

Are You Performance Addicted?

Turn Fear
into Strength,
Anxiety into Action
and Go From Getting By
to Feeling Free
Relatively Fast with...

**The 5-Stage
“Change Your Story”
Process!**

by Arthur P. Ciaramicoli, Ph.D and John Allen Mollenhauer

Copyright 2010 Arthur P. Ciaramicoli, John Allen Mollenhauer. All Rights Reserved

All rights reserved No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any Formby any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage or retrieval system without written permission by the author, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review.

Disclaimer

The information provided in this manual is provided for general guidance only and is not intended as a substitute for advice from a physician or other health care professional. Do not use this information to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease without consulting a qualified health care professional. Anybody using the information provided in this book or any corresponding website is doing so at “his or her” own risk. Please consult your Doctor.

These pages are designed to provide authoritative information in the areas of lifestyle and healthy living and are presented with the understanding that the publisher, primary and contributing authors are not rendering medical advice. It is the individual reader's obligation to evaluate their own medical needs, to determine for themselves whether specific medical advice is required, and where necessary to seek the services of a qualified health care professional. You should consult with a healthcare professional before accepting any advice about diet, exercise or any recommendation in this manual or its corresponding website, PerformanceLifestyle.com. and BalanceYourSuccess.com

It is not the purpose of this manual to reprint all the information that is otherwise available to authors, printer and publisher but to compliment, amplify and supplement other texts. For more information see the references throughout the text.

Every effort has been made to make this manual, as complete and accurate as possible. However there may be mistakes, both typographical and in content. Therefore this text should only be used as a general guide and not as the ultimate source of published information. Furthermore, this manual contains information, only up to the printing date.

The authors, advisers and publisher shall have neither liability nor responsibility to any person or entity, with respect to any health condition, loss or damage caused or alleged to be caused directly or indirectly by the information contained in this manual. If you do not agree with the above, return this manual to the publisher.

Contents

Copyright 2010 Arthur P. Ciaramicoli, John Allen Mollenhauer. All Rights Reserved.....	2
The Crux of the Curse.....	4
Free Chapter from “ <i>The Curse of the Capable</i> ”	7
How to Achieve for the Right Reasons —Performance Addiction	7
Next Steps:.....	13
Arthur P. Ciaramicoli, Ed.D., Ph.D.,	14
John Allen Mollenhauer.....	15

The Crux of the Curse

One Sunday morning while I was working out in our basement my wife called down to say I had just received a call from a man in New Jersey. She sounded unusually excited so I came upstairs. “This man said he read your book *Performance Addiction* and it had a huge impact on his life”. Our daughters were in the room, the youngest saying “Dad that’s great, aren’t you thrilled”. She and her sister were a little disappointed as I said, “I doubt my book could have *that* kind of impact”. “Dad you should still call, at least talk to him”, my wife chimed in “he sounds really genuine”.

So about twenty minutes later John Allen and I had our first conversation. I was intrigued as we connected on the phone. He explained how just weeks before his twentieth high school reunion, a few months before, he began searching the Internet for books on the psychological aspects of performance and perfectionism. He was running a website called PerformanceLifestyle.com and was coaching others on how to live a healthy lifestyle more successfully, and figured he ought to know what “performance addiction” was. He was depressed, though effectively covering it up at that time. Little did he know he was suffering from a persistent yet unknown addiction in full force. He had every reason to feel good, but, with periodic exception, couldn’t and it all came to a head at the proverbial “20th”.

John Allen could no longer stand the lack of joy, the comparison and the pervasive sense of shame he felt around others. Among close friends he hadn’t seen for a long time it was torture; so he drew a line in the sand. He read the book the next day and in his words said, “I finally found it”, meaning he identified his problem in a language he could understand. It would still be months before he called me.

In that first phone call he told me about many personal facets of his life; I was moved with his openness and his hunger for the truth about himself and about human nature. I could tell by the way he comprehended the content of *Performance Addiction*, and by the insights he had acquired in his life, that he was quite bright and insightful. He talked of trying to solve a problem that gave rise to overwhelming emotional challenges and a feeling that he was not “ok” which drove him to consistently prove himself that until then and for over two decades he could not grasp.

He spoke of his early entrepreneurial days and the beginnings of overachievement; being a gym owner while still in college, his former obsession with bodybuilding, fitness and nutrition, and his need to cope with erratic, often depleted energy. He talked of his failings and bittersweet successes in the business world and the recent launch of his new company focused on health and performance lifestyle solutions, which began as an attempt to solve his own problem. He then talked about his lovely ex-wife, and his failed marriage at a time when he fooled himself into thinking he had the problem licked, but didn’t.

Somewhere in the conversation it occurred to me that John Allen was describing a scenario I had heard many times, from many people of all persuasions. He was talking about *the Curse* of the Capable and the crux of it all, performance addiction. John Allen, this capable man, who as a lifestyle entrepreneur, trainer and coach was helping thousands of people obtain higher levels of health, energy and fitness to achieve their goals in life and business, needed more and more achievements to prove himself and ultimately overcome his emotional challenges. Yet overachievement was contributing to the demise of his own well-being; a pattern he experienced throughout his adult life.

Respected and praised for his thoughtful leadership, and seemingly positive outlook, John Allen was “achieving”, but at an overwhelming cost. He was in truth, teaching his own struggle, trying to help his clients develop a foundation of wellbeing he could not seem to obtain. We, the capable ones, tend to become invested in curing others, solving problems and looking good, when in fact we are really making efforts to vicariously heal ourselves. John Allen had not yet fully addressed the deeper view of himself, “his story” nor could he with others. Exhausted from his long time struggle, he came to the critical

realization that external rewards in body and business do not change the internal music “stories” we all listen to every day. Despite his challenged but still robust health, and all of his accomplishments, it would take John Allen nearly 20 years to clearly identify *performance addiction* and arrive at his first true glimpse of well being and the confidence that comes with it.

I have met and treated thousands of capable people who embody the qualities that are highly regarded in personal and professional life, yet they do not seem to appreciate what they have or what they accomplish. Known as “the curse” of the capable, performance addicts are plagued by a low-grade feeling of helplessness, and they cannot solve an internal problem with external achievements.

At one point in our phone conversation John Allen asked if we could meet, he wanted to share more about the journey that had shaped a series of lifestyle guides he was assembling for his clients, including him. The series was ironically titled “Performance Lifestyle”, basically the antithesis of the performance addicted life he knew so well. He was teaching its principles and practices at PerformanceLifestyle.com to other achiever types who wanted to look and feel and perform better but did not yet understand the real problem; what was driving them or how to change their lifestyle. He wanted me to review it, and potentially contribute insight on performance addiction to help people perform “well”. He offered to drive from his home in New Jersey. We agreed to meet at a local bookstore a few weeks later, just outside of Boston.

In our first encounter John appeared quite engaging, affable and eager to discuss the many insights he had acquired since his realization of the cost of performance addiction. He knew retrospectively that he had been crying out for help for many years but few could hear him due to his level of capability. After all, how could being so capable be a problem?

Reluctantly after his reunion, he spent a brief time with a psychiatrist that prescribed mood stabilizers, anti-depressants and diagnosed John as bi-polar. Being a fit athlete most of his life he couldn’t stand the “drugged up” feeling and went back to his work. Recommitted to his quest, I could hear how intensely he had embarked on a journey that would ultimate in our friendship and our partnership

John Allen told me about how he was growing and learning and recovering from the anxious, driven and often impetuous ways of his former life. We talked briefly of his earlier triumphs but talked more about his feeling of being emotionally overwhelmed. He clearly felt deep regret for the lost opportunities of the past, lost friends, estranged family members, and most recently the loss of his marriage all because he was always working. He was valiantly trying to learn and develop a new way of being in the world. His courage to admit his vulnerabilities, and his efforts to overcome former negative patterns was extraordinary.

We met again a few weeks later after I had reviewed John’s impressive guides. We began discussing its content and I complimented his innovative and refined insights on lifestyle, nutrition and fitness, particularly the focus on managing personal energy. My one concern was that I thought his concept was missing the most important link, the “sense of self” that breeds the optimistic resiliency one needs to live the lifestyle he spoke of; the lack of which leads to performance addiction and *the curse* that capable people can suffer from – **a story(s) that does not support what you want and need.**

First hand, he knew this to be true and after a short but considerate reflection said “of course, it all collapses if you don’t have the personal foundation to support your well being. It’s what enables your lifestyle to work for you”. He asked if I would help him, I replied that we could help each other. “How should we begin?” he asked. “Let’s start by telling the reader about our meeting and how the idea came about”. I had been working on a book following *Performance Addiction* about the emotional trials I hear high achieving adults talk about every day. These challenges make balanced, healthy living hard, limit

quality of life and inhibit personal and professional success. John Allen had a mastery of lifestyle solutions, but too needed to understand why he felt so challenged and unable to perform day to day with a sense of well being.

As we talked further we decided the combination of my clinical psychology experience with achievers of all types over the past 30 years, including the discovery of *performance addiction* and *the power of empathy*, along with John Allen's extensive lifestyle experience dealing with the consequences of overachievement, that lead to the development of the *Performance Lifestyle* and a series of important lifestyle solutions that would enable anyone to live a more balanced and healthy lifestyle, would reveal a roadmap; an effective way for helping the reader gain freedom from **the hidden challenge(s)** to that balanced, healthy higher achieving life we hear so much about but few experience.

In the process, John Allen's own recovery from performance addiction helped to develop the 5-stage change your story process that will help you experience greater love, health and success! John Allen will share how he's been changing his story and his experience in the [Introductory Webinar](#).

By the way, when we say **"high achieving"** we mean **maintaining balance and wellbeing in the process of achieving your goals, whatever they may be. That is high achievement.** Understanding how to do so is invaluable.

Performance addiction and what evolves into "the curse" is not one specific affliction, it's more a mindset that has been shaped by the past. Pending a cascade of events and experiences, it's likely a number of issues all building on one another that affect how you are presently thinking and living in the world; all of which can change with a proper roadmap and the practical knowledge you need to succeed. Objective feedback from rational, empathic people provides the key to liberating yourself from *the Curse*.

Countless hours of discussion, synthesizing the prior works *The Power of Empathy*, and *Performance Addiction* helped to develop a clear understanding of the real problem so many people are suffering from in the world we live in today. These issues and their resolution are clearly delineated in our new book, *The Curse of the Capable*. The book provides ways of resolving the emotional trials of adulthood and beyond. If you do the work, it will help you understand the hidden challenge to sustaining intimacy, balancing your success and living with greater joy.

We invite you to stop, and truly benefit from this book. It will explain the reasons why you picked it up in the first place. Partake in the journey we must all travel to **develop the resilient sense of self that allows us to take care of ourselves**, and others, with consistency and joy. This book is for all adults who want to live a healthy lifestyle successfully, with balance, wellbeing and authentic intimacy in their lives.

Below is an excerpt from Chapter 2 from the book, [The Curse of The Capable](#) – The Hidden Challenge to a Balanced Healthy, High Achieving Life. By Arthur P Ciaramicoli, Ed.D., Ph.D. with John Allen Mollenhauer, Foreword by Phil Simms, Super Bowl MVP Quarterback.

Free Chapter from “*The Curse of the Capable*”

How to Achieve for the Right Reasons —Performance Addiction

Thousands of capable, high-achieving people are suffering from Performance Addiction (PA), which is the belief that perfecting appearance and achieving status will secure love, respect and happiness. It is born out of an unsupportive story about the past. PA is the most common characteristic of *the curse* given the reinforcement of non-stop performance in today’s age of achievement. It is an irrational, inaccurate belief system, hardwired from earlier experiences, reinforced by cultural expectations. **It is often rewarded and usually leads to over-doing and overachievement**

Performance addicts turn to activity like alcoholics turn to a drink, like gamblers are drawn to the gambling table. If performance addicts are not constantly busy achieving something, they don’t feel worthy. When good performance doesn’t buy them happiness, they think they must perform even better. When that effort fails, they decide to try harder, go faster, be more dedicated and ultimately they believe they must make more sacrifices. They believe in the religion of perfection. They think they can perfect their way into happiness. As a result, they can end up achieving their goals for the wrong reasons; and this can take their life terribly off course. The emotional consequences of this are also experienced physically, as this all takes an immense amount of personal energy. As their energy gets low without recuperation, they can go into a downward energy trend that is equally challenging to acknowledge and change. The overwhelming feeling created by the emotional drives to perform, particularly if it’s something they don’t really enjoy, leads to exhaustion and fatigue.

The Downward Energy Trend

An addiction to performance, regardless of the underlying reasons, requires that you stimulate your way through the day to keep going. The methods employed are usually more food, stimulants and, yes more activity. Even if the “stimulant” is exercise, the body gets more exhausted because of a lack of recovery. **Facing a true exhaustive state without a feeling of accomplishment (which those with PA have difficulty experiencing because they are always on to the next thing) is depressing and persistent.** And so the downward trend continues; the psychological pattern of PA now becomes an energy drain with physical manifestations. Rarely if ever stepping back to change the pattern, the performance addicted person presses on for elusively better results in their body, their life and their business. They seek quicker, more effective solutions—fitness programs, diets and drug fixes—to deal with the ever-present health problems such as fatigue and weight gain. **But this can only be solved by stepping back and changing your lifestyle and essentially how you achieve your goals in the world.** As the symptoms of this pattern are suppressed en masse, we get an emerging population of increasingly more anxious people; performance addicts with seemingly less time, energy and space to take care of themselves. This could describe our culture.

When sharing the title for this book with others prior to publishing, no sooner would I get the words out of my mouth, those in the conversation would say something to the effect of “*Whatever it is, I’ve got it*” or “*I know what you’re talking about.*” Anyone who has followed the path of dealing with symptoms, but avoided the roots of the real problem, knows in their heart it does not work. Health statistics are the perfect example, they get worse and worse as obesity climbs up 6% per year. The “quick fix” (from the top down or outside in) for what are really lifestyle issues (that require a bottom up or from the inside out solution), is anything but quick. It seems to work in the short term, but in the end the gain is usually outweighed by the pain of compounding problems still covered up. The downward trend creates misery and potentially a “lost cause” outlook as the roots of PA, its psychological challenges and physical consequences are buried deep and out of sight. You know you need to change, but like all addictions,

Copyright © 2010 All Rights Reserved Worldwide

The Curse of the Capable.com

tomorrow your defense of rationalization and your “second wind” takes over. You return to using the only methods you know work; at least you know they work temporarily.

In our society we know if you look good and also have credentials and money (despite an unhealthy lifestyle,) you are going to be idealized for a while; but if these results are based on an addiction to performance and a poor lifestyle, it’s only a matter of time before the curse takes its destructive toll. It was this realization that originally inspired *The Curse of the Capable*. The addiction itself is not the cause; it is the stories we live by that determine our way of life and how we achieve our goals. If they are unsupportive, you risk heading into the downward energy trend that leads to low energy, weight gain and health complications.

The quest for relief typically starts with a recommitment to goals, higher levels of activity and productivity, a new exercise program, a stricter diet regimen, more attempts to please others etc. to deal with the symptoms of this driven, yet overwhelming and exhausting way of life that can leave you feeling helpless despite your obvious capabilities. Unfortunately, none of those efforts deal with the hidden challenge or its roots, which will magnify during periods of stress. Irrational and inaccurate belief systems emotionally hardwired from earlier experiences drive us in self-destructive ways, **even though the actions may appear admirable.**

In a world where performance is rewarded to maintain productivity, and quick fixes are the norm, the performance addict is at an extreme disadvantage. Amidst the cultural expectations for achievement, they are unable to assert their personal preferences, set boundaries or take care of themselves at the level they need to maintain balance, health and well-being. They may be achieving their goals, but living out of balance, they are trading their health to do it. Once you go into the downward energy trend, the only way out is to take steps back far enough and deal with the real problem so you can move forward in a position of strength.

Discovering PA – Anthony’s Story.

Since the publication of *Performance Addiction; the Dangerous New Syndrome and How to Stop it from Ruining Your Life* in 2004, I have had numerous referrals from very bright, engaging people suffering from PA. It has surprised me that people will drive over two hours from neighboring states to talk about their never-ending attempts to balance their lives. I mention this fact, not from an inflated ego position, but to indicate how desperate PA victims become, how miserable their internal lives can be despite every outward indication to the contrary and how determined they are to gain relief.

Anthony, an entrepreneur from Rhode Island, comes every Friday with a look of stress written all over his face. He is handsome, holds an MBA from a prestigious college, is married with three daughters, and has attained a level of financial success anyone would envy. He owns two homes; his extended family members are all alive and are quite connected through seeing and talking with each other frequently. His children are healthy and his wife loves him very much. Yet, despite the impressive resume, he is miserable!

You Look Marvelous, but...

What keeps Anthony from living up to his resume? His father and older brother are both attorneys and his youngest sister is an executive in the clothing business. They grew up in an affluent town in Southeast Rhode Island and he was expected to be like his older brother —handsome, athletic and charming. When he entered high school his brother had left for college. He was immediately reminded by coaches and teachers of his brother’s academic achievements and of his athletic prowess. His father, now a professor at a local law school, placed great emphasis on his children’s’ achievements. Both parents,

being Italian American, also placed great emphasis on family involvement. Sunday dinner was a ritual at their grandmother's house, with everything and anything open for discussion. Dating a girl from another, less prestigious town was frowned upon; and not wearing the right clothes or speaking with improper grammar were all imperfections to be immediately corrected. Regardless of who was present or in what situation they were, the talk was frank, direct, never compromising and shameless. Anthony's father was super critical of his "uneducated wife." She tried valiantly to please him, but never won the battle. She didn't speak correctly and dressed "like an old lady." The complaints went on and on as the children listened. When Anthony was in graduate school, his father had an affair. He left school for a semester to care for his mother, as she fell into a deep depression. Anthony, unfortunately, learned to identify with his mother while fearing his father.

The Making of Anxiety

Anthony learned early in life that appearance and status were crucial to being loved. This is the precise, shame-based formula that creates an anxious person and also develops *the curse*. As he listened to his mother's torment, Anthony discovered his mother felt she was not good enough to keep her husband from straying. No matter how hard she tried to protect her son and hold her husband accountable, Anthony knew in her heart she blamed herself. If only she had kept her figure; if only she had taken some courses as her husband had instructed; if only she could have become different, more sexy, less inhibited; and so on. He internalized her belief system that said, "You're only loved as long as you look good and maintain a certain status in the world." Anthony became an anxious person, always worrying about his performance and how he compared to others. In high school his coaches would say, "You're a great practice player; why can't you perform like this in a game?" The answer was obvious, he told me one night, "My father didn't watch practices but the moment I saw him enter the park on the day of a game, my heart would start beating." Despite this pressure he still managed to become an all-state quarterback and a star baseball player. "But I knew I was never playing as well as I could. My senior year I got hurt, tore up my shoulder and I was secretly grateful that I had a good reason to escape the pressure." He went on to say that he never told anyone how relieved he was to be hurt, having an escape from what he considered to be an emotional prison.

Anthony stumbled into college, drank too much, prayed for a way out of his athletic scholarship, but continued to do what he thought would be acceptable to his father and most other authority figures. He dated but never allowed himself to get too close. Women liked him because he was unusually respectful and sensitive to females (because his mother was the one soothing person in his life.) He knew his mother understood him, but he was afraid to be with her for too long, because she was prone to low moods. In his words, her moods "were catchy." He found himself attracted to women who depended on him, women who would quickly let him know he was liked and that they needed him. These relationships became burdensome; he would find some reason to disengage but always with an unusual level of guilt.

Eventually in graduate school he met and married his wife Paula, a pretty woman who is quite dependent and often overwhelmed in her role as a mother. Anthony works in his business, often does the food shopping and cooks most nights despite his long hours away from home. He loves his children but has much trouble setting limits with them, usually finding their tears and tantrums unbearable. "I can't stand to see them upset. I just give in to stop my own anxiety. I know it's wrong, but when they are emotional I fall apart." Paula complains about Anthony drinking and eating too much. She feels rejected by his tendency to want to be alone. He still works out, is somewhat obsessed with his physique and spends time reading muscle books to recapture the "body I had in college." Despite all these dynamics, Anthony is a person of integrity and high ethics. He is well-liked in business and although he seldom reaches out to friends, he is someone in whom people confide with comfort. He is known to be dependable in a crisis. All these abilities are matched by an equal amount of anxiety and unhappiness.

Can I Change or Is It Too Late?

Anthony had reached out for help with his primary care physician after weeks of poor sleep and worry. He was referred to a psychiatrist and placed on Prozac for depression and Ativan for anxiety. He felt some relief in the early weeks and would meet with the doctor every so often to talk about the medication and occasional adjustments to the dosage. The short term gain eroded over time and one night he Googled the word perfection and stumbled onto my book. It took him several weeks to make the call, but we eventually met and continued working on his PA in individual sessions.

Ultimately, Anthony joined one of my weekly group coaching sessions and he continues attending today. He has made remarkable strides as his internal story has changed and he has become more emotionally resilient; not perfect strides, but nevertheless remarkable. He is more relaxed, more able to be intimate with his wife, more able to tolerate the emotions of three young girls and more able to view his work and his appearance in a realistic framework. I don't mean to convey that his life is always in order, for it is not. Does he have times when he resorts to old ways of coping? Yes. Does he occasionally doubt himself as he has in the past? Yes. Does he, on occasions, withdraw from his wife instead of speaking and addressing conflict? Yes. But the difference today is that the old behaviors are truly old, like old records he can turn off as soon as he recognizes self-defeating patterns. In essence, the old hardwiring has been altered and new wiring has been created. There are still memories of certain behavioral patterns but new neurons, new brain chemistry and new enriched pathways of behavior have replaced them; the new aspects of Anthony's brain overpowers the old.

The Ultimate Transformation

How did these fundamental changes happen? They took place in the interpersonal world. The nature of our experiences in relationship with others has the potential to change our brains. High quality interactions can and will allow us to make permanent change for the better, and on a neurochemical level.

We are bombarded in the media by pharmaceutical advertising. We are told we can change the nature of our brains through certain medications. The method I am advocating in this book is more powerful and more permanent than any pharmaceutical change can ever produce. I am not anti-medication; I am simply judicious regarding their use. In our culture we have become quite lax in terms of thoughtfully examining the purpose and use of anti-depressants, anti-anxiety drugs and the like.

One fact supported by neuroscientists around the world is enormously encouraging: we can change the way we perceive and the way we feel about ourselves which ultimately causes neurochemical changes that make us healthier, more vibrant and alive; enabling us to think and live better.

In Anthony's case, our relationship gave him a new perspective regarding the possibilities that can occur between people. Oftentimes he would return the next week and say he knew he felt better when he left a session, but he wasn't always sure exactly what happened. "I think I have been feeling more comfortable in my own skin. For the first time in my life I feel understood; I am more acceptant of myself. I guess it's because I think you accept and know me. I don't think you agree with everything I say, but when you give me feedback, even if it's not complimentary, I don't worry about your intent. I know you're trying to help me. If your words hurt, I've come to realize they are words I need to hear in order to move forward in my life."

True happiness (love and respect, health and well-being) and personal and professional success comes when people have developed strong relationship skills, especially the capacity for empathy and lifestyles that promote sustainability. Performance addicts tend to rate status over character, achievement over relationships and productivity over healthy performance levels. The result of their drive to achieve is

to cover up vulnerability. They only recover when they learn in their hearts and in their heads that successful living begins with relationships. Interpersonal skills are indispensable to gaining what has been missing all their lives.

You may be wondering why “relationships,” “interpersonal skills,” and “empathy” are the primary solution to the problem. The ability to relate and communicate with others is necessary for every aspect of personal growth and development; relationships are the mirrors necessary to learning about ourselves. They help us face denied aspects of ourselves that we suppress or are unable to acknowledge. For the performance addict, it is essential to strengthen the underlying and fragile sense of self if thinking and living better are going to be possible, let alone sustainable, free of the compulsive and obsessive drives to keep performing. This requires a little help from your friends. It requires genuine perspective. You can be aware of “work life” balance and have a PhD in nutrition and exercise, but **if you are emotionally hardwired to incessantly perform for the wrong reasons, you’ll be constantly challenged.**

A resilient and optimistic sense of self can only be developed interpersonally. Reading self help books may help, but the solution is in developing empathic interpersonal skills in relationships with others in a group or community. With a stronger and clearer sense of self developed with others with similar goals, how you think and live improves as you get free of the irrational drives that keep you performing (**ruminating, comparing, obsessing, proving etc**) all the time. With appropriate feedback from others, you are likely to develop more genuine relating, especially if those around you are committed to truthful interchanges. When this is so, an emotionally fit and resilient sense of self develops.

Numerous studies have indicated that interpersonal skills are fundamental to success in diverse career paths. In the corporate world, successful executives have the ability to “sense others’ needs” and to “make others feel heard.” They don’t always agree with their employees but they attend to their employees. Essentially these executives have developed the capacity for empathy—the ability to understand and respond to the unique experiences of another. Sounds like a formula for good parenting too, doesn’t it?

Understanding the Unique Experiences of Another

Anthony was not accustomed to being listened to without judgment or fear of criticism, from his father in particular. Over the last few years I have realized that PA victims not only suffer from anxiety regarding their appearance and status, they are also people who generally are anxious in the presence of others. Many don’t show this vulnerability, for they have learned effective ways to mask their fear. I have worked with many clients who could deliver a speech while seemingly confident and at ease. But inside they were constantly scanning the audience in fear of spotting a person who looked bored or disapproving. Often this manifests as a low level anxiety that is always present, so that a person accommodates to this state of mind **like a person who gets accustomed to a low energy level without realizing they are burnt out.** Anthony, for instance, knew he always lived with a level of tension inside, but just assumed this was his makeup and was not likely to change.

His perspective changed as he participated in group sessions over a period of weeks. In his initial session he was anxious, as should be expected. However, he thought this was unusual, thinking other people probably coped better on their first try (a story he told himself.) Everyone smiled when he made a comment to this effect. They smiled because they all felt the same way when they began, and in each case they came to realize how little they understood about the human condition. Human beings often have anxiety when they try something new, especially when it involves revealing their true nature. **PA robs individuals of actually coming to understand what people tend to experience in any significant circumstance.** The PA sufferer’s preoccupation with their own performance deprives them of really

Copyright © 2010 All Rights Reserved Worldwide

The Curse of the Capable.com

seeing and understanding how other people actually feel. They are often rehearsing what to say rather than truly listening, again losing the opportunity to learn and observe. Their tendency to idealize is strong, as is the wish to excel. The belief that perfection actually exists drives them to do more and try harder. Ultimately, this process leads to the loss of energy and low mood, as each attempt at perfection usually results in that feeling of helplessness.

Beyond Inadequacy

PA drives a person to long to be great, to overcompensate for feelings of inadequacy. They experience a constant tension between these two extremes, most often not realizing the truth lies somewhere in the middle. PA individuals are not as great as they want to be, but conversely are not as bad as they think they are (even though this is not about the duality of “good or bad” which alone can cause distorted thinking.) But once this dilemma is understood, the work is to change inadequate feelings, assessing whether they are based in truth or are part of a story they have written in their minds over the years that prompt old emotional states.

Slowly but surely, Anthony became liberated from his condition as he came to realize from the truthful feedback of group members and myself what is myth and what is accurate about himself. **He essentially dropped the weight of his past** so that he could feel free once again, unencumbered by the false notions that had burdened him. It is not an easy process to have the courage to face oneself. We all have our shortcomings and our strengths but perfectionists have little tolerance for weaknesses. Still we all carry the memory of painful past experiences. Unfortunately for many, particularly those suffering from PA, these past experiences have become their identity. **Traumatic past experiences or significant emotional hurts usually stay that way in the mind. We maintain a fixed image of ourselves that was a consequence of the story our emotional pain created.** This recording can change when someone is in a group of their peers, where they reveal their vulnerabilities and strengths to obtain a deeper, more accurate view of themselves. This ultimately reveals a new, more understanding and supportive story.

We cannot arrive at self-knowledge without the participation of others, along with the reciprocal use of empathy. The power of empathy is in creating intimacy, self-understanding, and lasting love. A book by this title is the other recommended read to help you grasp the essential skill required to get free of the curse and its challenges. This will be experienced in the group process I refer to throughout this book.

It is quite likely that most people in our culture are performance addicts to a certain degree. There are healthy levels of comparison and competitiveness. It’s when achievement becomes your method of coping with the vulnerabilities of your past that performance addiction can rule your life.

Now I encourage you to take out your pen and answer the following question in the space provided:

What part of John Allen’s or Anthony’s story do you identify?

Does his life story cause any particular emotional reaction in you?

Journal:

Arthur P. Ciaramicoli, Ed.D., Ph.D.,



Arthur P. Ciaramicoli, Ed.D., Ph.D., is a licensed clinical psychologist who has been treating clients for more than 30 years. He is a member of the American Psychological Association and the Massachusetts Psychological Association. Currently in private practice, Dr. Ciaramicoli has been on the faculty of Harvard Medical School for several years, lecturer for the American Cancer Society, Chief Psychologist at Metrowest Medical Center, and director of the Metrowest Counseling Center and of the Alternative Medicine division of Metrowest Wellness Center in Framingham, Massachusetts. In addition to treating patients, Dr. Ciaramicoli has lectured at Harvard Health Services, Boston College Counseling Center, and the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore as well as being a consultant to several major corporations in the Boston area.

Dr. Ciaramicoli is also a seasoned media expert. He has appeared on CNN, CNNfn, Fox News Boston, Comcast TV, New England Cable News, Good Morning America Weekend, The O'Reilly Report, and other shows. He has been a weekly radio guest on Your Healthy Family on Sirius Satellite Radio and Holistic Health Today, and has been interviewed on The People's Pharmacy, The Gary Null Show, and more than two dozen other radio programs airing on NPR, XM Radio, and numerous AM and FM stations.

Dr. Ciaramicoli is the author of *The Curse of the Capable: The Hidden Challenges to a Balanced, Healthy, High Achieving Life* (Wiley, 2010), *Performance Addiction: The Dangerous New Syndrome and How to Stop It from Ruining Your Life* (Wiley 2004) and *The Power of Empathy: A Practical Guide to Creating Intimacy, Self-Understanding, and Lasting Love* (Dutton 2000), which is now published in 7 languages. His first book, *Treatment of Abuse and Addiction, A Holistic Approach* (Jason Aronson, 1997) was selected as Book of the Month by The Psychotherapy Book News. He is also the coauthor of *Beyond the Influence: Understanding and Defeating Alcoholism* (Bantam 2000). Dr. Ciaramicoli lives in a suburb of Boston with his wife and two daughters.

You can follow his daily insights at twitter.com/docapc.

<http://www.facebook.com/drarthurc> , <http://www.linkedin.com/in/drarthurciaramicoli>

John-Allen Mollenhauer



John-Allen Mollenhauer (aka “John Allen” or “JAM”) is the co-author of the book *The Curse of the Capable*, (Fall 2009) by Harvard Psychology Instructor Arthur P Ciaramicoli PhD. He is a leading [personal energy management](#) specialist, certified fitness, nutrition and lifestyle performance coach and founder of both [PerformanceLifestyle.com](#) and **The Lifestyle Coaching Center** in Livingston, NJ.

His work is with achievers (working parents, professionals, business owners and entrepreneurs) who learn how to increase and manage their personal energy better by getting free of the hidden challenges to a balanced, healthy high achieving life and improving their lifestyle.

Background:

John-Allen started his career at 19, launching Olympia Fitness Center and then a small chain of health clubs called Major League Fitness with the Strength Coach of the New York Mets.

He went on to work for and become a protégé of Tony Robbins, learning health and personal performance technologies. Although, much of what John Allen learned about lifestyle, he learned outside the health and personal development industries.

At the commercial inception of the Internet, John Allen held various positions in several start-up companies such as Design FX Interactive which launched South Jersey Online with Commerce Bank, then Bell Atlantic and ABC to create one of the first online communities ever. This 16 hour-a-day experience is where he realized that “lifestyle” was the greatest source of untapped potential.

He then went on to invest and help launch Ecademy.com, one of the largest business networks online today and one of the first social media companies on the Internet.

In 2001 he took a break from business ownership and helped transform Fortune 1000 companies at systems integrator Alliant Technologies. In 2003 he returned to the world of start ups and helped launch DrFuhrman Online; serving as the business manager for best selling nutritional excellence author, Joel Fuhrman M.D. whom he is a protégé of to this day.

In 2005 he launched the Nutrient Rich Revolution, the new trend in eating and the most successful way to eat for health, peak performance and natural weight loss, at [NutrientRich.com](#). And recently, he and his team are re launching [MyTrainer.com](#), for fitness and nutrition challenges online and via mobile devices.

Each step of the way, he has learned more and more about [the formula for balanced and healthy lifestyle performance](#). Today, John Allen he teaches PerformanceLifestyle to achievers worldwide. John-Allen is one of the leading authorities in Performance Lifestyle Training and

Coaching, helping an expanding achiever base optimize their lifestyles for better well being, health and success results.

He appears frequently on radio and television shows, including Comcast CN8, WTBQ, Air America, MoJo Radio, and others. He is a featured speaker at the Annual CoachVille Conference, the National Health Association Annual Conference, and the Monkey Bar Gym Fitness Chain. He speaks at corporations and business conferences including all types where listeners and attendees discover Performance Lifestyle. He is a regular contributor to the award winning Health Science Journal.

Follow John Allen on:

twitter.com/JohnAllenJAM

Facebook.com/John.Allen.Mollenhauer