

Inspired Life Formula with Nina Lockwood

Module 5: Reimagine Your Life

How to use personalized visualization and guided imagery to create a joyful and satisfying life.

This is Nina Lockwood and welcome to the Inspired Life Formula, Module 5: Reimagine Your Life. In this module we're going to look at the ways we can use our minds to affect what happens in our lives. You may be more familiar with using logic and reason to be successful but in this module we're going to be taking a more right-brained approach using our intuition, our inner senses and our imaginations.

One of the themes running through the Inspired Life Formula is that you always have an opportunity to step off the proverbial gerbil wheel of life where we've been conditioned to act, believe, admire and copy what we've been told. Not only does that make a very predictable and unsatisfying life, it keeps us locked into behaviors that limit our creativity, our inspiration, our spirituality and our ability to enjoy life. So having the skill that we're going to be reviewing in this module will be another tool in your skill set to empower you to you consciously manifest your experiences rather than simply being a victim or passive recipient of what comes your way.

I'm sure you've heard or read that your thoughts are powerful. I think we all agree with this in theory but in reality, when we're faced with a situation that has an emotional trigger, or if we have to meet a deadline and have to make a decision we often go into automatic pilot and fall back on the familiar way of figuring out what we need. Nothing wrong with that, but another world with many more options and opportunities opens up when you begin to incorporate your right hemisphere, intuitive side into your problem solving.

When we're left brain dominant, we look at the details of how to make something happen: all the planning, the controlling, the organizing, figuring out how to make things happen, anticipating problems and providing alternate strategies. However, when we're right brain dominant, we start moving into a non-verbal, image-based energy where we have an intuitive

understanding of the big picture, how everything fits together, how it feels. We connect with the energy of the heart. We're not focused on how to make something happen so much as how it looks and feels. And we realize that once we are focusing on what we want, the how of it will make itself known to us.

There are a lot of reasons to add the ability to visualize to the way you navigate the waters of your life. Remember the numbers we tossed around of how our everyday left-brain predominant mind, the one we've been trained to use most of the time, is actually very slow, because it's sequential, linear? The right hemisphere of the brain exists along the logical but because it can see the bigger picture, and see it much much faster because it's capable of a holistic, qualitative perspective.

Let's start by defining the terms we'll be using as we tap into this side of ourselves and look at why this process can be so effective. Then I'll cover the steps you can take to create visualizations or imagery for yourself. We'll be building on concepts that we've explored in earlier modules to make the process of visualizing easy, fun and last but not least, powerful.

Think about how you go through your day: You envision almost everything to varying degrees before you act or speak, whether it's something you want or want to avoid. Most of the time this happens so fast we just don't realize it's even happening. Obviously this is a good thing: these mental images help us orient ourselves in time and space, help us recognize where we are and who we're with, what we're doing.

For example, when you ask yourself, What do you want for dinner? Before you reach for it, in your mind's eye you've probably already looked through your refrigerator or your kitchen cupboards to "see" what's there. Or, what if you're trying to decide what to wear to go out tonight? Even if you're already holding a piece of clothing in your hand, you're also imagining how it will look on you. You're getting a root canal? You imagine what it will be like for you in the dentist's chair. With almost everything in life, how you prepare for something mentally has a huge impact on how you respond during the actual event.

You'll often read or hear the terms guided imagery, visualization, and guided meditation so you might be wondering whether they're all the same thing. They are: they're interchangeable terms that refer to using the mind's eye to imagine, or envision, something you want to have, be or do. Guided imagery simply means that you're being guided by either a person or a recording to follow a program or meditation that's been created for a specific purpose. I tend to think of guided imagery as having more of a qualitative intention: and I hear it used much more in the context of changing how your life feels to you or changing your mind rather than for skill building. Very few people question the effect of the mind on the body anymore because study after study demonstrates that, through the use of mental imagery, the mind does have a direct effect on the physical body, particularly, the immune system, the autonomic nervous system, and the endocrine system. Some of the results documented include speeding up the healing process, minimizing recovery time and improving overall health. Given the fact that guided imagery is so often used in the fields of healing, psychology and spirituality, you'll notice a willingness or an allowing of a higher power to influence events. Often in the context of healing, a healer will let go of their personal intention to allow for whatever is in the highest good (and which might not be knowable at the time) can occur. That is absent in the use of performance-driven visualization.

Using guided imagery, you can take the process a step further: once you've asked the mind to present an image symbolizing a problem or situation, you can have an imagined conversation with that symbol for additional meaning or direction. This was a technique used by Carl Jung as well as other psychologists in accessing deeper regions of the psyche. Or, as you'll be hearing about later in this module, you can recognize and release any thoughts or feelings to the contrary about what it is that you're wanting.

Daydreaming is also a form of imagining, in that you're passively following a series of images, but there's no specific intention or outcome in mind; you're just letting your attention.

Visualization is the word that's more commonly used in the context of skill acquisition or goal setting, and it's been a very effective tool in the self improvement and performance arenas since the mid-70's. Visualization is used in every field from professional sports to NASA space travel. With the

focus on rehearsing specific steps or tasks, the benefits of Visualization are more quantitative or goal oriented in nature: to improve focus; achieve goals, develop new skills or behaviors, improve self confidence and performance, become more positive or motivated. There's a sense of self generated, personal accomplishment.

From a physiological standpoint, When you visualize an activity, you see yourself going through the motions and rehearsing the the steps in your mind, you create new neural pathways in your brain, even though you aren't physically doing anything. These neural pathways are, in effect, training your muscles. Studies have been done where a control group mentally performs a task and a second group physically performs the same task, and the group that visualized the activity actually was able to perform it to a higher degree than the control group. This is an example where the body/mind is unable to tell the difference between what is imagined and what is quote unquote "real".

So, Whether the terms visualizing or imagining are used more in one context than another, the skill you're using is the same: you intentionally use the mind to imagine or envision a desired outcome, but how and what part of the brain you use is different. I suspect that with skill building or performance enhancement, "visualization" is a much more down to earth sounding term than imagination, which does in some circles have a negative or lazy connotation. But we know better, don't we?!

Let's talk about how you can use visualization (or imagery) in your life. I've already given you some examples of how you are already unintentionally using it in your everyday life, and intentionally for others when you're sending someone good intentions or blessings or good energy. I'm going to share two different ways of visualizing. The first one could be considered more traditional, more left-brained, where the outcome requires a certain degree of control or mastery.

Holding the Reins

I'm calling this first kind of visualization Holding The Reins. This is where you have a specific goal and and want to perform successfully, eliminate any pre-event jitters, familiarize yourself with all the details of what needs to

be done. It could be for a speech or a demonstration or a sports event you want to win, and each step you need to take is clear. In order to succeed or win you need to rehearse those steps in your mind's eye at your highest level of ability over and over again, as if you were actually, physically doing them.

There are basically three steps involved to this way of visualizing: relax; envision, and feel.

Step 1: Take the time to find a quiet place where you won't be interrupted. Then, Relax your body as much as possible. This is really important because you want to be able to focus and if your mind or your body is tense it's going to be much harder to do. Close your eyes, Take a few deep breaths, clear your mind and directing your focus exclusively on your goal.

Step 2: Visualize yourself performing each move perfectly, from beginning to end, seeing yourself accomplishing the goal easily. Imagine your surroundings, who else is there, how you are dressed, including as many details as possible. Use all your senses to feel, hear, taste, sense, and smell everything you're imagining. If you are describing your actions in words, use positive statements in the present tense as if your success is actually happening now. The mind does not recognize negatives such as can't or won't.

Step 3: One of the most essential elements in having success with your visualization is to include the feelings you would be having as you successfully perform at your best. Imagine yourself having fun, that each step comes easily to you; See yourself smiling, happy, confident as you move through each step; imagine the support of others as you accomplish your goal. See yourself having accomplished your goal, and imagine how you feel in having accomplished it.

Step 4: When your visualization feels complete, end it on a high point and gently bring yourself back to the present. This visualization works best when done several times so that the goal is reinforced and imprinted with familiarity, confidence, positive emotions and success.

Letting Go of the Reins

The second way that you can imagine your future is slightly different. In the first method you're essentially following a script in your mind of what needs to be said or done or experienced, and you combine that script with the feelings you imagine you will feel and by sensing every action in as much detail as possible. Everything is predictable, measurable, controllable so you reinforce each step in order to win or accomplish your goal.

But in the second method, the one I call Letting Go of the Reins, you let go of trying to control what happens and feel into what wants to happen, keeping in mind that life happens for you, not to you. You're less concerned with how to make it happen as how to attract or allow it. So instead of imagining what you will do to make something happen, you imagine how it will feel, what it will look like, what wants to be created in material form. There's no sense of dominating or manipulating or forcing. You create a space within your consciousness for that inspiration to manifest. There is a clear sense that something higher and greater is moving within this vision. Martha Beck has described this in a 4-step process that makes use of some of the practices we've worked with in earlier modules. Her steps include: getting out of the mind into a wordless state, sensing the interconnectedness of all of life, tapping into the imagination for clues and signs and allowing for the formation of ideas arising from your imagination. We're going to adapt some of her process and add a few other bells and whistles. Although the description may be a bit lengthy, once you've done this a few times it won't take long at all, especially since you've already been practicing a number of these steps already.

Here are the steps that we'll be using: presence; feeling, envisioning, letting go

As with the first method, it works best if you can be in a place where you won't be disturbed, but as you use this technique more and more you'll find you'll be able to drop into it at will. Bring to mind something that you would like to be, have or do in your life.

Step 1: Close your eyes, bringing that felt sense of breath and body into your awareness, letting yourself soften and open, effortlessly dropping out of the mental noise of the mind into that wordless presence of the heart.

Step 2: Feel into that sense of interconnectedness and oneness in which everything that exists is connected to everything else. This is the place where all time exists simultaneously, all is now, in this moment. Let yourself align with the flow of the universe.

Step 3: Without any sense of force or trying to make anything happen, allow yourself to picture what it is that you want, in as much detail as possible, seeing it as though it was already accomplished, already done, using positive present tense wording as you describe to yourself what it is you see.

Step 4: Let go of any attachment to outcome and let your personality step aside for what is highest and best for you. When this visualization feels complete, gently bring yourself back to the present moment. Let go and let the Universe work out how this will manifest for you. Your job is not to figure out the specific details but to be guided by the force that you have set in motion with the energy of your thoughts.

Whether you were Holding on to the reins or Letting them go with your visualizing, you may notice thoughts or feelings or images that were not what you wanted; in fact, they were contradictory. Maybe you heard a voice in your head saying, I can't do that, or this will never happen or they will never agree to this....or any images where the opposite of what you want appears. If this happens, take the extra step of welcoming the thought or the image that would sabotage your goal and choose to let it go. We all have thoughts and feelings based on old habits that are contrary to what we want, so making the choice to consciously recognize them and let them go is a very powerful way of enhancing your visualization.

Just as you did with the two different methods of releasing in the earlier module, try both these ways of visualizing and get a sense of how each one feels and which one works best for your current goals. And, as always, do your best to keep track of these in your journal. Is there a time of day that's best to use imagery? It's really a matter of preference. The beginning

of the day is good, but whenever it works best for you is fine; maybe it's at the end of your day or simply when inspiration strikes them. This is a skill that, like anything else, takes practice; and you'll find the right timing for yourself.