
What is your game within the game?

Want to be really good? It takes patience, persistence, and practice!

“Game within the game” is an expression that comes from sports. Athletes are committed to improving as they play. This is different from practicing before a game. This is about choosing to focus on one aspect of their performance as they play their games.

You have probably used the same principle with your kids in soccer. In each game, you or their coach gives them something to work on during the game:

- getting back faster on defense
- passing the ball quicker after receiving it
- maintaining the proper distance from team mates

The key to improving performance in any sphere is choosing a critical variable to work on, then working on it for two weeks until it becomes natural, intuitive, and available to you at all time.

Don't practice until you get it right. Practice until you can't get it wrong.

In sports, you can practice between games. But in most areas of life—meetings, parenting, relationships, conversations—we aren't given time to practice. We are just expected to go out there and be good every day.

Still, getting better at something takes deliberate practice. It requires choosing something to focus on and then working on that behavior until it becomes instinctive. Two weeks is a workable time frame. If you remind yourself as you begin each day, then reflect back at the end of the day, you'll quickly create a new awareness.

Here are several variables you might choose to look for and practice for two weeks in order to set yourself up for a year of learning and growth. Some of the ideas will seem specific to meetings or relationships. Most have broad application in life. Start with the ones that seem most interesting to you.

1. Look for who is not yet in the conversation— not participating.
2. Who interrupts whom? Notice what happens to the interrupted person and the conversation that is interrupted.
3. Notice each time the conversation changes direction. Do not change the conversation without permission.
4. Notice when in life you are not asking for what you want or when you are hinting and being so indirect that people might miss your request. Practice asking for what you want and not what you think you can get.
5. Notice when you say something and you know the other person's reaction will be negative. Choose not to knowingly upset anyone in your life, and apologize when you do. For example, stop saying “I told you so.”
6. Listen for each time you hear a commitment exchange without a commitment date. Notice every time someone promises to do something and no deadline is expressed.



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7. Look for the four key elements of effective conversation: clarity, candor, commitment and completion (*clarity: clear, shared understanding of what was said; candor: being self-expressed; commitment: do X by Y; completion: we are not going to leave this topic until we are all ready to leave it*).
 8. Set aside technology and be fully present. Notice how you feel when others are focused on their screens.
 9. Schedule the next time you will check on the world, then don't pick up your smartphone or tablet until then.
 10. Practice focused speaking: Be clear, concise, and relevant.
 11. Notice each time you justify your behavior for the next two weeks. Was it necessary? Excuses come across as being defensive versus being responsible.
 12. Each time humor is used in a conversation, ask yourself whether it added value to the conversation. Watch out for teasing.
 13. Catch yourself multi-tasking and decide whether to continue or to focus on one task at a time.
 14. Notice every time there is blame present in a conversation. Consider what happened to the conversation and to whoever is being blamed.
 15. Notice when people get defensive and consider how the situation could have been handled differently.
 16. Notice every time you have a positive thought about someone and you do not tell him or her. Move toward acknowledging people when you think of them.
 17. Notice every time you voice an uninformed opinion or make a statement you're not sure about without qualifying it.
 18. Notice when you are not being your best self and when you are being your worst self.
 19. Notice when you are having it your way—dominating a relationship or a conversation.
 20. Notice when you are waiting for the right time or for more time or for something to happen. Think about the price you are paying for waiting.
 21. What is your focus? Choose three things to accomplish each day.
 22. Reflection time—build it in daily and weekly. Aim for 45 minutes each day.
 23. Pay attention to conversational setups. Notice when a setup is absent and reflect on how a setup could have changed the conversation.
 24. Watch your speaking: if you're usually too fast, slow down; if you're usually rambling, work on being more concise; if you're too quiet, work on speaking up.
 25. What conversations do people associate with you? Keep track of the focus of your conversations at home and at work; are they what you want them to be?
 26. Whenever you notice yourself wondering what someone means, ask for clarity. Stop guessing at what people mean.

