



Formula for Success

Host: Rebecca Gillett, MS OTR/L

Guest: Jacques Dallaire, PhD

Setting goals is easy — achieving them is another matter. Health goals are just another part of living well with arthritis, but their importance should not be overlooked. Whether you want to achieve remission, move more, eat better, improve your mood or simply get a good night's sleep, identifying the obstacles and learning how to avoid self-sabotage are just a few factors in your formula for success.

In this episode, professional performance coach, Dr. Jacques Dallaire, PhD, shares a unique approach to setting and achieving any goal. It all starts with a simple formula he says is foolproof: $A \times B = R$. Tune in and read on to learn more.

Jacques Dallaire, PhD

Dr. Jacques Dallaire, PhD, is a performance specialist with a Doctorate in Exercise Physiology from the University of Alberta, Canada. He taught at McGill University in Montreal before assuming the role of Manager of Science and Medicine Programs at Sport Canada (a division of the Canadian Government's Ministry of Fitness and Amateur Sport), where he was responsible for the management of the Sport Science Support Program, which provided funding to more than 40 National Sport Governing Bodies.

Over the past 50 years, Dr. Dallaire has worked with thousands of individuals including elite athletes as well as leaders from law enforcement, the entertainment world and the business community. Dr. Dallaire was also diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis eight years ago.

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PODCAST OPEN:

You're listening to the Live Yes! With Arthritis podcast, created by the Arthritis Foundation to help people with arthritis — and the people who love them — live their best lives. If you're dealing with chronic pain, this podcast is for you. You may have arthritis, but it doesn't have you. Here, learn how you can take control. Our host is Rebecca Gillett, an arthritis patient and occupational therapist, who is joined by others to help you live your Yes.

MUSIC BRIDGE

Rebecca Gillett:

Thanks for joining us on the Live Yes! With Arthritis podcast. We all know that when you're managing a lifelong chronic disease, setting goals is kind of important to do. Especially when you have arthritis, because it's like being on a roller coaster. We have good times and bad times, but there are things that we can do to try to help manage our arthritis, which I learned the hard way.

So, on today's episode, I'm excited to have someone talk to us about how to be more successful in managing our arthritis. In a previous episode, we had NASCAR driver and arthritis patient Natalie Decker, and she mentioned her performance coach, Jacques Dallaire, who she swears by. And when she shared her formula for success that she learned from Jacques, $A \times B = R$, I really took that home with me.

It was a challenging year for me last year, going through a lot of different things personally and professionally. And this was a great way for me to get a different perspective on what I can control and what I can't, to kind of reduce my anxiety and my stress levels. But really, just manage the things that are most important in life: my health, my family and myself.

I'm so excited that today we actually are able to have Jacques Dallaire, Natalie's performance coach, join us on this episode. He is a performance specialist with a doctorate in exercise physiology from the University of Alberta, Canada. He taught at McGill University in Montreal before assuming the role of manager of science and medicine programs at Sport Canada, where he was responsible for the management of the Sport Science Support Program, which provided funding to more than 40 national sport governing bodies. Over the past 50 years, Dr. Dallaire has worked with



thousands of individuals, including elite athletes like Natalie, as well as leaders from law enforcement, the entertainment world and the business community.

He was also diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis eight years ago. So, he knows what all of us in our community deal with. Welcome to the podcast, Jacques.

Jacques Dallaire:

Well, thank you very much for inviting me, Rebecca.

Rebecca:

During our podcast with Natalie, she's like, "OK, so this is what I do. I have this amazing performance coach who I work with and he actually has RA." We're so excited that you could join us.

Jacques:

My work in the high-performance world is really about helping people to understand how the way they mentally sabotage themselves and hurt their ability to perform as opposed to optimizing their performance. I really try to educate them, to help them to understand how the way they think influences how they feel, which influences how they behave, which ultimately influences how they perform. But the stuff that I talk about is relevant to everybody.

Rebecca:

Right.

Jacques:

It doesn't matter what culture, language, gender, job or age, that simple equation Natalie told you — that $A \times B = \text{Results}$ — I have found to be the fundamental explanation for how people mentally sabotage their own performance. Now, I've never met anybody in 50 years who says to me, "I'm not interested in good results. I'd actually like to be a loser. I'm hoping that I failed this weekend. Can you show me how to suck at this thing I'm about to do? Cause I'd really like to suck at it." No one has ever said that.

Rebecca:

Right. (laughs)

Jacques:



Obviously, winning is a lot better than losing, but being successful is a lot more than winning. And the key is to understand what gets in the way of us bringing the best version of ourselves to everything that we do. And this simple equation, $A \times B = \text{Results}$, encapsulates how people mentally sabotage themselves. And I have found it to be fundamentally true, universally applicable, and in fact, infallible.

The two parameters are A and B. A represents the things I can control. B, on the other hand, represents those things by definition that I can't control. And isn't it true that the results we accomplish in life are a product of what we bring to the moments of our performance, influenced by things we can't control? Sometimes they're B minus and we're the bug. Sometimes they're B plus, and we're the windshield. How do we make results in our life be as good as they can possibly be?

Rebecca:

How would someone with any type of arthritis apply this way of thinking to managing their arthritis?

Jacques:

There are a lot of things we can control as we navigate this course. We can control our sleep habits. We can control our nutritional habits. We can control our activity patterns. And we can actually control the mindset we choose to adopt in the face of the situation that we're facing when we have arthritis. And the mindset is critically important in controlling the response and the emotional response, and even the pain response we have.

Rebecca:

I think it took me a few years until somebody pointed it out to me that there are some things that you can do to help manage and alleviate some of your symptoms or prevent symptoms, if you do things a different way with your arthritis. But how do we get past that point of feeling like B is taking over A?

Jacques:

Well, at that point, it becomes an intellectual exercise, doesn't it?

Rebecca:

Yeah.

Jacques:



If I accept the fact that I can't control those B factors, and if I choose to see it differently in my conscious mind, my unconscious mind will take that. And the response I have will be different. Because the reality of it is: Our unconscious mind takes its direction from our conscious thoughts. Think of your conscious thoughts as the rudder on a boat, that little metal or wooden plate at the back of the boat, that, depending on the position you put it in, will determine if the boat turns to the right or turns to the left.

Our conscious mind's thoughts are the rudder that steers the direction of our boat. The pain that we feel is not something that is actually happening in the joint, whatever the joint is, that's being affected. It's our interpretation in the brain of the signals that are being sent to us from that joint. The perception of pain is a brain thing, not a joint thing. So, if I change the position of the rudder and I change the way I look at it, I actually change my emotional response, and I can even change my pain level. I made the decision to be the master of my condition. I did not allow my condition to define or control me.

Rebecca:
Yeah.

Jacques:
I control the way I see the condition that I have and how I think about it. And because of that choice that I make in my conscious mind, I am not nearly as anxious about it. And I actually have minimized the pain that I feel as a product of the RA itself. Because if you don't process the pain in your brain, you minimize its impact on you. And I turned my attention to the things I can control.

Rebecca:
The funny thing for the podcast, our tagline, when we were coming up with it, was: "You may have arthritis, but it doesn't have you." It's not controlling me because there are things I can do to control my symptoms to a degree, right?

Jacques:
Absolutely. If I make the choice to accept, to simply accept, that this is a condition that I have... It is not going to go away for the foreseeable future, but there are things that I can do in my infusion... All of the things that I can control that minimize the negative effects of this condition on my life. I don't stress out about it.

How do you make the best result possible in a given situation? Stop worrying about the result. It's hard to do, but it's simple when you explain the problem that way. And most



people are so worried about the consequences and the outcome that they shift their focus away from what they're doing in the moment.

Rebecca:

Right. So, when you talk about mentally sabotaging ourselves, how does somebody police their thoughts when they are trying to get to a goal and wanna stay focused on the things they can control? But then that negative thought comes in. You mentioned different rules that helped to explain the formula of $A \times B = R$. Can you walk me through that?

Jacques:

Sure. The first rule says: If you want to climb out of a hole, the very first thing you have to do is recognize that you're digging. Stop it and put the shovel down. So long as we're mentally digging, we can't climb out of the hole at the same time. Those two actions are mutually exclusive. We can't think positively and negatively at the same time.

The first step is to recognize that you're beginning to think negatively. So, we have to become vigilant and eavesdrop on the mind chatter going on inside of our own head. The sooner I catch myself in the act of digging, and choose not to, and throw the shovel down, the shallower the hole is, and the easier it is to redirect my thoughts.

Rule number two says: The conscious mind can only actively process one thought at a time. What's the impact of that rule? It's huge. Here it is: If I'm focused on the wrong thing in that same moment in time, I cannot be focused on the right one. But here is also the simple and elegant solution to that problem. If I can control the deployment of my focus to be on the right thing, I'll never be focused on the wrong thing at the same moment of time.

Rule number three says: You can't not think about whatever you're thinking about. You can't not think about whatever's on your mind. The more you tell yourself not to worry, what do you end up doing? Worrying more.

Rebecca:

Right.

Jacques:

Use the truth of rule number two to solve the problem of rule number one. That's how we find our way to sleeping more effectively. If I focus on one thing, I can't be focused on the other. Why am I sometimes not able to sleep? Because I become preoccupied



by the discomfort and the stress and anxiety that's associated with my condition, and my mind never quiets down, and I can't sleep. That's what counting sheep is, right?

Rebecca:
Yeah.

Jacques:
Doing something benign that has nothing to do with what I'm worried about. And if I attentively focus on that, and I take some deep breaths, I'll fall asleep more easily.

Rule number four says: Our conscious mind's dominant thought determines our emotions, our behaviors and our performance. It also directly impacts our mental and physical health. So, our conscious mind's dominant thought, the rudder in our boat, steers the direction of our boat.

Rule number five says: We are in control of our conscious mind's dominant thought. The truth is: Most people don't. They allow the environmental situation and circumstances to define their thinking rather than be the boss of their thoughts and police their thoughts in the face of the challenges that they have in their life, including this condition called arthritis.

Rule number six says: Your perception or perspective determines your conscious mind's dominant thought and your emotional response. Choose your perspective carefully. 'Cause once you adopt something as a belief, whether it's true or not is irrelevant, your unconscious mind will steer your boat in the direction of that belief. So, our perception of our disease, our perception of the challenges that we face, determines our emotional response.

And rule number seven is kind of a bonus rule. It simply says: If you do what you've always done, you're going to get what you've always gotten. If you want something different, you need to approach the challenges and the opportunities of your life with a different mindset.

So, those are the seven rules; simple rules, a simple framework, that describes how we mentally sabotage ourselves, but also holds the secret to understanding how we can avoid that trap. You can't control what you can't control, but you have 100% control over how you choose to see it. I'm not telling you something you don't already know. Once you're clear on what the problem is, you have a much better understanding of what the solution needs to be and why it is a solution.



Rebecca:

It's almost like we need that reminder when we're managing a chronic disease. Because of the ups and downs of being on that roller coaster of life. When your disease is managed well and you're doing great, but then something might happen that brings you back down. You get off track, right? You get out of routines, and your habits kind of fall to the wayside. And then you kind of forget about... Wait a minute, there are those things that I can do.

Jacques:

Yeah. I have a toolbox that I can use here.

PROMO:

Whenever you need help, the Arthritis Foundation's Helpline is here for you, now offering support in Spanish and other languages. Whether it's about insurance coverage, a provider you need help from or something else, get in touch with us by phone, toll-free, at 800-283-7800. Or send us an email at <https://www.arthritis.org/i-need-help>.

Rebecca:

With all of these ups and downs, how much does that habit and routine come into play when we're talking about being able to manage our disease and setting some goals for getting there?

Jacques:

It's obviously extremely important. My condition does not define me or limit me. Do I sometimes feel some discomfort and pain? Of course I do, I'm a human being, but I have things I can do for that. And then on top of that, if I choose to not process that pain, it diminishes its impact on me. The most important mental skill we possess is the ability to control the deployment of our focus of attention so that we direct it to the right thing at the right time. That's actually what mental toughness is.

Rebecca:

Yeah.

Jacques:

The real key is focusing correctly, and correctly across the globe in every application, on what matters in the moment that it does on the things that I can control. And stop obsessing about the things I can't control and the reality of the situation I'm in. There is a process to being a patient with arthritis. Isn't there?



Rebecca:
Yeah. For sure.

Jacques:
Medications I do, whether it's infusion or injections or pills or whatever it happens to be. There's also activity patterns, there's sleep patterns, there's nutritional discipline, etc. Those are things I can control. If I focus on those things, I will minimize the impact of my condition on my health, on my happiness, on my anxiety levels and on my pain. It's simple. It's not easy.

Rebecca:
No.

Jacques:
But it's simple.

Rebecca:
Of course, we have to focus on all of those things, but that's a lot of stuff to focus in on at once, right?

Jacques:
You don't focus on all those things at once. You eat the elephant one bite at a time. You focus on one thing, engage that thing, do it to the best of your ability. And then you shift your focus in a multitasking way to a different thing, and you focus ruthlessly on that. We do multitask. Because we have a lot of things on our plate. But it's not about focusing on a bunch of different things at the same time.

Remember rule number two: The conscious mind can only actively process one thought at a time. And if we end up trying to put too many things on our plate at the same time, if we try to juggle too many balls or spin too many plates at the circus, what happens to us? We become the squirrel in the road trying to focus on everything, but effectively focusing on nothing.

I control my focus to be on the thing I'm focused on in that moment. And then I shift my focus to something else when it is appropriate to do so. That's the secret to performance. And it's the secret to controlling the outcome of my condition.

Rebecca:



Let's walk through an example of somebody with arthritis who needs to implement a better physical activity routine to manage their arthritis. What would that look like if we were applying this thought process?

Jacques:

The first thing is to understand, to think about: Why is this important to me? Assign importance to it. Give it its value. Because the research tells us that if I create importance in this thing, I will automatically attend to it more effectively. If I understand that the consequence of becoming more active is that, over time, gradually, I will feel better and better. My fitness level will improve. My emotional response will improve. And my sense of pain and discomfort from my arthritic condition will go down. I have to remind myself that that's true. And then I have to focus on the taking of each step.

It's like racing, right? If I think to myself, "I'm gonna run a marathon; my God, I have to run 26 miles at least." (laughter) And then I think there is no way I can eat that elephant. But if I think to myself, "I need to be able to take this next step. Oh, you know what? That's much more doable. I can accomplish that."

So, once I've determined, once I've accepted, that it's important to me and what the benefit is going to be, then I have to focus on the execution of that process, to simply get dressed and get out the door and go and walk. And start moving my feet, taking those long comfortable strides. And before I know it, I went from five minutes to 10 minutes to 15 minutes, and I gradually developed the capacity to do more without causing more pain. In fact, over time, reducing that level of pain, then it feeds back. Because now I feel really good about the fact that I got back on the goal, and I started moving. Understand why it's important. Then focus on the execution of the process that will lead you from point A to point B to point C to point D, one bite at a time.

Rebecca:

And when you see that benefit, you realize how it helps you and it motivates you to keep going further. One thing I wonder: I've had different points in 20 years of having my RA where I've hit bottom before. You know, finding out I needed a surgery. And I was stuck in the pain, and I was stuck thinking that whole negative trail of thoughts that you start going on. Like again, seriously, I have...

Jacques:

Digging.

Rebecca:



...to have another surgery.

Jacques:
That's called digging.

Rebecca:
Oh, I was digging. I was digging until I found a silver lining. And I stopped and I realized, well, I cannot change that my spine didn't fuse. I cannot change that I have to have this surgery if I want to have this pain go away. What is the silver lining in all this? (laughs) And I was having a really hard time with that one. 'Cause it was like: Do the surgery. What would you tell somebody who's in that situation?

Jacques:
What if there isn't a silver lining to this cloud? I just got told I have cancer. I just got told that I have serious arthritis. Where is the silver lining in that? Well, it sucks, but you can't change the fact that it is what it is. But you can use this as an opportunity to show the people in your life, your partner, your children, your parents, your friends, what a champion looks like. Who steps into the challenge, who leans in, does all the things that they can do to minimize that situation.

And what you do is: You have an opportunity to show if you have the backbone of a champion in the face of this significant challenge. Doesn't that by itself change your perspective on the problem? That changes the position of the rudder in my conscious mind. And now my unconscious mind does something different with it. So, if you can't see the silver lining, you always will have an opportunity to use it to test yourself, to see if you have the backbone of a champion. To show the people that you care about in your life what a real champion looks like. That changes your perspective on the problem, doesn't it?

Rebecca:
Yeah.

Jacques:
And if you change your perspective, it's rule number six of the mental road: Your perception, your perspective, determines your conscious mind's dominant thought and your emotional response. Choose your perspective carefully, because perspective is a choice. I can choose to see the glass as half empty, or I can choose to see that same glass as half full. People tell me: "It doesn't matter. It's the same glass." Oh, but it does.



If you only understood how your unconscious mind takes its direction from your conscious thought, you would understand that if you see the glass as half full, the rudder is in a certain position. The boat will go in that direction. But if you choose to see it as half empty, you move the rudder to a very different position. And the boat goes in a different direction.

Rebecca:
It takes work.

Jacques:
How do you get out of that? How do you not think about all that crap? You use the truth of rule number two: Your conscious mind can only actively process one thought at a time. If I'm thinking about all the things I can do and can control, and I act on those things, what can I not be doing at the same time? Thinking about all the things that I can't control that I become obsessed about. And then I start digging like a crazy person. A big, dark, deep hole. Rule number three also says: You can't not think about whatever you're thinking about.

Rebecca:
Well, I really think that it's a great way to approach managing my arthritis and my life in general. So, I appreciate you helping us understand why we should really focus on the things that we can control.

PROMO:
The Arthritis Foundation is always looking for new ways to inform you about the things you want to know more about. Check out our webinars — in real time or on demand. Visit <https://www.arthritis.org/events/webinars> to learn more.

Rebecca:
Part of our podcast, we have a listener segment where we ask questions to our listeners on social, and they provide comments and feedback. We asked two questions: What strategies do you focus on to manage your arthritis symptoms? And what prevents you from being able to follow through on these strategies? I'm gonna share some of the comments that we got, Jacques, and maybe you have something to speak to, to what they say.

Tom says he tries to keep moving and exercise in a pool when it's available. And he does kick boarding and water walking as low-impact exercises. So, he's sharing his tip.



Jacques:

It's a very useful tip, because weight bearing for people who have arthritic knees and hips and ankles, for example, is very stressful on those joints. Water walking, pool work, allows us to not have to bear as much weight and still get mobility in the joints. That's a really good suggestion.

Rebecca:

Rain says she's identified that her triggers are the things that she lifts. If she's walking or standing, walking on cement for too long, when she sits and stands too long. She has also identified staying away from certain foods has helped her, and that if she doesn't do those things, she's either using her wheelchair or stuck in bed or can't walk for a few weeks.

Jacques:

Well, first question I have for this young lady is: What kind of footwear do you wear? Do you have really good footwear with really soft cushioning support? As opposed to strappy sandals that have no support whatsoever. For example, if you're standing in your job... So, you are at a counter doing different things. There are mats that you can buy that attenuate the impact of the hard concrete on your joints. By just giving you essentially the same kind of cushioning you might put inside your shoe. There are things even in that situation that someone can focus on to do, to minimize the effect of hard surfaces and having to walk or stand for an extended period of time.

The other idea, if you're behind a counter and you're forced to stand for long periods, you can get yourself an elevated stool that, at the very least, allows you to put a cheek up on it while you're at the counter and take some of the stress, some of the weight, off of your joints. Logic would tell us that should help, right?

Rebecca:

Yeah.

Jacques:

There are solutions that we can turn our attention to, to minimize the effect of those triggers on our condition.

Rebecca:

Colleen says that she tries to keep mobile, even if it's walking, and she takes a couple supplements to help with her inflammation, like CBD and turmeric. So, she has identified that movement is key.



Jacques:

That, and that some supplements for her have been effective in reducing the strain that she feels on those joints and the inflammatory response that is a consequence of that.

Rebecca:

So, identifying the triggers is definitely right. And then what works for you is just another part of figuring out what you can control.

Jacques:

The first step in creating a solution to the problem is understanding, with great clarity, what the problem is. She's right in understanding: What are the triggers that get me going? And then how do I address those triggers in a way to minimize their effect?

Rebecca:

Like you said, there are some things that we can't control. And the next comment is one of those things. "Gentle massage therapy provides relief for up to two weeks. It seems to be the only thing I try that provides relief for longer than a moment, but money prevents me from being able to do it consistently."

Jacques:

I agree, massage can be really useful.

Rebecca:

Yes.

Jacques:

There are things out there in the fitness world that could be helpful. Have you ever seen those rollers, those foam rollers, that people use when they do yoga and so on?

Rebecca:

Yes. I use mine all the time.

Jacques:

OK. Well, there's a way of self-massaging to some degree, isn't it?

Rebecca:

Yeah.



Jacques:

If I self-massage with that roller, sure I'm not getting a professional, deep tissue massage, but I can do something that brings me part way along. I can join a yoga class, because the relaxation and stretching are gonna be really important to feeling better and not having the same kind of intense response that I typically have. Cause the yoga side of it is gonna help me to quiet my mind. And the stretching side will help me on the physiological side to keep the joint moving. So yes, money might, limit me in terms of my access to professional massage, but there are things I can do.

PROMO:

Do you have an idea for a topic you'd like to hear discussed on the podcast? Do you have a question about an episode or feedback you'd like to share? We'd love to hear from you. Just email us at podcast@arthritis.org and we'll get back to you as soon as we can. That's podcast@arthritis.org. Thanks for listening!

Rebecca:

Thank you so much for giving some feedback to our listener comments. And before we go, I would love it if you would share your top three takeaways on our conversation.

Jacques:

Well, I think the top three things that I would raise from our discussion are: the fundamental truth of the $A \times B = \text{Results}$ equation. We can't control outcome because we can't control the things we can't control, but we have full control over what we do, the A in the equation. So, if I pour all of my energy into the things I can control, I won't end up being focused on all the things that I can't control. And that's the secret to success.

I think the other thing that I would raise is the realization of how our conscious thought and our unconscious thought, our unconscious mind, work together. What we choose to believe in our conscious mind becomes the rudder that our unconscious mind acts on, and its job to salute and say, "Aye, aye, captain," and take us in that direction. We need to do a better job policing our conscious mind thoughts in the face of the challenges that we have to deal with. Because how we think in our conscious mind, our unconscious mind acts on. And mindset is critically important.

The last thing I'd offer is that pain is a perceptual process that occurs in the human mind. The signals that are received are generated at the level of a joint, but they go up the nerve to our brain, and that's where we perceive pain. So, if we can change the way our brain thinks about, perceives, the signals it's getting, we can change our pain



response. Those would be the three things that I would say are really important tidbits to keep in mind for people who have arthritis of any kind.

Rebecca:

Those are some great takeaways. It reminds me, when you keep going back to your ship analogy: Since I was in middle school, my favorite quote has always been, "I cannot change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination." Knowing that I can't control some things, but I can make some adjustments and focus on other things.

Jacques:

May I add one other comment?

Rebecca:

Yeah.

Jacques:

It is impossible for me to do better than the best I can do. So long as I strive to bring the best I've got to what I'm doing, in the moment I'm doing it, whatever the result is in that moment, is the best that can be gotten by me on that day, in that situation, except for the B factors I can't control. And I stopped worrying about those decades ago because I can't control them.

Rebecca:

I love that way of thinking.

Jacques:

With practice you get better at.

Rebecca:

I just wanna remind our listeners that the Arthritis Foundation has a great tool, a pain management app called Vim. Check it out and download it from your App Store. It is great way to take what we've talked about today. Make that first step to picking that one thing you're gonna work on to control your A, and adding it to your routine to take control of your arthritis. Thanks everyone for listening. Thanks for joining me, Jacques.

Jacques:

You're very welcome. Thank you for inviting me.



PODCAST CLOSE:

The Live Yes! With Arthritis podcast is independently produced by the Arthritis Foundation, to help people living with arthritis and chronic pain live their best life. People like you. For a transcript and show notes, go to <https://www.arthritis.org/liveyes/podcast>. Subscribe and rate us wherever you get your podcasts. And stay in touch!