

every
woman

WORKBOOK

Visualisation for career success: a beginner's guide



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ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

Established in 1999, everywoman advances women in business. Our aim is to ensure women from all over the world fulfil their potential. We produce workbooks, webinars, articles, and videos on topics that matter most to our members, and we're constantly listening to your views to give you the tools you need to kick-start your career, at a time and place that suits you.

Visualisation (or 'mental imagery' or 'making movies in your mind' to cite a few common synonyms) is a tool you're no doubt already using, albeit unconsciously. There's nothing like imagining how good you'll feel after going to the gym to inspire you to pick up your trainers, or perhaps you mentally run through important business conversations ahead of time, to help you prepare.

Psychologists who've studied elite athletes - for whom visualisation is every bit as important to their success on the running track or football pitch, as is regular practice and taking care of their bodies - say that the principles of conscious visualisation in sports are the same for 'corporate athletes', looking to win in the business world.



In the aftermath of major tournaments, the theme of visualisation regularly crops up on the sports pages of the world's press. Manchester United football player Wayne Rooney's premier league match preparation, he tells journalists, involves making a mental study

The principles of conscious visualisation in sports are the same for 'corporate athletes', looking to win in the business world.

of himself scoring a winning goal - in almost forensic detail. In directing his own mental movie he leaves no stone unturned, right down to visiting his club's laundry room to quiz the kit team on precisely which pair of socks will be laid out for him on the morning of the game, so he may know which to visualise himself wearing. "You're trying to put yourself in that moment, to have a 'memory' before the game." For Rooney, that 'memory' has to be vivid, sharp and authentic.



Olympic gold medal winner Jessica Ennis-Hill also attributes her athletic success to her visualisation routine: “I use visualisation to think about the perfect technique. If I can get that perfect image in my head, then hopefully it’ll affect my physical performance.”² As Ennis-Hill’s words suggest, this type of pre-event routine, used by numerous other athletes including boxer Muhammad Ali and tennis champion Novak Djokovic,

isn’t just about cultivating a positive mental attitude - the compelling scientific research we’ll present in this workbook, has uncovered remarkable links between mental preparation and its very real affects on the body.

In recent years, psychologists have begun to look at how the basis of visualisation used by sports stars applies to the business world. We’ve spoken to Dr Steve Bull, the chartered psychologist who’s coached athletes through three Olympic Games, who now applies the principles of high performance visualisation to the boardrooms of some of the world’s highest-profile businesses and brands.

“The parallels between performance in business and performance in sport are multiple,” he says. “You’ve got to make good decisions, you’ve got to be confident, and you’ve got to be focused, manage relationships and execute in a critical moment. All that is underpinned by exactly the same psychological principles, whether you’re kicking a ball or selling bank loans.”³

This discussion of the relationship between the winning mindset of sporting heroes and business leaders appears to have piqued the interest of our 11,000+ everywomanNetwork members across 80 countries⁴. When asked which topics you wanted to explore

“If you want to reach a goal you must ‘see the reaching’ in your own mind before you actually arrive at your goal.”

Zig Ziglar, US salesman

in our most recent workbook agenda, 'visualisation for workplace success' featured as strongly as other, perhaps more expected topics as 'upward management', 'effective communication' and 'elevating your online profile'.

One final thought before you get going: visualisation, like imagination, is often wrongly perceived as a skill a person either does or does not possess. You may downplay your creative abilities on account of your lack of artistic output, forgetting that your problem solving skills or aptitude for navigating challenging situations requires vast creative thought.

So before you embark on this workbook, ask yourself if you have any doubts about your ability to successfully visualise. And if you do, know that science is very clear when it comes to mental imagery: there is no single brain function responsible for your capability to conjure up vivid and compelling pictures in your mind. Researchers have discovered that though the visual cortex - the part of the brain that processes imagery - is alive and kicking when you paint mental pictures; so too are up to 12 other regions of the brain⁵. Even those of you who don't consider yourselves artistic or especially visual, have the capacity to become powerful visualisers, and all the more successful for it. "It works," says Dr Bull. **"It very powerfully works; so do it."**

Good luck! Let us know how you get on in visualising and achieving your goals:

mel@everywoman.com

Maxine & Karen

The compelling scientific research we'll present in this workbook, has uncovered remarkable links between mental preparation and its very real effects on the body.

PART 1

visualisation: a myth debunked



VISUALISATION: A MYTH DEBUNKED

If you could develop a skill, which, when combined with good ideas, hard work, and solid preparation, could increase your success rate in reaching goals small and large, short and long term, then you'd no doubt want to sign up.

“No amount of visualisation can make up for years of physical practice. But mental rehearsal can indeed help an athlete fire up for optimal performance.”

The Telegraph

Over the coming sections you'll discover why sports psychologists and business coaches agree that when it comes to 'performance', there are many parallels between the sporting and business worlds.

Make a note of any business 'performances' you regularly undertake which could be enhanced by the use of visualisation - this could include meetings with clients, presentations, internal brainstorming, or annual reviews. You should also think about any goals you may have, both personal and professional, short-term and long-term. Be as specific as possible.

VISUALISATION COULD HELP ME:

e.g.

Create better first impressions with new clients.

Appear more authoritative during meetings or presentations.

Behave as a role model to more junior team members during post-project wash-ups.

DOCUMENTED USERS OF VISUALISATION

Before you begin to explore how you can visualise for success, you're going to take a look at one of the biggest myths that persists - that visualisation is nothing but a hokey way to achieve your goals without having to put in the work. As the old cliché goes, "It takes 20 years to become an overnight success".

Those who use visualisation - in **sport**, in **business**, in **health** and in **leisure** - know that to repeatedly imagine their success in high Technicolor is far from being a means to an end, but rather an aid to achieving their goals.

Child chess prodigy Natan Sharansky spent a decade in solitary confinement in a USSR prison. He maintained his chess prowess by playing games in his mind and after release became a world champion, attributing his success to his effective use of visualisation.

Rugby player Jonny Wilkinson evokes the atmosphere of major matches to better deal with nerves during the actual game. "Creating the sight, sounds and smells, the sensation, right down to the early morning wake-up call and that feeling in your stomach... It helps your body to get used to performing under pressure."

Stroke patients use visualisation to aid recovery following tissue death due to blood no longer reaching arteries. When patients imagine moving the affected arm or leg, brain blood flow increases and tissue death is diminished.

When Spanx creator Sara Blakely was a fax machine saleswoman, she began visualising herself as owner of a hoisier brand. "If you take mental snapshots of your future you start to make decisions in your life that get you there."

Sources: ⁶

THE SCIENCE: EVIDENCE A 'MENTAL WARM UP' WORKS

The science behind visualisation

Visualisations under hypnosis enables Stanford gymnasts to execute complex tricks for the first time

Skiers who visualise skiing downhill fire electrical impulses and produce muscle patterns identical to those on the slopes

Subjects who only visualise lifting heavy weights 5 x per week increase their bicep strength by 13.5%

The brain activity in novices practising the piano is identical to those who imagine playing the notes

Groups exercising their little finger increase strength by 53%; those merely visualising increased strength by 35%

Sources: ⁷

There is no single theory that explains the mechanism behind the effect of mental rehearsal or visualisation on physical performance.

However, the general idea is that when you imagine yourself performing how you want to perform, you lay down the neural networks which tell the muscles what to do, as if you had actually physically performed the action.

The brain does not know the difference between what is real and imagined - when

we imagine moving a part of the body, the area of the brain that governs that part is also activated.

In addition to training the mind, mental rehearsal also prepares you for possible obstacles and threats that may arise. If you visualise successfully dealing with these, this reduces anxiety and improves self-confidence, which may enhance performance. In addition, stress may be reduced as mental rehearsal involves a certain amount of relaxation.

Adapted from wholescience.net ⁸

THE ‘CORPORATE ATHLETE’

You’ve learned how visualising bodily movements and functions can lead to increased real-life performance. But how does this science relate to the business world? Psychologists have coined the term the ‘corporate athlete’⁹ to emphasise the relationship between the two disciplines when it comes to performance-enhancing mind sets.



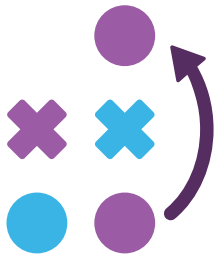
Corporate performers

“Challenges - such as conducting a one-to-one performance appraisal, making a presentation to the board, meeting a new client in a situation where it is crucial that a good impression is made, getting through a hectic day, running a team meeting or presenting a monthly progress report to colleagues - are ‘performances’. Not in the sense of a Shakespearian play but in the sense of an athletic performance. They require focus, confidence, resilience, quick thinking and the ability to deal with distractions and pressure,” says Dr Bull, sports psychologist, business coach and author of *The Game Plan: Your Guide To Mental Toughness At Work*.

“The notion of the ‘corporate athlete’ is resonating more and more with the business clients I come across these days. Individuals need a ‘game plan’ to help them prepare for, cope with, and learn from, the pressures they are facing in everyday corporate life.”

“When it comes to business, visualisation is...
about creating rock solid, unshakable self
belief.”

Dr Bull



“When it comes to business, visualisation is not about improving muscle strength; it’s about creating rock solid, unshakable self belief. Everyone can do it; it’s an everyday skill that you’re already using in an unconscious way. It’s an untapped skill, and the more you consciously use it in the same way as elite athletes, the better it will begin to serve you - in your preparation, in your performance, and as part of your post-performance review.

“If you visualise yourself performing with excellence and succeeding at what you do, common sense tells you that’s going to impact your self belief. Making pictures is the next best thing to actually doing it. It’s all very well having your strategy written down, but to run it through in your mind and visualise yourself actually doing it, you’re training your brain to be successful when the time comes to perform.”¹⁰

“I have great belief in the power of visualising something and working towards it.

This concept of visualising; feeling, breathing, touching a goal...can be a huge help in overcoming fear.”



everywomanClub member
Claire Irvin, The River Group’s
Editorial Content Director

PICTURES SPEAK A THOUSAND WORDS

There's another reason why visualising can yield such power – in sport, business and beyond: your brain is hardwired to respond to images. "Tell your brain your plan in a thousand words," writes Dr Srinivasan Pillay, author of *Your Brain And Business*, "And it gets bored mid-way and wants to go to sleep. But draw it a picture, and it will respond with much deeper interest and attention."¹¹

In keeping with the topic of this workbook, we present overleaf a series of infographics - a digital phenomenon that has exploded over recent years (Google searches for infographics increased by 800% between 2010 and 2012¹²; see the Appendix for more information on the trend) - which highlight the power of imagery on the human mind.

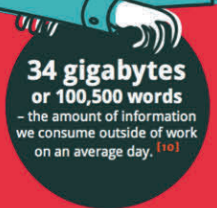
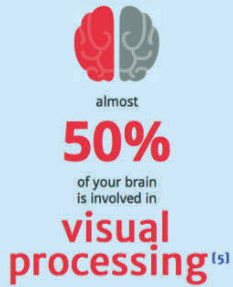
EXERCISE:

Spend a few minutes browsing an imagery site like Pinterest for an image which speaks to you on some level. Take some time to document all the thoughts and feelings the image evokes in you - does it arouse memories, what would it feel like to be in the image, why does it appeal to you?

The use of visualized information has increased...



This is because we are
'visually wired'



Infographics counter information overload because...


They're more engaging




Researchers found that colour visuals
increase the willingness to read by 80%.^[12]

Infographics produced with permission of creators, Infographic Design Agency NeoMam Studios

People following directions with text and illustrations do



323% better




than people following directions without illustrations.^[14]

More persuasive:


A study conducted at the Wharton School of Business found that:

50%




50% of the audience were persuaded by a purely verbal presentation

67%



67% of the audience were persuaded by the verbal presentation that had accompanying visuals^[15]

Adding pictures of brain scans and mentioning cognitive neuroscience make people more inclined to believe what they are reading^[16]



Easier to recall^[17]

People remember:



10%
of what they
HEAR

80%
of what they
SEE and DO

20%
of what they
READ

PART 2

quiz: what's your
learning style?



LEARNING STYLES

1



2



3



There are three key learning styles: visual (by sight), auditory (by sound) and tactile (kinaesthetic). It might seem logical that the best visualisers will be those who are predominantly visual learners, but therein lies another myth about visualisation: that it's all about visual imagery. The most effective visualisation, contrary to common sense, employs multiple senses in order to create a 360-degree image of a future performance.

This quiz will give you some insight into your own predominant learning style or styles, allowing you to:

- a) sharpen your predominant style by embellishing it further in your visualisation, and,
- b) consider ways you can incorporate your less dominant senses into your practice to make your visualisations fuller and more vivid.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What kind of book would you find the most relaxing?
 - a. A book with lots of pictures in it
 - b. A book with lots of words in it
 - c. A book with word searches or crossword puzzles
- 2 When you are not sure how to spell a word, what are you most likely to do?
 - a. Write it down to see if it looks right
 - b. Spell it out loud to see if it sounds right
 - c. Trace the letters in the air (finger spelling)
- 3 What's the best way for you to learn about how something works (like a new computer programme)?
 - a. Get someone to show you
 - b. Read about it or listen to someone explain it
 - c. Figure it out on your own
- 4 What do you find most distracting when you are trying to focus on a piece of work?
 - a. People walking past you
 - b. Loud noises
 - c. An uncomfortable chair
- 5 When in a new place, how do you find your way around?
 - a. Look for a map or directory that shows you where everything is
 - b. Ask someone for directions
 - c. Just start walking around until you find what you're looking for
- 6 What are you most likely to remember about new people you meet?
 - a. Their face but not their name
 - b. Their name but not their face
 - c. What you talked about with them
- 7 What's the best way for you to study for an exam?
 - a. Read the book or your notes and review pictures or charts
 - b. Have someone ask you questions that you can answer out loud
 - c. Make up index cards that you can review

Quiz abridged and adapted from educationplanner.org

RESULTS

Mostly As



Visual learner

You predominantly learn by reading or seeing pictures. You understand and remember things by sight. You are usually neat and tidy and might organise files and work by colour coding. You may close your eyes to visualise or remember something, and you will find something to watch if you become bored. You may have difficulty with spoken directions and may be easily distracted by sounds. Your visualisations will most likely begin with mental pictures, to which you'll naturally add layers of colour and visual detail to make them all the more vivid.

Mostly Bs



Auditory learner

You predominantly learn by hearing and listening. You understand and remember things you have heard. You store information by the way it sounds, and you have an easier time understanding spoken instructions than written ones. You often learn by reading out loud because you have to hear it or speak it in order to know it. You probably hum or talk to yourself or others if you become bored or distracted. You might visualise best by starting with the sounds of your performance - your own voice, or that of others. Once you have that clear in your mind, begin to add visual and kinaesthetic details.

Mostly Cs



Tactile (kinaesthetic learner)

You predominantly learn by touching and doing. You understand and remember things through physical movement. You are a "hands-on" learner who prefers to touch, move, build, or draw what you learn, and you tend to learn better when some type of physical activity is involved. You need to be active and take frequent breaks, you often speak with your hands and with gestures, and you may have difficulty sitting still. You tend to find reasons to tinker or move around when you become bored. Your visualisations may naturally begin with a feeling - the butterflies in the stomach example before a big event or the sense of your body holding a strong posture. Give dimension to those feelings by painting in pictures and sounds, and your visualisation practice will become all the richer.

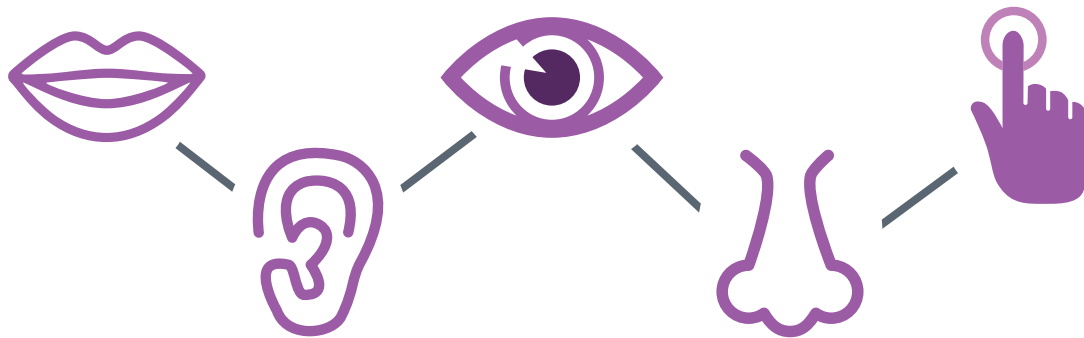
EVOKING YOUR SENSES

When a footballer uses visualisation, Dr Bull explains, they use all their senses to imagine every aspect of the experience – their foot hitting the ball, the smell of the grass under thier foot, or the sound of the crowd.

“This incredibly vivid imagery helps an athlete to prepare mentally, by improving their confidence, focus, clarity and speed of thought,” Bull says. “It helps them prepare for any scenario. But it also fires impulses to the muscles, therefore priming them for action. The more vivid the mental image, the more effectively your brain primes your muscles to complete the same physical and technical action in a real game.”¹³



To best flex your mental muscle during your critical performance, your mental imagery will need to include sharp, vivid and authentic detail.



Use all senses to add a rich layer to your imagery

Depending on your predominant learning style, you may find it easier to paint a mental image using sight, sound or touch, and will need to work harder to conjure up a mental movie featuring one or more other senses. Don't forget taste and smell too - evoking these senses will add another rich layer to your imagery.

Thinking about the non business-critical performance you summarised in the last section, work through each of the senses.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

YOUR ANSWERS

Sight



What will you wear?
How will you stand?
What impression will your body language convey?
How is the room arranged?
Where will you be positioned? What facial expression are you wearing?
How are others reacting?

Sound



What can you hear?
How do you sound?
What impressions are conveyed by your tone?

Touch



What does it feel like to be standing in the room?
How does the ground feel beneath your feet, your chair beneath your body, the clothes you're wearing against your skin?
Are you nervous? What do those butterflies feel like?
How is your breathing?

Smell



Is there a smell attached to your activity, the type of room you're performing in?

Taste



What will you have eaten or drunk before or during your performance that might impact your taste buds?
What impact do nerves have on your taste?

If your imagination struggles to evoke all your senses, do some background work to help it along. This might involve walking through the space you'll be presenting in, entering the room you'll be interviewed in or going through the motions of meeting an important stakeholder for the first time with the help of a role play partner.

After spending many years visualising her idea coming to life on the production line but failing to win support from manufacturers, Spanx founder Sara Blakely took a pair of scissors to some old hosiery in order to better understand why factories were reluctant to make the product. "It only took one time for her to cut the feet off her panty hose to know it was a great idea because she had been doing so much 'mental pre-work'."¹⁴



Sara Blakely

“If you visualise a big business presentation in real detail, you will prepare for everything from your best posture and body language, and how you will handle any feelings of anxiety, to the awkward questions that might be asked and how you will respond to them. By the time you walk in there, you will feel much more confident,” says Dr Bull.¹⁵

INTERNAL VERSUS EXTERNAL VISUALISATION

Whether or not you are predominantly a visual learner, when it comes to creating visual images in your mind you will probably do so either internally or externally.



External:

Where the visualiser experiences imagery as though they were watching themselves on film.



Internal:

Where the visualiser experiences imagery as though they are actually performing the action.

There are two simple ways to find out if you're predominantly external or predominantly internal: one diagnostic you can do on your own; the other you'll need a partner for (or if you're keen to get started on visualisation right away, you can imagine a partner performing the action).

DIAGNOSTIC 1:

Close your eyes and spend a few moments thinking about what you'll be doing on your lunch break.

Did you take a bird's eye view of yourself sitting at your desk or opposite the table from a colleague? Or did you imagine yourself looking outward, just as you would be in real life? The former suggests you are a predominantly external visualiser, the latter an internal.

DIAGNOSTIC 2:

Close your eyes and ask a friend to draw a circle on your forehead. This circle is a clock face. Next, your friend draws a vertical line in the top half of the clock face (the big hand of the clock, pointing at 12). Next they draw a horizontal line from the centre of the circle out to their right as they see it. What time have they drawn on your head?

If your answer is 9 o'clock (i.e. you are seeing the clock as if from your own mind looking out) you are an internal visualiser. If your answer is 3 o'clock (i.e. you are seeing the clock as if from the vantage point of the drawer) you are an external visualiser.

▶ If you ran both diagnostics and found different answers, you may be one of the lucky few who are able to visualise both internally and externally. Congratulations: this is something that elite athletes train hard to achieve, particularly those in judged sports - gymnastics, for example - who need to visualise their performances both from their own perspective (internal visualisation of the arena and their intricate manoeuvres) and that of the judges (how they look to their audience). Similar workplace situations might include job interviews (internally focusing on how you're feeling while externally viewing your body language as if from your interviewer's vantage point) and a new client pitch (internally visualising your winning message while externally seeing yourself succeed through a decision maker's eyes).

FIRST TIME VISUALISATIONS: A CHECKLIST

✓ ADOPT an athlete's mind set

Think about the ways in which the tasks you undertake at work are akin to performance - contributing in different ways in different meetings; responding to various stakeholders; even walking into a room when meeting a new colleague or client. Note down some of your key 'performances' below.



✓ Create a calm mind

“When you start your visualisation, strive to construct the image with your mind free of worries. When you visualise while worrying, it is like painting with a shaky brush. Calmness increases the creativity and authenticity of your ‘brushstrokes’.”¹⁶

This doesn't mean you need to meditate, but try to put worries or stresses to one side as you focus on crafting images in your mind's eye.

✓ Start by visualising non business critical performances

“Don’t start off by visualising performances where the outcome absolutely matters - giving a big presentation or going for a promotion interview,” cautions Dr Bull. Use the space below to highlight a forthcoming activity that you can practise visualising, for example, contributing more than usual in an informal team meeting.



✓ Formulate a plan for how you’ll go about visualising

Visualising is a highly personal practice. Just as you have your own working styles, learning styles and communication preferences, you’ll have your own personal style for visualisation which you can cultivate with regular practice.

You may prefer working in the hustle and bustle of a café, during your morning commute, or you might need absolute silence in order to ‘see yourself think’. Try out a few different ways in order to establish what works for you.

Once you get started, don't overdo it; visualisation needn't become something that adds pressure to your to-do list. "Little and often works best," says Dr Bull. "If your forthcoming presentation will last 40 minutes, you don't need to spend 40 minutes visualising it in real time. A few minutes a couple of times a day focusing on various aspects - walking onto the stage with confidence; standing tall with strong body language; making your opening remarks; deftly handling audience questions."

✓ Compile useful props

Maintain a notebook or online clipper like Evernote to document any useful props that can aid your visualisation. These might include quotes that summon up vivid pictures in your mind's eye or a Pinterest board of images that spark a useful train of thought or are related to your performance or goal.

✓ Remember that visualisation is an aid

It's not intended to replace hard work, preparation or knowledge. In fact, there is evidence that visualisation - when used alone in this way - can lead to failed goals, by "inadvertently trigger[ing] a relaxation response that mimics how we would feel if we'd actually reached the goal. Physiologically, we slide into our comfy shoes; blood pressure lowers, heart rate decreases; all is well in the success world of our mind's making." Note the caution and when planning your visualisation of a specific task, ensure it is part of a wider plan for success. You might want to look at the everywomanNetwork workbook on Career Planning for some useful exercises around goal planning (see Further reading).

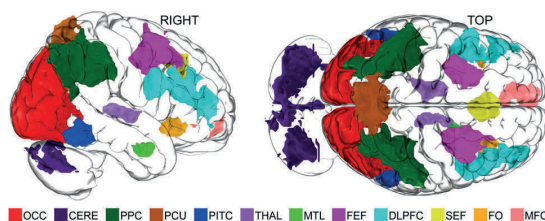
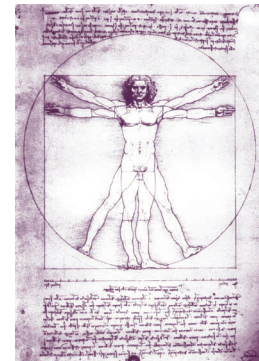


DEVELOPING YOUR IMAGINATION WITH DA VINCI

In business, as in sport, the more vivid your imagination, the more successful the results of your visualisation will be.

If you aren't used to tapping into your imagination, Renaissance man Leonardo da Vinci's 15th century creative techniques are still among the best.

Use the space on the next page to note any ideas that are sparked by some of da Vinci's creativity methods, or any that particularly appeal which you may want to build into your schedule.



© Alex Schlegel

Remember, everyone has an imagination and the ability to use it. The visual cortex isn't the only region involved in firing up mental imagery, so if you're not a 'visual learner' you're not in any way at a disadvantage when it comes to successful visualisation.

A study by cognitive neuroscientists at Dartmouth College found 12 "regions of interest" that seem to be involved in manipulating imaginary shapes. "We saw differences in activity all over the brain when we compared to control conditions. It does seem that rather than there being a single area responsible for imagining or manipulating... lots of areas have to work in concert."¹⁷ These regions included those involved in, among other things, motor control, memory, abstract reasoning, self-reflection, consciousness and sensory perception.

Source: everywoman.com/article/da-vinci-career-code-exercises-creative-geniuses

CULTIVATE YOUR CURIOSITY:

Think about a topic you feel strongly about, or a tried-and-tested process you constantly stick to. Examine all your assumptions in order to think creatively around your pre-existing views.

e.g.

Ask 'why' you think the way you do, in order to strengthen your thinking and come to more creative conclusions.

THINK INDEPENDENTLY:

Find the extraordinary in the ordinary. Look for new ways to see the world around you.

e.g.

Commit to watching one TED Talk each week on a topic I know nothing about.

REFINE YOUR SENSES:

Select a task to perform ‘in the moment’, whether it’s savouring each mouthful of food, listening intently during a conversation, or noticing the landscape you see on your commute.

e.g.

Read up on mindfulness and spend five minutes each morning practising the art.

INTERCONNECTEDNESS:

What are the connections between the tasks you perform and how your customers feel about your brand? By searching for the connections in the seemingly unconnected, you begin to strengthen your own ability to see the bigger picture.

e.g.

Reach out to colleagues in different departments or locations; find out what they do and how it relates to my work.

WHOLE-BRAIN THINKING:

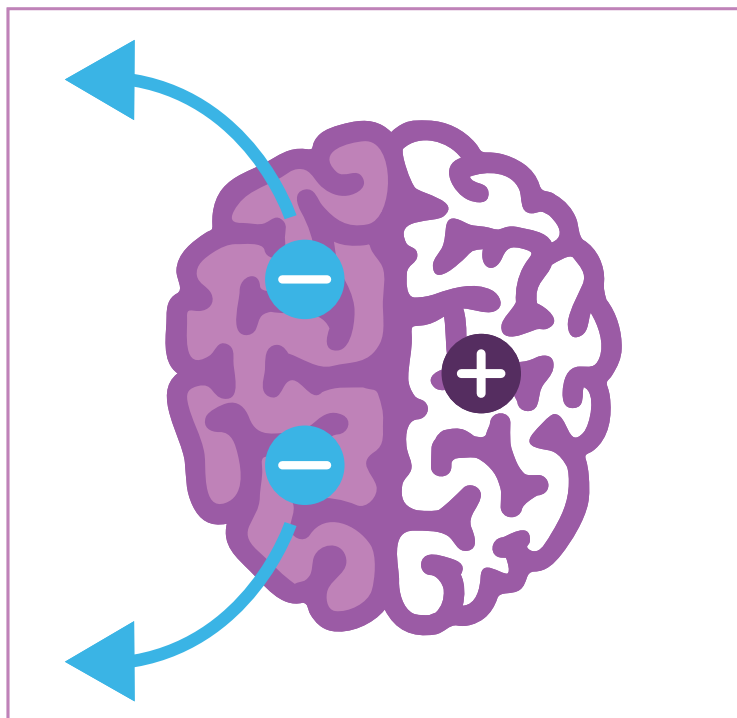
Look for ways to step away from all that regularly engages your brain to give it a workout in a new area.

e.g.

Spend one lunch break a week on a new and non-business focussed activity - art gallery, museum, reading newspapers.

PART 3

crush your gremlin



CRUSH YOUR GREMLIN

Once you've mastered the art of visualisation in non business critical aspects, you can start to think about bigger goals that can benefit from your newfound skills. Just be sure to get more practice before you take on the challenge of using visualisation to aid the success of a significantly important performance.

Positive self-talk is critical to successful visualisation (visualising yourself failing is every bit as powerful as visualising yourself winning). But often, the negative self-talk ("I'm not up to doing this job") can be as destructive to your visualisation as it is to your self-confidence and successful outcomes.

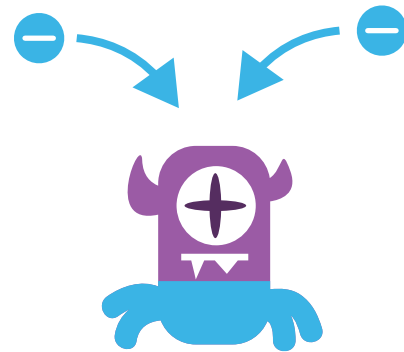
EXERCISE:

Use the space below to note down some of the common negative self-talk statements you give yourself.

e.g.

There are people much more qualified than I am to deliver this presentation.

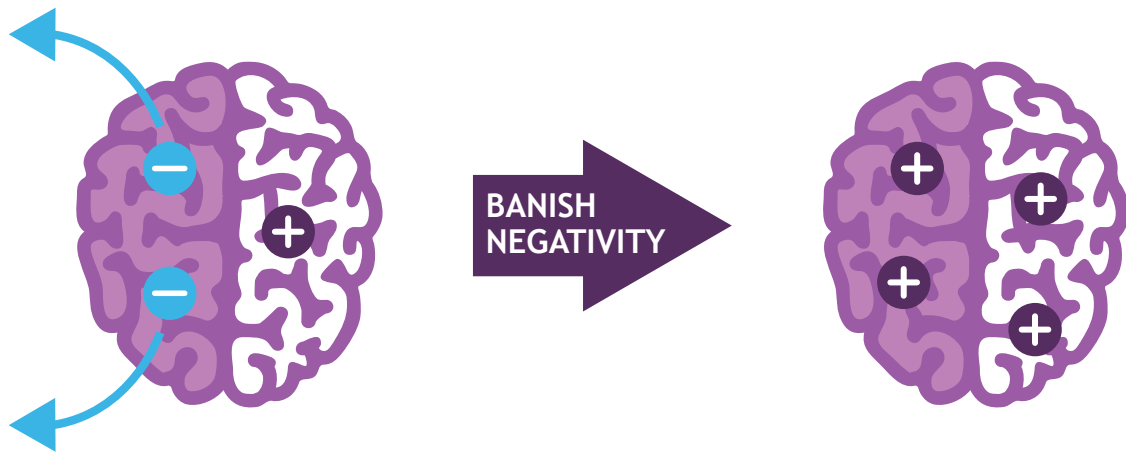
A great way to banish negative self-talk is to attribute its voice to a gremlin who embodies all of your most self-destructive thinking. Visualisation can greatly aid this process; by visualising your 'gremlin' - the horrid little creature that sits on your shoulder and tells you you're not good enough - you can vastly diminish its power, and in doing so become a more powerful visualiser overall, because the negative self-talk which can interfere with your visualisations will reduce.



Once you've banished negative interferences with your visualisation, you can begin to use it for more and more business critical performances. So long as you can maintain control of your images and not allow your gremlin to take over direction of your mental movie and produce images which show you failing or flopping rather than succeeding and triumphing, there is no stopping you.

EXERCISE:

Now use the visualisation techniques you've learned in previous chapters to imagine your gremlin. Note down what the gremlin looks, sounds, smells, tastes and feels like. Be as descriptive as possible in undermining your gremlin's authority and confidence. It might help to make it small, ridiculous and powerless rather than large, menacing and fearsome.



“The key thing is your vivid and clear images are controllable. The moment you start not doing very well in your movie is the moment you have to pause, rewind and replay,” says Dr Bull

“Imagine there are two golfers of equal ability about to take a shot. The first is saying to herself ‘the ball’s going to go in the lake’; the other is saying ‘the ball is going to sail over the lake and hit a hole in one’. Common sense says the golfer with the positive self talk as well as the positive visualisation is going to triumph.

“A great way to start your visualisation is to say to yourself: ‘I’m confident; I’m strong; I’m excited about this.’”¹⁸

Banishing negative self-talk and less than positive images from your visualisation needn’t mean creating unrealistic outcomes in your mind. If you know that you’ll be nervous during a presentation, visualise what those butterflies feel like and get used to the sensation; if you know that your body language tends to be the first thing that fails you in an interview situation; imagine the feeling of your shoulders

hunched over and how much better it feels when you remain upright.

“The solution isn’t to do away with dreaming and positive thinking. Rather, it’s making the most of our fantasies by brushing them up against the very thing most of us are taught to ignore or diminish: the obstacles that stand in our way.”¹⁹



In sports psychology this is also called ‘what if planning’: “While visualising a performance like a job interview, this might mean imagining yourself deftly responding to any question that comes your way, however much of a curveball,” says Dr Bull.

Professor of psychology at New York University and the University of Hamburg, Gabriele Oettingen, advocates a visualisation technique called ‘mental contrasting’ to ensure that your positive visualisation remains grounded in reality, while not veering off into negative self-messages.

HONOURING YOUR FUTURE SELF

Once you are regularly using positive visualisation to enhance your professional performance, you can advance your visualisation skills further by looking not just at impending workplace performances, but future activities and goals.

Research conducted by Assistant Professor at UCLA Anderson School of Management, Hal Hershfield, showed that most people “feel disconnected from the individuals they’ll be in the future and, as a result, discount rewards that would later benefit them”.²⁰

This manifests in people indulging in risky behaviour which may affect their reputation, saving less money for future needs and taking less care of their health.

Hershfield’s research showed that brief exposure to aged images of subjects has the consequence of changing certain behaviours inasmuch as they invest more in pension products (the finding resulted in Merrill Lynch using some of this technology to encourage savers).

“That future person is dependent on the current you and is ultimately the same you – just occupying a slightly different body,”

Hershfield

Exercise:

Writing a letter (on the next page) to a future self is one form of what psychologists call a ‘commitment device’ - “a decision you make with a cool head to bind yourself so that you don’t do something regrettable when you have a hot head”. If you’re feeling brave, you can upload a photo into an age progression app to create a prop to



aid your long-term visualisation, or you can put your visualisation skills to use by evoking your future self in your mind. You may wish to write a note to your future self, detailing what you hope to have achieved and learned along the way. Have fun with it - use an application like www.futureme.org to arrange delivery of your note to yourself at a specified date in the future.

EXERCISE:

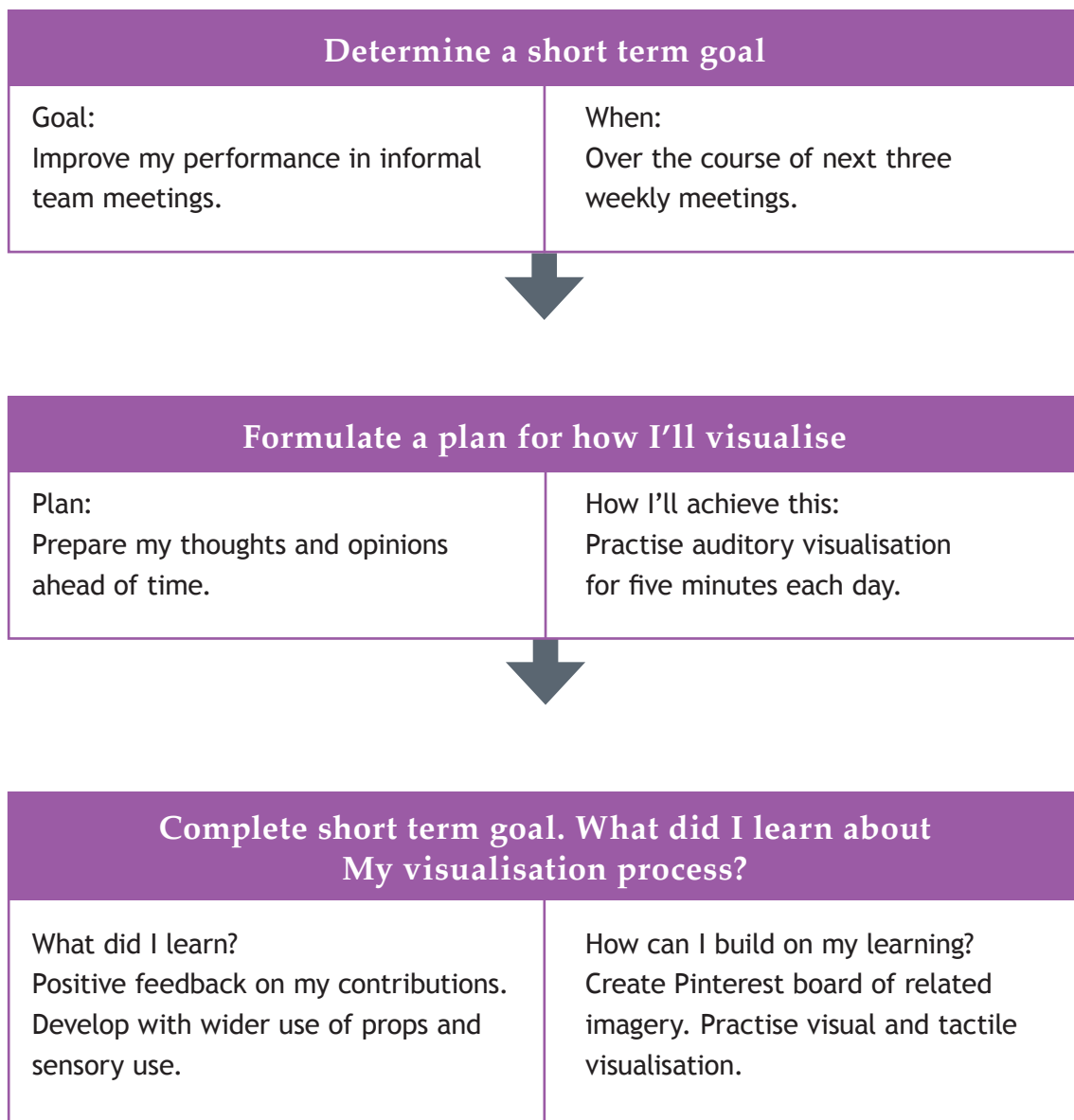
What will your job be like? Where will you be living? How will you feel each morning when you wake up? What will you see on your commute? How will you relate to your colleagues? And your family?

Dear future me,

YOUR PERSONAL 'GAME PLAN'

It's time to pull all your learnings together into a personal game plan for how you'll incorporate visualisation into your work life, and the goals it will aid along the way. The following table is an example of how a 'corporate athlete' might go about completing this section.

PHASE 1



PHASE 2

Key self-talk to eliminate

“I’m too inexperienced to have an opinion on _____”
“My opinion isn’t valid.”



Visualising my gremlin

Smaller than my thumb, slimy and green!

PHASE 3

Determine a long term goal

Become a stronger presenter in more formal scenarios. Volunteer to present at annual departmental review.



Formulate a plan for how I'll visualise

Continue to work on my sensory abilities and devote time each day to visualising myself performing an engaging and successful delivery.



A short note to my future self upon completion of this goal

(How would you like to feel? What will completing this goal mean for you?)

Congratulations on battling through the nerves and the pressures of performing at the departmental meeting. Your presentation was a great success and is already eliciting great feedback, getting you noticed by the senior management team. Your presentation style was perceived as natural, engaging and highly informative. The head of the team even said how good it was!

NOW, FILL IN YOUR PLAN:

PHASE 1

Determine a short term goal

Goal:

When:



Formulate a plan for how I'll visualise

Plan:

How I'll achieve this:



Complete short term goal. What did I learn about My visualisation process?

PHASE 2

Key self-talk to eliminate



Visualising my gremlin

PHASE 3

Determine a long term goal



Formulate a plan for how I'll visualise



A short note to my future self upon
completion of this goal
(How would you like to feel? What will completing this goal mean for you?)

SUMMARY



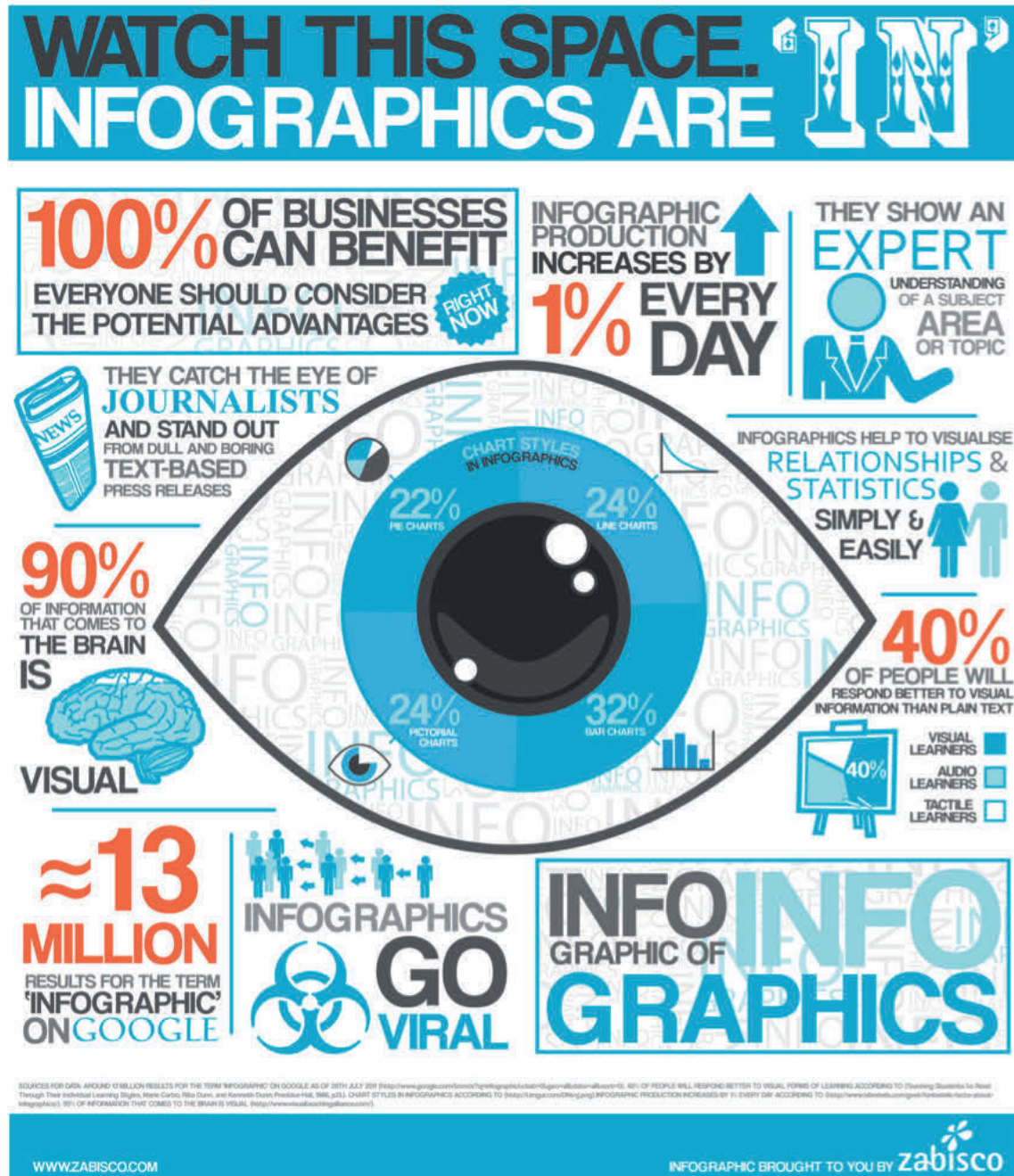
When it comes to achieving a goal, be it large (“I’d like to run my own company by the time I’m 40”) or small (“I want to finish writing this document by the end of the week!”), visualisation can help you understand your expectations - and how you’ll feel once you’ve hit your target.

By flexing the muscles of your imagination, you’ll find you’re able to call to mind your ‘mental movies’ of success with all the more creativity and clarity.

Good luck!

APPENDIX

The 'infographic of infographics' highlighting the voracity of the online trend for data visualisation and the reasons for its success.



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EVERYWOMAN EXPERTS

Everywoman creates workbooks on topics that matter most to our Network members. We draw on member surveys and the latest thinking from the academic and business worlds, as well our own experiences as we navigate our careers. Each workbook offers practical advice, enabling tangible actions for your daily work lives.



Maxine Benson MBE & Karen Gill MBE

Co-founders of everywoman, Karen and Max have spoken to thousands of women about the challenges they face at work. Through their own experiences of starting a business, they uncovered a real need for a network where female entrepreneurs and businesswomen could interact and share experiences. The everywomanNetwork, launched in 2012, serves as a truly global tool to enable members the world over to propel their careers through online membership.

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Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Dr Steve Bull, sports psychologist, business coach and author of *The Game Plan: Your Guide To Mental Toughness At Work* (Capstone: 2006) for his advice and guidance on visualisation for career success.

Any topics you'd like to see covered on the everywomanNetwork?

We'd love to hear from you: mel@everywoman.com

FURTHER READING

Books

The Game Plan: Your Guide To Mental Toughness At Work, by Steve Bull (Capstone: 2006)

Rethinking Positive Thinking: Inside The New Science Of Motivation, by Gabriele Oettingen (Current: 2014)

Online resources

www.gameplancoach.com

www.woopmylife.org

everywomanNetwork workbook: Brainstorming

everywomanNetwork workbook: Career Planning

ENDNOTES

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