

# COACHING I

## 2. THE POWER OF VISUALIZATION

### 2.1. Introduction

Visualization is a technique that has been in use for many years, but it only started to come to the attention of popular media in the 1970s and 1980s. Since that time, its use has expanded to all areas of life. Athletes like Jack Nicklaus use it to excel in their sports. Actors like Will Smith use it to imagine success not yet achieved. On a less grand level, people use visualization to see and achieve goals such as planning the perfect wedding or acing an interview.

In coaching, visualization can be used to help clients identify, imagine and achieve their dreams. Whether that is achieved through the creation of a vision board or having the client write a detailed description of their ideal life, visualization is a powerful tool in a coach's toolbox.

In his book, "The Success Principles", Jack Canfield asserts that consistent visualization causes three things to happen:

- 1) It programs your mind's reticular activating system to start letting into your awareness anything that will help you achieve your goals.**
- 2) It activates your subconscious mind to create solutions for getting the goals you want.**
- 3) It creates new levels of motivation. You'll start to notice you are unexpectedly doing things that take you to your goals.**

### 2.2. Use of Visualization in Coaching

The phrases "Mind over matter" and "Brain over brawn" are popular phrases. They assert that one's intellect will win over one's physicality. However, visualization is about mind *with* matter. It's about bringing the mind and body together in order to achieve one's goals. It is about training your body to naturally and automatically act in the way that your mind has trained it to act during multiple

visualization sessions. Successful visualization is not achieved in one session. It is only achievable after repeated use.

When someone consistently repeats thoughts, those thoughts become impressed into their subconscious. Thereafter, their brain becomes trained to automatically send signals to the body to act in accordance with those thoughts. Visualization takes those thoughts out of the subconscious and brings them into the conscious realm. With visualization, the client deliberately selects the goal to be focused on. By selecting one goal to focus on, the client is able to focus all of their resources on achieving that goal. The method of visualization that works best will vary from client to client. However, two of the major visualization methods that a coach can use are vision boards and written visualization. This paper will examine each method and how it can be used in coaching.

### **2.3. Vision Boards**

Vision boards have become quite popular recent years. They are the visual representations of the clients' dreams and goals. Vision boards work best for those clients who are visual people. They are people who remember experiences by reliving them in images or are visual artists themselves. They are people who primarily learn by watching things being done.

Vision boards are usually created on poster or cork board that is covered by images of the things that the client hopes to achieve. The images are usually pictures cut out from magazines but they could be pictures drawn or photos taken by and of the client. There are two major categories of vision boards: the Focus vision board and the Idea vision board.

The Focus vision board is for the client who knows exactly what they want. They already have a very clear vision of their goal but have not been able to make progress toward that goal. To create this vision board the client will look for or create the exact images that project their specified goal and attach it to the board. Ideally, they would add a picture of themselves to the board so that it will be even easier to visualize themselves achieving those dreams. Then the board should be placed somewhere the client would see it every day as a reminder of their goal.

Jack Canfield gave an excellent example of the use of a Focus vision board in his book, *The Success Principles*. John Assaraf created a vision board and put it up on the wall of his home office. Whenever he saw something he wanted or an experience he wanted to have, he would get a photo of it and add it to the board.

Then he would see himself already enjoying the object of his desire. Five years later, he was moving into his new home when his son noticed a stack of boxes and asked him what was inside of them. Assaraf told his son that the boxes contained his vision boards. When he took out the first vision board, he saw pictures of things that he had already acquired such as a Mercedes and a nice watch. When he took out the second board, he started crying. Why? Because on the board were photos of his dream house and it was the very same house in which he was standing. He had added the pictures to the vision board only four years before he moved into it. Assaraf had a clear vision of the things he wanted. By adding images of those things to the board, his mind started thinking of ways to acquire those things and in the end, that's exactly what he did.

The Ideal/Clarity vision boards are for clients who are not sure what they want but they do know that they want to make changes in their life. To create this board, they simply cut out or create images that intrigue them in some way. There does not have to be a particular theme or goal associated with the Idea vision board. If an image brings a smile to the client's face, they do not have to know why it does so in order to add it to the board. The purpose of this vision board is to provide the client a guide to what is important to them. They may not know how the images relate to their goal or dreams. However, after repeatedly seeing those images that triggered something in their brain, a pattern will emerge that will clarify their values. Gaining clarity on their values will allow them to gain clarity on their dreams and thereafter on their goals. Once they have gained clarity of their goals they can move forward and create a Focus vision board.

For instance, a client may say that they do not know what they want but they know they need to make a change. They then create a vision board that has pictures of beaches, a car filled with women, the Eiffel Tower, people bungee jumping and white water rapids. Those things may seem unrelated but by asking the client what each picture means, it would be possible for the client to recognize their need for adventure and travel. Once they've gained that clarity, they can move on to what kind of adventure they would like to have and where they would like to go. If they found the vision board useful, they could then make a Focus vision board based on those goals.

## **2.4. Written Visualization**

Written visualization is another method of visualization. Written visualization does not have to entail writing in one's diary. It involves in any visualization that is

done by writing what one sees when they see their ideal life or dreams. Written visualization is primarily for those clients who learn best by reading and/or writing. It is not enough to simply give a general vision such as “I want to live in a big house.” In order for written visualization to work to its fullest extent, the client must be as detailed about their vision as possible and use the present tense. So, “I want to live in a big house” becomes “I live in a five bedroom, five and half bath house. It is on 100 acres and has a regulation size pool and tennis court.”

Writing down one’s dreams is helpful in many contexts. For instance, it is a good idea to have clients who would like to start a business to write down how they envision their future business. In their book, *Sixteen Weeks to Your Dream Business*, Nada Jones and Michelle Briody have readers write about their dream businesses in the first week of exercises. The idea is to get a big view of what the business is and how it will fit into your life. They recommend that readers identify what their company will offer, where they plan to conduct business and why the reader is the right person for the job. Those questions are the *hard* business questions, meaning things that clients may put into a business plan. It is their next set of questions that address the *soft* questions that require more visualization. The authors ask readers to describe what their ideal place of business looks and feels like and what the reader’s ideal work life looks like. By answering these softer questions, the readers begin to imagine their dream as a fully realized accomplishment. Their goal is to open a business. Answering the hard and soft questions allows them to start thinking about their dream in concrete terms. By writing down the answers to these questions, the reader has presented their minds with a problem to solve and the mind naturally sets about working on ways to solve the problem. As Scott Adams, creator of *Dilbert* comic has said, when someone writes down a goal, they will “observe things happening that will make that objective more likely to materialize.”

Visualization can also be used to address personal areas of a client’s life. For instance, if a client would like to find a romantic partner but has not had any luck achieving that goal. One method of written visualization is to write letters to the client’s Ideal Partner. In those letters, the client would vividly describe the partner and what kind relationship they will have.

In her book, “Write It Down, Make It Happen”, Henriette Anne Klauser gives an example of a client using the letter writing method of visualization. Gloria was looking for The One but had not had any luck in finding him. She decided to start writing letters to him even though she had not met him. In these letters she detailed what he looked like, what kind of personality he had, how she felt when they were

together and what kind of relationship they had. As she continued to write the letters, they became more vivid and detailed. Two weeks after she wrote her final visualization that detailed their lives together, she met Ted. He matched all of the details in her letters and they were married eleven months later.

It was not magic that brought Gloria and Ted together. Once Gloria decided on her goal and set her intention, she began to live her life as if she had already met The One. She stopped staying at home and started living her life fully. She began collecting things that she had always wanted to share with a romantic partner. She began going to events and places that she enjoyed because those were the kind of things that she would enjoy doing with him. It was while she was out at one of these events that she met Ted. This is further proof that thinking alone will not achieve results but rather actions are required. Gloria's visualization led to her actively making changes in her life and those changes that lead to the result that Gloria sought.

Fundamentally, visualization is about setting a vision of your goal in your mind that leads to setting your body in motion. Simply put, visualization is **Thought + Action = Results**. It is not enough to simply think about reaching your goals but rather it is about doing something to achieve those goals. Visualization is the first step in that journey. Like with any journey, there are different ways to get the destination. Vision boards and written visualization are two methods to start the journey by focusing the mind on the destination. Using them in coaching will allow clients to get to the heart of what they want and provide motivation to continue working toward their goals when things get rough or are uncertain. Visualization is a power tool in the coach's toolbox and can be adjusted to meet the needs of any client.