

Optimism its the best
Way to see life

CONCENTRATION AND FOCUS SKILLS

Dr. John Lubker

The Graduate School

University of Notre Dame

WORKSHOP GOALS

- What is concentration and focus
 - Become more self-aware of own traps and triggers
 - How to better manage distractions
 - Develop a refocusing plans; routines
-

What does “concentration” mean?

What signals good concentration?

Why do we lose it?

CONCENTRATION

The ability to direct one's full attention to appropriate cues in the present task instead of being controlled by irrelevant external and internal stimuli

Almost every external event will trigger a cognitive and emotional shift in the performer and a corresponding change in the response of the body

CONCENTRATION CHARACTERISTICS

CONCENTRATION

```
graph TD; A[CONCENTRATION] --- B[Attentional Capacity]; A --- C[Attentional Readiness]; A --- D[Attentional Selectivity];
```

Attentional
Capacity

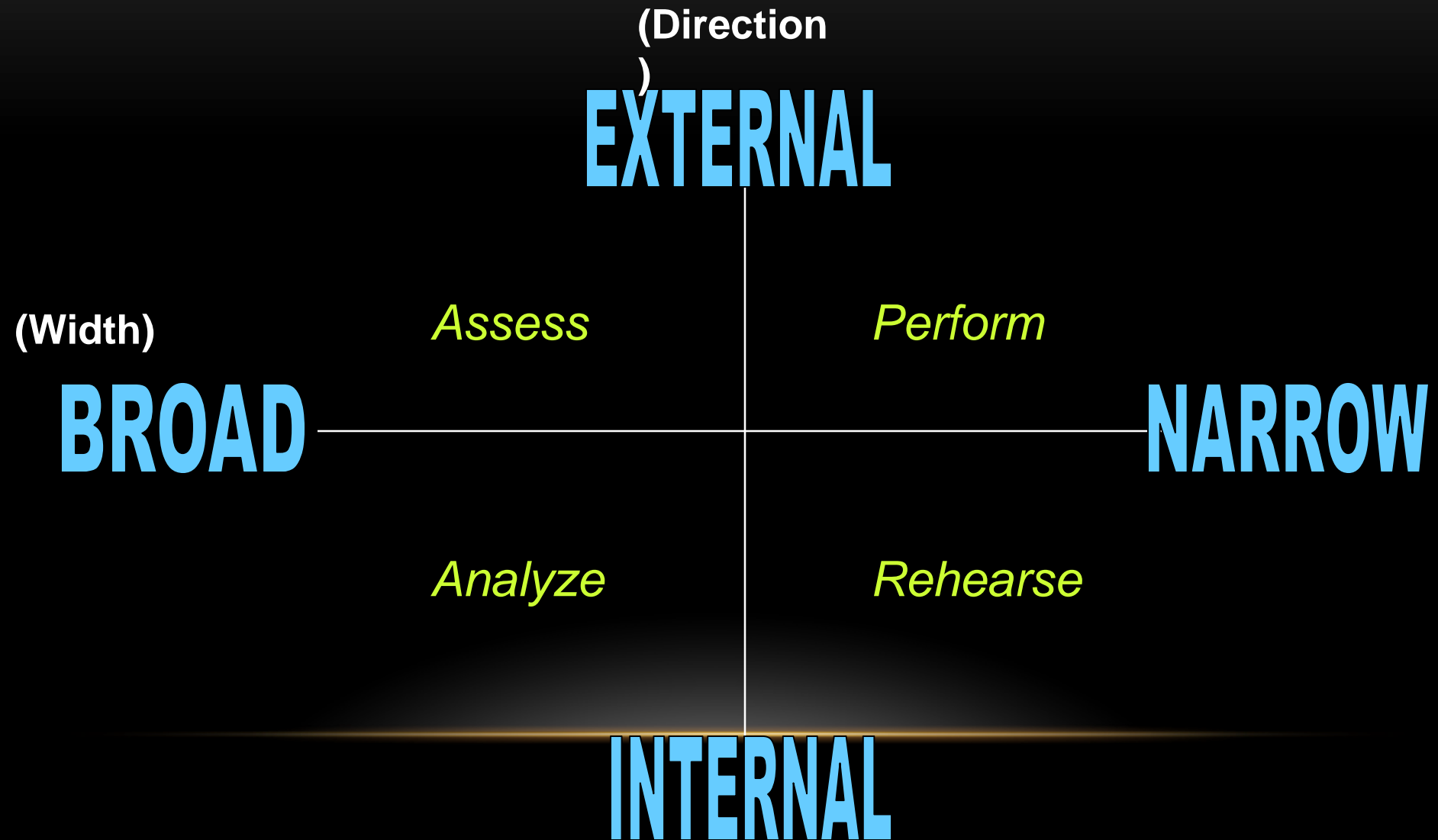
Attentional
Readiness

Attentional
Selectivity

Lost Concentration...When?

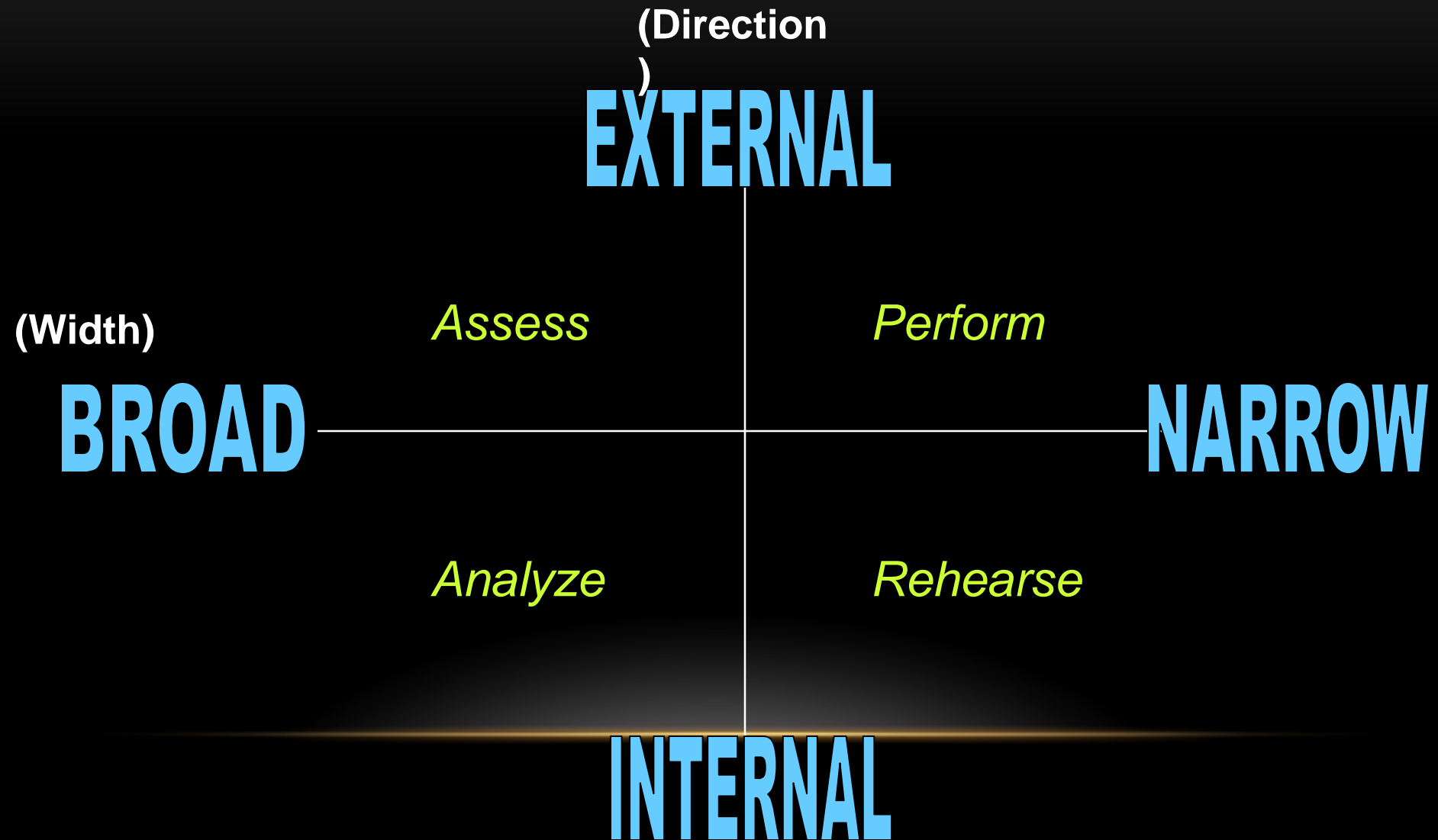
- Attention to irrelevant cues
- Left the here and now
 - i.e. thinking of past or future outcome
- Inappropriate divided attention
 - Ex.: Can't remember name after introduction because also focusing on making a good impression
- Become aware of gaps in experience
 - Ex.: Reading book chapter and pages later become "alert" and don't know what was read
- Performance level suffering (Leading a meeting, mentoring)
 - Not always, but more often than not

Types of Attentional Focus



Counting Passes

Types of Attentional Focus



Types of Concentration

EXTERNAL

Assess

Moderating a discussion
Presenting research

Perform

Solving an equation
Reading in noisy setting

Analyze

Planning essay answer
Clinician forming a diagnosis

Rehearse

Monitor neck and shoulder tension
Deep breath to relax
Mentally rehearse a skill
Memorize a fact

INTERNAL

BROAD

NARROW

QUESTIONS?

- Many students tend to think that distractions and obstacles hurt their performance
 - What actually hurts their performance is how/where they choose to focus when distractions and obstacles occur
-

CONCENTRATION PROBLEMS

(OR SITUATIONS THAT MAY REQUIRE REFOCUSING)

- After mistakes
 - When stressed out
 - When not sufficiently motivated
 - When over-motivated
 - Pre-event thoughts
 - Non-ideal conditions
 - Delays
 - Overwhelmed with distractions
 - Poor performance at the beginning of event
 - Criticism from advisor or peer
 - Mind wandering
 - Doubt own ability
-

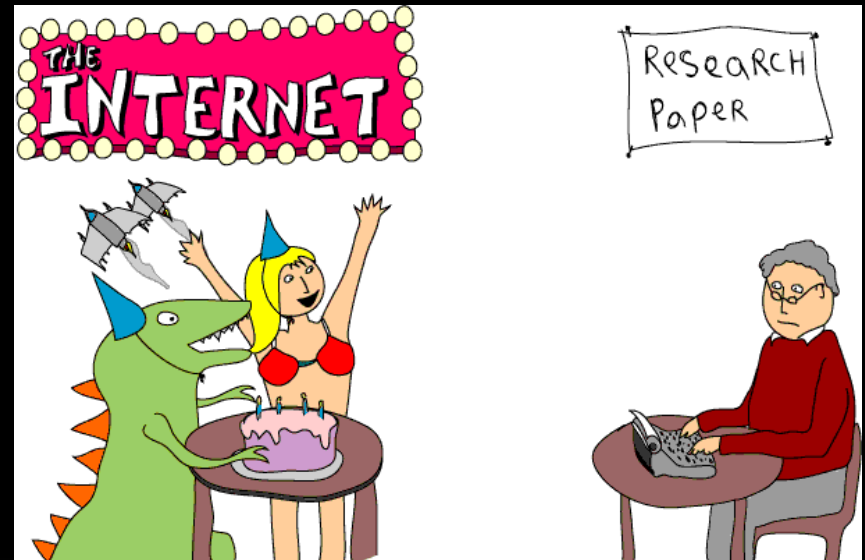
ATTENTIONAL PROBLEMS?

INTERNAL DISTRACTERS:

Within ourselves, thoughts, worries, concerns, stress

EXTERNAL DISTRACTERS:

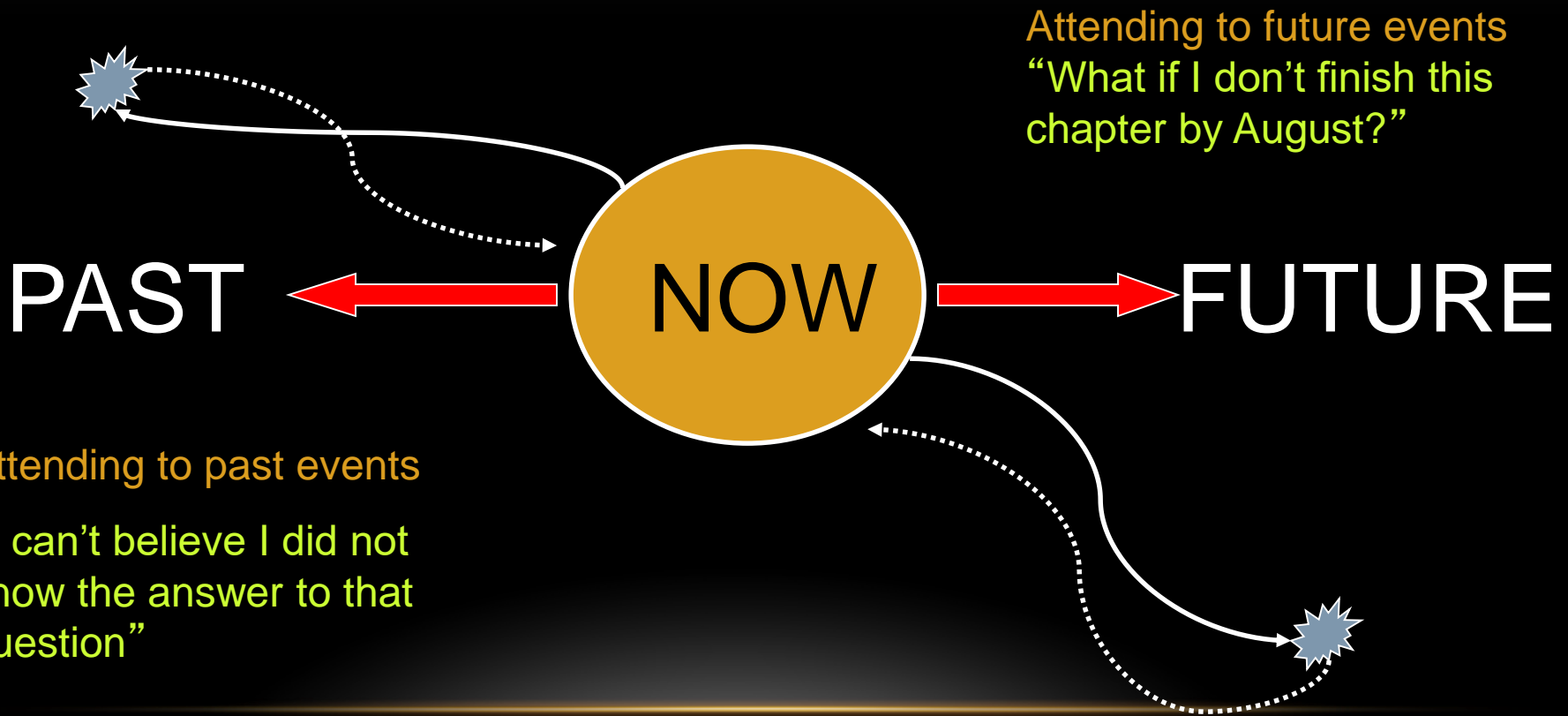
Stimuli from the environment



FOCUS GRID!

- The goal is to find as many consecutive numbers as possible
 - You have 30sec to find as many consecutive numbers as you can
 - Start with the number _____
 - GO!
-

LOST CONCENTRATION



HOW DO WE STAY IN THE PRESENT?

- Focusing can be learned
- Mental skills, like physical skills, must be practiced

ATTENTIONAL SELECTIVITY PROBLEMS

- Three common problems
 - Selecting the wrong focus of attention
 - Becoming distracted, or allowing one's focus to drift
 - Becoming stuck in one focus and unable to shift attention when needed
-

QUESTIONS?

STRATEGIES FOR EXTERNAL DISTRACTIONS

Simulated Performance Experiences

- Try to make practices as much like performance as possible
- Enables you to become so familiar with the stimuli associated with your task that they are no longer distracting
- Over-train for worst case scenarios
 - Distracting noise into the room
 - Performing with ½ time
 - Technology issues; Plan B
 - Example: Crying baby

EXTERNAL (CONT.)

- **Mental Rehearsal**

- Not reacting to purposely induced external distractions
- One student mentally rehearses a scenario while the other attempts to distract the performer
 - Then rates his/her achieved concentration
- Helps you screen out distractions by building a “wall” around you or by accepting the distraction but not judging it

STRATEGIES FOR INTERNAL DISTRACTIONS

- **Attentional Cues and Triggers**
 - Use verbal and kinesthetic cues
 - Focus your concentration and to refocus once it has been lost
 - Cues must focus on
 - positives rather than negatives
 - the present rather than the past or future
 - the process rather than the outcome
 - Must be individualized

STRATEGIES FOR INTERNAL DISTRACTIONS

- **TIC-TOC for self-talk**
 - Use the words TIC-TOC to trigger a response
 - TIC = any self-statements or thoughts that are irrelevant to the immediate task
 - TOC = switching to a task relevant focus
 - Strategy entails becoming aware of TICs and immediately making them TOCs
-

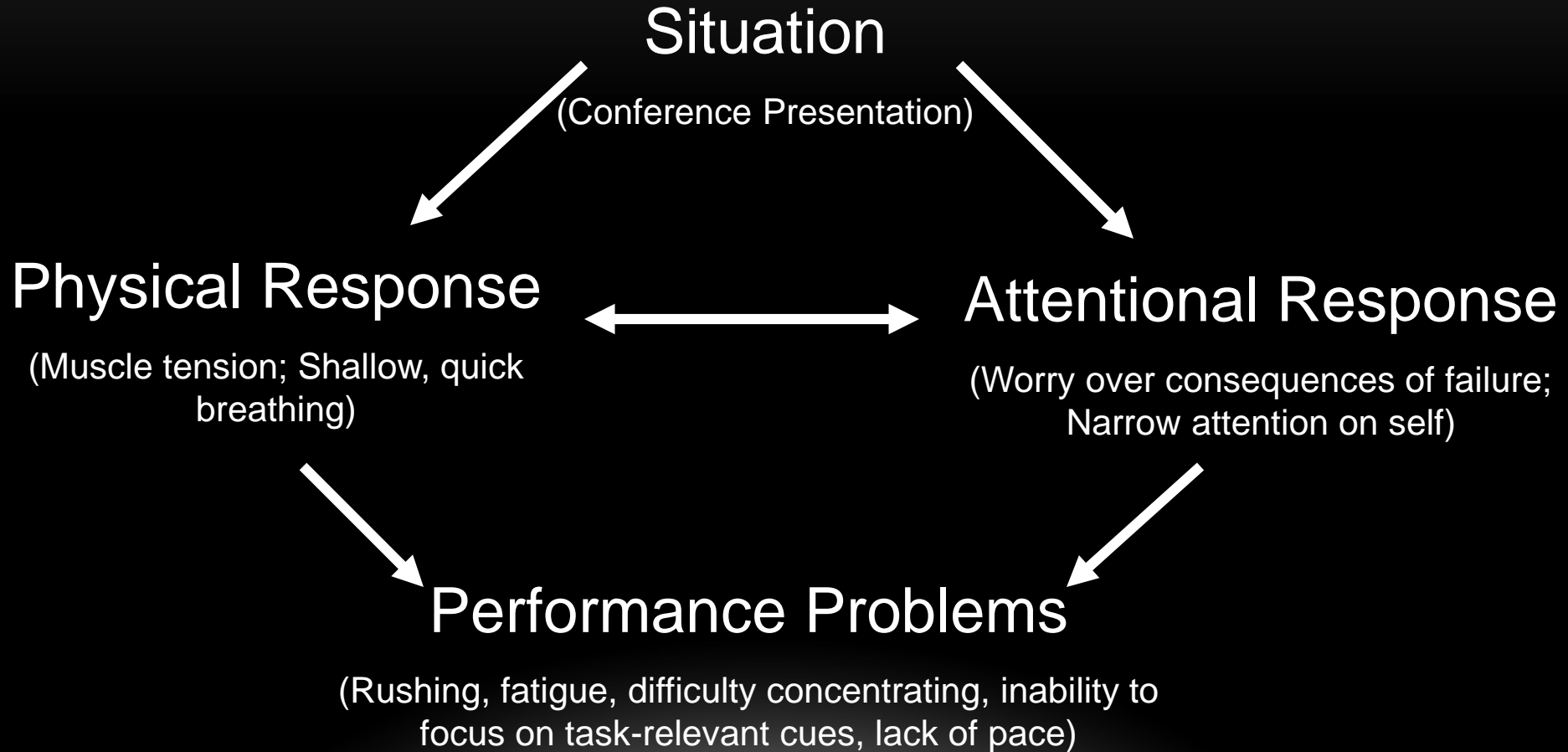
INTERNAL (CONT.)

- **Turning Failure into Success**
 - Mentally rehearse successful performance after a failure/error
 - Dwelling on the failure is even more harmful than making a performance error
 - Use positive self-talk to refocus attention and address why mistake occurred
 - **Use of Biofeedback**
 - Monitors physiological relaxation
-

FOCUSING/REFOCUSING PLAN

Distractions	Where Your Focus Should Be	Coping Response	Attentional Cue
Negative thoughts and self-doubts stemming from last meeting w/ advisor	Positive thoughts Present Moment Confidence	Thought-stopping technique, replace with positive self-talk	Positive imagery or statement of successful performance

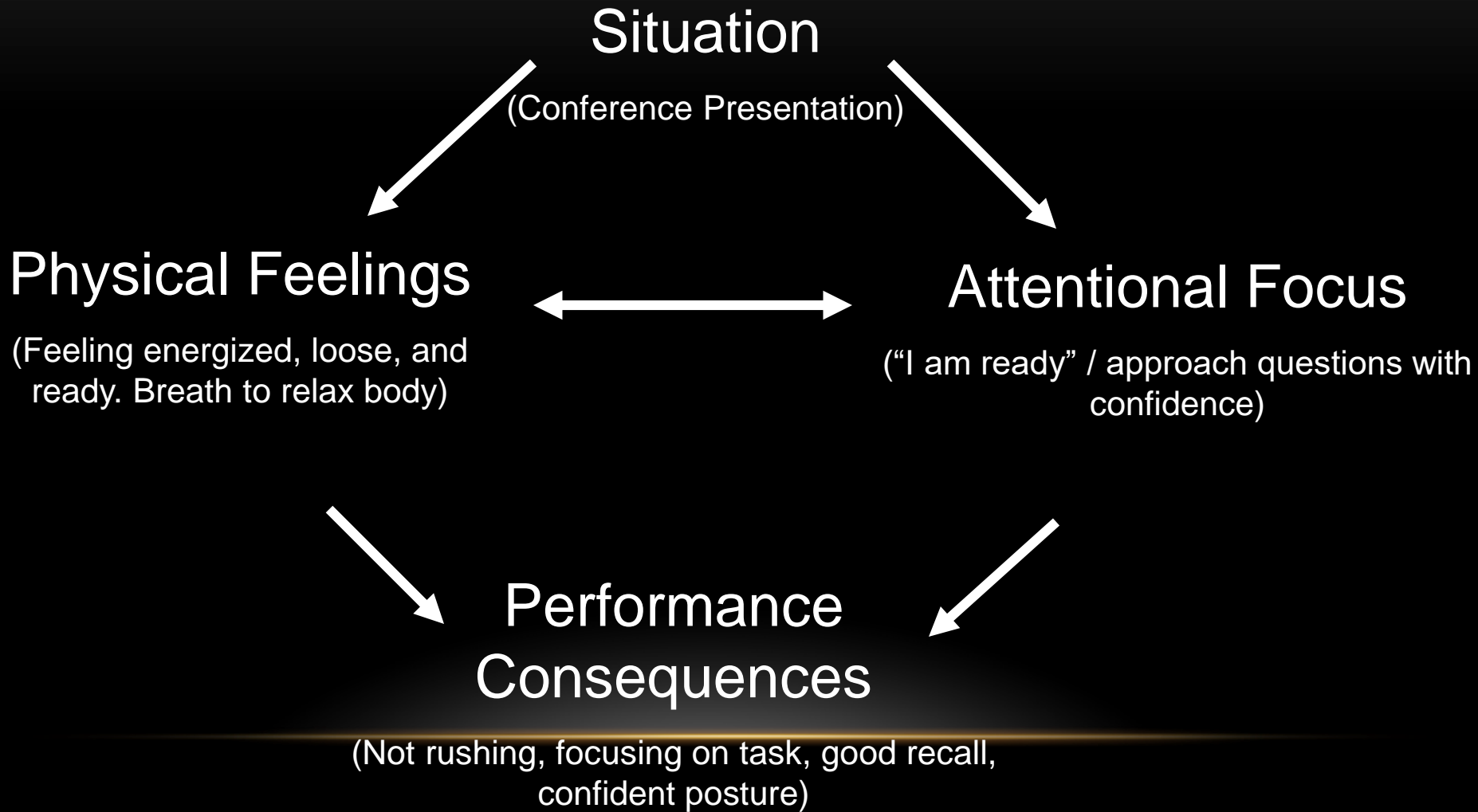
ROUTINES: HOW PHYSICAL TENSION & ATTENTIONAL DISTRACTION HURT PERFORMANCE



ROUTINES (GUIDELINES)

- Create physical and mental feelings that you want
 - Develop a rhythm
 - Rehearse your performance
 - Develop your “lock-in” cue
-

Using a routine



TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- The 3 Ps of Proper Focus
 - Present
 - Positive
 - Process
-

84	27	51	78	59	52	13	85	61	55
28	60	92	04	97	90	31	57	29	33
32	96	65	39	80	77	49	86	18	70
76	87	71	95	98	81	01	46	88	00
48	82	89	47	35	17	10	42	62	34
44	67	93	11	07	43	72	94	69	56
53	79	05	22	54	74	58	14	91	02
06	68	99	75	26	15	41	66	20	40
50	09	64	08	38	30	36	45	83	24
03	73	21	23	16	37	25	19	12	63