

Proprioception is not a "thing" that you learn once and forget; it's a sense that has to be cultivated and maintained daily, even by top athletes.

PUTTING PROPRICEPTION
INTO PRACTICE

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With the aim of increasing my own gray and white matter, I head to Park City, Utah, to turn myself into a crash-test dummy for the cause of proprioception. If Ian Waterman could teach himself to walk, I reasoned, I ought to be able to learn a simple ski trick or two.

"I'm a firm believer that you can teach yourself these things," says my instructor, Matt Christensen. The former head coach of the U.S. freestyle aerial team, Christensen works with Walshe at Red Bull to train athletes who specialize in spinning through the air on skis, snowboards, surfboards, and motorcycles. "I've seen athletes without a lot of talent, and they just work hard and teach themselves."

Athletes without a lot of talent: That'd be me. Though I've skied since I was 7 years old, I'm now 45, which is 107 in terrain-park years. Nevertheless, I've long harbored an irrational desire to throw a simple 360 on skis, a maneuver that could easily land me in the ER.

Christensen has me start in the U.S. Ski Team's training facility, which contains an array of trampolines capable of launching a person 30 feet in the air. I start on one of the smaller tramps, bouncing gently, gradually working up to a midair rotation. Per his advice, I try spotting landmarks as I spin—a climbing rope hanging from the ceiling, a vending machine in one corner. It works, and I feel cool.

"I teach my athletes to slow things down in the air, and really see things," he explains. "Even if you're only airborne for a second, I want it to feel like twice that long." That involves drills like jumps, fast spins, and somersaults.

Next we drive over to the ski team's outdoor jumping facility on a hill outside town. Built to train aerial athletes, it consists of a series of ever bigger and scarier AstroTurf ramps that launch skiers into an enormous 10-foot-deep pool. Actual Olympic athletes rocket into

the air, performing mind-boggling combinations of flips and twists. I know immediately that both of us are in for a painful afternoon—Christensen because he's used to coaching Olympic medalists, and me because 45-year-olds aren't supposed to fly off ski jumps, spin around, and crash into water, over and over.

I pull on ski boots, helmet, wetsuit, and life vest, and climb to the top of the smallest ramp, which is still a good 5 feet off the water. It's way bigger than anything I'd ever try on snow.

As I wait, I can't decide whether I should be stoked or embarrassed; I'm three decades older and a foot taller than everyone else on the ramp. *Baby steps*, I tell myself. Secretly I envy the kids, who are participating in a freestyle ski-jumping camp, because they're learning these things at ages 7 to 14. That's the time of life when neurologists say we are best at picking up new movements.

After a few practice jumps, it's time to try the 360. I zoom down the ramp, pop off the lip, and spin my head, looking for landmarks. My 360 splashes down at 180, with me facing the ramp I'd just jumped off. On snow, that half turn would've put me in the hospital, which might have been a relief. In water, I could try it again and again.

The next time, I make it to 9 o'clock, three-quarters of the way around. And I stay stuck at 9 o'clock for the next dozen attempts, until one glorious jump when I make it to 11—almost, but not quite, the 360 of my dreams. I'm exhausted, battered, and cold. Proprioception declines when muscles are fatigued, and our form predictably falls apart. I clamber out of the pool and stalk off to drink an angry beer.

The following morning I wake up feeling like I tried to wrestle a women's hockey team and lost. Christensen and I grab coffee and head for the ramps, this time to watch others do what I couldn't. We watch a world-class Australian mogul skier go off the intermediate ramp. Her 360 looks amazing to me, with her body ramrod-straight as her skis whip around every time. "No, no, she's messing up," Christensen says. "Look how her feet are landing. On snow, that's a face plant." What's more, she's probably been working on the move for years if not decades. "Even when you're teaching high-level athletes, it takes months to learn a new skill," he says. "It's repetition."

In other words, proprioception is not a "thing" that you learn once and forget; it's a sense that has to be cultivated and then maintained daily, even by top athletes. Although I suspect Mario Manningham would have nailed that jump on the first try. ■

Forget "the market."

"When we all speak of 'the stock market,' it's meaningless. It's merely the value investors put on all those securities, thousands of different stocks with a value of \$15 trillion. It goes up and it goes down, but in the long run it goes up. The stock market [fluctuation], therefore, is noise. A giant distraction from the business of investing."

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Understand Your Role

"Your job is to capture as much of the market return as possible for as long as possible. The only way to start investing for a lifetime is to buy a broad-market index fund. Don't pick an actively managed mutual fund. Don't pick stocks. Don't pick hedge funds. In the long run, I believe in owning the stock market, not having a manager own little pieces of it for you."

3

Don't Kid Yourself

"I ask people: What is the intellectual basis for indexing? Reduce cost and you maximize your fair share of the market return. What is the intellectual basis for active managing or stock picking? It's basically 'I can do better.' Is that an intellectual basis? No! It's a hope, it's a brag, and it has no chance of ever being realized in the long run."

4

Seek Boredom

"I look at indexing as being simple and, sad to say, boring. Be bored by the process but elated by the outcome. In Vegas, it's the opposite. You're elated by the process, but you're bored by the outcome because you know exactly what it'll be. The more you bet, the more you lose. Investing shouldn't give you a rush."

5

Think Ahead. Way Ahead

"It's foolishness to think you can beat the market. There are only two things working here: How much did it cost to get into the market, and how long are you in? If you're investing for a lifetime—and you *should* be, saving for retirement and educating your kids along the way—if you're 20 years old now, you should be thinking 60 or 65 years as your time horizon."

6

Forget "the Number"

"There used to be a company that purported to tell you 'the Number' [how much you need to retire]. It's more complex than that. It's what those dollars are worth in 30, 40, 50 years. Everyone is looking for the Answer, and there really isn't an answer except save. Save more. Invest for the long term, get cost out of the equation, and get diversified to the nth degree."

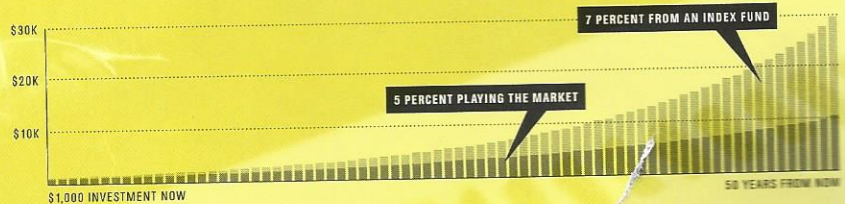
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Invest, Don't Trade

"All the trading back and forth each day has been called financial pornography. Paying attention minute to minute, hanging on every word, this is not investing. This is trading on what you think other traders will do. How can you tell who's right and who's wrong? It's a casino. Whether it's Wall Street, the lottery, or Las Vegas, 'hope' is not a good investment strategy."

8 / Do some math

"Should the market return 7 percent, and you're paying 2 percent to managers and brokers to get that 7, you get 5. [The rest] goes to the croupiers on Wall Street, the managers, the traders, the speculators."



9

Keep It Simple

"The rules are simple. If you don't save, you will have nothing. Guaranteed. Not investing is not an alternative. I have an age-based rule of thumb: Have a bond position that equals your age. If you're 25, have 25 percent in bonds, the rest in an index fund. Today, bond yields are so low, so this doesn't work quite as neatly as it worked for a long time. But it's simple."

10

Don't Peek at Statements

"This is one of the most important rules of investing. If you never peek from the age of 20 to the age of 70, you'll rip that first 401(k) statement open at age 70, and I recommend you have a doctor on hand because you'll go into a dead faint. Your heart might even stop. You're going to have an amount of money you can't even imagine."

11

Know Your Limitations

"Sometimes the market is valued way higher than the growth line, and sometimes it's valued way lower. If you could forecast that, you'd sell at the high and buy in at the low. But here's the thing: I don't know how to do it. I don't know anybody who knows how to do that. And I don't know anybody who knows anybody who knows how to do it. It's a fool's game."

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Don't Panic, Be Cool

"In this decade, the heavy lifting will have to be done by stocks. If stocks deliver 7 percent, you'll have 100 percent return in 10 years. And there will be bumps! I don't want to deceive anyone. I can guarantee that there will be at least two or three 20 or 30 percent bear markets in that time frame. Just assume them. When they happen, just say, 'I knew that.'"