

Visualization

Visualization is something most of you already do all the time and just don't know it. Just about everyone day dreams about achieving their goals, what it will feel like when you accomplish them and what it will look like getting recognized. Day dreaming is a form of visualization. Just like there is a right way to practice your activity, there is a right way to practice visualization. Visualization can be used to help in any activity you need to perform your best. Training your mind can help you overcome your- self imposed psychological limits in everything you do including athletics, school and any performance activity.

Your mind, like your body is trainable. Everything you think will affect your performance in a race. If you think about good habits and doing a skill perfectly, your mind doesn't know the difference and it is like physically practicing them. If have you ever heard someone call another person a "head case", you probably figured out the term means a person could have done better, but something in their mind made them anxious or unable to reach their goal. We spend so much of our time training the body, but very little training the mind even though the mind has a great deal of control over our performance. A champion imagines success. They see it, feel it hear it and taste it. They make those images big, bright and bold in their mind's eye constantly so it becomes part of their psychological make- up. They push their thoughts and visions about their losses, failures and undesirable outcomes way back in the darkest reaches of their mind making them learned lessons that they do not allow to affect their future performances.

Do you ever notice certain teams are always in contention for the championship even when it looks like they don't have as much talent returning from the previous year? It is because they have established a "standard of excellence" in their program that is passed down from one year to the next. They have set higher expectations for themselves than other teams and the current athletes chose to rise to meet them. Their success has more to do with their own expectations and attitude than talent. They learn to BELIEVE in themselves and their teammates which motivates them to work harder in practice and races. Notice words like "set expectations", "chose" and "believe" are all action words that an athlete has control over. Most athletes don't come close to reaching their potential not because they don't have the talent, but because they don't choose to believe in the talent they do possess.

If one is going to train the mind, it must be done just like physical training. It must be consistent and you must be in a relaxed state. When people relax it helps you perform your best when you need it most. Lastly, use a POSITIVE MENTAL ATTITUDE in everything you do.

How to Visualize

First, you need to find a comfortable place to relax where you won't be disturbed. While is it most effective to lie down on your back with your hands at your side, you must be comfortable and not feel any stress on any part of your body. Next, take several deep breaths. Breathe in through your nose until your chest and stomach expand and push the air through your mouth.



Pretend like you have a book on your stomach and watch the book rise up and down. Make sure you focus on your deep breathing.

After you feel practice your relaxation technique, begin to use all of your senses and start thinking about the day of your competition. Use all five of your senses to get the total experience. Think about traveling to the meet. Picture the yellow bus, hear your friends talking and picture the scenery of the road as you travel by. Once you arrive at the meet picture putting your gear in your favorite spot and notice all the colors and sounds around you. Each time you visualize, you should imagine different weather you might encounter. This is important because it puts you in the location of your competition and gets you ready to run your best. You want to be as detailed as possible so when it comes time for your big meet, you have already been there and run a successful race. Say to yourself "I AM PREPARED TO REACH MY GOAL."

Now it is time to warm up. Picture the color of your sweats and feel the crunch of the ground under your shoes. Go through your entire routine... warm up jog, stretching, striders etc. Listen for the commands of the starter... "10 minutes until the next race." You may feel nervous energy and your legs may feel heavy. You might even yawn. You may feel so nervous that you might feel like you are about to get sick. But tell yourself this is just your body's way of saving its energy for the task at hand. It is adrenalin and you as long as you take deep breathes, you can learn to control it before your race and use it to your advantage. Get your last couple of striders in, take your sweats off and come together with your team for your last cheer. Feel the emotion of each of your teammates and hear the positive energy from your team cheer. "I RECEIVE POSITIVE ENERGY FROM MY TEAMMATES AS THEY RECEIVE IT FROM ME."

Listen to the starter who calls out "one minute until the gun." You line up on the white starting line, put your left foot forward and listen for the starter to say "runners to your mark..." then you hear the bang of the gun. Feel the effort as you push off the starting line and become part of a herd of runners stampeding all around you. Hear the crowd cheer and look at the various colors of uniforms. After an initial burst of energy, settle into your pace and feel your rhythm of your race. See one of your rivals out of the corner of your eye and keep him in you sight. Picture every aspect of the course. Notice the gravel you have to cross, feel the rise and dips in the hills and listen to your breathing. "I AM POWERFUL, FAST AND STRONG."

As you go over the race in your head, practice using different racing scenarios, but always reach your goal. Maybe your opponent started faster than you would like, you started too fast or you fell during the race. How do you handle each situation? Picture the various moves you will make during the race on different parts of the course and always say positive affirmations during your visualization. Keep several check point goals in your mind during your visualization. It might be a split or a place in your races or running with certain person. When you are running up a hill imagine your body is attached to balloons and continue your effort up and over the crest of the hill into the downhill. Allow your rhythm to carry you past your competitors and start to separate from them. When you lose concentration in a race tell yourself to focus and refocus. Just by refocusing on your arms or your knee lift or your breathing, will help you keep your maximum effort. As the race is coming down to a final finishing kick, think of relaxing your



shoulders and allowing your competitive nature to take over. Picture your powerful stride that eats up the ground and pulls away from your competitors. Use a positive affirmation such as “I AM POWERFUL, STRONG AND FAST.” As you drive for the finish, see yourself reaching you goals and feeling a sense of satisfaction. You did it! Listen to the congratulations of your friends and see yourself receiving your award. You may choose to continue your visualization through your cool down, but when you are ready, slowly count down from ten and bring yourself back to the present.

You can use a script such as this one and record your voice using more specific details of your peak race. You can even go to the course and video tape part of the course with your voice over and music in the background. It should be as long as you can keep your focus. It is better to visualize for five minutes at a time than 15 minutes and lose your focus for most of it. But always remember to use a positive mental attitude in everything you do and always reach your goals. If visualization is done correctly, it is like physically doing the activity. But like any supplementary activity, how serious you take it will determine how effective it is.

