

Many factors contribute to a cyclist's performance. There are the physical, technical and strategic demands of sport, as well as the need to control their emotions, keep up their self-confidence and consistently apply themselves in both training and competition. While cyclists work hard on their physical conditioning, many are unaware that much of their performance is 'in the mind' and that they also need to work on sharpening their mental skills. ▶

Mental training for

CYCLING SUCCESS

Developing mental skills is increasingly recognised as an essential part of a cyclist's training and here, hypnotherapy has proven to be a highly effective way to help athletes improve mental focus, tune out all distractions and visualise the outcome they desire.





Lisa Raleigh spoke to Andrea Kellerman, a sport and educational psychologist who specialises in the practice of hypnotherapy, to find out more about this powerful yet safe mental fitness tool.

Q: If hypnotherapy is aimed at changing bad behavioural patterns, can it then be said that hypnotherapy is about helping you make different or better decisions?

Yes, hypnotherapy helps us to identify those behavioural patterns that are beneficial or detrimental. It also helps us to make better decisions because we are made more aware of our subconscious thoughts and behaviours. Hypnotherapy also helps to cancel out negative thoughts, fears, pain and uncertainties, which is very important if you want to achieve greater results.

Q: How can hypnotherapy help cyclists improve their performance?

I first help cyclists to identify their goals and understand why they are not achieving them. Often, the athletes are physically in top form, but mentally they are lacking confidence, self-esteem or they have fears and negative thoughts of what could go wrong. In the hypnotherapy session I allow them to 'let go' of the negative thought patterns and beliefs and create a new way of seeing themselves and how they can achieve their goals. The brain doesn't know the difference between fiction and reality, so as soon as the brain has visualised the positive outcome in hypnosis, it can access this state again in reality.

Q: From my personal experience of cycling, I know that a simple mental affirmation can help you push yourself further. Does the mind have that kind of control over the body?

Absolutely, affirmations are great and distract athletes from negative feelings and thoughts. We usually start with a thought, which is then followed by feelings and actions. If you think negatively, you will have less energy to perform well. Negative thoughts are destructive. In hypnotherapy I add a lot of positive affirmations into my sessions and help my clients to build positive thought patterns.

Q: Can hypnotherapy help cyclists block out fatigue and push themselves way beyond their physical limits?

Yes, I have had many cyclists and other athletes who were able to control their pain, heart rate and breathing, which helped them to work harder and achieve better results than ever before.

Q: With the cyclists you've dealt with, what has been the most common barrier you've had to help them overcome?

Well, everyone is different, but many cyclists battle with self-belief, fear and anxiety, which are often related to a specific event, belief or thought in their mind. They often do not know how to mentally overcome these and achieve their goals.

Q: How often is the negative subconscious prompting in an athlete directly related to fear?

Often, fear is the biggest cause of why we don't achieve our goals. If we can acknowledge what we are fearful of and find a way to eliminate that fear, then we can achieve the goals we've set for ourselves. The problem is that many athletes do not know what they are fearful of or they may not want to admit it to themselves or others. This is why they do not do anything about it and do not achieve their goals or perform better. ▶





Q: **Would you handle a rider doing a grand tour like the Tour de France differently to someone who is riding a single-day race like the Argus?**

Yes, definitely. The Argus is a short race and not as closely challenged as the Tour de France (or many other tours overseas). Racing in the Tour de France means that the cyclists must be mentally fit and push their mind and body to the limits every day for an extended period of time. The mental training would be quite different and more intense.

Q: **How much different is it dealing with athletes compared to dealing with someone who wants to stop smoking or lose weight?**

Athletes are much more focused and driven. It is great to work with them because they catch on quite quickly, have set goals and are extremely keen to achieve their goals.

Q: **Do you deal with specific issues or do you try to find the biggest issue causing a problem subconsciously?**

I generally try to find specific issues and eliminate them so I can work on the bigger picture. After the first session, my clients recognise their subconscious thoughts and behaviors as they come to the fore, to the conscious mind. In the second session we eliminate all those hidden 'issues' that have come up and strengthen what we have worked on before. My clients implement what they have learned every week and the following sessions are focused on fine tuning what they want to achieve. Generally, we find that once they have mastered the subconscious visualisations of their ideal performance, they are able to achieve the desired outcome in training and race situations too.

Q: **Is it harder to hypnotise someone who is pessimistic about it or who doesn't want to be hypnotised?**

Yes. I cannot and would not make people do what they do not want to do. If a person is pessimistic, doesn't want to be hypnotised or doesn't believe in the process, I can't do much for them because they can choose what they want to allow into their mind and what not. Following the ethical code of conduct is very important to me. Unfortunately, there are many stage shows and TV programmes that are not ethical and cast hypnotherapy in a bad light, causing the uninformed to be misinformed!

If you are looking to bridge the gap between your head and heart, make your goals more emotionally compelling and increase your chances of rising to new heights in your performance, why not give hypnotherapy a try? •



If you are looking for a personal trainer for your mind, contact Andrea Kellerman (B.A., H.E.D., Psych Hon, Med. Psych, NF Practitioner, Adv. Dip. Hyp.) by email andrea@eq-advantedge.co.za or visit www.eq-advantedge.co.za