



JIM HARSHAW JR.

Revealing Failure as the Path to Success

Success Through Failure Podcast

Action Plan Episode #223

Mark McLaughlin

Mark McLaughlin, M.D. is a neurosurgeon and the founder of Princeton Brain and Spine Care. The first time he cut open a patient's skull, he found himself confronting a powerful force that his fellow brain surgeons agreed was best never spoken of. FEAR. But Dr. McLaughlin knew that if he couldn't find a way to cope with fear, all he had striven for as a physician would be lost. So, with a scientist's analytical precision and philosopher's worldview, McLaughlin derived and formalized a method by which he could act rationally and confidently under the operating room's lights and in other areas of his life, while under fear's profound influence.

A former NCAA Division I wrestler, McLaughlin was inducted into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame in 2016. His commentary regularly appears in Business Insider and other national media outlets.

Quotes

"You don't just obtain cognitive dominance. It's something that you aim for. It's something that I aim for still. I feel like a student learning to practice cognitive dominance every day."

"We're at a certain state of our life, and that is the 'what is,' and we're moving along in our lives to 'what should be' or 'what we expect to be.'"

"Once you get an event that is not expected and not consistent with your goal, that's when you're going to enter into this quadrant system of where you're going to land and how you can react from it."

"We tell ourselves these stories that we're not good enough, that we could have done something better, when in fact, we're doing the best we can every day. Yes,

we can make mistakes, but as long as we're on the path to getting better, we're going to succeed."

About Choosing To Write *Cognitive Dominance* 11:53 - 12:35

"I have this incredibly unique opportunity to experience this fear and anxiety on a daily basis. It's something that doctors don't talk about, specifically surgeons. It's something like an unwritten rule to sort of suppress it and act like you don't have it and to just try to avoid it. I realized there was no way I could do that. I couldn't be honest with myself and do that. With the neurosurgery and facing all these highly stressful situations, I asked myself, 'What have I learned from the last 20 years of my career and how can I transfer those bits of wisdom to my kids, my friends, to people who are struggling with fear and anxiety in other ways?' Everybody has to deal with fear and anxiety. Fear is fear. When you're worried and you're afraid, that's real on any level. So I wanted to take the lessons I learned in neurosurgery of how to cope with it, how to metabolize it in a healthy way. Sometimes, I did it in an unhealthy way and I talk about that in my book as well. But yes, how do you metabolize this anxiety and fear and function effectively and thrive? That was my goal. My goal was to take the lessons and to try to make them transferable to everybody."

About The Meaning of *Cognitive Dominance* 13:43 - 15:01

"Cognitive dominance is a term that I stumbled upon when giving some talks up at Westpoint at the Center For Enhanced Performance. One of my mentors and colleagues now is a gentleman by the name of Dr. Nate Zinsser. He's been a sports performance psychologist for 40-50 years now. He's one of the pioneers. When I was giving some lectures up in his class called The Psychology of Elite Performance, I came across this term called cognitive dominance. That is defined by the military as **'Enhanced situational awareness that facilitates rapid and accurate decision-making under stressful conditions with limited decision-making time.'** When I heard it, it's obviously what you want a soldier to do but it's something we do in neurosurgery too. As I thought about it more broadly, that's something that parents do when they're talking to their kids or business leaders do when they're making an important decision and talking to their board. It's one of those concepts that I thought was really intriguing and I thought I could look through the lens of neurosurgery and define it in a different way."

About The Quadrants: Four Areas of Personal Development Towards *Cognitive Dominance* 17:42 - 21:36

Flow (Upper Right Quadrant)

A lot of performance enhancement people will say, 'We need to shoot for flow. We need to be in flow all the time.' I think that is a flawed concept. I believe we cannot live in flow all the time. The world would be King Midas-like and you'd lose interest very quickly in things. Similarly, if you look at some celebrities where success comes to them so amazingly quickly with everything that they do, and they fall off the track. They lose interest and lose their skills because they engage in bad activities and poor coping strategies. Everybody knows about flow. You can't do anything. You're not thinking, you're just acting. Your body is performing and your brain is performing. It's great and it's fun.

Calm Before The Storm (Lower Right Quadrant)

But then there are times in our lives when we've achieved a high state. I talked about the calm before the storm. So for me it was when I received the status of being a neurosurgeon and I moved to Massachusetts and began practicing. I realized I had these feelings that I never would've expected having. Some of them was like, 'Is this it? Is this how I'm supposed to feel? I'm not feeling so good right now. I have a tremendous amount of stress. I'm worried about whether I'm able to serve as a good husband and father to my family as I'm being pulled away to all these emergencies. My mind is always pulled away to different things, even when I'm having a family dinner, I can't think about it. I'm worried about work or a patient.' I didn't expect to feel this. That's what I call the calm before the storm quadrant.

All Is Lost (Lower Left Quadrant)

Here is when something catastrophic happens and it really forces us to question our meaning of life. Why are we here? You get faced with a horrific situation. You do everything you possibly can to make it right. You do everything you've been trained to do and something bad, sometimes terrible happens and you don't make any sense of it. It truly doesn't fit with your world view of how things should be. We have to cope with those too. We have to figure out a way to get through that and make sense and meaning of that.

Birthing Of New Skillset (Upper Left Quadrant)

That moves us into this quadrant. This is about how do we figure out a dilemma that's been plaguing and how do we work our way through that to solve it. Once we solve it, we add that to our skillset and move back into our flow quadrant.

To me, it's a constant journey between these four quadrants. They don't always go in a clockwise fashion. Sometimes, you switch from one quadrant to another immediately. But it's those four quadrants I think we live in. If we can identify them, it'll help us get through them."

About Mark's Habit 44:30 - 46:32

"I credit you for helping me craft this. It's something that I sort of was doing a little bit on my own, but in working with you and becoming more intentional with my choices, I really codified this.

My daily morning routine involves meditating, looking at my Franklin planner which is a written planning system. I could never go to a digital or a computer/based one. So I look at my week and my day, plan my to-do list. And then it's going through my file system. I took a page from *Getting Things Done* by David Allen, which is a great book. Outstanding book. I took the page from that book, basically setting a file system for every day of the month, and every month. I put things in a particular reminder system which allows me to do little projects that are important but not urgent. I just recently added to that, daily reading. For meditation, I use an app called [Ten Percent Happier](#). It's a great book and podcast also.

In summary, my four habits are meditation, Franklin planner, file system, and daily reading, even if it's just a paragraph. I'm trying to hit 80% to 90% of the time, doing all these things on a daily basis."

Action Item

"Ask yourself, 'In this particular event in my life, whether it's work or family etc., am I in flow, or am I in the calm before the storm, am I in the all is lost moment, or am I in the birthing a new skillset quadrant?' Just knowing what quadrant you're in will help you progress through it, and you will progress through it.

Recommended Book

12 Rules For Life: An Antidote to Chaos by Jordan Peterson

<https://www.amazon.com/12-Rules-Life-Antidote-Chaos/dp/0345816021>

18 Tactics To Staying Focused At Work

https://jimharshawjr.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/18_Ways_to_Stay_Focused_at_Work.pdf

Episodes Referred

David Allen: <https://jimharshawjr.com/116>

Routines: <https://jimharshawjr.com/210>

Website and Social

Website: <https://www.markmclaughlinmd.com/>

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Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/mmclaughlinmd/>

Book: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/193689162X>