

When I got my first race car, an old Garlits front engine Top Fuel car, I was about 16 years old. I'd been around racing since I was 9 years old, working as a photographer with my Dad at local drag strips and helping out with any race car team that would trust me with a wrench. So when I got old enough to get a license my parents, with prodding from some local racers, decided to purchase this dusty old car from a retired Top Fuel pilot and see if I could handle it. By the way, putting your 16 year old in a front engined Top Fuel car is not recommended, but we didn't know this.

So, we got the car, rented a garage at the back of an old house down the street from our home (rent \$25 month) and moved in.

The chassis was a roller and everything else was in boxes, old milk crates and plastic buckets. We had a lot of work to do.

Fortunately, the garage we rented was about half way between H.B. Beal High School, my school, and my parents house. So, each day after school I'd detour into the garage

for a couple hours before I'd go home for dinner and homework.

What I'd often do while at the garage turned out to be extremely helpful, actually quite complex, and ahead of its time.

I would get suited up in my driving gear from helmet to boots, strap myself in the car and make runs in my mind. I would pretend I was driving. I'd go through the start up procedure, drive to the burnout area, follow imaginary hand signals from a non-existent crew member, do the burnout, back up, stage and leave. I'd even make engine sounds. I would practice smoking the tires, the car moving left or right, engine failures, blow ups, fires, and oil in my face. I tried to imagine and prepare for every possible scenario and handle the situation perfectly. I was visualizing.

Although I thought I was just playing, I was actually engaging in a practice referred to in psychological circles as mental visualization, mental practice, mental imagery or mental rehearsal, different names for similar topics. This

mental visualization is an extremely popular and common part of sports psychology today and is practiced in some form at every level from high school sports to the Olympics and on into professional sports. There are psychologists that major in this type of therapy and Pros then earn millions of dollars a year that use it on a regular basis. It most definitely can improve your performance.

A few tips for mental visualization. First you must be very good at pretending. You must be able to sit in your car at the shop or even in a chair at your home and visualize every aspect of your perfect run. Mentally review everything from the feel of the seatbelts, your suit, the click when you lower and lock your visor, the heat, the sounds, the smells and the vibrations. See outside the car, the people, the track, the tree and the finish line.

Remember, your mind doesn't care whether you are actually driving or you pretend you're driving.

Next, have a procedure that you learn. Each step you take, every motion you make should be written down first

and rehearsed. Do everything in order and sequence until you no longer have to think about the steps. You simply do them without conscious thought.

Ok, make sure that everything you rehearse is a positive instruction. Don't practice "Don'ts." It would take more space than I have available here to explain why this is true but telling yourself what "not to do" will not prevent you from doing it at an unconscious level. So every move and motion you make needs to be how you would like to be, do not rehearse with negative instructions. Visualize your desired results. Everyone goes through these four basic steps when learning new skills.

- 1) Unconscious incompetent – You can't do it and you are unaware of your mistakes.
- 2) Conscious incompetent – you still can't do it but you are aware of your errors.
- 3) Conscious competent – you can now do it but you are still thinking about it.

4) Unconscious competent – you can now do it without thinking about it at all.

Everyone has to get to Step 4 to achieve good consistent performance. At our racing school we elaborate on these concepts and help individuals get to Step 4 as quickly as possible. If you'd like to learn the fast way and the right way, give us a call. We'd love to help.