# The Zen of Business

By Peter Switzer - Platinum Speakers and Entertainers

Twenty years ago if you tried to talk to business people about being in the zone youd soon find that you were talking to a brick wall. There were a few sportspeople who really understood the practice and took it up but for the majority it was too transcendental to transfer meditative practices to the business arena. The business world just wasnt ready for zen.Christo Norden-Powers is director business development at Spandah, a company that conducts workshops and assists people into achieving focus at the highest possible level. Norden-Powers began his career as a lawyer and practiced for 11 years primarily in criminal jurisdictions.I gained an affinity for asking questions at that point, except the types of questions you ask as a lawyer are quite different to what you ask in business. But nevertheless its a very important skill  being able to understand what people are saying and when theyre not saying things, and when theyre saying things that arent quite true. After about 11 years of practice, I became interested in other things and began training Olympic athletes in what we call peak performance states, he says.According to Norden-Powers, peak performance states are states of awareness where you perform at very high levels. His training developed into corporate areas where clients were wanting him to do peak performance for the whole company.We began with a colleague to work on corporate change on a large scale and work with the cultures of the organisations to generate peak states, he says.Given the fact that sporting athletes needed some kind of mental change  and presuming he wasnt working on their physical fitness to run the hundred metres in nine seconds flat  I asked Norden-Powers if he was doing something with their headspace so the athlete could take their body to the maximum limit. Yes, its probably a little bit more than the thinking process  its a state of awareness. In the 80s when I started doing this work, it was perhaps done in tennis areas  people like Arthur Ashe used to refer to The Zone  but it is much more common now. Its a special state of awareness that they are in and although people were able to get into The Zone, particularly the top level of sports, with this intense pressure and you break through into something else, they werent always clear on how to do that.Have you ever found it hard to ask the tough questions that every director, executive and manager should ask, but often doesnt when trying to solve problems, facilitate change or improve human performance?Norden-Powers would say that its because you havent trained yourself to be in The Zone  the space where nothing else matters but the task at hand.He says he was fortunate in having a background in his early 20s, of learning to meditate and realised when he read material about The Zone that it was similar to meditative states of awareness.Youre much more aware of whats going on but are not affected by things, and I found I could bring that in with my court work  quite a lot in intense courtroom trials. Once we started working in corporations, people wanted to know how I do this in business and, interestingly, most people do actually have some experiences of that in business but dont know how to talk about it or how to generate it.What Norden-Power is implying is that its not just a matter of thinking yourself into The Zone, theres something more. You have to go beyond thinking. The problem is that were thinking and caught in the mind and The Zone is beyond the mindset. Its something where you are acting almost intuitively and instinctively and youre very aware of what youre doing but not affected by it. For instance, if youre in the middle of an Olympic stadium, youre aware of the crowd but youre not impacted by the crowd or by Carl Lewis being right next to you, for instance, or another great athlete who might put you off. Your focus is very clear, without being affected, and it releases the physical energy, also the mental energy in business. Well find quite often the people at the top end of business experience these states but dont necessarily have a way of talking about it. You can actually encourage those states of awareness of high performance states by the culture of the organisation. That was one of the things that we worked with earlier. Translating these transcendental explanations to something more akin to my own language, I put this to Norden-Powers: I presume when you see, say, a dashing five-eight or winger sidestepping, say, ten players  they havent thought out that sidestepping. A lot of it becomes like a sixth sense in a way. They know they can go past everybody and they make it happen. Its extraordinary! They cant reproduce it time and time again, but there are those moments in their sporting history when they do that sort of thing. He agreed with me on this. Yes! A lot of it is accidental in that sense, but if you understand what the state is that youre in at that time  a very expanded state of awareness where youre able to see things around you without being distracted by them and manoeuvre your way through them without having to think  those states can be learnt and theyre very natural to everybody. Its just that we shut them off most of the time.His business is called Spandah, a Sanskrit word which means the initial creative throb of the universe. Its a word that really suggests that theres a higher level of consciousness of what we do, and thats actually what we work with, but we make that very pragmatic in terms of athletes and business and getting things done.What this zen-like trainer is talking about with the many activities that his company puts out is putting business people in The Zone. We work with the culture of businesses. We work with coaching individuals on how to increase their own performance. Not in a hard way but in a very easy way, if you like, the Zen of doing business. The effortless effort where you hit the straps in a certain way and what you do becomes very natural, very easy. It doesnt have to be hard. The harder you try, in fact, the harder it becomes in a lot of ways. I think people at the top of corporations understand this type of phenomenon quite a bit but dont necessarily have the models to understand how to reproduce it.Even ten years ago the zen of doing business was still a much harder message to sell, but these days theres a far more tolerant audience. I know that every time I do a business speech and I talk about the growth of business coaching, and even life balance coaching, I can see the heads nodding in the audience whereas ten years ago, they would have thought I was from planet Mars. Norden-Powers says that a lot of businesses are ready to hear the message. In the last seven years in particular, the awareness in business has grow enormously towards

understanding that there is something else that really works in business thats very hard to put your finger on. Its only hard because in our culture in particular, we dont have ways of touching and tapping into that. In other cultures its well understood. Weve been fortunate in being able to work so long with this, we can now translate it very easily into what to do and how to do it, and express it in terms that are very simple and understandable and, in particular, make it immediately recognisable and useable. Thats really the key on any of this sort of material.Heres a great tip that you could try using these as the starting points for putting yourself in a business zone:Understand you own self more than anything else. Thats really part of what it is. I know thats a fairly global sort of statement but know thyself as a metaphor is important. You really have to be able to observe your own awareness as youre doing things.This means you have to be objective about your strengths and your weaknesses. You have to be very honest about it. But the idea of observing your own awareness is something that for a lot of people is an anathema  theyre looking outside all the time. If you just stop for a moment and observe what goes on inside your own mind  in fact, if you could do that right now  youre probably having a little conversation internally while reading this, and you can actually watch your own mind chatter away about things. You can look at the concept thats going on and consider whether or not what Im saying matches your own experience or whether youll be another experience that you know is possible but you havent yet had. You are observing this all the time.Once youre aware of that  and its a very natural thing to be able to do  then you start to have some real control over the chatter that goes on and the distraction that goes on. With one of the athletes, for instance, that was one of the key things we had to do. Take away that constant chatter that distracts them from whats real in terms of their own performance and just leave them in the space where theyre not thinking about things but just being very present and doing what they have to do best. In other words, taking away all the restrictions and limitations of the mind and letting it just flow variously.Imagine if all entrepreneurs could develop that kind of focus!
Peter Switzer is an expert on money and business in Australia. Why should you believe this? Well, for over 20 years Peter Switzer has truly established himself. Apart from running his successful publishing business, Switzer Media and Publishing, he is the founding director of Switzer Financial Services - an accounting, business and financial advisory company. Peter Switzer is an award winning broadcaster, twice runner up in the Best Current Affairs Commentator award for radio behind Alan Jones. Previously a prominent radio commentator with the Triple M and the Australian Radio Networks, his background working in the media with the likes of Doug Mulray and the team from The Panel has also given him a unique sense of humour. Peter was also the official economics commentator for the Sydney Olympics.

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