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Visualizing Change: Using Your Mind To Change Yourself

By Brooke Loening

The best predictor of how you will be in the future is how you are today. When you are acting in a certain way that is not working for you or does not feel right, you are likely to do it again; changing that is not a magic trick that happens by sheer luck or happenstance. Often, change requires awareness of what the problem is, and a clear vision of the new way you want to be the next time it occurs.

One member of my young adults group on Monday nights told me that she was able to make a huge change after visualizing herself acting in a new way during a familiar situation. She found herself taking part in a conversation with some friends that involved criticizing other people. She told the group that it didn't feel good, but she could not stop herself from participating. In our meeting, she created a clear vision of herself in that same situation where she did not participate at all. Instead she saw herself saying one positive thing about that person to her friends. When the situation came up again, she was able to live her vision of not participating in the same old way. Naturally her friends looked at her like she was an alien, but it felt much better to her to live this new reality.

Visualizing a different way of being creates a template for new a way of being and opens the door to that possibility instead of the same old pattern. It also allows for a much higher likelihood that we will be able to make your vision a reality. But if it is so easy, then why don't we all do this? The truth is that most people don't know this "trick," and even when they do, they don't take the small amount of time necessary to do the work.

I frequently ask my clients to create a clear vision of how they want a certain situation to be in the future. I ask them to be as detailed as possible and to take their time with the process. We include lots of details like how they see themselves acting, speaking, standing, their emotional state and even the expression on their face.

I have another client who was always helping himself to seconds at the dinner table. He didn't feel good about it. His problem was magnified at gatherings over the Holidays, especially Thanksgiving. He was not hungry for more food, it was just a habit mixed in with a little anxiety that made him do it. The overeating always left him feeling stuffed and highly self-critical for once again not being able to restrain himself. We walked through a visual image of how he wanted the dinner to go. This session was in preparation for Thanksgiving dinner with his family. The visual exercise was detailed right down to how he was going to take his plate to the kitchen after one serving and where he was going to sit when he returned (which was in the living room, away from all the food.) He agreed to practice his vision again before the event. He was able to carry out his vision in detail because of the rehearsal in his mind beforehand. It was not as

hard as he had imagined and it gave him a lot of confidence that he could make breakthroughs after all.

Many of my clients have used affirmations to create new ways of being in their lives. I encourage them to attach the visual image of themselves acting out the affirmation because that process significantly increases the likelihood of making their vision happen.

An affirmation you can use is: “When I want to make a difficult change, I create a detailed visual image of how I want to be, and that frees me to make it happen.”

Brooke Loening is a life coach in Sharon who works with individuals, and runs weekly coaching groups on achieving growth in career, health and relationships. For more information and previous columns visit theloeningplan.com. Columns can also be found at textra.com