

## **USE YOUR IMAGINATION!**

You're faced with a problem; it could be short term (how to decide between two courses of action) or longer term (how will you spend the rest of your working life?). Or you're nervously contemplating a situation where you will be expected to give a good performance; an important presentation, or an interview. How do you deal with the problem? How do you prepare for the interview?

In Western society, the skills of logic and reason are highly prized, and it is these skills which we turn to when we want to resolve a problem. We weigh up the pros and cons, make lists, plan what we're going to say. All well and good - but what happens when we've argued ourselves round in circles, and still haven't arrived at a solution? Or when we're faced with the unexpected, and words fail us? It is at times like these that we can all benefit from a much neglected inner resource; the 'right brain' powers of intuition and imagination.

As the right brain uses symbols rather than words, imagery provides us with an effective means of accessing and harnessing these powers to enhance our performance and plan for the future. There are two main ways of using imagery. We can consciously create mental pictures of specific situations, as we do when we daydream, or we can allow spontaneous images to arise and explore these images; this is a particularly good way of getting round a 'mental block', as our unconscious often already 'knows' the answer (think of all the times you've ignored your instincts and 'gut feelings', only to find that they were right!)

Creating images isn't difficult; most of us daydream, or picture the action and characters of a book as we read it. Some of us have a strong visual ability, others find it easier to imagine sounds, touch, taste or even smell. With time and practice, you will find yourself able to incorporate all of these dimensions into your mental images; in the meantime, the golden rule is to relax and enjoy it, without judging yourself.

So how can we use imagery to improve our daily life and work? Here are some suggestions.

### **PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**

Perhaps you have reached a stage in your life and career where you want to change direction, make some changes. You are trying to find out what motivates you, what your needs are, what would give you satisfaction. As a first step, simply allow yourself to daydream; build up a picture of your 'ideal' job or your ideal lifestyle. Go through a typical day step by step, and make the image as vivid as possible, as if you were living it now. Where are you living? What is your working environment like? How are you dressed? Are other people there? What are they like? What activities are you involved in? What else is happening in your life? Then make notes of the main points. It can be helpful to capture the main images in a concrete visual form, by drawing them or making a collage. You may not be able to achieve everything in your dream scenario, but it can give you valuable clues about your needs and 'satisfiers', and you can build these into goals for the future, or use them to help you identify the type of work you would enjoy.

## **PROBLEM SOLVING**

Maybe you are feeling 'stuck' and really don't know what you want? Learn to tune in to your intuition - IT knows, even if you don't! Sit in a comfortable chair, and, starting at the top of your head, relax all the muscles down to your toes. Then, allow an image to come into your mind which represents your life as it is now. **DON'T CENSOR THE IMAGE**, however crazy it seems - take whatever comes.

Examine it from all perspectives. What does it look like? Where is it located? How did it come to be as it is? What does it need? Allow yourself to become that image, and see the world through its eyes. You'll be presented with some surprising insights. I recently felt depressed without knowing why; I produced an image of a leaky rowing boat adrift on a wide ocean, with no oars and no land within sight. I literally felt 'all at sea', and had lost my sense of direction. The solution was to stand up and see the wider perspective, but I had been scared of 'rocking the boat'; however, when I did so, new lands suddenly became visible. I needed a map; in other words, to take stock and review where I wanted to go. I also found that I already possessed the resources to repair the boat, and could stop myself from sinking. As I was becalmed, I needed an outboard motor, in other words to use my own energy to move on, instead of waiting for external circumstances to move me.

As a variation, you can generate an image that represents what is blocking you, then another which represents what you need to move on. Don't try to rationally interpret what you see at this stage; the images have their own internal logic and symbolic language. Stay with this, and interpret later! It is helpful to draw the image afterwards, as this helps to fix it in your mind.

Another way to resolve a problem is to imagine you've already resolved it. Visualise as clearly as possible what this would be like, if you were living it now. Describe it to yourself in the present tense, bringing yourself into the picture. What's different from before? What are you doing? How are you feeling? Is anyone else there? What are they doing, and how are you relating to them? Then rewind the film; retrace your steps and see what you did to reach that point.

## **FACING A CHALLENGE**

You have an interview, and you really want the job. Or, you are giving a presentation to an important client. In both cases, you're eager to give your best performance. Try using 'mastery imagery' to prepare for the challenge ahead. Imagine yourself being successful, and build up the picture in vivid detail. What are you doing to achieve such a good result? Visualising a successful outcome creates a positive mental blueprint that can increase your confidence.

Alternatively, imagine someone who would handle the situation particularly well; it could be a friend, someone you've seen on TV, a character from a novel. For example, you might choose a politician who is particularly eloquent and persuasive. Step into that person's shoes, and see what you can learn from them!

You may be worried about things going wrong. Imagine that they **ARE** going wrong, but that you are coping effectively. Look at how you're managing to do that. By facing your worst fears

in this way, you're less likely to be thrown off balance if they become a reality, as you will have already practised coping in your imagination.

Mental rehearsal can be a powerful anti-stress tool, as the brain finds it hard to distinguish between what is real and what is strongly imagined, and the body responds to the messages given by the brain; thus, if we imagine that a particular event will be stressful, the body will tend to respond by producing the very real physical symptoms of stress, and these will affect our performance. However, if we have programmed ourselves to believe that we can cope, those symptoms are less likely to manifest. The link between mind and body is now widely accepted and well documented.

Daydreaming at work tends to be frowned upon, unless (perhaps) you're in a creative role, and most of us learn to keep a tight rein on our imagination. Sadly, in doing so, we neglect a valuable resource which, if wisely used, can help us to be more effective in all sorts of circumstances; handling pressure, coping with change, resolving problems, setting career and life goals. By bringing together 'right brain' intuition and imagination and 'left brain' logic and verbal reasoning, we can open up a whole new perspective and change our lives for the better.