

**Brake,
Brake,
BRAKE!**

**THE HPDE INSTRUCTOR
MANIFESTO**



SPEED SECRETS

BY ROSS BENTLEY

For all of you HPDE Instructors: the ones who inspire, motivate, and educate people joining the ranks of performance drivers. Thank you for bringing new participants to the sport we all love so much.

Manifesto: *"A manifesto is a published verbal declaration of the intentions, motives, or views of the issuer, be it an individual, group, political party or government. A manifesto usually accepts a previously published opinion or public consensus and/or promotes a new idea with prescriptive notions for carrying out changes the author believes should be made. It often is political or artistic in nature, but may present an individual's life stance." - Wikipedia*

Herewith, I present my manifesto on the art (and science) that I'm passionate about: High Performance Driver Education (HPDE) Instruction.
– **Ross Bentley**

Legal-type Stuff

First, you know that motorsport of any kind is dangerous. Therefore, I provide my advice for you to use in the way you choose. I can't be held responsible for anything that might happen as a result. You're a grown-up now - you're responsible for yourself – and by reading on, you are accepting that responsibility.

Second, all of the material in this document is mine. In other words, it's copyrighted, and therefore you cannot share it, reprint it, publish it or quote from it without my permission. That might sound a bit harsh (it's a legal thing), but understand, I'm pretty liberal with allowing people to use my content...as long as they ask first. So, send me an email at ross@speedsecrets.com and let me know what you're looking for.

However, because I appreciate what HPDE Instructors do so much, I want every single one of them to read this. That's why it's free! It's my way of saying thank you. So please recommend that they download their own copy. Did I mention that I've made this available for free?

Finally, have fun. Oh wait, that's not a legal-type thing. No worries! Have fun anyway (I'm pretty sure the lawyers will allow that)!

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INTRODUCTION

"Brake, **brake**, **BRAKE!**" There are two kinds of HPDE Instructors in the world: Those who have used this phrase, and those who will.

No kidding - riding in the passenger seat with a driver, whether novice or advanced, will get your attention. Well, it should! For there will be a day, a session, a lap, a corner, where all of a sudden you're going to need the right combination of words and hand signals to save you and your student from "The Big One."

So what in the world would ever convince someone that strapping into the passenger seat of a car careening around a race track at high speed, driven by a person with questionable skills, would be a good idea?

Using my best David Letterman impersonation... From the Home Office in Omao, Hawaii, the Top Ten Reasons for Being a HPDE Instructor are:

10. Instructing leads to free or near-free track time.
9. You're a thrill-seeker.
8. You want to give back to others for all the enjoyment you've gotten from performance driving.
7. Instructing is good for the ego, since you get to tell others how to drive.
6. Instructing makes you a better driver.
5. You get to thrash... err, I mean... drive other people's cool cars.
4. To see the light bulb go on when your students "get it."
3. It's fun.
2. It gives you more time to acquire helmet hair.
1. You grew up in a country where they drove on the opposite side of the road from where you live now, so you often find yourself habitually getting into the passenger seat anyway.



Those may not be all the reasons to be an instructor, but they cover most of them. Over the three decades I've been around HPDE instructors, that list summarizes most of the justifications I've heard.

What's the job description of an HPDE Instructor? In short:

- Help your students stay safe.
- Help your students have fun.
- Help your students learn.

That's it! Pretty simple, right?

Safety is always the number one priority for every second of every session with every student. And having fun is just about as important, because if a student doesn't have fun, he or she won't come back (believe it or not, that happens).

So that leaves helping your students learn. This manifesto is focused on helping **you** help your students learn, have fun, and stay safe.

This manifesto is not meant to provide you all of the techniques and information that you should be giving your students. You can learn about the "what" part of instructing - **what** you should be teaching - by reading books and/or your organization's materials. Rather, this manifesto is meant to provide you with some guidelines, or "tools," for **how** you should teach those things.



I've aimed this manifesto at instructors of all levels. So whether you've just been asked to become an instructor, you've been doing this for decades, or you fit somewhere in between, you'll find something here for you.

I have three main goals for this manifesto:

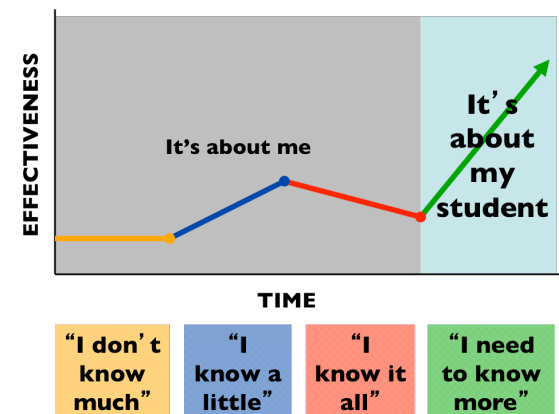
1. To share with you my thoughts, insights, knowledge, experience, and philosophy regarding instructing drivers who have a desire - strong or not so strong - to drive quickly around a race track. Some of this I've learned on my own, and some I've learned from others. I've had the opportunity to instruct, facilitate, coach, and mentor many thousands of performance and race drivers, with the bulk of these in some form of HPDE program. I've also hired, trained, and worked alongside thousands of instructors. I've learned a lot from a few, and a little from a lot - some good, and some not so good.
2. To help you be a better instructor. That's not to say that I'm a better instructor than you are, but only that I've been fortunate to spend more than a hundred days every year for the past couple of decades training drivers. I've been fortunate enough to acquire a lot of experience, and I want to share it with you.
3. To help you have more fun, even when strapped into that passenger seat of a car careening around a race track at high speed, driven by a person with questionable skills, while you're saying or thinking, "Brake, **brake**, **BRAKE!**"

There you go. If you're okay with these goals, let's move on. *What's it all about?*

Let's start by looking at the accompanying graph, which helps illustrate a critical point about being an instructor.

Assuming you've been instructing for a little while now, and in looking at your effectiveness over time, you'll remember when you were first asked to be an instructor. I'll bet one of your initial thoughts was, "Me? But I don't know much. I don't know enough to be an instructor." That's a good thing, because with this attitude, you learn. Your mind is open and you're learning to be a better instructor. Most importantly, with this attitude, your students learn. This is the yellow line on the graph.

After a little while, you start to get the hang of instructing. You learn some specific techniques that work (most instructors learn this through trial and error, and perhaps



by hearing some war stories from the old-timers), and you become even more effective at helping your students learn. This is the blue line.

Then (and it's true of every one of the thousands of instructors I've ever seen), you'll go through a stage where you think, "I've got this nailed. I'm really good at this. I'm a great instructor. Just listen to me talk to my students – I sound like an expert, because I am one." This is the red line on the graph - the one that slopes down in relationship to your effectiveness. It's the attitude that makes you less effective at helping your students. At this point, your ego has become more important than your students.

Okay, you never went through this stage, right? Wrong! I can guarantee that you did, if even for just a few minutes. For some instructors, this stage lasts a long time. For a select few, it never ends! But for most people, it's a phase that everyone goes through. Then they move into what's termed "the more I know, the more I realize how much more I need to learn" phase. This is the green line.

At this phase, you've learned a lot of instructing techniques and how to explain different driving skills in many different ways; you have deeper insights into what it is you do when you're driving; you've figured out how to adapt to your students; and so much more. And yet, you realize there is much more to learn; it's at this stage where you are the most effective in helping your students.

Take a good look at the accompanying graph, make note of where you're currently at, and look especially at the "effectiveness" arrow. If you're in the "It's about me" phase, your goal is to get to the "It's about my student" phase as soon as possible. Know that some of it comes with experience that you can't speed up or force to happen.

Be patient, focus on your student, and be aware of where you are on the graph.

What's it all about? Your students.

Do You Really Want To Do This?

Before you commit to becoming an in-car instructor, or continuing to be one, ask yourself these questions:

- Why am I doing this?
- Do I really want to do this?

Instructing from the passenger seat is not for everyone. When you're first asked to be an instructor, it's flattering. Typically it's a sign that others consider you to be a good driver. Of course, being a good driver and being a good instructor are two different things. It's like saying that a good salesperson will be a good people manager – each job requires different skills.

Ask yourself, "Do I really want to instruct? Why?"

So, take some time to decide if you really want to give it a try, or continue doing it. Think through your answers to the questions I just posed. If you're new to instructing, give it a shot. But don't feel that you have to do it. I know a lot of instructors who dread getting into the passenger seat with a student, and yet do it. Why? Because they feel like they have to. You don't.

If you're uncomfortable riding in the passenger seat with students, stop. Admitting that you're uncomfortable – even scared – riding with students takes just as much courage as actually doing it. Not admitting it is something less than courageous.

Why do you instruct, and do you really want to continue?

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Track Knowledge & Vehicle Dynamics

Road racing circuits tend to have right and left turns, elevation changes, and varying corner radii. Well, duh!

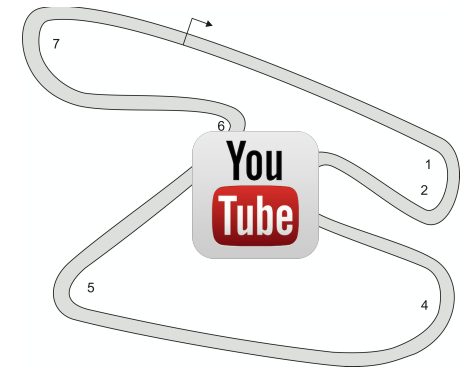
As I said earlier, I'm not going to write about the track and vehicle knowledge that you need to have to be an effective instructor. I'm not going to tell you what knowledge you should impart to your students. That's the job of your program's curriculum.

But it is your job to know it. You need to know it inside and out. Okay, you don't need to be an expert, but it wouldn't hurt. If you don't know the information in your program's curriculum in depth, you will not be the best instructor that you can be. You must - and I mean must - participate in the classroom sessions as often as it takes to be able to answer most questions that a student will ever have upon leaving the classroom. In truth, to be a truly great in-car instructor, you should be able to practically recite the classroom presentation word-for-word.

Of course, it would make sense to have a deeper knowledge base than just what your program's curriculum covers. Not only will that allow you to answer students' questions better, but you'll feel more confident. It'll also make you a better driver.

As for track-specific information, there's no excuse these days for not knowing it inside and out. From talking with experienced drivers and instructors to track walks; from in-car video (YouTube and Vimeo) to data acquisition; and from track maps to track guide articles; the information is available.

So, that's all I have to say about track and vehicle information: Learn it.



THE BIG PICTURE

What Happens in the Classroom Stays in the Classroom (But It Shouldn't)

Why do HPDE programs have classroom sessions?

- To give students something to do between on-track sessions.
- To give classroom instructors a chance to show the students how much they know.
- To do to students what was done to them when they first started.
- Because it's always been done that way.

Okay, that's a bit sarcastic, but it seems pretty close to the truth for many DE programs. When I ask Chief Instructors why they have classroom sessions, they usually talk about giving students an understanding of the vocabulary in-car instructors will use, and preparing them with the theory behind what they will experience on the track. But in spite of that ideal, there's often a huge disconnect between what is said in the classroom and what on-track instructors talk about. I'm convinced that many classroom sessions are really there for the enjoyment of the classroom instructor - so he can enjoy demonstrating all his knowledge.

That may sound harsh, but I've been there. For years I pushed my classroom sessions because I had a blast talking about driving to an eager group of learners. Sure, the students learned from it, but it was really more about me than it was about them. I can recall exactly where I was and what I was talking about when that hit me - that it was more about me than it was about the students. It was a humbling moment. From that day on, I've tried hard to simplify my classroom sessions to keep in mind whom it's really for. And most importantly, I've done everything I can to make the classroom session fit with and support what's going on on the track, as that's where our students learn the most. The best classroom of all is behind the steering wheel.

If you're teaching the classroom session, keep this message in mind: Only teach as much as the students can and will use during their next on-track session or two. Anything beyond that is unlikely to sink in, anyway, so why waste everyone's time talking about stuff that students will not use?

Most classroom instructors use one of two styles:

- They teach the way they've been taught in the past.
- They teach the opposite way they've been taught in the past... because it was so painful.

If much of your own classroom learning experience included a teacher who involved you and the others in the class, that's a great role model to follow. If you suffered with teachers who lectured on and on and on and on and on... well, that's a good reason to take on the opposite style.

Engage your students. Make your classroom sessions a discussion: ask questions, encourage questions, share experiences (and I don't mean just yours – allow your students to share). Make your classroom sessions interactive.

Examples of good classroom sessions begin with questions like:

- “How did that last on-track session go?”
- “What did you learn the last time on track?”
- “What questions have come to mind since your last classroom and/or track session?”
- “What’s become apparent – what have you learned – from the last classroom or track session?”
- “Are there any particular areas of your driving that you’re struggling with right now?”

You can imagine how these questions will engage students, and lead to great learning opportunities for everyone. Some classroom instructors don’t like asking questions like these for fear of the students leading the class astray from the designated curriculum. What?! You mean your curriculum is more important than what the students want and need to learn?! Ironical when you look at it that way, isn’t it?

Most replies to the above-mentioned questions can be guided in one of three ways:

1. You can decide that discussing the answer is more important to everyone in the class than what you planned to cover.
2. You can discuss the questions appropriately, and then move on to your original material.
3. You can use the questions to segue into what you had planned to cover.

*Only teach as much
as the students can
and will use during
their next on-track
session or two.*

If you’re not willing and prepared to discuss what your students want to know, you’re not focused on your students.

Classroom to On-track to Classroom to On-track...

Having interviewed and surveyed countless numbers of HPDE instructors and students, the most common comment I’ve heard is that the typical classroom has little or nothing to do with what the in-car instructors say.

Notice that I said that this feedback didn’t just come from instructors. In fact, the bulk of the comments came from students. And get this: Most were students of the car clubs who raved about how their curriculum, their instructors, and their HPDE program were so much better than everyone else’s. Hmmm... makes you wonder who’s making this assessment!

Yes, it’s ironic, but sad. The fact is that most of the students complaining were participants of the programs put on by the clubs that bragged the most about how good they were. So, before you write off what I’m saying as not applying to you and your organization’s program, think again.

Stand back and look at your DE program and see how you can better integrate the classroom and on-track instruction. There are many ways of doing this. It may require instructor training, a complete rewrite of your curriculum, different scheduling, new presentation materials, online discussion tools or a combination of these things. One thing is for sure: every on-track instructor

should have a written list of topics just discussed in the classroom session, along with specific objectives the student should be working on in their upcoming session.

And if integrating the classroom with the on-track instruction sounds like a daunting task... well, it can be. But when done right, your DE program will move to a whole new level. And your students will notice the difference. They will no longer complain, as they might be doing right now (behind your back).

If you're an in-car instructor, you can't just ignore the classroom. It's your job to know what's going on in there, and to relate your instructing to what's been taught by the classroom instructor. Imagine if your student just spent 30 minutes in the classroom talking about heel-and-toe downshifting, and then came to you for a track session where all you did was talk about the cornering line. How do you think she would feel? Frustrated, at best.

When your student has just come from a classroom session, ask her what was covered, and whether she has any questions about it. It gives you an insight into your student's knowledge level, and builds your working relationship with her.

Coordinate in-car instruction with what is being taught in the classroom, and vice versa.

Edu-tainment

Every HPDE curriculum should be a combination of education and entertainment. All education with no entertainment - no fun - and many students will not return for more. All entertainment with no education and it's not only frustrating, it's dangerous.

As an instructor, you need to keep education and entertainment in balance. Always remember that you're a salesperson. The good news is that you will never need to put the "hard sell" on someone. All you need to do is make sure your student is learning and having fun. If that doesn't sell the driver on coming back for more, nothing will. In fact, OSB - Other Sports Beckon.

No matter what type of program you're instructing, your student is a customer. The best, most successful businesses regularly exceed customer expectations; the best HPDE programs do the same. And you're the one person who will have the most impact on your customer/student's experience. Most often, it comes down to the basics: treat your customers professionally, communicate clearly, do everything you can to give them what they want and need (meet their expectations), and have fun (it's contagious).

Balance education with entertainment.

Ultimately, do everything you can to help your student have fun and be excited about coming back. You almost can't fail to make your student a better driver, but you can screw it up if he isn't enthusiastically signing up for the next event within minutes of finishing this one!

Some instructors are too serious, taking most of the fun out of the HPDE experience – and a lack of fun restricts learning (especially if you throw in some stress, nervousness and frustration!). Then there are those who are so caught up in having fun that they are too loose - and they can be dangerous.

Like driving a car at the limit, it's all about balance. Get it right, and there's nothing like it!

WHAT'S REALLY DRIVING THE CAR?

Is This Mental?

From your experience of driving cars quickly on race tracks, what percentage of performance driving is mental and what percentage physical?

When I ask this question during the seminar/workshops I conduct for drivers and instructors, the most common response is 80 to 95 percent mental. In other words, most drivers and instructors agree that performance driving is more of a mental challenge than a physical one (that's not to say that it doesn't take physical stamina and skill).

I could make the argument that performance driving is 100 percent mental, since our body does nothing unless our brain tells it to. All of the actions and movements that our eyes, hands, arms, legs and feet make are a result of our brain directing them.

So, what's driving the car that you're sitting in? The brain of the guy behind the wheel. And that's why I believe that you will never be a great instructor without having a basic understanding of how a driver's mind works.

Performance Model

Here's the best way to understand how a driver's mind works: use what I call the *Performance Model* - a model of how we, as humans, perform.

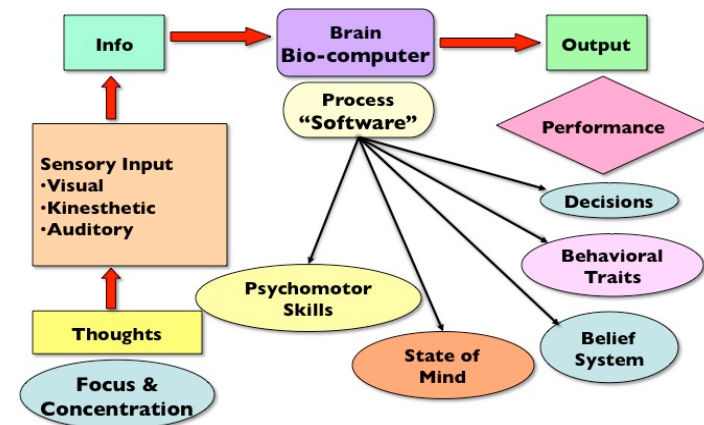
This model is much like how a computer operates.

Information enters the brain, where it is processed by the mind's software (mental programming), telling the body what to do in response. This response is an output, and in fact, is the performance.

The information entering the brain comes primarily from our senses, and specifically visual, kinesthetic (sense of touch or feel, along with balance and the ability to sense g-forces), and auditory (hearing). We typically only use olfactory (smell) to deal with problems, but not to improve our performance; taste is something we rarely, if ever, use when driving on the track.

One other "input" processed by the brain's programming when driving is **thought**. If you've ever driven through Turn 5 thinking about the mistake you made in Turn 4, you know what I'm talking about. And, if you're doing that, your performance will not be optimal; you were processing the "wrong" information. This is why focus and concentration are so important. If you focus on - process - the wrong information, your performance will suffer.

Based on this model, can you see why it's so important for a driver to take the best quality information into his brain? In fact, the more quality information the driver brings in, the better his output (or performance) will be. You may have heard the computer



term, "GIGO" (Garbage In, Garbage Out) - if you input garbage into a computer you will get garbage out of it. The opposite is also true, especially with our minds: if we put quality in, we'll get quality out.

A huge part of your job is to help your student take in more quality sensory information, and to ensure the right information is being processed. When you point out where he should be looking, you're helping your student take in more and better visual information. When you point out a bump in the track or how the car begins to understeer, you're helping your student learn to soak up kinesthetic information. When you ask your student to listen to the sound of the tires, or the wind noise to sense speed, you're helping her take in better quality auditory information.

Like a computer, drivers have "software," or mental programming. It processes information that enters the brain, then tells the body what to do. Of course, you have "instructor mental programming," too.

Drivers do what they do because they are programmed to do so. They don't do what they (or you) want because they either don't have the programming to do it, or they access the wrong program at the wrong time.

I'll say that again, for it's crucial that you understand it: Drivers do what they do because they are programmed to do so. They don't do what they (or you) want because they either don't have the programming to do it, or they access the wrong program at the wrong time.

Drivers do what they do because they're programmed to do so. They don't do what they want because they either don't have the programming to do it, or they access the wrong program at the wrong time.

A huge part of what you do as an instructor is build the right programming, and helping your students access the right program at the right time. As an instructor, you're a programmer.

When you look at the *Performance Model*, you'll see that a driver's psychomotor skills (those skills she's able to do without thinking, and do at the subconscious level), state of mind, decisions (the ones that are made quickly, and not the ones that she's able to deliberately and logically think about), behavioral traits, and belief system are all parts of her mental programming.

As a programmer, as an instructor, you help build the psychomotor skills by ensuring the driver practices the right things, because skills are developed through repetition. Only perfect practice makes perfect; if a driver practices the wrong thing, she will only get better at doing the wrong thing. Of course, the repetition of these skills can be done physically or mentally, as simply imagining doing the skill over and over again will build programming. We typically call this visualization, and yet a more accurate term is mental imagery. The more senses the driver uses when imagining the skill, rather than just imagining what it looks like (that's where the visualization term comes from), the more effective the programming will be. Drivers should imagine not just what the skill looks like, but also how it will feel and sound.

Often, your job as an instructor is to help put your student in the right state of mind - into a performance state of mind, one that will help her perform at her best. Anger, anxiety, calm, stress, intensity or energy, happiness and sadness are all emotions that

make up one's state of mind. It can be a challenge to determine an ideal state of mind; it might be calm and relaxed for one driver and hyped up and energized for another.

Every person has a basic set of personality or behavioral traits. They inform how the person behaves, naturally. Some people are very aggressive, some less so; some introverted while others are extroverted; some patient and some impatient; some are very analytical while others go with their gut. When put under pressure, like driving on a race track, often a person will change. Often just the act of putting a helmet on seems to change a person's behavior! It is critical to understand a student's basic behavioral traits, how they may change under stress and pressure, and most importantly, how to work with them. At a minimum, understanding that behavioral traits are a factor, and that every person is different (and different from you) is the first step.

Have you ever wondered why someone made the decision they made - one that you would not have made? The reason is simple: that person has different programming than you do. Decisions made at race track speed are mostly done at a subconscious, programmed level. In other words, there's not enough time to consciously think them through, so they are what we call reactionary decisions. And that's why a driver's programming is so critical; if a driver has inappropriate programming, she will make inappropriate decision.

Finally, a driver's belief system (part of her programming) will ultimately have the biggest impact on her performance. Call it confidence if you want, but it's that deep-down-inside belief a person has in her abilities. Too much confidence and bad things can happen. Too little confidence and bad things can also happen. So another huge part of your job as an instructor is managing your student's confidence level.

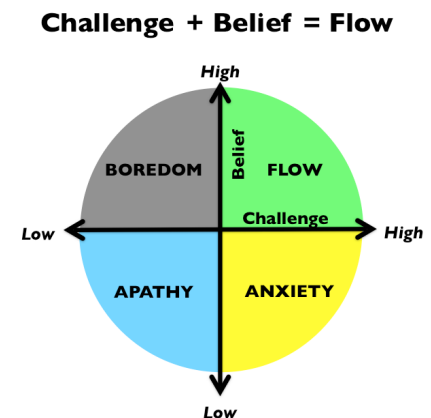
Confidence, Challenge & Skill

You must balance your student's confidence and skill levels. This is at the very core of what great instructing is all about. You also want to manage how challenged he feels in relationship to his belief in his abilities.

When a student feels challenged by an activity, and yet feels he has the necessary abilities to handle it, he's more likely to perform at his best. In fact, this is at the core of getting into the "flow" or "zone."

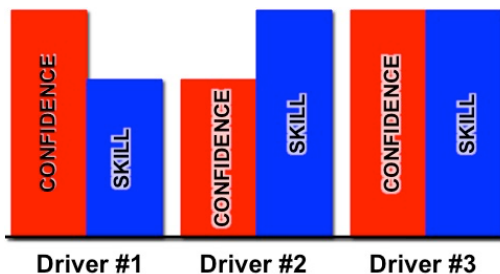
Think about a time when you performed at a very high level, perhaps one of your best performances ever. I can almost guarantee that you felt challenged, yet you knew you had the skills to handle the task. You were confident in your abilities, and you had the skills to perform at a high level.

You want to set up the appropriate level of challenge for your student - one that matches with his confidence and skill level. Telling him that everything is easy won't lead to the appropriate level of challenge, nor is making everything out to be the toughest test he's ever faced.



If your student is over-confident, at least one of two things will happen: He will feel the challenge is not evident, and therefore won't put all the effort in that it takes to perform well; or, he will take big chances because he's too confident, and the risky actions will hurt his performance (and perhaps other things!). Either way, if he is over-confident, he will not perform at his best.

Obviously, a goal is to always build a student's skill level. In other words, bolster his abilities. You do this through teaching, instructing and coaching. You accomplish this by explaining techniques; by demonstrating how to do them; by having your student imagine (visualize); and by facilitating and supervising his practice so he programs the right things. In this role, you're a programmer, building your student's skills (programming) using a variety of strategies and tactics.



Instructing a student also means managing her confidence level, while building her skills. Sometimes you have to knock the confidence level down a little to match her skill level (as shown with Driver #1 in the illustration). Sometimes you need to build a student's confidence level to bring it up closer to his skill level (Driver #2). Your goal is to have your student's confidence and skill levels equal (Driver #3).

But how do you knock a student's confidence level down without taking the fun out of the program for her? I find a polite but direct discussion - with the car stopped in the pits or paddock (to indicate, with subtlety, who is in control) - is best. Another very effective way is to deflect the student's focus away from her speed (or whatever it is that's demonstrating his over-confidence); have her work very deliberately on a task or skill that is difficult, and can be worked on at a lower speed. Many instructors use the "demonstrating their own abilities approach" by taking the student for a ride to show her how much more she has to learn. Unfortunately, this can backfire. Many students don't have the awareness to see the difference, and all they really notice is the speed at which the instructor is driving... inadvertently encouraging them to attempt to match that speed. I rarely recommend this approach; I prefer polite, honest and direct dialogue.

I want to strongly make this point: When you feel that a student is over-confident and driving too fast for his skill level, you mustn't wait to see how it will work out. You need to deal with it before The Big One happens. If you don't, and The Big One does happen, it's your fault. I know too many instructors who have said things like, "I knew it was going to happen. The lap before I thought about telling him to slow down or to pit. If only I'd trusted my gut and done something about it sooner."

TRAINING MODES

Teaching, Instructing, Coaching (& Bears, Oh My!)

There are three different modes for helping your students learn:

1. Teaching
2. Instructing
3. Coaching

(I don't recommend using bears!)

Teaching is best defined as trying to put information into your student's brain. Instructing involves some teaching, but also demonstrating and correcting physical techniques and skills. Coaching is drawing out what a student already knows or accessing a skill she already has.

I think of teaching as training from the *outside-in*, whereas coaching is training from the *inside-out*.

MODE	EXAMPLE
Teaching	"Look further ahead."
Coaching	"Where are you looking?"
Teaching	"Gently release the brake pedal."
Coaching	"How gently are you releasing the brake pedal?"

Notice that teaching tells, and coaching asks questions. Asking questions brings awareness to a student without making her feel she's being told what to do. If you haven't noticed already, many drivers participating in HPDE events have strong egos. Working with these students' egos, by giving them ownership in the learning process, can be extremely effective.

One of these modes is not any more important or better than another. It's simply which one is appropriate for the student. It's a timing thing. For example, coaching a novice - a student who knows little – isn't appropriate because there isn't much to draw out. And telling or teaching a very experienced advanced driver may be ineffective, as the student may "shut down," thinking you're talking down to her.

As a general rule, teach novices and coach advanced students.

However, I recommend coaching whenever possible and using this mode more often than teaching. In other words, use questions instead of telling as often as you can. It's very effective, don't you think?



Let's say you're about to hit the track with an intermediate driver. Rather than riding around pointing out what he's doing well or what he needs to improve, tell him that you're going to coach how he uses his vision. While he's driving, ask him, "Where are you looking now?" or "Can you see the track-out point?" or even "How's your vision?"

Since we tend to use the term "instructing" the most, and it fits in between teaching and coaching, we'll continue to use it as the default term. And yet, when I talk about instructing, I'm really talking about all three modes, used appropriately.

1ST GEAR: GETTING STARTED

Nice To Meet You

Many car clubs' DE programs have turned the "getting to know your student" into a fine art, as well as a well-defined process. And that's a good thing.

First impressions make a difference, don't they? Remember that when you first meet your student (on time for every session... hint, hint). Introduce yourself with a positive, warm, and confident attitude. Put your student at ease. No matter how experienced a driver he is, he will always have some anxiety and tension at a HPDE event. Start creating a supportive partnership with him from the moment you meet, then build on that over time.

You cannot be an effective instructor until you have a general feel for your student, and specifically, as a bare minimum:

- Why is he here? What is your student's motivation? Is it to become a professional race driver (if so, be prepared to explain that your HPDE program may be inappropriate for him), to just have fun, to learn to be a better street driver, to drive fast, to learn about his car, or what?
- What driving experience has he had to date? How many track days has he done, with whom, where, and what type of instruction has he had?
- How is his car prepared? Is it stock, modified, and what level of maintenance and/or preparation has it had before the track day?
- Does he want to work on any specific areas of his driving?

Ask these questions. You want to learn as much about your student as you can, as soon as possible. How familiar is he with the driving and track language we often use? What did he learn in the classroom session? What questions does he have? How much commentary and feedback does he prefer while driving?

I also find it useful to know what my student does for a living, or what his hobbies are, so I can think about how to relate certain explanations to him. For example, if my student is an experienced skier, then I know I can use analogies relating to that sport (vision, the line, balance). Or if he's a business owner, it can be effective to note how he can use his decision-making skills on the track.

Asking your student about his hobbies and work also encourages two-way communication and helps to build a relationship.

How many students really care about their cars? Most, if not all. It's unlikely your student would be at the HPDE program if he didn't care about his car, so ask him about it. Let him talk about it. Compliment him on it. Connect with him. Make the entire experience something he will rave about.

Asking about his car provides a lot more information than just the make, model and how it's maintained. It gives you a glimpse into his reason for being there. It also demonstrates your interest in him. Show a genuine interest in his car, and that will go a long way toward building a strong working and learning relationship.

Imagine you're a student with the specific goals of staying comfortable, learning more about your car's capabilities, and just having fun. Now imagine you have an instructor who is bound and determined to turn you into the fastest driver on the track, giving you all sorts of feedback and instruction about how to push the limits. Would you be happy in this situation? This is precisely why it's so important that you adapt your feedback to the goals of your student. Guaranteed it will lead to much less frustration - for both you and your student.

As you continue to work with a student, you will learn more about him. You'll pick up things about his personality, the way he learns best, his communication style, and get a more accurate read on his motivations for HPDE. This information will only make you a more effective instructor. Listen and pay attention.

Take time to get to know your student.

Unfortunately, you won't be the perfect fit for every student. No matter how good an instructor you are, there will be a student who just doesn't like your style, you can't connect with, or you can't get to do what you want. Don't take it personally. Instead, talk to another instructor or your chief instructor. Ask for help, and switch him to someone else. Your goal is to help students learn, whether you do it or someone else does.

Get Down & Personal

You should try to convey your own personal experiences so students will relate to you. You're human - not "super instructor"! Be approachable. You can do that by using a few mistakes you've made through the years as learning examples for your students.

However, don't bring your credibility level down by relating too many mistakes. I've heard some instructors tell so many stories of the mistakes they made that you could see the students begin to question why they should listen to the instructor.

Of course, in relating personal experiences you should not brag, either. This is not an ego trip. Well, it shouldn't be, at least.

It's fine to share your background with your student when she asks, but don't go bragging about what you've done. Most students will shut down and stop listening if you go on for more than thirty seconds about yourself. Remember, she's there to learn, not to hear how great you are or what experience you've had.

If you do your job well as an instructor, there will be no need to tell her about your experiences, skills and past results. She will learn quickly enough just how good you are.

Be equal with your student, no matter how much experience you have and how little she has. Don't act as if you're above her. Just because she can't do something that you can - right now - that doesn't mean she won't be able to in the future.

Who's In Control?

As an in-car instructor, you're always in control...even when you're not. Your student will do what you "ask" (you ask in many ways: verbally, through your actions, by being a role model, etc.), as long as you ask the right way. But if you don't ask, then you're controlling the situation by not doing anything, leaving the outcome entirely in his hands. Either way, you're controlling the situation, although by doing nothing your control is passive and you're leaving things to chance.

You're in control, and you're responsible for what happens.

It's important that you always appear in control, too. Looking rushed or hassled will make your student feel nervous and uncomfortable. No matter what, try to appear calm and relaxed. Even if you have to fake it for a while, eventually it will be real - you will feel and be in control.

*Take charge, be decisive,
and take responsibility.*

It's important that you build a learning environment, a situation in which your student feels comfortable. If he is uncomfortable, nervous, or anxious, he will not learn as much as he could. While there are always egos involved in performance driving, showing too much control can stir up your student's ego in a negative way; if you don't "take charge," your student may lose confidence in your abilities.

Being decisive is a big part of this. If you can't decide on what your student needs to work on next, or what he's doing wrong, he will lack confidence in your instructing abilities. That's not to say you need to be dominating, but make sure your student knows that you're in control, you know what you're doing, and that you can make decisions.

Once again, there is a balance between being too dominating and demonstrating your competence to your student. Be aware of this, and practice the balancing act.

I like the image of the peaceful warrior for instructors: gentle and accommodating when appropriate, and yet decisive and assertive when needed.

Be Consistent

It is critical that all of the instructors working a particular program say and teach the same thing. They must be consistent. Believe it or not, it is more important that you say the same things as the other instructors are than what you believe to be correct.

If you don't agree with something being taught, let the chief instructor know - privately. Most are wide open to suggestions, ideas or any input, if presented the right way.

I'm not saying that you need to be a robot or to keep your particular style, experience and knowledge from coming through. I am saying that you should not publicly contradict what other instructors say. The best programs have all the instructors teaching from the same text.

2ND GEAR: COMMUNICATION

Watch Your Language!

Instructing is all about communication. How do you communicate? Verbally and non-verbally. In fact, you may communicate more without words. And this may be intentional, or not.

Be aware of how much you talk. There's a time to talk, a time to ask your student to talk (telling you what she's doing), and there's a time for being quiet (still paying attention, observing, making note of things to discuss when you're back in the paddock at the end of the session). It is often best to give input, then give the student time to digest it, give more input, more time to digest, and so on. You have to "read" your student, finding the ideal compromise.

While it may seem that your student is not paying attention to what you're saying, you could be wrong. It may just be that she can't process all the information that you're trying to pass along at that moment in time. You probably have noticed (or will) that what you're saying eventually sinks into all students. It will be when, and in the order, that it works for them (and not necessarily in the order you thought!).

A constant flow of your recommendations, commands and information will overload most students. Of course, the opposite is true as well. I've heard of instructors who ride in the passenger seat for an entire session without saying a word, and then dump all of their feedback on the student when they get back to the paddock. That doesn't work! Students can't remember what happened in "Turn 2 on the second lap" of a 20-minute on-track session. They're unlikely to remember the last lap!

If your student has some experience and doesn't require you to constantly verbalize what she should be doing, tell her you're just going to observe for a lap or two. It shows that you have confidence in her, and it allows you to focus more deeply on picking up the smaller details of her driving, since you won't be as concerned about what you're saying.

Some students prefer a lot of instruction, while others perform best with only a little (again, none is not an option, otherwise you'd be called a passenger, not an instructor!). How do you know what works best for your student? Ask her.

Speak in short, concise phrases.

Keep your advice, recommendations, information and commands brief, to the point, clear, and consistent. And especially, be current. Talking about what your student did in Turn 1 while she's driving through Turn 3 is a waste of time. Wait until the next lap, and then preface the corner with "Last lap you did..., and this time I want you to..." Talk her through the lap, ahead of what she's supposed to do. And obviously, any in-depth theory discussion must only ever be done in the paddock or pit lane.

Both you and your student should be focused on what's coming up next, not what happened in the past. If she made an error in a particular turn, make a mental note of it, and preface the corner on the next lap with the appropriate instructions to correct the mistake. Part of your job is to provide a mini-plan for what's coming up next, either to reinforce the good driving, or correct what she's done wrong. You need to stay ahead of your student.

If you're not able to stay ahead with your instruction, you'll need to slow the student down. In fact, if you have a student who insists on driving too fast to learn, use your own inability to stay ahead of the car to slow her down (i.e., you have a student you want to slow down because he's over-driving and not learning. Tell her, "I'm having a tough time keeping up with you, so slow down for a few laps so I can communicate clearly – we can both learn even more.")

Avoid jargon that your student may not know yet. Don't assume that everyone knows the phrases and words you do. For example, many students don't know what a throttle is, knowing it only as the gas pedal. The best way to help your student understand the jargon without insulting her is to double it up with a term she knows, such as, "At the apex give it some throttle... squeeze the gas pedal" (she'll figure out that the throttle and gas pedal are the same thing). Over time, you'll find which words and phrases you prefer that are not defined in the classroom sessions (another reason you should attend the classroom sessions on a regular basis). You need to make sure your student knows what you mean immediately when you say something – there's no time to define a word or phrase when you're on track.

If there are more than a handful of words needed to explain something, you're better off having your student pull into pit lane. There, you can make what you're saying very clear; then you can head back on track. Trying to explain a complex technique or theory while at speed is futile.

Some instructions are purely instructions, some are meant to inform, and then there are commands. Make sure your student knows that commands are not suggestions; you won't use them often - only when necessary - but they are to be followed immediately. They are meant to keep her and her car safe (not to mention you!). Your student must know you're in charge. You can do this in a polite way, but you're in a position of authority, so act accordingly.

What is obvious to you may not be so obvious to your student. Think about that. Remember that.

Instructing should not be a one-way conversation. The more you engage your student in the conversation, not only will he learn more, but you'll be able to read her level of comprehension. Are you truly being understood? Some students will simply say "Yes" to everything you say, and yet you don't really know if they've understood or not. The only way to know is to ask questions, and to have your student tell you what she's doing. If she's unable to answer your question, explain what you want to know. If she can't tell you, you know immediately what her level of comprehension is.

Communication is a 2-way street. Ask questions and listen.

It can be dangerous to assume that your student knows what you're talking about. Of course, talking down to her – assuming she doesn't understand you - may be just as bad. It's likely to make her "shut down" and not listen to you. (However, if you think your student isn't aware of something, and you fill her in, it's probably safer than the alternative).

Your volume, rhythm, tone, inflection and timing will probably have a bigger impact on your student than the actual words you use.

Be aware of how you can change your student's actions through changing how you deliver a command or provide information. If you deliberately use a low tone, and speak rhythmically, your student will respond. It'll help her develop a rhythm to her driving (go online and find an audio recording of the lead pilot for the Blue Angels and listen to the deliberate rhythm and tone of his commands). Even the order of a command makes a difference. For example, "Smoothly brake" results in a different action than "Brake smoothly" will. The first word, especially in areas of the track where your student is feeling stressed (like heavy braking zones) usually get more attention.

Instructor verbal communication is all about the timing, volume, inflection, rhythm, tone, and order of your concise, clear, consistent, and current commands and information.

Your Body Talks

Do you remember your first HPDE program, when you first learned about driving on the track? If you're like most drivers, it was a bit of a tense experience. That might even be a gross understatement! But try to put yourself back in that situation again.

The first time you drove around a track, what did your instructor's body language say to you? It may have been so long ago, or you were so busy driving that you don't recall what was said. It may not be something you remember now, but I'll bet that at the time, you sensed something from your instructor's body language. It may have been good or bad.

Fast-forward and put yourself in the passenger seat with a student, with you as the instructor, now.

Communicate with your
body as much as with
your mouth.

Students can sense your expectations - and they will live up (or down) to them. If your student senses that you don't trust him, he will perform poorly. So, get in the right seat, adjust it so you have good support, do the seat belts up snugly, and then... *slouch in the seat*. Relax in the seat. Appear as relaxed and calm as you would be if you were riding with the best driver in the world on a slow drive on an open road. Rest your right arm and hand on the door (don't grab the handle), and your left arm/hand on your left leg close enough to be able to use it to point where you want your driver to look, or even "assist" with the steering wheel (if that's allowed in your instructing world). Relax and expect the best from your student. You'll be surprised at the positive impact your body language will have - on both you and your students.

This simple little tip – how you sit in the car - has had one of the biggest impacts on my students. As instructors, we tend to think a lot about the mechanics of the techniques we teach. We even think a little about the words we use with our students. But we don't think enough about our body language, our non-verbal communication.

Do you perform better or worse when people have confidence in you? Students can sense your expectations. Expect them to be successful. Students sense your expectations of them not only through what you say but also, more powerfully, by the way you look at them, your facial expressions, and body position and actions. Think of your student in terms of his potential, not his performance. By expecting your student to be successful, he will be more likely to live up to your expectations.

By relaxing your body, your student's body will relax, and more importantly, so will his mind.

Hand gestures are very effective instructing tools, as long as you're consistent with their use, and your student knows what they mean. Give your student a brief, but clear, rundown of the gestures you'll typically use (and their meaning), prior to ever going out on the track. Radio intercoms/communicators may be the best invention since the wheel (if the wheel hadn't been invented, we wouldn't need them!). They allow much clearer communication, but more than once they've failed due to a bad battery or broken wire. If you then have to rely on yelling at your student, he may miss an important instruction. That's why your hand gestures are so important - if your student understands them. Plus, some students respond to hand gestures better than they do verbal instruction.

Use your hand closest to the driver, keeping it in his peripheral vision, to point where you want him to look or go, to imitate braking (many instructors make a fist, squeezing it tighter to indicate braking harder), to use the throttle, or to mimic steering. Position your hands (again, in your student's peripheral vision), as if you're holding an imaginary steering wheel and turning it the way you want him to turn, and he will mirror your actions.

What Happens When You Ask Questions?

Let's step back to verbal communication again. What happens when you're asked a question? Makes you think, right? You learn more, right? And what happens if you're told something you already know? You get frustrated that your "teacher" doesn't recognize that you already know what he's telling you. Think about that the next time you're instructing. What would happen if you asked more questions than you do now?

- Instead of "Look further ahead," you might ask, "How far ahead are you looking?"
- Instead of "Squeeze the brakes hard," you might ask, "Are you squeezing the brakes hard, or stabbing the brakes?"
- Instead of "Hit the apex," use, "Are you hitting the apex?" or "Where's the apex?"

What do you think? Would this make you a better instructor? What other questions could you ask?

Obviously, this relates to what I said earlier about the difference between teaching and coaching. Do you remember what I suggested as a general rule?

Allow your student to learn through experience - don't lecture too much. The best approach is to "guide" him as he experiences driving. You want him to learn from his experience. Instructing - telling a student what to do - helps your ego. Coaching - questioning (even when you know the answer) and guiding - helps your student. Which is more important?

Want Some Feedback?

Be sure to give lots of encouragement (no matter how bad the driver is). A large part of your student's learning success is based on confidence. If your student is not confident, he will be a slow learner. It is your job to help build his confidence. Feedback is the key to doing that.

There are two kinds of feedback, right? But they're not positive and negative. So what are they? *Confirming and corrective.*

*Give 5 times as much
confirming feedback as
you do corrective
feedback.*

Why do we give feedback? To either confirm that what the student did was right (to encourage more of the same behavior), or to correct something he is doing wrong (to discourage that behavior, or encourage a different behavior).

You absolutely need to think about feedback in these terms: confirming or corrective. And as a general rule you should be looking to provide five times as much confirming feedback as you do corrective. That shouldn't be too difficult. After all, if your student drove to the track, and made his way onto and around it, he's done more right than wrong! Confirm that.

How do you train a dog? You tell it to do something, and then reward it every time it does what you want. Telling a dog what it did wrong doesn't help much, does it? Drivers are like dogs (I say jokingly!) Tell your student what he's doing right. If he does enough of the right stuff, he won't have time to do the wrong stuff.

So catch your student doing something right. When many of us were growing up, our parents, teachers, and coaches often tried to help us by pointing out everything we did wrong. It's all too easy to pass this approach on to others. Although feedback on our mistakes is important, it's also critical to know what we're doing that's working.

Catch your student doing something right! Be careful, however, to avoid indiscriminately lavishing praise on him. Even though you mean well, this often backfires, creating a credibility gap – if your student thinks “you’re just saying that,” he’ll lose trust in you telling the truth. Give accurate, appreciative feedback - lots of confirming feedback.

Focus on the Act, Not the Person

When providing feedback, be sure to focus on the act, the action, the performance, and not the person. Are you a driving instructor, or a person instructor? You're a driving instructor, so aim all of your comments, advice, recommendations and feedback on the driving instead of on your student.

Saying things like, "You're great!" provides nothing for your student to use. Instead, tell her what she did that was great. "That was a great line through Turn 1," "Nice smooth release of the brakes," "Turn in later next lap" are all focused on the act of driving, and not the person.

Focus your feedback on your student's actions.

It's easy to give your student a pat on the back with a comment like, "Well done. That was a great session." But other than stroking her ego and making her feel good, it does little to help her perform better or learn more. What did she do well? Why was it a great session? Be specific with your feedback and comments, focusing on her actions.

Some instructors claim they tell their students, "Well done" to build their confidence, but it's questionable how well that really works. If your student doesn't know exactly what it was that she did well, how is that going to build her confidence? It's not. It might provide a short-term "feel good," but that's about all.

There's an even bigger factor at play with comments aimed at the person. It impacts her mindset (read the book, *Mindset*, by Dr. Carol Dweck for a fascinating and useful understanding of this subject). Research has shown that to your student, the opposite of "You're a natural at this" is "You're not a good person." So if you sometimes make comments like "You're great at this. You're a natural" (comments aimed at the person, not her actions), and then you stop saying such things, her take-away is that she's no longer any good at it. That's human nature. That may sound overly simplified, but it's a fact of life.

Focus your instruction, comments and feedback on the skill, technique, or activity, and not your student as a person.

Finally, empathize before you criticize. Ask your student, "What's wrong?" "What could you do better?" before telling her that she's done something wrong.

3RD GEAR: REAL-LIFE ADVICE

Breathe & The World Breathes With You

"I sucked it up and held my breath to throw down that lap!" We hear race drivers say things like that a lot. But I'm here to tell you that no race driver ever laid down a great lap while holding his breath. When successful drivers say that, it's more of a euphemism. We humans do not perform at our best if we're not breathing. But students (and even successful race drivers, for short periods of time) do it all the time. It's part of human nature - part of the fight-or-flight response to stress.

When a student holds his breath, he tends to tense up his arms and grip the steering wheel more tightly. If you watch a driver as he exhales, you'll notice that his arms and hands relax. When a driver tenses up, he's less sensitive to the feedback coming through the steering wheel. In fact, a driver sometimes cannot sense an impending loss of control because he's holding his breath, unable to sense what the car is telling him through his arms and hands. Remember the *Performance Model*? The better the quality of the sensory information going into the brain, the better the output, or performance, will be. When your student relaxes, his brain receives better quality input.

One of the simplest ways to remind and encourage your student to breathe is to, well, breathe. If you exaggerate exhaling, and your student hears you do that (preferably while using a communicator), he will most likely follow your lead. Yawning is contagious; breathing seems to be as well. Of course, you can also resort to the old tried-and-true: say, "Breathe."

Another simple technique is to remind your student to wiggle his fingers while driving down the straightaways. Wiggling his fingers forces him to relax his arms, and it will often result in easier breathing.

Breathe, and the world will breathe with you. Well, at least your student will.

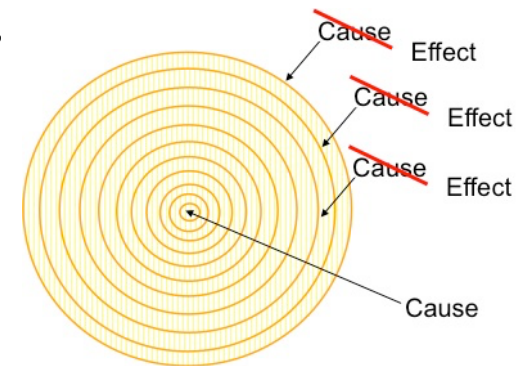
The Onion

The breathing issue is a good example of how we need to focus on the real cause of a problem. Dig to the core of the problem. We need to peel back the layers of the onion.

I believe the greatest philosopher of all time was Shrek. If you saw the first *Shrek* movie, you'll recall that he said, "Ogres are like onions. They have layers." See? What beautiful and powerfully meaningful words! And they remind me of problems.

Problems also have layers, like an onion (and like ogres). But often, we focus only on the outer layer of the onion when trying to solve a problem. Yet, you can only ever truly solve it by digging to its core, and solving it there.

An instructor once asked me to ride with a student because he could not get him to drive the right line. The student could not drive within three feet of the apex. I jumped in the right seat, observed for a couple of laps, then we pulled into pit lane. There, I asked him



to demonstrate how he used the brakes - applying and releasing (with the engine turned off). He did the same thing that I observed on the track - he applied the brakes okay, but very quickly popped his foot off the pedal when releasing. That was his habit, his program. I asked him to slow down his release, to slowly release the pedal. I had him practice that a dozen times or so, sitting there in pit lane.

Then we hit the track again and all I did was remind him to slowly release the brake pedal as we entered each turn. Immediately the student hit every apex. We had fixed the problem, and he drove a near-perfect line. Why? Because he wasn't unloading the front of the car by releasing the brakes so quickly – he had deprogrammed unloading the front tires. By more slowly releasing the brakes, he was managing the weight transfer and giving the front tires enough grip to steer the car to the apex.

When I asked the original instructor what he had been doing to help the student, he replied, "I talked him around the track, reminding him where the apex was, telling him where to turn to get to the apex. But no matter what I said, he wouldn't get anywhere near the apex." He was trying to fix the outside layer of the onion. He wasn't working on the core of the problem. And that's why he was ineffective.

It should be noted that by the time I got into the car, the student had reached a frustration level that bordered on causing him to quit. After being told over and over again to hit the apex, but not being able to do that, he wasn't having fun. As soon as we focused on the core of the problem, and he quickly fixed it, he was having a blast driving the track.

Dig for the core of problem - peel back the layers of the onion - and then work on it.

Then, focus on the solution, not the problem.

As a simple example, if you have a student who consistently turns in early for a corner, human nature seems to be to tell her not to turn in early. After all, it makes sense to tell her not to make that mistake. The problem is that our brains don't hear the word "don't" very well. We cannot **not** do something. As proof, tell a 10-year-old boy not to pick on his sister and see how well he responds to that! Or, right now, don't think about a pink elephant. I said, don't think about a pink elephant. Do not think about a pink elephant!

*Tell your student what **to** do, not what **not** to do.*

Instead of telling your student what **not** to do (which is focusing on the problem), tell her what **to** do (focus on the solution). Tell her where to turn in.

Don't use "don't." Eliminate the word "don't" from your instructor vocabulary.

As I said earlier, the language you use when instructing is critical, and a simple change in where you focus your advice and commands can have a huge impact on your student's success. And the great thing is that you'll be practicing something that will help you in everything else you do in your life: focusing on the solution, not the problem.

Be Honest

"How could a driver like Dario Franchitti right-foot-brake and keep up with all the left-foot-brakers? Come on, tell me. Don't give me that confused look, just tell me how he does it."

It's at this point that many instructors do the worst thing they could ever possibly do: They make up an answer. It's possible - it might be right. Then again, it might not.

Why would an instructor make up an answer when he doesn't know the real answer? Because many think that they're supposed to be "all-knowing." That could not be further from the truth.

If you don't know how to answer a student's question, don't B.S. After admitting it's a good question, tell your student that you'll find the answer. Then do it. You don't have to know everything. You can even figure it out together.

The next time you're asked a question by a student to which you don't know the answer, admit it, and then help him find out the answer. Of course, by doing this, you will have learned at least two things yourself: the answer to the question, and how best to help your students - by being honest.

Objectives: I'll Take 3, Please

Always ensure your student has specific objectives for the next track session. These objectives should be clear and concise. And there should be no more than three. The average human brain seems only to be able to handle four or five things at a time; the performance driver's brain can handle three at best (I'm being sarcastic - no human can handle more than three when in an intense situation like driving on a race track!).

If you can get away with providing your student only one or two objectives, even better. It is better to give your student three things to work on and have him perfect two, than to give him five, overload his brain, and get only one right (or maybe none at all).

When I say be specific, I mean it. Telling your student he should "brake later," is not good enough. Which corners? All of them, or just Turn 1? How much later? One car length or ten? Should he begin braking at the 3 marker, instead of the 4? Does this mean he should brake harder, too? Should he finish his braking at the same place, or later?

Provide your student with no more than 3 very specific objectives.

Be specific: "Brake 3 cars lengths later, which will mean you'll start braking at the 2 marker. Can you picture what 3 car lengths looks like, right now? It also means you'll be entering the corner a little faster, but the car can handle that. Make sure you're looking into the turn as you begin braking." (Obviously, this much instruction could only be given in pit lane, and not at speed on the track).

Start every session by asking your student what he wants to work on, what he wants to improve. Sometimes he won't know, in which case you'll have to lead him to the right thing(s) to focus on, but often he knows more about what he needs to improve than you do. This is especially true if you're instructing multiple students and need to keep track of all of them. Sometimes asking your

student what he wants to work on refreshes your memory of the previous session, and what needs attention. Better yet, keep a small notepad and jot down what your student should work on at the end of each session (this also sends a positive message to your student about how committed you are to helping him).

Be specific, and give your student no more than three things to work on.

Knowing The Limits

One of your goals is to help your student learn her limitations (and the limitations of her car). It may be more important that she learns what she **can't** do, rather than what she can do.

All the "driver aids" – traction, stability control, and ABS – are a challenge with modern cars. They often give a student a sense of invincibility. Even more often, the student doesn't even realize when her car has saved her from The Big One.

It's important to point out when one of these driver aids has contributed to keeping the car in control and on track. Once again, part of your job is to help your student become more aware - you're an awareness-builder. That may require you to simply identify every single time the ABS or traction or stability control has kicked in (the student is usually too busy to notice a stability control light flashing on the dash).

As I said, it's more important for your student to learn what she and her car can't do than what she can do. Help her by providing timely feedback. Build her awareness.

Hey You! Yeah, You! Pay Attention!

Be alert. The world needs more lerts. Okay, that's a bad joke, but I'm always reminded of it when a student catches an instructor off-guard, which can often result in some type of mishap.

Pay attention – at all times.

In more than thirty years of in-car instructing, I've been off the track once with a student. The reason for that off-course excursion? I wasn't alert. I let my guard down, and wasn't paying full attention to what my student was doing. It was on a cool-down lap, but we were still moving at a high rate of speed through Turn One.

Of all the spins, crashes, and near-crashes I've heard about from instructors, at least 90 percent of them were due - at least in part - to their own lack of attention.

Think back to a time when you spun or crashed. How much time did you have before it happened, where you knew it was going to happen? Not much, right? Perhaps a second or two, at best. Now relate that to instructing. What could happen if you lost focus or stopped paying attention for a second or two? Since you're not actually driving the car, you have even less reaction time than your student. What does that tell you?

Sometimes when we're instructing, we have the responsibility of overseeing more than one driver. Often, that means doing some type of "train lapping," where you're riding in the passenger seat of one car, with one or more students following directly behind. The idea is that the drivers in the train see and follow exactly where you guide the lead car.

Whenever you're in this situation, keep an eye in the side mirror for the students behind you. Watch for someone hanging back to attempt a fast corner or series of corners, or someone consistently making mistakes. It will help you when riding with them later. As well, they may be intimidating the student you're riding with now, with their unpredictable behavior. You may have to pull into pit lane and have a "conversation" with the rest of the drivers to control the behavior.

Be a Good Role Model

Expecting perfection from anyone is a bit much to ask. However, if there was ever a time for you to be near-perfect, it's when you're behind the wheel, demonstrating something for your student.

When you're driving demonstration laps, it is far more critical to be smooth than to be really fast. Remember that your student may have spent very little time on a track (for many, it's their first time ever), and it doesn't take much speed for him to be impressed (especially when he's in the passenger seat). If you drive too fast, he won't be able to take everything in.

A simple approach to take with demo drives is this: As your student buckles up next to you, ask him to watch how much you **don't** do. Have him notice how smooth, precise, and subtle your driving is. With that image in mind, he will drive better.

Don't forget that you'll be in the passenger seat with your student when he makes a mistake because **you** wanted to impress him with your speed! Students are more impressed with a smooth, relaxed, finessed, unspectacular ride than a fast one. Be mistake-free, no matter what it takes to do it. An instructor should not hit cones, drop a wheel, drive off-line, or make any other dumb mistake. Drive at a speed that guarantees that you can do that.

Remember what demonstration laps are for: to demonstrate how you want your student to drive. Show him.

There is often a "payback" ride. If you drive too fast, the student thinks it's okay to drive that fast, and will try to at least match your speed – and sometimes out-do you. That can be a nasty payback for driving with your ego instead of your brain.

*Demonstrate how
you want your
student to drive.*

Imagine This

Have you ever worried about something? Then you've done visualization - that mystical, way-out-there technique that sports psychologists recommend all athletes use - the technique that requires that you close your eyes, relax, breathe slowly, and use your imagination. Worrying is simply imagining something going wrong in the future, and pre-playing this negative image.

Of course, visualization can and should be used for more than worrying. In fact, it's a powerful tool for improving your performance and your student's performance, when used in a positive way.

As I said earlier, the term "visualization" is a bit of a misnomer. At least, it should be. By the very definition of the term, it uses only one sense: visual. It represents imagining a picture of whatever it is you want to accomplish. But to be most effective in learning anything, you should use more than just your visual sense.

In his excellent book, *Lessons From The Art of Juggling*, Michael Gelb writes about an American serviceman who was captured and held in a POW prison camp for seven years during the Vietnam War. He was an average, but keen golfer, so as he sat in the prison for all those years, every single day he imagined playing eighteen holes of his favorite game. Not only did he mentally picture playing golf, he imagined the sound of the club striking the ball, the feel of the wind blowing, the smell of the grass, and most importantly, he physically imitated the movements. He imagined the physical movement, by moving.

Help your student use
mental imagery to
improve her performance.

Upon his release after seven years, he headed to the links and played better than he ever had. In fact, he scored a round of golf twenty strokes better than he ever had played before. He had not physically touched a golf club in seven years.

If this POW had simply closed his eyes and imagined the visual aspect of playing golf, he would not have performed the way he did. Because he used his senses of hearing, smell, and feel, it was "real" to his brain; it was as if he had practiced a round of golf every day for seven years. And he had, as our brains cannot tell the difference between a real and an imagined event if we make it real enough, through the use of many senses. No wonder he improved so much! He had played eighteen holes every day for seven years!

What does this tell you about instructing? First, it should tell you to ask your students to use mental imagery (the proper term for visualization) because it's effective. Second, it should tell you to help your students use as many senses as they possibly can. And finally, it should also tell you to use mental imagery to become a better instructor. Pre-play various scenarios, and imagine how you would respond - in great detail, using as many senses as possible.

Imagine that!

4TH GEAR: LEARNING

We're All Individuals

Much has been made of the idea that we all have different learning styles. I believe this idea has been over-emphasized (and research backs up my hunch), but it's still important to understand the concept, and be aware of it. It has some validity.

The basic theory about learning styles suggests that there are visual, auditory and experiential learners.

Some people learn visually, meaning they take in information through their eyes. For students like this, drawing the cornering line and reference points on a map, pointing these things out while driving the track slowly or walking the circuit are all effective tools.

Some students learn best with an auditory style, meaning they process words and sounds well. They respond well to verbal cues while they're driving.

Finally, some are kinesthetic, or experiential learners. These students need to experience something before they truly “get” and learn it. Experiencing the line or managing weight transfer often helps it sink in for these students. If you're able to help “guide” the steering wheel from the passenger seat (only holding the steering wheel with two fingers - the student is really turning the wheel - you're only assisting the movement), this allows the student to feel what it's like to turn through a corner the way you want him to. You can also try to mimic the ideal steering movement with an imaginary steering wheel that you turn in your student's peripheral vision. This can cement the muscle memory for students who learn through experience.

Understand that while people may have a dominant learning style, it doesn't mean they don't use all three. We all use every form of sensory input to learn. The point is that some people's dominant learning style is very dominant. For example, I once coached a driver who was really visual, and unless I drew a picture for him, he just didn't seem to understand what I was talking about. In fact, I could draw the throttle and brake pressure traces like from a data acquisition print out, and he'd go and match it. Interestingly, his son was very much not visual - he was an auditory learner. When I drew a picture for him, he'd look at me with a confused look on his face. All he wanted me to do was talk to him about what I wanted him to do.

These two drivers have not been typical, in my experience. In fact, most drivers do not have such a dominant style - it's more of a mix of all three.

My main point here is that you may need to adapt your style to suit your student's. It will always be easier for you to adapt than it will for your driver (he's kinda busy just learning to stay on the track!).

So, if a student doesn't “get it,” try a different approach or different words. Use a combination of learning styles when instructing:

- Draw pictures
- Talk to your student, telling him what to do and where

- Ask your student to feel the movement of the car and the controls
- Provide written information to your student to read
- Point to where you want him to go
- Give your student a demo ride around the track, letting him feel what you want him to do
- Suggest that your student write notes
- Ask your student to focus on the sound the car and tires makes
- Walk the track, picking out visual references and feeling the surface of the track
- Ask your student to tell you what he's doing
- Use hand gestures, and even push against his shoulder with your fist to demonstrate pedal pressure.

Then, when you have your student do mental imagery of a technique you want him to learn, ask him to use his visual, auditory and kinesthetic (feel, balance) senses. Ask him to mentally picture the technique, hear what is happening, and physically move his body to imagine the forces he would feel.

*Adapt your instructing
to your student.*

Learning happens physically, yes, but also mentally. This means that your student can learn from physically doing things, but also by imagining them. Again, this is typically referred to as visualizing, but my point is that your student should be using more than just their visual sense when imagining. He should be using as many senses as possible to maximize the learning experience.

So, does everyone learn in the same way? No. But the best method to help your student learn is to mix and match a combination of different teaching modes or styles. If your student doesn't "get it," try a different approach. Remember, there is always a way in, always a way to reach your student and help him learn.

Don't treat people as equals! Recognize their differences. We're all individuals.

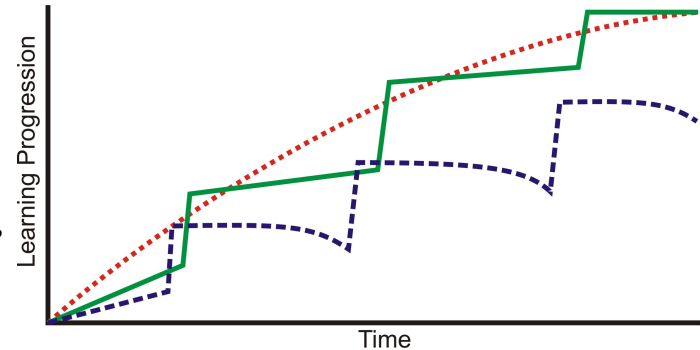
The Learning Curve

Be patient. Does everyone learn at the same rate? No. Some students are slow to pick things up initially, but then burst ahead; others start learning quickly, but taper off over time. Remember that everyone learns at a different rate, with stages of improvement, apparent setbacks, and plateaus. Try to understand where your student is on her graph of progress and allow adequate time for the process to evolve.

I know of no human being who follows the much-referred-to "learning curve" (the red dotted line in the graph) when developing any kind of skill. It's not natural to have a smooth curve when learning. Instead, humans learn in steps: At first, you might

not see much learning, but then you'll see a burst of learning. That burst is then followed by a plateau, another burst, plateau, burst, and so on. I call them "Learning Steps" (the green line).

The only time a student doesn't follow the Learning Steps is when they get frustrated... and we let them get frustrated. People who drive cars on race tracks are... well, kinda "driven" people. They're often competitive, if only with themselves. They want to improve. In fact, they have a **need** to improve. And when they aren't getting better, they're often frustrated, leading to what I call the "Frustration Steps" (the blue dotted line).



The nature of learning, as I said, involves plateaus. When your student has hit a plateau, one of two things will happen: she is going to be patient, knowing that after every plateau comes another burst of learning (it's only a matter of time before that happens); or she gets frustrated with the lack of improvement, tries even harder which results in a worse performance, more frustration, trying even harder, a lack of improvement, and so on.

Your job is to make sure that your student doesn't get frustrated to the point that she's trying harder and negatively impacting her learning. Often, you can do that with a simple conversation about the learning process. Explain the accompanying graph and how plateaus are always followed by a burst in learning, as long as she relaxes and focuses on her performance, and doesn't try so hard, she'll improve. Sometimes, simply pointing out the things she's doing well relieves her frustration and allows her learning to progress.

The key is to recognize when your student is becoming frustrated. The sooner you see it, the sooner you can do something about it. Even before you get to the point of talking about the learning process, you can give your student something that he can focus on to help her avoid the Frustration Steps altogether. Giving your student a specific, well-defined task or skill to accomplish - ideally one where she will see some easy success - will work wonders.

HPDE has the word "education" in it for a reason: it's all about learning, improving, and progression. The key to learning on a race track is taking appropriately-sized steps. Too big a step and your student will likely feel anxious and overwhelmed; too small a step and she may not notice any improvement and get frustrated. It's your job to ensure she takes the right-sized steps. Not only is too big a step dangerous, your student will learn little from it.

You probably can't over-emphasize the focus on control, consistency, accuracy, and smoothness over speed. We all know that speed comes without trying, after the techniques are applied smoothly, so communicating that - and getting your student to buy into the process - is of utmost importance.

You are the manager of the learning process. Use your powers for good.

Empty Your Cup

During the Meiji era (1868-1912) in Japan, a university professor visited a Zen master, Nan-in, to inquire about Zen. As the professor talked about all that he knew about Zen, Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor's cup full, and then kept on pouring. The professor watched the cup overflow until he no longer could restrain himself. "It is overfull. No more will go in!"

"Like this cup," Nan-in said, "you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"

How can you learn to be a better instructor unless you empty your mind of its opinions and speculations?

Put yourself in your student's position. Do you remember what it was like when you were at his level of competence? You may have forgotten more than your student knows. It's time to recall what you have forgotten.

People often marvel at how quickly children learn. It's not because their minds are any more moldable than adults'. It's because their minds are not full of expectations, opinions, and stuff. Yep, our brains are so full of stuff, it can be difficult to add more.

Open your mind. Do you know everything there is to know about driving? About instructing? Unless you know it all (in which case, I really want to meet you!), learn something new yourself from each and every student.

Think like a beginner. Open your mind. And remember - to be a great instructor, one must be a great learner.

Flip Roles

Ask your students to teach you.

Think back to when you became an instructor. Do you better understand the driving techniques you use, and you teach? I'll bet you do. Encouraging your student to explain a technique to you will make him more aware – he will understand things better than if you teach him. Encouraging your student to “teach” what he is learning accelerates his learning. Ask your student to explain to you the technique or skill that you are teaching him.

*Help your student
learn by having him
teach you.*

As an example, after you've talked your student around the track for a while, ask him to talk **you** around, instead. Have him tell you where he's looking; when he begins braking; where he starts releasing the brakes; where he turns into a corner; where the apex is; where the exit point is; where he begins accelerating; and/or what he feels the car doing. You will most likely want to pick just one or two for him to focus on.

When a session is over, ask your student to tell you what he did well, and what he could improve. Have him explain to you a specific technique he's working on, such as heel-and-toe downshifting or trail braking. Pretend to be a beginner and ask questions.

By having your student explain what he's doing, he's learning at a much deeper level. And that's a good thing. Plus, as he explains a technique you may find out that he doesn't understand it well. You might think he understood a technique, but as he describes it, you may see that he's missing something. This is another way to discover what your student knows or doesn't know - ask him to teach you.

End Right

Your student should always end a practice session or day successfully. Researchers talk about the "recency effect" - you are more likely to remember things that happen at the end of a learning session than at any other time. If your student finishes on a high note, she will have a memory of success

This is especially important during multiple-day programs. For example, if it's the last session on Saturday, and your student will be back for more on Sunday, it's critical for her to finish Saturday with what you want her to be thinking about (and mentally programming) overnight. You want her to be replaying what went well - smooth, precise driving on the ideal line.

Set up the session with something like, "It's your last session of the day. I want you to focus on what's going to make you fast tomorrow - being smooth and precise, hitting your marks, driving the perfect line. Even if you need to slow down by 5 percent to do that, it will be well worth it. This is the session to cement all the things you've worked on today, and set yourself up for a great day tomorrow."

And before she leaves the track, ask her to tell you what she's going to focus on and replay in her mind overnight. If you have to correct a few things as she talks you through it, that's okay. You'll want her to leave with a solid, clear image of what went right, and therefore, what she's going to do more of the following day.

The Silver Bullet: $MI + A = G$

This is it, the secret to helping your student learn. It's the silver bullet.

If you help your student get a strong Mental Image (MI) of what he wants to achieve, and help him become Aware (A) of how close he is to that MI, he will naturally achieve his Goal (G) – his brain will do whatever it takes to match the MI with the A. Let me explain.

I've long been a believer in the power of having a strong Mental Image of what you're trying to achieve. Read anything about achieving your goals and you'll hear all about the importance of having a mental picture of your goals. And doing mental imagery is all about getting and programming a Mental Image. As I said, it's powerful stuff. If you have a strong Mental Image in your mind, you will achieve this image.

But it hasn't always been powerful enough for me. Call me impatient (you wouldn't be telling me anything I didn't already know!), but I don't want to wait long for this Mental Image to turn into reality. That's when I stumbled upon the second part of the equation, the Awareness piece.

Make sure your student has a strong Mental Image (MI) and an Awareness (A) of what he's doing now.

I find that if someone is not **Aware** of where they are currently (in relationship to their Mental Image), the learning process can take a while. Without **Awareness**, making a change or improvement, or learning something new, is inefficient.

So, how do you make your student **Aware**? Ask questions. Ask him to ask questions. Questioning builds **Awareness**.

What does all this mean? It means to make sure your student has a strong Mental Image of what he's trying to achieve (ask him to describe it, in detail), and that he's **Aware** of where he is *right now* in relationship to that Mental Image (ask him how he's doing, how close he is). When you do this, you may be surprised at how quickly your student learns.

5TH GEAR: IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

Mistakes & What To Do About Them

Allow students to learn from their mistakes. Of course, to do that means allowing the mistakes to occur in the first place. And the last time I looked, mistakes at high speed on a race track can be a little dangerous! So you need to find the right balance here.

Think of mistakes as "learning-takes." Sure, keep priority one - safety - in mind, but then manage the mistake. If you know it's going to lead to The Big One, then you need to do everything you can to minimize it. But if you can see that the mistake won't lead to anything but a great learning opportunity, let it happen (again, keeping safety in mind at all times). Or, at least, let some of the consequences come through - enough for your student to learn something.

For example, if your student turns in early for a corner, and you know that the worst thing that can happen is he'll run out of track at the exit and have to drop his outside tires into the dirt, then let it happen. Of course, you should absolutely make sure your student understands what happened and why. In fact, as it's happening you may be able to say, "Early turn in (identifying the mistake while it's happening) - watch what happens." Add in, "Keep your wheels straight" as he goes off to make sure it doesn't become a big mistake (it'll also add to the learning experience). Then, down the following straight, ask, "Did you notice what happened when you turned in early back there?" If there's not enough time or your student doesn't have the focus to answer while driving, pull into the pit lane to talk about it. The key is to ensure your student learns from it.

If your student doesn't learn anything from his mistake, it's a real mistake. If your student learned from his mistake, it's a learning-take, and that's extremely valuable.

When It All Goes Pear-shaped

If you instruct long enough, the odds of "having an off" while in the passenger seat are relatively high. Having said that, some instructors go decades without having a student make a big enough mistake to cause them to go off track, while others... well, it seems to happen fairly often.

Is it luck that keeps some instructors (and their students) on track? I don't think so.

Everything I've written in this manifesto is based on my experience of having been off-track once with a student. I'd like to think that my approach to instructing has had more to do with that than pure luck. At least, I hope so!

However, I've witnessed and been near many off-track excursions - some of them were serious. I've spoken with instructors who have been along for the ride when a student crashed; I've heard the excuses, I've heard the justifications, and I've heard the apologies.

With that in mind, I'll tell you what to do when a student has made an error which will lead to an off-track incident. I'll also tell you what to do during that incident, and after it.

What I've written in the previous sections should cover what you can do to prevent an incident. Well, all except one thing: accepting responsibility. If you feel that you have little responsibility for what your student ultimately does, the likelihood of an incident goes way up. If you accept that you have a huge amount of control over your student's actions, you're more likely to prevent them from happening. And that's a better attitude.

When It's Happening

If you've been in an incident, you know how quickly it happens. That's good news: there are far fewer things to do during an incident than the whole time on-track!

When a car is out of control, it's likely that there is only one person in the car who is keeping his wits about him: you. It's likely that your student is in complete overload mode (that may have been the cause of the incident in the first place), and it's fully up to you to minimize the impact of the situation (no pun intended). It's at this point where you must respond with quick, concise verbal commands. This is no time for suggestions. Tell your student what to do.

*When things go wrong,
stay calm, give
quick/clear commands,
and take control.*

While this manifesto is not meant to provide you with any of the "what to teach," I will give you a few options for what to do once you recognize that you're in the middle of an incident. Obviously, there are an infinite number of possible incidents, and therefore I'm not able to tell you exactly what to do in each one. But the most common responses are:

1. Tell him where to look, including pointing there. Always direct his vision toward where you want to go (to avoid having him look at where you're likely to crash, as that will increase the chances of crashing).
2. "Brake, *brake*, BRAKE." That's often a pretty good command at that moment in time, if only to minimize your speed if and when you hit something. Do you care if your student stalls his car? No! The old saying, "In a spin, both feet in" is good advice. But in the heat of the action, stay away from that lengthy advice and go directly to the command of "brake." I witnessed an incident in which the student had the car mostly back under control, but the instructor told him to depress the clutch.. That's when the student's focus left the brakes, causing him to release the brake pedal. The car rolled backwards and hit a tire wall. If the instructor had continued to remind the student to keep his foot buried in the brake pedal, they wouldn't have hit anything.
3. If going off-track at the exit of a corner, keep the front wheels pointing as straight ahead as possible. With some HPDE programs, instructors are not allowed to touch the steering wheel from the passenger seat. I understand the liability and insurance reasons for this approach. But if your organization does allow you to assist the student with the steering wheel, be prepared to do so. Many potential Big Ones have been avoided by an instructor "guiding" the steering wheel to ensure the student did not panic and crank in steering to avoid going off the track (a natural instinct for someone to protect what they think may damage their precious car). Notice that I don't say, "Grab the steering wheel and take control." No, from the

passenger seat all you want to do is help guide the steering in the right direction and/or dampen the abrupt, panicked movements of the wheel.

4. Rarely is doing nothing a good option. In fact, you could define panic as doing nothing, and this applies to both you and your student. But to clarify, holding the steering straight when dropping two wheels off at the exit of a turn is not doing nothing - if it was a deliberate decision to do so.
5. Every now and then, telling your student to use the throttle is appropriate, even if that's just to maintain its position – to avoid a quick lift of the throttle, upsetting the balance of the car. While too much speed is usually part of the problem, your student snapping his foot off the throttle rarely helps the situation! But remember, tell him what to do, not what not to do. Instead of saying, “Don’t lift,” tell him, “Give it some throttle.” It’s likely you’re going to have to practice – program - this language. Mental imagery is a good way of doing that. In the heat of the moment, you’re going to rely on habits, and if your habit is to tell your student what not to do, you may end up somewhere you’d prefer not to be!

Your first priority once the car has come to a stop is to ensure that no one is injured. Safety is job one, right? Assess your own condition, being aware that the adrenalin rush may cloud your judgment. Ask your student how he is. If there is any doubt whatsoever regarding a possible injury, that continues to be your number one priority. As quickly as possible, communicate the situation to whomever is in charge of the event and/or the turn workers. I'm not going to go into detail about emergency procedures, as your HPDE program and organization will have their own procedures (whether to stay in the car, how to deal with an injury, how and when to remove the car, where to go, reporting, etc.).

After any incident, no matter how big, the adrenaline will be pumping – yours and your student's. Your next priority is to get that under control. Breathe. Relax. Walk around (in a safe location). Remember what flight attendants tell you in the pre-flight briefings: put your own oxygen mask on first before helping others. Make sure that you're under control before trying to get your student under control.

After an incident, the number one priority is attending to any injury.

Once you've dealt with any injury and made sure your student is calm enough to talk about the incident, then it's time to begin the debrief. This is where the learning opportunity comes in. Most likely, your student won't know why the incident happened, and it'll be up to you to help him understand so he can learn from it. Ask your student what he thinks happened, what he was doing just before he lost control, did he feel or notice anything that would be a clue as to what happened. Have him think back and dig for the cause, as that will provide a longer-lasting lesson than you simply telling him. But if you do need to tell - and it's quite likely you will, to some extent - that's okay (don't forget the onion - make sure you peel back the layers of the problem and find out what was at the core, the real cause). The root cause was likely a few steps back from where things really went awry. It's usually a chain of events that ultimately led to the off, spin or crash.

Recall my earlier comments about balancing confidence with skill. After an incident, your student will most likely need to be built up again - you'll need to help him regain his confidence. This is best done by pointing out the things he's doing well. Even during the incident, he may have done some things right. Make sure he's aware of them.

Going back on track with your student after he's had an incident is a challenge to your confidence, too. But it's important for both of you to "get back on the horse" as soon as possible. Showing your nervousness will do your student no good at all, so you're going to have to fake it until you make it. Take a dose of your own medicine: breathe, relax your body, look way ahead, and focus on a specific task, such as braking technique, the line, how the car is handling, or feeling the track's bumps and elevation changes. The more specific your focus, the better.

You want to convey confidence - in yourself and in your student's ability. Remember, he can sense your fear, and your expectations; he will live up to those expectations.

And again, there are times for being Mr. Nice Guy, and times to get tough. If in doubt, take control before something bad happens. You've taken on a responsibility when instructing - responsibility to do what you can to keep your student safe. Do what it takes to ensure that safety.

6TH GEAR: “FLAT OUT”

When Your Student Is Better Than You

I once conducted a survey of a few hundred HPDE instructors. One of the questions I asked was, “Who is your most challenging student?” The response was not surprising: advanced students who were as good as or better drivers than the instructor.

Coaching advanced students can be intimidating until you realize and accept that you don't need to be better at something to help someone learn and improve. If that weren't the case, coaches in other sports would be out of a job: would someone like Tiger Woods have a coach?; how many coaches in the NBA are better than their players?

So, what to do with an advanced driver? First, go back to what I said earlier about coaching versus instructing. With advanced students you do little, if any, teaching. Your job is to draw out what they already know, as well as make them aware of what they're doing (since it's difficult for a driver to notice everything about what he's doing while he's doing it).

Ask questions. If you ask your advanced student what he wants to work on, and how you can help him, you'll both be more successful than if you assume you're just going to ride around with him and tell him what to improve. Many advanced students simply want someone to observe and give feedback on how well they are executing certain techniques or parts of the track. They want you to be an “extra set of eyes.”

When working with an advanced student I find it useful to start by saying something along the lines of, “You may be a better driver than I am, but I still want to help you improve. I’ve been successful coaching other advanced drivers like you. Is there anything in particular you want to work on, want to improve, that I can help with? What type of feedback would you like?” While you don’t want your student to think that you don’t know what you’re doing, it’s okay to admit to being at an equal or even slightly lower level than he is, as a driver. It’s okay to be human! And more to the point, it’s okay to be a coach.

You don't have to be a better driver than your student to help him learn – coach him.

Make recommendations and suggestions. Rather than making a black and white statement like, “Apex at the end of the curbing,” try suggesting it, preferably with a question: “What would happen if you apexed at the end of the curbing?” or “Have you tried apexing a little later, at the end of the curbing? How did that work for you?” Part of working with an advanced student is getting him to try different lines and techniques.

Set yourself up as a coach, rather than a teacher, and the learning partnership will be successful.

IF ALL ELSE FAILS...

Know When to Stop

Too many laps can overdo it for a student - at some point they are not learning any more. You must be able to identify when a student is tiring, and therefore not learning any more. It's time for a break.

Be aware of when your student's mind is full or beginning to lose focus. Students are human, so it will happen. Often, a loss of focus can be attributed to dehydration; ensure your student drinks plenty of water throughout the day to delay the onslaught. Be especially aware of this on cool or cold days when people tend to drink less. If your student makes two or three errors in a short period of time, that may be a clue that his mind is fatigued or he's dehydrated.

*Know when
enough is enough.*

And with that, I'll stop and let you digest what I've written and prepare for your next instructing session.

"Your 3 Objectives For The Next Session"

Keeping my rule in mind about only ever giving your student three things to work on at one time, here are yours. If all else fails and you're not sure what to do, fall back on these three things:

1. **Provide clear, well-defined objectives...** and no more than three. If you're unsure of what those objectives should be, ask your student. She may know exactly what it is she should be working on. All you need to do is ask more questions to dig deeper and define them further.
2. **Manage your students' confidence and skill levels.** This may require knocking the confidence level down a little until the skill level catches up; it may mean focusing heavily on building skills; it may mean building confidence by pointing out what he's doing right; it may mean providing an honest and somewhat blunt evaluation to ensure your student stays safe, while developing the necessary skills.
3. **Focus on the solution, not the problem.** Peel back the layers of the onion and find the real core of the problem, and then focus your instruction on the solution.

THAT'S IT

That's all I have to share with you... for now. And I believe it's enough, at this point (and hopefully not too much). To wrap up, my final quick thoughts:

- Use what I've written here for good, and not evil. That means focusing on who's most important: *your student*.
- Let me know how it's going. Email me at ross@speedsecrets.com with questions, suggestions or comments.
- Check out my eCourses at Learn.SpeedSecrets.com.
- Listen to my podcast at Podcast.SpeedSecrets.com.
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- Help me learn. I want to improve, and I want to improve this manifesto. If you have suggestions for things I can add or change, please email me at ross@speedsecrets.com.
- Have fun!

Thanks

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