

Making Movies in Your Mind

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By Dr. Alexander R. Lees

Another title for this article could have been *Guided Imagery Gone Wrong*. Approximately 50% of the function of our brain is devoted to visualization. Interestingly, in those days when I presented workshops on guided imagery, it wasn't unusual for some participants to lament on their inability to make pictures in their heads.

Sometimes, their speech patterns indicated they were doing so, but at the same time, not really conscious of it. For example, I would offer everyday examples of visually accessing information, and the spontaneous response might be "Oh, I **see** what you mean," or "Can you **show** me more examples?"

This was extremely useful feedback, and allowed me to adjust the training accordingly. You see, it isn't really a question of whether or not you can visualize. It's a question of **noticing** that you do.

Human brains process some 60,000 thoughts daily. Most of them are like movies, streaming through consciousness. These thought movies keep our world somewhat *knowable*, and therefore predictable. Some time ago, some very bright people began to study how very successful people did things (they called it modelling). It wasn't long before they discovered these people had certain patterns of thought, and it was a common denominator amongst successful people, and set this group apart.

By far, the use of creative visualization was the most consistent pattern. As one entrepreneur said during an interview, "I just run the movie, and then live it." So, why isn't everyone doing this? It seems so simple...

Well, the fact is, everyone does do it, but here's the difference, and it's a difference that makes the difference between those that do it well, and those that say they can't do it well, or do it all.

A few years ago, I was asked to work with a basketball player that had hit a slump. As we explored the issue, comfortably in my office, it came to light that the ball was bouncing off the left side of the hoop. Further queries revealed the player ran the movie (in his mind) of this happening, and this is what he saw. He saw himself running down the court, dribbling the ball, eluding everyone that was trying to stop him and then effortlessly would throw the ball, and as it soared through the air, heading for the hoop, it suddenly veered off to the left and bounced off the rim, and onto the floor. He ran this same movie, over and over, many times a day, and he also saw it in 3D and in colour!

We changed the *movie* to one of seeing the ball drop through the hoop, over and over, and the player was out of his slump in no time.

A dancer I worked with was acknowledged as having the best potential the instructor had seen in a decade. Unfortunately, the dancer wasn't consistent, and her performance was on one day, and off the next, and this pattern had been repeating itself for months. Once again, the *good* and *bad* movies she was running in her head turned out to be a major contributing factor. We successfully deleted the *negative* movies and script, and replaced them with *success* movies.

In Squaw Valley, a ski team was divided into two groups. Group A was asked to relax, listen to the soothing music, and visualize skiing down the hill. The instructor encouraged them to visualize each twist and turn on the run, with emphasis on the details, such as: "Where would your hip be, in relation to your leading ski, as you traverse that turn at Pole 4?" This training was repeated twice daily for three days.

Meanwhile, team B practised on the slopes under the watchful eye of the coach, and they were even encouraged to beat their previous times, with enthusiastic feedback all the way.

On day four, the entire team then skied the hill, and each member's performance was compared to the one established prior to the *experiment*. In each case, those that had practised in their heads improved the most! The full implication of this kind of phenomenon is astounding. Time and time again in this kind of research, the fact remains the brain does not distinguish between what is *real* and what is imagined, and the process can be used for either empowering outcomes, or limiting ones.

So yes, imagery or visualization is a powerful influence on attitude, behaviours and performance. But, please remember, the process itself doesn't care if you use it for useful outcomes, or self limiting ones. This concept - positive guided imagery - is not the domain of athletes and performers... the opportunity is open to everyone.

Since you're running movies in your head anyway, why not adjust them so they become more supportive and help you achieve your chosen outcomes and desires. Therefore, the next time you find yourself in a bit of a slump, do yourself a favour - check the movies in your head... it can really make a difference. And, if you work with others, do them a favour - check theirs.

For more information visit www.DrAlexLees.com.

