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When My Anxiety is High and I Need to Put Things into Perspective...

By **Christal Peterson**
UCF Forum columnist
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"You've got to stay in your lane."

Close eyes.

"Focus on what you have to do and not on what everyone else is doing."

Take deep breath.

"You've got to have tunnel vision, if you want to be great."

Exhale.

"Now. Down, set...and pop!"

After my UCF track career, these are some of the reminders I still focus on from time to time since hanging up my spikes to pursue a different career route. I recall those reminders when my anxiety is high and I need to put things into perspective. Ask those people you consider successful, and their usual message is: Block out all distractions when in the pursuit of a goal.

When you're an athlete, acquiring tunnel vision is a skill that must be constantly mastered because one slip and it could be game over for you or your team. So what goal is your vision focused on?

Tunnel vision can benefit everyone in the right situations.

Focus on the task at hand and everything will take care itself, right? Sounds easy enough.

But there's always distractions to plague your vision, such as staying up too late, partying, eating unhealthy foods, paying no attention to the controllable things that can affect your performance on the field.

Two years after transitioning out of athletics, I realize that my goal now at the end of the tunnel isn't as clear and the "distractions" aren't as obvious or as easy to fix as a simple switch of my diet.

I have been fortunate at UCF to be part of the DeVos Sport Business Management Program, athletics and the President's Leadership Council. I feel like I've personally come a long way.

I've constantly pushed myself through each application process because I thought I could add value to these organizations. My tunnel vision now is serving the transformation of a student-athlete through personal and professional development.

Through my tunnel vision I have acquired the urge to want to gain more knowledge, not only from an athletic point of view, but from a university involvement to help me achieve my goal. I realize I have been given numerous opportunities, to educate those about the side of athletics the camera doesn't always show, to hang with kids at the Florida Hospital for Children, to help a student-athlete land a job or internship post-collegiate career. I've gotten to be a part of those things and share with others about how stepping outside of ourselves and being appreciative of the lane that has been assigned to us can silence the self-doubt we all face when approaching new situations or meeting new people.

Sometimes those self-doubts emerge after meeting new colleagues: "Hey, my name is so-and-so and I am the president of this big-time organization on campus. (My *self-doubt* starts creeping in.) "I am involved with this and that, where I organize this type of event for these types of people." (*Fear.*) "Upon completion of the program, I plan on being the owner of this professional team." (*Insecurity.*) Accolade after accolade. Goals after goals. The words would crank away and seemingly minimize how little I thought I was doing now to achieve my end goals in life. I start to think about other missed opportunities that I could have been involved in along my journey.

Then it's my turn in the introduction.

"Hello, my name is Christal Peterson and I am..." (*Maybe I should have studied harder, maybe I could've been the president of an organization.*) "...in the DeVos Sport Business Management Program." (*Maybe I don't belong here. This is an elite group.*) "And I am also the graduate assistant of the Student-Athlete Welfare and Development Office for UCF Athletics." (*Just cut my losses now.*)

All of these things go through my head every time an introduction is made, but then usually something happens towards the end of my wrap-up that catches attention.

Their response is something like: “Oh cool! That’s amazing! So what is it that you exactly do?” or “I really didn’t know that. I just learned something new!” or “I would have never known any of that if it were not for you. I can tell that you must really love what you do.”

After compliments and questions, my doubts and insecurities start falling by the wayside, and what arises in their place are words like *grateful, pride and secure*.

And just like that, things seem to click.

It’s so easy to be distracted by those around us who seem to have it all together, when the feelings likely may be vice versa.

So again, I say, stay in your lane and hone in on your tunnel vision because no one can do what you do. Don’t downplay your impact.

We are all constantly building and constantly evolving into better versions of ourselves. It’s important that we all check ourselves with methods or statistics that help keep us focused when the distractions try to blur our visual scope.

Whenever I am feeling overwhelmed with self-doubt, anxiety or just confused as to why I feel like I am constantly playing catch-up in comparison with those around me, I just simply close my eyes and remember:

Down.

Take a deep breath.

Set.

Exhale.

And pop!

Christal Peterson is a graduate student in UCF’s DeVos Sport Business Management Program and a member of the President’s Leadership Council. She can be reached at chhpeterson@knights.ucf.edu.