

[Share](#) [Report Abuse](#) [Next Blog»](#)[Create Blog](#) [Sign In](#)

THURSDAY, MARCH 18, 2010

Twitter Updates

Give Me an “M” ...Give me an “A” ...How Mantras Can Be Your Best Cheerleaders

[follow me on Twitter](#)

I am going to give you a training scenario and I want you to write down the very first thing that comes to your mind. Ready?

First, clear your mind. Seriously. Take a few seconds, close your eyes, and completely clear your mind. Then when you are ready, review the scenario below and note your first reaction.

Scenario:

It is 80 degrees and the sun is shining. It is 7:00am on a Saturday. After a proper running warm-up, your training workout for today is as follows:
Repeat 8 times: 3 minutes FAST sprints (as fast as you can run) with 1 minute recovery jog between sets.

What is your first reaction? Make note and we will come back to it.

Reaction is Everything

Our perceptions make our reality and how we perceive something is a basis for how we react. So for example, if you perceive something as threatening, unpleasant, or uncomfortable, you will likely react with a negative attitude or behavior.

Interestingly enough, many athletes perceive certain workouts as “threatening” for various reasons (fear of failure, injury, embarrassment, massive discomfort, etc.). But if you objectively look at a track workout for example, it in and of itself isn’t threatening. It is simply an exercise plan that involves running around in a quarter mile circle multiple times at various speeds. But how we perceive that track workout determines our reaction and ultimately our success or failure. In the words of Bobby McGee, it becomes critical to, “Judge your judgments.”

Are your Responses Holding You Back?

Let's return to your initial reaction at the start of this article. Was it something positive like, "Yes! I can't wait to get out there and run strong and fast!" Or was it more like, "Oh crap - I hate these types of workouts!" Or even, "I hate getting up this early and running." Negative thoughts set you up for failure even before you begin. It's that "devil on your shoulder" we all know so well.

Each time we have a thought, there is a physical process that takes place in the brain. It begins with an input. The input moves into our sensory registries within seconds and if it is meaningful to us, the input is moved into short term/working memory where it will remain for a few minutes. If we deem it important enough, the input will move from short-term into long-term memory where it will either create its own physical connection OR be physically linked to other related long-term memories. If the same input is repeated over and over, the memory process repeats itself and forms bigger and bigger physical connections in the brain - memory connections. If repeated often enough, the thought moves from the conscious to the subconscious and ultimately to the point of "automaticity" - when the thought happens without you even really knowing it. At this point it becomes difficult to undo that connection - but not impossible.

The concept of these brain connections is similar to a dog running the same path alongside a house. The longer and more frequently the dog does it, the deeper the trench and the more difficult it is to retrain the dog to take a different path. But luckily we can teach a dog new tricks and we can reprogram our minds. The key is being aware of your responses and attitudes.

Reprogramming Your Responses

The first step to reprogramming your responses is to identify areas where you find yourself responding negatively and then come up with a new, positive "replacement" response. Some examples are below.

If you start to think... -> Replace it with...

I hate track workouts. -> Track workouts make me wicked fast!
Open water swimming scares me. -> I am a strong swimmer and fear nothing.
I don't like hills on the bike. -> I rock the hills!
I hate working out in the morning. -> What a great way to start the day!

Replacing or substituting old responses with new responses will physically deteriorate those negative brain connections over time and the new, positive connections will be formed in place. Fair warning - brainwashing doesn't happen overnight. Retraining the brain can take months or even years but the key is to stick with it.

Give me an "M"...

The fundamental nature of sport is to trick the body to keep going long past the point where the mind has screamed STOP! Mantras are a great way to get your mind to jump on the “keep my body moving” bandwagon and are the second step to reprogramming your negative responses. But mantras must be crafted in such a way that they actually work.

What are the chances of you remembering a long, drawn out motivational speech when you are in a carbohydrate-depleted state? Not good. Effective mantras should be short, specific, and easy to remember. Mantras can focus on form, inner strength, or keeping a positive attitude. Mantras can also include a visualization component or a rhythm that supports the phase. For example, if you are facing a steep climb on the bike, an effective mantra would be, “Strong and steady and get to the top” - repeated over and over rhythmically to each pedal stroke.

Need some mantra ideas? Or want to add new mantras to your list? Check out these real-life inspirational phrases from multisport athletes just like you:

- I can win
- I am doing it
- I own this hill
- I get the job done
- Quick, light, feet
- Pull, pull, feel that water
- This is solid training in the bank
- Every second counts - so keep moving
- Pain is temporary, memories are forever
- Feeling strong now!!! (Rocky theme song)
- I feel good....I knew that I would... (James Brown song)

Create Your Mantra

I once heard someone say that an Ironman is a 17 hour opportunity to problem solve. While you cannot control everything, you can have mental strategies which can make the difference between merely surviving and totally thriving.

Not sure where to begin? Pick one mantra for each sport (swim, bike, run) and use it each time you train. Afraid you'll forget to use it? Here are some ways to remind yourself:

1. Type or write the mantra on a small piece of paper and then put it in a small ziplock bag (like the kind you use for salt tablets or other small items) OR cover it with packing tape or laminate to make it water and sweat proof. Tuck it in a pocket or your hat.
2. Set the timer on your watch to go off every 3 minutes to remind yourself to repeat the mantra 10 times to yourself or out loud.

3. When you take in fluid or calories, repeat the mantra to yourself at least 10 times.

The expression “mind over matter” illustrates the true power of your mind. By incorporating mantras in your training and racing, you are turning that devil on your shoulder into your own personal cheerleader. And who wouldn't want that?

Additional Resources:

“Magical Running” by Bobby McGee

“The Power of Your Subconscious Mind” by Dr. Joseph Murphy

For more mantra ideas, search the Internet for “sports mantras”

Article by Susan Farago, M.Ed., USAT L1, USAC L2, NFPT Sports Nutrition. Susan is a multisport coach, athlete, and freelance health and fitness writer in Austin, Texas. She can be reached at susan@redlicoriceevents.com or at www.susanfarago.com. © 2010.

Check out her Red Licorice Tweets, “Susan Says”, at http://twitter.com/Red_Licorice.

Posted by Red Licorice Events at [10:37 AM](#)



Labels: [Facebook Notes](#), [Susan Says](#)

0 comments:

Post a Comment

Comment as: Select profile...

Post Comment

Preview

[Newer Post](#)

[Home](#)

[Older Post](#)

Subscribe to: [Post Comments \(Atom\)](#)