

# THE POWER OF YOUR MIND

**By Dr Bruce Lawrie**

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As a young Scottish coach, aged 20, I formed a swimming club in London and attracted a group of swimmers who impressed me with their mental strength, within two years over 50% gained international honours.

In 1977 I spent the best part of a year at Indiana University studying under the legendary Doc Counsilman. Upon my return, I found that over 90% of my research was psychology-based; these experiences combined to ignite my long-term interest in performance psychology. In 1983, three clubs, and numerous international swimmers later, I was an English National Coach. Come 1984; I accepted a coaching position in Denmark, where I studied psychology and became a fully qualified Educational and Clinical Psychologist, and worked in Mental Health. Here I am, aged 68 years with 48 years

of coaching experience. Over thirty years as a clinical/educational psychologist, having worked in a therapeutic setting with more than 4000 people, some diagnosed with significantly challenging psychological disorders, and I have arrived at one pivotal conclusion.

**I have never met a person  
with a weak mind!**

Sure, many were exceptionally challenged, but they all had strong minds. What I mean is this, it has become clear to me that we all possess strong minds, but at times we use this strength in a way that results in significant challenges, both to ourselves and others.

Let us consider how a swimmer can use their strong mind to create significant problems. Say hello to Steve (an anonym). Steve is talented, has excellent stroke technique, works hard in the gym, and his pool work is fantastic, he is very tough in training. Steve, however, has a history of performing poorly at meets, less talented swimmers beat him, and has been known to swim slower than he does in practice. Steve undoubtedly has a strong mind, as evident in his remarkable dedication to training, and amazingly tough workouts, but, Steve does not allow himself, and I repeat Steve does not allow himself to swim tough at meets. When preparing for meet swims, Steve uses his strong mind to concentrate on his competitors. He thinks that they are superior and that he cannot beat them, with the result that he swims poorly.

Yes, Steve uses his strong mind to defeat himself, as he loses his races before his feet leave the starting block. Steve's strong mind rules both in success and defeat!

Now here is the positive news, if Steve became aware, and accepted, how strong his mind is he will be on the road to establishing a positive control over his life. One that will enhance his capacity to attain both his sporting and life-goals. He can achieve this by developing his Inner Competitor. The Inner Competitor forms part of your psychological make-up and includes several factors such as your confidence and self-esteem, but at its very foundation lie your words and thoughts. The combined influence of your words and thoughts constitute a vital key to you having a strong mind, and they control your Inner Competitor, which exercises a powerful effect on how you perform in training, competition, and all areas of your life.

Words and thoughts include your self-talk (what you say to yourself), the words of others (parents, coaches, competitors), and what you read. *Steve tended to tell himself that he was going to swim badly.* Words and thoughts act to trigger pictures in your mind. These pictures exercise a powerful influence on how you see yourself performing. Such as achieving a personal best time, or in *Steve's case - swimming poorly at a meet.* The pictures in your mind can

stimulate powerful feelings, including being happy, determined, or scared. *Steve feared competition as he saw himself swimming badly.* Feelings in turn influence behaviour, in *Steve's case swimming poorly at meets.*

As per the Inner Competitor Model, your words/thoughts, pictures in your mind and feelings keep rotating, continually communicating the same message. Unless you manage this process appropriately, it can regularly reinforce negative behaviour, making it increasingly difficult for you to attain sporting and life goals. This negative pattern will continue until you learn how to control your Inner Competitor positively.

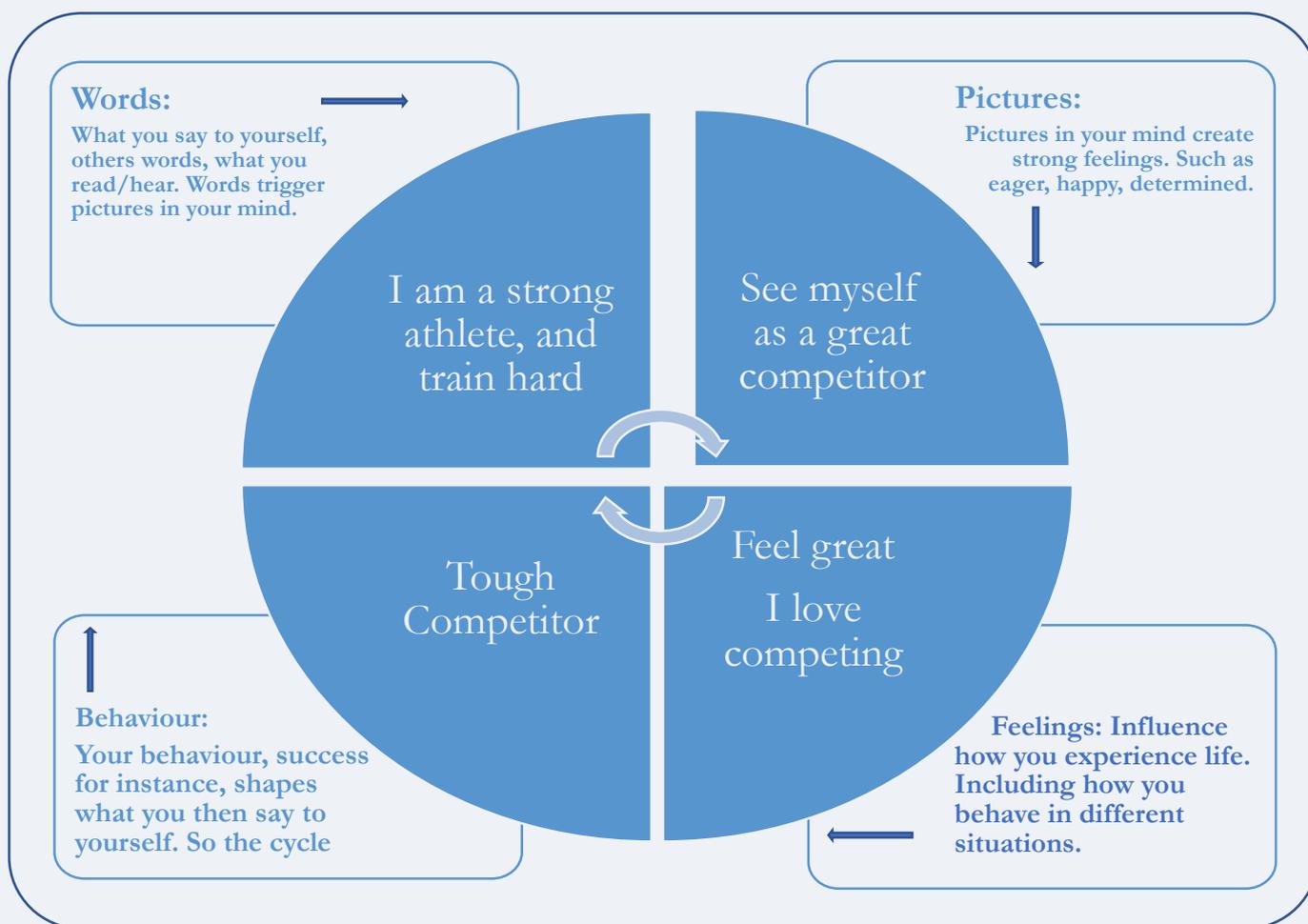
In sum, your Inner Competitor includes your words/thoughts, pictures in your mind and your feelings that in combination act to influence your behaviour, including how you race in meets. Based on this knowledge, you should appreciate the important difference between competing and racing, as there is only one competition; it is the one inside of you - your Inner Competitor. You are the psychological source of your success, as you race with your body but win with your mind - your Inner Competitor.

This principle is clearly reflected in the words of Australian swimming legend Dawn Fraser: "I've always believed that the desire must come from within, not as a result of being driven by coaches or parents."

As Steve demonstrates, a talented, hard-working swimmer with a weak inner competitor tends to fold under pressure and fails to reach their potential. If Steve developed a strong Inner Competitor, he would improve his capacity to master nerves, remain confident, focus, concentrate, maintain good technique, manage pain, race tough, and finish strong. As evident by the power of the Inner Competitor, there is some truth in the claim that winning is 90% mental and 10% physical.

The good news is you can develop mental strength by improving your Inner Competitor, which involves learning how to use your words/thoughts to create pictures in your mind that

# Your Inner Competitor



positively influence both your feelings and how you perform. Your journey to building a strong Inner Competitor commences with the successful completion of three vital steps:

1. Recognize the power of your mind
2. Understand how you can control your mind
3. Personal acceptance that you can learn how to apply your mind positively.

When you complete these three stages, you will appreciate how your Inner Competitor works and accepted the benefits of improving your Inner Competitor. You will have greater confidence in your capacity to make essential improvements in your life, both as a competitor and a person. Last, and by no means least, you will be motivated to manage any barriers or challenges you may face.

Congratulations, to all who have completed these three stages, you have taken the first, crucial step to develop your inner strength!

Remember, it is your Inner Competitor that dictates how you perform, you decide! *As depicted in the words of the great Ian Thorpe:*

*"When I go out and race, I'm not trying to beat opponents, I'm trying to beat what I have done ... to beat myself, basically. People find that hard to believe because we've had such a bias to always strive to win things. If you win something and you haven't put everything into it, you haven't actually achieved anything at all. When you've had to work hard for something and you've got the best you can out of yourself on that given day, that's where you get satisfaction from."*

**Your Body Achieves  
What Your Mind Believes**



## Dr. Bruce Lawrie MSc, PhD Consultant Psychologist

Qualified in Clinical and Educational Psychology,  
Special interest in Performance Psychology

Trained in Forensic, and Cross-Cultural Psychology,  
Personality Evaluation and Psychotherapy.

### Sporting Background

Dr. Lawrie swam on the Scottish National Senior Team, competes in Masters Swimming, has won numerous National Championships, and broken two Masters World Records. Holds a 2nd Degree Black Belt in Shotokan Karate.

Extensive experience as a professional swim coach and sports lecturer. ASA qualified Swim Coach/Teacher, graduate of the American Olympic Coaches training program at Colorado University, USA, made several study trips to the USA. Former coach to the English Swim Team, coached over 50 international swimmers, including medal winners at the Olympics, Paralympics, Transplant Olympics, European Championships for the Deaf, Commonwealth Games, European, British, and Danish Championships. Director for several world-class clinics - including: Jonty Skinner Stroke Clinic (former World Record Holder) and Doc Counsilman [Arguably the most innovative swimming coach ever] International Swim Clinic at Crystal Palace, London.

Review board member, with special responsibility for Sports Psychology: Journal of Swimming Research. Under the auspices of the American Swimming Coaches Association.

### Coaching Positions:

- Head Coach West London Dolphins
- Head Coach Kensington & Chelsea Swimming Club
- Head Coach Salford Triple 'S' Swimming Club
- Head Coach Stockport Metro Swimming Club
- Head Coach Lyngby Swimming Club\*
- Head Coach Naestved Swimming Club\*
- Head Coach Vordingborg Swimming Club\* [\*Denmark]

### Psychology Positions

- **Head of Clinical and Educational Psychology:** Alpha School, Peterhead, specialist school for young people with complex psychosocial needs.
- **Head of Clinical and Educational Psychology:** Specialist service for individuals with Challenging Behaviour, Learning Disabilities and Autism. Leyland, England.
- **Head of Service: Department of Clinical Psychology, Educational Psychology, and Speech and Language Therapy,** Saxskobing, Denmark.
- **Principal Therapist/Lead Clinical Psychologist: Center for the Rehabilitation of Brain Damage,** Copenhagen University, Denmark.
- **Clinical Psychologist: Adult Mental Health,** Royal Cornhill Hospital, Aberdeen, Scotland.
- **Clinical Psychologist:** Aberdeenshire, Children, adolescents, adults with Learning Disabilities.
- **Psychologist:** Platangarden, Vordingborg, Denmark: Specializing in Forensic and Substance Abuse problems.
- **Psychology with Athletes:** Dr. Lawrie has worked with athletes, coaches and parents, from novice to Olympians. Sports include: Archery, Cycling, Diving, Football, Golf, Handball, Martial Arts, Power Lifting, Rugby, Running, Shooting, Swimming, Tennis and Triathlon.