

Visualizing Your Goals Using Mental Imagery

Objective

To use a visualization technique to increase goal-directed behavior.

You Should Know

Goal visualization, or mental imagery of future events, is a technique that can help you imagine possibilities and develop a plan for goal completion. This can be outcome-focused, where you imagine the successful end result, or process-focused, where you think about the steps leading up to goal completion. Outcome-focused imagery can help you envision your desired outcomes and identify specific and concrete plans; process-focused imagery guides you to visualize the steps to goal completion to create an action plan. Each type can increase your motivation.

Research has shown numerous beneficial effects of goal visualization. Your performance can be improved, and you are more likely to achieve a goal, if you consistently imagine your future success. In addition, mental imagery of future events increases the likelihood those events will occur. Mental imagery has been shown to enhance athletic performance, reduce relapse rates, and decrease the likelihood of premature termination of therapy.

What to Do

The following meditation exercise will help you visualize the completion of a goal through mental imagery. Please note it is normal for your attention to wander as you do the exercise. Avoid criticizing yourself; instead, simply notice your focus has shifted and gently return your attention to the exercise.

- Get comfortable in your seat and gently close your eyes.
- Take a few deep, slow breaths, and allow yourself to relax.
- For about 30 seconds, think about a goal you want to accomplish in the next year of your life. This might be a relationship, personal, educational, or work-related goal. Visualize it in your mind's eye.
- Now, for 1-2 minutes, imagine yourself going forward in time, into the future...going forward one week...two weeks...three weeks...and four weeks. It is now one month into the future, and you have started working toward achieving your goal. Think about the decisions you have made and the actions you have taken. How does it feel to be on the road to success?
- Continue going forward in time until you are six months into the future. You are significantly closer to achieving your goal. You are starting to feel the benefits of all of your efforts. What is this like? How does it feel to be this much closer to your goal? Notice any feelings or emotions tied to this moment.
- Continue going forward in time until you reach one year from now. Here, you have fully accomplished your goal and you have achieved success. Visualize yourself in your mind. Where are you and what are you doing? Who are you with, if anyone? What are people

saying to you? What are you saying to them? How does reaching your goal feel? What emotions are tied to this achievement? Perhaps you feel pride, joy, contentment, or satisfaction. Linger on these feelings for a few moments.

- Take a few moments to look back on your journey. Review the process of achieving this goal, and consider all of your hard work and effort. Think about the step-by-step process of reaching your goal. What were the little things you did each day to achieve success? How did you manage difficult thoughts or emotional obstacles? What coping strategies did you use? Consider all the things that helped you manage the personal challenges that appeared along the way.
- Take a deep, slow breath. When you are ready open your eyes.

Reflections on This Exercise

Describe the goal you imagined during this exercise.

Now, write down the specific steps you visualized during this exercise. What can you do to achieve your goal?

Reflections on This Exercise

What was it like to do this visualization?

What were the challenges or obstacles you identified in achieving your goal? List them.

What are some ways you can overcome these obstacles and challenges? Be specific.

Are there any insights you can use to move closer to your goal? Why or why not? Describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
