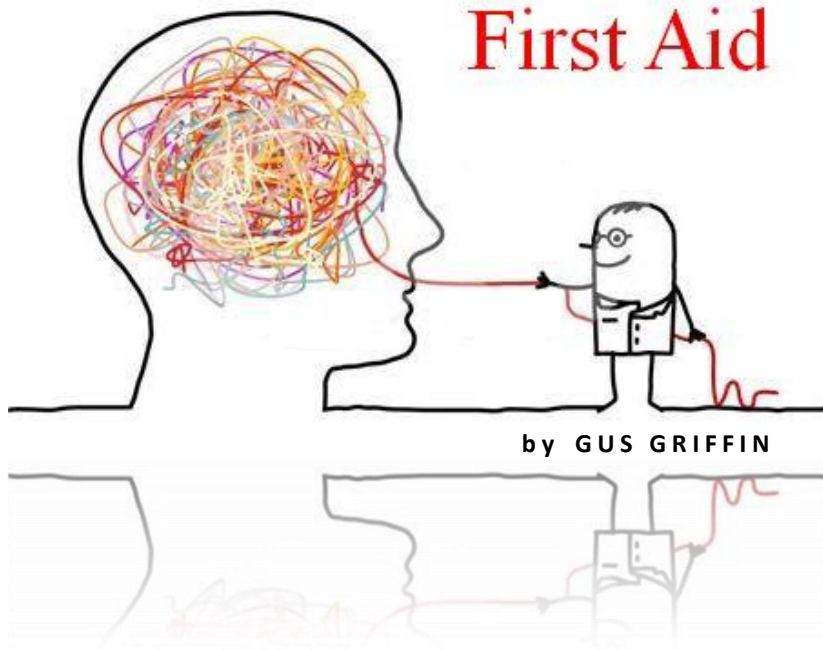


# A t t i t u d e

## First Aid



by GUS GRIFFIN

an Instinx® publication

Part of the *Instinx Toolkit* module – see [blog.instinx.com](http://blog.instinx.com)

# Attitude First Aid

by Gus Griffin

Some useful by-products have come out of the last fifteen years of *Instinx*<sup>®</sup> research. One of them is a technique we call: **Zoning-In** (also *Exercising Your Concentration Muscle*).

It's deceptively simple but has proven routinely helpful in relieving stress, getting over upsets, coping with pain and other discomforts, making decisions easier, raising spirits, remedying insomnia, quelling stage fright, the list goes on. It's sort of a quick mental tonic: attitude first aid, in fact.

You can do it at any time and in any place, as long as your attention is not required for keeping you alive in some other way, such as driving a vehicle, dodging bullets or being nice to your in-laws. You can do it for less than a minute or for hours—whatever you have time for and feel is needed.

Now, before I tell you about this, let's not forget that the really revolutionary development here is *Instinx Performance Coaching*. That's the one that will take you to levels of effectiveness and performance you've never experienced before—with gains that continue to grow as time goes on.

That's where our main attention belongs, so let's not get faddish about this other thing. It's simply something you can use for those times

when you can't do *Instinx*. Something that will tide you over in the meantime. But it certainly will make every day you use it a better day.

### **Mental Muscles**

I developed this exercise in 1992 but didn't write it up for others until 1997. Very few people picked up on it, though, and I think this was because I made them wade through several pages of theory before getting to the practical part. This time I shall bow to the demands of a world grown accustomed to instant gratification and throw out what I think was the best bits (you can ask me for it if you're keen to impress). However, a small amount of introduction *is* required.

To get the most out of this exercise a certain orientation is necessary. I want you to think about using your mental faculties in the same way you use your physical ones. Consider exercising the “muscles” of your mind as you do the muscles of your body.

Therefore you would have an imagination muscle, wouldn't you? And a calculation muscle, a memory muscle, a determination muscle, also a moral muscle and a humour muscle, perhaps a caring muscle. Of course, there would be a concentration muscle. And so on.

Just like the muscles in your body, some of your mental muscles are going to be in better condition than others. And, just like your body, it's a good idea to get them into a good state of fitness and keep them that way. And you would do this in the same way you get fit physically—by deliberately using these mental muscles to make them stronger.

(I'm not presenting this as a truth about the mind; I'm not saying it *is* constructed like this. This is simply a way of looking at it that provides an effective orientation for doing this exercise.)

### **Getting Fit**

Now, when getting physically fit, there are basically two kinds of exercises you can do: 1) ones that develop a particular set of muscles or 2) more general ones called “foundation” exercises, such as walking or running. Foundation exercises provide a general level of fitness upon which to build more specific capabilities. Without them, the other abilities would prove to be of limited use.

For example, many years ago a group of Australian football trainers made an interesting discovery about speedbag punching. (You've seen a speedbag—it's the small punching bag mounted at head height that boxers bounce back and forth in rapid rhythm.) It turns out that this exercise, which was originally developed only for arm fitness and timing, is actually an excellent fitness developer for the entire upper body. But it hadn't occurred to anyone to use it as a *foundation* exercise before.

Aussie Rules Football works the upper body much more than most team sports, and for extended periods of time. (Basketball puts similar demands on players, but they are rested more often and it's a shorter game.) So it was difficult for even the fittest of athletes to last a whole game of football without his arms dropping off, so to speak.

But getting players to train with a speedbag for hour after hour—much longer than boxers were accustomed to—has changed all that. It gives the players a foundation of fitness throughout the upper body they were not getting from other foundation exercises like running.

Poor physical fitness puts dangerous stress on your body. In the same way, poor mental fitness creates unpleasant and even dangerous stress in your mind.

The good news is that it's not necessary to separately “exercise” all of your many mental muscles to achieve general mental fitness. Just as simple speedbag punching was discovered to condition the body in general, so also do we find now that “exercising your concentration muscle”—or “zoning-in”—has a similar foundation effect on the mind.

The ability to place your attention where you want it, and keep it there, is fundamental to *all other* mental faculties. It is the “slab” upon which the skyscraper of your ability is built. This has been thoroughly substantiated through the many years of Instinx research. And it is this powerful principle upon which the following exercise is based.

So this is how I'm asking you to think of it. Where exercising your “imagination muscle” or your “relaxation muscle” would only improve those particular faculties, exercising your “concentration muscle” turns out to be a foundation exercise which improves your overall mental fitness, not only the ability to concentrate. In fact, it will improve your mental functioning in general—the more you do it, the better.

## Exercising It

Ok, are you ready to “pump iron” mentally? Well, here’s how it is done. This Instinx way of “**Zoning-In**” is simplicity itself:

*Find some place you can stand or sit quietly and then simply close your eyes and focus your attention on your lips, holding your attention there for as long as you can.*

Just concentrate on feeling your lips and you will be exercising your “mental concentration muscle”—as long as you are not doing anything else with your mind at the same time.

That is the simplicity of the technique. But believe me, it’s a lot easier to write about than it is to do it. There are a number of things you need to know about this all-too-simple activity to be sure you get the full benefit from it. So read *all six points below* before having a go:

1. Firstly, don’t make the mistake of thinking that this is “the same as” some meditation technique you already use. If you complicate this exercise—adding in any other feeling or belief or agenda about what you’re doing while you are concentrating on feeling your lips—you will only reduce its effectiveness. You aren’t trying to do anything else except focus your attention on a physical point perceptible to your tactile sense, while limiting (ignoring) other sensory input as much as you can in the circumstances.
2. Why the lips? Because they are touching each other and so you can clearly feel them. They are a physical location in space that you can sense with your eyes closed without having to do anything special to sense it.

Your nose or your toes, or any other body part, would do the job as well—except that you would have to twitch your nose (or wiggle your toes) every once in a while to remind you where they are.

Whereas your lips are already touching when at rest. Even when your nose is blocked, making it necessary to breathe through your mouth, you can still sense the corners of your lips touching. (Eyelids are similar, but seem to draw too much attention to the eyes to be useful.)

When you do lose orientation—and even with your lips touching, you will from time to time—simply press them together a little more

firmly to put yourself back in touch with where they really are in physical space. You can do this as often as you like, but don't do it as a substitute for concentrating. In other words, don't use sensation to *draw* your attention. The idea is to keep on *deliberately, knowingly* placing your attention on your lips.

3. If you have some special reason for using some other continuously "sense-able" part of the body, ok do that—but once you've selected one area to concentrate on, don't change it for that exercise session.
4. Now let me assure you before you try this, you are not going to succeed at consistently holding your attention on your lips. You might hold it for a little while, but before long you will find yourself thinking about something else.

When first learning this exercise, it would surprise me if you managed to maintain a continuous concentration on your lips for even sixty seconds. Your attention will wander very quickly. But that's not exactly a bad thing—it's how the exercise is supposed to go.

When you cut down your sensory input like this, and then concentrate your attention on one physical location, this allows your mind to begin uncluttering itself. We call it "clearing the mental pipes".

So thoughts and feelings surface as you do this exercise. Daydreams and unbidden images interfere. That is what is supposed to happen and you should let it happen ... to a degree. When you realise that your attention has wandered from your lips, you can choose one of three things to do next:

- a) *Continue thinking about what has come up because it seems important for you to do so—perhaps it came up for a good reason. You can even act on it if it now seems more important than continuing the exercise.*
- b) *You can write a note to yourself about it, so you don't forget to follow it up later. This leaves you free to mentally let it go for now and get back to zoning-in. (It's best to have pen and paper handy when you do this exercise—in fact, I often use it to help me compile my "to do" list for the next day.)*
- c) *You can ignore what's come up and immediately get back to concentrating on your lips as soon as you realise you've drifted from doing so.*

Whichever option you take, return your attention to your lips as soon as you can. Before long, you will find you have again drifted into thinking about something else.

So just choose *a*, *b* or *c* again—getting back to concentrating on your lips as soon as you can. And simply continue *exercising your concentration muscle* this way for as long as you have time or until you decide to act on something you thought of.

5. The object of this exercise is not to psych yourself up to rigidly hold your concentration in one place as long as you can, no matter what. That's *not* what it's about.

Yes, you do want to be consciously, deliberately placing your attention—but not with gritted teeth. The idea is to relax into doing this more and more effortlessly. Only you and your lips hanging out together, with nothing else distracting or intervening. And that is exactly what will happen as you get the hang of it.

It's not *wrong* to think about things. When you notice your attention has wandered, just bring yourself back to concentrating on your lips as soon as you feel ready to do so, without feeling that you have failed to do the exercise correctly in some way.

And don't go for records, like: "*This time I'm not going to let myself wander for at least three minutes.*" Doing that would be dividing your attention: partly on your lips and partly on how much time has elapsed so far. So you wouldn't really be doing the exercise, would you?—which is simply to maintain your attention on your lips, not adding in anything else.

6. Sometimes you'll feel like yawning. It's good to do so. Sometimes you'll go to sleep. Well, that means that sleep is what you needed most. In fact this exercise is great for helping you to go to sleep if you have any trouble doing so.

### **Instant Payoff**

Ok, that's all there is to it, but don't be deceived by its simplicity. It is very effective.

Any time you are feeling down or stressed or uncomfortable, start **Zoning-In** (especially when *Instinx* isn't available). Every time, you'll find that stress begins reducing almost immediately.

Sometimes strong emotions surface, but if you keep on gently bringing yourself back to the exercise, relaxing into it more and more, you will soon find your spirits rising or balance returning. It also improves your imagination (it's great for clearing writer's block), your memory functions better, you become more motivated and determined, you regain your sense of humour, your equanimity, your perspective, etc.

In other words, your mind in general becomes fitter.

I recommend **Zoning-In** as a general mental conditioner and day brightener, to be used any time you can grab a few moments to yourself and close your eyes. Personally, I use it regularly. Whenever I wake up in the morning feeling out of sorts, I always take a few minutes to “clear my mental pipes” in this way.

It's also a perfect thing to do before doing something you find challenging or difficult, or which demands your peak performance—like an exam or performing in public. Also anytime you feel mentally sluggish or clogged up. Once you get used to it, I'm sure you'll find it very useful indeed.

And don't forget, it's *Instinx Performance Coaching* that will completely change life for you, in ways that no other approach has ever been able to. **Zoning-In** is fine as first aid, but for resolving performance problems once and for all, use *Instinx*.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO [BLOG.INSTINX.COM](http://BLOG.INSTINX.COM)

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