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# Day 11—The Art of the Pep Talk: Inspiration from Olympians

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*Challenge: Learn the art of the pep talk. When you direct it toward yourself, it's called "positive self-talk" and can help you stay motivated.*

It takes more than physical training for Olympians to reach their goals. The mental component of athletics is also important.

Many elite athletes have mastered the art of giving themselves pep talks through "positive self-talk." This type of pep talk involves telling yourself that you have the ability to achieve your goals. By using positive thinking in this way, Olympians stay focused on their goals even when the going gets tough.

**Talking Through Adversity**

Manteo Mitchell is well-versed in overcoming difficult situations. The elite runner made world news when he completed his portion of the Men's 4x400 relay at the London 2012 Summer Olympics on a broken leg—something you definitely shouldn't try at home!

There was a time when Mitchell seriously debated leaving his athletic career behind. As he was talking through his options with his coach, three words came to him, "Faith, focus, finish." He decided to keep going, and in 2012 had his best season to date—earning him a spot on the U.S. Olympic team and the Men's 4x400 relay team.

Mitchell remembers that race clearly. "Everything was great, and all of sudden, I get half way down the track and my leg snaps," he recalls. "I was faced with a decision of whether I keep running, or I just let four years of hard training go down the drain. I just recited those three words and had a lot of adrenaline in my body to get me to the finish line."

The runner's efforts helped the relay team win a silver medal that year.

"That would probably be the hardest and toughest spot that I had to use those three words," says Mitchell, who also uses visualization techniques as part of his training. "But it definitely was beneficial to me—both on and off the track."

**Positive Self-Talk for Motivation**

Another big believer in the inner pep talk is two-time Olympic cyclist Giddeon Massie who sums up his approach simply, "Positive self-talk is a way to reaffirm

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the reason you began down a path and where you intend to go."

For Massie, a personal pep-talk is key to setting goals and seeing them through. He notes, "Part of staying motivated is having a purpose in mind, setting attainable goals, getting into a routine, holding yourself accountable, and sometimes finding a friend or family member to join you."

Today, Giddeon puts his pep talk skills to good use volunteering with Ready, Set, Gold!, a nonprofit organization that promotes healthy living in public schools. Mark Crear, a two-time Olympic medalist, is also a volunteer—and he takes a slightly different approach to internal dialogue, preferring the term "review talks."

"I rehearse and review what I already know I can do and what I already have done," says Crear. "Self-motivation and getting fired up is a definite key [to success]."

Scaling major hurdles is second nature to Crear, who raced with a broken arm in 1996 to win his first Olympic medal—a silver in 110M high hurdles—and later took home a bronze in the Sydney 2000 Summer Games. He admits there were times during his training, in "blazing" 110-degree weather, when he didn't want to practice. Crear says he kept himself going by remembering his goals as an athlete.

"Once I reminded myself of why I was doing what I was doing," he says, "the motivation began to reenter."

**Positive Self-Talk Strategies**

The Mayo Clinic defines self-talk as "the endless stream of unspoken thoughts that run through your head every day." Have you ever paid attention to what you're saying to yourself with these thoughts? If not, it's time to start. Your goal is to notice when you're thinking pessimistically, and change your thoughts to more optimistic ones.

The American Heart Association (AHA) notes that positive-self talk may help you control stress and stay calm. If you would like to try it, consider beginning with these simple tips:

- Repeat ideas and mantras that are encouraging and hopeful, like, "I can do this!"
- Evaluate your negative thoughts. If you wouldn't say something to another person, then don't say it to yourself in your thoughts.
- Do your best to counter negative thoughts with positive ones. For example, the AHA suggests that if you have a thought like, "I hate it when this happens," you counter with a positive thought, such as, "I know how to deal with this; I've done it before."

**Gold Medal Message: Encourage Others Too**

Pep talks are a great way to keep yourself feeling positive and motivated about your health and fitness goals. Now that you're feeling good, why not share the effectiveness of the technique with someone else? If a friend or family member is struggling to reach a health goal, give them a pep talk. A little positive thinking can go a long way.

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