

The Courage to Win™ in Sport: Perform Your Best Under Pressure 30 Day Advanced HOME STUDY Program with Lisa Lane Brown

Lisa's Weekly Coaching Answers For

Lesson 2

GAME FACE

How To Psyche Up The Day Of Your Event

Mental Toughness Action Assignment 7

Write a paragraph on “Why I Compete” or “Why I Coach.” Include everything you love about your sport.

Most athletes and coaches find this assignment very easy to complete, because they are so passionate about their sport. How did it go for you? Were you able to connect with your love of the game?

This assignment re-connects you to the real reason we complete: to express ourselves. To bring out your best in sport, you'll want to express yourself rather than prove yourself. If you express yourself, then establishing your dominance will take care of yourself. Proving yourself is the icing; the cake is self-expression.

If you're ever overwhelmed with nerves or stress, remember that there is very little difference between the winner and loser in most sporting contest - in most cases, 1 or 2% - if that. So, rejoice in the opportunity to compete, and remember that you can heal yourself of any disappointment or loss. You will learn how to do this in Lesson 3.

Mental Toughness Action Assignment 8

In the space below, write down your worst fear as an athlete. For example: A free-style kayaker told me that one of the worst fears of a kayaker is “swimming in a competition.” In kayaking, “swimming” happens when you flip your boat upside down and can't roll it back up. It is embarrassing because kayakers believe that any respectable kayaker should be able to roll his boat back up (even though this isn't always the case...many expert kayakers have gone swimming!).

The purpose of this assignment is to reveal what when you are tempted to reject yourself and be overly critical (the opposite of self-acceptance). In other words, your answer to this assignment will tell you when you are likely to become very ashamed and self-destructive in your self-criticism.

To be resilient, you must come to grips with your worst fears as an athlete and learn how to accept yourself if they materialize. When I say “accept yourself”, what I mean is that you learn how to accept your feelings of shame and failure. I’m not asking you to “accept” a poor performance or a loss, because these are circumstances that are undesirable. What I am asking you to do is accept your feelings about these scenarios so you can heal yourself and move on to the next competition.

Acceptance is one of those concepts that we all understand and relate to on some level but it’s hard to apply it to ‘real life’. What does self-acceptance look like, moment-to-moment? Here’s one way I think about it: what does the opposite of self-acceptance look like?

Most of us relate more easily to what self-rejection (self-criticism) looks like in the here and now. I tell myself I’m not OK, I get down on myself, I try to avoid my feelings, etc. Here are a couple strategies to try: keep track of moments throughout the day when you are tempted to reject your feelings. This could be trying to make a thought or feeling go away (common strategies are to tell yourself to make it go away - stop feeling sad, I wish I didn’t feel sad - or to distract yourself with something else).

Becoming aware of these moments means becoming aware of your tendency to reject your feelings. Record them (in a journal or notebook, for example) and practice using the phrase: I acknowledge. Examples would be:

- “I acknowledge that I want my feelings of sadness to go away right now”.
- “I acknowledge that I turned on the TV because I didn’t want to think about ‘x’”.
- “I acknowledge that I felt frustrated after that last competition”.

The point that is easy to miss is that accepting something does not necessarily mean that you like it or that you approve of it. It simply means that you acknowledge your feelings of frustration and disappointment and these feelings are OK.

Doing this exercise and practicing acknowledging moments of self-rejection will naturally lead you to - self-acceptance. Something else you might like to try is a similar exercise with moments of self-acceptance. You may not be conscious of it, but you accept many things about yourself daily - your successes and your joys, mundane things like your personal habits, mistakes in training, etc.

The point is that you already practice self-acceptance. Doing this exercise will help you become aware of what you're already doing that works and apply these strategies to your worst fears.

Mental Toughness Action Assignment 9

Now that you have acknowledged your worst fears, complete this sentence five times:

If I were more accepting of my fear today—

Here are some examples:

- I'd relax more before my event
- I'd realize that the competition feels the same way
- I'd stop focusing so much on the fear and start focusing on my game
- I'd realize it's Ok to be afraid
- I'd somehow use my fear to motivate me

This assignment trains your mind to accept your feelings (we already discussed this idea today). If you are like most athletes, you tend to push away fears and disappointments because you feel weak when you have them. The problem with pushing away fear is that it doesn't leave you - it merely gets pushed into your unconscious mind and stored there. Then, when you least expect it, this fear jumps out before a major performance and causes you to choke. If you simply let your fear of failure happen when it occurs, it will not be very strong and it will not last very long. Let the fear "run its course", much like a flu. Accept it - it can make you alert and energize you. If you re-read your completions, you will find that the more you accept the fear, the more it lessens, and the better you feel. 😊

Mental Toughness Action Assignment 10

Here's a wonderful exercise for creating a positive affirmation. Starting today and continuing each day for the next 7 days, write 5 new and different endings for the following sentence. Here is an example of one day's work:

- If I were 5% more appreciative of myself as an athlete--
- I'd admit that my kayaking strokes are improving every day
 - I'd better recognize my emotional strengths, e.g., my determination
 - I'd realize how hard I was actually working
 - I'd probably succeed more often
 - I'd have more fun
 - I'd focus less on my weaknesses

I've found that most athletes get a big kick out of this assignment because they tend to be very hard on themselves and do not remember their strengths enough. It seems like such a simple exercise, and it is, but I want you to repeat this one at least once a week. It will allow you to take joy in your tremendous unique abilities as an athlete or coach.

It's especially important to complete this assignment when you are feeling low. If you persist with it daily, first thing in the morning, it will energize you for training.

Mental Toughness Action Assignment 11

Based on these sentence completions, what is an affirmation or statement you could come up with for your positive affirmation? Write it in the space below.

Now that you have a positive affirmation, I want you to repeat it to yourself every time you train or compete. When I did this, I selected a very 'big' affirmation. I'm going to reveal it even though it may seem boastful. I used to say, "I'm the best Ringette player in the world," constantly in warm up. When I started using this affirmation, this statement was not true. However, after a few years, I think many people would agree that it did come true. While I cannot say that this affirmation created the reality for sure (it was a combination of factors), I can't help but think it did have an impact. The interesting thing about this is that even when I play recreational Ringette today, I still spontaneously have this thought whenever I step on the ice...it makes me smile because even though I know intellectually I'm not the best player in the world any more, my heart believes it.

So, select your affirmation carefully and repeat it religiously. It's your little secret to use inside. No one ever needs to know. 😊

Mental Toughness Action Assignment 12

Pick a situation that could occur in your event. Develop an affirmation about it that begins with, "It's OK". Here are some examples:

It's OK to feel powerless.

It's OK to miss shots, make strategy errors, be clumsy, etc.

It's OK to be anxious.

It's OK to be frustrated.

Record your affirmation below:

The most difficult part of this assignment will be to believe your affirmation. In your heart of hearts, you will resist it. Your ability to calm your fears will rely on your open mind and your willingness to accept this affirmation as true. Do not be afraid that if you say, "It's Ok to be nervous" or something like it that it will create nerves. It will not. The feelings will dissolve because the purpose of them is to make you more alert. If you let your body know that you're listening, and you are not resisting the feelings, it will calm down and stop sending you waves of fear. Trust me on this one.

Visualization Exercise

Sit in a quiet space where you will not be disturbed. Close your eyes and relax. Focus on your breathing. Breathe slowly and deeply. Once you are relaxed, go back to a time in your mind when you felt really confident and powerful in competition. Re-run this scene in your mind. *Allow the feeling to grow stronger as an energetic experience. Re-access the confidence, relaxation, pride, and positive energy you had at that time.* Continue this for at least 5 - 10 minutes.

Write a few lines on what you experienced during this exercise. What happened to you? Were you able to recall a situation? What feelings did you have? If you couldn't summon any feelings, describe what happened to you emotionally. Feel free to describe your thoughts; however, please make sure that you also describe the emotions you had during this exercise. If you were not able to access any emotions, please record exactly what you did feel. Describe what did happen.

Remember that visualization takes practice to perfect. Do not be concerned if your images broke up or you felt numb. Probably the best advice I can give you here is to persist with thinking about your sport - as though you're performing from the inside - until you get comfortable with visualizing. This should be easy for you, and you will get better and better at imagining the outcomes you want with confidence. As your skills grow, you will be able to visualize in your GAME FACE quite nicely.

Mental Toughness Action Assignment 13

Your GAME FACE Psych Up Routine

In the space below, put together a 10-30 minute GAME FACE routine for yourself that includes the following components:

1. A physical warm up that activates you
2. A reminder of the 'Want, Not Need' mindset
3. At least one affirmation
4. Emotional visualization planning

Now you are ready to try your GAME FACE routine in live competition. After each competition, make notes in your athletes' journal about what elements of it helped you and which elements were not helpful. You will start to get to know what you need to do to pump yourself up. Remember that you are unique - do not try to use someone else's routine if it's not a good fit for you (I remember one teammate of mine used to read trashy novels in the dressing room. This just worked to take her mind off the game). There is no one right GAME FACE routine - be yourself!

Your friend,
Lisa Lane Brown