

Achieving Happiness

HOW TO BOOST THE CONFIDENCE,
SELF-ESTEEM, SUCCESS, AND HAPPINESS
OF THOSE THAT MATTER TO YOU
– *IT'S AS 'EASY AS ABC'*

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About the author

I never imagined, 35 years ago, that I would find myself working with homeless people, the unemployed, those with life-threatening illnesses, and Olympic competitors. Nor did I see myself training sports psychologists, and a wide range of coaches.

I just set out to deal with some personal issues, and develop my understanding of how mental preparation can unleash potential, and now I find myself mentoring youngsters, parents, aspiring sports stars, and business leaders, to be happier and more successful.

I take great pleasure in helping people, whatever their circumstances, to find within themselves something stimulating and energising to look forward to – partly because they are fascinated to discover that the three step process is as 'easy as ABC'.

The concepts equip people of any age to develop an effective mindset and put themselves on track for greater success and happiness. Those who study and understand the concepts will appreciate how to help others in their family, or environment, to benefit from their support.

I take every opportunity to run workshops, coach individuals, give talks, and train those who want to use this approach to work with their clients at a deeper level.

I have no intention of retiring – I am enjoying my work, and the rewards it gives me and those I help, far too much!

The purpose of this book

I have given numerous talks and presentations in Europe and the U.S.A. and members of the audience have frequently asked if they could buy 'my book'.

After a talk I gave, on my 'ABC' model, a former international table tennis player told me that I should not only be working with athletes and other competitors but should also be training our Olympic coaches.

When an Olympic medallist then told me I needed to write a book about my approach I realised that it was indeed time to do so.

While the original book was primarily intended for aspiring sports stars, coaches, and sports psychologists, this version will give valuable insights to any individual (whether a student, parent, employer, employee, or retired person) wanting to use more of their potential and be happier, or more fulfilled.

I stress it is *not* simply intended to be a '*self-help*' book – I hope and anticipate that the concepts will help all my readers to help many others:-

Part 2 of this book, the Psychology element, covers many well-known concepts that all readers will be able to use to their advantage.

Part 4 is deliberately all about what each of you can do for yourselves, to use more of your potential and fulfil your ambitions. Also, the last chapter of Part 4 'Mental simulation' is in the free 'Mind Games' download, on the website, as an immediately available resource for anyone you know who is looking for support of this kind.

If you really want to stretch yourself and fulfil your heartfelt ambitions, you may well need help from a suitably qualified coach, to tap into your inner aspirations, and then to overcome any lurking, subconscious, doubts about your prospects of making your dreams come true.

Extracts from Part 4 Effective ‘mind games’

“What's the mind attends to it considers.

What it does not attend to it dismisses.

What the mind attends to continually it believes and what the mind believes it eventually achieves.”

Earl Nightingale

Putting your mind to it

The key points:

Using ‘mind games’ effectively is essential to ongoing/continuous improvement.

Once you know how to ‘put your mind to it’ you can draw on the creative power of your subconscious to accelerate your progress towards your objectives – whether they involve an improvement in your physical or emotional wellbeing, or the attainment of a specific objective or sporting triumph.

Keeping your goals stretched to the limit of your inner self-efficacy boosts your chances of success by increasing your subconscious drive and creativity.

The more you mentally rehearse the sense of the achievement of your objectives (in an effective way) the quicker your subconscious picture of yourself will adjust itself to the new you – provided your self-talk is aligned with the changes you are working on.

Generating commitment

The key points:

Professor Bandura's research suggests that commitment has two elements: self-motivation and self-efficacy.

Focusing on the changes you want to make, in the most effective way, will boost your drive, energy, and creativity (the components of self-motivation) to find resources and solutions that will help you achieve your goals.

It is essential to raise the level of your self-belief, self-esteem, and confidence (the components of your self-efficacy) to underpin the new performance level you are striving for.

'Mindset Priming' boosts your self-efficacy by highlighting your inner self-belief and removing doubts and fears from your subconscious.

Mental simulation

The key points:

'Mind games' have been a natural and instinctive process for you all your life.

Understanding 'mental simulation' will enable you to control your 'mind games' and ensure they are working effectively for you and moving you steadily towards your objectives.

Repeatedly visualising yourself at the level of performance, success, or enjoyment that you are seeking, or needing, is like having a full dress rehearsal of that outcome, over and over, so that it feels natural and normal for you.

There are different ways to trigger a consistent and appropriate picture/experience in your mind – you need to find the one that works best for you.

Your natural change process

Many of the changes in your life that you have achieved, or experienced, thus far will have resulted from your anticipating the new circumstances that you wanted to enjoy, using visualisation to adjust your comfort zone, and then finding you are able to revel happily in the changes you have achieved.

My original version of this book, written for elite competitors, inevitably used a great many examples from the sporting world. While I appreciate that few readers of this edition will be wanting to visualise themselves as sports stars, I have left in the original sporting examples because I think they are easy to understand and I hope you will find it easy to transfer the concepts, and techniques, into the areas of your life where you are wanting to improve or be happier.

If you are involved in sport then you will know that effective visualisation involves much more than just thinking about how you want to perform in your next competition. Successful competitors, when using visualisation, truly sense their event taking place in their mind's eye.

As mentioned earlier, Michael Phelps, the greatest swimmer in the history of the Olympics, visualises his ideal swim before he goes to sleep each night.

David Hemery, who set a world record for the 400 metres hurdles when winning Olympic Gold in Mexico in 1968, told me "In my own competitive days it was vital for me that I didn't hope to win, I **intended** to win, and visualised that, in huge detail, hundreds of times".

Sports psychologist Dr JoAnn Dahlkoetter wrote in the *Huffington Post* about a speed skater she works with. Her article gave a great description of the range of sensations it helps to involve in visualisation. "She feels her forefoot pushing off the track, she hears the sound of her skates, she sees herself surging ahead of the competition and she experiences all the elements of her race in explicit detail before executing her performance."

One of the key reasons this is an effective process is that fortunately for us, our subconscious does not register the difference between something that is very vividly imagined (perhaps in a 'realistic' dream) and something that we actually experience.

Strange as it may sound, and very fortunately for us, as far as our subconscious is concerned, both events are 'experienced', and stored, as if they actually happened to us.

Effective mental simulation uses experiential imagery to create events that feel as if they have actually happened to us. Repetition of such images stacks up multiple 'experiences' in our subconscious, of things being how we want them to be.

I explained earlier how Gestalt kicks in to help us restore order when reality conflicts with what we want, or expect, to see. When we use visualisation effectively we trigger

Gestalt, because the process confronts our subconscious with two conflicting pictures of 'reality'.

Thus, when you vividly and repeatedly imagine that things are already how you want them to be, this is accepted by your subconscious as a picture of actual reality, and that will clearly be in conflict with the genuine reality of the situation, or self-image, that you wish to change. Your subconscious will need to resolve this conflict.

Provided you visualise what you want repeatedly, the picture of your future goal will become the more dominant of the two conflicting pictures. Your subconscious will get creative to move the less dominant picture to match the dominant one and will thereby adapt your self-image, as required, and move you towards the achievement of your goal.

Applying the process will achieve the same effect for you as for actors, who repeatedly rehearse for their performance on stage, so that they actually perform, on the day, in a way that they feel they have experienced many times before and that comes quite naturally to them.

Pilots are prepared for duty by being trained in simulators to deal with a whole range of crises that could crop up in an actual flight. They learn, and practise, the appropriate responses so that, should a drama occur in mid-air, they are able to instantly and automatically react without needing to think about which procedure to adopt.

Even without being aware of the technique, we have all used it instinctively. We describe many of the things we automatically do well as 'second nature for us now'.

What made them 'second nature'; how did we shift from what had been 'first nature' for us? It was almost certainly by using mental simulation to speed up the process of assimilating the new behaviour.

Perhaps before you were big enough to ride a tricycle, you observed older children doing so, and thought to yourself "I am nearly old enough to ride a trike" and imagined yourself pedalling away.

Then, once you were old enough to ride your trike, maybe you began imagining yourself riding a bike, then a motor bike, or driving your first car, and so on.

Each acquired technique becomes second nature to you once you have repeatedly imagined yourself doing it, learnt the skills needed, and experienced the reality a few times.

Lasting change starts on the inside in your imagination.

It is worth repeating that when you launch the process by repeatedly visualising, in an experiential way, how you want things to be, you imprint that picture into your subconscious as an existing 'reality'.

When that picture conflicts with the current reality that you are seeking to change, it will trigger tremendous drive, energy and creativity in your subconscious to bring about the change you want – you will be 'putting your mind to it' in the most productive way possible.

The more clearly you define your objectives, the more precisely defined will be the picture you paint in your mind, and the more likely you are to achieve exactly what you want.

Remember also that the greater the gap between your current situation and your aspiration, the more your drive, energy and creativity will be generated subconsciously to make the pictures match.

A full dress rehearsal

To move you on from the theory of how to change to the practical application of that process, I hope you have understood that the easiest and most natural way to achieve your goals is to change 'from the inside out'.

You can best achieve that by imagining how you want to be in the future, imprinting that picture on your subconscious – in such a way that it gradually adjusts your self-concept – and thereby effecting a lasting, and comfortable, change in your behaviour.

There is no limit to how many changes you are able to work on at any one time.

I want you to recognise that you are likely to need to visualise a number of aspects of each goal that you have in mind. You will also need to support the change process by being careful about the thoughts you allow to run through your mind and the way you describe your performance to others (and in your own head).

To explain these important aspects I would like to move from an emphasis on athletics to the idea of a golfer improving their handicap. The principles I will be describing can be related to any activity or sport.

Let us imagine you are an amateur player with a handicap of 16 and your goal is to get that handicap into single figures. You might think, from what you have been reading, that I'm suggesting that to achieve this change all you need to do is to visualise yourself, at the end of a round of golf, looking at your scorecard and seeing the evidence that you have gone round the course in nine over par.

This would be asking far too much of your subconscious.

I know that if I want to improve my golf game I need to look at its component parts and identify specific aspects to work on: I need to practise and play more often. I need coaching to help me improve my technique when playing out of a bunker. I certainly need to improve my accuracy when chipping onto the green, and I need to work on my line and length when putting.

In making an action plan to improve my golf, I would need to work out how often I wanted to play and practise, and when I would find time to do so. I would need to book lessons with the pro to get help with my bunker shots. Having put these sessions into my diary I would need to start working on my self-image.

At least twice a day I would need to make time for my mental simulation of each of the elements of my game that I am trying to improve. To make the visualisation as realistic as possible, I might imagine myself playing accurate shots on some of the holes on the golf course I regularly play on.

The more you can ‘experience’ in your visualisation the positive emotions you would feel, and the actions you would be able to perform, the easier it will be for you to not only ‘see yourself’ but also ‘sense yourself’ at the new level.

This ‘sensing yourself’ is called ‘experiential’ imagery and the more detailed it is, the more effective your mental simulation will be.

Let me give you an example of what I mean by ‘experiential’ imagery. If I asked you to film me mowing my lawn and I then watched the film on, say, your iPad, I would be able to ‘see myself mowing the lawn’.

But if I was to use ‘experiential’ imagery to ‘see myself mowing the lawn’ I would see and feel my hands on the back of the mower, see my feet coming into the bottom of the picture in turn, see the immaculate stripes where I had already cut the grass, see the longer grass still ahead of me, smell the new mown grass cuttings, hear the sound of the mower and perhaps birds circling overhead, feel the breeze on my face, etc.

Using ‘experiential’ imagery involves as many senses as are appropriate for each situation you need to visualise.

There are different techniques for triggering these pictures that I will come to shortly, but I want to stress something very important at this stage. Once you have decided on the performance that you wish to make ‘like you’ – that is to say the performance you see yourself consistently achieving in the future – it is really important that your thoughts, and the words you use, support this new performance.

To illustrate this in the context of my golf example, if I am visualising myself as a single handicap golfer (chipping well, putting well, and getting out of bunkers when I need to), I will undo all the benefits of visualisation if I allow myself to talk about being ‘hopeless at chipping, usually taking three putts, dreading having to get out of bunkers’ and so on.

Those kinds of comments would present pictures to my subconscious that add weight to the current reality rather than the future goal.

A very helpful image that sticks in my mind, from one of The Pacific Institute®’s courses, is that of an old-fashioned set of weighing scales (where the item to be weighed was put on one side, and differing weights then added to the other side, until the balance revealed the item’s weight).

When I first attended one of their courses I needed to do a lot of work on my self-esteem. In the context of the weighing scales, it was suggested that throughout my life I had frequently been ‘putting myself down’ and that each time I had

done so I had put a negative weight on one side of the scales. I realised that over the years these weights had accumulated to ensure that I leant in that negative direction.

To reverse that damage I was taught to stop loading the negative side and start putting positive weights on the other side of the scales. I mentally covered up the pile of negatives, realised I could use visualisation to put positive weights on the other side, and recognised also that I could reinforce the change I wanted by ensuring that my self-talk was positive and supportive at all times.

I would encourage you, should you choose to adopt this technique, to apply it widely to every aspect of your life and not just to your career or ambitions.

I suggest you take a piece of paper, or type yourself some notes on your computer or iPad, listing aspects of your life that are not as you would ideally like them to be.

Then prioritise the improvements you would like to see and practise applying the following techniques to achieve your aims.

Techniques for triggering mental simulation

By now I am sure that you understand the need to imprint a consistent picture, in your subconscious, of you revelling in the achievement of your objectives.

When appropriate, and possible, it is brilliant to relive an actual experience in your mind (as Steve Backley did after visiting Helsinki), perhaps adding a new or better outcome if necessary.

When that option is not available some people like to use photographs, or images cut from magazines, to imprint the picture.

Others prefer to write a carefully worded sentence that gives them a sense of experiencing the achievement and being filled with appropriate emotions. Such a sentence is often referred to as an 'affirmation'.

Any of these approaches will clearly ensure that each time you visualise you will consistently be imprinting the same picture into your subconscious. That is important because you need a consistent picture if your visualisation is to trigger ongoing conflict with your current reality.

Writing affirmations

If you choose to use affirmations, the simplest way to write them is to use a four step process: first, describe what you want to change about yourself or your situation; second, write down how you would like life or success to be instead; third, turn that description into a first person, present tense sentence that includes reference to the benefit you will have gained by making that adjustment; finally, write any supporting affirmations that will be needed.

When I started using the affirmation process, I found my sentences were often quite long. With time, I learnt that very often the shorter the sentence the more powerful it could be.

Many books have been published on techniques for writing affirmations and they very often list eight or more elements that need to be included if an affirmation is to be successful.

That approach works fine but is not always necessary.

The most powerful affirmation I have ever seen was just three words long.

I was shown it during a workshop that I was running a while ago when one of the participants asked me for help with his affirmations. He was somewhat round-shouldered, stooping, and prematurely grey. He also lacked confidence and told me he had low self-esteem. He was concerned that the affirmation he had written did not meet all the criteria that I had suggested could be helpful.

Whenever I tell this story I find myself welling up, because when I read his affirmation to myself I immediately realised that it was brilliant.

I asked him to read it out loud for me and his affirmation simply was, just, “I walk tall”. As he spoke it, he visibly straightened up, his shoulders went back, and he stood up straighter.

Of course, he needed to do more than use that one affirmation if he was going to successfully rebuild his self-esteem, but it was a great start and would do wonders for helping him hold his head up with pride.

Having shared that with you, here are some of the recommendations for writing affirmations effectively that are often quoted and that I hope you will find helpful.

Guidelines for success with affirmations

You will need to write an affirmation for each of your goals in the first person, present tense – as if it is a reality NOW, *i.e.* “*At the end of each day I look back with pride on my achievements*”.

Using language that describes your potential, rather than the success you are aspiring to, will not work for you and you will want to avoid any sentences like “*I can confidently cook a supper party for six people*”.

Affirming that you *always* succeed in achieving something is not recommended either, because your subconscious will be aware that the statement is not likely to be true. For example, if you are wanting to improve your punctuality, affirming “*I always arrive on time*” is not recommended because your subconscious will know that there may be occasions when you are unavoidably delayed in a traffic jam.

In my previous book I used the following series of sporting examples and hope you will find them helpful.

If you are a runner, your time may be affected by differing track conditions or headwinds. So avoid affirming anything like *“I always run the 100 metres in under 10 seconds”*.

If you’re currently running 100 metres in over 10 seconds, and genuinely think you have the talent and determination to be the best in the business, an affirmation you might think would work for you could be: *“I’m proud to have broken 10 seconds for the 100 metres and I’m really looking forward to breaking the British record”*.

However that is not a great affirmation either, firstly because there are two separate achievements referred to (and you want to give your subconscious one picture per affirmation) and importantly, also, the second achievement is one you are looking forward to (i.e. it is in the future) and you need to picture things in the present to achieve the conflict with your actual reality.

“I’m proud to have broken 10 seconds for the 100 metres” might do for one affirmation (though it sounds a bit flat, or bland, and non-specific to me) while the second half of the original version would need to read something like *“I feel over the moon to be the British 100 metres record holder”*.

It would be even better to be specific about the time you are intending to achieve. In your visualisation you might want to see that time up in lights, against your name, on the giant scoreboard.

Strange as it may sound I hope you don’t choose to use any of the sample affirmations that you see here. The reason I say that is that they are written using my words rather than yours.

If you’re going to use affirmations the words need to be your own – in every sense sounding like you.

The late Pat Given, one of the great mentors in my life, was helping a group with their affirmations and one of the participants was something of a rough diamond whose habit was to litter his sentences with some pretty robust swear words. Presenting his affirmations to Pat, he had stated they were useless and didn’t work. Pat read them and pointed out that they were written in surprisingly elegant English prose (rather than in the more robust language that the individual normally used). Pat encouraged the man to write his affirmations incorporating his usual way of speaking, which he was sure would work better for the individual concerned.

Several weeks later Pat got a telephone call from the man who, using a typical number of swear words, told him gleefully how great affirmations were and how well they were working now he littered them with four-letter words.

So create affirmations, written in your own way of speaking, which inspire you, excite you, and trigger a picture of believable success, and be sure to write each aspiration as if you had already achieved it. Be as specific as possible about the detail of the change, express the benefit of the

achievement, include any appropriate emotion about the change and use action words (where suitable) that describe the new experience.

Then 'live' each vision in your mind at least twice a day and experience the event as you would if you were able to practise it in a simulator.

Using supporting affirmations

In Part 3 of the book, in the chapter on 'Mindset Priming', I described how I had helped Darren Lovegrove, a golfer, to recognise that he had the talent to be far more accurate with some of his clubs than he had realised.

To achieve that level of accuracy consistently he, of course, needed to change his self-image and his self-talk. So, since his overall goal was to reduce his handicap and turn pro, he would have needed to have an affirmation about playing as a professional, and also to have supporting affirmations about the consistent accuracy he achieved with each of his clubs.

In Part 2 of the book, I suggested that the four things that hold us back from achieving our objectives are beliefs, expectations, habits, and attitudes.

In helping people to achieve their goals, I always suggest that, having set the goal and written their main affirmation, the next stage is to identify any of those four blocking elements that might hold them back. They then need to write supporting affirmations to change the belief, the habit, or whatever combination of blockers they think are impeding their progress.

If you are a parent with two or more very different children, if you are a business person mentoring a team with different levels of confidence in their roles, or if you are an athlete competing in more than one event, you are likely to need supporting affirmations for each individual you are nurturing, and each achievement you are seeking.

If you are a golfer, you may need supporting affirmations about a number of the clubs that you use, or aspects of your game that you are working on.

The more you can think of affirmations that will support your achievement of your goals, the easier it will be for your subconscious to adjust your self-image so that you free-flow at the new level.

You have almost certainly used the mental simulation process to bring about change instinctively before. You now know how to control it.

Gradual and incremental change

With this approach you can change attitudes and expectations quite quickly. Beliefs and habits are likely to take longer. All changes tend to be gradual and incremental but will be sustainable.

One thing I would like to emphasise is that it is important to be patient and allow the change in your self-image to be the source of the change in your performance.

What that means is that you do not give up, or stop doing, something immediately (which you may have done in the past when you made a New Year's resolution).

If you forcibly change your natural and instinctive behaviour (rather than waiting for the change to come about from your adjusted self-image) it will stimulate your subconscious to get you back to being 'like you'.

Instead, with this approach, you decide on the change you want to make, frequently visualise the 'you' that you wish to become (imprinting that picture on your subconscious) which will change your self-image which will then, in turn, change your natural and instinctive behaviour into how you wish it to be.

In other words you just let the 'mind games' do their work and carry on being you.

Controlling your self-talk

I have mentioned before how important it is that your self-talk is in line with your aspirations and affirmations.

If you go back to my example of the weighing scales, I think it will be easy for you to see that if you use an affirmation to bring about change (effectively putting a positive weight on one side of the scales) you will cancel out the benefit of that if you allow your self-talk to put a contradictory picture on the other side of the scales.

"I'm happy that my technique is improving" or some such comment will support your affirmations in that direction, whereas, "I am still lousy at ..." most certainly will not.

Talking of weighing scales, people often use visualisation to achieve a healthier weight.

If you keep fit this is unlikely to be a change you need to make, but someone in your family may appreciate some coaching from you in this direction.

I have often been asked to help people get thinner and very often I'm told that they have no trouble losing the weight but always put it back on again. If I ask them what they did with their old clothes (having lost the weight in the first place), I can guarantee they tell me that they put them in the back of a cupboard, or in the loft or the garage. The reason for this is that in their mind they knew they would need the clothes again when they had put the weight back on. In other words, their self-image had not changed and they still saw themselves as a larger person.

It is preferable not to use self-talk such as, "I'm trying to lose weight" because 'trying to' conveys an expectation of failure. If someone you know is working on losing weight, then suitable self-talk for them could be, "I'm looking forward to having more energy" or "I'm going to find it much easier to get

around the golf course” or even “I can’t wait to take all these clothes to the charity shop and replace them with something that flatters the new me”. (Please note that these sentences using the future tense are fine for your self-talk but would not work as affirmations because those need to be in the present tense if they are to have the desired impact.)

It really helps, if wanting to lose weight, if your affirmations refer to the benefit you will gain from being lighter (‘now I run when out walking the dog’, ‘having more energy’, ‘looking great in the mirror’, etc).

Once I added the ‘benefit’ words to my affirmations I found they had much more impact – I strongly recommend you to try it.

The self-talk spiral

Once you recognise how your self-talk develops your self-image, and the link between that and your performance, then I am sure you will see the value in paying careful attention to how you talk to you.

From now on listen to your self-talk and make sure it is helping you towards your objectives.

Many, many, people “talk themselves” out of happiness and/or success by careless use of throwaway lines about how their life is.

Happy people can achieve and maintain their level of happiness by controlling their self-talk.

Successful people talk themselves into success with an ongoing upward spiral. Many people talk themselves out of success and watch their performance spiral downwards. Both groups use a process of comment – self-image – performance – comment – self-image etc. The only difference is whether the comment/self-talk sends the spiral upwards or downwards.

What you need to do, having set your aspirational goal, is to align your self-talk with that goal and then mentally rehearse that achievement.

En-route to your success there may be days when your performance falls short of expectations. On those days, it is important to say to yourself something like “that’s not like me, I’m better than that, the next time I will get it right”.

On days when you exceed your expectations you might want to say something like “I’m getting better all the time and next week I look forward to...” to turn on some drive, energy, and creativity to do even better.

Prepare for an endless journey

The two most frequent reasons I have heard people use, for resisting the idea of change, are that they anticipate firstly that the process would be stressful and secondly that the changes would not last.

I hope I have explained why using mental simulation *will* help you achieve the changes you are seeking to make.

I hope it also makes sense when I assure you that, if you do use that approach, your progress towards your goals will be *comfortable*, because it will be achieved by you changing your self-image, and reinforced by you using appropriate self-talk, while just behaving in a natural and free-flowing way.

If that makes sense to you, then you do not need me to explain why, once your self-image has been adjusted to the 'new you', that will underpin the new behaviour and your changes will be *sustainable* until such time as you may choose to set new goals or targets.

As I have suggested earlier, there may be setbacks along the way. You can prepare for them by deciding what sort of thought process you will adopt, in the event of a disappointment, and mentally rehearse that response so that you can pick yourself up and get back on track quickly.

I hope both your career and your life will flourish and become more enjoyable now you have the 'mind games' you need to help you on your journey to a happier, more fulfilling and successful future.

There is a lot you can do for yourself and by now you know that there is a lot a coach can do to support you with 'Mindset Priming'.

So go for it!