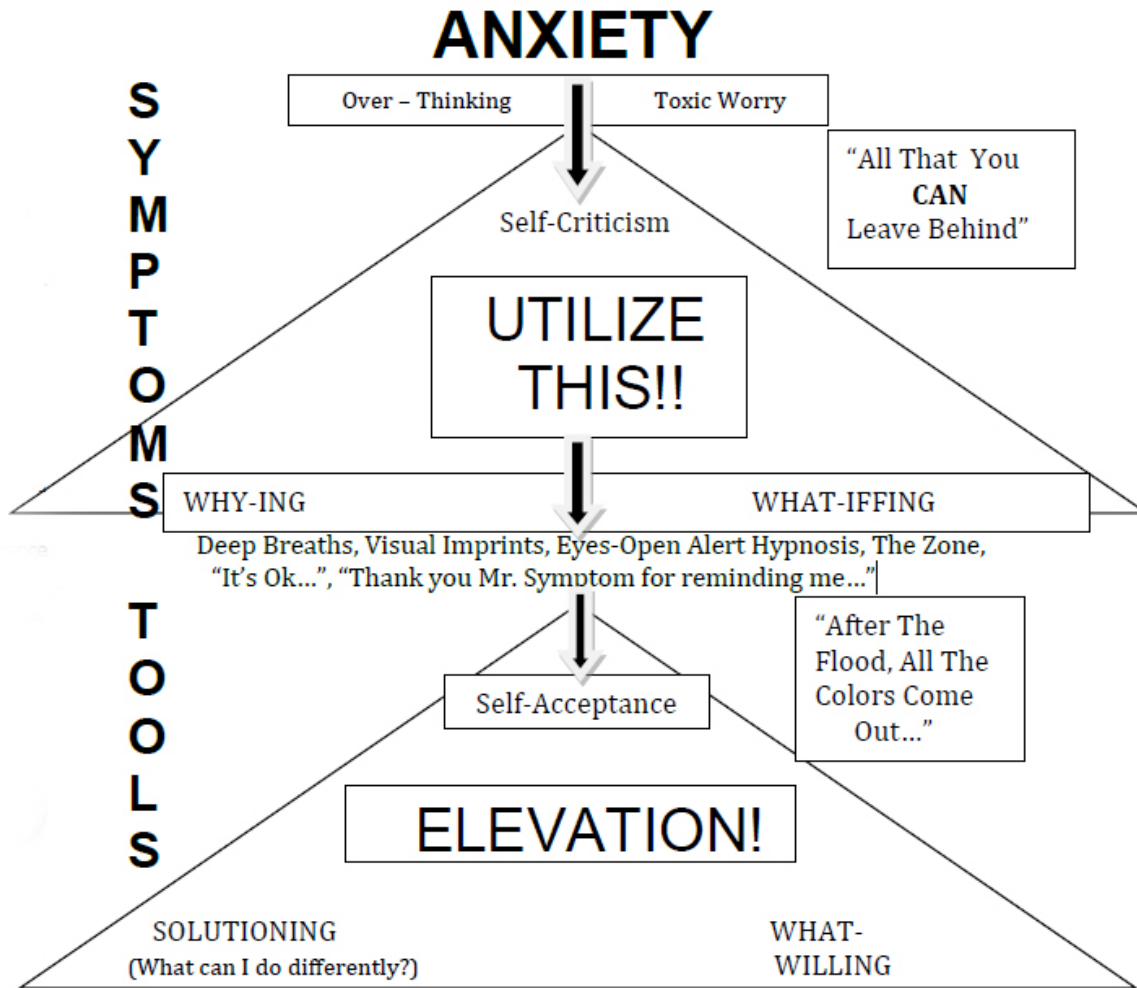




Zonefulness: An Ericksonian Approach to Peak Performance in the Game of Life

The Brief Therapy Conference
San Diego, CA
December 8-11, 2016



How Do You Dismantle an Atomic What If?

THE ART OF WHAT-WILLING

1. Transport your client back and forth, in time and space, accessing her unique history of success and future memories of her best self.
2. What-Willing is the therapeutic polarity of What-IFing.
3. A pragmatic, realistic approach to your world view.

<p>What-IFing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What IF I fail the test... • What IF I lose the sale... • What IF she leaves... • What IF a purple leopard breaks in the house... <p>What-IFing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equals eternal stuckness, moment after moment • Is the world's greatest symptom phrase • Keeps people in the symptom cycle • Is the executioner of energy • Reports to King Anxiety 	<p>What-Willing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DO the best I can... • Ace the Test... • What Will it be like When I allow things to Unfold...When I TRUST MYSELF..., • When THAT beautiful leopard brings gifts • It Will be great, AMAZING, EDUCATIONAL, GROWTHFUL... JUST RIGHT FOR ME.
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“I’m wondering what you WILL do with all of that new found energy” - Milton H. Erickson, M.D.



LOVE and PEACE with yourself OR ELSE

SELF CRITICISM WILL RULE

Self-criticism is relentless, yet can be remarkably subtle, a self-doubt, a 'why', a "what-if" can be as powerful as an ALL-NIGHT round of bitter self-loathing.

THE 3T'S OF DISSOLVING SELF CRITICISM

"...Dr. Erickson loved to flex his utilization muscles..."
-Jeffrey K. Zeig, Ph.D. Personal Communication, 2004

- 1) Translate:** Self-criticism is utilized as a positive trigger to speak a language of self-support.
- 2) Transport:** Self-criticism is utilized as a cue to transport yourself to a new dimension of time. A 1-3 minute power trance can reconnect you with your personal history of success and future memories of your best self.
- 3) Transform:** Pretend to play the part of your very best self.

2 Brief Therapy Techniques to Create Lasting Solutions

* Whenever feeling stuck in a moment, a relationship, a career choice, in any type of dilemma....

Do the following:

Technique #1

A) Close your eyes and take 5 very slow, very deep breaths.

B) Imagine yourself watching a movie with your favorite movie star playing the part of YOUR VERY BEST SELF.

C) Ask yourself, "What do I want the actor in the movie to do? See, feel, experience the lead actor really BEING YOUR VERY BEST SELF.

Technique #2

A) Imagine a loved one, a best friend or family member, and ask yourself, "How would I advise them and guide them? What would I say to really empower this person I care so much about?"

These Techniques Produce Lasting Solutions By:

- 1) Creating new perspectives, images, and experiences.
- 2) Stepping out of the problem in order to experience solution(s).
- 3) Stepping in to your best self.

***IS IT REALLY ACTING IF IT FEELS SO RIGHT?**

Zonefulness

The Toxic Three of Poor Performance: Zone Blockers (Symptoms and Anxieties)

The Toxic Three:

1. Self-criticism (negative self-talk; analyzing and agonizing).
2. Why-ning (negative focus on past poor performances and outcomes). “Why did I do that?”
3. What-ifying (negative focus on future poor performances and outcomes). “What if I fail?”

I have been working as a peak performance specialist with student-athletes at the elementary school, high school, and college level for more than 20 years. I’ve also done extensive training with professional athletes over this period of time. Whether it’s a little league baseball shortstop, a high school field hockey player, a college swimmer, or any athlete from any walk of life; I have been routinely peppered with toxic questions and negative expectations from student-athletes.

I have discovered that the most common questions are variations of “What-If I fail?” and “Why did I play that way?” The most common self-assessments are: “I am the worst,” “I’ll never make it,” “I can’t believe I choked,” and so on. All of these questions are symptoms of anxiety that are born of the ultimate concern, “Where did my zone go?”



Zonefulness

The Big Three of Peak Performance: Powerfully Calm Techniques

The Big Three:

1. Extreme Self-Support (internal strength).
 - 1a. Support from family, friends, coaches, and teammates (external strength).
2. Personal History of Success (positive focus on past peak performances and outcomes). Magnifying the good!
3. Future Memories of Success (positive focus on future peak performances and outcomes). What-willing: “What-will it be like when I succeed?”

Owen was introduced to The Big Three of Peak Performance when I guided him into the 15 minute zone during his first session. He was able to comfortably explore his Personal History of Success; experience Future Memories of Success; and reconnect with the support he has received from family, friends, coaches, and teammates while focusing on his own capacity to support himself at a higher level.



How Zoning Out Triggers Zoning In

Session two began with a discussion of how the zone blockers, notably The Toxic Three, can be utilized as positive triggers to zone in and perform at your best. I explained, “Owen, whenever you find yourself what-ifying, worrying, or beating yourself up, make the problem the solution.”

Owen looked at me quizzically as I continued, “Say, ‘Thank you what-if, for reminding me, what-will it be like when I play well and hit the ball hard.’ ‘Thank you what-if, for reminding me to remember my love for the game and my Personal History of Success.’ ‘Thank you self-criticism, for reminding me to treat myself like I would a teammate or a good friend.’

So, you see, the zone blockers, the symptoms, can actually be used to your advantage. Symptoms make you zone out and play poorly. Now, they really can be incorporated as powerful reminders, to zone in. And remember, the symptoms that take you out of your zone live in your conscious mind, which is extremely small and limited. But your zone lives in your subconscious mind, the place where you can really trust and support yourself, that infinite space that creates calm, confidence, and peak performance.”

Finally, I gave an example that I knew would be of personal significance to Owen, a lifelong Phillies fan. It went like this: “I want you to take a moment and remember the little league team you played on at the age of 12. Now, consider that the conscious mind that blocks your zone and creates anxiety is this team.” (His team was the Rockets.)

“Just imagine that your subconscious mind is a major league team, let’s say the Phillies. Could the Rockets, a bunch of 12-year-olds, ever beat the Philadelphia Phillies?” Owen rolled his eyes and laughed at this ridiculous question. “So, here’s the best part of everything we’ve been talking about: Your subconscious mind, where your zone lives, is the Phillies, and your conscious mind, where the symptoms live, is the Rockets.

The subconscious mind can’t ever lose to the conscious mind and I know that you already know that the Phillies would never lose to a little league team. So, your zone is extraordinarily stronger than any worry, why, what-if, or self-criticism. And now these symptoms can trigger your zone!” Owen’s comfortably curious look was becoming more and more hopeful.

Zonefulness: A Case Study

5th Inning Triumph

A major league baseball player who was mired in a most unusual slump was referred to me. As a first year starting pitcher he was unable to make it through the 5th inning of his first five starts of the season. He rapidly developed an irrational belief that he would never again make it through the 5th inning.

Interestingly, he pitched extremely well during the first four innings of each game he started. After being unable to survive the 5th in his first two starts he began to worry. Specifically, he began to “what-if” about not making it through this most troublesome inning. So, the five days he had to endure between starts became mentally excruciating.

He began obsessively engaging The Toxic Three zone blockers that guarantee poor performance. Variations and combinations of “What- if it happens again?” “What-if I get sent down to Triple-A?” “Why am I playing like this?” “I don’t belong in the big leagues, I’ll never make it, I’m a loser,” played over and over in his conscious, overthinking mind. Unbelievably, he explained that he would actually calculate his earned run average (ERA) rising during the 5th inning. He would do this after surrendering runs, prior to the next batter stepping up to the plate.

Now, I already understood that anyone who makes it to “the show,” the big leagues, is a world class athlete. Any major league baseball player is better than 99.9999% of the players in the world. So when he said to me at the outset of our session, “I don’t know what you think you can do, I already know I’ll never make it through the 5th inning,” I was prepared.

I continued, “I have a question for you, but I don’t want you to answer it until later in the session. Here goes: ‘What’s so special about the 5th inning?’ I promise we’ll come back to it.”

I proceeded to inquire about his Personal History of Success, his ability to support himself and his teammates when having a difficult time, and about his Future Memories of Success. I was highlighting The Big Three techniques that create Peak Performance.

Personal History of Success: Why-ning (asking, “Why did I play so poorly?”) is used as a positive trigger to magnify your Personal History of Success.

ZONEfulness

The Ultimate Guide for Student-Athletes

I was curious about the road that brought him to the highest level of professional baseball. “So let’s put the stress and pressure aside for just a moment and talk about pure baseball.” I continued with the following questions, “When did you first realize you loved the game? Who were your primary supporters? What are your most meaningful memories of your life in baseball, from little league, and high school, on to the minor leagues?”

Over the next five minutes I learned a great deal about his passion for the game. He told me of “playing from the time I could barely walk with my brothers and dad; the smell of the glove oil I would use to break in a new mitt; the ping of the aluminum bat when I hit home runs; the sound of my mom’s voice cheering me on; the awesome feeling of getting drafted; the party we had when I signed my first contract,” and on and on he went.

I could feel his energy heightening as he reconnected with and detailed his Personal History of Success in baseball. So I said, “Can you tell me about a time, from little league to the present, excluding your past five major league starts, that you did NOT make it through the 5th inning?” I fully anticipated that he would remember a few times when he was off his game and was taken out prior to the 5th inning. He looked up for a minute and reviewed his career as a pitcher and realized that he could not, amazingly, remember a single time he was removed from a game, on any level, before this season. “So what’s so special about the 5th inning? Don’t answer that yet.”

Extreme Self-Support: Self-criticizing is used as a positive trigger to become Extremely Self-Supportive.

I then wondered aloud if he had a close friend on the team. After learning that he is extremely close with a fellow pitcher, I asked him how he would support his buddy if the roles were reversed, if he were pitching very well and his friend was convinced that he would never again see the start of the sixth inning. He emphatically responded that he would tell his friend, “You belong here! You destroy hitters! You are the man! I wish I had the nasty stuff you have! I believe in you!”

I commented, “Imagine if you took 20% of the genuine, heartfelt support you have for your friend and applied it to yourself. And, by the way, would you ever advise another pitcher in a slump to beat himself down, to focus on future failure, and, in what universe would you recommend that he calculate his ERA going up while he was still in the game pitching?” I detected a slight smile and a nod of the head.

Future Memories of Success: What-ifying (What if I fail?) is used as a positive trigger to begin What-willing (What-will it be like when I succeed?).

I then posed a series of pointed questions, “What-will it be like when every pitch is the first pitch and every inning the first inning? Isn’t every pitch an opportunity to be extremely confident and intense? And, please help me understand what’s so special about the 5th inning? I noticed his smile became a bit wider and his head continued nodding in agreement.

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He sat upright in his chair and said, “You know, you’re right, what’s the big deal about the 5th inning? It’s just another inning.” We then discussed the philosophy of allowing every pitch to simply be the next pitch, the first pitch. I went on, “Every pitch can be a positive trigger to trust your ability, to really zone in, to be fiercely focused . . . and, by the way, my personal favorite technique is to imagine Future Memories of Success. And you can do that on the mound, seeing and experiencing success right before throwing the pitch, believing that in just a split second you will be achieving your goal. And then you do it again, and again, and again.”

Peak Performance Zone: This guided zone exercise allows The Big Three (Personal History of Success, Extreme Self-Support, Future Memories of Success) to become your go-to tools that enable intense focus and maximum achievement. Zone exercises in the office and at home serve to dismantle the symptoms that prevent you from accessing and maintaining your real-time performance zone in your sport.

As he sat comfortably in his chair I continued, “Close your eyes and take five very slow, very deep breaths. A nice way to really absorb yourself is to stare at the inside of your eyes, experiencing the unique light, the colors . . . and I know that your conscious mind may have certain doubts about this process, this exercise, but I also know from my experience that your subconscious mind is already creating and generating sensations of comfort and confidence, visions of your best self really competing, succeeding, and believing in your talents and abilities.

So, why not forget all about trying, and transport yourself back in time, like a bodiless mind, enjoying the process of reviewing your own personal history of playing ball . . . experiencing the sights and sounds of dominating on the mound, the sensations of lightness . . . the smell of the freshly cut grass, the powerfully calm confidence that flowed through you and remains within you.”

I continued guiding him back through his Personal History of Success for five minutes, helping him to reconnect with memories of not only playing great but of loving to play.

The final ten minutes of the guided zone magnified the tools of Extreme Self-Support and Future Memories of Success.

The outcome: The rookie pitcher went on to pitch four complete games throughout the remainder of the season. He routinely pitched beyond the 5th inning. The start after his Zonefulness session he pitched seven innings, gave up two runs, and earned his first major league victory. He was quoted after the game saying, “It’s really about my mental focus. I just tried to take one pitch at a time and do my very best.”

Positive Psychology

I'm extremely interested in what's right with people. I enjoy learning about their past and present achievements while discussing future possibilities and potentials.

Traditional psychological therapy is enamored with figuring out the "why" and labeling people with a diagnosis. It is heavily laden with analysis, testing, and much too frequently reliant on medication. It often is a cumbersome, boring experience that encourages people to believe that they are flawed and in need of long-term therapy.

Positive psychology (specifically solution-oriented and strategic therapy) focuses on the unique strengths of each individual. Zonefulness is a strength-based, future-focused model that empowers student-athletes to access the answers and abilities that they already possess. The peak performance zone that exists inside of each person is loaded with solutions and creative strategies.

Magnifying the past, present, and future good is the foundation of positive psychology. Solution-oriented questions and strategic task assignments will be highlighted in the Zonefulness techniques to follow.

Solution-Oriented Questions: Personal History of Success

I've asked the following questions of student-athletes over the years to assist them in reconnecting with their Personal History of Success.

- "Tell me about a time you played soccer with extreme confidence?"
- "What would you consider to be the best round of golf you ever played?"
- "When did you realize you loved swimming?"
- "When did you know that the backstroke would be your best event?"
- "How would your favorite coach describe your strengths as a hockey player?"
- "What individual honors have you achieved as a sprinter? What team honors?"
- "How do you feel about yourself after a huge workout in the weight room in preparation for football camp?"
- "What do you enjoy doing after a Friday night hoop victory?"
- "Tell me about your pre-race ritual and how you focus your attention to compete?"

Positive Psychology

Self-support is the foundation of positive psychology. It is the cornerstone of happiness and emotional well-being. Whether excelling in your sport or winning the game of life, it all begins and ends with self-compassion.

It's been shown that consistently self-critical people have decreased energy, increased mood swings, and great difficulty enjoying life. Self-criticism is, unquestionably, the most damaging of The Toxic Three of Poor Performance.

Solution-Oriented Questions: Extreme Self-Support

I have asked the following questions of student-athletes to assist them in understanding the extraordinary value of self-support.

- “Who in your family has been extremely supportive of you from when you first began playing soccer?”
- “What coaches have been emotionally supportive and influential in your softball career?”
- “What specific memory do you have of a teammate being there for you and supporting you after a poor performance on the court?”
- “How do you treat a teammate after she makes an error? Tell me about a specific example?”
- “How does it feel when teammates, coaches, and fans cheer you on?”
- “Can you remember a time or times when you were Extremely Self-Supportive after missing multiple foul shots?”
- “Tell me how you can so easily beat yourself up but so readily support teammates when they have an off game? Interesting, isn't it?”

Solution-Oriented Questions: Future Memories of Success

The questions I ask student-athletes are designed to provide an orientation to the positive future that exists. The following are examples:

- Imagine the lacrosse season is over and you had your best year yet. Look back through the season and review all that you did in practice and in games to play at such a high level. Tell me about how you prepared in practice and competed in the games. What did you achieve individually? What did the team accomplish?
- How will it feel when you achieve your goal of shooting 90% from the foul line this year?
- What will you do differently to set the defensive tone as the starting middle linebacker this season?
- As soccer camp nears what will be new and improved about your mental focus as the returning goalkeeper?
- How will it feel when you approach every swim meet as if it were your last? How will your focus change? How much more energy will you have?

Zonefulness: A Case Study The Miracle Question

The miracle question is perhaps the most effective and interesting of the solution-oriented questions that I am able to pose to student-athletes.

I asked the miracle question to a talented high school track athlete. Jamie ran cross country in the fall as well as the mile and the 2 mile in the spring. He came to me at the start of his junior year because of the extraordinary discrepancy in performance times he was experiencing when training as compared with his times competing in races.

“If I ran even close to the time I run in races as I do in training I would be one of the best runners in the state,” Jamie explained. “I’m really relaxed and fast in practice but I tighten up on the course. I think to myself, ‘what-if it happens again’ . . . I can really feel it in my chest. That’s when I know I’m done. I know it’s the worrying that gets me. It’s going to kill me every race.”

ZONEfulness

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I soon learned that Jamie had been what-ifying around the clock. He had developed an obsessive pattern of worrying that he would run poorly. The what-ifying catapulted him into major self-criticism and a fear that he would never prove to himself, his teammates, or the world for that matter, what he was actually capable of achieving in the 5 kilometers of the cross country competition.

I then learned that Jamie had run confidently and successfully in the 1 and 2 mile races during the spring of his sophomore year. He explained, “Yeah, that was different. I knew I could do that. I had a lot of confidence.” He was unintentionally showing me the talent and potential he possessed. It was time to help channel that same confidence into cross country.

The session proceeded with my inquiring about certain things, namely, “What’s so special about a 5k compared to a 2-miler? What-will it be like when you run faster in competition than during training runs?” Of course, I also told some stories and discussed the subconscious mind, Zonefulness, and The Big Three and The Toxic Three of Peak Performance.

It then occurred to me that Jamie had the capacity to burst out of his obsessive pattern of what-ifying by answering and, more importantly, experiencing the miracle question.

I began, “Jamie, I have an idea. Let’s take some time to do one my favorite peak performance exercises. It’s called ‘the miracle question.’ I’m going to go through it—it’s a long question—and then you can give me your answer. So here we go:

We both know that when the session is over you are going to leave the office, get in your dad’s car, drive home, at some point eat dinner, finish the homework you mentioned earlier, do the 1 minute power zone we talked about, get ready for bed, go to bed, and finally fall asleep.”

Jamie nodded affirmatively while I was describing what he would be doing after the session.

“Now is the part of the question where it’s necessary to put your immediate reality to the side. What I mean is to put the worry, the what-ifs, and the fear away so you can really focus on the question. You can always come back to the symptoms later.”

Jamie sensed, correctly, that I was just making light of the symptoms and proceeded to settle in for the remainder of the question.

“This is the best part. While you are sleeping tonight a miracle will occur. The miracle has to do with the reasons you came here today. More specifically, the miracle is about the symptoms of anxiety that have been holding you back from running at your best.

So when you wake up tomorrow the miracle will have occurred. The question is: How will you know as you go through the day tomorrow that the miracle has actually taken place? How will you be feeling differently? How will you be thinking differently? What will you be doing differently?”

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Jamie looked at me quizzically as I continued, “Just have a little fun with this. Imagine that when you wake up you feel energized and motivated. So take it from there. How will you be feeling throughout the day; later in the afternoon at practice; tomorrow night? What will you be doing differently to feel so good? How will your thinking have changed?”

Imagine how these changes are in place at next Saturday’s race. So what will you be doing differently? How will you be feeling differently?”

Jamie began, “Well if a miracle . . .”

I immediately interrupted, “No, when the miracle . . .”

Jamie responded, “Ok, when the miracle happens I won’t be so stressed.”

Again I intervened, “Let’s flip the ‘I won’t be stressed’ to ‘I will be relaxed.’ Let’s stick with ‘I will’ throughout your answer.”

Jamie continued, “Sounds good. I will be energized when I wake up. I will be relaxed and calm.”

“Good. So what will you be doing differently?”

“I’ll be confident, I guess.”

I enthusiastically bounced out of my chair and announced, “There is no guessing in the miracle. There’s no maybe. There’s no probably. This is a miracle!”

Jamie laughed and went on, “Got it. I’ll be psyched. I’ll be pumped for the race on Saturday. I will, like you said, support myself the same way I do my teammates and friends. I will (now laughing) win the race. I will win the state championship!”

“So how will you feel differently?”

“I will be confident. I will be happy because I love to run and I know how well I can run.”

I asked, “How will you be thinking differently?”

“I’ll be positive. I mean I will be really positive. I will think, wait a minute, I know, I won’t think on the trail. I’ll just go for it!”

“Wow! What an awesome answer, Jamie. Now THAT’s what I’m talking about. How about we finish up with a zone exercise.”

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The zone exercise consisted of Jamie closing his eyes, breathing deeply, and listening as I reviewed the miracle answer he gave. He fully absorbed himself in the future memories of positive thinking; Extreme Self-Support; and ultimately into the sights, sounds, and feelings of running at his very best.

His homework was to imagine the next day as the miracle day every night before falling asleep. He was then to enjoy living the miracle day every day.

Before leaving the session, Jamie asked, “Why is it called a miracle when I know I can do it?”

“Because it’s only a miracle to your symptoms, the zone blockers we discussed. Your best self knows what you can do. And you’re right, it’s not a miracle, it’s who you really are.”

Jamie didn’t win the state championship, but his team did. Jamie did, however, run extraordinarily well in the final three races of the season and in the state playoffs. He routinely eclipsed his training times in the respective meets while reconnecting with his passion for the sport and event he loves.

Strategic Assignments: Future Memories of Success

I give homework assignments to student-athletes to show them the possibilities that exist. The following are examples:

- Do a one minute power zone three times a day where you experience yourself on the foul line. Mentally rehearse your pre-shot routine. Create a tunnel vision on the front of the rim. See, feel and hear the free throw swishing through the net.
- While stretching before the next swim meet imagine yourself surpassing your best time in the 100-meter butterfly.
- I know your favorite player is Mike Trout of the Angels. Later tonight, go to YouTube and watch highlights of Mike’s best plays in the field. Then study the video of his focus at the plate as he launches line drives and home runs all over the park. Afterwards, close your eyes and imagine your own future highlight film for this upcoming season.
- Pretend field hockey season is over and you performed at an extraordinarily high level throughout the season. Before bed tonight close your eyes and take five deep breaths. Then really enjoy reviewing all that you achieved from the first game of the season through the conference championship. Magnify the sights, sounds, and feelings of your incredible season.
- Ask yourself, every day, “What-will it be like when I’m the starting midfielder this season. I know you know the answer is, ‘It will be awesome!’” Ask yourself this question all the time until you are named the starter.

Just Like Carli Lloyd

July 5, 2015

The United States women's national soccer team defeated Japan 5-2 to win the World Cup, a triumphant performance that was seen by 25.4 million viewers on American television. The size of the audience is a record for any men's or women's soccer game watched in this country.

This extraordinary number of American soccer fans gratefully joined the massive amount of international soccer loyalists to witness one United States player experience her most vivid of dreams materialize on the world's biggest stage.

Just about two months before the championship game, during an intense training session, Carli Lloyd imagined herself having what can only be described as an unimaginable performance in the World Cup finale.

"It's kind of funny, I'm running and I'm doing sprints and it's hard, it's burning, and I completely zoned out. I dreamed of and visualized playing in the World Cup final and visualized scoring four goals.

It sounds pretty funny, but that's what it's all about. I think at the end of the day you can be physically strong, you can have all the tools out there, but if your mental state isn't good enough, you can't bring yourself to bigger and better things. And for me, I've just constantly been visualizing, constantly been growing confidence with each and every game. I was on a mission."

Believe it or not, Carli scored three goals in the first 16 minutes of the contest as the American women never looked back on their way to a dominant World Cup victory.

Incredibly, Carli barely missed scoring another goal during her epic opening to the game. Her header, from point blank range, was directed just wide by a couple of feet. Her dream, with clear visions of scoring four goals, came ever so, so close to happening.

Carli Lloyd practices her zone. She takes great pride in mental strength training and has demonstrated her capacity to elicit her peak performance zone anywhere and at any time.

She meditates routinely, takes a ten minute run prior to each match to daydream and visualize playing at her best, possesses great pride in her work ethic, and feels an intense sense of gratitude for her opportunity to play the game she loves.

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Carli was awarded the Golden Ball trophy as the Most Valuable Player of the 2015 Women's World Cup. She described her zone beautifully when she said, "I feel like I blacked out in the first 30 minutes or so . . . it's just crazy and unbelievable!"