

A Simple Mind Trick to Help You Succeed

Figure skater Ilia Malinin used this trick to go from loss to win. You can, too.

By Chitra Ragavan

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Key points

- In high-pressure situations, it's important to have the right mental framework to win.
 - Ilia Malinin mentally over-framed his Olympic gold quest in 2026 and lost.
 - When Ilia Malinin changed his mindset in the World Championships, he won gold.
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Over the past several weeks, I've been writing about a psychological construct called "lowering the stakes" that I've uniquely applied to coaching people through high-pressure situations to ensure peak performance.

In early March, I applied this concept to U.S. Olympian figure skaters Ilia Malinin and Alysa Liu. During the Winter Olympics in February, Malinin set the mental stakes for himself sky-high by proclaiming himself the “QuadGOD” for his record-shattering quadruple axel, stating he had “broken physics.”

But the night before the finals, Ilia got a case of mental jitters and sleeplessness not just from the heat of the games, but from the weight of his own rhetoric and expectations.

Rather than winning gold in the individual events, he ended up falling twice on the ice and placing a shocking eighth place. Looking back, Malinin admitted he was not ready for Olympic pressure.

In contrast, I wrote about how his female counterpart, Liu, had set her stakes much lower than Ilia. She had returned from a self-imposed two-year retirement to recompete. Massively popular on social media, Liu said she was competing again just to share her love of the sport with her fans and show off her new hair, makeup, and cool outfits.

Love of the Sport vs. "Redemption Event"

Liu said she was competing on her own terms, just to have fun. Alysa subsequently won the gold in the women’s competition, impressing judges and fans alike with her relaxed and joyful performance.

Then, in a post earlier this month, I wrote that Malinin was once again setting himself up for potential failure by raising his own mental stakes too high in the lead-up to the World Figure Skating Championships in Prague. (Liu didn’t even participate, saying she had too much else to do and had already performed her best in the Olympics.)

Malinin said in media interviews that the Worlds, as they call it, would prove to be his “redemption event.” I suggested in my post that if Malinin instead lowered his mental stakes, he could have a better outcome.

That's exactly what happened.

Perhaps learning from Liu's strategy and listening to his coach's advice, Malinin changed his mindset just before the Games and won his third consecutive gold medal and title at Worlds.

"I felt relieved that the season's finally done after a long up and down for this whole season," Malinin said. "I'm glad to be here at the World Championships. It was a different change of mindset to come here. All I wanted to do was skate for myself, enjoy every moment on the ice, and just have fun out there—and that's exactly what I did."

In other words, Malinin lowered the stakes with the temperature of his words and won.

For those of you who are facing a key decision or event—whether it's a job interview, a product demo, a crucial board meeting, a high-profile media interview, or even a wedding dance—I'd highly recommend this technique of lowering your stakes.

You may be surprised at the outcome. You will put so much less pressure on yourself and set yourself up for success, just like Malinin did at Worlds.

Give it a try, and let me know if it works for you.