

# THE TOWER OF TEN

## A Model for Personal & Athletic Success Psychology & Motivation

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I have been looking forward to this for quite a while. It is not often I get the opportunity to speak in front of this many coaches. I work in a counselling centre at the university so my primary function there is to work with students who are having difficulties and I am also the training director so I spend a lot of time working with graduate students in helping them become psychologists. David Marsh's introduction was very gracious and generous too. I have been very lucky the last three to four years to work closely with the diving team and what I would say about the swimming coaches, David and Ralph Crocker, Dave Derden, Kim Bracken – everybody with the program – it is one of the more psychologically sophisticated coaching staffs I have ever been around in that it feels good that they allow me to work with their athletes because I see what they do with their athletes already so I appreciate that introduction and really, I get as much out of working with the coaches as athletes, I think sometimes, as they get from me. Hopefully they get something from me, but anyway. I said to Dave, if this was an applied sports psychology conference and it was 4 o'clock and we were in San Diego, this place would be empty. We would be out on the beach or we would be out running or golfing, swimming, so I am not sure what that says about you, but I am fascinated.

I am a collector of quotes and these are a couple that I collected in the last month or so as I was starting to think about this talk, and just looking at the newspaper or looking at Sports Illustrated and Andy Roddick is doing excellent in the US Open. As far as I know he is still in. I didn't see what his last match was, but this was after a recent upset loss and I think he is referring here that the mental aspect of his sport seems to be important to him. It is all in the head. I am not sure if it is all in the head, but at least after this loss, it felt to him like it was all in the head. Kerry Collins on mental preparation, NY Giants quarterback – I tried to stay out of my own way. Sometimes going inside my head is like going behind enemy lines. I think oftentimes in working with our athletes much of what we are doing in terms of sports psychology or performance enhancement really is getting their heads out of the way of their physical performance.

You know, all the hard training that they have done and them standing on top of the blocks and they are all inside their head where that is not probably where they necessarily need to be or if they are in their head, they need to be focusing on just a couple of things rather than too much complex or complicated material that is just going to get in their way.

I had no idea that Teri McKeever was going to be the speaker in front of me, but – actually this was a couple of weeks before the world championships and I am lying there in bed and I am looking at Sports Illustrated and there is a wonderful article on Natalie Coughlin and I am reading it and I almost bolt up straight out of bed when I read this quote, "A lot of people say you are a psychology major; does that affect how you handle pressure?" I have never worked with a sports psychologist. I think pressure is something you have to learn to deal with yourself. No one else can tell you how to deal with it." If I become a sports psychologist in five years you can repeat that to me." I mean, I love that quote. I love it – I love it.

Because really, we talk about the rule of thirds in sports psychology and that simply is that we present stuff to athletes and coaches because that is what we want. We want access to your athletes. That is what we want. We want to work with them and you know we are pumped about what we are doing and about a third of the athletes immediately buy into it and they get pumped about the mental stuff too and they can really see the application and want to use it. And then we have another third who are kind of you know sitting on the edge, kind of going well you know, this might be helpful – it might not, let's see what this guy has got. Let's see what this woman has in terms of mental training that can be useful and then we got about a third and I think Natalie Coughlin probably belongs in here who have no use for it whatsoever and you know what? She probably doesn't need it.

Okay and I did stay long enough for Teri's talk to see if the comment about when she walked into the CAL-Berkley program that she was probably mentally tough already. She is and she was and you all probably have athletes – I know the Auburn Swim Team has athletes like this – I mean – this is just the way they are built and they do not need sports psychology or mental training and that is cool. That is absolutely fine, but this one made me sweat a little bit when I read this and started thinking about coming to this conference and doing this presentation. Oh my gosh! Shaun McCann, who is the head sports psychologist at the USOC training facility in Colorado Springs, frequently

talks about the gurufication of sports psychology consultants.

What I really want to do today is really de-gurufy what we do. I think coaches have been doing sports psychology for hundreds of years before we even showed up. And I think many of you are already doing it even if you don't know you are doing it. This is more just kind of a more disciplined manner. It is not standardised because you want to be very flexible with how you do this stuff, but I am a big advocate for coaches being their own mental training consultants or acting as sports psychologists. It could be that Natalie Coughlin had a bad experience with a sports psychologist consultant. These really are not secret magical techniques. This is stuff that anybody can utilise and most of you will be able to teach with not an incredible amount of training.

That last bullet – gurus take credit for athlete's successes but rarely acknowledge blames for failures. I think that is really important. At the PGA recently, Davis Love was interviewed after the first round – he had shot mid to high sixties – I think was in the lead and he was referring to his work with his sports psychologist and there actually was a quote from his sports psychologist in there too and you know it seemed to be implying that the mental stuff and what work they were doing was what was responsible for their success. You never – myself as a sports psychologist – I never want to be taking credit for athlete success. It is wonderful to hear David say “you know, we had an athlete who made quantum leaps,” but the fact remains that athlete was the one who had to get up on the block and swim the race and they are the ones that are completely responsible for taking whatever techniques we can offer them. And David Love shot about a 75 in the second round and there were no quotes from his sports psychologist taking credit for the 75 so anyway.

Bad Spanish and loosely translated, this is “we are tilling the field said the fly sitting on the horns of the oxen” and again truly, as I stand here, I am the fly – I am a fly. I am going to probably throw out some names and we will probably forget people in the sports psychology world that are colleagues that are excellent researchers who don't have the opportunity to get in front of this group, but I do. I just want to acknowledge that a lot of their work has gone into the way I think about this tower of ten and anyway, if you are hearing names and you don't know who they are, it feels good for me to be able to say them.

Now what about the coach as the sports psychology consultant? I just said I am a big

advocate for coaches doing this. Here is a quote from Doc Counsilman, “Not all the successful coaches I have known have been effective teachers of technique, but with no exceptions, all have been effective on this human side of the coaching coin.” There is not a specific reference to sports psychology or mental training in that quote, but there is that kind of idea you know. It is much more than simply coming up with the practice schedule each day and teaching technique. Obviously, those are very, very important things, but there is something about this mental stuff that we can address and maybe ought to utilise a bit more.

Now, pros and cons of acting as your own sports psychology consultant – Pros: mental training is part of what you get sports psychology in some of your certifications so you are getting some of this training already. You guys spend more time with your athletes than anybody else. You know, I am lucky to get over to the pool once a week and maybe be on the deck for 45 minutes to an hour, and usually trying to stay out of the way of everybody else. You've got the athletes. I am going to push this and I will probably say it a couple of times. It is the coach who is able to actually use some of their physical practice time and show the athletes the importance of your belief that this is something that is important by utilising some of that physical practice time to actually do some of the mental training. Athletes see that and they will much more likely buy into it and there is the control element. If you act as your own sports psychology consultant, you get to choose what types of things you are going to focus on in terms of mental training.

A good sports psychology consultant is going to be consulting with coaches and talking to them about the types of things they want their athletes to learn, but there is a control element. I had a coach tell me one time, you know the problem with this mental training stuff is you know if I add another set of 50 blowouts and when I see them at the end and they are just staggered and they are flush and they can hardly breathe, I know they are working hard. If I teach them relaxation the only thing I see is them getting sleepy. I don't see how this is useful, so that is the other part of it too, that is you know a lot of the mental training you can't see so it is sometimes hard to spend time focusing on it.

Cons: do you want to add this to your relationship with your athletes? One of the things that I mentioned to David was about Teri's talk on Natalie and all the work that she has done. As a psychologist I am bound by confidentiality, meaning I cannot talk about

specific athletes that I have worked with. I can't tell exactly what I have done with whom. As a psychologist I have legal and ethical issues. You don't. What you need to think about is first of all, the athletes may be getting tired of you. They see you all the time. They heard you say the same thing over and over perhaps, but if I am trying to choose a relay team and I am wanting my athletes to be honest with me about their anxiety level and I want to work with them on that and get into the appropriate zone so that they can perform their best, as an athlete do I want to be completely honest with you the coach? I am scared witless about this. I may not share that with you so it is one of the things you need to consider as a coach, and your relationship with the athletes is will they be honest with you and really let you know what is going on inside their heads.

Generalisation of athletic experiences: as consultants we are also guilty of this at times and that is falling back on our own athletic backgrounds. I would imagine that most of you are former swimmers – it is hard not to believe psychologically, mentally that your athletes aren't a lot like you and being able to let go of that and understand that your athletes may approach their swimming and they are competing in a very very different way from you, and that if you are going to use mental training, you wouldn't want to just choose what you think would work for you, but choose what you also believe would work and be best for the athlete. Do you want to use the time during your practice? You know it may take away your focus, your objectives and a coach's own anxiety. Do any of you get anxious when you watch your athlete swim? Ralph, do you get anxious when your athletes swim? Okay, do you think they can see it? You know, is it good for your athletes to see you sweating if you are the sports psychology mental training person and you know you are up there on the deck about to fall apart and your athlete and you are asking them to be calm and cool in that proper arousal zone?

So, some things to consider. I am going to briefly go over some research and I am going to go through this quickly and move on to the Tower of Ten, but this really gives you kind of an idea where some of this stuff is coming from. This was looking at the development and maintenance of expert athletic performance and we had here qualitative study meaning they did a lot of retroactive interviewing of 10 former or current gold medallists either in the Olympics or world championships so these were not one shot wonders, these were athletes that had been the best in the world on at least two different

occasions and they identified four stages and I want to focus briefly on the investment and the maintenance stages. McKeever referred to this as well. There is an element of the coach needs to help provide motivation which you are going to find as your athletes mature and get older really that should come more intrinsically from within the athlete and that is something I preach with the athletes that I work with is the coach can be the motivator but you know it needs to come from you as well and working with them to figure out how to do that. This to me was fascinating.

These are Olympic and world champions so in investment years they have selected their sport that they are going to be specialising in, ok? And yet they continue to maintain some former balance. They had had something else going than just their swimming and a lot of these in the study were actually more swimmers than divers despite the intensive training and appearance and family and as Age Group coaches I know you guys do not have to deal with parents at all. You have got wonderful parents that give you no problems whatsoever, have no investment in their child's swimming, you know they hand them over to you and just say let them go. You know, do the best you can with them. What seems a little bit surprising for me at Auburn is seeing the number of parents at the D1 level who are still so invested in their sons and daughters as athletes. They are not doing that achievement by proxy. They are not living through their child's athletic prowess. What they are doing is playing a much more supportive and nurturing role so – very interestingly and not surprisingly, these athletes were highly motivated, independent and competitive, independent to the point sometimes where it causes conflict with their coaches.

Competition still kept in perspective – these are Olympic and world championships, but still kept in perspective. Their training was not only physical, but mental, technical and tactical and in regards to the outcome, these Olympic world champions spent time after competitions really looking at what did they do right, what did they do wrong, evaluating what types of changes do I want to make?

Here are a couple of quotes from that study: I would like to add something on the side. "Right up until the Olympics I made sure they had friends who were not swimmers. I also got an education so I had a backup plan in case I got injured and all of a sudden couldn't swim any more – balance is really important." Best in the world and still talking about balance. Another quote: "I basically didn't treat the world

championships or Olympics as such, I treated them just like a regional practice competition. I really had to minimise everything. I would tell myself this is only a frigging sport. I believe there is stronger language here, but frigging is what I'll use here. This is such a miniscule part of my life. There are people who are dying out there and I am sweating about swimming in a swimming pool, ok? Perspective and balance.

Maintenance years and this is after they won at least one gold medal so they have continued to choose to remain in their sport. Families and coaches continue to provide support and knowledge, but they are using more of the scientific community. Again, continued emphasis on balance and perspective. Teri talking about this – focusing on the process of competing rather than the competition. Focusing on the process rather than the competition. So these individuals were rarely getting up on the block and focusing on beating those next to them. They were focused on the process of that. The after effect was that they did win so a paradoxical kind of thing right there and for these older athletes importance of recovery and creativity and I probably will mention creativity a lot too, keeping things fresh in terms of the mental training techniques you might utilise.

A couple more quotes, and I am a collector of quotes – I said that already. “I needed to be relaxed and almost uncanny with the result of the relays but in order to do this I had to be able to look beyond the result and understand that it really didn't matter. I realised that I was a really good swimmer, but I was a really good person too and the people who were important to me didn't give a shit about how I swam. Ok?” And one last one – I realised that the reasons I swam were more important than the outcome. Again, and Teri pointed out that for Natalie Coughlin in a disappointing performance I am sure for her and a lot of other people at the world championships, but if the sole focus was whether or not she had won medals then you know you are losing a lot, but that journey, that process was really important and I think we could start communicating to our Age Groupers a lot sooner on too that this outcome thing is not the end all be all.

I mean, one of the things I know as coaches that you probably struggle with is drop out and I think a lot of the drop out we get is again, too much focus on the competition. Yes, competition is incredibly important – incredibly important and learning how to compete is important, but that not being everything. All right, one other quick study and this was again a qualitative study – this one was interesting ...

again, looking at 10 Olympic champions. They competed an average of 2.4 games so they had been there at least twice, all of them. Amongst the 10 they had won 34 medals – 28 gold and this was really neat too because they didn't just ask the athletes kind of, okay, what set you apart from the rest. They also asked their coaches; psychologically what is it about these folks that are special. They asked their parents. They asked their friends and/or significant others and some of the results, and I love this as a sports psychologist: all of the athletes used mental skills extensively: some of those being self regulation of arousal, in control but not forcing an attitude, imagery and self-taught, goal setting, well-developed coping strategies, well-developed competition plans and the other thing they said too, I wish I had learned to do this much earlier on. It would have helped me with my athletic career. This would have helped me so much more.

These athletes also had high levels of optimism and hopefulness. I think there is going to be a presentation actually Saturday on optimism. It is a real interesting concept that is making a big splash in the sports psychology world and what is neat about this is we are learning that some athletes – kind of like some are mentally tough and some are not – we have some athletes who are optimistic and hopeful and some who are not, but that you can actually teach kids and that is what I love best about this research is that you can teach kids how to think optimistically and it seems to have an impact on performance.

Adaptation to perfectionism. What I am talking about here is these athletes had very high standards for themselves, but they were not critical of themselves. This is interesting too – these athletes let parental criticisms of them wash off them very quickly. Not that they didn't listen to their parents, but they didn't hang onto that criticism. What did they get from their parents? The parents of these Olympic champions did give this idea of a can-do attitude and also, if you are going to do it, do it right so it is not that the parents were not involved, but the message was not one with a lot of expectations on what they wanted from their athletes other than I want you to work hard at it and I want you to work as well at it as you can.

And in terms of psychological development their coaches played a primary role on that too. If coaches emphasised mental training, these athletes were more likely to develop it and require different things at different points in their careers. Probably more direction and more of a backing off as the athletes get older.

So, that is some of the research. There is a

lot of it. Just a couple of studies that I wanted to look at and share with you because it is kind of looking at what are the people who are winning gold medals doing? Because what we are trying to create or recreate over and over is this idea of flow and flow, also referred to – talk about athletes – talk about performing in the zone or they will talk about peak performance or you know any number of different description of sport, but trying to re-create and the idea is we try to identify what are the psychological mental training types of things, how do we set this up? Because we would like for this to happen, not just by chance. We would like to re-create it. And you have heard athletes and you have probably experienced this at different points in your life too where you are so, I mean it is so effortless, you are so into the moment – time either slows or speeds up. The divers – when the divers are diving well, they talk to me about how it is slow motion. I mean it is just, they can feel every twist and turn of what is going on, but that is what we are striving for. How can we re-create this and so it just doesn't happen by accident?

Now, the Tower of Ten which is, you know – where do you get the Tower of Ten? I was working with the divers – 10 metre platform – Tower of Ten. Had I been working with the baseball team it probably would have been the Magnificent Nine. Had it been the basketball team it would have been the Fast Break Fantastic Five. You know, talking about creativity – I mean, the divers loved it. They are like going, oh my God – he has created this thing just for us, but I happened to be working with them the most when I finally pieced this together so I think now it's the divers and coaches who really helped shape this concept. They were the ones that, with the whole swimming and diving team, that gave me the opportunity to get involved.

All right now, don't let this slide scare you. That is the one, there it is, right there what you have all been waiting for. The most scary and complicated slide of the day. The idea here is that we have some foundational skills or basic skills that are important to have in place before we teach other psychological skills and the first five there at the bottom. We had the physical skills or athleticism which is not a mental skill and then the next four – attitude, motivation, action focus and commitment and interpersonal connections. Those are the ones that athletes need to be working on a day-to-day basis as they move toward long-term goals.

Okay? To sustain that energy to keep striving for excellence. Now the engagement or the preparatory concepts are self-talk and

visualisation or imagery and arousal regulation. There is a little bit of an overlap over there; anxiety management and these are the ones that are going to be focused on more as you are preparing for competition. You are going to be focused more on those then.

And then finally at the top of the tower or the performance or competition concepts and those are the ones of emotional power or dealing with strong emotions and attentional focus or concentration. What are the cues? What are the things we need to concentrate on? Now at the bottom you see the idea of process again and this is all a process and needing to focus on that. You know it is the coaching clinic so you see I have coaching stuck down in the corner. I had to put that in there – coaching – very, very important. So caveats are the guideline rather than the recipe. There is an art and science to this. These concepts are grounded in good research again. They are not magical, but how you implement them is important.

We talked about the thirds rule. I like this too. There is much more of a focus on the positive rather than what is wrong and that, as a sports psychology person, probably one of the more frustrating times is when you don't see an athlete until the coach has given up on them; they don't know what else to do with this athlete and so they hand him over to you. Present this in a pro-active fashion – not trying to fix a problem but saying here are things that you can utilise and help you now. Here is my recent physical. We did blood tests, CAT scan, MRI, colonoscopy, spinal tap: CONCLUSION: YOU GOT NO GAIN.

What is at the bottom of the base of the tower? Athleticism, physical skills and this is an acknowledgement that genetics plays a large role. Some of us are built with bigger motors than others. That we do have to train hard and practice diligently and this is how I present these concepts to athletes too. This is exactly how I present them to them. That you cannot cut corners. That you cannot image your way to a gold medal. That would be great. I would have had a whole closet full of gold medals at this point if imaging them was all we had to do and also talking and emphasising the positive. I know you do this, that competition effort and practice effort is not going to always be competition effort but for particular practices yes, you are going to have to work very hard and there are no corners that you can cut.

Attitude: it is a choice. I think as coaches with younger athletes maybe, you will help them more so, but with the athletes I work with at Auburn, other than just the swimmers and divers, you know again, this idea that you are

going to have to choose how you want to approach your sport. That people cannot force it onto you. For swimming excellence rather than perfection. And again this idea of seeking balance is a hard concept sometimes for some athletes to buy into. They think that they have to be totally focused on just their sport for fear that they are not going to be doing enough. Balance is very important.

Oftentimes when I am working one on one with athletes, motivation is a huge question, meaning I talk about it as being a love/hate relationship. I think the farther along you go in your sport you will know what I am talking about. There are times when you just love what you are doing and other times when it is so damn hard, the training is so difficult. You know everything about getting in a pool, I mean, you know you are looking at your sport you will know what I am talking about. There are times when you just love what you are doing and other times when it is so damn hard, the training is so difficult. You know everything about getting in a pool, I mean, you know you are looking at the bottom of the pool. Well, I guess if you are a Backstroker you are not, but you know you are looking at the bottom of the pool and you hate it. Why am I doing this? Why am I doing this? Hopefully remind them and reflect back on what are the things that brought them to their sport initially? You know, what did they find their joy in? Bring them back to this idea of process. That it is a journey rather than just focus on the outcomes. Just like our Olympic and world champions and the importance of persisting through hard times.

We also know about elite in performers and not only athletics but also in music, CEO's – those types of areas – that excellent performers embrace obstacles. Some athletes, if they bump up against an obstacle – “Well hell – it's too hard. I'm not going to do this.” Excellent performers accept this as a part of the process and when these things happen they actually embrace them. Okay? This is really giving this obstacle the challenge rather than an opportunity to quit. Avoiding the obstacle preparation trap and I think this is especially true in swimming. This idea the more I do the better I am going to get and if I have a setback and don't perform as well as I want to or I would like to, what I need to do is go back and put in more physical work. I have to do more dry land stuff, I have got to do more sets and that may be part of the problem why athletes don't perform well. It may be over-training or not peaking physically or tapering the way they want to. Try encouraging athletes not to just throw themselves back in the weight room or doing

more in the pool.

Goal setting – most of you are familiar with the basic goal-setting steps. Short term goals are important to lead up to long-term and dream goals. Setting clear and positive and realistically hard goals. This I think – the fourth rule is setting practice and performance goals and the one before that is seeking out the feedback. One of the things that I hear from athletes is that they do not get enough feedback from their coaches. I don't know what the coach is actually thinking about how I am practicing and how I am performing. Most athletes crave that. Now you have got a lot of athletes and you can't always individually give it to them, but know that they want it and that is very, very useful in terms of a goal setting process. What I find athletes doing a lot of times is what they think is a realistic goal is probably their dream goal. I see that frequently and if they think their dream goal – if they get that confused and they don't reach that what they think is realistic – you know frustration is very intense and so you want to give them as much feedback as you can and also sit down with them.

Talk about them. You know, what are our goals this year? What are we trying to accomplish? Setting a variety of different goals too. Goals not written down are nothing more than wishes. You know, talk is cheap. One of the things I encourage athletes to do is a lot of journal work and it can be focused on some of the Tower of Ten concepts or it can be more just like a process journal in terms of talking about what is going on in their lives, but that is one other place where those goals can get written down.

One of the assignments that I do with the divers, at least a couple of times a year, is this one here and talking about that goal setting is something – these concepts can be used outside of swimming. They can be focused on your personal life, academics – other areas, but finding a quiet time and writing down their thoughts and feelings to these sorts of prompts. Which road to a dream goal? If there were no limits, if there were no impossibilities – what would you want to accomplish? You can talk to your athletes about that too. I mean, you talk about – do they get excited about talking about that? Oh my gosh, yes they do, and for swimmers what is usually the ultimate goal? Gold medal – they can see themselves up on the stand, national anthem playing, that is the goal and that is wonderful to have and you want them to revisit that and think about that. It is important to have that ultimate dream goal and also what is your ultimate dream goal this year? Okay? Is it finaling at NCAA's? Is it getting a

time that qualifies you for NCAA's? Is it winning an SEC championship? You know, what is your ultimate dream goal? You know, if everything goes wonderful, if you are training perfect, your taper is perfect – what do you want to accomplish and then setting what the realistic goal is. What would you be satisfied with? Okay? If you perform at about the level that your practice indicates, I mean that is reasonable. That is a good goal and you compete and you perform at that level that is good to have that.

Most importantly, we talked about this idea of adapted perfectionism and I see this in a lot of swimmers and divers ... they tend to come from high achieving families and really put incredible pressures on themselves. They get a lot from their family and parents and then they impose a lot on themselves and I talk about even if everything goes right, you don't always perform as well as you can and so ultimately and most importantly you need to have a self-acceptance goal. If I don't meet my goals, can I still be happy with who I am as a person.

Encouraging a Tower of Ten goal. At different points of the season I will have them focus on different points of that tower and daily goals and as a coach help your athletes set daily goals. This can be simply 45 seconds prior to a practice, saying to an athlete "What are you trying to accomplish? What are you trying to accomplish here? This is why I am giving you this set today. This is what this means, but what are you trying to accomplish. What is the daily goal here?"

In the last of the foundational skills is interpersonal connections and this is reminding athletes that they are part of a bigger system, that they are impacted and they impact family, friends, coaches and others. That they can appropriately communicate thoughts and feelings and needs to these people and listen to them as well. They have learned effective skills to handle conflict with those who are negative or oppositional. This is basically that communication part and the importance of communication.

At the end of each year what I will do with athletes or coaches or if I am working with entire teams, I will sit them down and ask them "What did we do that worked well this year? What did we do that didn't work well? What did we waste our time on? What do we want to be thinking about next year in terms of psychological skills?"

Mental training – what do we want to be doing? And they will generate a lot of ideas and then I will always ask, "What was the most important thing we did this year? What was the

thing that was most useful? And invariably what they will point to is something to do with this idea of interpersonal connectiveness and that was whether it was resolving a conflict among the team, it was helping build a team cohesively and that is something I have watched the Auburn University staff that they just – I am in awe when I watch them do – they create this cohesiveness, but they spend time doing it too. This is not something that happens happenstance, but invariably the athletes point to this as kind of a turning point in the season. It has something to do with this.

Now moving into the preparatory or engagement skills, self-talk and that is first of all letting your athletes know that you know that they are having running conversations with themselves because I know you guys have that running conversation with yourself and you really are not crazy, but you know, that talk that we do and that we want to choose as much as possible to focus on positive optimistic self-talk to maintain and build confidence and steer away from the negative or the critical and being able to ... or redirect that and talking to one's self as if you were best friends. This is something that we can utilise during practice. We can utilise it during competitions – as coaches you cannot get inside your athletes' heads and see and hear what it is that they are saying to themselves, but you will get some clues as you hear your athletes talk to themselves in practice and even more so in competition or after a bad competition – what is it they say to themselves?

We know from a lot of research that you know that this positive self-talk is much more helpful with few exceptions – the biggest one of course is John McEnroe – everybody talks about how he could be so critical of himself on the court and still engage in a sport at such a high level, but for most athletes we want positive self-talk and this is very much different than positive – the myth of positive thinking – everybody remembers Stuart Smiley from Saturday Night Live – "I am good enough – I am smart enough and by gosh – people like me." Because when people think about self-talk or positive affirmations that is usually what they get and they go yeah, I don't want to do that stuff and or as one athlete said to me – "If I tell myself I am going to succeed am I going to be able to be successful? And I don't think so. I don't know what you are talking about here." We do need to look at our thoughts critically at times, but more times than not we want to redirect that into more of a positive statements that we are telling ourselves.

Another powerful concept, visualisation or

imagery. There are a number of different ways that this can be used as you are working with your athletes. This can be five or ten minutes before practice where you can have them go through an imagery relaxation sequence. Have them focusing on a particular competition or performance, have them focusing on a particular race for them. So, using imagery even to visualise the upcoming practice that they are about to do you know the sets that they are going to have to do and having them visualise themselves doing them successfully.

With imagery one of the things that we sometimes have a problem with the athletes is that they are so used to pushing hard with imagery but with relaxation it is much more of a passive attitude. Allowing it to come to them so that is something you will want to keep in mind. You know, some athletes say they can not make themselves relax – well you know, relax. I mean if you try to force it or make it happen you are not going to be able to make it.

We want to use all of our senses in multiple perspectives. Usually we will talk about multiple perspectives. It is that difference between internal and external perspective – external perspective is like having your athlete watching themselves as if they were in the grandstand, watching themselves compete, and internal perspective is them being able to see their performance as they image through their eyes – seeing it that way. A combination is usually best. You will find that athletes are usually better at one or the other and you should let them focus on the one that they are best with and encourage them to utilise the other one.

With the divers the sense that we probably work on most is that kinaesthetic, that sense of feel, because a lot of times they can do the external imagery of themselves doing the dive, but some of them have a very difficult time seeing from an internal perspective what it is they are doing when they are twisting and turning. So, what we focus more on is that imaging of what is the feel right when you do the dive right? What is that – what does it feel like and focusing there. And a concept in swimming probably that you know we could use this kinaesthetic feel and Teri McKeever talked about the relationship with the water – I don't think she really intended this, but there are some things that you can use imagery for in terms of techniques where you could have your athletes imaging the correct technique, but there are some concepts in swimming that are pretty nebulous so that it is hard to put your hands on. I think this idea of finding still water where you can propel yourself through more quickly when you find that water – that is an

example where we might use that kinaesthetic imagery.

The acceptance and regulation of anxiety. First of all the acceptance that it is part of it. That often-time is enough to free up people. When you are anxious, it is your body and mind telling you that this is something that is important. What we need to figure out is how to get yourself in that proper arousal zone. What do you compete best at? Our sprinters, you know we have got some that they get up on the blocks and they are like limp noodles – I mean, you cannot even tell that they are alive – they are so relaxed. And we have others who for them the proper level of arousal is they are so pumped up they are about to come out of their skins. I mean, they cannot get any more excited and that is good for them but not good for the person who needs to be relaxed. So you want to help your athletes identify – usually looking back retroactively at their best competitions – where were you when you competed that way?

The tool box. Some of these are relatively simple: diaphragmatic breathing, deep breathing, a very simple concept that we forget to use a lot of times. Muscle relaxation – we can do mind to muscle techniques or muscle to mind techniques. Most athletes again are usually more comfortable with the physical stuff so we could use progressive relaxation in terms of contracting muscles and then relaxing muscles and for them to be able to really experience the difference with what that feels like. Centering. Again combining deep breathing here and then literally centering themselves on the ground and usually using some kind of positive self statement that makes sense to them to get them back in that arousal zone that they want to be. We can use imagery, coping affirmations. Autogenic training is probably something that you would not want to utilise. It came out of the old Eastern Germany type of psychological training where we are creating heat in the muscles in kind of a hypnotic effect.

These are just tools some athletes can use. Some of this will work better for some of them and some won't. Use the ones that work, noting the other ones that don't. Help them figure out what one is useful for them.

Dealing with strong emotions. Again, similar to the anxiety you need to accept them as part of sport and that they are going to happen. Realising that most often these feelings happen automatically. There is no sense fighting them. I mean, they happen, but then return to the zone, the arousal zone that you want as quickly as possible and tone that down. They realise we can feel this way. We can be pissed off. We do not necessarily have to behave this way. Then to

be able to use and refocus these emotions to improve rather than interfere. One quick way of being able to do this is a simple technique from Shane Murphy who used to be out at the USOC training site in Colorado Springs: first the acknowledgement that these emotions occur – they react – they happen – don't fight them as if it makes it worse.

Wanting to get calmed down as quickly as possible. Again, diaphragmatic breathing, three quick deep breaths is enough for some athletes to pull it together right there, okay? You are pissed off ... what can I learn here, okay? Followed by a corrective positive self-talk statement and something simple like let's move – let's go and that is okay now I am going to actively get back into the process of the competition. Re-engaging with that and starting back where I was before.

Again, here is a simple 4-step refocusing plan to handle strong emotions – not rocket science here. Something your athletes can utilise and at the top of the pyramid is the idea of concentration and intentional focus – helping your athlete to identify what is it they need to be looking at – what do they need to be listening to – what do they need to be feeling – what do they need to be attending to when they are up on the blocks, okay? When they are in their race, what do they need to be attending to? And usually we don't want it to be a lot. Again, we want to get the head out of the way and so I will talk about it in a minute – a couple of cues that might be useful. In competing in the here and now without regard to past or anticipated future events. Again this idea of process and letting outcome take care of itself.

Something I use with the divers – this is just something for early, early meets that really didn't have a lot of importance, but the idea was we wanted to start a pre-competition plan early in the season and not wait until NCAA's and regional zones and NCAA's to develop this. So, start early in the season and figure out what it is that you are going to use for your pre-competition plan. The pre-competition plan is simple and this can start the day of or the day before, in terms of the general physical warm-up or psychological warm-up, again – what are you going to be doing physically and identifying beforehand exactly what that is prior to getting on site and trying to figure it out, okay? And this is where you coaches can help your athletes by saying this is what we are going to do and doing that and nothing else.

The psychological warm-up – when you get to the site of the competition first of all finding out your athletes are going to need different types of personal space. We have some – I pick on the

divers again – we have some divers who are very social animals and want to be with the other divers during competition – during the whole event and constantly chatting and communicating you know, talking with one another and then we have other divers that want to be completely left alone and they don't want this – they do not want the chatty stuff going on so they need to find a personal space somewhere at the site where they can kick back and get some time out. Again, physical preparation – what are we going to do right before the event and identifying that with the athletes and right before competition deciding the psychological preparation. What are our pre-plan pre-event thoughts, assessing our arousal level? Are we too anxious? Do we need to do some deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation – are we not pumped up – do we need to do something to re-energise ourselves?

Now, a competition focus plan is really now much more right before we get ready to compete. Again, very highly individualised. We want to start working on it very early in the season rather than right at the last minute. The recognition that we are going to expend more energy earlier on in the season and as we progress we are going to back away so a lot of this stuff becomes a routine and we do not have to think about what we are thinking about or doing because we have already done it all season and recognising that we need some flexibility. You know if the pool temperature is 20 degrees lower than we anticipated, how are we going to respond to that? We know that our best athletes respond to these obstacles better than others.

Encouraging performance goals and not simply focusing on outcome and when I am talking about performance goals these are these last little things that you want to say to yourself when you are up on the block and these goals may change depending on the event, meaning if I have lower expectations for this particular event. If this is a lead-up race, you know it is early in the season, maybe I am going to be focusing on something else. Am I working on a particular technique during this race? I am not worried about necessarily swimming as fast as I can in this particular race. These concepts should be very specific, uncomplicated and simple as you focus on controllable factors and they ought to be ones that athletes are confident about reaching, and if they can't say with 70% confidence that they think they can reach it, it shouldn't be one of their competition performance goals. They need to let that one go and find something else that they feel more

likely that they can accomplish and do a very simple one – in order to swim fast – this is one athlete – this is one Auburn University athletes' performance goals: what they wanted, the last things they wanted to say to themselves as they stepped onto the block – stay relaxed – catch the wave – have fun. Very simple, okay? Very calming. They have selected these prior to the competition and they know that they are going to run these through their head right before they compete.

Just one last quote from Lance Armstrong on his success and this was a couple of weeks before he started his defence of the Tour de France this year and I think this really kind of gets across the whole idea of what the Tower of Ten is trying to create. “A lot of times success happens to an athlete and then you see them change their performance, their motivation and their desires – mine hasn't changed. I still love it. I still need it – the riding – the training – the building – the crafting and hopefully ultimately the winning. I just get off on it – the whole process – the whole process.”

So in conclusion: you know, we called it the Tower of Ten as a model. I really almost want you to look at it as a tool box. You know, what parts of it that might be useful for you and use those. Emphasising with your athletes and accepting for yourself too that you cannot do this mental stuff half-assed. I mean **if you are going to do it – do it. If you are not – not to be blunt.** I mean that the athletes that use this and really spend time and coaches encouraging it are most likely going to get the benefit. Just like physical training. Don't forget the present – again – the idea of process and the journey and finally don't be a stranger.