


PAUL VAN DEN BOSCH

**EGO
PRE
NEUR**

REACH THE TOP WITHOUT
LOSING YOURSELF



LANNOO
CAMPUS



‘Egopreneurs are entrepreneurs who devote a significant part of their efforts to self-improvement, to become more productive in their professional environment and to better support people in their immediate environment.’



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Foreword

I began my career as a sports coach in 1988. My athletes expected me to improve their performance, to raise it to the next level. Ever faster, ever further, ever stronger. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. The difference between an athlete's heaven and hell was sometimes fractions of a second. But these fractions could make a world of difference. The result of training was often disappointing, even discouraging. Even if everything seemed to be under control and even though everything possible had been done, my athletes, and by extension myself, could still go home empty-handed.

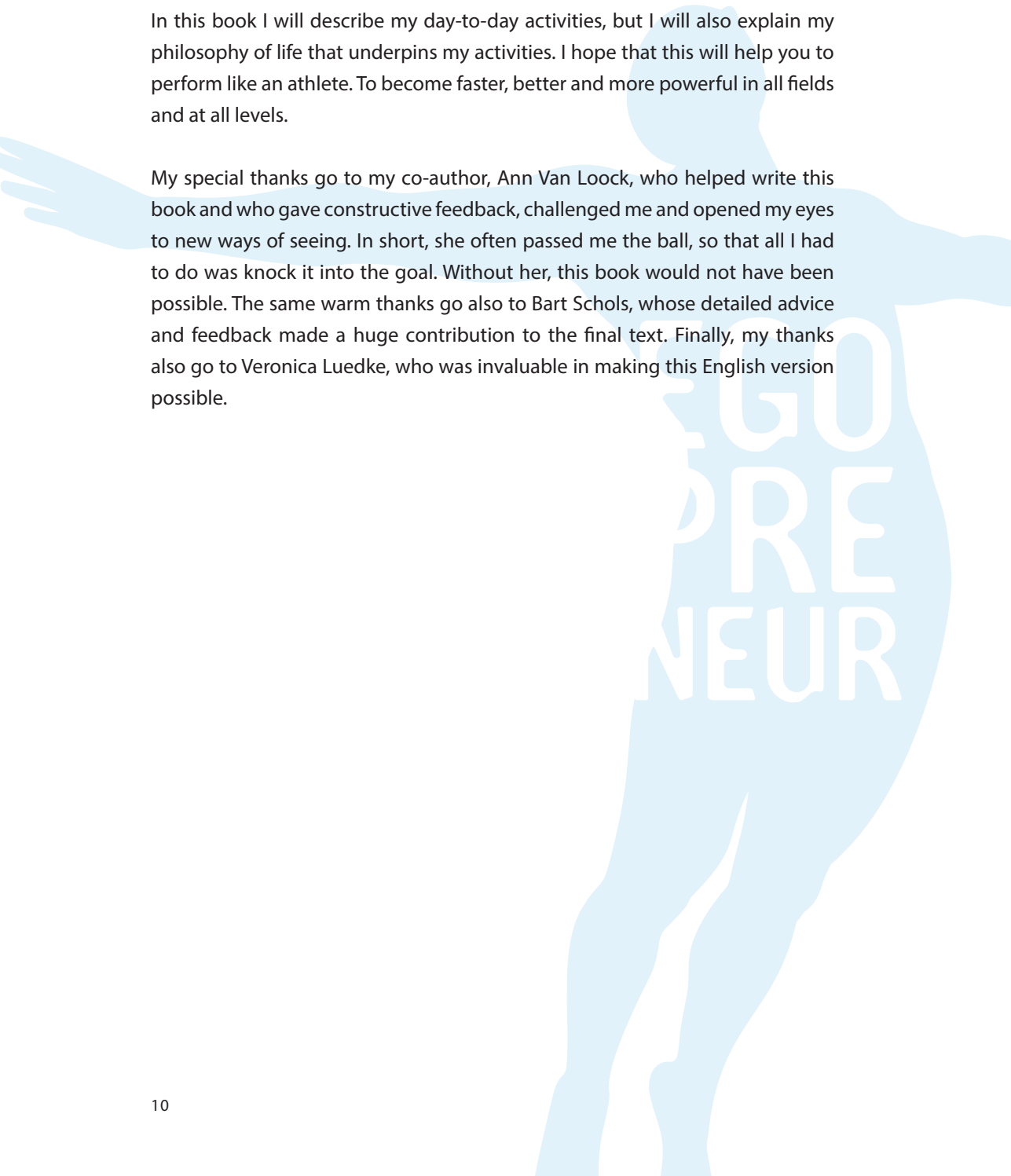
For 30 years, I gave the best of myself to my athletes, but gradually a new dimension entered my professional life: the coaching of people outside of sport. I meet so many passionate and driven people who put everything into their work and their family, but nothing or at least not enough into themselves. This lack of self-concern and self-care often results in new struggles.

As with athletes, it is often the case that people outside of sport who are physically fit are also mentally resilient, and that people who are mentally strong are also physically strong and recover quickly. For this reason, the health aspect, with an emphasis on sufficient exercise, sleep and the right diet, is of the utmost importance to me as a coach. If people trust my advice and actually start to take better care of themselves, I soon see that they not only improve physically, but also mentally, and that as a result neither of us are left empty-handed. We

are always rewarded with success. Therein lies the major difference between coaching sportsmen and women and coaching 'ordinary' people.

In this book I will describe my day-to-day activities, but I will also explain my philosophy of life that underpins my activities. I hope that this will help you to perform like an athlete. To become faster, better and more powerful in all fields and at all levels.

My special thanks go to my co-author, Ann Van Loock, who helped write this book and who gave constructive feedback, challenged me and opened my eyes to new ways of seeing. In short, she often passed me the ball, so that all I had to do was knock it into the goal. Without her, this book would not have been possible. The same warm thanks go also to Bart Schols, whose detailed advice and feedback made a huge contribution to the final text. Finally, my thanks also go to Veronica Luedke, who was invaluable in making this English version possible.





Introduction

One of the first people I coached outside of the sporting world was Hans¹. Hans is a highly respected CEO of a company that today employs some 800 people. I first got to know him in April 2016. After only a few minutes, he confided in me: 'I am stuck in a rut, completely stuck'. During the conversation that followed, a number of things soon became clear. Hans was leading the transformation of his company. He had also spent considerable time and effort defining the new direction that his company would follow in the years ahead.

For Hans, keeping communication channels open to his colleagues was crucial, as was leading by example. A self-confessed communications maniac, he thought it was important that every e-mail should be answered by his team as quickly as possible, or at least within a reasonable time-frame. To set the right example, he felt obliged to personally read and reply to each of his many e-mails, every day. It meant he worked most days until late in the evening, often clocking up working weeks of 80 hours or more.

¹ All the people who are mentioned by their real name in this book have given their prior permission.

Over time, this punishing schedule had taken a toll on him, both professionally and personally. When we first met, Hans still had roughly one year to serve of his second three-year mandate as CEO. He hoped that he would be able to complete that mandate, but he could not envision renewing his contract. He was becoming overwhelmed, like a tired runner struggling to the end of a very hard marathon. When I asked him what he wanted to achieve in his private life, he answered that he wanted to write a book. But that was impossible in his current circumstance. How could he ever write a book with such a time-consuming job?

Nowadays, people in all walks of life and at all levels of society feel stuck in a rut. Business leaders, teachers, professionals, people in commercial functions: for many, it has become, or is rapidly becoming, all too much. In 2016, more than 320 million doses of anti-depressants were taken in Belgium, an increase of 100 million doses than just 10 years ago. These are frightening statistics, but they are nothing new. As long ago as June 1983, the American magazine *Time* warned that stress was destined to become the biggest single cause of death by the 21st century. Slowly but surely, that prediction is coming true.

Eminent writers and thinkers like Hans Rosling (author of the book *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World – and Why Things Are Better Than You Think*) and Maarten Boudry (author of the book *Why the World Isn't Going to the Dogs*) have tried to show us in a reasoned and incontrovertible way that many aspects of today's world are improvements on the past. But I often feel that the Peter Principle best describes today's society: people in a hierarchy tend to rise to their level of incompetence. Our society has become so 'developed' that it is getting out of control and is increasingly unable to regulate itself adequately. The proof? You need to look no further than the problem of global warming and the yearly increase in burn-outs.

We have reached the point where one is justified to speak of societal derailment and there is no obvious solution to get us quickly back on track. The world has become too complex. Our ears are assailed each day by new and more disturbing

prophecies of doom. Many people feel that the demands made on them are spiralling out of control. Their flexibility and resilience are being stretched further, and further and further, until they snap. No wonder, then, that countless men and women feel exhausted and can no longer see the light at the end of the tunnel, to the point that anti-depressants become their remedy of last resort.

ACHIEVING MORE WITH A LOWER SCORE

Despite these conditions, some people seem better able to deal with this complexity than others. Thankfully, not everyone suffers from burn-out and not everyone has a pessimistic view of the future. So, what is it that makes these people different?

Superficially, such people seem to have a thick skin. They appear to cope with complexity better than others. A closer look reveals that in the majority of cases they are men and women who resist being driven to distraction by the pursuit of perfection. They do not strive to achieve 100% success in all they do, having found that an 80% success rate is usually enough. Odd as it may seem, they have learned that being satisfied with less makes them more resilient and boosts their performance. Another important benefit of this approach is that it helps them free up more time for themselves, time that they can use for the things that are important and personally fulfilling.

To escape from his rut, Hans needed to change lots of things in his life. He had to learn even better how to delegate, how to make more time for himself and how to avoid focusing on non-urgent matters, so that he could concentrate on the bigger picture. At the same time, I also recognised that, as his coach, I needed to focus on another contributor to Hans' stress.

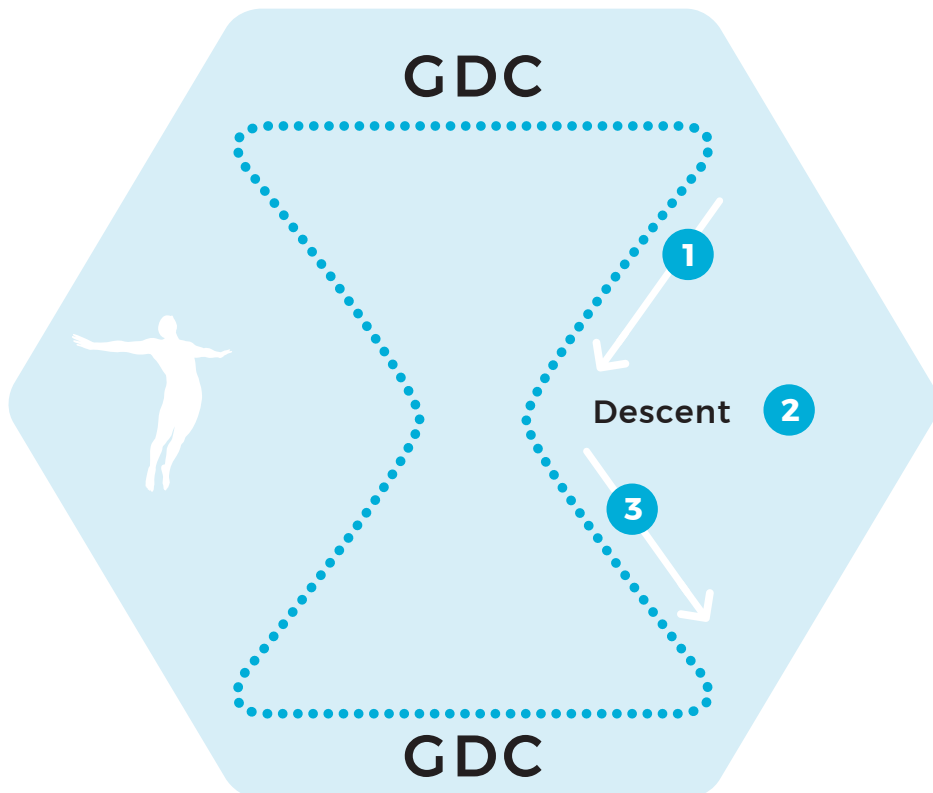
I am 100% convinced that there is a fundamental connection between a person's mental and physical status. I believe that good physical fitness enhances mental resilience and that great mental strength enhances physical recovery. For example, the successful Japanese author Haruki Murakami goes running for an hour each day. In his book *Novelist as a Vocation* he explains why: 'Physical and spiritual energy are like two wheels of the same cart. They work best when they are in balance, to keep you on the right path and to better develop your strength.' I could not agree more. That is why, for me, having a holistic approach to the people I coach is so important: I need to work on their body and their mind. You cannot help someone through a mental dip unless you devote equal attention to their mental and their physical condition. Hans' problems reflected this. He had shamefully neglected his physical state in recent years. He was overweight, took almost no daily exercise and had an average of only four to five hours of sleep each night. It was immediately clear to me that getting him to adopt a healthier lifestyle was the most important element of the coaching trajectory that I would map out for him.

DESCENDING TO CLIMB HIGHER

To explain the origins of my specific approach, I need to take you back in time. Between 1974 and 1978, I studied what was then called physical education (it is now sporting sciences) at Belgian university KU Leuven. I wanted to be a sports teacher and help young people to learn about the basic principles and practices of the most important sports.

The descent from Global Dynamic Coordination (GDC) is a powerful didactic method used to teach students the fundamental skills for any given sport, also called its global form. If a specific skill is not present, it is practised individually. This is referred to as a descent from GDC. Consider volleyball. If students lack sufficient skills for overhead passing of the ball, the game would be stopped

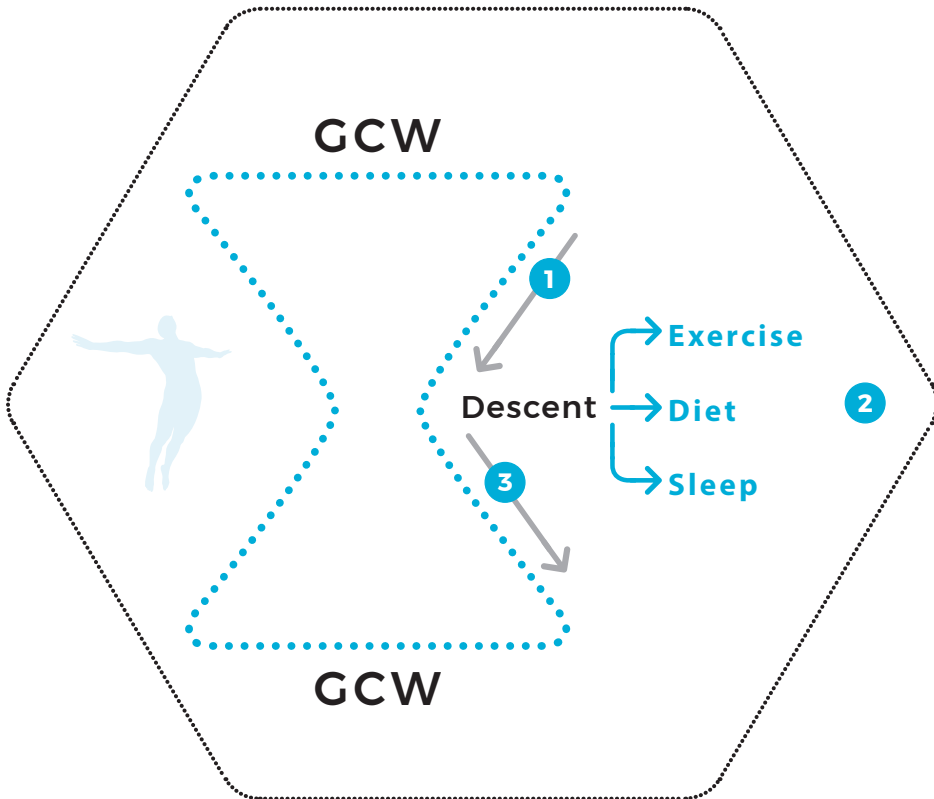
and exercises to acquire or improve the hand skills would be performed. Once the lesson had been learned or the hand position corrected, the global game would restart. If a further weakness or error was noted, the GDC would stop again and a new descent initiated. Instruction would continue in this manner until the students had mastered all the techniques necessary to play the global game correctly.



DESCENT FROM THE GLOBAL DYNAMIC COORDINATION

This method can also be used to prevent us from getting stuck in a rut or to get out of a rut we are in, so that we can gain better control over the totality of our lives. To apply this didactic system, we first need to change the starting point

from GDC to GCW (Global Complex World). It is from this GCW that we should descend by performing exercises that help us in how we bear up under the complexity that surrounds us by making us stronger and more resilient, both mentally and physically. These descents force us to learn to take better care of ourselves, with the most important descent being the need to exercise more, eat healthier, and sleep better.



DESCENT FROM THE GLOBAL COMPLEX WORLD

BECOMING A STRONGER ME

This is precisely the method I used with Hans and with later coachees. It may sound simple, but it isn't. Just like mastering any complex athletic skill, you need to make several descents, and some descents will need to be repeated more than once. Automatisms are not necessarily instinctive so they sometimes must be learned. Sometimes you need to hit the same nail on the head repeatedly.

A common problem arises when coaching people towards a healthier lifestyle and greater mental resilience: they all have good reasons for remaining stuck in their complex world. This means that they fail to free up enough time to take proper care of themselves. Meetings, targets and other work pressures, the kid's homework, the kid's taxi service on weekends (art school, tennis lessons, etc.) and 101 other family obligations all take up time. So often, my clients make time for everyone but themselves. They ignore the familiar lesson we hear each time we board an aeroplane: in the event of an emergency, put on your own oxygen mask first, then help your children and your fellow passengers. Only when you have enough oxygen, can you be of help to others. This is a rule that applies in our everyday life, even down here on the ground.

Egopreneur is intended to help you to
become a stronger and more resilient 'me',
so that you can function better in an increasingly
complex world, thereby allowing you to also
take better care of others.

This book is written for everyone who is struggling to deal with too much pressure and too little time; for everyone who has the feeling that chasing the facts is the only form of exercise they get. *Egopreneur* is here to help you become a stronger, more resilient 'me', so that you can function better in an increasingly complex world, allowing you to also take better care of others.

In the first part of this book, you will find numerous insights that will help you make time for yourself, so that you can care for yourself adequately. The most important prerequisite for success is your willingness to accept that 80% is good enough in everything that you do. This will be a serious 'mind switch' for many. But remember that 80% should never be seen as setting the bar too low. Most of us would have been more than happy with 80% at school or university – which is still more than enough to get you a *cum laude* diploma!

The second part of this book provides an in-depth look at the connection between a healthy lifestyle and high stress-resistance, and it offers concrete tips on how to exercise more, eat (and drink) better, and sleep more soundly. These little pieces of advice are both useful and, more importantly, achievable, provided you first understand the 'why'. For this reason part one will focus heavily on these 'why' questions, so you know exactly how to apply these tips in part two.

In the meantime, things are going well for Hans. His lifestyle has undergone a complete makeover. He has lost weight, improved his sleep patterns and now, three years later, manages an average of 9000 steps per day. He applied for a third term as his company's CEO and was awarded a new three-year mandate by the board of directors. He has also realised his dream of publishing a book. Not to mention, the people around him are happy. And in Hans, I have acquired a new and very dear friend for life.

PART 1

