

THE 5 SECRETS *of All Great* NBA SHOOTERS

*Learn the drills, techniques, and mindset
that made these shooters great*



Quinn McDowell



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About the Author

My name is Quinn McDowell and I am a professional basketball player, aspiring writer, and founder of Arete Hoops. I completed a four-year liberal arts degree (in Religion and Economics) at the College of William and Mary while excelling on the court for the Tribe.

I finished my career scoring over 1500 points and grabbing 500 rebounds while being honored as the Colonial Athletic Association's only two-time winner of the Dean Ehlers Leadership Award.



One of my greatest strengths as a player is my ability to shoot the basketball. I have made "shooting" my craft. I have studied, practiced, and worked my way to becoming a great shooter. I learned great technique from my father when I was young and have continued to refine this ability throughout my career. Some of my shooting highlights include:

- **Shooting over 40% from the 3-point line for my 4-year career at William and Mary**
- **In my Junior season he was only 1 of 5 players nationally to shoot over 50% from the field, over 40% from three, and over 80% on free throws.**
- **Leading the Australian Professional League in 3-point shooting percentage in Australia for 2 consecutive years at 45% and 47% respectively.**
- **Shooting over 50% from the field in my 3 years as a pro**
- **Setting the CAA Conference Tournament scoring record (at the time) for one game with 35 points**

Since graduation basketball has taken me on a crazy journey. I played professionally for 2 years in Perth, Au, in the NBA-Development League, and in Spain's second division (Leb Oro). I believe basketball can change your life because I've seen how it has changed mine. I want to share these experiences with you as you continue on your journey.

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The Arete Hoop Mission

Put simply, Arete Hoops believes basketball can change your life because it has changed ours. We think basketball and sports have serious power: they have the ability to transform you, shape you, and mold you into a better basketball player and person.

Our Mission is Simple: We think the world can be changed through the game of basketball. We want to question the status quo. We want to think differently. We want to consider the traditional ideas of how to approach the game of basketball and take the path less traveled.

We think that anyone who participates in sports has the incredible opportunity to grow in character, influence, and maturity in ways that will profoundly affect the rest of their life. Arete Hoops is about more than basketball, at the heart of our mission we are passionate about helping coaches and players grow in their:

1. Discipline

2. Commitment to Excellence

3. Leadership

4. Influence

We hope you will take this journey with us as we try to make a positive impact in the lives of people we encounter everyday.

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Secret 1: Commitment to Excellence

BIG IDEA

No one ever becomes truly GREAT until they commit to living by a standard of excellence every day.

All great shooters are faced with a choice. This choice confronts you everyday of your life. When you wake up in the morning it is there, when the weekend rolls around it is there, when you step into the gym it is there. On holidays, at school dances, in the Summer, in the offseason, during practice, it never goes away. The choice to commit to excellence is always staring you in the face. This choice never takes a day off and is never satisfied. You can't hide from it, and you can't kill it, you can't appease it. Always present, always watching, always asking.

There are two options and two options alone. The two paths are laid out before you, the choices are clear. You have a decision to make. But this decision must be made over and over again. Will you find yourself

wandering down the crowded path of mediocrity or **sprinting** on the path of excellence? Because those are your two choices. Some people just wander into whatever circumstance life throws

their way, while people passionately sprint after their dreams. Don't allow yourself to wander away from what you want most in your life. Make the decision now to pursue excellence no matter the cost.



Will you stop the construction of your game because you believe your efforts haven't made a difference, or will you continue to invest because you know that eventually hard work pays off?

The choice is yours and the time to get started is now. You don't have any more time to waste, the road to excellence is long and the journey is difficult, and its time to start walking.

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Building your Skyscraper

Excellence is a process, not an instant solution. It grows slowly through long hours of training, habit forming, and consistency. It needs to be fed, watered, and cultivated daily. No one has ever become a great shooter without a dogged commitment to becoming excellent each and every day. One of the great classic philosophers Aristotle once said this on the topic of excellence:

“Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”

If we take Aristotle at his word, we don't act excellently because we are virtuous athletes, **rather we become excellent athletes as a result of acting rightly.**

Think about the construction of a skyscraper as a metaphor for how the idea of committing to excellence will play out in your life.

Skyscrapers are magnificent structures when we see them from the outside. Yet there is so much more to these buildings than what meets the eye. If we were to take a tour into the inner workings of each skyscraper we would begin to understand the incredible complexity that is required to make each building functional. Unless you have worked construction before, you would be confronted with a new reality about what it takes to build such a structure.

Hundreds of hours of work must be accomplished before any construction starts. The beginning of the project is usually dirty and exhausting work. You have to work with an architect, get building permits, find a location, hire contractors, and find investors all before you see any visible results of your efforts.



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Before you build the structure, you have to dig the foundation, connect the plumbing, and pour the concrete, obtain the building codes, order the materials, and draw up the building plans. Before there is any resemblance of a finished product, hundreds of people will have worked thousands of hours, yet you still can't see any resemblance of what looks like a skyscraper.

Especially at the beginning, this process is difficult, tiring, and time-consuming. It can be easy to get discouraged because you may not see the results of your hard work.

Yet, as time goes on, little by little, a structure starts to rise out of the mess and begins to look like a building. After months or even years of planning, construction, and hard work, you start to see the culmination of your efforts.



Basketball is no different. At times it might feel like your effort is getting you nowhere, and you can't see any visible progress, you can't see your skyscraper.

Have patience! Believe that every time you make an investment to become a better basketball player/shooter, that is an investment in your skyscraper, your finished product.

Here's the key though: making a commitment to be excellent is **never a one-time decision**. Over the course of time when you consistently choose excellence over mediocrity, you create habits that start to shape you into a virtuous person.

Excellence evolves from a difficult choice to live your life differently than your default mode of operation. Over time, the tendencies of laziness or mediocrity slowly dissipate and are replaced with virtuous habits as your shining skyscraper of excellence rises from the chaos.

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Choosing Excellence

Excellence is a decision that you have to make over and over again. When you want to become a great shooter you have to build your skyscraper from the ground up. You have to start at the ground level by constructing your foundation with a dedication to the fundamentals. As you progress you start adding more complex pieces to your shot development, including:

- **Timing**
- **Rhythm**
- **Shot selection**
- **Consistency**
- **Range**

These are some of the building blocks that contribute to making your skyscraper grow, but your skyscraper won't grow without a commitment to excellence. To clarify: **excellence is never a single choice, but a series of decisions that build upon each other to form habits.**

Ultimately, all you have to fall back on as a shooter are the habits that you develop in practice and training. You will experience great shooting nights and shooting droughts. You will have games where you are the hero and you will have games where you want to run away and hide.

Yet, the stabilizing force, the thing you can revert back to through all of these ups and downs is your habits. This is your bread and butter, the bedrock of your game. The foundation you return to again and again regardless of the circumstances around you. Remember, that each day is another opportunity to build up or tear down your skyscraper.

The way you approach practice, training, workouts, film study, and strength training is now guided by your commitment to excellence. Basketball gives you the opportunity each and every day to decide what kind of approach you are going to take and what kind of shooter you want to become.

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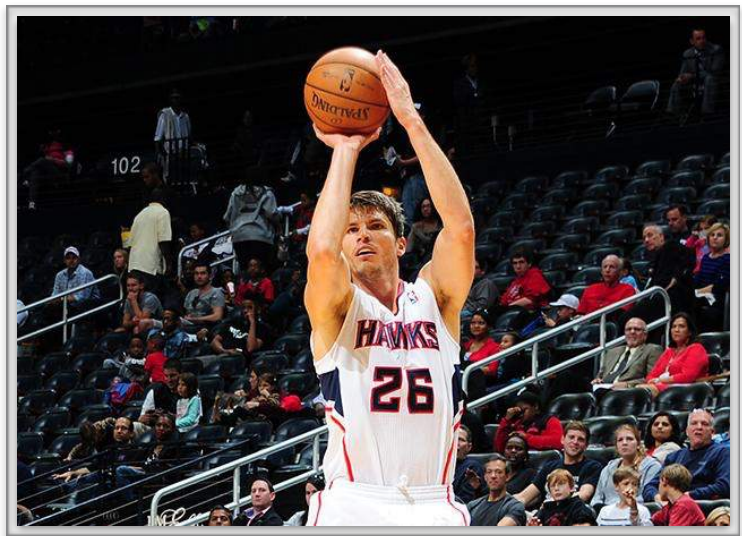
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A Case Study in Excellence: Kyle Korver

There are no shortcuts on the road to becoming a great shooter. As with anything else, mastering a skill takes time, hard work, and consistent effort. You have to make a decision about how good you want to be.

Ask yourself these questions: Are you are willing to sacrifice to become an elite shooter? Am I making a choice today to strive towards excellence or accept mediocrity? What kind of basketball player do I want to become? How will you be remembered after you leave your high school, college, or professional team?

Kyle Korver is one player that has consistently made this sacrifice throughout his career. In the first half of the 2014-2015 NBA season his team the Atlanta Hawks had the best record in the NBA and he was on pace to be the first player to ever shoot 50% from three, 50% from the field, and 90% from the free-throw line. He was on pace to set an historic precedent. The year before Korver set a record in the 2013-2014 season with 127 consecutive games with a three-pointer made. How did Kyle reach such historic levels of performance so late in his career (in the 2014-15 season he was 33 years old)? In short, his commitment to excellence throughout the years has slowly built a magnificent skyscraper of shooting excellence. Here's how he did it.



Attention to Detail

Korver commitment to excellence is expressed through his attention to detail. He meticulously combs through every aspect of his shot to make sure that he is shooting the same exact shot each and every time. In an [interview](#) with Andrew Kulp he outlines how his pursuit of perfection has lead him to construct a 20-point shooting that he has in the back of him mind at all times. Korver had this to say:

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“As I’m shooting, I have this list in the back of my head, and I know I’m not doing one or two of them. Once I feel I get all 20 of them clicking, then I’m going to have a natural rhythm in my shot.”

- Kyle Korver

Kyle’s checklist covers every part of his shooting mechanics from his foundation, release, posture, feet, fingers, and feeling when he releases the ball. His attention to detail is exhausting. Check out Korver’s list below.

1. Wide stance.
2. Exaggerated legs.
3. Drop through heels.
4. Engage core.
5. Slight bend at waist.
6. Up strong.
7. Elbow straight.
8. One hand.
9. Fingers spread.
10. Slight pause.
11. Elbow up.
12. Land forward.
13. See the top of the rim.
14. Ball on fingertips.
15. Strong shot.
16. Shoulders forward and relaxed.

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17. Ball and arm risen straight.
18. Hold the follow through.
19. Keep the release point high.
20. On turns, square shoulders.

To be clear, just because you sacrifice to improve yourself as a basketball player **does not guarantee success**. There is no guarantee that assures success in life or the game the basketball. There are hundreds of factors outside your control that can interfere with your athletic success. Injuries, coaching decisions, school politics, other players, are a few examples of the factors outside of your control.

BUT the key is to concentrate **on the aspects of your game you are able to control**. Shooting is one of the skills in basketball that you have an immense amount of control over. Korver's shooting checklist is a prime example of this.

Instead of focusing on the things outside of his control, he makes sure to concentrate on those things he can control, including; **his effort, attitude, routine, technique, repetition, and habits**.

Gaining an Edge

You are faced with choices every day. You can choose to get in extra shooting sessions, you can choose to break down film of your shot, you can choose to work on your technique while teammates are practicing trick shots, you can choose to stay in the gym until you've made 10 consecutive jumpers. Hard work doesn't guarantee success, but it does increase your chance to be successful. Not everyone who works hard is successful, but no there are no successful people who haven't worked hard.

More importantly, one of the greatest sign of a commitment to excellence is the desire to find an edge over your competition. About two years ago, Korver was trying to find something that would rejuvenate his career and extend his days in the NBA. This search for an edge led him to discover the idea of ***misogi***.

When Korver started working with Harvard trained sports scientist Marcus Elliot (who runs the Peak Performance Project in Santa Barbara¹) he stumbled on the

¹ <http://www.p3.md>

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ancient Japanese idea of pushing your body beyond its perceived physical limits to the point of failure in order to expand your sense of what is possible. Partakers of this ancient ritual embark on insanely difficult physical adventures that push them beyond their perceived capabilities. Here's what Elliot had to say² about Korver's enthusiasm to push himself in unthinkable ways:

“He has a search for truth, fearlessness, honor. He's warrior-like and has an adventurous spirit. But especially because he's always trying to be better.”

- Marcus Elliot

Korver's first *Misogi* was a 25 mile stand-up paddleboard trip across the open ocean. Korver had never set foot on a paddleboard before. 9 hours later the group reached their destination bleeding, sunburnt, and narrowly escaping the shark infested waters³. After the thrill of his first *misogi* experience, Korver was eager for more, and Elliot wouldn't disappoint. After having gone through a few of these rituals, Korver had this to say about the unforeseen benefits *misogi* has had on his mindset during the season.

The *misogis* have turned into my grind activator, and when I need it, I can imagine myself stroking across the Pacific Ocean. Or picking and running that rock.

- Kyle Korver

² <http://www.outsideonline.com/fitness/mental-conditioning/The-One-Day-a-Year-Fitness-Plan-Misogi.html>

³ <http://www.outsideonline.com/fitness/mental-conditioning/The-One-Day-a-Year-Fitness-Plan-Misogi.html>

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Since his first *misogi* Korver became hooked on the idea, so before the start of the 2014 NBA season Elliot proposed their group of daredevils carry rocks underwater for *distance*. A 5k of lung-tearing, leg shredding hell awaited Korver and his band of comrades.

So one morning during the Summer of 2014, Korver and his group set out for a California beach at 5am to complete their task. After nearly five hours of descending to the depths of the ocean and lugging a 85lb rock along the ocean floor (for stints that lasted as long as their lungs and legs would permit) the group had finished their second *Misogi*. Korver found that going through that kind of sustained pain and discomfort eventually forces you to adopt an etherial sort of concentration and focus - otherworldly and divine. Korver has used these experiences to fuel him during the grueling demands of an NBA season.

Korver's quest to give himself an edge took him to a place where many athletes are unwilling to go. A place of pain and discomfort, a place that begs for you to give in and take the easy path home. But a commitment to excellence is not the result of success, it sets the parameters of it. A commitment to excellence infiltrates every nook and cranny of your life and won't leave you alone. It precipitates your thoughts and actions and refuses to let you take shortcuts. It holds you to a higher standard, a *modus operandi* that may seems strange to outsiders. It questions your limitations and refuses to let you settle for '**just good enough**'.

This commitment is what sets Kyle apart from other players in the NBA. He was taken late in the second round of the NBA draft and wasn't expected to make much of a splash in the NBA. Korver admits that his physical gifts are somewhat limited compared to many of the other guys in the league.



"I've never been the fastest guy," and "I've never been the tallest guy. But I know how to keep going, to grind. It's probably not one of the sexier gifts you can get, but it works."

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Korver is a great example of what can be accomplished with a firm commitment to excellence, but once you make that commitment your behavior will start to change. Let's look at some of the practical steps you can take as a shooter to actively live out this commitment.

Craft your Game

Great shooters work at perfecting their craft and those who practice habits of excellence give themselves a chance at greatness. Greatness in basketball is never achieved by choosing the best drills or most clever training regiment. Rather, you give yourself a chance at greatness by the habits you choose to cultivate.

There is an endless obsession – particularly in the world of sports - with using the **most innovative training** equipment or learning the flashiest drills **hoping these things will make you a great basketball player**. Of course there is amazing potential for creativity in basketball training, *BUT excellence is always a product of creating the right habits NOT a product of picking the right drills.* Here are some practical steps to forming excellent habits as a shooter.

1. Get in the habit of counting **makes** during your workouts not just '**number of shots**'. Anyone can get in the gym and 'get a bunch of shots up', but who cares how many shots you get up if they don't go in. Challenge yourself during a workout to make a certain number of the type of shots you get in the game (ex. if you take a lot of 3's don't leave until you've made 100 threes off the dribble and 100 stationary threes)
2. Take shots at **game-speed** and in **game situations**. Kyle Korver recently talked about this in an interview⁴ with USA today. He said that he rarely takes more than 150 shots at a time because **"You can't shoot 500 shots at the exact speed and exact intensity that you're going to in a game."**



⁴ <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nba/hawks/2015/02/02/kyle-korver-vs-perfection-atlanta-three-point-shot/22693565/>

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3. Make a **shooting checklist** and use it to analyze and perfect your shot. Korver made a 20 point list with all of the things that he knows he needs to do well in order to make shots. Your list might be different than his, and THATS OK. Take your list into the gym with you and review before and after a shooting workout. Have a coach or teammate take some film of you shooting the ball and watch the video with your checklist and see how you measure up. Also, notice that Korver said he could **feel** when one specific part of his shot is off. Work on recognizing the feeling when a part of your shot is off and then quickly correct it.
4. Avoid a **consumers mentality**. Consumers believe that external products will give them an advantage over their competition, don't fall for this trap. The problem with consumers is that as soon as a training technique, product, or service goes out of style, they immediately look to switch to the newest trend. **Great shooters are not made by machines, apps, or gadgets but by habits, hard work, and dedication.** Discipline your body and ingrain habits that teach you consistency and a pursuit of perfection.

“You can’t shoot 500 shots at the exact speed and exact intensity you’re going to in a game.”

- Kyle Korver

A craftsman (i.e. all great shooters) understands that his/her habits are of the highest priority in the pursuit of becoming excellent. A craftsman's greatest achievement lays in their ability to form virtuous habits that shape their entire person. In athletic terms, a virtuous athlete must train their bodies to repeatedly practice their skills and hone their talents. Craftsmen hold themselves to a higher standard because their craft has immense meaning in their life. **How important is becoming a great shooter to you?**

The Order of Excellence

A few quick closing thoughts as we contemplate the importance of incorporating an unwavering commitment to excellence into our lives. First, a question: **do we**

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act rightly because we are excellent or does excellence come as a result of acting rightly?

This central question is important to consider as we tease out the implications on our lives while pursuing excellence. Athletes and coaches must wrestle with this question as they attempt to develop an inner scaffolding of motivation.

Following the order of excellence is crucial if we want to become virtuous - or in plain language, consistently excellent. Let's first consider what excellence is NOT before we explore the notion of how to achieve it. **Excellence is not** a buried treasure deep inside of us waiting to be unlocked by a **magic potion** or secret mechanism. Although excellence is available to those who act rightly, the attainment of it is not a treasure hunt with a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. There are no formulas, 5-step DIY manuals, or treasure maps that show us the road we must take.

Excellence is a laborious process; it is the summation of thousands of individual decisions that comprise a greater work of art. It is like a sculptor who starts chipping away at a piece of rock. The sculptor does not expect to find his piece of art to take shape after only a few swings of the chisel, **but understands that each cut into the rock brings him closer to a beautiful finished product**. The daily decisions we make to act in accordance with our ultimate goal are the **ONLY** things that matter if we desire to become excellent. Virtuous repetition is the path that leads to excellence; the decision is yours, the choice is up to you.

The Order of Excellence:

- 1. Commitment to Excellence**
- 2. Make Daily Decisions that Align with that Commitment**
- 3. Create Habits and Practices that build your Craft**
- 4. Repeat**

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Questions, people who are walking the path of excellence ask.

Q: What are my positive habits? What are my negative habits?
What do I need to change?

Q: What is my plan to put my commitment to excellence into practice that will help me become a great shooter?

Q: Am I willing to make the daily sacrifice it takes to become a great shooter?

Q: How can I gain a mental edge over my competition?

Q: What is my “grind activator”?

Key Points from this section:

- Excellence is a process that starts with a commitment
- Excellence is achieved as a result of our daily decisions
- Building your Skyscraper is a difficult process but over time you will start to see results
- Everyone wants to be a great shooter, but few players are willing to make the sacrifice and attention to detail it takes to become great

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