



Visualization

Visualization

I realize that “visualization” is a word that hockey players are quick to resist. They associate it with hypnosis and affirmations, but consider this.....

- **Jack Nicklaus**, considered by many to be the best golfer of all-time, winner of 18 Master Championships, visualized every shot before taking it. In his book *Golf My Way*, Nicklaus writes about the imagery he uses before hitting every shot. “It’s like a color movie. First I ‘see’ the ball where I want it to finish, nice and white and sitting up high on the bright-green grass. Then the scene quickly changes and I ‘see’ the ball going there; it’s path, trajectory, and shape, even its behavior on landing. Then there is sort of a fadeout, and the next scene shows me making the kind of swing that will turn the previous image into a reality....”⁶
- **Arnold Schwarzenegger**, five time Mr. Universe, four-time Mr. Olympia has used visualization not only for athletic success but also credits it for his success as a movie star: “When I was very young, I visualized myself being and having what it was I wanted. Mentally I never had any doubts about it. The mind is really so incredible. Before I won my first Mr. Universe title, I walked around the tournament like I owned it. The title was already mine. I had won it so many times in my mind that there was no doubt I would win it.”(Watch the movie *Pumping Iron*. During college this was my roommates favorite movie. In the movie Arnold tells Lou Ferrigno’s parents, his main competitor and the man you know as the original Hulk, that he already called his mom and told her he won 5 days

⁶ *Golf My Way*, Jack Nicklaus and Ken Bowden, Simon & Schuster, 1998

before the tournament even began. The guy is so cocky it's comical.)

- **Nolan Ryan**, all-time leader in strikeouts and no hitters pitched, says “The night before a game I lie down, close my eyes, relax my body, and prepare myself for the game. I go through the entire lineup of the other team, one batter at a time. I visualize exactly how I am going to pitch to each hitter and I see and feel myself throwing exactly the pitches that I want to throw. Before I ever begin to warm up at the ballpark, I’ve faced all of the opposition’s hitters four times and I’ve gotten my body ready for exactly what it is I want to do.”
- **Alex Rodriguez**, future Hall of Famer on the baseball diamond talks about visualization in the introduction to the book *Mind Gym*. “I can’t tell you where I would be now if I hadn’t seen myself wearing a big-league uniform long before it happened. Early in the 1996 season, I visualized winning the American League MVP award and holding it above my head. I visioned winning the batting title and holding up that trophy, too. I visioned a .380 batting average. In my mind I could see the number, flashing and blinking on exit signs.....380...380...380.”⁷
- **Pele**, regarded as the greatest soccer player ever, would find a quiet place where no one would bother him to go through his visualization routine. An hour before every game he would lay on his back with a rolled up towel under his head and one placed over his eyes. He would then go through a mental movie of his soccer life. The mental movie started with him playing on the beaches of Brazil as a kid. It ended with him reliving the crowning moments of his career at the World Cup. He would bring

⁷ *Mind Gym*, Gary Mach and David Casstevens, McGraw- Hill, 2001

the fun of playing as a kid and that winning feeling during his World Cup games to mind so he could use these feelings to fuel his fire for the upcoming game.

The list could go on and on. The truth of the matter is that in examining NASA astronauts, Olympic level athletes, Fortune 500 CEO's, neurologists, Special Forces Soldiers, musicians, and any field of considerable challenge, all the best use this technique to improve their performance. In the sports world they're called leaders (think Mark Messier) and in the business world they are called visionaries (think Steve Jobs of APPLE). They see it. They feel it. They experience it before they actually do it. They begin with the end in mind.

**STILL DON'T BELIEVE ME. LET ME PROVE IT TO
YOU ON A PERSONAL LEVEL**

(Read over the next couple of paragraphs very slowly. Really feel the words described.)

Picture yourself relaxing around a table with good friends after a long day on the golf course or your favorite lake. Your good buddy just fired up the bbq and slapped 2 huge New York T-bones on the grill. He dumped all your favorite spices on it. With your favorite beverage in your hand, you sit back and take in the unbelievable smell smoking off the grill as the meat sears. He flips the steak once and all the juices from the top of the steak make the fire come up around it. Once again the smell hits you and stays with you for the next 7 minutes as you patiently wait for the come and get it call. Then he slaps the steak on your plate. The steak lands on your plate, steaming, with the juices pooling around it. You cut through it, stick the fork in it and put it in your mouth. Imagine chewing that first piece very slowly.

Anyone who is even half a fan of food as me will be salivating and even chewing that imaginary piece of steak. Or if that didn't phase you---you're not a man, but that's another

story---another vivid example that we've all experienced is the startling wake up from a nightmare with your heart beating a million mph. Both of these above examples have no basis in reality, yet they elicit physical responses in your body. These are physical responses to something occurring solely in your mind.

How many times has every pro hockey player lifted the cup over his head before getting the chance to do so in real life? 5,10, 100, or most likely everyday since they were 5.

I'm going to organize this chapter by first giving a little background on visualization. This includes what you're trying to achieve as you practice it. There are fascinating, proven benefits from visualization. They concern both mental preparedness and also internal physical changes shown to improve performance. Secondly, I will walk you through the process of making "mind movies"-a catchphrase that signifies a personal visualization you can immediately use tonight to improve your play. As funny as it may sound, "mind movies" will make you a better player without a doubt.

Background on Visualization

Morpheus: Have you ever had a dream, Neo, that you were so sure was real? What if you were unable to wake up from that dream? How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world?

Morpheus: If real is what you can feel, smell, taste and see, then 'real' is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain— From the mind bending movie “The Matrix” (1999), and yes I realize this is another Keanu Reeves movie.

“Winners say, Of course I can do it! I've practiced mentally a thousand times. Losers, say, How can you expect me to do it? I don't know how!”

--Dennis Waitley

“Ninety percent of the game is half mental”

--Yogi Berra

Visualization is known by many names including guided imagery, mental rehearsal, mind movies, zoning in, and many more. I prefer my surfer buddy from Australia, who refers to it as “chilling out and letting his mind rip.” The basic premise is the same for all of them- To see yourself positively completing or reliving a scene only in the mind. It's been proven to mentally raise a player's confidence, decrease anxiety and fear, and physically improve one's performance in the specific visualized area. Your brain literally cannot tell the difference between reality and a vivid mental thought/feeling. Visualization has been used since the beginning of recorded human history---yoga is over 4,000 years old--- and has been studied in a more in-depth manner since 1894 when Dr. Carpenter first studied the technique. I won't bore you with information from hundreds of positive studies in every walk of life. The bottom line as stated before is that if you take any group of overachievers you will see them consistently using visualization.

When and Where Visualization Has Been Used

A famous study clearly shows the benefits of visualization. The study was carried out at Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan by one L. Verdelle Clark. He took three groups of basketball players and tested their ability to make free throws. He instructed the first group to spend twenty minutes a day physically practicing free throws. He told the second group (the control group) not to practice and had the third group spend twenty minutes a day only visualizing that they were shooting perfect basket after perfect basket. As might be expected, the control group that did nothing showed no improvement. The first group physically shooting baskets improved 24 percent, but through the power of imagery alone, the third group improved an astonishing 23 percent (this number is open to question and many believe it to be as high as 38 percent.)⁸ This study has been tested in other sports such as downhill skiing, archery, and with the military for snipers. It's not a matter of testing to see if it works, because it undoubtedly does, but rather testing to see if there's any limit for mental and physical improvement using visualization.

The most common form of visualization is seeing yourself completing a specific task in the future. We're going to use it for hockey by visualizing scoring goals, making the big save, winning the last second face-off, etc. But before you stop and think that you can't, won't, and have never visualized, think about your daily habits. Everyday you wake up and see yourself driving to work, talking with your spouse, cooking/eating that night's meal, thinking about what movie you want to see, that cute member of the opposite sex that you keep trying to get the nerve to ask out, before they happen. How else would you accomplish anything if you didn't see yourself at least starting the task first? **The problem with nearly all people though is they imagine themselves in negative scenarios or at least limit**

⁸ Clark, L.V. Effect of mental practice on the development of a certain motor skill. *Research Quarterly*. 31: pp 560-69, 1960

themselves to average achievements. Limits begin where vision ends. Visualization can then be a painful, debilitating everyday process that holds you back without you every really realizing it. When these negative thoughts are focused on hockey it will severely hurt your game. You have to see yourself as a no-limit person. So therefore we want to use visualization techniques of pro players to improve your physical skills. But for someone with little to no experience in using positive visualization, how can you take a fluid game like hockey and pick out specific things to use? The following sidebar is a rule that can be applied not only to your hockey game but in all areas of your life.

80/20 rule

This is a common rule that applies to nearly everything in life. Founded by Vilfredo Pareto---a long dead famous economist and sociologist from Italy--- who noticed that 20% of his peapods he planted produced 80 percent of the peas. But not only did this apply to my man Vilfredo's peas, it also proved true in almost every area of life. This applies to a very long list of everyday activities and the ratio is often more like 90/10, 95/5, or even 99/1. What this means for hockey is that:

- 20% of a goalie's movements are responsible for stopping 80% of the shots.
- 20% of the defenseman's actions stop 80% of the opposing teams offensive rushes.
- 20% of a forward's actions account for 80% of his goals.
- 20% of a team's players score 80% of a team's goals.
- 20% of a teams' players takes 80% of a team's penalties.
- 20% of a team's players eat 80% of the post-game pizza and so on.

This means that you can analyze your game and break down the 20% of your on-ice actions that produce 80% of your desired results. NOW you have the 20% actions that make the biggest impact as a visualization starting point. What many don't realize—that successful people have recognized and figured out—is that you work hard to strengthen what you do best and simply keep a baseline of skills that you are inherently weak at.⁹ What I mean by this is that if you have great speed but you're not a big hitter, then visualize and work on beating D wide, backchecking with speed, crashing the net for a rebound, and so on. Don't visualize open ice hits even though you want to be the next Dion Phaneuf. This may be against what you've heard time and again in the past (I think Vince Lombardi might even be on the other side of this statement) but think about it. When you work on your strengths or what you do best, then you multiple your results. If you work on fixing weaknesses then you get incrementally better. (try to Youtube Gretzky fighting or hitting and you don't get many results. Youtube him scoring and it's pages long.)

First start by looking at your past 10 games. Pick out the positive moments that jump out at you. From big game-winning goals down to small plays every coach loves and can make a difference in the game's outcome. Forget about the negative thoughts and breakdowns in your game. We will deal with eliminating these later in the chapter. Some positive examples are:

Forwards---

1. battling in front of the net for a rebound goal
2. chipping the puck off the boards and taking a big hit to get the puck out of the zone
3. driving the puck wide with speed and cutting to the net
4. a successful backcheck
5. great defensive positioning
6. great decisions 5 feet inside and outside the blueline

⁹ The 4- Hour Workweek, Timothy Ferriss, Crown Publishers

7. finding a open spot in the offensive zone for a goal or tip.

Use these above examples as a reference point. Add some of your own and make them crystal clear, so you can really feel it as we will see later on in the chapter when we practice visualizing.

Defenseman---

1. a blocked shot
2. a tape-to-tape breakout pass
3. rushing the puck up the ice
4. clearing the front of the net
5. controlling the puck on the powerplay
6. one-timing a puck from the blueline
7. getting the puck to the net through bodies
8. rushing back to get the puck for a breakout.

Again use these as a reference point and add your own.

Goalies---

1. rebound control
2. glove save
3. blocker save
4. hugging the post on a wraparound
5. staying focused late in the game
6. looking around screens to make the save
7. moving post to post
8. having great angles
9. playing the puck around the net.

Create a clear mental picture of 10 positive plays of at least 10 seconds in length. Then jot these down on a piece of paper. (Take the time to do this. If you just read through this chapter then your game won't benefit. Don't be a lazy bum.) Just write the play simply- such as rebound goal against Team B. As long as you can take a quick glance at each written statement and

immediately flashback in your mind to that play, it will have the desired effect. Then go over each play 3 quick times. Imagine your mind to be a Tivo. Play the movie once in fast forward, then in slow motion, and finally in real time. Now you have 10 10-second mind movies that you can refer back to as we go over how to actually visualize.

How to Visualize

"I went into a cocoon for 15-20 minutes before each game. This was my quiet time, my preparation time. I focused on the pitcher and how he would try to get me out. I would envision getting a hit off the pitcher."

---Wade Boggs, one of the greatest hitters ever in baseball

The most important aspect of visualizing is that you have to actually feel the experience in all of your relevant senses:

Sight---see yourself clearly on the ice, including the other team, your teammates, and fans in the stands

Sound---get juiced by the volume of the crowd, hear your skates cut through the ice, and the foghorn after a goal.

Touch---Feel the stick in your hand as you stickhandle, the force of a big hit, pushing through long strides

Smell---the distinct rink smell, breathing the cold air, that horrible glove smell

This may seem a bit odd at first, but the more intense and real the feeling, the greater the impression created on the brain. From a scientific perspective every experience in your life creates a new pathway in your brain. You can create this pathway through a physical experience or by simply thinking and feeling the same thoughts through visualization. The "mind movies" repeatedly emphasize your strengths which creates confidence through positive reinforcement. I can't teach you to hypnotize yourself so you can toe drag entire teams or shoot 100 mph, but visualization will generate confidence and give you experience

that you wouldn't otherwise gain. As you step onto the ice you have the feeling that you've been there before, and this experience (even though it's only mental) creates confidence. And remember the more vividly you recreate the experience you want to happen, the deeper and more permanent the pathway created will be. Keep this in mind through each exercise. ***OK, LET'S GET STARTED.***

Before you get to the rink, there's a certain amount of free time (bus ride to the rink, after pregame meal, etc.) When I was playing I would grab a couple of buddies to walk around the lobby of the hotel, check out the magazines/candy of the hotel lobby store (fat kid at heart), or walk around the block. Basically anything to waste the hours before the puck drops. The waiting was always the worst. I just wanted to play.

Instead of wishing this time away, you can use it productively by practicing visualization. It will effectively pass the time and make the game come quicker, but more importantly it will make you a better player. First, find a quiet place to go for the longest of the visualization techniques. At this time you can use the relaxation method and actually go through the entire visualization process described below. To learn the process I used a standard stock example meant for beginners that holds your hand and walks you through everything. It involves three steps with different options in each step. Go through each option exactly as shown below only a couple times at first. Figure out which one feels right so you can use it specifically next time. After the example below the book runs through different ways to tailor this for your own specific game.

Step 1: Relaxing your body and mind

"An anxious mind cannot exist in a relaxed body....When one is anxious, so is the other. When one is at rest, so is the other."--
-Bernardo Leonard, a MLB batting Coach.

Everyone has had the experience of getting so fired up

that their face turns red, your muscles tense up, and your mind has one single thought which is usually violent in nature. The same way that you can generate these emotions that make you tense, you can also use your body to calm down and relax. It may seem counterintuitive but tensing your muscles even more and holding them in this position will bring you into a relaxed state upon release. Once you make your body relax the mind will follow and vice versa.

Option A

Sit or lay down in a comfortable position away from any distractions. This option involves physically tensing your muscles, holding the position for 5 seconds, then releasing. In between each step take two deep breaths. Don't rush through the steps. The goal is to relax with the process, not to race through it in the quickest time.

1. Start at your toes. Tense the toes by curling them. Hold for 5 seconds then release.
- 2. TAKE 2 DEEP BREATHS**
3. Next tense your calf muscles. Hold for 5 seconds and release.
- 4. TAKE 2 DEEP BREATHS**
5. Then tense your thighs by straightening your leg while flexing. Hold for 5 seconds and release.
- 6. TAKE 2 DEEP BREATHS**
7. Tense your abdominal muscles by crunching your stomach. Hold for 5 seconds and release.
- 8. TAKE 2 DEEP BREATHS**
9. Curl your fingers into a fist and hold for 5 seconds. Release.
- 10. TAKE 2 DEEP BREATHS**
11. Tense your biceps as if you were starting to curl a weight. Hold for 5 seconds then release.
- 12. TAKE 2 DEEP BREATHS**
13. Tense your shoulders by moving your elbows out and up so the arm is parallel to the ground at shoulder height. Hold

for 5 seconds then release.

14. TAKE 2 DEEP BREATHS

15. The final hold is your entire body. Tense everything you can for 5 seconds then release.

16. TAKE 5 DEEP BREATHS

This whole process should take around 3-5 minutes and leaves you relaxed for the visualization phase. Try **Option A** a couple of times after using the below two relaxation options. Weigh it against Option B and Option C. Decide which option puts you in the optimal relaxed state for the visualization sequence. Now you can repeatedly use this favorite option and discard the others. Or you can use them in conjunction with each other. Whatever gets the results you want.

Option B

Sit or laydown in a comfortable position away from any distractions. This option involves breathing in a regular pattern that relaxes the body. In a later chapter the book goes into more depth on the physical pluses of breathing and many different ways of practicing it, but for now this basic pattern will help relax you.

1. Start by taking a deep breath, inhaling through your nostrils for 4 seconds. It's important to actually feel your lungs fill with air and have your stomach rise.
2. Then hold your breath for 8 seconds. Feel your entire body relaxing.
3. Finally exhale for a total of 16 seconds. Feel the air emptying from the bottom of your lungs all the way to the top until there's no more air in your lungs. Your stomach will crunch in toward your spine as you exhale.

REPEAT THESE STEPS 5 TIMES

The inhale/hold/exhale ratio is 1:2:4. You can start with 4 seconds as the initial inhalation time and as you grow

accustomed to it, you will need to increase this to 5,6,or even 7 seconds. After completing the breathing pattern 5 times, which will take also about 3-5 minutes then you will be ready to start the visualization phase.

Try **Option B** a couple of times to get relaxed before the visualization process. Weigh it against Option A and Option C. Which option gives you the best results? Now you can repeatedly use the best option for you and discard the others. Or you can use them in conjunction with each other. Whatever gets the results you want.

Option C

I used this when I was playing before I knew it's benefits. You may too. Sit or laydown in a comfortable position away from any distractions. Grab your iPod and put on your favorite slower song(s). For an example, I use (and don't judge):

- Dave Mathews Band
- Segur Ros
- some Led Zeppelin
- Pink Floyd
- James Taylor
- Theme music to *Gladiator*
- O.A.R.
- Bob Marley

It doesn't matter what song as long as it puts you in a relaxed mood. After listening for 5-10 minutes you will be ready for the visualization step.

Try **Option C** a couple of times. Weigh it against Option A and Option B. Which option gives you the best results for getting in a relaxed state? As stated above, take your favorite of the 3 options and use it while discarding the others. Or you can use them in conjunction with each other. Whatever gets the results you want.

Step 2: Visualize

This is where you vividly experience the 10 “mind movies” created before. Since visualizing is something new (and your mind hates anything new) your mind will try to trick you into simply not trying it. At this point in time, myself included, your mind persuades you that you can’t think in pictures. Or you think this is dumb or not going to be beneficial to your game. Or it appeals to your ego and tells you how stupid you will look visualizing. Everyone’s brain is adverse to change and work. (Kind of like in school when you had that term paper or big test and didn’t start writing/studying until the night before. I’ve been there multiple times. Procrastination is a killer.) So do yourself a favor and stick with it. This may feel like a difficult process for some, but remember that all your thoughts are just quick snapshots of what you’ve previously experienced or been taught. For example when I say Ferrari, immediately a picture of a nice red car pops into your head. Then if you follow your thoughts, the next picture may be the car racing down the road at break neck speeds with you in the driver’s seat, or the attention you would get, or the huge amount of cash you would have to fork over every month to own one/fix that nice red car. All of these thoughts are mental pictures strung together. So you really can think in pictures(visualize) and therefore create mind movies. It’s even easier with the 10 mind movies you already wrote down, because you have either personally experienced them in the past couple of months or watched a player, on TV or live, do it. You have a baseline. Now it’s a matter of experiencing these plays again in your mind with the same emotions as you originally felt. Just as the example of Jack Nicklaus, the golfer, at the beginning of the chapter where he could smell the cut grass in the air and feel the humidity during his visualization on the course, you also have to feel it with all of your senses. The stronger the emotions created and felt during the “mind movie,” the more powerful of an effect it will have. Really try to imagine everything you would physically feel with all of your senses and also how you would

emotionally feel during the play (confidence, enthusiasm, happiness, etc.) For a reference point on how to create your own “mind movie,” I will walk you through one of my own. Notice the details I create and then apply it to each of your own mind movies. All the mind movies that you produce will be positive plays. Therefore you should feel an immediate sense of confidence as soon as you start visualizing the first one. This will continue to build through the entire visualization exercise. I played center, so my mind movie focuses on cycling down low, hitting an open linemate in the slot, then driving to the net for a rebound goal.

MY PERSONAL MIND MOVIE

Ex. The University of Notre Dame was playing at home versus Alaska Fairbanks during my freshman year. The rink always had a distinctive popcorn smell on game night that you could clearly smell on the ice. I was normally on the third line, but tonight I got moved onto the first due to an injury. The mind movie starts with a faceoff in the offensive zone on the blocker side of the goalie. The arena was jam packed and the band/student section were going crazy as I bent down to take the faceoff with a white knuckle grip on my stick. I closely watched the ref’s hand drop the puck. As soon as his hand released the puck, I drove my stick into the opposing center’s stick with as much force as I could muster, then I quickly swept the puck back to the Left D at the point. I keep my legs moving to fight off the opposing center and then busted to the net for a rebound. The puck deflects into the corner and my linemate rushes in to retrieve it. I take a quick look around to see the position of my teammates and position of the other teams’ players in the zone. I break behind the net with two long strides and holler at my winger to cycle it back behind the net. He banks the puck off the boards and I notice the other teams defenseman break down to cover my position. I reach the puck first, set myself for the D’s hit and feel my shoulder bang

the glass so hard that it sways backward. I get low and spin off the hit by driving my feet while protecting the puck. I feel my skates cut into the ice as I beat the defenseman around the net. All the time I have my head up watching my wingers and D move for offensive position. I hear my left winger Ben Simon holler and I hit him with a perfect pass for a one timer. I fight toward the net, hit the D and battle for the rebound that is lying on the doorstep. I give everything I have to get to that rebound. I win the battle and lift the puck into the net and watch the twine bulge. I scored the go-ahead goal with 2 minutes left in the game. I am so pumped that all I can do is raise my hands and wait for the rest of the guys to come in and congratulate me. All five guys join the group huddle, happy as heck, saying anything that comes to mind. At this point I hear the siren blasting over the loudspeakers, the fans banging on the glass, and the band striking up the fight song. Unbelievably awesome. I skate hard toward our bench and high-five the entire team.

This is just one of the 10 mind movies that I would go through before each game. There should be another 9 mind movies highlighting different areas of your game to also go through. Just as before when you initially created and wrote them down, you will also go through an extended version while in a relaxed state- first in slow motion, then game speed, and lastly in fast forward. Here's what you may feel and experience---using my example above---at the different speeds.

Slow Motion

The above example was everything I felt in slow motion and it takes about 1 minute to do the mental walk through. You will actually feel the hits, faceoff win, spinning off the D, and the battle in front. You will want to move faster through the mind movie (game speed), but resist this urge and absolutely feel/experience each step of the play. This permanently implants the image and feelings into your brain, so later when you want a quick reference you will feel the same sensations as before. Once

you have completed the mind movie in slow motion once then move on to Game Speed.

Game Speed

Start the play from the beginning and go through its entirety again in game speed. This should come naturally now. Of course you won't be able to feel, hear, smell, and see all the things that you would in slow motion but it will be there in your subconscious mind. Move through the play with confidence knowing that the play ends with a huge accomplishment. Focus on the big aspects of the play such as winning the draw, spinning away from the defenseman, hitting the open man, getting to the rebound first, and watching it go into the net. This will take 10-15 seconds max. Do this once and move on to play it in fast forward.

Fast Forward

At this speed the play should move at least twice as fast as normal. This will take under 5 seconds each time to run the entire play. Do this 3 times. You will only be able to see the play, where as the prior two scenarios you really felt the play with your entire body. Focus on two main parts of the play. This would be hitting the open man and watching the puck go into the net. You did this perfectly in the slow motion and game speed version. Permanently stamp this image into your brain.

Step 3: Let it go

After completing the 10 "mind movie" visualizations in slow motion, game speed, and fast forward, then simply forget about them. We will focus on other methods such as routines and breathing that blocks outside distractions and also manufactures positive emotions to enhance your game. This step is completed after the final mind movie. The confidence established through this exercise will stay with you throughout the entire game. (You will quickly go through each mind movie in fast forward if you

choose, in between the pregame skate and the game, to refresh them in your mind as you will see below.) If you continue to think about the upcoming game and worry about the other team for the entire time leading up to the game then you lack the moment-to-moment focus needed to get psyched up for the game. **Pressure to perform is created by anxieties about the future and remembered failures from the past.** In the present moment there is no pressure- only the now. Also if you overanalyze a certain situation, then some people (most people I know) get stuck on it and begin to even think the task is too big. This is called paralyzation by analyzation. Let it go and trust your subconscious mind to do the heavy lifting for you. You need to trust in your skills. Don't mentally make a mountain out of a mole hill.

Refreshing the Highlights from Your Mind Movie Right Before Game time

After highlighting the fact that you need to let it go after the initial visualization process, I'm going to give you the option(works for most people) of bringing it back briefly- right before the game if you're fortunate enough to have a pre-game skate. After the pre-game skate clock ticks down, after you have ripped the 100th puck at the crossbar, put the pucks in the paint bucket, and the zamboni doors open, you get back into the locker room, grab a cup of gatorade, sit down in your stall, and throw out a few "let's go boys." Then you have about 5 minutes before the coach comes into the locker room. You can quickly zip through all 10 mind movies in fast forward. Focus, just as you did before on the two most important moments in the play. Feel the confidence these moments create and smile. **YOU'RE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO BE PLAYING HOCKEY**(always remember that), and now you're more mentally prepared then ever to help the team when the opportunity presents itself.

HOW TO GET OVER A SLUMP

“A slump starts in your head and winds up in your stomach. You know that eventually it will happen, and you begin to worry about it. Then you know you’re in one and it makes you sick.” – Billy Williams, a batting coach with the Chicago Cubs

I know that you have experienced the incredibly frustration of being in a slump. It sucks. Losing sleep over another game without a goal or point can drive you mad. “It’s just a game,” everyone says. But you just broke you’re 200 dollar stick out of frustration by smashing it against the boards. Now you have another problem because either your dad or the trainer is going to ninja chop you in the neck for the broken twig. It’s all bad.....

I’m just going to assume that everyone reading this book has been in a slump at onetime in their life. Whether in hockey, baseball, or dating it all starts with a couple of “unlucky breaks” and pretty soon it turns into a pattern that is hard to break. It’s a natural cycle in sports that every player goes through. First you change your equipment, then you start gripping your stick harder, and finally you feel like nothing can go right. It’s a tough position to be in when you can’t see the light at the end of the tunnel. You get negative and think it will never end. You overanalyze everything and get into your head too much. Every time you see an opportunity to score or make the right play, your mind immediately thinks that you can’t do it. I know, I’ve personally been there more than a few times. It’s called a negative loop to the psychologically-minded doctors. You see an opportunity, you have a negative thought about it not turning out in your favor, you live up or rather down to the negative thought, and you’re in the same exact spot you started. Now you just have another instance to think back to for proof that you suck. The following sidebar is a quick analysis of what you go through in a slump.

The Anatomy of a Slump

"A Slump is like a fire. It starts with a simple spark and can spread out of control if not contained." Cleveland Indians baseball psychologist

Digging Yourself a Hole(this usually happens over a 1-3 game stretch): A slump starts with consecutive bad games or missing a couple of routine plays. As an example of the escalating steps leading to a slump let's all put ourselves in the skates of a rock solid goaltender.*** (Realizing goaltenders go into bad slumps always helped me as a forward. This means that you can shoot from anywhere and have the chance to score. You never know when the opposite netminder is in a bad funk and any sort of mental edge you give yourself will help.)*** As the number #1 goaltender for a team, you're going to be looked upon to start 80-90% of a team's games, perhaps more. To be up for each game requires tremendous mental strength. If for 1 period or even 5 minutes your mental concentration lapses and they score 2 or 3 quick goals, you get pulled. Now you have to sit on the bench with the towel around your neck, hat pulled low, and relive each goal. Your coach and entire team doesn't say a word, let alone even look at you. You know and they know you're better than that. The team can't climb back from the 3 goal deficit and gives up two points in the standings. Not to mention your personal save percentage craters. That night you go home with the loss resting on your shoulders, vowing to try harder and make it up next game.

Mind Bending Irritation(2-4 games): The team doesn't play for two days, so you vow to fix the mistakes in practice. "That was a fluke. No big deal" you tell yourself. The coach gives you the start because both he and the team have faith in your ability. The game starts with your team outshooting the other team big time and the puck is kept down in their end all except for a few

outside shots. Then they have one big rush and the next thing you know you're fishing the puck out of the back of the net. The first thought that goes through your head is "Oh no not again. Now I'm going to have to play on my head just to keep my team in the game." (Trying harder leads to overthinking, overcommitting, and overplaying in this instance.) Before you know it you let in a few more and dig your team a deeper hole. Now your head starts playing tricks on you. Your muscles tighten and you begin to play tentatively/ Everyone in the building can see it. The fans cheer when you stop a slow roller from the redline and you don't laugh or break a smile in response. It's trouble.

Hair Pulling/Stick Breaking....Slump(after 4-5 games and lasts until you can break out of it): You don't understand what happened to your game. It's not a physical breakdown of your technique, but you still spent 30 minutes after the next 3 practices working on fundamentals. On top of questioning yourself, the coach sits you down and asks if there's a problem you need to talk about. You feel like slashing him in the face but simply say "no." You pull back from your teammates and forget about laughing at all the practical jokes in which you were a constant player only 10 days ago. You have thoughts common in these situations such as "if only I would have done this," "Why is this happening to me right now?" and "Do I deserve to be the Number 1 goaltender?"

Everyone says that you will break out of it. You just need to play through it or try harder. This worked in the past but somehow now it's a bigger obstacle than any you've ever faced. You've been in a slump before just like every other player in the locker room so you know it will eventually end. But when..... I'm going to show you how to stop it sooner by recognizing the steps and taking preventive measures to break free.

What you saw happening to the fictional goaltender is some of

the same escalating steps you've gone through. The trick is if you can consciously recognize the steps then you can take preventative counter-steps to mitigate the slump and break out of it.

*****Just by sheer odds the number of goaltenders reading this will be far outnumbered by forwards or defenseman. I really don't want anyone(even goaltenders) to relive a slump. Just thinking about it will frustrate the H%ll out of you. But I know that we've all been there and can recognize the common pattern. *****

How To Get Over a Slump or a Debilitating Image

"This young man has had a very trying rookie season, with the litigation, the notoriety, his subsequent deportation to Canada and that country's refusal to accept him, I guess that's more than most 21-year-olds can handle. Number six. Ogie Ogelthorpe."

Slapshot -----(1977)

I don't like to spend a lot of time dredging up negative experiences because I believe the more you focus on something the more you bring this into your life. It's like the speeding car wrapped around the only telephone pole within a quarter mile. How did this happen? Because the driver lost control of his car and during the chaos he focused on the only thing he needed to miss. The pole. But I also know that everyone has that last second mistake that cost their team the game, or the bad injury that you can't get out of your head, or the mental block that causes constant anxiety and poor performance in a certain situation. It's usually not as bad as in baseball or golf where you have the time to think over every play, but it can still be just as debilitating. Every time your mind thinks of a particular situation, which seems like every second in a slump, you have a

rush of negative emotions. This is severely affecting your game. You know it and everyone around you can sense it. So let's get rid of them.

Now that you know some of the common escalation steps, as seen before in the goaltender situation, and the overall mindset behind nearly every slump, then you can use specific techniques to fight it. There are two ways to break the negative mind loop and erase the mental image of the nuclear meltdown, worst case scenario, that you imagine. In both options the goal is to gradually eliminate the bad thought from your mind. It's stuck there because of the importance you place on it and the strong negative emotions you feel everytime it runs through your mind. It's no way to prepare for a game. And it's definitely not a thought you want popping into your head at anytime during the action of the game. Once you complete one or both of the slump busting options below, you will literally laugh at the sticking point. It will simply fade away or be replaced by one of your positive "mind movies" implemented earlier.

Option A

"I made the joyous discovery that ten minutes of genuine belly laughter had an anesthetic effect and would give me at least two hours of pain-free sleep,"—Norman Cousins, a writer diagnosed with ankylosing spondylitis, he used only laughter and Vitamin C to live another 26 years.

This process is meant to be fun and produce a laugh or at least a smile instead of the "I suck so bad that my dog hates me" original feeling. It involves changing the bad image popping into your mind through a number of different comical ways.

Step 1: First, recall the bad image and put it into a "mind movie" format. If you're stuck in a slump then you've seen the image play out at least 100 times. Most likely it's the same dreaded thought each time. One more time isn't going to hurt. This exercise will eventually eliminate it, but first bear with me

and rerun the negative images one more time.

Step 2: Since you've played this image out in your mind at least 100 times, it's grown into a monster of what was once a simple mistake. Realize that you're the director of your thoughts. You added things, including emotions and self talk, to this play until it's become a negative spiral severely effecting your game. Your mind made an action movie on the ice into a horror movie that would cause a small child to cry for a week afterwards. The good part about this is that you can put anything you want into this mind movie. Your new goal is to create a comedy of the situation. Rerun the situation, but this time make it a **CARTOON** instead of real life. Think South Park. (It's alright to laugh. That's the point of the exercise.)

Step 3: Now the slump causing movie is a cartoon playing in your head. Make one player Cartman from South Park, one player Peter from Family Guy, and the other player Homer Simpson. If there are more players, create them based on your favorite comedy shows. (This may seem ridiculous but obviously nothing else seems to work so give it a try. You might just end up laughing.)

Step 4: Now that you have the cartoon movie playing with you're favorite bunch of wacky characters, you can add a new scene. It doesn't have to have anything to do with your original negative loop. Grab your hockey stick and take a massive hack at Cartman's shins like Harry and Llyod in Dumb and Dumber. Or maybe rip a slapper off of Cartman's family jewels. This should bring a laugh to your face when you imagine it.

Step 5: The next step is to put the entire sequence together and play it forward in game speed. Remember you're the director of this thought. Do this at least 10 times. Make sure you have a smile on your face before stopping. Instead of the negativity previously felt while thinking about your slump, you can now

shrug it off with a good laugh. It's very hard to be afraid of something that you can laugh at. It's like a "Kick Me" sign on the back of someone much bigger than you. It's very hard to fight the urge and not wind up and giv'r.

Step 6: This step will put the finishing touch on your new comedy. Take the complete mind movie that you played with all the new additions included in the prior 5 steps and now play it backwards 10 times in slow motion.

After you complete these 6 steps—or more if you feel like getting creative—you will erase the brain pathway of the old image and create this new one. Many people can do it just once and have it be enough. But for others, including myself, it takes repeating the process a couple times (or even more) to fully engrain the new thought into your head and replace the old one. Similar to the positive "mind movies", the key is to really see it clearly. Believe it or not if you can laugh about the new image then the slump is nearly broken. It's that simple because a slump is purely mental. This will allow you to play in the present the next game instead of holding onto mistakes from the past. When you play in the present you can fall back on your talent and work ethic to lift you out of the slump. Remember the great players make mistakes too- they just don't hold onto them as long. The trick is to detach yourself from the play, learn from it and then forget it. This first option involved laughter and the next option will be a serious way to eliminate these images.

Option B

"I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened" --Mark Twain

I read about this option from NLP(Neurolinguistic Processing) therapists. It may seem a bit quirky but it works. I used this to get over my fear of sharks- not even remotely related

to hockey but more terrifying to me than having my gloves accidentally fall off while skating by George Larouge. I watched Jaws when I was a kid and was afraid to even go water skiing in the lakes of Minnesota- absolutely froze me with fear. Just as the hockey obstacle is stuck in your head causing you massive problems, this fear was amplified to an irrational point. Do I know for a 100% fact that Lake Minnetonka doesn't have Great White's swimming around in it? **YES**. Was I hesitant to jump into the water in the middle of the lake? **YES**. In turn, do you think that you will never score a goal again? **OF COURSE NOT**. The point is that your emotions are very strong. Our minds tend to link thoughts together and create something out of nothing. This distorts reality and makes the current situation you're feeling the most important, all consuming thing in the world. But is it reality? You can use your rational self to downplay the scenario. It's called Reframing a belief. I believe this technique goes right to the core and pushes the thought from your mind. It may take more thought and time than Option A, but the results are just as powerful. After doing this technique a few hundred times, I was able to scuba dive and surf in parts of Australia and California where Great Whites were seen in the exact same spot within a week's period. This time, I knew that there were probably multiple Great Whites bigger than my car within a 2-mile radius. Was I a little scared floating on a piece of styrofoam camouflaged in a wetsuit so my pudgy body looked like a seal? Yeah for sure, but I still got over it and ended up having a great time. It's the same thing with your mental block concerning hockey. This option uses your prior experiences and knowledge to dismiss the worst case scenario running through your head. Let's get over it so you can go back to having fun and scoring goals.

Step 1: Get into a relaxed state, just as before with the visualization sequence. Use either the muscle flexing technique, regular breathing pattern, or simply listen to your favorite music to get calm and focused.

Step 2: Now re-run the negative scenario causing the slump. It's going to be tough, but you have to actually examine the root cause of what's getting you down. Pinpoint the exact thought and fear creating the internal state affecting your game. For example you've missed 5 open nets and haven't scored in 10 games, or you've been minus 9 in the last 5 games as a Defenseman, or you can't stop a beachball as a goalie. Bring the "I'll never score again" thought to the surface. When broken down this is the limiting belief that's holding you back.

Step 3: NOW REFRAME THAT BELIEF. It's a NLP(Neuro Linguistic Processing) technique used by psychologists to challenge beliefs, break unuseful associations, and create new possibilities. I'm going to walk you through 7 different ways of reframing the limiting belief using a forward's scoring drought as the example.

1. Reframe the External Behavior (not scoring): True you haven't scored in 10 games. Have you had opportunities to score? You will go through scoring droughts just as a baseball player will go through hitting droughts. If the baseball player hits the cover out of the ball and it finds the infielders glove, is it a slump? If you have 2 seeing eye goals in a game but play awfully are you happy? The key is to get consistent opportunities and the scoring will come. Take your mind off of scoring and focus on getting opportunities. It will come.

2. Reframe the Internal State(Negative feeling toward not scoring): You're in a slump and think you will never score again. Every thought about hockey or even going to the rink is negative. I don't have to tell you this isn't the starting point to break out of the slump. Begin to look for positives in your game besides scoring. A great back check to save a goal or a great hit for instance. Celebrate the little things and stick to the basics. This will encourage you and develop confidence.

3. Counter Example: Can you think of a time when you were in a similar situation? Can you think of a time when a teammate or even Alexander Ovechkin or Wayne Gretzky was in a similar situation? Everyone including yourself has been held scoreless for a number of games. Did you eventually score? Obviously.

4. Outcome Framing: What's going to happen on the ice if you keep thinking this way? You know how it's affecting your play now. Just think 5, 10, 20 games from now. It becomes a bigger obstacle every time you step on the ice. Will thinking this way help you score in that big game half a season away?

5. Allness Framing: I used this particular one to get over my fear of sharks in Australia. "More people are killed by bees than sharks." It's a fact. There are millions of people swimming in the ocean safely everyday. I shouldn't be paralyzed with fear if millions of other people are doing the exact same thing.

Along the same line of thinking- there are thousands of players scoring goals every night. Do you think that every player that has ever experienced a scoring slump went the rest of his career without scoring a goal? That's ridiculous.

6. Apply This Thought to Another Player on your Team or even Your favorite NHL Player: Do you think that because your linemate hasn't scored in ten games that he will never score again? If so why would you pass him the puck or want to ever play with him again? If the announcer notified you that your favorite NHL player hasn't scored in 10 games, what's the thought that goes through your head. He's due, right? *(This will get you into trouble in blackjack but feel free to think it about hockey.)*

This really highlights the ridiculous lengths that your mind goes to in a slump.

7. Chunk Down: This applies to the above section on The

Analogy of a Slump with the fictional goalie. How does a player get into a slump? How does it go from a few bad breaks and get magnified into a slump in your mind? What are the steps? How can you interrupt the pattern? If you can identify the steps than you can fight them.

At first, read through all 7 reframing techniques. You can use all 7 together or just focus on a particular one. Whatever works for you. The goal is to logically attack the notion that the slump will never end. Your mind has blown something small out of proportion and this exercise proves that to you. You will score again. You will get a shutout again. You will come from behind to win again. You will break out of the slump. It's not a question of if, but when.

"Whether **you think** that **you can**, or think that **you can't**, **you** are usually right"
-- Henry Ford.

Both options above will work for any slump. The next time you step on the ice and encounter a situation or opportunity similar to the slump your subconscious mind will instantaneously play that positive "mind movie" of you scoring the goal, blocking the shot, winning the draw, etc. This will be the first thought your mind draws upon instead of the negative one holding you back. Then the negative loop is broken. *In hockey it only takes a fraction of a second to make the right or wrong decision. And when you score or make the right play this will build real world confidence.*

Summary of the Visualization Chapter

- Visualization is the ability to see your self positively completing or reliving a scene only in the mind.
- It's been proven to mentally raise a players confidence, decrease anxiety/fear, and physically improve his performance in the specific visualized area.
- The most common form of visualization is seeing yourself completing a specific task in the future. We're going to use it for hockey by visualizing scoring goals, making the big save, winning the last second face-off, etc.
- You already use visualization everyday whether you know it or not. When you lie in bed on Sunday night and think about everything you have to do that week. When you think about what you're going to say to the cute girl sitting beside you in English class. When you go to the grocery store and plan the night's/week's meals. When you think about the weekend's hockey games. These are all some form of visualization. You will get deeper and clearer thoughts by practicing visualization techniques regularly.
- Limits begin where vision ends. The problem with most people is they think negative thoughts about future activities. The only surefire way for success is to stay positive.
- "80/20 rule"--Nearly everything in life falls under this concrete rule. Applied to hockey this means that 20% of the on-ice actions you take make up 80% of the results. Use this rule to narrow down what you want to visualize about.

- The most important aspect of visualizing is that you have to actually feel the experience in all of your relevant senses- sight, hearing, touch, and smell. The more intense and real the feeling, the greater the impression is created on the brain

Visualization involves 3 Steps

1. **Relaxing the body and mind**

- a)Muscle relaxation
- b)Breathing Exercises
- c)Listen to Relaxing Music

2. **Visualization**

- a)Vividly experience the “10 mind movies”
 - I. Slow Motion
 - II. Game Speed
 - III. Fast Forward

3. **Let it Go**

Slumps are mental obstacles that have become bigger than life for the person going through it. It’s a negative loop.

There are two ways to get out of a slump:

1. Cure it through laughter.
2. Reframe the belief 7 different ways.

Thank you very much for your interest in the book *7 Pre-Game Habits of Pro Hockey Players*. I hope you enjoyed the preview. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to email me at bhenning11@gmail.com or even call at (949)701-0536. If you would like to sign up for the newsletter go to <http://score100goals.com/newsletter.html>.

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Thanks Again,

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