




EP 66 - The Seven Strike Supervisor

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There's a bowling alley that gives you a free pizza whenever you start a game with seven strikes in a row. But around the fifth or sixth strike, a supervisor comes over to watch. How does observation change your performance?

The situation may feel familiar: Having to perform knowing someone's watching you. Over your shoulder, or in an audience. They're observing you. Judging your performance.

This attention can come out of success: More eyeballs on your work because of past performance.

Or the attention can be negative: People waiting, maybe hoping, to see if you fail. Or they're waiting to swoop in and take the spotlight, or pick apart, coach up, leave a negative review.

When the stakes ratchet higher, the memory of your actions matters most.

The process, rhythm, and success of the first six strikes matters little. All anyone will remember, likely including you, is if you hit that seventh. Did you win the prize?

There's a curiosity in how you'll handle the higher pressure.

How much experience do you have in these moments? Or do you try to avoid them?

These can be some of the great lessons of youth and beer league sports: Low-risk opportunities to experience pressure. Success or failure hinging on a roll of a ball, an at-bat, or a shot of a puck.

In the workplace, there are often plenty of opportunities to get yourself in the spotlight. Raising your hand at these opportunities, you'll catch others' attention. It's risky, as you won't always succeed.

Even if you fail, getting up there has merit.

A bowler repeatedly falling short of that free pizza is at least getting six strikes in a row on a regular basis.

That's not easy to do, and they're still performing better than many bowlers.

And a game is ten frames, not seven: Either way, you don't have long to process the result and get back up there for the eighth frame.

The Effects of Observation

Scrutiny of others leads to scrutiny of ourselves

Do you perceive your purpose any differently when you're in the spotlight?

Would you consider yourself a failure if you don't land that seventh strike?

Consider if what you're doing naturally has performative aspects?

The actor, politician, comedian, motivational speaker, or pro athlete always has to perform in front of others. They're constantly in the spotlight. It's expected they'll land the seventh strike. They are playing for the audience. What they're doing is naturally performative.

Opposite that is the welder, business analyst, or accountant. They work for results. There's often no audience, no fanfare.

Some people go out of their way to make their jobs unnecessarily performative.

They crave attention, a spotlight, even when it's not warranted.

This might be with flashy clothes, an expensive watch or car, manufacturing situations to signal their past successes.

In the bowling alley, you can imagine such a person shouting "Hey everyone, I've got six strikes!"

If you do this: You better deliver the goods.

The Power Of Streaks

There's a magic in the simple X: A bowling frame completed perfectly. Accomplishing the daily goal with a mark on your calendar.

You showed up, conquered, and now you're on to the next.

Streaks can drive us, provide momentum to keep going, not wanting to break them.

Even after a successful seventh strike, and that free pizza, you're eager to see if you can get an eighth. Then a ninth. So close to a perfect 300 game.

Nobody goes bowling at this alley with the singular goal of getting a free pizza.

Improving Performance With An Audience

If you find yourself wilting in these kinds of moments, consider a few ways you can improve:

1. **Take a deep breath** - Center yourself in the moment. Thank earlier you for putting in the work to get to this moment. Appreciate the stakes, our audience. Crack a smile if you can. The flow of our breath is also a great way to stabilize our physiological reactions to pressure.
2. **Give yourself more opportunities to get into the spotlight** - You don't become a better bowler by *thinking* about bowling successfully. You have to put in the frames of practice.
3. **Compartmentalize the moment** - Your entire life, or livelihood, likely doesn't rest on the result of each moment in the spotlight. Sure, it has an impact, but often it's fleeting. Fading from high emotion to innocuous statistic. Rarely is the moment world changing.
4. **Enjoy the moment!** - How often do we get a chance to be performative? Most of our reps occur in obscurity. Even if the audience is a lone supervisor, or a family member coming to your beer league game, it's enjoyable to have them witness you striving to accomplish something meaningful to you.
5. **Don't change your style** - Suddenly abandoning the process, techniques that got you the first six strikes. Changing the ball, or equipment you're using to appear more impressive.

Improving Performance For Negative Attention

At the beginning of the episode, I mentioned how observation can also come about from negative performance. This advice for improving can be applied there as well:

1. **Take a deep breath** - Center yourself in the moment. Mentally reset. Focus on this moment, not the previous failures. Taking a singular, next right action. One at a time. Appreciate your audience, the stakes they have in your performance. The flow of our breath is also a great way to stabilize our physiological reactions to pressure.
2. **Give yourself more opportunities to get into the spotlight** - Become better able to handle those physical reactions to pressure. Put in the practice to improve the quality of your work. Take notes on what does or doesn't work, and give yourself more opportunities to work on improving your weaknesses.

3. **Compartmentalize the moment** - Your entire life, or livelihood, likely doesn't rest on the result of this negative moment in the spotlight. If it does, everything else should drop from your attention. Your focus must narrow completely on executing successfully. Just ensure you're not catastrophizing, making the moment more important than it really is. Keep it in the right context! This is the recipe for anxiety, which often hampers our performance. (I recommend everyone see **Inside Out 2** for it's incredible treatment of this)
4. **Enjoy the moment!** - Most of our reps occur in obscurity. The supervisor is there for negative reasons, but perhaps the problems aren't all your fault. Observation is a chance to highlight issues with your training, or the process or equipment. Perhaps the supervisor sees the lanes aren't properly oiled, or the ball your using is the wrong weight & can provide advice. It may seem counter-intuitive, but embracing the moment can help you seize an opportunity at redemption.
5. **Don't change your style** - (Yet) Be yourself. Don't try to gloss over your weaknesses, or try to put makeup on a pig. Focus on the important aspects of the task at hand, not on distracting observers with pomp & circumstance not relevant to the task. People often see right through that anyway. Be okay with asking questions - People love to give advice & guidance, so giving them an opportunity to help can create a more positive environment regardless of the result.

Episode 66 Quote:

Here's a quote from Jerry Seinfeld on what to do when people say something bad about you:

"All this hand wringing, worry and concern over how are people viewing me — someone said something bad about me, and you get so upset about it — is wasted time and energy. Your only focus should be on getting better at what you're

doing. Focus on what you are doing. Get better at what are you doing. Everything else is a waste of time."