The importance of feeling Mentally Tough



I remember some years ago watching Roger Federer lose the first two sets of a grand slam and then win the remaining three.

The commentators were all talking about how he showed great Mental Toughness to achieve such an amazing comeback.

Was it great Mental Toughness, or did he just play really, really badly during the first two sets and then play really, really, well during the final three sets.

What did the commentators see to come to the conclusion that it was Mental Toughness? He was focused and concentrated, he looked confident & and in control and he was jumping in the air and executing perfectly sliced, backhand smashes; but is that Mental Toughness?

Mental Toughness is not something you can see; it is a psychological concept made up from "constructs" – none of which you can actually see.

Mental Toughness is, in essence, an attitude; it is something internal, something that is in our thoughts. The behaviours that we associate with people who have high Mental Toughness are the outcomes, or the results of Mental Toughness; they are not Mental Toughness itself – our actions are how we translate what is in our internal world into our external world

Those with high Mental Toughness have that little voice in the head telling them; “you can make a difference”, “you know what you are talking about”, “you can stay the distance”, etc.

Those with lower Mental Toughness have that little voice in the head telling them; “maybe this is not for you”, “the others probably know better than you”, “you’ve gone far enough”, etc.

Developing your Mental Toughness is about cultivating your “positive” little voice and this is not simply by standing in front of the mirror; telling yourself “you are great”, “you can do it”, “don’t be afraid” and suchlike.

There is a constant flow between our internal world and our external world, our positive voice will help us to take on a difficult challenge; overcoming the difficult challenge will reinforce the positive voice – even failure, if we can learn from it, will reinforce the positive voice.

One of keys, at least for me, in developing one’s Mental Toughness is identifying what it feels like to be mentally tough; what the mentally tough do and say is relatively easy to get a handle on – understanding what they are feeling is something else.

Do they feel omnipotent, invincible, charismatic and daring? Do they feel vulnerable, cautious, ordinary and lucky?

I’m not a Roger Federer but here are some things that I feel when faced with a challenge:

Although I feel a little uncertain, I feel willing to have a go and curious as to what I might learn.

I feel as though I have a choice, I don’t have to take on the challenge, it’s my choice to take it or not; if I take it, it’s because I feel I can make a difference

I feel comfortable when it becomes uncomfortable, I feel

connected and able to both support my arguments and listen to the arguments of others.

I feel in the flow, concentrated on what is happening here & now and feel that I can contribute to achieving something.

How do you feel when faced with a challenge?