

7. POSITIVE PERSPECTIVES

*A bump in the road is either an obstacle to be fought or an opportunity to be enjoyed.
It's all up to you.*

One of the first steps in being successful in any endeavour is carrying a positive perspective. The following section outlines skills and strategies that can help you keep a positive mindset when things are going well but more importantly, when they're not going so well. Positive thoughts, statements, and emotions are part of a good training and game plan. They accompany the actions of elite athletes who have succeeded at the highest levels.

Do you consider yourself a positive person?

The dialogue you have going on in your head is called your "self-talk." Have you ever noticed that you have a little voice inside talking to you most of the time? You might even have more than one voice. When you're thinking, you're most likely talking to yourself as well. So really, you can be talking to yourself all the time!

What do you say when you talk to yourself about your ability to perform in different contexts?

Good things or bad things? Maybe a little bit of both? Remember that what you think or say to yourself can affect how you feel, and how you feel largely determines how you perform. Thus, the words you say to yourself can significantly influence how confident you will feel in training and during games, for example.

We are not always aware of what we are saying to ourselves. On one hand, this is a good thing because if we were aware of it all the time, we'd go crazy! Plus, imagine all the energy we would spend. On the other hand, this is also dangerous because we may be saying terrible things to ourselves without even knowing it. Think about it: if you constantly bad-mouth yourself by saying "I suck," "I can't do this," or "I'm useless," and you're not aware that you are doing this, first, you won't be able to tell yourself to stop making these detrimental statements, and second, you could seriously jeopardize your self-confidence, performance, and well-being.

Many performers spend a great deal of time talking negatively to themselves, especially when the going gets tough. But you know what? At the risk of sounding cliché, the tough must get going. When you realize that you are telling yourself something negative, stop, and choose to turn it into something positive or constructive instead. You always have the choice to talk to yourself in an encouraging, confidence-enhancing way, even if you are not performing well right now.

Start improving your self-talk right now.

The first step in improving your self-talk is to become aware of it by regularly asking yourself, "What am I saying to myself?" "Am I encouraging or discouraging myself?" and "Am I helping or hindering my performance and well-being?" Another way to stay in touch with what you are

saying to yourself is to keep a journal (see Exercise 6.2 in previous section). Each night or as often as you can, write down what you thought about yourself and your performance during the day. After an event, practice, or a game, note what you told yourself about your ability to perform.

What should you say when you talk to yourself?

Good self-talk statements are positive and encouraging, for example, "I can crank this ball," or "I'm making a difference on my team." Secondly, you should say what you want to do, for instance, "I'm going to fire it in the top left corner of the net," and not what you don't want to do such as "I'm not going to miss this shot."

EXERCISE 7.1 - USING SELF-TALK TO ENHANCE MY PERFORMANCE

Figuring out what you say to yourself when playing your best will help you use self-talk to your advantage. What do you say to yourself when you are performing at your best (before, during, after)? Write it down below. If your response is "Nothing," that's ok because as described in a previous section, when you are really engaged in what you are doing, there's a chance you might not be thinking of anything and rather just feeling your way through your performance. However, *if you were* to talk to yourself, what would you want to be saying? Having a few phrases that you can repeat to yourself will give you something to go to when you're struggling.

How can self-talk help? When can you use it?

You can use self-talk for different purposes. See examples below. What's important is that you personalize statements and practice applying them in different situations to determine if and how they help your performance. There might be other relevant situations in which you would benefit from using constructive self-talk. Add them to the list below.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Master specific skills <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Change bad habits <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Get connected with your Dream <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Persevere during training <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Stay positive <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Psych yourself up <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cope with stress <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Relax <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Get energy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Focus on a given task <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Refocus under distractions <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Boost your confidence <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Guide your imagery <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Remain accountable for your actions <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cope with pain or injuries <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Solve problems constructively <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
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Following are examples of constructive self-talk statements that water polo athletes have used to prepare themselves for games. Could any of these apply to your sport or life context? Would you benefit from adapting and using some of these statements, especially if you have a tendency of having a negative dialogue?

TABLE 7.1 - SELF-TALK STATEMENTS TO PREPARE FOR COMPETITIONS		
General:	"I'm in control." "Take it one play at a time." "Focus on each play." "Trust yourself."	"Go for it." "Be in the moment." "Love the ball." "Feel strong."
Shooting:	"I can shoot." "Shoot the ball hard." "Be aggressive." "Penalty shots are great."	"Layout." "Hit the target." "Bottom left corner." "Be ready to counter."
Passing:	"Control your passes." "See the line." "Free and easy." "Feel the ball."	"Take your time." "Smooth." "Powerful passes." "Assess then pass."

TABLE 7.1 - SELF-TALK STATEMENTS TO PREPARE FOR COMPETITIONS <i>(cont)</i>		
Catching:	"Wide hand." "Jump for it." "See the ball." "Protect the ball."	"Reach." "Feel it." "Steal the ball." "Control the ball."

Saying Things You Don't Believe

When things are really bad, telling yourself "Everything is great" might be ridiculous or inappropriate. However, you can still say things that are positive and encouraging by focusing on your strengths and recalling past successes. Just like it can help to look confident even when you don't feel confident, you may talk to yourself positively even when you don't feel that positive. In fact, saying positive things that will allow you to reconnect with how you truly want to feel could be extremely beneficial. Here are reasons why:

- 1) You will once again feel the way you want rather than feeling negative, down, frustrated, worried, etc.
- 2) It will empower you to take responsibility for your own thinking and to control what you think and say to yourself rather than letting your thoughts control you.
- 3) Making the effort to say positive things directs your focus and keeps you from saying anything negative. For example, you can't say, "I hope the ball gets passed to someone else," when you are saying, "Pass it to me."

Is it still difficult for you to make the distinction between positive and negative self talk? Here are more examples. The argument is that positive statements are more helpful than negative ones. But, let's face it, sometimes we need to shake ourselves to get going and a statement like, "You're slacking here and not doing anything good. Move your #*% and get back into the game" might serve you well. You must know, however, when it is appropriate to "shake" yourself a little bit and the best way to do this is by paying attention to how this makes you feel and how it affects your performance.

TABLE 7.2 - DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EFFECTIVE AND INEFFECTIVE SELF-TALK	
Ineffective	Effective
"Please don't pass me the puck."	"Get the puck and shoot it."
"This set is way too difficult."	"Trust yourself, you'll get through it."
"I hope I don't make a mistake."	"This one is going low, to the right."
"I'm terrible on hills."	"I've done it before, I can do it again."

Thought Stopping

An important skill to consider when developing or trying to change your self-talk is *thought stopping*. It can be used to deal with negative thoughts as they enter your mind, before they become harmful. If you have a tendency of thinking about or seeing in your mind poor past performances, mistakes, or things that went wrong in your day, this technique will likely be useful. Essentially, thought stopping consists of the following steps:

1. Recognize that you are having a negative thought or image.
2. Immediately stop the thought or image by using a cue or trigger, and clear your mind. This cue can be a word, for example, "stop" or "release." It can also be a gesture, such as snapping your fingers or touching your head, or it can even be an image such as a stop sign or a remote control (see previous section), whatever is relevant to you and what you are doing.
3. Replace the negative thought or image with a positive one.

EXERCISE 7.2 - SHIFTING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

Think of recurring negative thoughts you have about yourself or your performance in training and in competition. Try to identify patterns. It is possible that the negative thoughts you have during training will occur in competition as well, particularly when you're under pressure. Write them down and list positive thoughts with which you can replace them.

Negative thoughts about myself as a person

– e.g., "I'm the worse communicator."

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Positive thoughts to replace the negative ones

+ e.g., "If I take the time to figure out what I want to say, I'll do well."

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EXERCISE 7.2 - SHIFTING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS *(cont)*

Negative thoughts about myself as a performer / athlete

Positive thoughts to replace the negative ones

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Let's keep going with this. To further get you to think positively about yourself and your performance, complete the following exercise. It's ok to brag once in a while!

EXERCISE 7.3 - POSITIVE THOUGHTS ABOUT MYSELF

I'm good at:

My friends think I'm great because:

I'm happy when:

I get excited when:

I'm thankful that:

EXERCISE 7.3 - POSITIVE THOUGHTS ABOUT MYSELF *(cont)*

I'm proud of myself because:

My biggest strength is:

My parents are so pleased with me because:

My coach/teacher says I'm good because:

It's important that I continue to:

I look forward to getting up every morning because:

I love life because:

Exercise 7.2 was a general exercise to help you figure out the negative thoughts you might be having right now and the positive thoughts you want to experience instead. This next exercise is more specific to the context of competition and will allow you to reflect on statements you could learn to repeat to yourself in an attempt to feel the best way you can and perform at your best.

EXERCISE 7.4 - MY PERSONAL SELF-TALK STATEMENTS FOR COMPETITION

Write down your own personal statements that you can repeat to yourself before, during and after events or games to get into and maintain an optimal physical, mental, and emotional state. Think of the different roles and responsibilities you have in and out of your sport. Also, remind yourself of what has worked well for you in the past. If it helps, think of things that can detract you from your event/game or bring you down, and write statements that will prevent you from doing so or help you respond in an appropriate way. Try to keep your statements short, concise, and positive. Refer to Table 7.1 for examples.

THE DAY BEFORE AN EVENT/ GAME

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THE MORNING OF AN EVENT/ GAME

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EXERCISE 7.4 - MY PERSONAL SELF-TALK STATEMENTS FOR COMPETITION *(cont)*

THE DAY BEFORE AN EVENT/ GAME

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THE MORNING OF AN EVENT/ GAME

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BEFORE AN EVENT/ GAME, AT THE SITE

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SECONDS BEFORE THE EVENT/ GAME

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DURING THE EVENT / GAME On offense...

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DURING THE EVENT / GAME On defense...

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EXERCISE 7.4 - MY PERSONAL SELF-TALK STATEMENTS FOR COMPETITION (cont)

AFTER THE EVENT / GAME

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|---|---|
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| * | * |
| * | * |
| * | * |

It is important to have a positive dialogue not only in your sport but also in your daily life. Exercise 7.3 got you to reflect on reasons to have positive thoughts about yourself. Obviously you are doing many great things and you should compliment yourself in the process. How often do you compliment yourself during a given day? Do you take time to celebrate small successes and nurture your self-confidence through positive self-encouragement? If not, there's no better time to start than the present.

EXERCISE 7.5 - FINDING WORDS TO COMPLIMENT MYSELF

"I really lack the words to compliment myself today.

Outstanding. Excellent. Fantastic.
 Magnificent. Superb. Exquisite.
 Astounding. Exceptional. Unequaled.
 Matchless. Unsurpassed. Unrivaled.
 Incredible. Unique. Stellar.
 Notable. Amazing. Fabulous.
 Impressive. Grand. Beautiful.
 Dazzling. Gorgeous. Spectacular.
 Remarkable. Wonderful. Extraordinary.
 Phenomenal. Indescribable. Marvelous.
 Wondrous. Sensational. Thrilling.
 Astonishing. Breathtaking. Impressive.
 Striking. Splendid. Unbelievable."

-Alberto Tomba-

Write down words or phrases you can use to compliment yourself. Repeat them as often as needed (e.g., when you get up in the morning, before going to bed at night, when you look at yourself in the mirror, etc.), particularly when you want to increase your confidence.

Emotions

As you should already know by now, your performance and well-being are affected by not only your thoughts but also your emotions or feelings. We have spent much time getting you to pay attention to how you feel and want to feel in different life contexts. In this section, we will specifically delve into the world of emotions, which are an important aspect of “feel.”

Think of a situation in which you were very emotional.

- Was it a positive or negative experience?
- Did you express your emotions or did you keep them inside?
- If you expressed them, how did you do it?
- How did it affect you, your performance, and well-being?

If you try to relive the emotions you had in this situation, you might notice that they generated a lot of energy that you either gained or lost. That’s why it is said that emotions are the fuel of life. When you are emotional, it is important that you notice what happens to your energy because this may affect your performance and daily living. How do you typically feel after you’ve had a really long cry? What about when you get really angry? Surprised? Curious? Do you feel energized or drained?

What do you do with any surplus of energy? Do you use it to your advantage and channel it in ways that are beneficial to you? If you’re wise, you are doing this or will learn how to do it. You’re the only one who can control your emotions and energy levels. Learn to live and express them in appropriate ways. Recognize when your emotions are not helping you and develop strategies to respond. You are well on your way if you have refined your resonance process.

TABLE 7.3 - BASIC EMOTIONS

Emotion	If you are aware that you are experiencing an emotion and respond to it by using the resulting energy to your advantage, it could help you:
Fear	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be alert at all times.• Take risks/attack (e.g., ball, situation)• Energize yourself.• Spark up the instinct to “survive at all costs.”
Anger	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fight for what belongs to you.• Be assertive.• Assume control of the situation.• Focus on your goal.• Perform with intensity.
Guilt	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be accountable for your actions.• Live up to your expectations and those of others.• Plan for solutions to whatever caused you to feel guilt.

TABLE 5.3 - BASIC EMOTIONS *(cont)*

Disgust / Contempt	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intimidate your opponents.• Get “fired up” to extend your limits.• Show what you can do in the face of distractions.• Increase your level of patience and tolerance to unpleasant things, people or situations.
Surprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activate yourself.• Re-think your immediate goals.• Anticipate the unknown.• Adapt to changes.
Sadness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get ready to “give it your all.”• Reflect deeply upon your goals.• Relax, rest, and recover because sadness can drain your energy.• Express and communicate your feelings.• Grow and accept all of life’s realities.
Happiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enjoy your sport.• Concentrate on the positives.• Appreciate what you have achieved thus far.• Feel good!
Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get excited to learn new things.• Be passionate about accomplishing tedious tasks.• Challenge yourself to go the extra mile.• Be creative in solving problems.• Be innovative in your sport/life.

How else can your emotions help you? You have likely been through many emotional experiences so far in your life. What have you learned from them? What about emotions that have a negative impact on your performance? Do you have strategies in place to deal with them?

1. Should you just stop and try to get yourself under control?
2. Should you revisit how you want to feel (e.g., shift your focus to positive thoughts, images, or situations in which you felt great)?
3. Should you work harder to channel the energy?
4. Should you take a break from the activity?
5. Should you talk to someone?

Paying attention, experimenting with different strategies, and doing regular checks will allow you to monitor and regulate your emotions to maintain an appropriate focus and conserve valuable energy.

An emotion is energy waiting to be harnessed. Do something with it!

EXERCISE 7.6 - SHIFTING NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

Think of situations in training and competition in which you experience undesirable emotions or feelings (e.g., don't feel the way you want to feel) that affect your optimal state to perform. Write them down and describe actions you can take to regain your appropriate physical, mental, and emotional state.

<i>Situations in <u>Training</u></i>	<i>Unpleasant Emotion / Feelings</i>	<i>Steps / Actions to Regain Optimal State</i>
•	-	+
•	-	+
•	-	+
<i>Situations in <u>Competition</u></i>	<i>Unpleasant Emotion / Feelings</i>	<i>Steps / Actions to Regain Optimal State</i>
•	-	+
•	-	+
•	-	+

One way to assess and monitor your thoughts and emotions is to videotape your performances and view them afterwards to learn from them. As you recall your thoughts and how you felt, note your focus, self-confidence, actions, and overall performance. Draw lessons for the future.

EXERCISE 5.7 - VIDEO ANALYSIS OF THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS

Videotape a performance. If you can, ask the person who is videotaping to tape moments before and after it as well. Immediately following the performance, replay it and write down what you were thinking and feeling at critical points of the event. Notice when you were positive and when you were negative, if at all. You might also want to note your current thoughts as you watch your performance on video. This type of evaluation can provide useful information to manage your thoughts and emotions.

TABLE 5.4 - SUMMARY SUGGESTIONS
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Be aware of your self-talk. Choose to talk to yourself in a positive, confidence-enhancing way.2. Write personal statements that you can tell yourself before, during, and after an event (ex. training and competitions) to <u>achieve</u> and <u>maintain</u> an appropriate physical, mental, and emotional state.3. Refrain from engaging in any negative self-talk. <u>Stop</u> yourself when you do so and replace your thoughts, images, or words with positive ones.4. Talk to yourself in an encouraging way even when you don't feel positive. This will help you be in control of what you think instead of letting potentially detrimental thoughts control you.5. Be aware of your emotions in different performance situations and devise a plan to respond to them in an appropriate manner. Use any resulting energy to your advantage.