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The Spine Race 2014
November 2013

Hebden Bridge Training,
Cognitive Fitness Consultancy

Cognitive Fitness *'The Mental Game'*

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Background to & Purpose of, this presentation

This presentation was first used on the November 2013 Spine Race Training Weekend at Hebden Bridge, (CP1), as part of the preparation for the 2014 January Spine Race.

It's been designed to be accessed & used by those Ultra runners who ran the 45m training run over the weekend, and also by those 2014 'Spinners' who couldn't make the training – especially less experienced Ultra runners – The Spine isn't like any other Ultra race and you need to be physically & mentally prepared for it.





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Session Outline

- Why is there a psychologist on the support team?
- What is 'cognitive fitness'?
- What does 'success' mean to you?
- Top 3 physical challenges / top 3 mental challenges
- Strategies for success
- Post training support



Why is there a psychologist on the support team?

- We have a duty of care, pre and post race
- *“Beyond injury or accident, it’s all mental”* – Phil HB
- *“The hardest thing about the race was the mental challenge - the race is clearly physically demanding, but the mental fight is harder”* – Rob S
- Someone to talk to about the mental side of things if necessary, e.g. concerns and strategies
- Support materials on the Cognitive Fitness Blog





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What is Cognitive Fitness?

*“Thinking in the right ways
at the right time”*

Flexibility

Multiple Perspectives

- Practical / Theoretical
- Positive / Negative
- Collaborative / Competitive
- Strategic / Detail
- Creative / Logical
- Different Timeframes
- ‘Through other people’s eyes’

Agility

Switch Approaches

- Planning
- Problem Solving
- Contingencies
- Self-Awareness
- Self-Regulation
- Alternative Scenarios
- State Management

Strength

Courage

- Mental Toughness
- Resilience
- Vulnerability
- Attitude
- Generosity of Spirit
- Acceptance
- Forgiveness

Explanations of the terminology, and the ‘thinking behind the thinking’ for this slide can be found in the posts on the Cognitive Fitness blog (which you can access via the website below).

*“Courage is the ladder
on which all other virtues mount”
Clare Boothe Luce*

In the context of The Spine, what does 'Success' mean to you?

- Write down your answer/s
- Share with the group if you are willing to do so
- Is your definition 'cognitively fit'? i.e. is it the most useful one? What is likely to happen to your mental state if you don't achieve it?
- After hearing other people's definitions, do you want to revise yours in any way?





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In the context of The Spine, what does 'Success' mean to you?

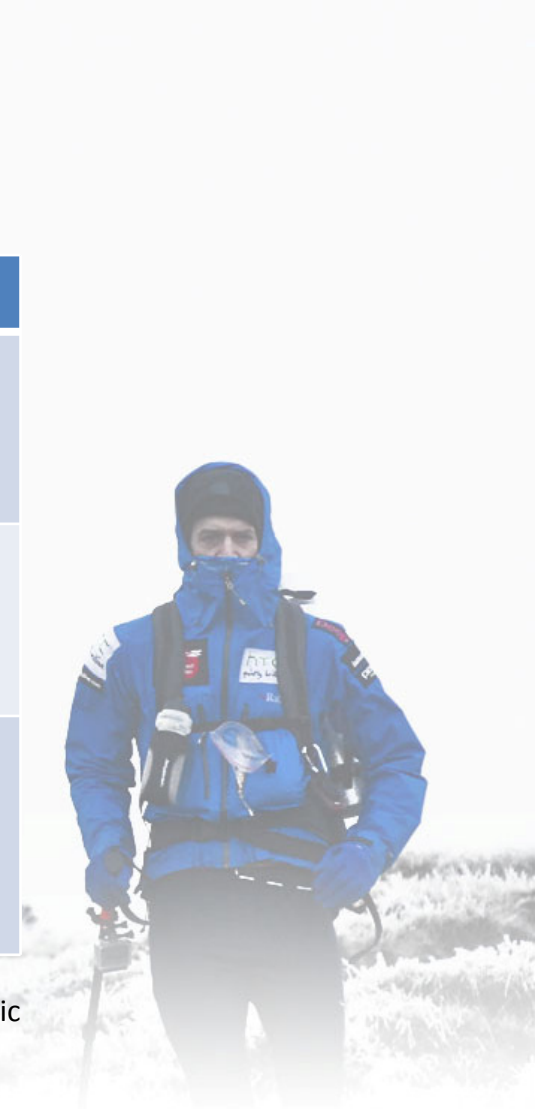
These were some people's answers:

Finishing	Completing
Fulfilment	The best I can do for me
Not getting lost!	Not getting injured!
Sense of pride	The feel good factor
Pushing the boundaries and enjoying it	
Long term achievement	
Balancing performance and achievement	



The Top 3 Physical & Mental Challenges

Physical	Mental
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear (rational → irrational)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fitness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boredom (manage your thoughts)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Admin. (feet, hygiene etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive Mind Set



Input from Phil HB, who's seen everyone finish the race, or fail to. He's also raced to both geographic poles in the Arctic and Antarctic. Having successfully reached both, he knows a lot about this stuff!





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Strategies for Success

We asked a number of previous competitors the following questions regarding their experience of running The Spine:

1. What was the toughest thing about the race?
2. If you had to do it again, what would you do differently?
3. What are your top tips for someone running in 2014?





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1. What was the toughest thing about the race?

“Apart from the cold, the distance, the navigation, the lack of sleep and the terrain? I think it was time it took to cover distances at some points 1-2 miles per hour” – Jonathan Z

“The hardest thing about the race was the mental challenge - the race is clearly physically demanding, but the mental fight is harder” – Rob S





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1. What was the toughest thing about the race?

“The toughest thing was initially frustration that my feet were starting to become a problem, requiring medical attention. As the race progressed I still required medical aid, but I started to accept the increasing pain as 'normal' and later on 'disowned' my feet. That way the problem went away and I could concentrate on the task at hand, finishing the race”. – Gary M





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2. If you had to do it again, what would you do differently?

“It’s important to break each day into manageable chunks rather than look at the race as whole, or even checkpoint to checkpoint. In terms of kit I am bringing a more reliable GPS for the long night sections and plenty of warm layers”. - Jon Z

“I am racing again this year and have prepared a lot better. My three main changes have been training, food and footwear.” – Rob S





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3. What are your top tips for 2014 runners?

“Stay warm, stay fuelled and try not to get lost!” - Jon Z

“Train hard, fight a little easier - training at long steady distances, especially when tired is the best way to replicate race conditions. Think carefully about what you're going to eat, then eat some more. Feet and shoes. Lots of dry socks, liner socks, Sealskinz and whatever works for you, but make sure you try out your options before the race” – Rob S



3. What are your top tips for someone running in 2014?

- *“Don't fear the event, embrace it, soak up the atmosphere, take in the scenery and treat it as an adventure.*
- *Focus on one step/section at a time. Don't think too much about breaking records and trying to win. You have to finish the race first before you can worry about that.*
- *Know your kit inside out. You should be capable of locating any thing in your pack and utilise it blindfolded. Remember you are most likely to need something when everything is conspiring against you.. Eg...The weather has closed in, you're cold, you've just pulled yourself out of a bog, you are physically shutting down & you're on your own. And you could be lost.”*

Gary M



After yesterday's 45m training loop and the experience of staying in CP1, think about the following:

(writing your answers down is useful, as you may find your answers change over time)

1. What were the things you learnt?
2. What are you going to do differently now in your preparation for the Spine 2014?
3. What are your Top 3 Tips TO YOURSELF?





After yesterday's 45m training loop and the experience of staying in CP1, think about the following:

These were some people's answers:

Eat more food

Lessen the load

Stay injury free

Spares of essential kit

Do things as soon as you think of them, not in 10 mins time

Practise with your head torch (changing batteries in the dark)

Continue with the non-running parts of my training

'Confidence is currency'

Concentrate on my admin.

Carry some money for the chip shop!

It's not a running race

Refine my checkpoint checklist

Lose weight before the race!





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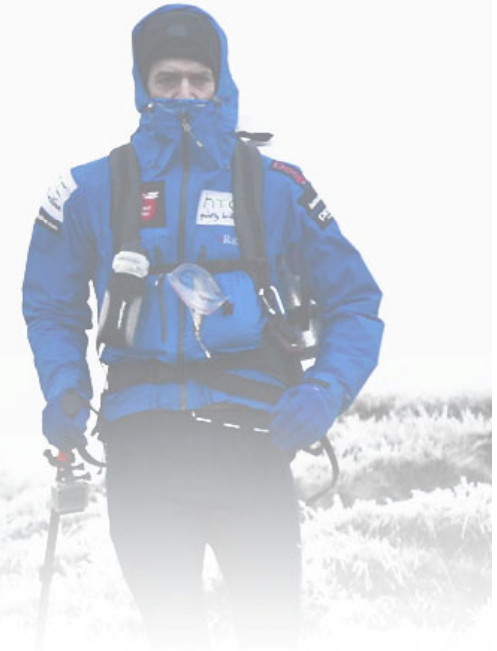
Strategies for Success ...

Constantly monitor your cognitive & emotional states (thoughts & feelings) as well as your physical one.

Develop a self-monitoring feedback loop so you can address any issues before they become critical or dangerous, just as you would for hydration, nutrition, personal admin. or hypothermia.

A spiral of negative thinking can catch you out - just like hypothermia, hunger or dehydration recognise the signs in yourself & catch it early so you can address it.

Practise the mental stuff in the same way that you practise the physical stuff – proactively.





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Strategies for Success ...

Manage your thoughts.

It's part of self-regulation. Alternative scenario planning / contingencies / 'flow' & being in the zone / appreciating beauty are all useful strategies. Count steps/ mentally rehearse transitions / listen to music – do whatever works for you.

Managing rational fears so they don't become irrational ones is critical.

Make all of your thoughts useful ones.





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Strategies for Success ...

What I noticed from yesterday & watching you all ...

Stopping is the easy bit, starting again can be harder. The frontrunners made it look easy They had a strategy for the stop & the CP & they transitioned through quickly & smoothly.

They were totally focused.





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Strategies for Success ...

Surround yourself with positive people who are as committed to your success as you are (or more so!)

If you choose to have support, they need to be self-sufficient & self-reliant, and *totally* supportive

Or, you will end up having to 'manage' them as well as yourself. (e.g. if they are tired, they could become negative & you can't afford to prop them up!)

Be very careful about phoning home, phoning friends, checking Facebook!! **Stay focused on the task at hand**





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Strategies for Success ...

How will you get through the pain?

You will have a physical strategy, what's your mental one?

e.g. use it as part of your personal admin. feedback loop / make it your friend / embrace it / talk to it / ignore it





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Strategies for Success ...

If you are wearing a tracker, ignore it!

From your perspective as a runner, it's simply there for your safety and so the race organisers can track the general progress of the group.

It's not there so your friends & family can phone the race organisers & say, "X hasn't moved for 3 hours" !! You will probably be sleeping! *(see the point on managing your support crew / friends & family!)*





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Strategies for Success ...

Buy a decent / new compass if you need to!

You can't rely on your GPS (as you might not always have a signal on the route!) So you need to be a decent map & compass navigator or you are in serious danger of going off track!

We saw some shocking bits of kit on the training w/e, which when tested, weren't accurate.

Get the kit right – get the right kit!





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Strategies for Success ...

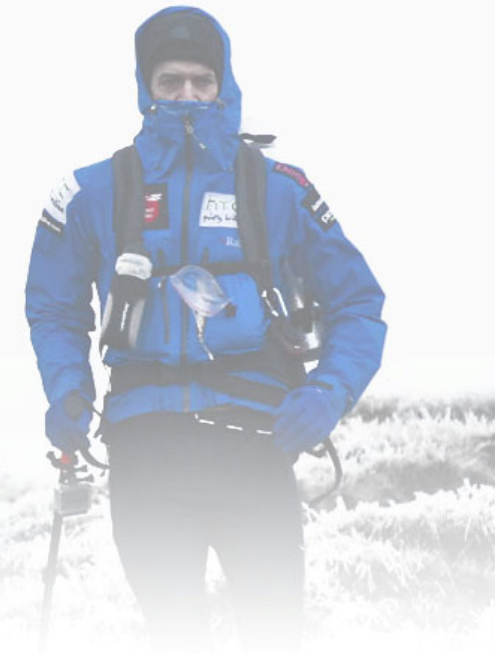
What are your sleeping and waking strategies? You need to practise these too.

If you don't rest optimally, everything is compromised.

e.g. use a good sleep mask, earplugs or music system. Even more critical for checkpoints which are busy, noisy and light. Wear them at home so they feel 'normal' to you. Have an eye mask with a nose, - black satin & lace saying 'sexy' won't do the job!

Music is an 'anchor' and a 'hypnotic command' – if you use a particular track or loop & practise at home you will be able to fall asleep quickly & easily.

Practise waking up. A first thought such as *Wake Refreshed* can help – Your body will do as you tell it.





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Strategies for Success ...

Every gram counts! - If you need it, but not on you, put it in your resupply bag & pick it up at the next CP.

Smart phones are heavy & the batteries drain very, very quickly – especially in the cold – the Nokia Numpy is 86 grams & has a long battery life. Keep it in an inside pocket so the battery stays warm. You might need it in an emergency.

Same with your spare head torch batteries – pack them on the inside of your rucksack, not the outside where they could freeze!





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Strategies for Success ...

Start thinking now about your post race mental state

Some of you will be elated, some of you will be gutted, - you will all be exhausted

Begin thinking now about getting through the race and beyond it – in that way it becomes just another transition through your last CP

The organisers open entries for the following year's race for just that reason – to help you maintain your focus and think about what you would do differently next year





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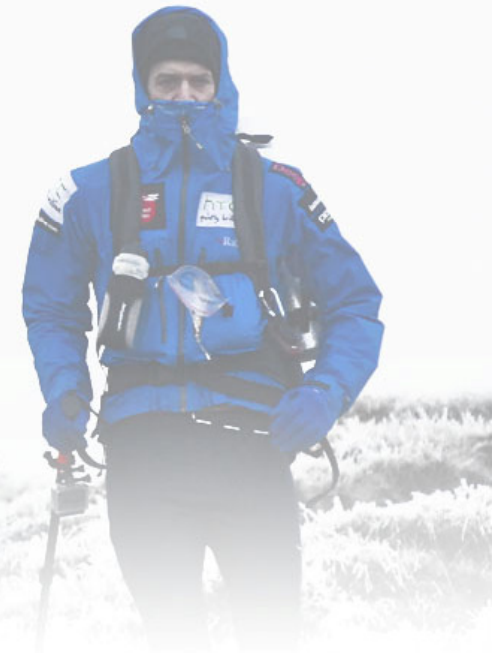
Strategies for Success ...

In the context of The Spine, using Phil HB's list of the top 3 mental challenges,

Develop at least 2 strategies to deal with each of them, (or avoid experiencing them in the first place).

And, as previous finishers have said, there's no substitute for actually training & experiencing something to learn how best to physically & mentally deal with it, (such as exhaustion or fear).

BTW, the best Ultra racers never get bored – they have too much to think about!





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Strategies for Success ...

In the context of The Spine, using the What is Cognitive Fitness? slide, identify your top 3 mental 'weaknesses' & develop strategies to manage them, (as potentially, they could derail you)

Also identify your top 3 mental strengths, as they will get you through.

(definitions & examples at www.cognitivefitness.co.uk on the Cognitive Fitness Blog)





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Strategies for Success ...

Have a look at Marc Laithwaites' podcast on mental prep for ultras, on the Talk Ultra website (episode 26?, & there are many other training tips on the site)

<http://www.marathontalk.com>

If for any reason you can't physically train, use visualisation techniques & mental rehearsal (see, hear, feel). These can reduce muscle wastage & ensure that the neural pathways remain strong.





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Strategies for Success ...

Have a look at the following for more useful resources:

<http://www.nav4.co.uk>

<http://bigandscaryrunning.com>

<http://www.rangerexped.co.uk>





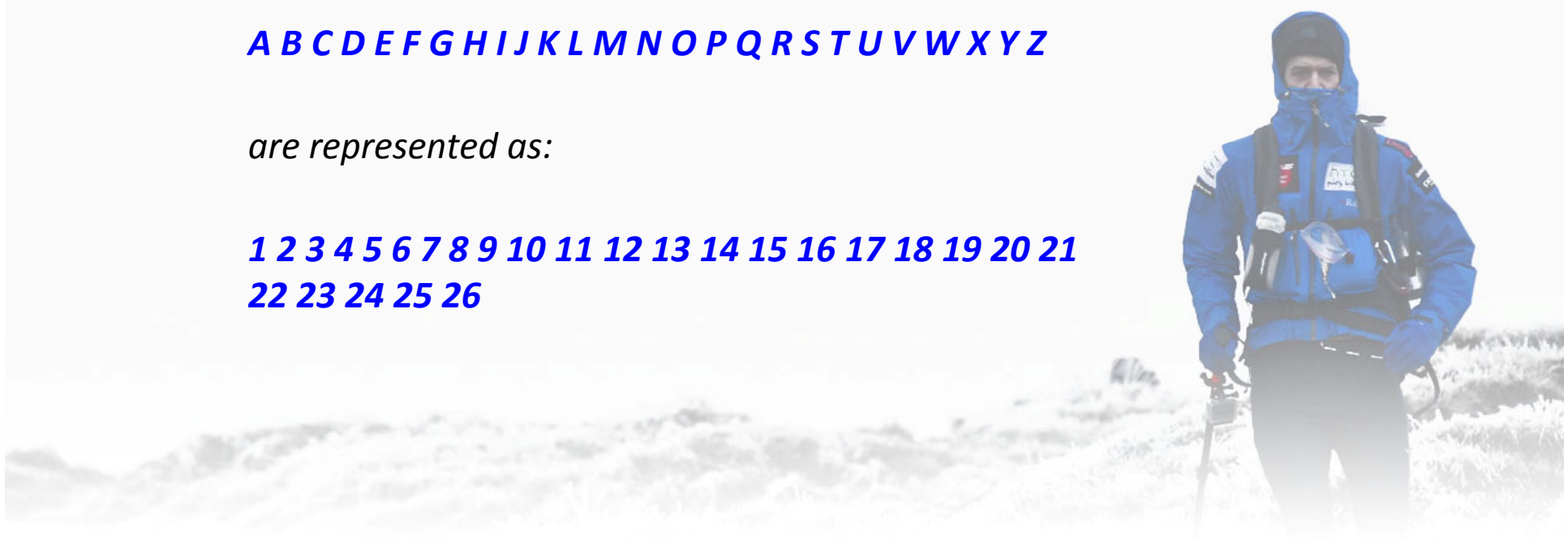
A Final Thought

If:

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

are represented as:

**1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21
22 23 24 25 26**





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K-N-O-W-L-E-D-G-E

11+14+15+23+12+5+4+7+5 = **96%**





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H-A-R-D-W-O-R-K

8+1+18+4+23+15+18+11 = **98%**





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A-T-T-I-T-U-D-E

$$1+20+20+9+20+21+4+5 = \mathbf{100\%}$$



Post Training Support

There is always support for you if you need it

1. You can contact the support team at any time via the Spine website or its Facebook page
2. Any 'cognitive fitness' / personal coaching support questions via the same routes, or directly to me on fiona.bj@cognitivefitness.co.uk. There is no charge for pre & post race psychological support from me, provided that you call me!
3. There is more information about cognitive fitness on the Cognitive Fitness Blog, accessed via my website

Good Luck!

