

5 MENTAL TOUGHNESS TECHNIQUES OLYMPIC ATHLETES USE UNDER PRESSURE



— THE —

THE ANTI- FRAGILE MINDSET

— CHRISTINE REEVES BELEZNAY —

Mental Strategies for Champions

**Proven strategies from elite sport
Applicable to business, athletics & life**

BY CHRISTINE REEVES BELEZNAY, CMTT, CLC, NLP
MENTAL PERFORMANCE COACH TO OLYMPIC-BOUND ATHLETES
FORMER WORLD PROFESSIONAL PAIRS FIGURE SKATER

CHRISTINEREEVES.CA



INTRODUCTION

Welcome!

I'm Christine Reeves Belezny. I've competed and performed as a professional world pairs figure skater across 22 countries. I've performed under extreme pressure thousands of times—in competitions, professional shows with Disney on Ice and Torvill & Dean tours, and live broadcasts, TV specials and movies.

Now, I coach Olympic-bound athletes on the mental skills that separate podium finishers from everyone else.

Here's what most people don't understand:

Mental toughness is not a personality trait you're born with.

It's a SKILL. And like any skill—it's trainable.

The five techniques in this guide are the exact strategies I teach my Olympic clients. They're used by elite athletes across every sport.

But here's the best part:

These techniques work in ANY high-pressure situation.

- Job interviews
- Sales presentations
- Public speaking
- Medical procedures
- Difficult conversations
- Competitive exams
- Athletic competitions

Pressure is pressure.

The mental skills are the same.

Let's get started.

Christine

TECHNIQUE #1: THE 4-6-7 BREATH

Regulated Breathing for Nervous System Control

THE PROBLEM:

When pressure hits, your body releases adrenaline and cortisol (stress hormones). This triggers:

- Increased heart rate
- Shallow, rapid breathing
- Loss of fine motor control
- Racing thoughts
- Physical tension

Athletes describe this as "feeling rushed" or "can't slow down."

In business, you talk too fast, fidget, or forget your points.

THE SCIENCE:

Controlled breathing activates your parasympathetic nervous system—the system responsible for:

- Calm, focused thinking
- Fine motor precision
- Regulated heart rate
- Clear decision-making

You literally cannot be in "fight or flight" AND parasympathetic activation at the same time. Controlled breathing is a manual override for your nervous system.

THE TECHNIQUE:

Before any high-pressure moment, do this 3 times:

1. Inhale through your nose for 4 counts (1-2-3-4)
2. Hold for 6 counts (1-2-3-4-5-6)
3. Exhale through your mouth for 7 counts (1-2-3-4-5-6-7)
4. Pause for 1 count
5. Repeat 2 more times

Why 4-6-7? The longer exhale (7 counts) than inhale (4 counts) activates the vagus nerve, (calms the monkey brain) which signals your body to calm down.

WHEN TO USE IT:

- 2 minutes before a presentation
- In the waiting room before a performance
- At a red light before a difficult meeting
- Before stepping on stage, into the arena, or into the interview room
- ANY time you feel adrenaline spiking

PRACTICE:

Don't wait for the high-pressure moment to try this.

Practice the 4-6 breath daily:

- In the morning
- Before bed
- During your commute

When you've practiced 100 times in low-stakes situations, it becomes automatic in high-stakes moments.

Christine's Notes:

**I used this technique before every single performance in my professional skating career. Some days I performed 2-3 shows. Without breath control, I would have burned out my nervous system by show two.

This works. Trust it.

TECHNIQUE #2: NARROWING THE WINDOW

Present-Moment Focus Under Pressure

THE PROBLEM:

Under pressure, your mind wants to:

- Jump ahead: "What if I fail? What happens next?"
- Replay the past: "I just made a mistake. I'm blowing this."

Both destroy performance.

Anxiety lives in the future.

Regret lives in the past.

Performance lives in the present.

When your attention is split across past/present/future, you cannot execute at your peak.

THE SCIENCE:

Your working memory (the part of your brain that handles immediate tasks) has limited capacity.

When you're worrying about the future OR replaying the past, you're using working memory that should be devoted to the present task.

Result: Mistakes, hesitation, poor execution.

Elite athletes train themselves to keep 100% of their working memory focused on THIS moment.

THE TECHNIQUE: NARROW THE WINDOW

Reduce your focus to ONE THING in the present moment.

For athletes:

- The entry edge before a jump
- The position of the ball
- The breathing of your opponent
- Your landing foot

For business/life:

- The person in front of you (not the whole room)
- The slide you're currently on (not the 10 slides ahead)
- The question being asked (not the one you think is coming)
- The sentence you're speaking (not the paragraph ahead)

ONE THING. THIS MOMENT.

HOW TO PRACTICE:

Exercise: Single-Task Focus (5 minutes daily)

Pick one easy task:

- Washing dishes
- Doing homework
- Off ice skipping or jogging

Do ONLY that task. No phone. No thinking ahead. No mental planning.

Just: Dishes. Homework. Skipping.

When your mind wanders (it will), gently bring it back to the present task.

Do this daily for 2 weeks.

You're training the muscle of present-moment focus.

IN THE MOMENT:

When you catch yourself worrying about the future or replaying the past during performance:

1. Notice it ("I'm in the future right now")
2. Name ONE thing in the present ("The person in front of me") (My entry edge)
3. Refocus completely on that one thing

Takes 3 seconds.

Changes everything.

CHRISTINE'S NOTE: The best performances of my career happened when I narrowed the window to ONE THING. Not the judges. Not the crowd. Not the elements coming up. Just: This edge. This position. This moment. That's where flow lives.

TECHNIQUE #3: THE ONE-WORD RESET

Quick Recovery Protocol for Mistakes

THE PROBLEM:

Mistakes happen.
Even at the Olympic level.

The difference between athletes who medal and athletes who don't is NOT whether they make mistakes.
It's how FAST they recover.

Athletes who carry a mistake forward into the next element—spiral.

One mistake becomes two. Two becomes three.

Athletes who reset within SECONDS—stay competitive.

THE SCIENCE:

When you make a mistake, your brain's error-detection system (anterior cingulate cortex) lights up.
This triggers a cascade:

- Increased stress hormones
- Negative self-talk
- Physical tension
- Loss of confidence

If you don't interrupt this cascade immediately, it compounds.

The One-Word Reset is a pattern interrupt.

It stops the spiral before it gains momentum.

THE TECHNIQUE:

When a mistake happens:

STEP 1: Say ONE WORD to yourself (out loud or in your head)

Choose your word:

- "Reset"
- "Next"
- "Here"
- "Release"
- "Breathe"

Whatever feels natural to you.

STEP 2: Take ONE full breath (4-6-7 technique)

STEP 3: Refocus on the NEXT moment (Narrow the Window)

That's it.

3 steps. Takes 5 seconds.

WHY IT WORKS:

The verbal cue creates a circuit breaker.

Your brain hears the word and recognizes: *"This is the reset protocol. I've practiced this."*

It interrupts the error-spiral before it starts.

Then the breath regulates your nervous system.

Then narrowing the window brings you back to present-moment focus.

PRACTICE:

You MUST practice this in LOW-stakes situations.

Daily practice:

When you make a small mistake in daily life:

- Spill coffee
- Miss a turn while driving
- Say something awkward

Use the One-Word Reset:

1. "Reset"
2. One breath
3. Next moment

Train the protocol when the stakes are LOW.

So when the stakes are HIGH, it's automatic.

CHRISTINE'S NOTE: I've seen Olympic athletes lose medal positions because they couldn't reset after one mistake. I've also seen athletes medal DESPITE mistakes—because they recovered in seconds. This is the most important skill you can build.

TECHNIQUE #4: THE 10-SECOND TENSION SCAN

Physical Regulation for Mental Control

THE PROBLEM:

Pressure creates physical tension.
You don't always notice it consciously.

But your body knows:

- Jaw clenched
- Shoulders raised
- Hands gripping
- Shallow breathing
- Rigid posture

Physical tension BLOCKS performance.

In athletics: Loss of fluidity, timing, coordination In business/life: Appears nervous, rushed, uncertain.

THE SCIENCE:

Physical tension and mental tension are linked.

When your body is tight, your brain interprets: *"Threat. Danger. Be on guard."*

When your body is loose, your brain interprets: *"Safe. Capable. Execute."*

You can't think your way out of physical tension.

But you CAN release physical tension—which then calms the mind.

THE TECHNIQUE:

The 10-Second Tension Scan

Before you perform, scan your body and release tension.

Start at the top, work down:

1. JAW - Is it clenched? Open your mouth slightly. Release.
2. SHOULDERS - Are they up by your ears? Drop them. Roll them back.
3. HANDS - Are you gripping (fists, pen, phone)? Open your hands. Soften.
4. BELLY - Are you holding your breath? Take one full breath. Let your belly expand.
5. LEGS - Are your knees locked? Soften them slightly.

Total time: 10 seconds

WHEN TO USE IT:

- 1 minute before you perform
- While waiting in line (interview, competition, presentation)
- At your desk before a difficult call
- In the car before walking into a meeting
- Standing backstage, rinkside, or in the wings

ADVANCED VERSION:

After you've practiced the basic scan, add this:

Intentional Tension → Release

1. Tense your ENTIRE body for 5 seconds (everything tight)
2. Release EVERYTHING at once (full exhale, total release)

This creates contrast—your body recognizes what "loose" feels like.

Elite athletes use this right before competition.

CHRISTINE'S NOTE: You can see tension in elite athletes on TV. Watch their shoulders. Watch their jaw. Watch their hands. The ones who medal? Loose upper body. Fluid movement. The ones who struggle? Visible tension. 10 seconds to release it. Don't skip this.

TECHNIQUE #5: TRUST THE BANK

From Trying to Allowing

THE PROBLEM:

Under pressure, athletes start TRYING too hard.

- Trying to land the jump
- Trying to nail the presentation
- Trying to get it perfect

"

Trying" creates tension. Tension blocks execution. Ironically, the harder you TRY, the worse you perform.

THE SCIENCE:

Your brain has two performance systems:

SYSTEM 1: Automatic Execution

- Motor cortex & cerebellum
- Handles trained skills without conscious thought
- Fast, fluid, effortless

SYSTEM 2: Conscious Analysis

- Prefrontal cortex
- Handles new learning, planning, decision-making
- Slow, deliberate, effortful

When you've trained a skill 10,000 times, it lives in System 1 (automatic).

But when you START THINKING about it during performance—you activate System 2.

This is called "paralysis by analysis."

You interrupt the automatic process with conscious thought.

Result: Hesitation, errors, loss of flow.

THE TECHNIQUE: TRUST THE BANK

You have a "bank" of preparation.

Thousands of hours. Thousands of repetitions. Thousands of reps.

Your job in the performance moment is NOT to DO anything new.

Your job is to *GET OUT OF YOUR OWN WAY*.

Mental shift:

From: "I need to TRY to land this jump"

To: "I've landed this jump 10,000 times. Let it happen."

From: "I need to TRY to nail this presentation"

To: "I know this material. Let my preparation carry me."

TRYING = Tension ALLOWING = Flow

HOW TO PRACTICE:

Pre-Performance Self-Talk:

Before you compete/performance/present, say this to yourself:

"I've prepared for this.

I've done the work.

I trust my training.

My job is to execute—not to figure it out.

Let it happen."

Repeat 3 times.

Then step into performance with the mindset:

"I'm not trying. I'm allowing."

IN THE MOMENT:

If you catch yourself TRYING during performance:

1. Notice: "I'm trying too hard right now"
2. Verbal cue: "Let it happen" or "Allow"
3. Shift focus: Trust your body to execute

Your body knows what to do.

Your mind needs to stop interfering.

CHRISTINE'S NOTE: My worst performances happened when I was TRYING. Trying to impress. Trying to be perfect. Trying to prove something. My best performances happened when I TRUSTED. Trusted my training. Trusted my partner. Trusted my body.

"Let it happen" became my pre-performance mantra. It works.

YOUR PRE-PERFORMANCE PROTOCOL

How to Use All 5 Techniques Together

THE COMPLETE ROUTINE:

2 MINUTES BEFORE PERFORMANCE:

1. TRUST THE BANK (10 seconds)

Say to yourself:

"I've prepared. I trust my training. Let it happen."

2. TENSION SCAN (10 seconds)

Scan and release:

- Jaw → Release
- Shoulders → Drop
- Hands → Soften
- Breath → Full exhale

3. THE 4-6-7 BREATH (30 seconds)

3 cycles:

- 4-count inhale
- 6-count hold
- 7- count exhale

4. NARROW THE WINDOW (5 seconds)

Choose ONE thing to focus on in the first moment of performance.

Not the whole thing. Just the FIRST thing.

5. ONE-WORD RESET (ready to deploy)

If something goes wrong, you have your reset protocol ready:

- One word
- One breath
- Next moment

TOTAL TIME: 55 seconds

That's all it takes.

Less than 1 minute to regulate your nervous system, release tension, and set yourself up for peak performance.

PRACTICE SCHEDULE:

Week 1-2:

Practice each technique individually in daily life.

Week 3-4:

Practice the complete routine before low-stakes moments (presentations at work, workouts, etc.)

Week 5+:

Use the complete routine before high-stakes moments.

REMEMBER:

Mental toughness is not magic.

It's not a personality trait.

It's not something you're born with.

It's a SKILL.

CHRISTINE'S NOTE: And like any skill—it requires practice.
The athletes who perform best under pressure aren't born different.
They've TRAINED these skills.
You can too.

NEXT STEPS

Work with Christine

YOU'VE LEARNED THE TECHNIQUES. NOW LET'S BUILD THEM INTO YOUR LIFE.

LISTEN TO THE PODCAST:

The Anti-Fragile Mindset

Weekly episodes on mental performance, resilience, and thriving under pressure.

Available on:

- Spotify
- Apple Podcasts
- YouTube
- All podcast platforms

1:1 MENTAL PERFORMANCE COACHING:

I work with:

- Competitive athletes (all sports)
- Business executives & entrepreneurs
- High performers in demanding careers

Areas of focus:

- Competition pressure & performance anxiety
- Mental toughness & resilience training
- Energy management for sustained performance
- Quick recovery from setbacks
- Career transitions & identity work

Book a FREE 20-minute discovery call:

christinereeves.ca/coaching

Let's discuss your challenges and how I can help.

READ THE BOOK:

"Glitz & Grit: Beyond the Spotlight"

A memoir about mental survival in elite figure skating—and what comes after the spotlight fades.

For athletes navigating transitions.

For anyone facing identity crisis.

For high performers wondering "what's next?"

Available on:

- Indigo
- Barnes & Noble
- christinereeves.ca

MEET ME IN PERSON:

FREE Mental Performance Q&A

Sunday, April 12, 2026

12:00 - 3:00 PM - Come for 5 mins or stay a while and say HI!

Indigo Sherway Gardens, Etobicoke, Ontario

This isn't just a book signing.

It's FREE mental performance coaching. Bring your toughest questions. Ask me anything.

No purchase required. Everyone welcome. RSVP: christinereeves.ca/events

FOLLOW ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

Instagram: [skatingmindgym](https://www.instagram.com/skatingmindgym)

TikTok: <https://www.tiktok.com/@christine.glitz.g>

LinkedIn: Christine Reeves Belezny

Daily mental performance tips, behind-the-scenes content, and community support.

YOU ARE MORE THAN YOUR LAST PERFORMANCE.

You are capable. You are resilient. You are trainable.

Now go perform.

- Christine

© 2026 Christine Reeves Belezny
christinereeves.ca The Anti-Fragile Mindset
QUESTIONS?

Email: careeves62@gmail.com Website: christinereeves.ca