

Mental Imagery

GUIDE



By Ross Bentley

SPEED SECRETS

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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

Mental imagery is an extremely powerful technique that results in the development of mental programs. These mental programs, then, allow you to do things without “consciously thinking” about them. You do them “automatically,” by habit. Just like launching a software program on your computer, a mental program can be launched or “triggered” when you needed.

Just as you have a mental program for walking - and therefore do not have to think about how to walk - you can develop mental programs for the act of hitting a baseball, running a business meeting, racing a car, behaving in a certain manner, or whatever, and then be able to rely on that program. In fact, that’s the goal – to get to the point where the act of doing whatever it is you want to perform well at is a program, where you no longer have to consciously think about what needs to be done, and you just do it. And the reason you “just do it” is because you’ve developed a mental program that resides in your subconscious, and you’ve triggered or launched it.

When driving (or during any other activity), *you do what you do because you’re programmed to do so*. You don’t do what you want sometimes because you either don’t have the mental programming to do so, or you access the wrong program.

Of course, you can develop the mental programs to do something through physical practice. That’s what physical practice does – it develops the habits or programming to do things without having to think about it. However, there are a few problems with relying only on physical practice to build your mental programming:

- It can cost a lot of money.
- It takes a lot of time.
- Every time you make a mistake, you’ve made that mistake a part of your mental programming. Remember, practice does not make perfect – only perfect practice makes perfect. If you practice making mistakes, you’ll only get better at making mistakes.
- If you’re trying to do something that you’ve never done before, it can be very difficult to do it physically.
- Experimenting with a new technique could be risky, as a miscalculation could lead to a costly mistake.

Practicing the same techniques mentally, through the use of mental imagery, costs nothing, it doesn’t take much time, and you can practice everything perfectly, improving your ability to do it perfectly when needed.

While this technique is often - usually - referred to as visualization, it is actually mental imagery (I will sometimes call it mental programming, as it does program your mind). By the very definition of the word visualization, it uses only one sense (visual), and mental imagery uses many senses, as we’ll discuss shortly.

You do what you do
because you’re
programmed to do so.

How effective is mental imagery compared to actually, physically doing something?

Let's look at some background on mental imagery. Of the many research studies and examples of the impact of mental imagery, I've selected three:

1. Hunter College/Basketball players study: A group of basketball players were asked to shoot free-throws, and the success percentage was measured. They were then split into three separate groups. The first group was told not to practice whatsoever, physically or mentally. The second group was asked to practice daily by actually shooting free-throws. And the third group was asked to not physically touch a basketball, but only to do mental imagery of shooting perfect free-throws each day. When the players' free-throw percentage was checked, the results were interesting. The first "no practice" group showed no improvement whatsoever – no surprise. The second group, the ones that had physically practiced each and every day shooting free-throws, improved their shooting accuracy 23%. And the last group – the ones that did not touch a basketball, but only did mental imagery each day? Well, they improved their free-throw shooting percentage 22%. Without touching a basketball, they improved 22% - essentially the same amount as the group that physically practiced each day.
2. Soviet Union Olympic study: During the 1980s, what was then the Soviet Union Olympic team tested various training procedures. Athletes from various sports were split into four groups. The first group trained entirely with physical practice – 100% of the time. The second group used physical training 75% of the time, and mentally 25% of the time. The third group split its training 50 – 50, and the fourth group spent 25% of the time training physically, and 75% of the time mentally. The mental training required them to spend time every day practicing their sport in their minds using mental imagery. At the end of the study, the group who had the made the biggest gains or improvement was the fourth group – the one that had spent only 25% of the time training physically and 75% of the time using mental imagery. Interesting, the group that trained 100% of the time physically actually improved the least amount.
3. While this is not a formal research study, the following story provides a great example of the power of mental imagery. An American prisoner of war who was held captive for 5 years loved golf. It was his passion, it was his favorite past time – prior to the war, of course. During the time he was held captive, he mentally played a couple of rounds of golf every single day. And he played them perfectly. He saw the green of the grass and the shots he hit. He felt his swing, the connection with the ball, and he even felt the way the grass felt underneath his shoes as he walked the course. He heard the sounds of the birds in the trees, the wind, the sound of his club hitting the ball, and it soaring down the fairways. He imagined every last detail of what his perfect round of golf would look, feel and sound like. When released from prison, one of the first things he did was hit the links. Despite not having touched an actual golf club in over 5 years, and only having played golf mentally through that time, he shot the very best round of golf he ever had in his life.

In other words, mental imagery just plain works as a tool, or strategy, for improving your abilities. And as you'll learn in this eBook, it's effective for learning and developing both your physical skills, as well as your mental skills.

A MENTAL IMAGERY EXAMPLE

As an example of the power of mental imagery, I'd like for you to read the following italicized narrative at least three times. After you've read it, close your eyes, breathe deeply and slowly and relax, and then imagine the scenario that you've just read. (Note: Even better, have someone slowly and calmly read the following to you as you sit with your eyes closed)

"To begin, make yourself comfortable, with your hands resting in front of you. Close your eyes. Breathe deeply, taking nice, slow breaths. Relax your body. Allow your muscles to relax. Feel your body sink into the chair. Feel your body get heavy and relaxed. Hear your heartbeat slow down. Continue to breathe slowly and deeply. If you should feel yourself start to drift off to sleep, just take 2 or 3 quick, deep breaths and that will bring you back to a relaxed but awake state. Breathe slowly. Relax your muscles.

"Breathe. Relax.

"Imagine a bright yellow lemon sitting on a table in front of you – a bright, shiny, yellow lemon. Notice how bright yellow and shiny it is.

See, feel, hear,
smell, taste.

"Now, imagine picking that bright yellow lemon up with both hands. Feel the texture of the skin and shape of the lemon. Notice how bright the yellow is. Be aware of the its shape.

"Imagine placing the lemon back on the table in front of you. There is a knife sitting on the table. Pick it up in one hand. Place the blade on the lemon and slice it in half, hearing the sound of the blade slicing through the lemon.

"Notice the juices dripping onto the table. See the lemon juice on the blade of the knife. See the lemon in two halves, with juice on the table around it.

"Pick up one half of the lemon and give it a squeeze. As you feel the lemon squish, notice the juices on the face of the lemon, dripping back onto the table.

"Give the lemon half a squeeze and feel the juices drip down your fingers.

"Bring it up to your nose and smell the lemon. Breathe deeply as you smell the scent of the lemon.

"Give it another squeeze, noticing the juices on the face of it. Now, bring the lemon to your mouth, stick out your tongue, and slowly lick the juices off the face of the lemon. Taste the juice.

"Continue to taste the lemon juice in your mouth.

"Okay. When you're comfortable, slowly open your eyes as you mentally come back into the room."

Again, once you've read this narrative three times, close your eyes and imagine going through it in your imagination. Try to imagine as many of the details that you read as you can. See, feel, hear, smell and taste the scenario.

What happened? What did you experience? Did you experience anything, like your mouth puckering up? Did you have saliva build up in your mouth? Yes? If you're like most people your mouth began to salivate and pucker. Why? Because your brain can't tell the difference between a real and an imagined event. Because your brain thought there was real lemon juice in your mouth and your brain then triggered saliva to water down the citric acid of the lemon.

This is a simple example of the power of mental imagery. It's why the best drivers – in fact, anyone who depends on performing at a high level – use it. It's why, if you want to improve or develop a skill, learn a new track, make a change in your behavior, build up your confidence, learn to control your focus... using mental imagery is a critical step – perhaps the most important.

Your brain can't tell
the difference
between a real and
an imagined event if
you use enough
senses.

THE USE OF MENTAL IMAGERY

Mental imagery can and should be used for the following:

- **To see success** – A person can develop his or her belief system (confidence) by recalling past success, and pre-playing success in future events. A driver's belief about his or her abilities may be the most important key to success – more important than natural or developed skill – and it can be improved upon with mental imagery.
- **To motivate** – By recalling the emotional feelings of past successes, and imagining them for future events, a driver can remind him or herself of what they enjoy most about their sport. When things are not going well (as they sometimes do), focusing on what he or she truly gets out of their sport can lead to a superior performance.
- **To perfect skills** – If a driver vividly imagines the look, feel and sound of performing a skill, the likelihood of doing it on the track is improved. These skills may be a specific technique, an inter-personal skill, or just about any other skill, technique, or act a driver needs.
- **To familiarize** – A driver can use mental imagery to perform thousands of skills or techniques (laps of a track, brake release, timing of throttle application, etc.) to learn it for the first time, refresh one's memory of it, or fine-tune the details of it. It can also be used to pre-play a media interview, or any other activity, helping the driver to feel more at ease when the real situation occurs.
- **To trigger a performance state of mind** – By vividly recalling the feelings of a past success, it's almost impossible to not get into a great state of mind. Over time, and by building in a "trigger" word or action, one can literally say a word and get into the ideal state to perform at one's peak.
- **To program behavioral traits** – A driver needs to behave in different ways, in different situations. By pre-playing these situations and adapting one's behavioral traits, he or she improves the ability to act in the ideal manner; i.e., more aggressive, more patiently, or more out-going when the need arises. Mental imagery programs the ability to adapt one's behavior to suit the situation.
- **To pre-plan** – Although there are an infinite number of possibilities for what can happen in an event, by pre-planning for many of them you will act quicker, more accurately, more confidently, and more at ease. For example, pre-playing a number of scenarios that could occur at the start of a race will help you develop an attitude of "It doesn't matter what happens – I'm ready."
- **To re-focus** – If you mentally image yourself dealing with problems during an event - especially the problem of losing your concentration and then immediately re-focusing and continuing on - you will develop a program for doing this. When it happens on the track, it's much easier to regain your focus.

Sports psychologists define two different types of mental imagery: cognitive and motivational.

Cognitive is essentially focused around mentally imaging techniques and strategies; i.e., the line through a corner, race strategy, racecraft, etc. Motivational is focused on your belief

system, state of mind, ability to focus during an event, pushing hard when down, mental toughness, control or use of emotions, and the “rewards” that come from performing the skill or technique well. Each is equally important. In fact, every time you do mental imagery, there should be a balance between cognitive (technique-specific) and motivational (relaxed/balanced/confidence/enjoyment-specific).

Ultimately, these two types are further broken down into:

- Cognitive General
- Cognitive Specific
- Motivational General
- Motivational Specific

To give you an idea of how you would use each type of mental imagery, take a look at the following chart:

	Motivation	Cognitive
Specific	Goals & goal attainment; i.e. setting mental objectives and goals for an event or session, having these objectives and goals be more than just something you’ve thought about at the conscious level – they’ve become a part of your mental programming.	Rehearsal of specific skills; i.e. the line, braking points, where you’re looking, etc.
General	Arousal control, self-confidence, mental toughness; i.e. where you develop mental programming of your beliefs (confidence), your state of mind, your behavioral traits, as well as feeling the rewards of a job well done.	Rehearsal of strategies; i.e. how you handle the start, problems during the race, adapting to an opponent’s position, etc.

Mental imagery can also be “associated” or “dissociated.” Associated means you see, feel and hear yourself in the very act; that is, from your vantage point. Dissociated is as if you’re seeing yourself from above or from a camera view. For some reason, some people naturally do mental imagery from an associated perspective, while others do it from a dissociated perspective.

So, which is best, associated or dissociated? Some say that neither one is better than the other, however, I disagree. While there is nothing wrong with dissociated mental imagery, it’s best to program your mind from the perspective that you’ll experience when performing, when driving. Having said that, doing some mental imagery from a dissociated perspective, as if you’re watching yourself perform from a TV camera’s viewpoint is also valuable. The key is to make your mental imagery as real as possible by seeing things from your point of view, by feeling the car and motions from there, and hearing everything from your perspective. The more realistic you can make your mental imagery, the more effective it will be.

The more senses you include in your mental imagery, the more effective it will be. Notice in the lemon example that you used all five senses: you “saw” the lemon (visual sense), you “felt” it

(kinesthetic), you “heard” the knife cutting the lemon (auditory), you “smelt” the lemon juice (olfactory), and you “tasted” the lemon (taste). But did you really see, feel, hear, smell and taste the lemon? Only in your mind, right? Only in your imagination. By involving all five senses you made the experience very real in your imagination. If you had only “seen” the lemon, using only your visual sense, it’s likely that your mouth would not have salivated because you would not have made it real enough to your mind.

Obviously, your smell and taste have relatively little to do with driving on a track (other than to identify problems – but not to improve your driving), but certainly visual, kinesthetic and auditory have a lot to do with it. Most people who claim to do mental imagery really only visualize. That is, they only imagine the visual scene in their minds; they do not imagine what they feel and hear. And that’s the difference between mental imagery and visualization – mental imagery involves more than just your visual sense, and visualization doesn’t.

The more senses you include in your mental imagery, the more effective it will be.

In addition to your visual, kinesthetic and auditory senses, experience all the emotions and feelings that you possibly can. The more you tie your emotions and feelings to each mental imagery session, the more real it will become to your mind. More importantly, the easier it will be to trigger the specific mental program in the future, on the track. This motivational piece of mental imagery is critical to your success.

Prior to beginning a mental imagery session, know exactly what you want to accomplish. This is a good case for writing out a narrative, even if it’s a simple bullet pointed outline. By doing this before beginning, it’s more likely that you will stay focused throughout the imagery session. I’ve included the example of the lemon imagery narrative, and a template for you to create your own. You can make them as detailed as the lemon example, or you can make a few short bullet points to help you remember the key points you want to program.

Many drivers talk about not being able stay focused on the specific scenario that they want to imagine and program for very long. Some people have a difficult time doing a specific mental imagery scenario for much longer than a minute or two. If that’s you, that’s okay - you’re human, and every human I’ve ever talked to about imagery experiences this. The ones that continued to practice imagery get better and better, to the point where they may be able to stay focused on imaging a scenario for up to an hour or even more. The drivers who get frustrated that they can’t do it perfectly the first time tend to quit and, of course, never improve.

Mental imagery takes practice to get good at it. Don’t expect instant results. It’s best to perform mental imagery at least twice a day, once in the morning and once at night, in addition to the specific sessions you do at the track. Also, have a plan for the type of skill or technique you’re going to work on. Mondays could be for programming specific driving skills, Tuesdays for working on your beliefs about your abilities, Wednesdays for strategy, Thursdays for your overall state of mind, Friday for learning the track, and so on. Like any skill – and mental imagery is a skill - be patient and your imagery skills will improve. It’s an acquired skill.

Which brings me to a major and common misconception. Thinking about driving is NOT mental programming – it’s not mental imagery. Thinking about something is done at the conscious level, which is not the most effective state for your mind to be in to truly learn

something – for it to become part of your mental programming. Until you allow your brain to get into the right mental state, you’re not using mental imagery to program your subconscious.

So, what then is the right or ideal mental state to be in to program your mind? Let’s start with a little background or theory. Doctors and researchers define four brainwave states, as measured by an electroencephalograph (EEG). By attaching a few probes to your head, the EEG can “read” the bio-electrical activity going on inside your head, and therefore measure the brainwaves. These brainwaves are broken down into four levels or states:

Thinking about something is NOT mental imagery.

- *Beta*, where your brain is primarily producing brainwaves in the 13 to 25 Hz (cycles per second) range. While reading this and when you’re in a conscious, thinking, active state, your mind is in the Beta range.
- *Alpha*, where your brain is primarily producing brainwaves in the 7 to 13 Hz range. Alpha is when you close your eyes, relax and begin slowing down your mind. While getting to this state, you should feel your body relax, your muscles letting go and your body sinking into it’s chair or seat.
- *Theta*, where your brain is primarily producing brainwaves in the 4 to 7 Hz range. Just before you fall asleep you pass through a state where you can feel yourself drifting off, but you’re barely aware that you’re doing this. You may also have flashes of odd images in your mind. This is Theta.
- *Delta*, where your brain is primarily producing brainwaves in the 0 to 4 Hz range. When you’re asleep, your mind is producing mostly Delta waves.

Notice that I never said that your brain is only producing one level of brainwave at a time. No, it’s always producing some amount of all four, but it’s the concentration that matters. When consciously awake and conversing, thinking, reading, and driving, your mind is producing mostly Beta waves, some lesser amount of Alpha, less Theta, and much less Delta. When asleep, you’re mostly producing Delta, less Theta, less Alpha, and even less Beta. In other words, your brain is practically always producing some amount of all four levels, but the concentration of the various levels change depending on what state you’re in.

While doing mental imagery, if your mind is in the Alpha-Theta state, the programming will be much deeper and more effective. And with that in mind (no pun intended), let’s move into how to use mental imagery.

HOW TO USE MENTAL IMAGERY

For your brain to be in the most receptive, effective programming state, you want to relax your mind enough so that it is in what is called an Alpha-Theta state. In this state of mind, your brain is primarily producing brainwaves in the 6 to 12 range. The best way to describe this state is that your mind is not busy, it's relaxed, you haven't drifted off to sleep yet, but if you let your mind relax and slow down much more it would.

If you simply close your eyes and consciously think about something, your mind will be in a Beta state, and the effectiveness of your mental imagery will be much reduced. By allowing yourself to get to an Alpha-Theta state by relaxing your mind and body, everything that you imagine will become imprinted within your brain much deeper and stronger. This is how you program your mind.

So, prior to beginning to do mental imagery, take a few minutes to allow your mind to relax and slow down – to get into an Alpha-Theta state. If you do, whatever you imagine will seem more real to your subconscious mind, and therefore become deeply programmed in your mind. And from there, the ability to re-produce it on the track is much greater.

Have you ever installed a piece of software on a computer and then couldn't locate the icon to click on to launch the program? Imagine the frustration! Imagine how useful a computer program would be without an icon or trigger to launch it. Not very, right? The same thing applies to a mental program. Imagine if you did mental imagery over and over again and developed the programming to perform a specific skill. You can see it, feel it, and hear it so clear in your head. Then, once on track, you can't locate that mental program in the vast hard drive in your head. Imagine the frustration! It's the very same thing, isn't it? So, as important as mental imagery is, it's just as important to develop a trigger to launch this program.

Build a "trigger" into every one of your mental programs.

As an example, you could do this by simply saying the word, "flow" in your mind as you imagine doing it, over and over again. The more you do this, the more your mind will associate the word "flow" with the program, eventually getting to the point where you almost can't help but perform the skill when you say it. It's just like Pavlov's dog.

Even when pre-playing a success to develop your confidence or motivation, focus your mental imagery on the act or performance. Sure, see yourself be successful, but focus on what led to the success – the way you felt, the way you performed, the state of mind you were in, and the actual skills and techniques it took to get there.

Finally, don't expect mental imagery to compensate for a lack of knowledge, or for hard work and practice. While it can and will make a huge difference to your performance, it can't perform miracles.

THE PLAN

Okay, with that background, here's the plan I'd suggest you follow.

1. Seven days a week (you can have a day off if you want, although I bet some of your competitors are not – if you take a day off, they are getting an advantage on you) spend a minimum of 15 minutes, twice a day doing a mental imagery session. You can do one in the morning and one just before bed at night, one in the afternoon and one before bed, one after dinner and one before bed, or whenever. But, there should be at least one hour in between the two sessions. You should also determine one consistent place to do them. Preferably this is not lying on your bed, as there is too much of a tendency to fall asleep while doing it (if you feel yourself drifting off to sleep, take 2 or 3 deep, quick breaths). Sitting in a chair is good; sitting in your race car is even better. You want to make sure you are comfortable, relaxed, it is quiet, and you will not be disturbed.
2. Remember, the more you use your body, the more the session will program the muscle memory to do things right when on the track. Use as many “props” as you can to make it most realistic. You can wear your helmet, hold a real steering wheel, work the pedals, etc.
3. Prepare and read over the narrative (it can just be a few bullet points, or a fully written out narrative). The reason for writing out a plan for your narratives is to make sure you stay on task. The only way for this programming to be really effective is to repeat it enough times – repetition is critical. If you begin to stray off of what you've outlined in your narratives, you will not be repeating the session enough times.
4. After you've read through the narrative and you've got it memorized enough to be able to follow it over and over again for 15 minutes, prepare for your imagery session. To begin, get yourself in position, close your eyes and breathe deep and slow. Relax. Feel yourself relaxing. Feel your muscles begin to let go. Feel yourself begin to sink into your chair or seat. Listen to your heartbeat slow down. Notice your breathing slow down, become even more relaxed. Notice the images of you as a relaxed person sinking into your chair or seat. Breathe. Relax your muscles. Breathe.
5. Your objective is to get into that Alpha-Theta state, where your mind is slowed down, and in a very receptive state. It's near that state just before you fall asleep, but you're still awake enough to be aware of what's going on around you. This can take anywhere from 2 to 5 minutes to get to this state (it will probably take less and less time with practice).
6. Breathe. Relax. As you do each of these imagery sessions, continue to breathe and be relaxed. Part of what you're programming is the ability to feel relaxed and continue to breathe throughout these scenarios. Breathe. Relax.
7. You're now ready to begin a mental imagery session, programming what you prepared in the narrative, and using multiple senses.

The more you use
mental imagery, the
better you'll get at it.

RECAP

Simply thinking about something is NOT mental imagery. While it may have some benefit, it's not until you relax your mind and begin to create a "virtual reality" with your imagination that true mental programming is occurring. Close your eyes, breathe slowly and deeply, relaxing your mind and body prior to, and throughout your mental imagery session. Having your mind in what is called an Alpha-Theta state is the most effective state to build mental programming.

- The more senses you use (you imagine) in your mental imagery, the more effective it will be.
- Imagine yourself from the point of view of you actually driving (Associated mental imagery). It's okay to imagine yourself from a distance (Dissociated mental imagery), as if you're watching yourself on TV, but it's not quite as effective as Associated mental imagery.
- Keep your imagery personal, positive, detailed, and in the present.
- The more emotions you can attach to a mental program, the deeper ingrained it seems to be. Experience all the emotions and feelings that you possibly can.
- It's okay – even beneficial – to sometimes do mental imagery in slow motion (especially when programming a new skill, technique or track), or in fast motion (to help you feel more relaxed when at actual speed on the track).
- Every mental program that you develop using imagery must have some type of "trigger" (a word, phrase or action) that you can then use to activate the program with when needed. A mental program without a trigger is like computer software without an icon to launch it.
- Writing out a brief narrative or bullet-pointed outline of what you wish to work on with imagery will help keep you focused. Know exactly what you want to accomplish prior to beginning.
- Mental imagery can be used to program your mind to do more than just perform a skill or technique. It can, and should be used to program behavioral traits, beliefs, state of mind, and motivation.
- If you do imagery of a specific program just before bed, and then again in the morning, it will become programmed quicker than if you do the same one twice in one day. Mental imagery done just before bed seems to sink in a little deeper overnight.
- Doing mental imagery twice a day is more than twice as effective as doing it once a day. The more often you do it, the better.
- Mental imagery takes practice. The more you do it, the better you'll get at it, and the better the programming will be. Don't expect instant results. Be patient and your imagery skills will improve.

Mental imagery, like most things, requires practice to get good at it.

"Hope is not a strategy."

If you want to make a change or improvement in any aspect of your life, just hoping for it won't help much. But using mental imagery to help change or update your mental programming will have a huge impact. In fact, it can be said that until you change/update your mental programming, you will never change or improve.

A MENTAL IMAGERY TEMPLATE

The following can be used as a template for your mental imagery narratives – just fill in your specific narrative and/or bullet-pointed outline in the middle section below.

“Sit up straight in your chair, making yourself comfortable. Close your eyes. Breathe deeply, taking nice, slow breaths. Notice your breath – inhale and exhale. Relax your body. Allow your muscles to relax. Feel your feet relax. Feel your legs relax. Feel your hands relax. Feel your arms relax. Feel your neck and shoulders relax. Feel your torso relax. Feel your body sink into the chair. Feel your body get heavy and relaxed. Hear your heartbeat slow down. Continue to breathe slowly and deeply. If you feel yourself start to drift off to sleep, just take 2 or 3 quick, deep breaths and that will bring you back to a relaxed but awake state. Breathe slowly. Relax your muscles.

“Breathe. Relax. [Write/say your Trigger word/phrase here]

[Add your specific narration/bullet pointed outline here...]

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“As you imagine yourself in this setting, notice the expression you have on your face. Notice your body posture. How do you feel? Do you feel confident, happy, focused, ready?”

“Enjoy the feeling of your imagery...”

WHAT'S BEEN SAID BY ATHLETES WHO USE MENTAL IMAGERY

Kenny Roberts, the first American motorcycle racer to win the 500cc Road Racing World Championship; two-time AMA Grand National Championships (1973 and 1974), three-time 500cc World Champion (1978, 1979 and 1980): *"The first time I went over to the Match Races in England, it was at the Brands Hatch short circuit. I had run a bunch of laps in the morning and I was three seconds off the pace. I mean, I was three seconds off the lap record! There were a lot of tires up in the transporter we had, so I moved a bunch of them around and got up in there where nobody could bother me. I stayed in there for two hours.*

"For the first time, I thought about every single thing I was doing on the track, what RPM I was turning in this corner, who was going better than I was and where and how, if I was having a braking problem someplace else. When I had some idea of what I ought to be doing out there, I must have done 200 laps in my mind. I came out of there and went one lap to warm up the tires. The next lap was three seconds better – right at the track record. I went back up in the truck again and I came out with a new track record. That was the first time it dawned on me that my mind had more to do with fast laps than skill."

"An hour before the start, all the mechanical stuff with the bike is over, and I don't think about it anymore. When I set off from the motorhome, my concentration is fixed. As I walk through the paddock, I don't have to worry about not talking to people for fear of disturbing my concentration because nothing can disturb it anyway. It's already sort of on automatic pilot. When I sit on the bike, my concentration takes over. I stop hearing noise and I stop seeing people in any particular way. I don't focus on anyone or anything I see. I'm programmed, and the programming takes over."

"You see, we only get a few laps of practice, maybe six or seven, and there's very little you can learn in that time, so I have to make up for it in my head, lap after lap, until I know it. Right now, I know every bump and ripple out there."

"I regard my brain as just another part of my body, a sort of programming center. Over the years, I have trained it just like I have trained the rest of my body. I have practiced it, taught it how to behave in the sort of situation it's likely to meet on a racetrack. By now, it works pretty well, so that when I start to concentrate to some extent and in some ways, it's automatic. It all starts to happen, it's sort of switched on and I can start to think about something else."

"Between race meetings, I spend so much time thinking about the racetrack because there's so little time to do everything when you are actually there that I can never figure out how people who don't do that to manage it all."

Sam Moses, Sports Illustrated, describing Kenny Roberts, 3-time motorcycle World Champion: *"Sometimes Roberts will sit on his bike in the clamor and commotion of the pits and grip the handlebars in a racing crouch. He'll stay that way for minutes, motionless, entranced. Then he'll suddenly snap out of it, swing off the seat and recite a list of necessary changes in the engine or suspension, as if the handlebars had been antennas and he had received a message through them."*

"One reason Roberts is so much better than other racers is that he thinks so much about his racing. Often he can be seen amid some mild commotion, oblivious to it, sitting as if in a trance, thinking about gear ratios or shock absorbers or tire compounds. Sometimes he retreats to his motorhome and laps a circuit in his head, drawing curvy lines on his thigh with a finger, moving his lips as he memorizes his braking and shifting points like an actor going over his lines."

Dean Miller, Team Roberts trainer, about Kenny Roberts: *“Kenny could lay down on his back and completely visualize 150 laps and find two seconds. We were struggling at the Suzuka 8-hour in '86 when he was riding with Tadahiko Taira; he couldn't get the bike to go around. He said, 'let's go to the hotel' and he lay on his back, and you could see his wrists moving and his feet moving like he was shifting and braking and you could kinda see his head moving and shaking. Then he suddenly just stands up and says, 'man, I've just found two seconds.' In the hotel, visualizing. He goes back and goes two seconds quicker and puts the Yamaha on the pole. It's a true story.”*

Warren Willing, Kenny Roberts, Jr.'s crew chief, describing Kenny Roberts, Jr., 2000 motorcycle World Champion: *“All top riders have the ability to visualize to a very high degree. When Kenny is out there, he's concentrating 100 per cent on his riding and automatically compensating to make the bike work. When he's riding, his subconscious takes in everything without interpreting it on the track. When he comes into the pits, he can visualize everything and pull that information back out to any degree of accuracy you want, and that's a strong point.”*

Mick Doohan, 5-time motorcycle World Champion: *“Learning new things is the key to improving, but the vital thing is to try them out in your mind, one at a time, before you do it on the bike.”*

Dean Miller, Team Roberts trainer, on Wayne Rainey, 3-time motorcycle World Champion: *“I've been at Laguna Seca where he's said, 'shut the door, don't let anybody in, I don't want to see anybody, anywhere, anytime.' I'm there standing guard on the door while he's inside, visualizing the things he needs to do.”*

Wayne Gardner, 1987 motorcycle World Champion: *“Phil also taught me about visualization. I can look at a circuit map and visualize the race the next day, what's going to happen in certain circumstances and how to approach that if it happens, even down to going for the finish line close to someone else, thinking about what I can do to beat him. It is amazing how visualization can create something that actually happens and you're prepared for it. Obviously, I visualize situations with the most competitive riders – sometimes two or three, but sometimes just Eddie Lawson. I think about his weaknesses and what I can do to exploit them in certain situations.”*

Roger Bannister, talking about being the first person to run the mile in under 4 minutes: *“Each night in the week before the race there came a moment when I saw myself at the starting line. My whole body would grow nervous and tremble. I ran the race over in my mind. Then I would calm myself and sometimes get off to sleep.”*

Jack Nicklaus, considered by many to be the greatest golfer of all time: *“I never hit a shot, not even in practice, without having a very sharp, in-focus picture of it in my head. It's like a color movie. First, I 'see' the ball where I want it to finish, nice and white and sitting up high on the bright green grass. Then the scene quickly changes, and I 'see' the ball going there: its path, trajectory, and shape, even its behavior on landing. Then there's a sort of fade-out, and the next scene shows me making the kind of swing that will turn the previous image into reality... I believe a few moments of movie-making might work some small miracles in your game.”*

Nick Faldo, speaking of the time he won three major golf tournaments in the early 90's: *“In each of those weeks, I had total confidence in what I was doing. I was picking a shot, visualizing it and trusting myself to pull it off. I could stand up there and do precisely what I intended to do.”*

Terry Orlick, Peak Performance Expert, Trainer, Author: *“In sport, mental imagery is used primarily to help you get the best out of yourself in training and competition. The developing athletes*

who make the fastest progress and those who ultimately become their best make extensive use of mental imagery. They use it daily as a means of directing what will happen in training, and as a way of pre-experiencing their best competition performances.”

Sylvie Bernier, Olympic gold medalist springboard diver: “I did my dives in my head all the time. At night, before going to sleep, I always did my dives. Ten dives. I started with a front dive, the first one that I had to do at the Olympics, and I did everything as if I was actually there. I saw myself in the pool at the Olympics doing my dives. If the dive was wrong, I went back and started over again. It takes a good hour to do a perfect imagery of all my dives, but for me it was better than a workout. I felt like I was on the board. Sometimes I would take the weekend off and do imagery five times a day. It took me a long time to control my images and perfect my imagery, maybe a year, doing it every day. At first I couldn’t see myself, I always saw everyone else, or I would see my dives wrong all the time. I would get an image of hurting myself, or tripping on the board, or I would ‘see’ something done really bad. As I continued to work at it, I got to the point where I could feel myself doing a perfect dive and hear the crowd yelling at the Olympics. But it took me a long time. I read everything about what I had to do, and I knew my dive by heart. I worked at it so much, it got to the point that I could do all my dives easily. Sometimes I would even be in the middle of a conversation with someone and I would think of one of my dives and ‘do it’ in my mind.”

Brian Orser, World Champion figure skater: “My imagery is more just feel. I don’t think it is visual at all. I get this internal feeling. When I’m actually doing the skills on the ice, I get the same feeling inside. It is a very internal feeling that is hard to explain. You have to experience it, and once you do, then you know what you are going after. I can even get a feeling for an entire program. Sometimes in a practice I get myself psyched into a program that I will win, like I won the long program last year. I step on the ice and go to my starting position and I get this feeling, ‘I’m at the Olympic Games,’ and I sort of get the whole program flashed before my eyes, and I get this internal feeling how this program will be, and usually I’m fresh and usually it will be a perfect program. I don’t just step out there in training and just say, ‘Here we go, another program.’”

Kelly Kryczka, World Champion synchronized swimmer: “We did a lot of imagery during training sessions, especially as the competition approached. When we were doing compulsory figures in practice, a minute before doing certain ones the coach would say, ‘Okay, you are going to do a best one.’ You are going to do a whole compulsory figure.’ So before we went out there and did it, we would sit on the edge of the pool and imagine ourselves doing it, and feel how it feels. You imagine yourself doing it right on, perfectly. Then you go out there and do it. Doing a lot of imagery was the major difference in our preparation last year, not just the duet, but also the compulsory figures. About half an hour before we actually did a competition routine we would go through the routine once together on dry land doing the movements. The two of us would do the movements, moving our arms, and feeling the moves while the tape was playing our music.”

Alex Baumann, Olympic double gold medalist swimmer: “The best way I have learned to prepare mentally for competition is to visualize the race in my mind and to put down a split time. The splits I use in my imagery are determined by my coach and myself, for each part of the race. For example, in the 200 individual medley, splits are made up for each 50 meters because after 50 meters the stroke changes. These splits are based on training times and what we feel I’m capable of doing. In my imagery I concentrate on attaining the splits I have set out to do. About 15 minutes before the race I always visualize the race in my mind and see how it will go. I see where everybody else is, and then I really focus on myself. I do not worry about anybody else. I think about my own race and nothing else. I am really swimming the race in my mind. I go up and down the pool, rehearsing all parts of the race in

my mind, imagining how I actually feel in the water. I try to get those splits in my mind, and after that I am ready to go. I started imagery in 1978. It has been refined more and more as the years go on. That is what really got me the world record and Olympic medals.”

Linda Thom, Olympic champion in pistol shooting: *“When I go to the line in training or competition, I mentally go through my shot-plan checklist before I shoot. This strategy started out very mechanically with a physical list of words which I have on the shooting table, and which I read exactly. These words represented every single step involved in shooting a shot. Then I reduced the steps to key words so that I could go through the list faster. Finally I didn’t need a list anymore. I would usually write one word to emphasize what I wanted, such as ‘trigger’ or ‘smooth.’ Then this shot-plan rehearsal became a mix of simple verbal reminders and images, which I ran before each shot.”*

Bill Russell, NBA hall of famer: *“Something happened that night that opened my eyes and chilled my spine. I was sitting on the bench watching Treu and McKelvey the way I always did. Every time one of them would make one of the moves I liked, I’d close my eyes just afterward and try to see the play in my mind. In other words, I’d try to create an instant replay on the inside of my eyelids. Usually, I’d catch only part of a particular move the first time I tried this; I’d miss the headwork or the way the ball was carried or maybe the sequence of steps. But the next time I saw the move I’d catch a little more of it, so that soon I could call up a complete picture.*

“On this particular night I was working on replays of many plays, including McKelvey’s way of taking an offensive rebound and moving quickly to the hoop. It’s a fairly simple play for any big man in basketball, but I didn’t execute it well and McKelvey did. Since I had an accurate vision of his technique in my head, I started playing with the image right there on the bench, running back the picture several times and each time inserting a part of me for McKelvey. Finally I saw myself making the whole move, and I ran this over and over. When I went in the game, I grabbed an offensive rebound and put it in the basket just the way McKelvey did. It seemed natural, almost as if I were just stepping into a film and following the signs. When the imitation worked and the ball went in, I could barely contain myself. I was so elated I thought I’d float right out of the gym. Now for the first time I had transferred something from my head to my body. It seemed so easy. My first dose of athletic confidence was to me when I was 18 years old.”

ABOUT...

I discovered mental imagery at the age of 15, after reading an article in my school Phys Ed teacher's *Athletic Journal* magazine. I immediately applied it to tennis, since that was the sport I was really focused on at that time. I went from being an average player to winning tournaments in a matter of months. Of course, as I started racing, I used mental imagery there, as well.

I've been fortunate to race some pretty cool cars throughout my career, from sprint cars on short ovals to Indy cars, and from club racing in Formula Fords and Showroom Stock cars to GT and Prototype cars in Grand-Am and ALMS. I've won a few races along the way, and when I got a ride with the factory-supported PTG BMW team in 1998 I won the United State Road Racing Championship. And one of my most satisfying wins was the 2003 Daytona 24-Hour race, driving an LMP-2 car. Mental imagery was a part of my approach to racing through all those years.

For much of my racing career I drove for under-funded teams, whether my own or someone else's. That meant that I needed to find an advantage other than from the car – it had to come from me. The mental game, or as I call it, Inner Speed Secrets, became my advantage. I went on to write a book with my friend, Ronn Langford, solely focused on the mental game and by that *Inner Speed Secrets* title (along with 7 other *Speed Secrets* books). I continue to conduct Inner Speed Secrets workshops and training for other drivers.

A major goal I have is to be the most complete training resource for high-performance and race drivers. In addition to the one-on-one coaching and in-person seminars and presentations that I do all over the world, I offer the following:

- Webinars (both live and recorded) – SpeedSecrets.com/Webinars
- Virtual Track Walk videos – SpeedSecrets.com/Virtual-Track-Walks
- eBooks (*Shocks for Drivers*, *Endurance Racing Guide*, *HPDE Instructor Manifesto*, *Performance Driving Illustrated*, *How To Learn A Track...Fast!*) – SpeedSecrets.com/eBooks
- Speed Secrets Weekly – SpeedSecrets.com/SpeedSecretsWeekly
- Ask Ross (weekly Q&A column) – SpeedSecrets.com/Ask-Ross
- Speed Secrets Podcast – Podcast.SpeedSecrets.com, or on iTunes, Stitcher or Google Play
- Speed Secrets books (where it all started) – just go to Amazon.com

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Keep learning and having fun!