Mental Skills Training
Triathletes

Establishing a Sport Psychology Process
Top 10 Mental Skills
Guiding Principles

1. A strong mind does not replace fitness & physical skills
2. Physical fitness & skills are not enough for success
3. Mental toughness may not lead to success, but mental weakness will lead to failure
4. Without insight into internal dialogue the coach cannot help the athlete
5. How you think is how you perform. Consistent internal dialogue leads to consistent behavior
Top 10 Mental Skills Guiding Principles

6. **Coaches are more likely to help with physical than mental deficits**

7. **However, the primary guide in the mental skills process is the coach!**

8. **Any formal mental skills routine is better than none**

9. **Mental skills must be measured to be developed**

10. **The coach needs to follow a similar mental skills pathway when they coach**
The Mental Tools
What a Mental Plan must contain

1. Self-awareness & confidence & self-efficacy
2. Goal & target setting
3. Visualization/imagery
4. Self talk/thought control
5. Energy management
6. Attentional control/focus
7. Ability to endure peak sensation
8. Excelling under pressure
9. Decision making ability
10. Consistency
The Master Equation
Define Self Confidence
It is belief in & knowledge of your ability to excel under pressure.

This is the Primary Success Trait.
Building Self Confidence

- Absolutely know what you want
- Train **HARD** & be consistent
- Connect training to racing
- Understand the processes of success
- Display Self Confident behavior by:
  - Thinking
  - Feeling
  - Talking &
  - **Acting** like a champion
- See doubt, fear & anxiety as part of the pathway to success
- Completely believe in your ability to perform, by pre-experiencing that success repeatedly
What is Our Greatest Teacher?

FAILURE! or Experience
What Question Does Pain Beg?

IS IT WORTH IT?
What is Internal Dialogue?
Internal Dialogue
(Self Talk/Affirmations & Thought Control)

- Continuing the conversation
- Challenging your thoughts
- Emotional control
- Self observation - see your triggers as cues
- Process thinking
- The Futility of “Change”

**Process:**
1. **Recognize**
2. **Assess**
3. **Replace**
4. **Habituate**
Common Self Talk Errors

- Focusing on the Past or Future
- Using the Negative
- Focusing on Weakness during Competition
- Focusing only on Outcome
- Focusing on Uncontrollable Factors
- Demanding Perfection from Yourself
The MST QUAD

1. Participation value
   • *Is it worth it to you?*

2. Execution skills
   • *How self-efficacious are you?*

3. Arousal optimization
   • *What are you really afraid of?*

4. Sensation management
   • *Can you deal with the demands?*
1. Participation Value

*Is it worth it to you?*

1. Look carefully at what triathlon means to you
2. Analyze your reasons for participation
3. Discover your overt & covert motivations
4. Pay specific attention to areas of resistance & failure
2. Execution skills
   How self-efficacious are you?

Belief in Competence

=  
Belief in capability to perform in a certain manner to attain a certain set of goals & targets
You Are Strongly Self-Efficacious if:

• You consider tough situations as challenges to be mastered
• You develop increasingly deeper interest in triathlon
• You have a strong commitment to training & triathlon
• You rebound rapidly from setbacks and disappointments

(Adapted from: Bandura, 1994)
You have a Weak sense of Self-Efficacy if You:

• Avoid tough situations & tasks
• Consider challenging tasks & situations as outside of your ability
• Focus on personal failings/weaknesses & negative results
• Rapidly lose confidence in your abilities

(Adapted from: Bandura, 1994)
Triathletes high in self efficacy:

- **Work harder**
- **Tough it out longer**
- **Are better strategists**
Sources of Self-Efficacy

- **Mastery Experiences**
  - Set achievable training & skill tasks
  - Increase challenges progressively
  - Stay with task till association is one of mastery

- **Social Modeling**
  - View similar athletes persist & succeed

- **Social Persuasion**
  - Find people who encourage you & express belief in you

- **Psychological Responses**
  - Monitor, understand & manipulate your responses to triathlon environment stresses (perception & interpretation)
3. Arousal Optimization
What are you afraid of?

1. How to pinpoint sources of apprehension:
   •  Introspection
   •  Guidance from a mentor
   •  Vulnerability

2. Frame discussion around your expectations

3. Accurately project training to race performance

4. Make sure you buy-in to the process
4. Sensation Management
Can you deal?

1. Keep re-framing your RPE, “I have a new 10!”
2. Recognize where you back off, “As soon as I …”
3. Uncover & challenge these perceptions in training & then in races
4. Manipulate your internal dialogue to serve you
Success is not Luck, it is a Process
Create a **Success Plan** & **Execute**

Bobby McGee