

STATE CONTROL

Reflecting on the Athens Olympics, one image comes to mind - the vision of track cyclist and Olympic gold medallist, Ryan Bayley on the start line for the second race in the sprint final. I remember the commentator directing our attention to the look on Ryan's face. He announced "Ryan is mustering up every ounce of aggression he has." As the camera zoomed in, you could feel the energy.

Imagine if you were able to harness and control that type of energy or aggression during a training session or race. What would it mean for your performances if you were able to create a desired state of mind? How much harder would you train or race? Alternatively, how much more "relaxed" could you become if you understood the feelings or code associated with relaxing? Would this impact on your pre race behaviour?

If you revisit the first report in this series titled "Motivate Me" (TMSM January 2005), I introduced a technique in the "Understanding the sensory experience of emotions" section. You will need to familiarise yourself with the content discussed. It is critical that you have a competent level of skill and a detailed understanding of the process of determining your code for emotional states. If this is the first article you've read in the series, you will need to follow the drills as directed and way them for a week or so.

Emotional states during training and racing are similar. Therefore, we are exposed to the same "stressors" whether they are positive or negative. Here are four examples of emotional states that are typical throughout the sport of triathlon for both sprint and Ironman distance:

1. Powerful
2. Nervous
3. Relaxed
4. Angry

It is worth noting that the individual may use different terminology for the same emotion. For example, strong, powerful and fit may all be used to label the same emotional state depending on the references we have for them. If my examples don't fit with your terminology please change them to reflect your interpretation. Following is an example of how you can understand the emotional state of feeling powerful. You will then need to follow the same protocol for all four states.

Powerful

Close your eyes and search for a memory in which you were successful. It could be finishing a race, standing on a podium receiving a medal or running past a group of friends who are cheering for you. If you are unable to find a memory like this

don't worry. Rent the first Rocky movie or Chariots of Fire and go to a scene that provides the emotion that you are trying to achieve and use that.

When you find the state of feeling powerful, document the code. Write in detail the feelings associated with the emotion. Follow the checklist provided in "Motivate Me", but please re-write the example on a separate sheet of paper ie. When you were feeling powerful what did you see, hear, feel, smell etc.

Pick a symbol that reflects the nature of this emotion. When I think of this emotion, I instantly think of a winner's trophy or three people standing on a podium accepting medals. When you have chosen a symbol, draw it on the same piece of paper as the code. Please see Figure 1 for an example of a symbol.

Figure 1: Example of symbol.



Now that you have documented both your code and symbol, repeat the same process for the three other emotions identified earlier. If you have any other emotional states that you would like to understand further, please feel free to use this process - it is not limited only to my examples.

Use a variety of resources to help achieve the desired emotional states - memories, movies, music or photographs. For example, find a photo of yourself sitting on the beach to achieve the state of relaxation. You should now have a code list and symbol for each of your desired states. Now you need to link the symbol to the code so they become synonymous with each other. This process will allow you to recall the symbol and feel the code of the specific emotion. Follow the drill below for each of the four emotional states.

LINKING SYMBOL TO EMOTIONAL STATE

Step 1

- Close your eyes and recall the code for the emotional state you desire. When you have that code I want you to look for detail in the sensations as with the earlier drills.
- Let go of the code and bring it back ten times, holding it for a few seconds, looking for detail.

Step 2

- Make a visual picture of the symbol that you have designated for the emotion.
- Practice this until you are able to hold a clear, still and detailed picture.
- Move the picture to the left-hand side of your body just above your left shoulder and in front of you. Again you will need to bring it back ten times.

Step 3

- Utilising techniques in Step 1 and Step 2, flick between the symbol and your code. Think of the code then flick across to the symbol.
- Chose an event that happens regularly, such as making tea or coffee and practice Step 3 each time this event occurs. Do this for a week.
- It is important that you embed the code into the symbol and keep reinforcing the connection over the course of the week. The time that is required for practicing should decrease as you progress. By the end of the week it should only take a second or two.

Step 4 (A)

- Practice seeing the symbol only.
- Your goal is to think of the symbol and have the entire code for the emotions come flooding back instantly.
- PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE.

Step 4 (B)

- Recall your symbol at times when you are feeling the desired emotional state. You may feel the emotional state during training or when out with friend's etc.
- Your emotional state does not always need to be manufactured. If they come on naturally because of environmental stimulus, simply recall the symbol to reinforce the state control process.

HARNESSING YOUR EMOTIONAL POWER

The underlying idea is that your symbols become a gateway to harness and control your emotional power. What you need to consider is when to use these skills? Let's use a typical race day as an example, assuming that we all generally go through the same process during the day. Below is a summary of a typical race day offering suggestions as to when you may need to use state control techniques.

Pre race at home (morning of the race)

Generally a nervous time for all athletes. A key time to use the relaxation technique. Frequently revisit your code and symbol at regular intervals depending on your level of arousal.

Pre race at event

The tool you use at this stage is critical. When setting up in the transition area you should use relaxation as your main emotional state as it may allow you to get everything done on time and without any negative stress.

Race start

This is a very personal time for a lot of athletes. Some people like to be relaxed, some like to be a little more on edge. If it's a sprint race and you are a strong swimmer perhaps angry or powerful may be a good state. If you are competing in Ironman relaxed or powerful may be the desired states.

Race

You may have ups and downs during your race. The key is to look for any changes and use the state control process to stop negative emotions inhibiting your performance. Alternatively, use the state control process to maintain a feeling. As an example, when I ride at a hard tempo, I find that I move into my powerful emotional state regardless of how much I'm hurting. This has a snow ball effect. I'm riding fast and feeling powerful, so I start riding faster. You should be able to develop specific emotional states for the bike and run leg that will help with your performance.

Post race

Most people say this is a time to relax. They are generally correct. However, this is also a time to reflect on all of the positive things. Reinforce the states of powerful, successful or angry. This is the time to create strong emotions, that you can recall assisting you at a later date.

Good luck

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