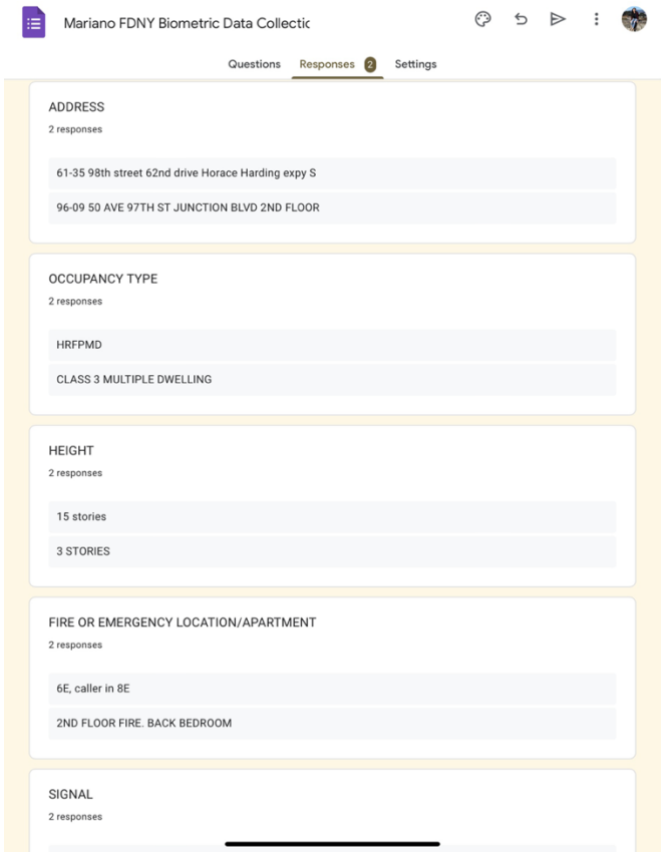
Performance enhancement interventions have proved useful in my own personal experience towards improving my self-confidence. Applied practice in this field varies for different performance areas and can look different from one client to another. In conclusion, I

have become more aware of my idea of peak performance and have created a foundational structure for working towards it in my own way, which I can hopefully utilize with future clients. Biofeedback devices such as the Whoop band has provided pertinent information that will help me begin to track my actual performance on a larger scale. My work has only begun, and learning will never stop as this field will continue to change over time.

Figure 6

Biometric Data Collection





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