



TRIGGERS

Introduction to TRIGGERS

Long before sports psychologists gave it a name, athletes were regularly in situations where they caught themselves thinking or doing something that was not 'part of the plan', and would quickly create a new routine – a thought or action - to get 'back on track' with their intended performance. These routines can either be constructive or positive (you can read more about patterns of self-talk and body language here):

- **Constructive routines** are similar to when a coach tells you something to adjust, for example, "watch the ball all the way onto the bat and keep your eyes fixed on that contact point for a split second"
- **Positive routines** are words or actions of encouragement, for example, "let's go, you've got this"
- **These routines should always be Present** – meaning that they are in the present, not in the past or future, "higher over the net"
- **These routines should be Controllable** – meaning the fix you adopt is always something within your control, "chase everything"

The list of negative routines is almost endless, unfortunately. They range from, "you suck" spoken to yourself after a mistake. Or, "I can't do anything today" as a thought that makes you feel helpless. Or, "hit the (beep) ball", as though that is somehow helpful. Or, "oh no, if I miss this return, it's over", taking your thoughts into a future possible outcome that does not keep you in the present.

"You can't control the outcome of the match BUT you can control your preparation & commitments to how you will act and think during competition."

With practice, you can learn to catch yourself at the beginning of a negative routine and replace it with a pre-rehearsed constructive or positive routine. For example, a track athlete in the starting blocks catches themselves worrying about going before the starting gun. Knowing that it is not a constructive or helpful thought, says to themselves something like, "MY routine – gun then push right knee high perfectly". In other words, they use it as an opportunity to rehearse and practice correct action, instead of thinking something negative that is almost like practicing to fail.

Definition of TRIGGERS

TRIGGERS are deliberate and pre-rehearsed reactions used by athletes to immediately begin a corrective routine – some positive or constructive form of body language or self-talk – in order to use a potentially negative course of action as a moment to reinforce a positive action.

How do I successfully develop Triggers?

You may be able to develop these yourself but, should you prefer, there are tools such as the Athlete Performance & Mental Skills Profile to help tease out your routines and triggers. You can also try and work with a coach, or with Dr. Petersen as a specialized Performance Psychologist and teaching pro, to support the process.

1. Triggers require you to first become aware of the various thoughts and actions that you use in sports that are NOT constructive or positive.
2. You probably already know some of your negative habits, BUT you should also keep a journal nearby during practice and after games to write down specific scenarios where your routines of body action or self-talk are negative.
3. You can then work to create a profile of different situations where you're aware that you can be negative sometimes and, with some thoughtful effort, work to create a profile of TRIGGERS – responses you can rehearse that you will use with your actions or self-talk to create a beneficial moment to support your performance.
4. Then, in the period before matchplay, when pressure is somewhat reduced, you can read and rehearse these scenarios and triggers by reviewing your journal and by visualizing moments in the upcoming match.

Visualization: Active Rehearsal Ingredients

- Rehearse new concepts in the present while being flawless
- Pair visualizing with positive reinforcement self-talk as needed
- See yourself successfully using self-coaching during a game
- Take “walking recaps” to relax, think, & reinforce
- Use focused breathing as a form of meditation to quiet your mind and stay present

How do I measure my progress with using Triggers?

It is critical that you allow a period of time to first learn, then put into use, these new tools like Triggers. Here is an overview of planning for success:

1. It can take several weeks to figure out your scenarios where triggers would be helpful, using journaling and memory to develop.
2. It then takes some time to active rehearse triggers using visualization.
3. Practicing triggers in low-pressure situations means you can focus more on the trigger scenarios and process of implementation, without worrying about failing or losing.
 - Use your journal to document the triggers that come more naturally and those that feel awkward or difficult to implement. This helps you tweak your process without a high pressure situation.
4. Then, finally, you can test your triggers in a match, with pressure, to learn how they stand up under pressure.
 - Use your journal to document the triggers and how well they worked in specific situations.
5. Build your profile of triggers that are suited to a variety of pressure situations.

GOOD LUCK !

If you need assistance with developing or testing your triggers, please email me at:
info@petersenfuturesolutions.com