



YOUR MIND'S EYE

The Old Art and New Science of Visualization

David Krueger MD

A group of executives asked me to present a seminar to them on writing a first book. My first question was, "Has any of you seen a yellow Jeep in the last month?" Of the twenty-four people present, one raised his hand.

Then I went through a visualization exercise with them.

Let's do it now:

1. Close your eyes and visualize a yellow Jeep—the specific detail of how it looks.
2. Walk toward it. Walk all around it. Look at the tires, the body, and the trim.
3. Open the passenger door. Look at the seat, the steering wheel, the dash.
4. Smell the interior. Touch the seat. Start it, and listen to it run.

Open your eyes. In the next week, see what happens.

I asked them to contact me if they saw a yellow Jeep in the next week. Twenty-two of the executives contacted me in the first three days to say they had spotted a yellow Jeep.

What happened? What someone sees—what appears on the radar screen—is determined by belief and assumption. In that particular situation, a yellow Jeep was preprogrammed as possibility.

For example, the most common reason people don't earn more money and accumulate wealth is that they don't see themselves as capable of it. I can tell you how much money people will make by listening to their assumptions. Once someone genuinely sees himself or herself as capable of doing it, all sorts of things begin to happen. The amount of wealth—or number of yellow Jeeps—existing in the world doesn't change; you just code your radar for possibility.

It's difficult to challenge long-held beliefs, because they are part of your identity. A vision starts at the other end—the successful outcome. If someone has a fear of success, or a fear of failure, the visioning process bypasses that fear and etches the successful outcome.

In the film *The Lookout*, Lewis, a blind man, helps his mentally challenged roommate make sense of things by thinking of his day as a story. Lewis said, “Start at the end. Can't tell a story if you don't know where it's going.”

Our possibilities are only limited to the ones we allow ourselves to see.

The Art of Visualization

A vision crystallizes possibility into a fundamental, articulated idea. A vision gives hope possibility—a shape and form—to program your future while rehearsing it. You inhabit the experience of your vision as guide to then guide its creation.

A vision serves as inspiration to design ways to realize it. The most successful businesses have a vision that is also universal with each person in the organization.

Proven guidelines include the following elements:

- You must construct your *own* vision.

- The criteria to measure success need to be clearly defined.
Wanting to change, to start your life over, to be happy are all imprecise and abstract goals.
- Create positive terms for success.
Make your criteria in positive terms of what you want, what you will do.
- Be specific, simple, concrete.
- Vague and theoretical criteria are not useful, because there is no way to live a theory.
- Be entirely present to your experience of the vision: Being in your body, what you feel, what you think.

Now: form a real vision. Picture yourself as you have just succeeded at your goal at a specific time in the future, such as one year from now. Create this success experience specific to time, place, how you would experience yourself, and your body through all five senses. Hold the energy of the precise outcome you've just achieved, the goals met, and the feelings it brings. Imagine the details of the scene of your success inside and outside, engaging all senses, thoughts, feelings, and bodily experience along with details of the scene. For example, for a successful transaction, include the values and needs fulfilled, the money you have made from it, the details of what you are doing, such as shaking hands and ushering someone out of your office.

Carve out a few moments at the beginning and the end of each day to “read” this vision. You’re programming a message for success in your mind by creating the experience of having achieved it. This vision statement related to a goal begins the experience and outline of a new story that you can then live into.

You *do not* have to be motivated in order to plan and act. A vision can mobilize motivation. Even professional athletes drag themselves to the gym, get started, and when they get in motion, *then* they access a motivated state. They do not wait for motivation to get moving. Waiting until you get the energy to exercise doesn't work; you have to exercise in order to *get* the energy to exercise.

A number of accomplished, creative individuals were asked how they did what they did. Their response had a common thread: they just got up to do the next thing, and only in retrospect did they recognize how important or how immense it was. Or as one writer stated, "I'm just going to be here at my desk from 8:30 to 12:30, and if anything shows up that's worth writing, I'll capture it."

There are ten scientific, aerodynamically proven reasons why bumblebees cannot fly. Yet they do. The bumblebee has transcended factual evidence and obstacles to be able to fly. The bumblebee does not refute or overcome each of the aerodynamic principles; it simply does not engage them and sets about flying. Working through each of the problems, each bit of scientific data, to disprove the notions of its inability to fly would not enable it to fly.

While resolution of a problem may bring an end to the past, that alone does not create a successful future. Like the bee, your design is internal, and which is what directs your journey.

The Science of a Vision

Recent positron-emission tomography (PET) scans of the brain have confirmed several things about visualization:

- Visualization brings about actual physical changes in the brain.
- The brain assimilates a mental picture whether the stimulus is actual from the optic nerve, or imagined; the brain cannot distinguish between a mental image and an actual image.
- When you repeat a vision of successfully attaining a goal, the act programs neural networks and neuronal pathways to etch the experience more strongly.
- Mental visualization of a complex movement can actually improve performance.
- PET scans have established the fact that thoughts cause physical changes in your brain.

When you program your unconscious, you actually create a “future memory” to live into. The brain can’t tell who conjured it—you or reality. The more detailed your visual image, the more specifically etched your brain will be. We know that by simply picturing a danger, we can trigger the entire body’s responses of fight or flight.

Here’s the key: You do not make the brain changes permanent *unless* you incorporate them into your story. Doing so makes it part of who you are—your identity. Otherwise, the change either doesn’t register, or gets extruded as noise.

For example, if you see yourself in a successful business, you create the specific imagery to live that experience. You then incorporate it as part of your identity, rather than as belonging to someone else.

While your unconscious mind cannot tell the difference between something you physically see and something you mentally picture, your conscious mind can do so, and your conscious mind must incorporate an evolving story to include and assemble the

imagery as part of the story. Otherwise, unconscious messages will delete access to or believability of the imagery.

Here are the key elements:

- Repetition. The neural networks dedicated to your vision must be renewed and repeated regularly, or they will be eliminated.
- Conscious incorporation of this new vision into an ongoing story to be ultimately metabolized as part of the self. Otherwise, you will “lose” this vision.
- Specificity about the experience of having achieved the goal.

A footnote: Write it down. Research on memory tells us that a new idea or fact lasts an average of 40 seconds in short-term memory before it’s gone, unless you write it down to review.

Visualization *crystallizes possibility* into an *articulated idea*—the experience changes the brain. A vision serves as guide and inspiration to design ways to realize it—to live into it.

When you program your system with a visualized goal, you create structural tension in your brain—cognitive dissonance—the difference between where you are and where you visualize and affirm. Your brain then strives to end this tension by actualizing the goal. Structural tension (dissonance) in your brain will do the following things:

- Give you creative ideas
- Help you see things in your environment not seen before—a perceptual shift
- Provide motivation to take action (remember: The universe rewards action)

Major James Nesmeth spent seven years as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam. During the time he was imprisoned, he was essentially isolated and had no physical activity. . Before the war, Major Nesmeth was an average weekend golfer, hardly breaking 100. To preserve his sanity, he learned to visualize golf. He selected his favorite country club. He saw himself dressed in golfing clothes. He experienced everything in great detail. He smelled the fragrance of the trees and grass, made each stroke with his entire body.

After he was released from his captivity, playing golf in his mind seven days a week for seven years, on his first outing he shot a 74.

Affirmations to Support Visualizations

Affirmations make visualization a complete story. To achieve a goal, reprogram your automatic pilot by affirmations. Affirmations are positive statements that state the goal as if it has already been achieved. For affirmations to be optimally effective, the following characteristics need to be incorporated.

- Present tense

Begin with, "I am ...". State the goal as if you have already achieved it. "I am enjoying this month of skiing in Steamboat." (I told you you have to be persistent)

- Positive

Your brain will strive to achieve the image you focus on (close your eyes and notice the images that come to mind when you think, "The dog is not chasing the cat," or "I am not thinking about elephants.") The purpose of

an affirmation is creation of an image; a positive image is more powerful than ideas

- Personal.
 - Make your affirmations about your experience and accomplishment. Do not try to change other people's behavior. "I am watching my daughter clean her room" won't work
- Visual
 - Use all five senses, different lenses: include wide-angle and close-up; make a complete picture of experiencing the success of your goal
- Emotional
 - Include a feeling word (happily interacting, peacefully experiencing). A primary reason we do things is how we imagine we'll feel when we do it
- Brief
 - Brevity is the soul of wit—and affirmations
- Specific
 - Clearly focused, specific detail makes it real. No abstractions
- Action words
 - "I am driving ... acting ... living ..."
 - If you say "I am going to ..." you will always be on the way
- Consistent
 - As soon as you let up on the disciplined, focused pursuit of a goal, your automatic pilot will revert back to the familiar. This is the frustration of

losing weight and then letting up to have it all come back. Remember the astronauts who got Day 15 off and had to start over?

- Add “Or something better.” “I am enjoying my month each summer writing on the coast of Maine, or something better.”

Write each goal and affirmation on a 3 x 5 card. Read each one at the beginning and the end of each day. Remember to visualize yourself as having already achieved the goal.

How long do you do this? Until you reach the goal.

How many goals should you generate affirmation for? A reasonable number—at least three—maybe more—that you’re working on daily.

In this way, you create the feeling of internal success. You inhabit the experience. An affirmation will initially make you feel uncomfortable, even anxious. With an affirmation that is positive and not yet achieved, you challenge the core belief of your identity and systematically create the template of a new life or business story.