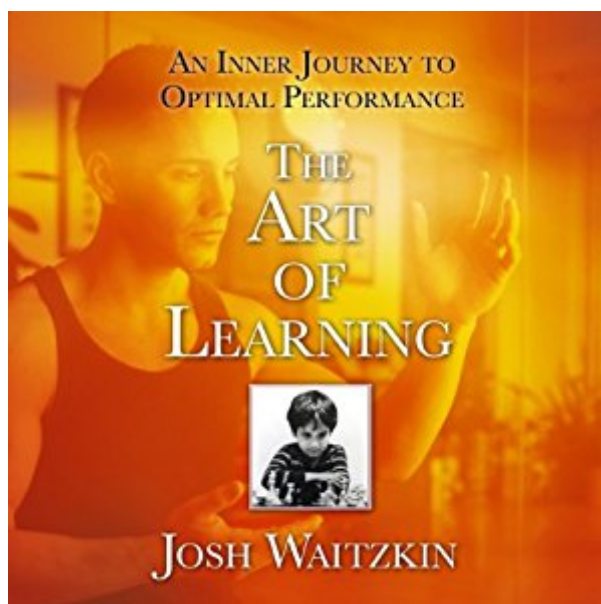


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# The Art Of Learning: An Inner Journey To Optimal Performance



## Synopsis

Josh Waitzkin knows what it means to be at the top of his game. A public figure since winning his first National Chess Championship at the age of nine, Waitzkin was catapulted into a media whirlwind as a teenager when his father's book *Searching for Bobby Fischer* was made into a major motion picture. After dominating the scholastic chess world for ten years, Waitzkin expanded his horizons, taking on the martial art Tai Chi Chuan and ultimately earning the title of World Champion. How was he able to reach the pinnacle of two disciplines that on the surface seem so different? "I've come to realize that what I am best at is not Tai Chi, and it is not chess," he says. "What I am best at is the art of learning." *The Art of Learning* takes listeners through Waitzkin's unique journey to excellence. He explains in clear detail how a well-thought-out, principled approach to learning is what separates success from failure. Waitzkin believes that achievement, even at the championship level, is a function of a lifestyle that fuels a creative, resilient growth process. Rather than focusing on climactic wins, Waitzkin reveals the inner workings of his everyday method, from systematically triggering intuitive breakthroughs, to honing techniques into states of remarkable potency, to mastering the art of performance psychology. In stories ranging from his early years taking on chess hustlers as a seven year old in New York City's Washington Square Park, to dealing with the pressures of having a film made about his life, to International Chess Championships in India, Hungary, and Brazil, to gripping battles against powerhouse fighters in Taiwan in the Push Hands World Championships, *The Art of Learning* encapsulates an extraordinary competitor's life lessons in a pause-resisting narrative.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The Art of Learning as an autobiographical story makes for good reading. However, the book introduces itself, and seems to be marketed, as a practical guide for people interested in improving their own learning skills. I question how well the majority of people will be able to make much use of the book in that way. Waitzkin's presentation and description of learning techniques is pretty vague. While I have little doubt that Josh Waitzkin is an accomplished learner, I don't think that he successfully, practically transmits what he knows about learning to the reader. It seems that he has an unusual capacity to learn, and while I don't think that that capacity is necessarily "genetic" or somehow hopelessly unavailable to those not blessed with it from birth or a very early age, I don't think that most people will improve their learning skills very much through Waitzkin's description of techniques that he may understand and be able to apply very easily, but which refer to and rely on processes and perceptions internal to him that can't, or at least aren't in this book, adequately conveyed through the written word. Though I think I may understand what "smaller circles" (one of the learning strategies Waitzkin outlines) means on some level, how to actually apply it to something I'm trying to learn is not clear to me (and the ideas behind it seem fairly cliché, like take one step at a time, you have to walk before you can run, etc.). Though it could be argued that its scope is more limited, for a book that provides more concrete methods for improving learning and performance, I'd recommend "The Inner Game of Tennis".

The Art of Learning is not about learning. At least a couple reviewers said it ought to be retitled, "The Art of Josh." This is a pretty good idea. But a perhaps even more accurate title would be, "Some Basic Truisms about Sports Psychology." The first 50 pages of the book begin innocently enough. I was enjoying it quite a bit. Josh tells his story as a child chess-champion and national celebrity. It's a rather charming story, which is probably why they made a movie of it. Waitzkin also lays out a few introductory ideas about learning theory, namely that the idea that intelligence is fixed is a fallacy, and that anyone can learn. Wonderful theme! Worthy of a whole book! But this is the last we hear of learning theory, and the last we hear of how ordinary people are prone to underestimating their ability. It is clear that Waitzkin did almost no research into learning theory for his book. He references no more than two or three theories and studies. This really shows a great lack of effort in versing oneself in the subject matter one claims to be an expert on. Learning theory is actually a hugely active field in academia. It's been a hot topic for decades among psychologists,

and studies are published just about every day in the study of learning. Then there is a whole other more theoretical field of education philosophy: what the aims of learning should be, and what are the best ways to learn and teach. Don't expect any of this kind of discussion from Waitzkin. This book was a marvelous opportunity to popularize and synthesize scholarly work in the field of learning, the conclusions of which are very uplifting in their insistence on human possibility. But Josh is more interested in mulling over himself.

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