

# MENTAL PREPARATION

## FOR YOUR PERSONAL BEST

The most important preparation for top running performance occurs during the many months prior to a race. During the final week, there is usually little that you can do to enhance your physical performance. Yet there are many things that can detract from performing your very best. Many of these factors are mental.

The following guidelines are practical tips to help you prepare mentally for your highest level of performance. These techniques are recommended for the final week before a race, but can also help you to get the most out of your training from day one.

### CONSISTENCY

You'll perform best if your surroundings feel familiar to you. Follow your usual schedule of getting up and going to bed, meal times, types of food, even television programs and reading the newspaper. If you travel to a race, do everything possible to generate this feeling of familiarity. Try to maintain your daily routine while you travel. Bring along your favorite music or books to help you feel comfortable.

Be sure to develop this feeling of familiarity with respect to the race course. Visit it in advance or view pictures. Talk with others who have competed there. If possible, jog, run, walk or drive the course. When the actual event begins, you'll know what's ahead of you. If many elements are different from what you're accustomed to, focus your attention selectively on the aspects that seem familiar. For example: other runners, familiar logos, running shoes, and your body's sensations as you warm up and stretch. As you do this, your attention will automatically drift away from that which seems unfamiliar or disconcerting. Wear familiar warm-up and racing clothes and go through a familiar warm-up routine prior to your event.

### POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

Monitor your internal "self talk" and develop honest, positive statements that you can think or say to yourself to reinforce your confidence. These are not global grandiose statements like, "I'm the greatest" or "I know I'm going to win." Good positive affirmations are irrefutably true.

Effective affirmations include "I'm thoroughly prepared for today's race;" "All I need for a good performance is inside of me—I put it there through many hours of training and competition;" "I've competed very well before in situations like this;" and "I am strong and fast."

### RELAXATION

Practice relaxing your mind and body during the days prior to the competition. Close your eyes and imagine the most relaxing place that you've ever been. Become aware of how your breathing slows down and how your muscles begin to feel heavy and limp. Do this many times each day during the week before the event.

### MENTAL REHEARSAL

Close your eyes and imagine your best previous performance. Relive it in your imagination as vividly as possible. Try to recreate all of the sensory images—the sights, sounds, feelings and smells.

Imagine how you felt inside just prior to the start. Imagine how you felt while you were running and as you finished. Do this over and over again. Now, change the script, and imagine your upcoming race. Imagine the setting and the moments prior to the start. Use all of the information you have available to enrich your imagery—the more details, the better. Be realistic and visualize a performance just a bit better. Do this over and over again. Imagine different scenarios and strategies for dealing effectively with any possible changes in the competitive situation.

## MOTIVATION

*We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act but a habit.*

~ Aristotle

Staying motivated is a struggle—our drive is constantly assaulted by negative thoughts and anxiety about the future. Everyone faces doubt and depression. What separates the highly successful is the ability to keep moving forward. There is no simple solution for a lack of motivation. Even after beating it, the problem reappears at the first sign of failure. The key is understanding your thoughts and how they drive your emotions. By learning how to nurture motivating thoughts, neutralize negative ones, and focus on the task at hand, you can pull yourself out of a slump before it gains momentum.

There are 3 primary reasons we lose motivation:

- **Lack of confidence:** If you don't believe you can succeed, what's the point in trying?
- **Lack of focus:** If you don't know what you want, do you really want anything?
- **Lack of direction:** If you don't know what to do, how can you be motivated to do it?

## HOW TO BOOST CONFIDENCE

The first motivation-killer is a lack of confidence. When this happens to me, it's usually because I'm focusing entirely on what I want and neglecting what I already have. When you only think about what you want, your mind creates explanations for why you aren't getting it. This creates negative thoughts. Past failures, bad breaks, and personal weaknesses dominate your mind. You become jealous of your competitors and start making excuses for why you can't succeed. In this state, you tend to make a bad impression, assume the worst about others and lose self confidence.

The way to get out of this thought pattern is to focus on gratitude. Set aside time to focus on everything positive in your life. Make a mental list of your strengths, past successes, and current advantages. We tend to take our strengths for granted and dwell on our failures. By making an effort to feel grateful, you'll realize how competent and successful you already are. This will rejuvenate your confidence and get you motivated to build on your current success.

It might sound strange that repeating things you already know can improve your mindset, but it's amazingly effective. The mind distorts reality to confirm what it wants to believe. The more negatively you think, the more examples your mind will discover to confirm that belief. When you truly believe that you deserve success, your mind will generate ways to achieve it.

## DEVELOPING TANGIBLE FOCUS

The second motivation-killer is a lack of focus. How often do you focus on what you don't want, rather than on a concrete goal? We normally think in terms of fear. I'm afraid of being poor.

I'm afraid no one will respect me. I'm afraid of being alone. The problem with this type of thinking is that fear alone isn't actionable. Instead of doing something about our fear, it feeds on itself and drains our motivation.

If you're caught up in fear-based thinking, the first step is focusing that energy on a well defined goal. By defining a goal, you automatically define a set of actions. The key is moving from an intangible desire to concrete, measurable steps.

By focusing your mind on a positive goal instead of an ambiguous fear, you put your brain to work. It instantly begins devising a plan for success. Instead of worrying about the future, you start to do something about it. This is the first step in motivating yourself to take action. When know what you want, you become motivated to take action.

### DEVELOPING DIRECTION

The final piece in the motivational puzzle is direction. If focus means having an ultimate goal, direction is having a day-to-day strategy

to achieve it. A lack of direction kills motivation because without an obvious next action we succumb to procrastination.

The key to finding direction is identifying the activities that lead to success. For every goal, there are activities that pay off and those that don't.

Make a list of all your activities and arrange them based on results. Then make a make an action plan that focuses on the activities that lead to big returns.

### REWARDING YOURSELF

- Take a day off to do something you love
- Get a massage
- Take a bubble bath
- Download a favorite song
- Spend time with someone special
- Give yourself quiet time with a book or music
- Take a break from any goal-oriented activities
- Take a nap
- Watch some favorite TV shows or movies
- Window shop
- Go to a museum
- Just sit and relax



**Lutheran  
Health Network**

**Lutheran Hospital  
Weight Management**

LutheranHealth.net