

Visualising

In skydiving, as with other sports, we often talk about the importance of visualising and how we should build it into our preparation before a skydive. We are told we should be visualising our body positions, the jump we are about to do, how the skydive is going to go, etc, etc.

But do we really understand why we are doing this? Do we understand what the real benefits are to improve our game plan? If we don't truly understand the power of visualisation are we really maximising our time doing it? Or, are we just paying lip service to it because our peers do it and it seems to work for them?

It certainly worked for Julia Foxwell, who shot to the dizzy heights of World Champion with *Team Airkix* in 2006. Here, Foxy gives an in-depth guide to using the power of the mind to gain a competitive advantage.

What is Visualisation?

Visualising is an ideal method to increase success, as your subconscious mind doesn't differentiate between what you see with your mind's eye and your physical eye, if your visualisation is done in the correct way. Imagery is a way of creating a new reality. In other words, as far as your brain is concerned, you have actually physically practised.

Visualising in the correct way means it's absolutely essential to put emotion into your visualisation. If you don't mix real emotion into your visualising then your subconscious mind **can** distinguish between the two, so you will then dramatically limit the benefits of this amazing tool. In order to add emotion into your visualising you have to fully describe **out loud** everything you feel, smell, see, hear and touch. If you do not do this, you will find it difficult to trigger your emotions and really feel that you are in the place you are describing. This is an important part and I will touch more on this later.

The beauty of visualising is that it can be done at any time of day, and as often as you like. You can continue to practise whether you're ill, injured, skint or bored at work and you are therefore continuing to improve on your skydiving.

Visualisation is so powerful that it has been proven with many athletes in sports around the world that if the athlete has had a layoff through injury, and has spent time visualising, their skills have actually improved!

The Power of Learning

When a coach teaches you something new, such as a way to improve your body position or a different block technique or a change in your exits, do you nod and do what you have just been told? Or, do you truly take the time digesting the information to ensure it remains with you? In other words, if someone wanted you to repeat back, in your own words, what you had been told, would you just shrug your shoulders and say, "Well, I can do it, I just can't explain it". Or would you actually be able to describe it using your own words and understanding?

By describing what you have just been told, you 'find out' what you have digested about the new information.

It therefore allows you see what needs further clarification. This in turn, will ensure your visualisation is most effective as you will be confident that you have the knowledge to visualise with conviction.

Become a Veteran Early

We all know that when we practise something enough, often enough, we will improve. The problem we have in skydiving is that the length of time we can practise our moves is extremely short. It can take years to become good at skydiving, particularly if you are short on funds, or time.

As the subconscious mind does not know the difference between what we are physically and mentally doing, when you have repeatedly visualised something, it actually feels like you have done it many times before. For example, if you properly and repeatedly visualise round 1 of the Nationals, when you are actually in the moment it won't feel as alien to you. This is because your mind and your body have practised that moment so many times, it feels like you have already been there.

When you visualise, its essential you become emotionally involved otherwise your subconscious will be able to distinguish between reality and fiction. To become emotionally involved you have to use all your senses to ensure that it feels as close to the actual experience as possible. Hear the engines cut as your team is getting into position, really feel yourself taking the grip as you walk towards the door, smell the jet fuel in the slipstream as you climb out onto the rail, look into your teammates' eyes and see them smiling back at you, sense your breath within your helmet, take those final deep breaths to slow down your