

Your Imaginative Brain and Your Future

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Many leadership books describe the importance of articulating a personal vision. When you articulate and share a vision, you are describing your future-projected self-image. It is what keeps you going during tough times. Your imagined future gives depth and richness to the various roles you play in life.

When I work with clients, I have them generate a leadership development plan that includes each of the significant attributes they want to enhance. I often ask for their visionary description of each.

Let's say the person wants to become a better delegator. I'll ask her (or him) to describe current behaviors associated with delegation. This is usually easy to generate. She will then imagine that we've done some great work together over the next year. She considers what an observer might witness relative to her behaviors after months of experimentation, selective practice, and forming new habits.

She can write these descriptions in phrases, full sentences, bullet-point format, or anything else that allows the imagery to be expressed. Then I make some suggestions, usually offering encouragement that stretches the person beyond what she (or he) thinks is possible.

Any of my suggestions may be accepted or rejected by the individual. She'll continue to enhance the vision of "what could be" until it expresses her best image of what's possible. The contrast between current reality and the imagined future vision sets up an inherent positive tension to move in the direction of that desired future state.

An amazing portion of your brain is called the "reticular activating system" (RAS). Many people have never heard the term. Look it up and learn about it! The RAS is a bundle of nerve cells at the base of your brain, where your spinal cord enters the medulla oblongata.

The reticular activating system serves as a filter, sorting out the many sensory stimuli that bombard you constantly. For example, if you concentrate on your shirt, you can feel its presence on your back and shoulders. Until I raised your awareness, however, your reticular activating system was filtering out that sensation, freeing your cerebrum (the thinking portion of your brain) to concentrate on this article.

Similarly, the reticular activating system "filters in" anything that you consciously program into it. Essentially, it's the portion of your brain where the world outside of you joins with your internal thoughts and feelings. (So, be careful what you think! Your RAS is listening, programming your subconscious!)

For example, if you decide that your next car is going to be a particular model, you'll be astounded to suddenly start seeing those cars around you everywhere. Are there more of them than there used to be? Of course not--your reticular activating system is merely making you aware of their presence.

Words are symbols. When you read or speak the words of your vision, you process them through another section of the brain that makes them even more concrete. In essence, you are translating from your imagination into reality, a very necessary step if you are to bring your imagined vision to fruition.

Your brain is a marvelous organ. Your creativity, freedom of choice, and self-control all contribute to imagining and expressing ideas. Your vision of your future perspective and behaviors merely sets the direction in which you will work to fulfill your potential in the not-so-distant future.

The more you affirm your interest in and desire for your future vision, the more the reticular activating system works to align your subconscious with the dictates of your conscious mind. Of course, nothing manifests in your life automatically. You must take the appropriate actions, intentionally trying new approaches. If you continue your past behaviors, you can't expect your outcomes to change.

If you execute the kinds of behaviors that others have tried, you'll discover what works for you and what doesn't. If you then practice the new skills you've learned, you'll rapidly move toward the future vision you've imagined. Those you serve will celebrate and appreciate your progress!

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