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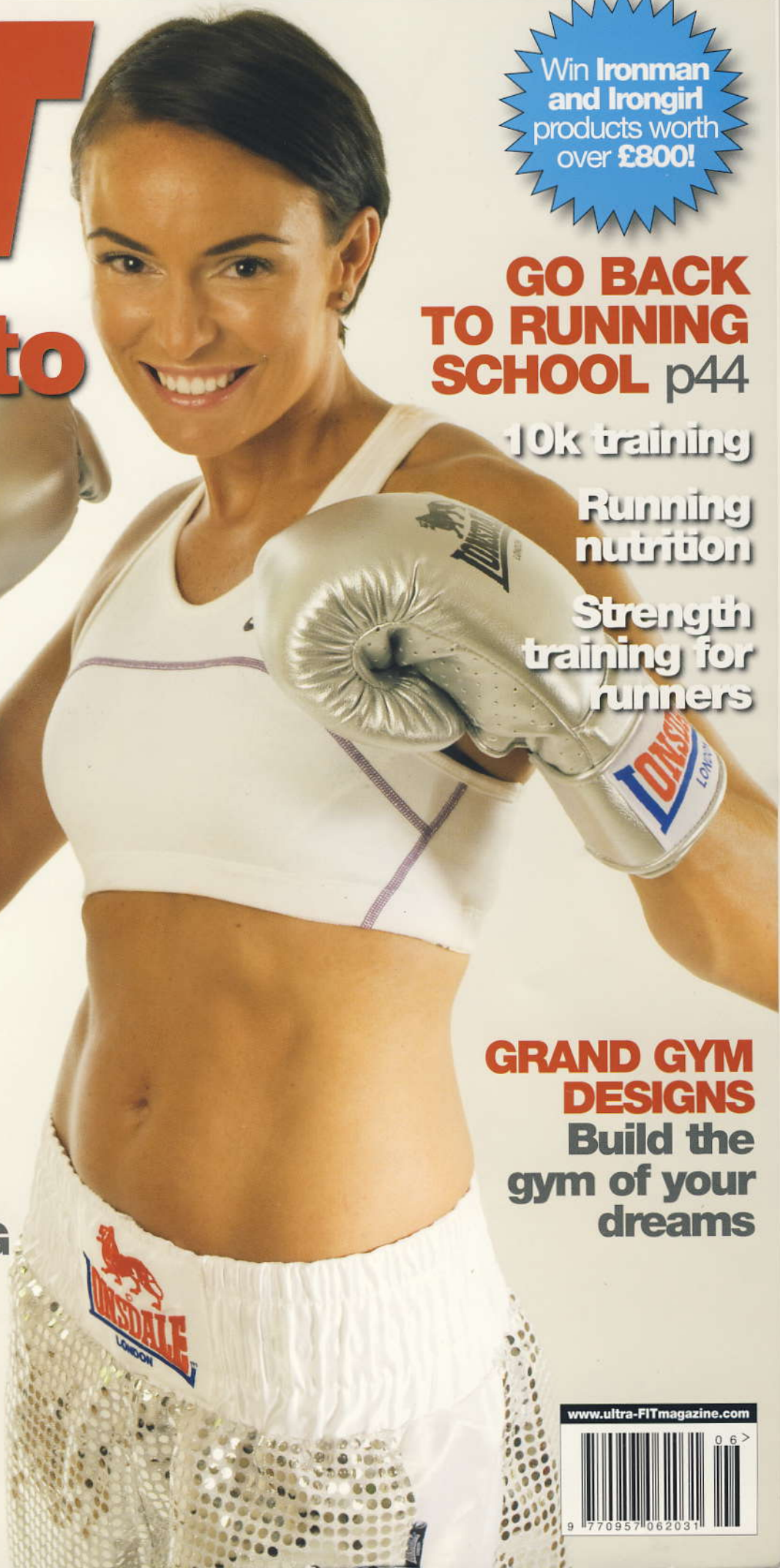
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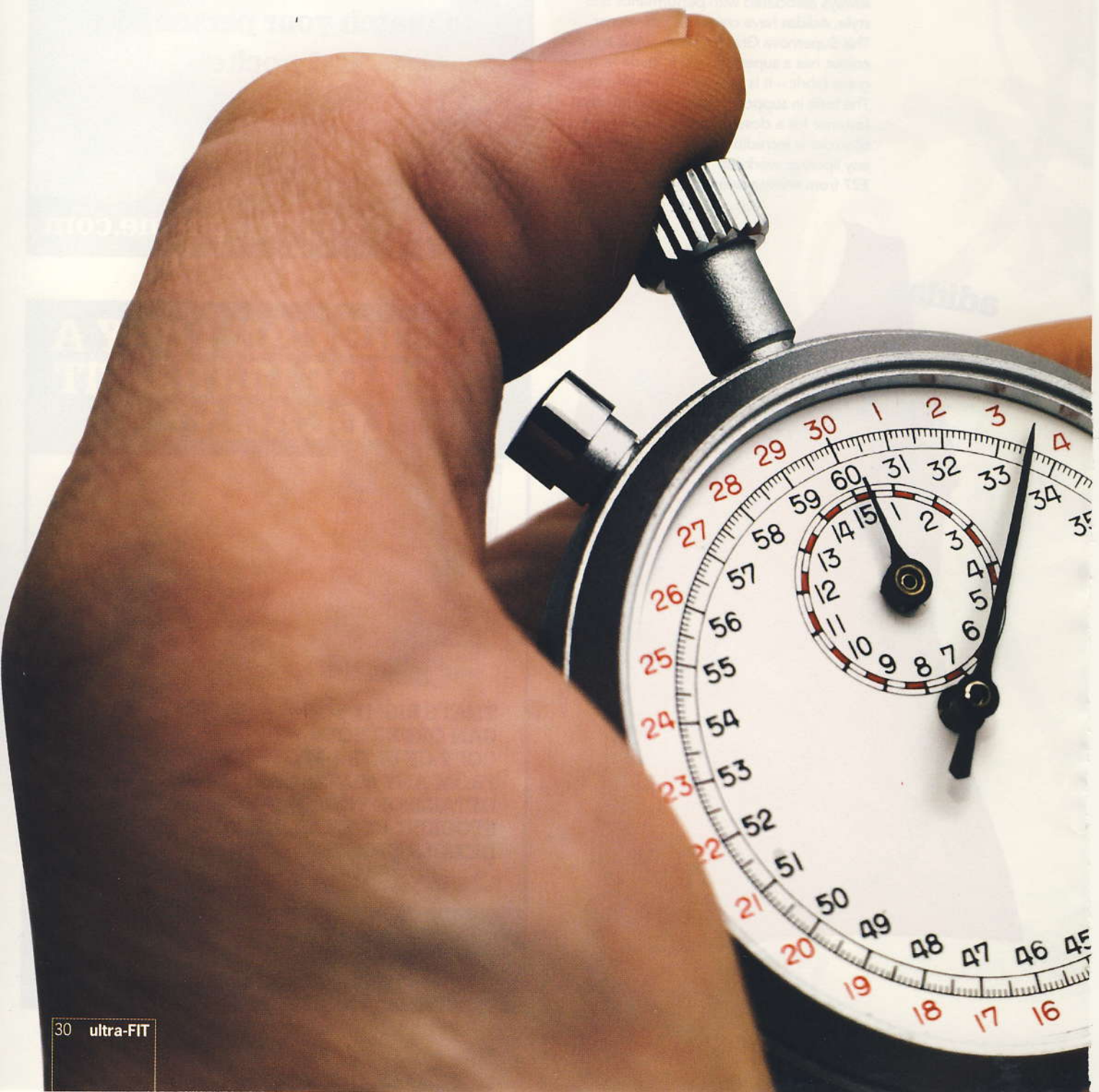


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performance

Cognitive hypnotherapist **Trevor Silvester** examines how cultivating elite thinking can help you achieve your personal best

To make it to the top in sport, it helps to have an exceptional gift. Think of Pele, Usain Bolt, Muhammad Ali and Kelly Holmes, for example, they all seem to be born with an innate talent that transcends the normal physical limitations of other mortals. But talent alone is not enough. In any sport, there are similarly gifted performers who don't make it to the top, and some less

gifted who do. Why is this? It's because elite sportsmen and sportswomen have certain attitudes in common that override disparities in talent which enable them to become winners and record breakers.

6 steps to achieve your personal best

1 Elite thinking - consistency

Joe Paterno, Penn State football coach once said, "The will to win is important, but the will to prepare is vital." There have always been examples of mercurial brilliance - performers who for a time dazzle the world with their performance, either in a brief career, or for moments of brilliance within that career. But most of the true sporting greats have achieved peak performances over extended periods. Think of Michael Johnson who, despite retiring in 2000, has still run eight of the top fifty 200m performances of all time, and 22 of the top fifty 400m runs, including five in the top ten. Such consistency in your event or sport can only be created by consistency in your training. Top athletes don't just show up, they engage in what they're doing, focusing fully on their training and giving it all of their energy. But that's a tough ask.

Most of us fit our training around our job, and it's all too easy for the frenetic pace of daily life to seduce us into the need for an evening on the couch, or an extra hour in bed. But whilst you're doing that, one of your competitors is putting in the miles, punching on a bag or chasing a ball. You can't negotiate with success; you either give what it demands, or success goes to someone else who's prepared to pay the price.

2 Creating the drive
So, how do you create the drive to be consistent? Start by engaging your values - the things that are important to you about something. They provide your motivation and get you out of bed in the morning. To identify them, you simply have to ask yourself, 'what's important to me about your training, or your sport?' When working with clients, I usually ask the question enough times to get 3-5 responses.

In one case, a client wanted me to help her apply herself to triathlon training, but on too many occasions the sofa and a glass of wine won the contest with getting on her bike! Her personal values were 'getting fit, competing and being different'. Whilst these values had a unique meaning for the client, clearly that meaning wasn't giving her the kick she needed to get her training. It wasn't really surprising: she was already fit and she trained alone, so the drive had evaporated. With nobody to compete against in training, the competition of the race situation was too distant to act as a motivation. In this scenario there were two possible choices, a) help her develop a training strategy that would utilise her existing values - get her training in a group so she could compete against someone else, or b) devise a way of competing against herself. We could also work to change her definition of what 'fit' was, to move her to another level. However, in this case, neither strategy was appropriate, so the next step was looking at consistency in other areas of her life - see 3.

3 Applying your skills to a different context

We often compartmentalise our life, separating our relationship, job, training and social life into different boxes. Unfortunately, when we do that we often isolate skills and good habits by attributing them solely to those contexts, when actually an attitude or behaviour from one part of your life could also benefit you in another, for example,

from work to the gym. Think about the times you've been consistent in any and all contexts of your life; write them down, and see how they could be applied to your training regime. In my client's case we discovered that she was rigidly consistent in delivering projects at work. When we looked at what created that consistency, her key value was 'supporting others'. The thought of letting people down drove her to fulfil her deadlines. So, for her next race she chose a charity that was personally important to her, and raised money based on her times during the triathlon. This fulfilled both her need to compete, and the importance of supporting others. Her motivation returned, and she completed her next race in a personal best time.

The tip here is to recognise what is really important to you about your target, and ensure that your values are being utilised in its pursuit, or to use values from another area that would be compromised if the goal isn't achieved. If you're not doing well in one area of your life, borrow the resources from another.

4 Elite thinking - perseverance

There will always be times when things don't go your way, but the big question is, what do you do when they don't? Winston Churchill defined success as, "The ability to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm." That takes resilience and the ability to cope with stress and catastrophe.

The development of resilience in children has been found to be a key ingredient in predicting their mental health and success as adults. It's a rich subject, impossible to do justice to here, but in my opinion, one of the most significant factors is the difference between having what's called an internal or external locus of control.

You'll come across people every day who have an external locus: they look to the world for their solutions and they blame the world for their difficulties or failures. And by 'world', I mainly mean other people. Having an internal locus is the difference between saying 'something must be done', and 'I must do something'. It's about seeing yourself as the cause, not the effect.

5 Shield yourself

How many people remind you of baby birds the moment they meet with a challenge, flapping their wings around the nearest adult, mouth open, asking for what they need? The most successful people in any field look inside themselves. This doesn't mean not listening and learning from others - it means being in control of who you listen to, and proactively searching out the best information you possibly can, before making your own decision. I teach many of my

clients to use what I call a 'f*** off shield', activated the moment they're on the receiving end of anything from someone that would diminish their resolve or bring them down. It gives them the power to reject anything that doesn't fit their need. So, when faced with any setback, ask yourself, 'What can I do to move myself forward?' Usually the answer is to treat the setback as a learning opportunity.

Feeling in command, feeling that you're the one making the choices, both reduces stress, and is a powerful motivator to push past a setback.

And this 'push' is all-important, in fact 'take action' is my personal mantra. Will Smith was recently quoted as saying, 'I'm not afraid to die on the treadmill. You might have more talent than me, be

smarter than me, be sexier than me, but if we get on the treadmill together, two things are going to happen. You're getting off first, or I'm going to die. I will not be outworked.' Will is therefore someone guaranteed to persevere.

6 Elite thinking - self-belief

The final attitude step is self-belief. A lack of belief in yourself can be expressed in many different ways, but something it requires is an audience. If Robinson Crusoe suffered from low self-worth, he would probably have been blissfully free of it during his time as a castaway. But as soon as he spotted the ship on the horizon his first thought would be, 'I bet they'll laugh at the botch I've made of my hut.' A fear of other people's opinion is the second most common phobia (called 'social phobia'), after spiders. It's what makes people sweat at the prospect of public speaking, chatting someone up in a bar or failing an exam. If you're an athlete, the prospect of failure will tighten you up and keep you from your best.

Just about every athlete I've ever worked with has benefitted from the techniques used in cognitive hypnotherapy that reduce or remove the sense of feeling that they're not good enough. Look at any top athlete and you'll see someone exuding the message that they're going to win - and conversely consider how easy is it to spot one who doesn't and isn't?

Letting go of a lack of belief is something best worked on with someone equipped to help you, but there are things you can do for yourself.

Scientist Paul Ekman knows more about the relationship between facial signals and emotion than anyone alive. He identified that seven expressions are universal indicators of particular emotions. During his research, he got students to convey to a camera an expression that would be recognised as anger, fear or disgust. Most people found this easy to do, but an interesting thing happened. The students reported that adopting the expression caused them to begin to feel the related emotion. Our mind affects our body, but our body also influences our mind. Adopt the posture and expression of someone depressed and notice how quickly your mood dips.

Spend the rest of today moving like someone who believes in them self. What

Feeling in command, feeling that you're the one making the choices, both reduces stress, and is a powerful motivator to push past a setback

is your posture when you feel confident? How does your face feel? Rehearse this, so confidence becomes a 'suit' you can just put on. The adage 'fake it 'til you make it' can be changed to 'fake it and you'll become it'.

So, take a tip from the sporting elite and emulate that elite attitude. Persevere in your self-belief, and be consistent in your confidence, despite what the world throws at you, and you'll soon notice how your perception of yourself as a winner reaches a new level. And once your perception changes, so will your performance - for the better. **UF**



Trevor Silvester is the founder of the Quest Institute which specialises in Cognitive Hypnotherapy and NLP and is one of the largest and most successful hypnotherapy

training institutions in the UK. His work with clients includes helping sports people improve their performance using mind body techniques, and is part of the Team Perfect sports network (<http://www.qntuk.com/team>) A published author and popular speaker, Trevor also runs a private practice in Harley Street, London. To order Trevor's books and audio downloads, or to find out more about training with Quest go to: www.questinstitute.co.uk And for more information about seeing Trevor: www.trevorsilvester.com