

Visualization Exercise by Colin Wee

Professional sporting events are recognized as 'mental games'. So players and those benefiting from sports psychology use mental tools to hone physical performance. Can an untrained person use the same tools? We discuss how to use pre-competition regiment, visualization, and scenario exercises to help in both martial arts and self-defence.

Introduction

At a sporting event several years ago, our team heard some gossip relating to the Korean's training regime. Apparently, in addition to their regular practise, some of their preparations included a free fall roller coaster-type ride, standing at the edge of a ten-storey building, and eating lunch while staring at their 'target'.

While our preparation was not half as exotic, such mental tools were designed to do one thing.

*TO BRING THE COMPETITION INTO YOUR PRACTISE;
AND TO BRING YOUR PRACTISE TO THE
COMPETITION.*

In short, it means you recreate as much of the conditions experienced in competition during training, and bring some of your relaxedness and non-inhibiting performance factors into competition.

Mental Imagery

Apart from eating similar foods and avoiding alcohol leading up to the event, the core aspect of competition preparation lies in *mental imagery*. The technique draws from theories relating to hypnosis, and the idea that the mind-body connection is stronger than most think.

This involves putting yourself into an 'easily suggestible state,' where you relax and filter out extraneous information, focusing on a simple set of instructions. You in fact experience this trance-like condition just before you go to sleep.

Using this 'easily suggestible state,' you recreate as much detail surrounding the event as possible. Drill down into your surroundings, your heartbeat, and your actions. This sets the stage for visualizing motion and a positive outcome of each event.

The Doing

After visualization, you then bring that mental 'layer' back to your practise, and lay it as a mental tapestry guiding your moves. With this, you are able to actualise your dreams, and step-by-step become that which you believe yourself to be.

Firewalking

In a religious ceremony, Indian devotees would enter a trance-like state and perform incredible feats like walk over white-hot coals. In fact, I have seen several other groups (both in the English speaking and non-English speaking world) that use this similar stunt to improve a person's faith and self-confidence. The fact is research has shown that white-hot coals do not burn the skin on your feet unless you come into contact for more than 3 seconds. So if you walk fast enough, the most you would feel is warmth of the coals as radiant energy. No you won't get burned.

The biggest obstacle in firewalking is thus the decision to walk over the coals. No more conjecture. No more fantasy. Are you going to walk over the coals *without knowing* that the skin on your feet isn't going to be burned off? Visualize yourself in front of a pit of hot coals. Compartmentalize that palpable fear. And sign on the dotted line.

Visualization Test

Question 1. I will walk over white hot coals if ever I am faced with that test. (✓ - Tick where appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes. I have made the decision that I can compartmentalize my fear and cross the mental barrier.
<input type="checkbox"/>	No. I am not prepared as yet. But will soon be.

Possibilities

Mental exercises as described above can allow you to ignore pain by focusing and filtering physical sensation out. Such exercises can be used to recreate different scenarios where you face 'virtual opponents.' The objectives of these exercises range from decreasing reaction times, to improving pain tolerance and endurance, to shrugging off failure and self-motivation.

Just like physical repetition, practising mental imagery needs to be repeated. But unlike physical sports, you can engage in mental imagery whilst doing a host of other activities. You could conceivably bring this level of professional sports training into your own living room!

Mind and Body

The mind and body do not always travel together. Understanding this, you may overcome paralysing fear by acting on decisions you have made during affirmation and visualization exercises. Fear and indecision -- even denial can be compartmentalized. This concept, applied to martial arts and self-defence is a powerful tool to allow yourself to be roused into action, overcoming challenges placed in front of you.

About Colin Wee

Colin was a national representative in the Singapore Archery Association from 1983 to 1990. He has travelled internationally to compete, using many of the same visualization tools described above. In 1990 he served as Assistant National Coach to the Ladies National Team, and included affirmation and mental training into his coaching regime.