



AWARENESS BUILDING

WHAT WE ARE AWARE OF....WE CAN CONTROL. WHAT WE ARE UNAWARE OF...WILL CONTROL US – Ken Ravizza

In life and sport, your ability to recognize when you are at your best physically, mentally and emotionally is crucial to staying in control of your performance. Not only is it important to know what your ideal mindset is, but it is also *important to be able to recognize when you are not in your optimal frame of mind and are beginning to lose control*. Being able to recognize this can keep you playing in proper thinking rather than being played by your emotions.

The goal IS NOT to avoid stress or to never lose control. These are many times unavoidable as part of being human. The goal instead, is to be able to recognize when we are not in control and have routines in place to get us back to being in control. The quicker we recognize we are losing control, the quicker we can get back to being in control.

Brian Cain and Dr. Ken Ravizza talk about the **Stop Light System**. Green, yellow and red lights are a simple and effective way to help athletes FIRST *recognize* where they are at (mentally/physically), SECOND *release* whatever may be hindering them (if anything), and THIRD *refocus* on what is most important in that moment.

Green lights (positive, confident, encouraging) are what we experience when we are in control and playing at our best and enjoying the game the most. We want to stay in this zone as much as possible. Feelings characteristic of the Green Light zone are calm, relaxed, having controlled aggression when needed, warrior mentality, body feeling good. Things an athlete in green lights might say, “I am going to crush this ball,” “I am fast, I am smooth, I’m going to win this race,” “That was a good swing, you are about to get another good pitch,” or “I won’t let you score a point all day on me!” Green Light mentality is where athletes are at their best. This mentality is very planned and is achievable for an entire game when athletes choose to train their minds to do so despite the circumstances.

Yellow Lights (hopeful, uncertain, timid, frustration, anxious, overexcited) are what athletes experience when something negative or over-stimulating happens or is about to happen that can cause the athlete to begin to lose control and abandon green mentality. If you do not recognize the slippery slope of your yellow lights, (ie: a bad referee call, an opponent talking trash, an overbearing parent yelling from the stands, coming up with the bases loaded with less than two outs) you could be speeding up into Red Lights.

Red lights (destructive thoughts/feelings, defeating, fearful, loss of hope, extreme excitement) are a sign that there is a total loss of control which typically entails the athlete playing at their worst. This is when the most self-defeating behaviors occur and usually evidence themselves in athletes trying too hard (performance), and saying “I have to do well here” [external pressure] versus “I *want to do well here.*” [internal desire]. Other things associated with red lights are a fast heart rate, heavy/fast breathing, poor body language, quick movements, and muscle tension).

Staying in green lights **first** takes an understanding of what green looks, feels, and sounds like [self-talk]. It is much easier to know how to stay in or get back to green if you know what it looks like. **Secondly**, and just as important is knowing when *you are not in* green and may be heading towards yellow or red. **Thirdly**, the best way to check in with yourself is to establish routines that get you back to the present, and provide a mental checklist for getting you back to playing your sport one play or pitch at a time. These routines often start with a nice deep breathe in through the nose and deep into the belly, holding, then releasing through a relaxed exhale out of the mouth nice and slow as the athlete uses cue words to encourage themselves in preparation for the next play.

Some of the best ways to **getting back to green**:

- Establishing routines that have ways to build confidence, calm you down, or pump you back up depending on the sport needs.
- Positive body language, GET BIG! Allows you to *act your way into feeling confident.*
- Positive self-talk, “Who cares, new moment!”
- Also asking yourself if what just happened is in or outside your control.
- Encouraging a teammate gives them the encouragement they need while instilling trust in you that you can rely on them.

These are just a few ways to getting back to green. Each individual athlete must know what their green, yellow, and red lights are for their particular sport and (1) Recognize which light they are playing in, (2) RELEASE what just happened in order to get back to green, and (3) REFOCUS on competing in a green light mentality on this next play/pitch.

Please see the attached sheet with the stop light task and begin to build routines pre-game, during the game, and post-game that help you to play at your best when you need it the most.

On the Stoplight below, fill out when, how you feel, and what you say or are thinking in each of the different ‘lights.’ Then using your own strategies or those above, fill out ways to get back to green for yellow and red lights.



