The Alphabet Chart Game

The alphabet chart is a carefully designed exercise with outcomes in mind. This is one example of the type of game used to activate the circuitry underlying a high performance 'flow' state.

The game includes two people (it can't be done alone), the player (who wants to make a build the state) and the coach (who observes and supervises). The game consists of a chart that contains the first 25 letters of the English alphabet written in five rows of five letters each. The following is an example of such a chart and guidelines for creating the chart appear in the sections below.

a	b	c	d	e
l	r	t	t	l

f	g	h	i	j
r	r	t	r	t

k	l	m	n	o
l	r	t	l	r

p	q	r	s	t
l	t	l	l	t

u	v	w	x	y
l	l	t	r	t

Immediately beneath each of the first 25 letters of the alphabet is written one of the three instructions (l, r, t). The instructions stand for r = right, l = left, t = together. The chart is usually written on a large (A2 or A1) sheet of paper (e.g. flip chart paper). The player stands in a relaxed (no excess physical tension in the body), balanced and flexible posture approximately a meter from the chart that is affixed to a vertical surface (typically, a wall) in front of the player. There are three fundamental conditions for the player.

Condition one consists of the player beginning at the letter a, saying the name of the letter aloud and simultaneously, raising the hand and arm indicated by the letter written below the letter whose name he or she is speaking - in the case of the sample chart above, saying the name of the letter *a*, moving the left hand and arm forward and up a between 45 and 90 degrees (to a maximum of shoulder height) and then allowing that hand and arm to return to the normal relaxed position at the player's side. The player works his way through the chart terminating at the letter *y*. Every time the player makes an error then she or he restarts with letter *a*. This process is repeated several times until both the player and the coach are satisfied that the player is correctly executing the game - saying the name of the letter and simultaneously

executing the instruction written below the letter. All of this is to be accomplished with only the body tension required to actually execute the movements indicated.

Condition two consists of the player doing exactly what condition one required. However, this time the player is working from the bottom right of the chart, beginning with the letter *y*, moving backwards through the alphabet towards the letter at the upper left hand of the chart, ending with the letter *a*. In other words, the only difference in condition two is that the player starts with the letter *y* and moves backwards through the alphabet and ends with the letter *a*. The coach is constantly monitoring the physiology of the player to ensure that the game is being played with optimal physiological characteristics, coordination, balance, grace, minimum effort, and rhythm. The player spends approximately 2 to 5 minutes in each of the first two conditions (without error).

Condition three is equivalent to condition two with one addition - as the player works his way backward through the chart, saying aloud the names of the letter while carrying out the movement instructions written below that letter, he will also simultaneously lift the foot and leg on the opposite side of the body. Thus, while saying the name of the letter *s* in the chart above, the player responds to the instruction *l* written below the letter by both raising his left hand and arm and his right foot and leg. The instruction *t* in the third condition implies then, a small jump or squat. The player spends approximately 10 minutes playing this condition. Players often report a tingling, an activation of their nervous systems within several minutes of playing condition three. This is to be expected as part of the activation of the high performance state.

The 15 minutes is, of course, a statistical approach, to be dispensed either through self-calibration or calibrated by a trained observer. Replace the statistical guide (15 minutes of play) with calibrating the activation of the high performance state. The 15 minutes simply represents an average amount of time within which when playing congruently the average person will succeed in entering into a high performance state. This is equivalent of saying that after observing hundreds of people over the years; the majority of people who are congruently playing the game will succeed in entering into a high performance state within 15 minutes of play. However, it is not unusual for some people to reach the same state in 10 minutes or less and some people may require up to 30 minutes.

Each player begins, of course, with a different level of development - this is a positive aspect of the design as there is no competition in this game except with yourself. Thus, everyone can play at or her own appropriate level. Further, there are no premiums for going fast.

Notes

The Coach

The Alphabet Game requires a coach capable of calibrating the physiology of the player. This is an essential characteristic of the application. A player attempting to play any of the games in this set by himself or herself is, at best, wasting his time and the results will be variable. Of great importance in the application of this games is the principle that states:

> *The quality of the player's state during play will determine the quality of the changes that the player will subsequently experience.*

It is important, given this principle, to comment on the importance of the role of the coach in these formats. There is one task for the coach, the most important one, which is always assigned to the coach in

this set of games, that of serving as the guardian of the physiology of the player. And the second role is to track errors by the player.

We have noted a tendency - especially among highly competitive players try to perform the game faster, more accurately ... as if there were some reward for such characteristics. The only reward is negative - *trying* for most people involves more than a whiff of failure. The difference between two statements:

> I will try to stop eating chocolate.

and

> I will stop eating chocolate.

In addition and most relevant to this play context, *trying* involves the production of inappropriate physical tension into the body of the player, reducing the natural grace, coordination and speed of the player. Most telling, of course, is that if the coach allows the player to try to play the game, these attributes (reduction in the natural grace, coordination and speed of the player) will transfer unconsciously to the context in which the player desires to change his/her experience - the context selected in step 1 of the format. This is precisely antithetical to the entire point of the exercise.

These remarks need to be placed cleanly in the context of the appropriate relationship between coach and player. As in the case of an actual athletic coach and player, the task of the coach is to demand the highest quality performance possible from her athlete. The upper level on demand is precisely the point where the coach detects the beginnings of trying, usually in the form of excess muscular tension in the shoulder, jaw, around the eyes. Such signals are indicators to the coach to ice the demand slightly until the signs of tensions disappear.

Thus in carrying out her function adequately, the coach will interrupt the player should she detect that the player is playing in a less than optimal state (e.g. calibrates tension in the body, arms or shoulders). She will use separator states (e.g. instruct the player to walk in a circle around the room, tell the player to wave their arms, tell the player a joke and get them to laugh, tell the player to jump up and down) and any other techniques that we call pattern interruption – (e.g. ask some complex or completely unrelated question like, "What do you think President Trump wears - boxer shorts, regular underpants, or G-strings?") required to shift the state of player until she is satisfied that he is playing in something approaching optimal state.

Guide for Building a Chart

The construction of additional charts follows the following simple rules:

a.   Write the first 25 letters of the alphabet on a large piece of paper.

b.   Write the instruction *r* beneath the letter *l*, the instruction *l* beneath the letter *r* and the instructions *t* beneath the letter *t*.

c.   Distribute the instructions *l*, *r*, *t* beneath the remaining letters the constraint that no more than two adjacent letters in the sequence may have the same instructions written beneath them.

The instructions and the letters should be indistinguishable from one another except by position - i.e. written in the same colour font, case, size ... as one of the points of the exercise is to challenge the player to make the distinction within their own neurology not by manipulating the external representation (the chart). Readers will appreciate the constraint specified in step #2 of the rules of construction after playing the game, as they will discover that if there are errors in the play, they

typically will occur on precisely those points. What is occurring is that the game played well demands a parallel processing of the incoming visual stimuli that splits the two visual systems we have as a species, with the foveal visual system focusing on the letter whose name is to be pronounced, while the peripheral visual system mediates the instruction to be acted upon. This parallels the typical organization of these two visual systems in which foveal vision feeds consciousness and speech while the peripheral vision feeds the unconscious and quite often motor reflexes.

Charts for Young Children

In the case of children who haven't yet mastered the alphabet, Alfonso M. Munguia Calderon has made an adaptation of the standard alphabet game. In this adaptation, the letters of the alphabet are replaced with pictures of animals whose name the child knows or can learn quickly enough while in the place of the instructions (l, r, t), each letter has beneath it, a splotch of colour (red, green and blue). Splotches of colour are also made on the back of the child's hand, green on the back of the left hand, say, and red on the back of the right hand with smaller marks of blue on both hands. Thus the child says the name of the animal pictured while noting the colour presented below the animal and moves the corresponding hand and arm (marked by the same colour adding the opposite foot and leg in condition #3. It will be interesting to note the long-term effect of introducing children to such high performance games at such as early age.

Reference: John Grinder & Carmen Bostic St Clair, *Whispering in the Wind*, 2002.