

# THE BRIEF



**THE BRIEF** is a process that elevates the way you prepare and focus before taking actions. It might seem familiar—all organizations use some type of brief—but this approach is unique because it is systematic, iterative, and focused on outcomes. The Brief incorporates specific tactics, including visualizing outcomes and the actions needed to reach them. These tactics create the speed teams need to perform at their absolute highest potential. It enhances the way teams think about preparation and execution. When you execute the Brief in this way, it also positively affects what you've learned in the other parts of this series. It helps you create trust through contracts, gain alignment on a CenterPoint, and apply the Glad To Be Here mindset to your visualizations.

## INTRODUCTION OF THE BRIEF BY JOHN FOLEY

The Blue Angels gather in a briefing room an hour and 15 minutes before every airshow. The meeting has the tone you would expect given that the team is about to fly maneuvers no other flight team in the world would even attempt. There's a process and a mindset that keeps the pilots safe in the air, but they're still putting their lives on the line every time they get in the cockpit. So when the stakes are that high, how do you get prepared so that you can execute at your absolute best?

One of the most powerful tools in the Blue Angel toolbox is the Brief. The team assembles and begins in a way that would be familiar to anyone who's been in the military or in any type of business meeting with an agenda. They cover standard operating and administrative issues, discuss safety issues specific to that day, go over the possible impacts from the weather, talk through logistical items, etc.

But when that ends, the Blues do something unique. The ground crew leaves the room to prepare for the show, but the pilots stay for a complete, guided visualization of the entire airshow. The gathering becomes hyper focused.

*There's a process and a mindset that kept us safe in the air, but you're still putting your life on the line every time you get in the cockpit. So when the stakes are that high, how do you get prepared so that you can execute at your absolute best?*

Some pilots close their eyes, or move their hands as if they are controlling the stick. And in that completely focused state of mind, the Boss makes the radio calls exactly the way he will make them when the pilots fly the airshow.

As a pilot in those meetings, I realized we actually flew two airshows every day, and that first one—that we just played out in our minds together—had as great an impact on our performance as the experience we gained during the flight.

***"Plans are nothing; Planning is everything."***

— Dwight Eisenhower

# THE BRIEF



## THE EVOLUTION AND APPLICATION OF THE BRIEF FOR JOHN

I've had the opportunity over the years to talk about high performance with a range of firsthand experts. I once had a conversation with downhill skier Billy Kidd—the legendary Olympic medalist—and he told me visualization had the same benefits in his experience. Before a race, he and the other skiers would visualize the entire course in real time, just like the Blues. They would time themselves, and they knew if they were doing it right when they finished the visualization within tenths of a second of the actual run times.

I did these types of briefs and visualizations about 500 times a year when I was flying with the Blues, and I picked up some helpful techniques. When I got good at visualizing, I could actually close my eyes and see myself sitting in the airplane, looking out at the changing landscape. I knew where the stick was, and I could even see what was happening on my Heads Up Display. I would coordinate my movements exactly as I would in the airplane, in direct

correspondence to the Boss' tone and cadence. Reaching that level of clarity in your visualization—where you can actually hear and taste what's going on around you—gives you the awareness to elevate your performance.

As I continued to examine this practice, I realized our Blue Angels visualization was about more than just keeping the show tight and safe. Through repetition, we were actually changing the way our minds focused, carving new pathways in the brain that allowed us to execute at a higher level. And the detail of the way we visualized it actually created mental impressions and planted seeds for our future success.

*The gathering becomes hyper focused. Some pilots close their eyes, or move their hands as if they were controlling the stick. And in that completely focused state of mind, the boss would make the radio calls exactly the way he would make them when we flew the air show.*

This mindful process can help anyone. For an individual, it can be as simple as clearing your mind at the beginning of the day, visualizing the outcomes you're going to achieve and the mindset you'll have when you're executing. And for a team, using this tool can bring a collective understanding and speed to upcoming projects, creating more efficient action.

*"You can't depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus."*

— Mark Twain

# THE BRIEF



## BUSINESS IMPACT

Research over the last few decades indicates visualizing the outcome of your actions can have a significant impact on execution. For instance, it shows that athletes using mental training outperform those who use only physical training. When you visualize an action, it activates areas of the brain that address problem solving relating to the action being visualized. In other words, the process of visualizing leads the brain to figure out how to perform a function in reality. By using the power of thought process and preparation, you can enhance performance.

Pro sports teams like the Seattle Seahawks—winners of the 2014 Super Bowl and the runner-up in 2015—or the Golden State Warriors—who have become a dominant, record-breaking NBA franchise—have embraced practices of individual and group preparation of the mind. These organizations take their success incredibly seriously and compete in arenas where the slightest advantage can be the differentiator that secures a championship.

It may not seem practical for business teams and individuals to visualize performance like an athlete or a Blue Angels pilot, but teams can use the same technique to think about and go through scenarios and outcomes. Traditional business briefing meetings are meant to be quick and efficient. There's no time for details and the expectation is that everyone is given enough time to prepare individually. Yet plenty of team and individual scenarios are important enough to require this level of practice and preparation. Slowing the review down and "talking through it" or using visualization can have a tremendous impact on your team's preparation for an important meeting, presentation, event or project.

We do this informally or subconsciously when we think about or prepare for an activity. Our minds put us in the environment and we make some quick assumptions that formulate our expectations. Slowing this process down and giving structure to it allows individuals or teams to address more variables, truly consider the action and experience the desired outcome. This allows everyone to pay more attention to the details, set stronger expectations and gain confidence. This alone improves performance and creates a higher level of expectation or belief of execution. Going through this process also positively changes our perspectives of ourselves and creates a stronger awareness of others or the team. It is no longer a simple examination of the details; it becomes a belief system.

*...the detail of the way we visualized it actually created mental impressions in our minds, and planted seeds for our future success.*

## ADOPTION METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

These steps provide you with a framework for implementing the Brief. Just like an elite athlete before a race or the Blues about to fly an airshow, you can create routines of visualization. The steps will help you do that as a team and as an individual.

*"The man who has no imagination has no wings."*

— Muhammad Ali

# THE BRIEF



## Team Implementation

- 1 State the Goal**  
Identify each goal you want to reach as a team. It might be a long-term or medium-term goal, or it could even be a meeting you are preparing for with a client in the next few hours or days.
- 2 Detail the Goal**  
Go over the outcome in as much detail as possible. Doing this paints the picture of what that goal should be. You are also making sure all potential assumptions and misunderstanding are eliminated at an early stage.
- 3 Map out the Path**  
Clearly map the path you are likely to take from where you are to where you want to go as a team to meet the desired outcome, as well as all potential scenarios or external variables.
- 4 State the Solution**  
Stating all the possible solutions and options helps the team acknowledge multiple paths, as well as the most desired outcomes.
- 5 Reframe through Feedback**  
Using feedback creates buy-in and allows the team to reframe its approach. It sends you back to Step 1, and you can repeat the loop as often as necessary until you feel satisfied as a team.

## Individual Implementation

Practicing the Brief individually involves a similar approach. The only difference is that you can use your own personal whiteboard in your mind. That individual whiteboard is where you work through the five steps of visualization using mental images and simulations.

- 1 State the Goal**  
By stating your personal goal(s), either short- or long-term, you give your brain a clear picture of what you wish to achieve. A picture really is worth a thousand words. By training your mind to think in pictures, you are directly using the language of the brain. Albert Einstein actually conducted mental experiments through images (see Einstein: His Life and Universe by Walter Isaacson).
- 2 Reaffirm the Goal**  
Once you get a clear image of the goal(s), challenge yourself to make sure it is as clear as possible. Don't let doubt creep in. In fact, use a debating strategy to identify doubts and root them out.
- 3 Map out the Path**  
Then see the path you are going to take. The path will emerge in your mind quite naturally, because of your mind's ability to use its resources to resolve the challenge.

*(continued on next page)*

*"You got to be careful if you don't know where you're going, because you might not get there."*

— Yogi Berra

# THE BRIEF



## Individual Implementation (cont'd)

**4 State the Solution**  
Now make sure you understand the solution and the various steps involved for reaching your goals.

**5 Reframe through Feedback**  
Compare the expected goal in **Step 1** with where the path is likely to lead. Go back to **Step 1** and repeat the loop until any gaps disappear. This process actually raises your awareness of the goals and commands the brain, like a computer, to figure out a solution. It is an exercise in pure awareness and focus. By doing so, you are wiring the brain to come up with proposals for the best outcome and you can repeat the loop as often as necessary until you feel satisfied as a team.

## OVERCOMING IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

The most common challenge leaders and teams express when it comes to executing the Brief can be summed up in one sentence: "We don't have the time."

This is ironic because taking the time to properly prepare decreases individual execution time and elevates the efficiency of individual and group performances. It is the ultimate example of the common aphorism "slow down to speed up."

Asking seasoned professionals to go through the exercise of visualization might not be well-received, but many top performers understand the value and can be leaders who talk through it with others. Turn the skeptics into the facilitators by using their experiences to help lead the thought process. Introduce the concept in a way that it is most acceptable and understood by your specific team, but stress outcomes and performance. It is not about visualization; it is about focus and very thoughtful preparation that requires the mind to consciously go there. The very best performers rehearse; they are just not used to doing it as a team.

*Turn the skeptics into the facilitators by leveraging their experience to help lead the thought process.*

Like the Glad To Be Here wake up, this is a habit that will make individuals and teams feel more positive and confident because of the positive perspective and expectations. That helps individuals and teams become aware of sources of gratitude. Committing the attention to this process may be uncomfortable because it is not what everyone is used to and it's not traditional in most work environments. But that is exactly why it's important. Being elite requires a non-traditional and uncommon approach.

*"A goal without a plan is just a wish."*

— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry



# THE BRIEF



In *Peak Performance*, Charles Garfield refers to a study done by Soviet researchers; several groups of Olympic athletes were observed. The group that spent 50% of their time doing physical training and 50% of their time mentally training performed better than the group that spent 100% of their time training.

*From mental power to muscle power--gaining strength by using the mind; "A study looking at brain patterns in weightlifters found that the patterns activated when a weightlifter lifted hundreds of pounds were similarly activated when they only imagined lifting."*

Source:  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/neuroscience>

In his study on everyday people, Guang Yue, an exercise psychologist from Cleveland Clinic Foundation in Ohio, compared "people who went to the gym with people who carried out virtual workouts in their heads". He found a 30% muscle increase in the group who went to the gym. However, the group of participants who conducted mental exercises of the weight training increased muscle strength by almost half as much (13.5%). This average remained for 3 months following the mental training.

Source:  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/flourish/200912/seeing-is-believing-the-power-visualization>  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/14998709>

How athletes are using mental images/guided imagery/mental rehearsal/visualization as part of their training;

Source:  
[http://sportsmedicine.about.com/cs/sport\\_psych/a/aa091700a.htm](http://sportsmedicine.about.com/cs/sport_psych/a/aa091700a.htm)

## The role of mental simulation

Sources:  
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0149763413000778>  
<https://hbr.org/2014/03/to-reach-your-goals-make-a-mental-movie/>

## How Pete Carroll helped the Seattle Seahawks win the Super Bowl

Source:  
[http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/\\_/id/9581925/seattle-seahawks-use-unusual-techniques-practice-espn-magazine](http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/9581925/seattle-seahawks-use-unusual-techniques-practice-espn-magazine)

## The Science of Visualization by Dr Srinivasan Pillay from Harvard University

Source:  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/srinivasan-pillay/the-science-of-visualizat\\_b\\_171340.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/srinivasan-pillay/the-science-of-visualizat_b_171340.html)



### ABOUT JOHN FOLEY, INC.

John Foley, Inc. is committed to helping individuals and organizations reach their highest potential by living life to its fullest through the Glad To Be Here mindset.

### JOHN FOLEY, INC.

701 E. Santa Clara Street, Suite #14 info@johnfoleyinc.com  
Ventura, CA 93001 www.johnfoleyinc.com  
208.726.2121

