

1985

# A psychological skills program for springboard divers

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A PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILLS PROGRAM FOR SPRINGBOARD DIVERS

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A Project Presented to the Faculty  
of the School of Health, Physical  
Education, and Recreation  
Ithaca College

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In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science

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by  
Melanie Ann Gillet

May 1985

Ithaca College  
School of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation  
Ithaca, New York

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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This is to certify that the Project of

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submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in the School of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation at Ithaca College has been approved.

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## INTRODUCTION

The following psychological skills program was designed to help improve self-confidence in springboard divers. Because the level of performance reached by athletes is virtually self-determined, it is very beneficial to sport performance to have self-confident divers. Sport excellence is largely related to athletes believing in their own capabilities and fully committing themselves to their development.

Springboard diving is an inner-directed sport. The diving environment remains fairly predictable, thus diving can be considered a closed environment sport. There are few, if any outside variables that affect divers' performances. Consequently, once divers reach an advanced performance or skill level, their performances are based on their level of mental preparedness and emotional control (Oberhausen, 1983).

Diving competitions may last several hours from start to finish, but each diver only performs for several minutes. Competitors must learn to perform one dive, analyze the performance, then mentally prepare for their next dive. It is extremely beneficial to optimal sport performance if divers can learn to use thought stopping techniques if negative self-talk is being processed. Each

diver should restructure any negative thoughts into positive coaching cues because, if the mind is processing positive cues or phrases, it can not process any negative self-talk. Athletes must learn to process positive coaching cues and positive inner self-talk when mentally preparing for each dive.

Diving is a sport which requires successive performances. Commitment, control, and competence are variables of total self-confidence which must be learned, practiced, and mastered in order for divers to maximize their sport performance potential.

Commitment to the physical, social, and psychological task demands of springboard diving is essential. Athletes must be able to assert that each drill or minute of their practice is helping them to reach one or more of their performance goals, and that by concentrating and working hard at practice they are developing themselves into stronger, more consistent, and confident performers.

Control is essential to self-confidence. Self-control must be developed by athletes so that they can perform well under a variety of stress producing circumstances. Such circumstances might be either a diver trying to set a new record, or competing in a very close contest. In order to be successful, divers must learn to perform their dives in meet competitions as well or better than they perform the same dives in practice situations.

Divers must also be able to stay motivated through an entire diving competition. They must remain in control in order to be able to come back from a poor or mediocre dive and perform the next dive in their repertoire with success. Divers must also be able to remain in control when they receive low or even unfair scores from the referees and judges during competitions. They must attempt to perform each dive in their diving order optimally and attempt to disregard the scores.

Competence is mastered through excelling in practices and competitions. If athletes consistently perform dives in practice situations adequately, then they should be able to perform the same dives as adequately in competition situations. Once this occurs, divers begin to develop competence. Once a minimum level of competence has been achieved through structured practice, mental preparation becomes essential to maximize diving potential.

Divers who have developed a high level of self-confidence by improving their levels of commitment, control, and competence tend to be more successful in diving competitions. Self-confident divers experience success and winning much more often than divers with low self-confidence. Harris (1973) designed several statements about the characteristics of winners and losers. The following are insights into success and failure by

Harris (1973):

A WINNER makes commitments; a LOSER makes promises.

A WINNER has a healthy appreciation of his abilities, and a keen awareness of his limitations; a LOSER is oblivious both of his true abilities and his true limitations.

A WINNER respects those who are superior to him, and tries to learn something from them; a LOSER resents those who are superior to him, and tries to find chinks in their armor.

A WINNER focuses; a LOSER strays.

A WINNER learns from his mistakes; a LOSER learns only not to make mistakes by not trying anything different.

A LOSER believes in "fate"; a WINNER believes that we make our own fate by what we do, or fail to do.

A LOSER feels cheated if he gives more than he gets; a WINNER feels that he is simply building up credit for the future.

A LOSER becomes bitter when he's behind, and careless when he's ahead; a WINNER keeps his equilibrium no matter which position he happens to find himself in.

A LOSER is afraid to acknowledge his defects to himself or to others; a WINNER is aware that his defects are part of the same central system as his assets and, while he tries to diminish their effect, he never denies their influence.

A LOSER thinks there are rules for winning and losing; a WINNER knows that every rule in the book can be broken, except one--be who you are and become all you were meant to be, which is the only winning game in the world.

A WINNER rebukes and forgives; a LOSER is too timid to rebuke and too petty to forgive.

Most diving coaches would agree that optimal performance in competitions is achieved by mentally tough and confident divers, but as diving coaches how much time do we spend in the mental preparation of our



divers? 5% or maybe 10%? In order to optimize the performance of our divers, we must train them to believe that they have the ability, skill, and effort required to perform well. Self-confident divers believe they can achieve their goals and they are aware of their talents.

Excellence in diving is largely dependent on how well divers know where they want to go, how much they really want to get there, and the extent to which they believe in their ability to arrive at their desired destination. As coaches, we must encourage divers to set short- and long-term goals and we should encourage self-reinforcement (Orlick, 1980). Coaches should actually sit down with their divers and help them to set realistic but challenging goals. The short-term goals should relate to the long-term goals. Dates of achievement should also be designed with each goal in mind. An achieved short-term goal acts as reinforcement and also helps to motivate divers to pursue their next goal. This systematic process helps divers maintain their motivation and it also increases their level of self-confidence.

The following statements are thoughts which divers should train by:

Anyone can act heroically for one day. The person who achieves a high purpose makes that day the pattern for all the rest of his life (Anonymous).

Desire is the perfect mental antidote for fear, despair, resentment, and jealousy (Anonymous).

Experience is not what happens to you, but what you do with what happens to you (Anonymous).

The diving scene is crowded with divers who have gone as far as they are going, simply because their goals are not high enough (Anonymous).

There is only one thing that is powerful enough to make your life successful--YOU (Anonymous).

What lies behind you and what lies before you are tiny matters compared to what lies within you (Emerson).

Continually to strive, is ultimately to become (Anonymous).

Your reach must exceed your grasp (Robert Browning).

Imagination rules the world (Napoleon).

We must create environments where people have permission to use their natural powers (George Leonard).

The greatest revolution in our generation is the discovery that human beings by changing the inner-attitudes of their minds can change the outer aspects of their lives. Man alone of all creatures on earth can change his own pattern. Man alone is architect of his destiny (William James).

As diving coaches, we must attempt to train our athletes to expect success. Thus we should learn to be competent both in the area of diving and in the area of applied psychology. It is important to allow all athletes to become fully aware of their sport potential; this is essential for athletes in order for them to be able to achieve their challenging goals. All practice sessions should be structured so that athletes can explore their sport potential in a positive and supportive learning environment.

The following principles have been established for the purpose of teaching athletes and coaches to become aware of the many factors related to maximizing diving performance. It is very clear that each individual diver is in direct control of his or her destiny. In order to enhance performance, coaches and divers must learn to communicate honestly with each other. They must also learn to work together in an attempt to produce a consistent and self-confident diver. The following section consists of nine self-confidence principles. These principles were designed in an attempt to teach people to become aware of their thoughts and feelings and to teach them to increase their level of self-confidence in an attempt to maximize sport performance.

## SELF-CONFIDENCE PRINCIPLES

- I. Self-confidence can be altered.
- II. The mind can not readily distinguish between a real and an imagined experience (Kellner, 1978; Maltz, 1960).
- III. In any attempt to change self-confidence, the target individual must desire the outcome, believe improvement will occur, and expect improvement to take place.
- IV. Behavior is a function of the perceived environment, and perception of the environment can be altered.
- V. People are not anxious, situations are (Orlick, 1980).
- VI. Awareness and the perceived self-image of the athlete are crucial in attempting to modify self-confidence.
- VII. The earlier that success is encountered, the stronger the self-confidence (Bandura, 1977).
- VIII. When athletes are in control over their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, they tend to be more effective in competitive situations.
- IX. Commitment to the physical, social, and psychological task demands of the sport is essential for optimal sport performance.

I. Principle: Self-confidence can be altered.

An important question surrounding the assertion that self-confidence can be altered is, "How long will it take before a change in a diver's self-confidence can be noticed?" Maltz (1960) suggested that if change is sought, and the methods of change are applied systematically, then significant changes in self-confidence can be observed in 21 days. It takes 21 days for an old mental image to dissolve and a new one to form.

The building of a diver's self-image is a continual process that occurs from the first to the last dive. This process will not be entirely accomplished in a 3-week period, but the athlete can most definitely experience improvement within this time period. The improvement may be small, or possibly could be quite dramatic.

It seems likely that the time period it takes to notice a change in self-confidence in the diver might be directly related to the significance of the specific experience. For instance, if a diver is encouraged by the coach and teammates to attempt a new dive and then executes that specific skill successfully, then might not the notice of the enhancement of the diver's self-confidence occur almost instantaneously?

II. Principle: The mind can not readily distinguish between a real and an imagined experience (Kellner, 1978; Maltz, 1960).

There are many articles in the current popular literature that support the popular adage, "success breeds success." Through the use of mental imagery a diver can always experience success. By experiencing the feeling of success, the self-image and self-confidence of a diver will be enhanced. Self-confidence is related to specific skills and abilities as they are related to specific sport task demands. The athlete's self-image is a more global interpretation of every day behavior and personality. The self-confidence of a performer has a very powerful influence on sport performance.

Science has confirmed that the mind and the nervous system can not readily distinguish between an actual experience, and one that is vividly imagined. Both the imagined experience and the actual experience can be equally recorded in the brain's memory banks (Kellner, 1978). Since human beings always act, feel, and perform in accordance with what they imagine to be true about themselves and their environment (Maltz, 1960), then through the use of creative imagery divers can experience success and, thus, enhance self-confidence. In an attempt to maximize self-confidence, coaches should encourage their athletes to exaggerate or "milk" their successes

and minimize their failures. The more vividly, emotionally, and controlled that the imagery experiences are practiced, the more benefit the diver will obtain from the imagery. Divers must practice at creating vivid, lifelike pictures. These pictures must be clear, vivid, and positive in order to maximize the potential of imagery to enhance self-confidence (Ernest, 1977).

Athletes tend to think in terms of mental pictures. They internalize verbal and nonverbal cues and translate these messages into pictures in their own minds' eye. Since divers tend to think in terms of mental pictures, it will be their imagination that will create a new future for them. While practicing mental imagery, divers can also concentrate on relating feelings and kinethesis to the mental picture. For example, if a diver is mentally rehearsing a back 1-1/2 somersault, then it would be to the diver's advantage to attempt to feel each aspect of the dive and also to concentrate on the position of the body and body parts during the entire dive.

New behavioral characteristics, attitudes, and skills will evolve through the use of visualization (Kellner, 1978). The superior diving coach will be able to give clear, strong, and positive cues that relate to pictures of what is expected of each of the divers.

Once athletes begin to utilize creative imagination, it becomes easier and easier to clearly visualize new

pictures. Through proper practice, many athletes will be able to hold onto the mental pictures longer. If these exact, life-like images are held in the diver's mind long enough, the images will grow and become real. The diver will be able to experience and incorporate these sensations into the brain's memory storage. Success can be guaranteed in the mind of the athlete if the images are vivid and controlled.



III. Principle: In any attempt to change self-confidence, the target individual must desire the outcome, believe improvement will occur, and expect improvement to take place.

Once athletes decide that something is worth pursuing and they truly desire a specific outcome, goal setting and reinforcement should be applied. Goal setting is a very important procedure. In order for divers to set and reach goals, they must really desire the specific outcomes, believe improvement will occur, and expect the desired outcome to take place (Mahoney & Thoreson, 1974).

It is paramount to self-confidence that the diver be able to set attainable goals which are also realistic and challenging. Teammates and coaches can help an athlete design short- and long-term performance goals. It is of great importance that the performer designs a goal in which the outcome is desired immensely and knows full well that the goal will be achieved through proper practice techniques. A series of short-term goals should be designed which relate to long-term goals. The short-term goal acts as reinforcement and is a stimulus to pursue the next goal, thereby helping the athlete to maintain motivation and build self-confidence (Orlick, 1980).

Goals that are selected by the individual performer, self-reinforced, and accompanied by positive self-thoughts will enhance the diver in maximizing sport potential. The

diver's behavior is generally a function of the individual's personal expectations. Excellence in athletics is largely dependent upon how well you know where you want to go, to what extent you really want to get there, and finally to the extent to which you believe in your ability to get to the desired destination.

There is another important aspect of goal setting which must be discussed. The goal that the athlete designs must be one that can be conceptualized by the performer. The athlete should be able to form a mental picture of the desired outcome. If the goal can not be conceptualized by the athlete, it certainly will not be realized (Kellner, 1978).

One method of enhancing goal achievement is to have the diver actually write down on paper what the desired behavior is, and also to write down a deadline date for which the goal should be achieved. This method can increase the commitment of the athlete. This method might also hook the athlete on the process required for achieving written goals. By seeing the goal written down on paper, the athlete is attempting to increase or maintain motivation in an attempt to achieve the desired goal.

Once a goal has been established by an athlete, it is not necessarily etched in concrete. If the athlete designs an unrealistic goal or experiences mental or physical setbacks, the goal should be redesigned. Goals

should be designed at a high degree level so that the athlete is challenged, but the goal should be within reach. By achieving previously designed goals the athlete's self-confidence is being enhanced. By improving the self-confidence of a diver, the diver's skill level and performance will also improve.

IV. Principle: Behavior is a function of the perceived environment, and perception of the environment can be altered (Mahoney & Thoreson, 1974).

Psychological research has supported behavioral determinism, that is, behavior is a function of the perceived environment. We can control behavior by making systematic changes in the environment (Mahoney & Thoreson, 1974). Reality to divers is what they perceive, and all athletes react with thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward their personal perceptions.

How divers perceive their environment relates significantly to their self-confidence, or lack of self-confidence. As a diving coach, instead of attempting to alter the physical environment surrounding the diver, would it not be easier to change that particular individual's perception of the surrounding environment?

This change could be accomplished through persuasion by altering the antecedent cues (often referred to as stimulus control) that tend to mediate the athlete's self-perception. Behaviors are also influenced by their consequences (events that immediately follow the behavior), as well as by their antecedent cues. The consequences of behavior can be classified into three general categories: positive, negative, and neutral. Positive consequences are those which tend to reward or reinforce the specific behavior. Negative consequences are those which tend to

punish, or are considered to be aversive stimuli to the specific behavior. Neutral consequences neither reward, nor punish the behavior.

The key to solving many sport-related problems lies within the athlete's ability to view situations in a rational and constructive manner. It is truly incredible how a simple change in one's belief about the meaning of a particular event can change one's current emotional reality. Nothing else changes except the way in which the environment is perceived. This change in perception can free one from the feelings of anxiety, fear, depression, and the feeling of lacking self-worth (Orlick, 1980).

Diving is a competitive sport replete with opportunities to experience failure. The number of dives that have received perfect scores can easily be counted manually. It is very easy for divers to misinterpret their previous performances as failures if they did not perform each dive of the meet up to their performance potential. Divers may be extremely successful on 80% of their dives, and be moderately successful on the other 20%, yet it seems to be easier to recall the failures (or moderately successful dives) when placed in similar circumstances the next time. This is definitely an erroneous memory recall, but it serves as reality to the diver due to the fact that it is what is perceived as reality. By changing divers' perceptions of their past diving

experiences in order to accentuate their successes rather than accentuate their failures, the first step is taken toward enhancing the athletes self-confidence (Mullins, 1981).

V. Principle: People are not anxious, situations are (Orlick, 1980).

One of the most important keys to excelling in competitive athletics is the individual athlete's ability to view circumstances in a rational and constructive manner. Every time that an important experience occurs in your lifetime, numerous thoughts dart through your mind concerning the meaning and probable consequences of this happening. It is your personal perception of the event and your accompanying self-talk that tends to trigger emotion rather than the actual event itself.

By changing the athlete's perception about the meaning of a particular event, this can change the athlete's current emotional reality. Nothing else changes except for the way in which the athlete perceives the event, and yet this one change in turn makes the athlete either happy or unhappy, anxious or not anxious, depressed or not depressed. Belief is the mother of reality, both in terms of emotion and performance (Orlick, 1980).

Anxiety is an internal development that is comprised of arousal plus cognitive worry. People are not born anxious. Anxiety develops when an individual accepts a situation as being anxious, and when the individual becomes over concerned and worried with the possible consequences of the event. Anxiety is self-originated when a disastrous thought is processed by the mind, or when an

external cue is interpreted as being threatening.

Athletes experience anxiety in athletic events primarily because of what Ellis (1961) refers to as irrational or illogical beliefs. The major irrational or illogical beliefs which are related to anxiety are as follows:

1. The belief that the athlete must have love and approval from all people that they consider significant.

2. The belief that the athlete must prove to be thoroughly adequate, competent, and achieving.

3. The belief that emotional misery comes from external pressures that you have little ability to control or to change your feelings.

4. The belief that if something seems fearsome (or dangerous) you must preoccupy yourself with it, and make yourself anxious about it.

5. The belief that your past remains all-important and, because something once strongly influenced your life, it has to keep determining your feelings and behavior today.

In athletic competition excessive anxiety tends to destroy skill performance. Athletes have a tendency to exaggerate the importance of the outcome of the event and become physiologically and emotionally uncontrolled. It is extremely important for divers to relax, evaluate personal abilities, and place the diving contest in proper



perspective. The most permanent means by which divers can reduce unwanted and unproductive anxiety is to challenge and change some of the irrational beliefs (Orlick, 1980).

VI. Principle: Awareness and the perceived self-image of the athlete are crucial in attempting to modify self-confidence.

The mental picture that the diver has developed of self is referred to as self-image. This global picture that the diver has developed is the key to human personality and human behavior. By attempting to enhance the athlete's self-image, a coach can change the personality and behavior of the athlete. By enhancing an athlete's self-image, there will hopefully be a carry over and a noticeable improvement in the athlete's self-confidence. On the other hand, if a diver develops a negative attitude, lack of enthusiasm, or a fear of failure toward any aspect of life, then negative goal pictures tend to develop. It is the negative goal picture of failure that automatically produces negative responses. The source of the problem is that the person has developed an inadequate self-image (Kellner, 1978). This perception of an inadequate self-image is damaging to the athlete's self-confidence; failure begets failure.

The awareness and self-perception of the diver sets the boundaries of individual accomplishment (Maltz, 1960). The greatest boundaries that divers generally confront while attempting to maximize their sport potential are psychological barriers. These barriers are generally set unknowingly by the individual athlete. It is similar to

the history of track athletes attempting to break the 4-minute mile. At one time it was considered virtually impossible for a human to run this fast. Finally, one athlete ran the mile in under 4 minutes, and then almost immediately a host of other runners broke the previous long standing record. It was definitely not the physiological makeup of the track athletes that changed; it was the psychological knowledge of what was considered possible. The athletes' perception of the limits or barriers changed, and then the limits themselves changed (Orlick, 1980).

By attempting to enhance the self-image of a diver, the coach is actually expanding the area of achievement possible for the athlete to attain. The development of a positive and realistic self-image will aid the athlete in discovering new capabilities, new talents, and new levels of skill possible to attain. The athlete's self-image has the potential to turn past failures into future successes.

The self-image that a diver has formed is actually a system of beliefs about past experiences. The self-image is not necessarily a true picture of the athlete's potential and talent. It is based on the perception of the athlete concerning past experiences rather than being based on actual facts. The self-image of a diver may be a deception rather than an actual description of reality

(Kellner, 1978). This is why it is extremely important for athletes to be encouraged to "milk" their successes that have been experienced, and to be able to draw upon positive experiences while forming the self-image and self-confidence.

When divers do become aware of negative cues it is important for them to be able to utilize some learned strategies such as self-directed thought stopping techniques, internal verbalizations, or internal visualizations in an attempt to cope with negative or undesirable cues (Peale, 1976). If the diver can restructure any perceived negative cues into positive cues, then the self-image and self-confidence of the diver will be enhanced.

During athletic practice, the average coaching mode utilizes negative feedback or criticism in a ratio of perhaps 10:1, or even more, in relation to utilizing positive cues. Would it not be beneficial for coaches to attempt to offer more positive feedback to their athletes in attempts to build a positive memory storage for the athletes to draw upon to form and expand on their self-images?

VII. Principle: The earlier that success is encountered, the stronger the self-confidence (Bandura, 1977).

When athletes experience success, it tends to raise their expectations for achieving success in the future. Success begets success; failure leads to the lowering of expectations to experience success. The earlier that an athlete experiences success, the stronger the self-image and self-confidence. Once an athlete has several experiences dealing with success, it is not as damaging to self-confidence to experience failure. It is very damaging to a beginner's self-confidence if failure is experienced early in the learning process.

It is natural for athletes to think positively and improve self-image and self-confidence when they perceive their performances as being successful. On the other hand, athletes begin to think negatively and subconsciously impose psychological barriers upon themselves when they perceive their performances as being bad. Therefore, it is very necessary for athletes to develop self-control and self-awareness in an attempt to help program their minds to respond in effective positive ways instead of responding in ineffective negative ways (Rotella, Malone, & Ojala, 1981).

VIII. Principle: When athletes are in control of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, they tend to be more effective in competitive situations.

Excellence in the realm of athletics demands that the performer possess more than just the qualities of ability and commitment. In order for athletes to be able to maximize their sport potential, they must also exhibit self-control. The athlete's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors must be congruent with all internal dialogues and also must be congruent with the specific demands of the sport situation.

The best, most confident, and consistent performers are those who are able to control or channel their emotions, focus their concentration, and bounce back from setbacks in an emotionally mature or constructive manner (Orlick, 1980). Successful athletes can quickly shift their attention from an emotional reaction to a performance oriented focus. For instance, if a diver executes an optional dive poorly or not up to a certain expected level of performance, the athlete should channel all thoughts to the performance of the next dive instead of allowing the mind to process any disastrous or negative thoughts. If the diver's thoughts are facilitating, the diver should process and use them, but if they are negative, the athlete should not process the thoughts and should attempt to channel thoughts and concentrate on the next dive to be

performed. Again, the inner self-talk of the diver must also be directed toward performing the next dive to the optimal level of performance.

Athletes who develop and exhibit self-control over their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, practice and perform in an assertive manner. These performers realize that at the moment of truth, there is no necessary reason to allow any past failure to increase the chance of failure in any present attempt of performance. Athletes who are in control of their thoughts, feelings, and behavior generally practice and use thought stopping procedures in order to interrupt any negative or failing thoughts which their minds might be processing.

An important question which is often asked is, "How do I as a coach teach self-control to my athletes?" A coach can begin to teach self-control to athletes by attempting to enhance the self-awareness of each of the athletes. The athletes must be aware of the demands of the sport, their personal abilities, and their personal level of commitment to the sport. A diving coach can also encourage the development of self-control in athletes by having each athlete physically, mentally, and psychologically prepared for each new skill that is taught. It is extremely important for a diver to be able to conceptualize each new skill prior to the first attempt. If all of this has been achieved, then the coach should encourage

the diver to attempt more difficult dives, and most importantly the coach should not let the diver ever "wimp-out" after experiencing pain, or failure.

It is important for the diver to realize the difference between pain and injury. For example, if a diver attempts a forward 2-1/2 somersault and opens late and slaps his or her back on the water, then this should be associated with pain that will soon disappear, not injury. The coach should communicate with the diver, attempt to have the diver conceptualize a forward 2-1/2 somersault dive again, and then immediately encourage the diver to attempt the dive again. Divers will continually develop self-control through organized and challenging practices. This self-control will become present in practice and in competitive situations and will help the diver to maximize sport performance.



IX. Principle: Commitment to the physical, social, and psychological task demands of the sport is essential for optimal sport performance.

In order to achieve high levels of excellence in sport, athletes must possess high levels of physical, social, and psychological commitment. Commitment, self-control, and ability are the keys to achieving sport excellence. Athletes need to be dedicated to their sport, and they also need to possess enough self-control in order to perform well under a variety of potentially stress-producing circumstances that sport often creates.

Psychological commitment to the sport of diving requires that the athlete fully understand the task demands of the sport. Divers must also understand that diving requires successive performances, and that each athlete should learn to use coaching criticism to improve future performances. For example, if a diver performs the second dive of an 11 dive list poorly, it is important for the athlete not to let this past experience negatively affect the next nine dives.

Divers must commit themselves to taking negative feedback constructively. Diving is a sport in which the participants are constantly being compared to a mental picture of a perfect dive. In nearly all diving attempts divers will not be ultimately successful. Divers can, though, commit themselves to being better performers today

than they were yesterday, or they can commit themselves to developing their own personal excellence.

Physical commitment must be directed toward effort. A keep trying attitude must be developed by each diver if maximizing sport potential is a major performance goal. The athlete must also commit to utilizing all information available. For example, a diver might listen to a critique of a particular dive and use this information to enhance the effectiveness of the next dive to be performed.

The athlete must also be committed to maximally enhancing sport abilities by being ready, alert, and conscious of each minute of practice time. At any time during a practice session a diver should be able to say, "What I am practicing now will bring me closer to my performance goals." Divers must also be committed to eating healthy foods, keeping trim, and being well conditioned. Divers especially need to maintain strength and flexibility.

Commitment in the social parameters deals with coaches and athletes interacting with each other often. Each person must commit to helping others, and commit to developing a supportive environment. There is a high need to get along with all types of people. This does not by any means require that everybody love, or even like each other, but everyone should be able to help develop a posi-

tive, and supportive environment. The following section should be used as a guideline for coaches and athletes to follow during practices and competitions. The do's and the don'ts for athletes and coaches were designed in an attempt to help create a synergistic learning environment.

## DO'S AND DON'TS FOR ATHLETES

### Do's:

1. Accept all genuine compliments graciously.
2. Acknowledge errors and poor performances, then forget them.
3. Leave personal problems outside the pool.
4. Commit yourself physically, emotionally, and psychologically to your sport.
5. Learn to accept criticism and negative feedback because diving is a sport which utilizes a reductive scoring system. For example, a diver starts with a 10 and then points are deducted for performance errors. It is easy for coaches to just say what was wrong with the dive but their intent is not to evaluate as much as it is to provide information.
6. Plan, write, and evaluate progress toward your goals.
7. Positively affirm team members when they deserve praise.
8. Help maintain a supportive learning environment.
9. Expect success.
10. Model yourself after someone who performed successfully, especially someone who succeeded through hard work (Mullins, 1981).

11. "Milk" all your successes frequently and optimally.

12. Continue to set positive goals both after successful and non-successful diving attempts. Always challenge yourself.

13. Continually remind yourself that you are in direct control of your actions.

14. Control your bodily functions. For example, learn to reduce unwanted tension in muscles in an attempt to maximize performance potential.

15. Engage in positive mental practice at home when your body is in a relaxed state. For example, when you are awaiting sleep or when you are awaking in the morning, attempt to visualize and feel successful.

16. Remember that your thoughts are at your disposal.

17. Challenge all your irrational beliefs (Orlick, 1980).

Don'ts:

1. Take coaches' criticism personally. It is the performance that is being analyzed, not your personality.

2. Accentuate your errors.

3. Criticize or make fun of your team members or their performances.

4. Make excuses for your performance.

5. Get emotionally upset after blowing a dive.  
Diving requires successive performances. Don't let one bad dive negatively affect the others.

6. Put too much emphasis on the outcome of a certain meet.

7. Be afraid to fail. Never hold back because of the possibility of failure (Orlick, 1980).

8. Lose control of your emotions.

9. Allow the judges' scoring system to upset you or let them in any way negatively affect your diving.

10. Allow yourself to feel that you are not as good as the other athletes in the competition.

11. Ignore or minimize compliments.

12. Complain about or criticize the coach behind his  
back.

13. Minimize your successes or your teammates' successes.

14. Allow your mind to process any negative internal dialogue.

## DO'S AND DON'TS FOR COACHES

### Do's:

1. Attempt to correct dives in a positive and constructive manner.
2. Reward all of the honest attempts and efforts of divers, not only the successful attempts.
3. Praise deserving divers in front of other teammates.
4. Let all divers know exactly what is expected of them.
5. Work with all athletes in developing goals.
6. Associate with all team members, not only your star divers.
7. Make sure that nonverbal and verbal behaviors are congruent. Athletes will perceive the coaches' nonverbal expressions equally as important as verbal cues.
8. Be humanistic, caring, and understanding of the athletes.
9. Develop communication skills. Be assertive, but also be an active listener.
10. Attempt to build positive memory storages for all divers. Encourage divers to mentally rehearse successful diving experiences.

11. Reveal to your athletes your "humanness" by acknowledging evidence of nervousness (e.g., butterflies in your stomach, or jitteriness) in competitive situations in an attempt to demonstrate that you are an effective coping individual. Role modeling can be a powerful agent of learning (Mullins, 1981).

12. Involve all team members in certain decision making processes.

13. Be genuinely enthusiastic as a coach at all practices. Leave outside pressures outside of the pool.

14. Encourage divers to leave their problems outside of the pool. Encourage the athletes to give 100% both mentally and physically while attending practice.

15. Encourage all the members of the team to help maintain a supportive training environment.

16. Compliment divers unconditionally with no strings attached.

17. Attempt to have each athlete finish a practice session on a positive note.

18. Attempt to find the roots of problems instead of just ignoring or accentuating the problem.

Don'ts:

1. Use sarcasm or ridicule as a main source of interaction with team members.

2. Use excessive negative feedback during practice or in meet situations.



3. Allow team members to dwell on errors or subpar performances.

4. Publicly condemn athletes unless there are no other alternatives.

5. Let past errors or attitudes affect the coaching of present performances. Forgive and forget.

6. Chew athletes out for poor performances if effort was present during practices or competitions.

7. Over-control the diving environment. Everything does not have to be done in one specific way.

8. Lose emotional composure in front of your athletes.

9. Overload your divers by over analyzing performances, giving too many directions, or expecting them to learn too much too quickly.

10. When analyzing performance, especially on videotape, don't exclusively highlight the errors without recognizing the successes.

11. Allow teammates to criticize or "pick on" teammates in practice or in meet situations.

## STRUCTURED EXPERIENCES

Self-awareness is critical when attempting to increase a person's level of self-confidence. Divers must learn to be totally honest with themselves at all times. They must recognize their strengths and their weaknesses, but should not accept their weaknesses as being permanent. Divers of all levels should become aware of their weaknesses and utilize the information to help strive to improve those aspects of their diving which are slightly inferior. The athletes should also truly desire to improve upon their weak areas, because just being aware of certain deficiencies does not mean improvement will automatically occur.

On the following pages, 13 structured experiences are designed to help improve the level of self-confidence in springboard divers. The goal of the experiences is to increase the levels of control, commitment, and competence in each diver. It is suggested that the experiences be utilized in a systematic manner. It is also important to remember that a dramatic increase in self-confidence does not appear overnight. Athletes and coaches must continually work together and strive to create a self-confident performer. It is suggested that the coach lead the entire team through one structured experience a day, and that all

team members continually practice the experiences which they feel are beneficial to their sport performance. This systematic method will encourage the development of self-confident springboard divers.

## RELAXATION BREATHING\*

Purpose: To teach athletes to utilize relaxation breathing in an attempt to reduce or prevent the physical symptoms of stress and anxiety. Relaxation breathing is an effective coping technique in practice or in competitive situations.

Introduction: In stress or anxiety producing situations, such as some athletic competitions, athletes often become physiologically and emotionally tense. Their breathing patterns become much more rapid and shallow. When practiced correctly, breathing exercises can counteract this pattern and also train athletes to slow down. This is the first step in relaxing and gaining total control. This breathing exercise emphasizes a long exhalation phase.

Preliminaries: Team members should get in comfortable positions and be able to listen to the leader.

Activity: After you find a comfortable position, close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing in order to become more and more relaxed. Inhale just slightly deeper than your normal regular

inhalation. Make sure that your abdomen expands during this inhalation. Immediately upon completion of your inhalation, begin to exhale. It should be at a rate that allows you to exhale evenly and comfortably for a few seconds. Upon completion of your comfortable exhalation, begin to inhale and allow your abdomen to comfortably rise. Accentuate the evenness and relaxed exhalation phase. Keep repeating this pattern and begin to focus on any awareness of relaxation that may spread across your chest area.

Variation: After this relaxation breathing is taught to the divers, they should be encouraged to practice this breathing technique several times throughout the day. After practicing the breathing technique often enough, it can become an "automatic" type of response to any kind of stressful situation. It can be practiced with the eyes open or shut, and with the body in different positions. For example, relaxation breathing can be used while sitting, standing, or while you are trying to sleep at night prior to an exciting event.

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\*Adapted from Wenger (1979).

## SUCCESS A-DAY\*

Purpose: To make each athlete aware of the successes that he or she has attained, and to have each athlete "milk" that success for all it is worth.

Introduction: Diving is definitely a sport replete with opportunities for athletes to experience failure. Athletes often accentuate the negative aspect of sport while they minimize their positive aspects. This procedure leads toward the development of a low self-image and low sport self-confidence. This must be changed if we want to maximize each athlete's sport potential. Athletes must learn to recognize their many accomplishments and learn to process the successes while they look for future successes.

Activity: At the end of each practice session and competition, each diver should record on paper the successful aspect or aspects of their diving. These successes might include psychological preparation, mechanical diving changes, or learning new dives. This list should be read before each diving session in an attempt to

build a positive memory storage for the diver to draw upon.

Variations: Athletes may wish to share with other team members what they recorded as their successes. This may help create a positive and supportive learning environment.

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\*Adapted from Canfield and Wells (1976).

## PORTRAIT OF GREATNESS\*

Purpose: To enhance athletes' self-image and reinforce goals.

Introduction: The coach should arrange for a photographer to take pictures of all the divers while they are practicing. Each diver should have several (5-8) action pictures. These pictures should be arranged into a personal collage by each diver. The divers may also cut out sayings or captions from magazines or books, or they may personally design phrases or captions to help complete their collages. Example words or sayings:  
reach, ride, rip, win, #1, excel, champion, or go for the gold.

Activity: Each diver uses the color pictures and favorite captions or verses to design a collage of themselves diving. These collages should be hung in the athlete's bedroom and should be visible while the diver is in bed. The collage is reviewed prior to bedtime and prior to starting each new day.

Variations: Collages may be hung on a team bulletin board or in or above the diver's locker in the



locker room. This will allow the divers to view the collages prior to and after all practice sessions and competitions.

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\*Adapted from Canfield and Wells (1976).

## BETA PROGRAMMING

Purpose: To help improve divers' performance, skill, and level of confidence.

Introduction: Presently there are two types of visualization procedures that, when practiced consistently and correctly, can help a diver to program his or her mind. These two types of visualization are alpha programming, a deeper level of visualization, and beta programming. The athlete for the most part is totally conscious and aware of all surroundings while practicing in the beta state. This specific type of mental programming is also called "mental rehearsal." This technique can be practiced almost anywhere or anytime. The divers are programming their nervous systems through the conscious mind. The imagery, however, will eventually enter the subconscious if the mental rehearsal is repeated often and vividly enough (Kellner, 1978). The primary advantage to beta programming is that anybody at anytime or place can utilize this type of imagery.

Activity: Prior to each dive both in practice sessions and in competitions, the competitors stand or sit near the diving board and picture themselves performing the dive beautifully and correctly. They begin by visualizing themselves standing with confidence and poise on the diving board, then they perform the perfect approach, take-off, flight pattern, and finally the perfect entry. The divers practice beta programming prior to each dive. This type of mental rehearsal will improve the divers' best and worst dives.

Variations: This form of mental rehearsal can be done during practice, during competitions, or whenever the diver is thinking about diving. Beta programming can also be used in an attempt to improve school work, job skills, or just about any aspect of the athlete's life.

## ALPHA PROGRAMMING\*

Purpose: To program the diver through visualization to experience the art of "ripping" an entry.

Introduction: If the mind can conceive of an idea, then the idea can become reality (Kellner, 1978). The alpha level can be attained naturally while the diver is sitting comfortably or when the athlete is preparing for or awakening from sleep. These are excellent times to visualize positive and helpful mental pictures. The subconscious, at this deeper level of slow electrical activity, is more susceptible to positive suggestion. The ability to produce and maintain mental pictures can be more vivid, clearer, and more detailed because the mind is uncluttered and free from most distractions at this time. In order for alpha programming to be effective it is very important that the diver:

1. Desire the skill or attitude.
2. Believe that improvement will take place.
3. Expect the improvement to take place (Kellner, 1978).

Activity: First the athlete must attempt to clear the mind of any distracting thoughts. The diver assumes a comfortable position and then utilizes a relaxation breathing technique in an attempt to relax and clear the mind. The next step is to visualize a giant, blank movie screen. Attempt to visualize the diving boards and pool on your giant screen. Note the texture of the board and the temperature of the water and the air. It is time for you to practice line-ups from the three-meter board. You feel confident and strong. You attempt your first line-up, you fall, squeeze, grab, and you "rip" the line-up! The entry had no splash at all, and it really looked and felt like a great entry. You continue to rip several more line-ups. You know just what to do in order to be able to "rip" line-ups consistently. Now it is time to visualize yourself ripping your required and optional dives. Perform each dive first, then visualize the rip into the water. You can rip your line-ups, requireds, and optionals consistently. It feels so good entering the water and making no splash at all! Your body has the feeling and experience of ripping dives.

Variations: Separate times can be used to practice the different aspects of the dive. For instance, at night you may wish to visualize the perfect hurdle. In the morning you may wish to practice perfecting your required dives. At times you may wish to visualize all aspects of your diving as if you were competing in a meet. Another variation is the speed at which you visualize yourself diving. Diving can be visualized at normal or slow speed. The mind can also use freeze frame in order to inspect certain positions of the body during the dive. Whatever aspect of the sport of diving you prefer to visualize, attempt to create a vivid image so that the mind and body can both feel the experience of the specific performance.

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\*Adapted from Blanchard and Epstein (1978).

## TECHNIQUES FOR FEAR REDUCTION

Purpose: To attempt to dispel fear by helping the diver to become aware of the specific fears, and to attempt to overcome the fear through a systematic process (Moawad, 1977).

Introduction: Fear is one of the greatest obstacles confronting divers who are attempting to acquire new skills. This disabling emotion can be broken down into five categories: (a) fear of the unknown, (b) fear of failure, (c) fear of success, (d) fear of pain, and (e) fear of fear itself (Oberhausen, 1983). Many typical fear reactions observed in diving are (a) an increased number of balks, (b) allowing other divers to jump line, (c) negative talk both verbal and inner self-talk, (d) an increased number of lead up dives, (e) short or irregular breathing patterns, (f) increased joking or laughing, or (g) possibly any change in a person's usual practice behavior. Once any or several of these reactions are noticed, the coach should attempt to work with the diver in an attempt to dispel the fear.

Diving coaches often attempt to dispel fear in their athletes by utilizing logical statements. This technique often fails because fear is an emotion and emotions are not logically based. Fear does not respond to pure reasoning. Overcoming fear should be attempted through a systematic process. The coach should be the primary facilitator working with the individual athlete. The coach must first attempt to help the diver look openly at the specific situation and assess the degree of fear. By attempting to increase the diver's awareness, the fear of a new dive can be eliminated. When confronted honestly, fear will retreat (Oberhausen, 1983).

Activity: The diving coach must help divers to recognize fear responses. After the fear response is recognized, divers must analyze their own specific anxiety reactions. Once a diver is aware of the fear warning signs the coach must help the diver to express his or her feelings about the specific fear. Allow the athlete to experience anxiety release. The coach can then recollect another time in which the diver was fearful, but still extremely successful. Being



worried about a dive does not mean that the diver will be unsuccessful. Attempt to have the diver become aware of his or her feelings. It is possible that the diver may not have a conscious awareness of the reason for the specific fear. If the diver is denying any feelings of fear, tell the athlete that the behavior exhibited indicates that he or she is afraid. Let the diver know that having fear is understandable and acceptable and that, as a coach, you would like to know more about what the diver is feeling so that you can help. It is very important for the diver to be able to thoroughly examine his or her own feelings with total honesty. It is very important for the coach to accept the diver's feelings without criticizing them. The diver may feel as though he or she is losing control. The diver needs reassurance that he or she can cope with any and all feelings. A coach should encourage expression of feelings, not repression of feelings. Reassurance and support are very important. Divers must learn that they can control the consequences of emotion as long as they do not deny the emotion itself (Oberhausen, 1983).

Variation: Attacking a known fear is a process of desensitization. Through guided goal setting, positive self-talk, proper mechanical training, and visualization, a diver can learn to deal with fear. Specific goals in diving are essential. For example, "I will learn to control my fear by performing an inward 2-1/2 somersault." Avoid the words try and attempt as they relate to trying new skills, instead of actually performing the new skill. Utilizing the words, "will perform" gives a much stronger and positive meaning. Have the diver support the goal with positive self-thoughts and positive self-talk. Have the diver write the goals down on paper and read them several times a day in an attempt to program the diver with positive self-expectations. It is also important for the diver to perform many correct lead-up dives while he or she is thinking about the new or previously feared dive. The next step is for the diver to visualize and feel the proper way to perform the dive. Help the divers to trust their abilities. It is important for the coach to close the gap between the last skill learned and the new skill to be learned. This can be paralleled

to any other successful dive that the diver learned. This will help to build the self-confidence of the diver. Finally, when the diver is ready to perform the new dive, have the coach or a knowledgeable person call the diver out of the dive. This will help prepare the diver for the entry into the water. Fear can practically paralyze divers and prevent them from making steady progress. Divers must be helped to learn to stand up to any dive that frightens them. Every time that a diver overcomes a fear of trying a new skill, confidence and trust will be gained (Oberhausen, 1983).

## COMPLIMENT ACCEPTANCE

Purpose: To teach athletes to accept and process genuine compliments and praise, without being embarrassed or feeling uncomfortable, in an attempt to build a positive memory storage.

Introduction: A coach may wish to praise individual diver's efforts as well as performances that are successful. During practice, athletes should be outwardly praised by the coach and all team members for any particular improvement in their diving. This genuine outward praise will enhance self-confidence and also help to provide a supportive and positive learning environment.

Activity: During practice sessions, coaches or team members may initiate clapping or cheering for a team member who improves a dive or learns a new skill. The diver will then learn to accept compliments and process these compliments in an attempt to build a positive memory storage.

Variation: Coaches and divers should feel free to initiate praise to any deserving diver. The coach may wish to verbalize in front of all team members why the athlete deserved such praise.

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\*Adapted from Elkins (1977).

## THOUGHT STOPPING TECHNIQUES

Purpose: To train divers to stop the brain from processing any negative or disastrous thoughts.

Introduction: When divers process negative self-talk they begin to develop a poor self-image. The development of the poor self-image and feelings of inadequacies lead to a decrement in performance and also triggers the diver to expect failure, thus minimizing sport success. Coaches should teach their athletes to process positive cues in an attempt to build a positive memory storage which is necessary in order to improve the diver's self-image and sport self-confidence. Divers must learn to use their minds in a positive manner. They must practice positive mental exercises everyday in order to maximize the benefit of thought stopping techniques (Schwartz, 1979).

Activity: Anytime that athletes begin to process negative self-talk they must become aware of what they are doing and say, "Stop. Let go of the negative thought and begin to process positive cues!"

## CONSISTENT PERFORMANCES

Purpose: To develop mental toughness in each athlete through the use of visualization or imagery guided experiences.

Introduction: As a coach you will eventually deal with a diver who is fearful of a certain dive. The quicker that you as the coach can help this athlete overcome this fear, the quicker the athlete will excel in the sport of diving as a consistent and confident performer.

Activity: You are lying on the beach, warmed by the bright sun. The sand feels nice and soft underneath your body. You are very calm and relaxed, almost falling asleep. You can hear the waves gently rolling in and back out to sea and you can smell the fresh salt air. You feel so comfortable and warm. Now picture yourself diving. You are still comfortable, warm, and very relaxed. You just performed your best dive and everyone is clapping. You are smiling and feeling extremely confident and happy. Your next dive is your least favorite, but the feelings of confidence and happiness overflow

your body. You perform the dive and everybody is clapping and you feel warm with pride. You did your least favorite dive as well as you performed your best dive. You really feel as though your training has paid off. You no longer have a weak or fearful dive in your repertoire. All your dives are finished and you feel happy, warm, and confident. The sand is warm and comfortably shaped to your body. You feel that you have become a confident and consistent diver. You feel really good about your diving and yourself.

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\*Adapted from Stevens (1971).

## GOAL SETTING

Purpose: To learn to clearly define and set challenging short- and long-term performance goals, and to teach athletes to advantageously use self-reinforcement, such as using positive encouragement, compliments, and rewards when steps towards goals are achieved.

Introduction: It is important for divers to formalize their procedures for designing and setting down their goals on paper. These goals become similar to self-imposed contracts. The divers must write down clearly and concisely what their goals are. Divers want to advance from point A to point B as quickly and efficiently as possible, and this systematic process helps to keep each athlete constantly improving. It also trains divers to stay on track and become consistent and confident divers who reach goals and then set new and more challenging goals. Divers should be encouraged to set short- and long-term goals and to set dates of expected accomplishments. They should also write down suggestions that they will



use in an attempt to accomplish their goals. An achieved short-term goal acts as reinforcement and as a stimulus to pursue the next goal. This process helps divers to maintain motivation and build self-confidence. The ability to set specific goals and pursue those goals in a systematic way separates those divers who want to excel as athletes from those divers who actually do excel (Orlick, 1983).

Activity: Each diver on the team should design his or her individual goals and dates of expected accomplishments, then each athlete should sign and date each sheet.

MY LONG-TERM GOAL IS: \_\_\_\_\_.

MY SHORT-TERM GOALS ARE: \_\_\_\_\_

THE DATE I EXPECT TO ACCOMPLISH MY LONG-TERM GOAL IS: \_\_\_\_\_.

THE SUGGESTIONS I WILL USE TO ACCOMPLISH MY GOALS ARE: \_\_\_\_\_

I WILL PRACTICE DAILY AND VISUALIZE MYSELF AS HAVING ACHIEVED MY GOALS.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

## VISUALIZING YOUR GOALS

Purpose: To teach divers to systematically work toward achieving their goals and to teach them to eliminate all notions of what they as performers can and can not achieve.

Introduction: Divers have no idea of what they can accomplish until they set some realistic and challenging goals and systematically work toward achieving those goals. It is extremely beneficial to sport performance if we can teach athletes to eliminate all notions of what they can and can not achieve. Most of our athletes' limits are self-imposed, and they are generally erroneously self-imposed. It is important to teach divers to expect success and to only process positive inner self-talk.

Activity: Write down a goal in which you previously thought that you could not achieve.

MY GOAL IS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Visualize the level of diving performance that you would like to accomplish as if no limitations existed. Picture yourself doing what

you previously wanted to achieve. Decide on three major obstacles that are keeping you from attaining this goal. These obstacles could be inherent in the task, or they might be part of you or your erroneous beliefs. Write these three obstacles down.

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What is it that you will have to do in order for you to attain your goal? Concentrate on the three obstacles that you wrote down. Each obstacle should give you some important information that you can use in your attempt to move closer toward your goal. In the space below outline the steps necessary for you to attain this specific goal. Consider the physical, mental and the emotional demands that this goal requires.

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Read the steps that you considered necessary to attain your goal. Analyze one step at a time

and focus on your goal attainment with each specific step being accomplished. What level of commitment are you prepared to make in order to attain your goal?

I WILL \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Goals are extremely beneficial to sport performance when they are carefully designed and acted upon systematically and consistently. If you are serious about attaining this goal, you will commit yourself fully to its attainment immediately.

WEEKLY INTENTIONS

Purpose: To increase the level of commitment in each team member, and to provide a team support system in an attempt to encourage individual team members to excel.

Introduction: The coach should have individual intention sheets designed for each athlete to fill out and hand back to the coach each week. For example:

WEEKLY INTENTION      DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ INTENTION: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

POWER WORDS: \_\_\_\_\_

The coach attempts to encourage all divers to design reasonable performance oriented goals, and to choose key power words which help to reinforce the intention. These power words will be used by team members to help motivate each athlete to attain his or her intention. The coach asks all team members to complete and hand in their weekly intention by a specific time. The coach collects all intention sheets and

then compiles a master sheet with every team members' intention and power word(s). The coach has copies made for each team member and distributes them at a specific time each week.

Activity: Each diver designs a weekly intention sheet and gives it to the coach prior to an established deadline. The coach compiles and delivers the master sheet with every team members' intentions and power word(s) to every diver. Each diver reads all the information and posts the sheets in a convenient place. The divers are constantly encouraged to verbalize the power words to each other whenever they interact, in an attempt to motivate divers to attain their intentions.

Variations: Some intentions may not be purely performance oriented. Some intentions may be to study for exams, to get over a sickness, or to lose weight. Each coach must decide what intentions are acceptable.



### SELF-AFFIRMATION\*

Purpose: To direct divers to design a personal self-affirmation in an attempt to maximize sport performance and self-confidence.

Introduction: In a group setting, the coach explains the importance of self-value and self-trust, and also explains that athletes have little control over the external environment, but that they have total control over the internal environment. If divers are to develop and maintain a level of self-confidence, then it is extremely necessary for them to accentuate their self-trust (Mullins, 1981). In order to maximize the self-confidence gained through writing affirmations, the divers must value the process as much as the desired product (i.e., products or ends are only achieved through the process or means). The affirmation or personal promise must be a firm and challenging declaration of one's personal intentions and goals.



Activity: The coach distributes several affirmation statements to team members and requests the divers to construct their own personal affirmations. Divers may use the samples to foster ideas but must not copy sentences or ideas. The affirmations designed must be personalized, therefore, each sentence must be comprised of the individual athlete's feelings and words. These affirmations may be typed, framed, and hung either at home, at the pool, or in the locker room.

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\*Adapted from Mohr (1979).

MY PERSONAL AFFIRMATION

I feel good about myself and my diving because I am in control of my own behavior. My commitment to myself, my coach, and to my team members is that I will give whatever it takes to maximize my success in diving. If it requires more effort, I will give more effort. If it requires more practice, I will give more time. If it requires more mental preparedness, I will practice more and I will focus better. I will not get frustrated because I may feel that I am not improving fast enough. I will analyze and concentrate on the positive aspects of my diving and realize that I am getting closer and closer to the real me--the successful performer.

I am a natural winner and I am going to be a better winner. I will infect those team members who are less confident. I will infect them by example. I will strive continually in practice and in competitions. I will maintain my focus in competitions whether I am ahead or behind.

Success does not embarrass me. I will milk my successes in an attempt to build my positive memory storage and increase my level of self-confidence.

I will learn from my errors. I will recognize them and realize that only athletes who strive for excellence make errors, but I will only recognize my errors for the purpose of pointing out the aspects of my diving which

require special attention. I will not dwell on the negative aspects of my performances. I will forgive myself and forget my errors.

My associations with my team members and coaches are extremely important to me. I will constantly strive to help create a supportive and positive learning environment and I will encourage my team members to do so also. I will process all of the coach's comments and I will realize that the comments are directed toward my performances and not toward me personally.

## CONCLUSION

The goal of most diving coaches is to develop skilled, consistent, and self-confident divers. Self-confident divers tend to be more successful in competitions than divers with low self-confidence, therefore, as coaches we must attempt to create and develop self-confident performers. The preceding pages only scratch the surface of the many facets of total self-confidence. The principles, suggestion of "do's" and "don'ts" for athletes and coaches, and the structured experiences can all be very useful if they are implemented positively and consistently in a program, but they are a beginning. It is important for coaches to be creative and do more research in the area of self-confidence. Coaches must continually attempt to create and implement new concepts toward developing athletes that are aware and confident. By developing awareness and self-confidence in our athletes, we are allowing them to maximize their individual sport potential. We are also allowing each person to be the very best that they can be.

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