



# Maximizing the Mental Side of Running

Caption

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Just as our kids develop physically through their training, they should also display growth and developmental gain with their mindset as well. What's your mind-developing offseason plan?



Caption

# The Alan Webb phone call

For someone coached by Alberto Salazar, Jerry Schumaker, and others...it was surprising to me.

Just acknowledge that every single one of your athletes and their thinking is different



Caleb Wilfong 2011 State CC Champion



Matthew Hauser 2020 State CC Champion



Tyra Wilson 100m/300m hurdles MO State record holder

Nate Peat 100m State Champion 2018/4X1&4X2 State Record Holder

Evan Schulte 2013 NXN Qualifier



Martez Manuel 100m hurdle/4x2 MO State record holder



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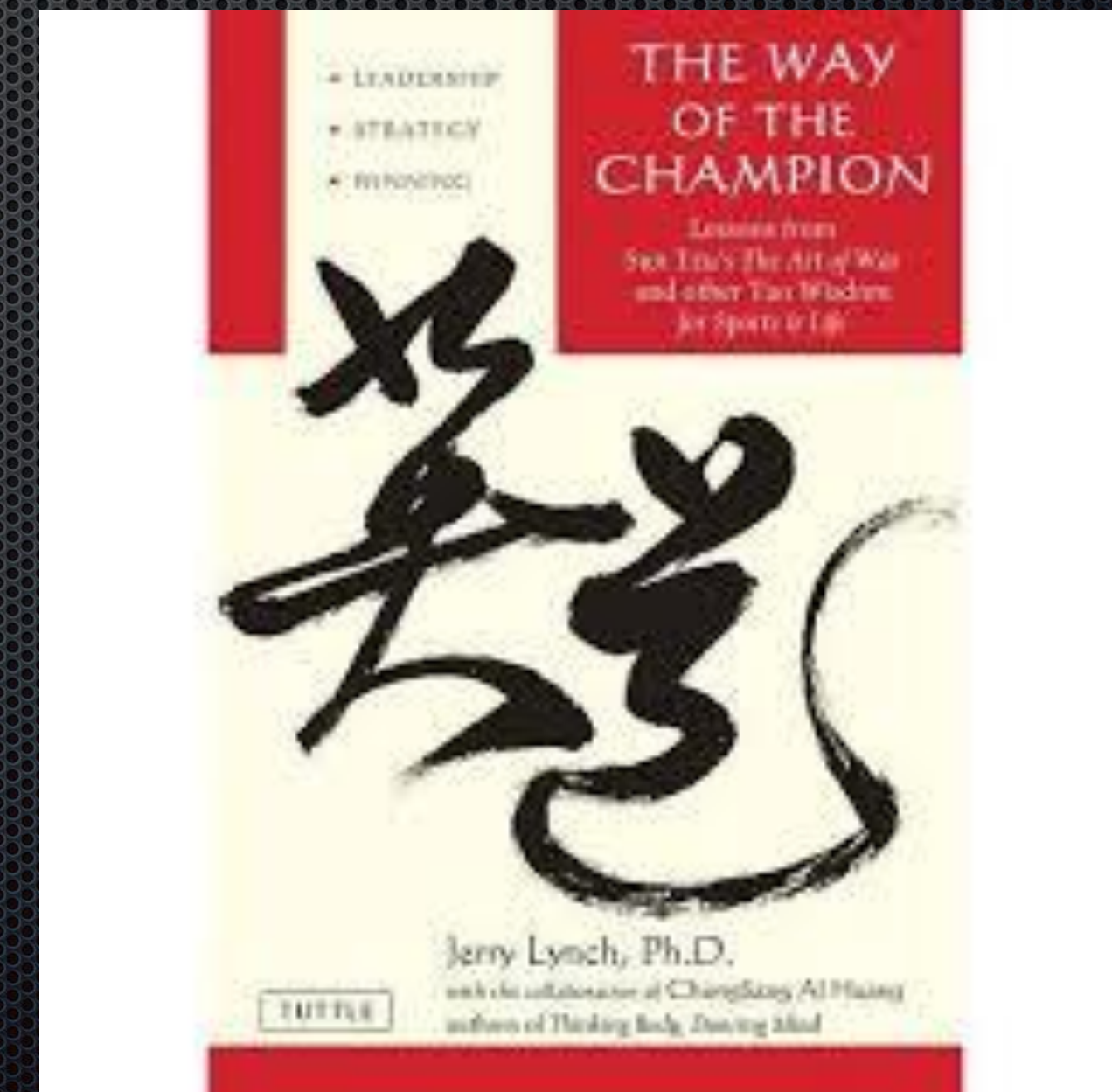
Carolyn Ford 2019 State CC Champion



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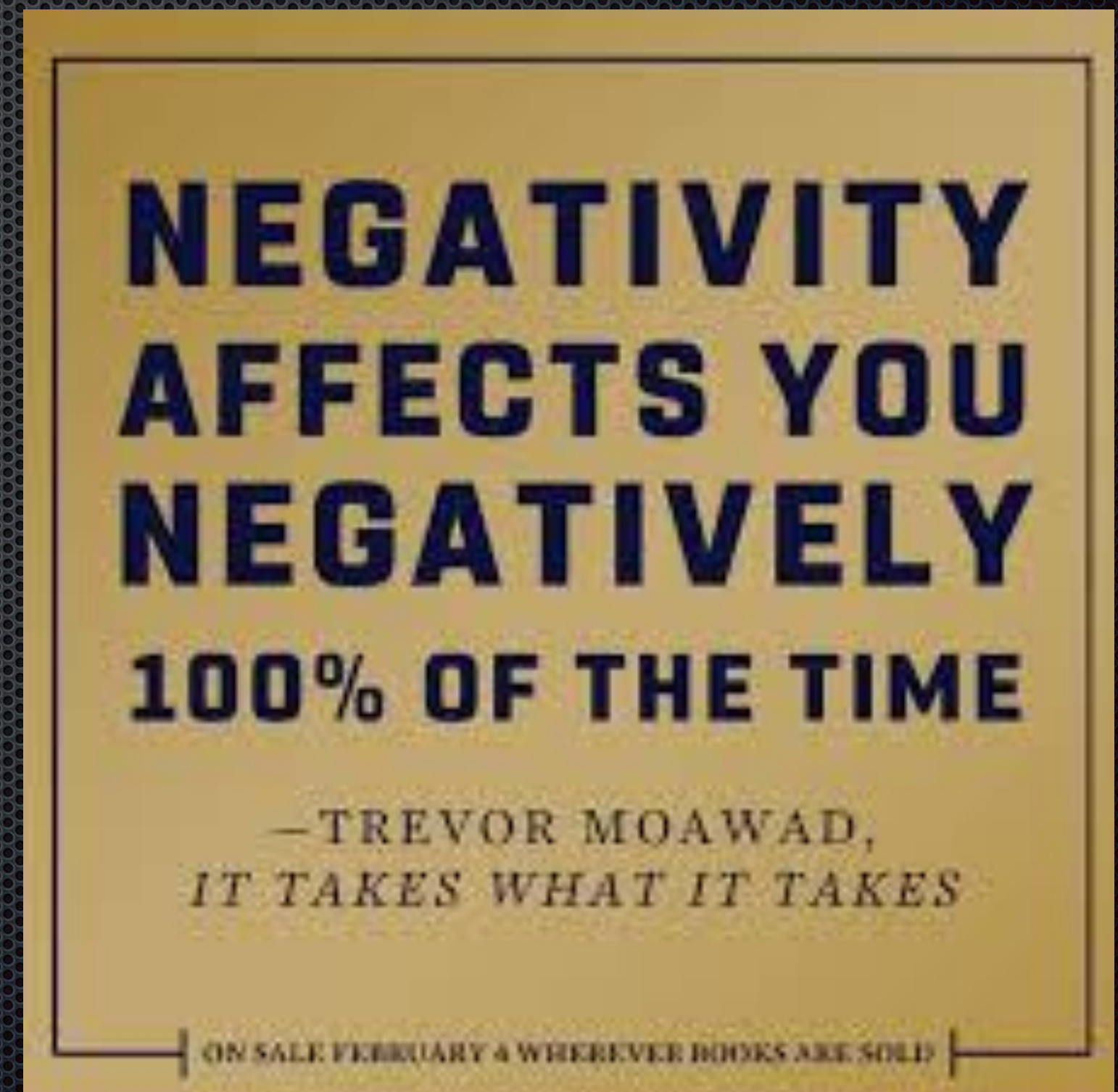
- Have you ever tried to think positively while you were physically exhausted, stressed mentally & emotionally, and had negative feelings?
- Exactly.
- Yet we oftentimes believe our 14-18 year-old runners can somehow do that because of their years and years of mental training and youthful resiliency.
- While positive thinking is one of many ingredients the recipe requires; this presentation is an attempt to show alternatives to the main dish of positivity as well as provide you with other essential components to assist in helping you expand you and your athletes' toolbox.

- The Inner Game of Tennis Gallwey
- How Bad Do You Want It? Fitzgerald
- Peak Performance Stulberg & Magness
- Mindset Dweck
- Passion Paradox Stulberg & Magness
- Amazing Racers Bloom
- The Playmaker's Advantage Zaichkowsky & Peterson
- Endure Hutchinson
- **\*\*\*\*Performing Under Pressure** Weisinger & Pawliw-fry
- The Mindful Athlete Mumford
- Relentless Grover
- **Thinking Body, Dancing Mind** Ai Huang & Jerry Lynch
- Flow Csikszentmihalyi
- The Obstacle is the Way Holiday



# Neutral Thinking: Trevor Moawad/Russell Wilson

- *It Takes What It Takes* T. Moawad
- We know negative thinking is bad, but it is also really hard to get to positive thinking - especially in the midst of an endurance event not unfolding as desired. So shift to neutral. A non-judgement method of thinking; related to judgement free thinking of Taoism. What happened, happened. What happens next has nothing to do with that.
- 3 states: What has happened? What is happening? What will happen? The next event is independent of the past. It can be different.



# Shifting to Neutral:

- **Create a plan** - just like you design a training or racing plan. What's the plan to eliminate the negative? It's what you do, not how you feel. Imprint memories of past successes. We write successes in practice and meets on notecards. We visualize past successes during our relaxation/visualiation time.
- **Choices** - "The illusion of choice" - Choice is your competitor. It will lie to you in order for you to be average or less. "You can do what you feel, or you can do what you choose" - Nick Saban "Our challenge every day is to ignore the choice that makes us feel better now so we can make the choice that can help sustain us." - Trevor Moawad Think about how self-esteem relates to how we feel about ourselves. If we are making good choices, we will feel better about ourselves and therefore put us in a better position to succeed.
- **Avoid Negative Talk** - especially aloud - don't speak negativity into existence. Ex. Bill Buckner 19 days prior to Game 6 1986 World Series. "the process of elimination is the first step" to any serious improvement (Matthew McConaughey) Verbalizing our negativity tends to lead to a parallel behavior. Make the decision to reduce and eventually eliminate negativity from your speech. Then reduce and eliminate negativity from all forms of expression.
- **Reduce {Eliminate} Negativity as an influencer** - social media, music with negative/depressing lyrics or messages. Music can lift, but also bring down. Protect your state of mind. If nothing else; near a measured outcome or event, limit these things. "Slow the flow of the forces of negativity from the outside world and stem their effects." We become what we consume. If you are a negative individual, what are you consuming each day? If you have athletes that are primarily negative, where is that coming from? Other coaches? All in all, negativity is poison to you as an individual and deadly to your culture.



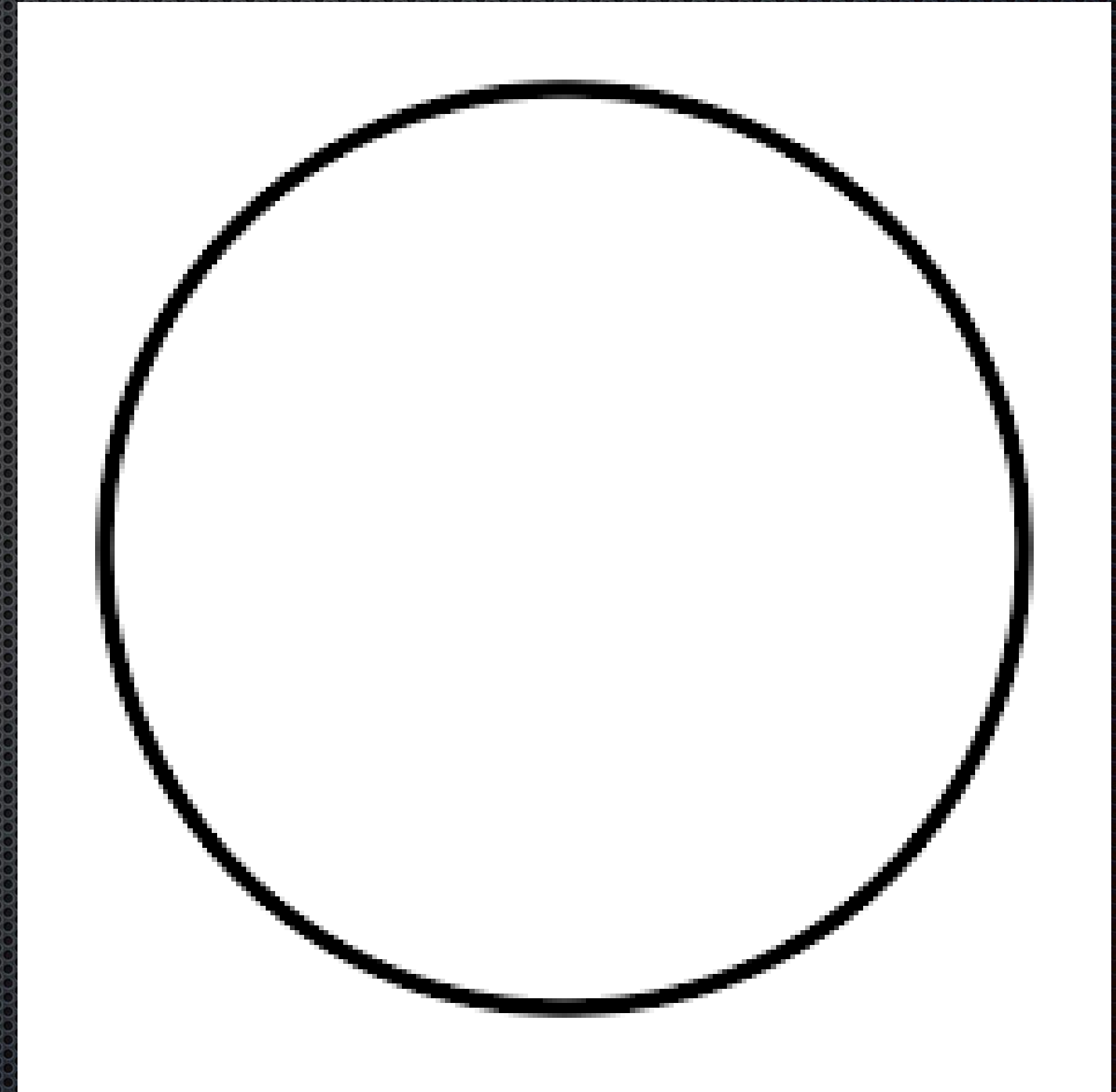
# What we do: Visualization

- One session per week *eventually*
- Multiple sessions - create longer focus over time
- Wednesdays / Fridays - why?
- How: Relaxation-Adopt a perspective-Stimulate 5 senses-Rehearse from post practice pre meet day to the drive home-Attachment of music w/intentional lyrics or bpm.
- Creating a mental model of desired performance
- Reduce performance anxiety / be open to the unexpected
- Create Neural Pathways through rehearsal



# Vulnerability Circles

- Share the pressure
- Speak your goals into existence
- “I will” vs. “If” - “I” speaks to commitment to the task.
- Shared accountability
- Oneness shared
- Compare notes with the coach time to time



# Peer Props (Mondays typically)

- Share successes
- Share micro-successes
- Acknowledgement of peer performances/gains
- Jerry Seinfeld - “Don’t break the chain” - Encourage and point out these successes in a public display to help improve others’ performances
- Everything is contagious. The positive and the negative.
- Your group is only as good as its weakest link.



# Helpful Tips + Implementation Methods

- Befriend the moment/Become comfortable with pressure - challenge or opportunity vs. a threat or dealing with a fear of failure (probably the one my kids have most often) We set up practice with goal times most “measured days”. The competition within the team itself oftentimes creates the chance to work on this mentality.
- Multiple Opportunities concept - this won't be the first or last - same when we introduce a new stimulus. We typically struggle with a new workout first time out.
- Downsize the importance - regardless. Use this in the cumulative aspect of training. It's a piece of the puzzle. No one workout, no one race (even when it's not true) can take on a greater role than the others.
- Focus on the mission - create a mission - share the mission - give them the mission at the right time (Wed for us) - then it becomes **execution**. Only one person wins the race - false. At each position you have a chance to win the race within the race.

- Anticipate the unknown. Talk about it. Discuss the what-ifs. Then focus on your personal composure in handling it. This is where you attempt to create opportunities in practice for such experiences. Have the Plan A, Plan B, Wildcard discussions; know your competition if applicable. This is addressed in one on one visits during striders/hill/speed sessions & in a team format on Wednesdays and/or Fridays.
- Affirm self-worth prior to event itself. For teens this can be so difficult. So manufacture some of that through teammates. We have used notecards in our “vulnerability circles” to write **our** (teammates & coaches) thoughts and encouragement to one another. Peer props enforces the self-worth aspect as well.
- Flashbacks - recall through **visualization** past successes in workouts/races. Stay away from the moments of failure. Create right muscle memory. I have also had kids create an actual filing system of notecards using workout books, training logs, and race performances cementing the reality of what they’ve done vs. the perception of failure they may currently be dealing with.

- Positivity\* - modeled and practiced. Which wolf are you going to feed? In-practice coaching is huge in these moments especially. What do you do when a workout goes wrong for an individual/team? Obviously, each athlete will respond to different degrees of addressing their current struggle. I may adjust rest, volume, intensity, or duration at various points in the workout.
- Stay in the Moment - what is being done, thought, and felt in the present. Stay away from the could've, might've, should've language. Ignore the past and the future. "Pay attention". Start centered with your breathing (**relaxation**). Learn to develop this focus - no distractions. Structuring workouts with multiple tiers; taxing different energy systems, etc...may eliminate the looking ahead or staying in the past tendency. Implement "Neutral" thinking as a pre & post workout piece.
- Control - Too much focus and energy is often spent on those things you cannot control. That makes running different than the other competitive sports. List the factors you can and cannot control. We do this with practice sometimes. We cannot control the wind or the temperature. On those days we may place our focus on something different. I may ask them to focus on their breathing and composure in and around their teammates. I may have them focus on leading odd number reps. Try different focal points out.

- Music - I imbed this with our relaxation and visualization exercises. I provide a song and its background or story and we implement it as a mantra for the week or for the upcoming race. Focus on the lyrics and symbolism as a means to develop focus.
- Anchor words - I like the three C's: Control - Confidence - Composure, but we train on Corporate for some of our longer measured runs, so that is a marker or anchor word to bring them back to successful thinking. We may visualize the last mile of a course being that of our training grounds.
- Left Hand Physical Cue - Squeeze or clench the left hand to activate the right hemisphere of the brain as it may be overridden by the self-focused anxiety producing left hemisphere.

# “Reprogramming the Athlete”

- Define “winning” differently
- Execution is not found only in the end result
- “Coping” - making good decisions in the moment - typically produced through proper preparation over time
- “On task” / “Off task” thinking. Don’t leave the moment. “Off task” begins when you begin thinking about things outside of your control.
- Debrief for 3 things: Effort - Execution - Mind on task after workouts and races as a means of prepping the mind.
- “These thoughts are happening to us” vs. I have an actual say in my thinking. Validate vs. Junk -Correct your thinking.  
“Move to that tree” / “Stay with that jersey”





# Other methods of implementation:

- Identify the psychological benefit to everything you do.
- No watch workouts periodically -Matthew Hauser's Sub-T 8 miler - Making him guess splits each mile
- Create racing situations within workout; tap into the unknown. Create chaos from time to time.
- Training Sessions at labeled paces such as 3k/5k but without specific goal times and more "on feel".
- Race with the mindset of doing something different (3 times) than before. Regular season racing is used for exploratory purposes on what may work best for the individual and team.
- Your greatest coaching will be in the combination of your preparatory work and maybe more significantly your on the spot, in the moment decision-making coaching.

Confidence is the belief that you can do what is demanded. You must have the physiology and skillset to achieve something, but you need to be holistic.

- Project it. Behavior, body language, verbal. See *Caleb Wilfong 2011 Class 4 State Cross Country Champion*
- “Amy Cuddy” - “Fake it until you make it” - Posture.
- Develop an Optimistic Vocabulary and environment - you and your staff MUST believe in the concept of no ceiling
- Tenacity - create and develop the ability to “hold on” during durations of time. A setback is an opportunity for improvement rather than any alternative





QUESTIONS?  
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