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Discovering You

What are the secrets to making affirmations work for you?

People often ask me how affirmations work from the perspective of NLP. Affirmations were something I used frequently when I was younger, reading Louise Hay in particular. However, I couldn't work out at the time why I wasn't experiencing my affirmation consistently. In the moments I was saying the affirmations to myself, and perhaps for the rest of the day, I would be feeling more relaxed or energised. Then it would fade back to the anxiety or wariness I had started with. It seems I'm not the only one with this experience!

I got curious about why that was. When I applied the NLP model of the world to this problem, some light bulbs went on in my head. So, if you would like to know the secrets to using affirmations powerfully, read on!

Four simple principles can make the difference. Conveniently, they fit the acronym of LOVE, which seems incredibly appropriate given that our affirmations are often aimed at ultimately enhancing how we love life, love others and love ourselves.

Powerful Affirmations:

Language: phrase your affirmation in future tense

Observe: use positive language to acknowledge where you are right now

Visualise: see yourself in the future with the affirmation met

Embody: support your affirmation and take action in *now*

Jeanette's Story

Jeanette wants to be more confident about a new project she has been offered at work. It's a challenging, interesting piece of work that could lead to a promotion. She currently feels daunted, sick to her stomach with nerves, and worried that if she can't do it that her career will be on the line.

For a week she uses these affirmations, at night and during her lunch hour: "I am confident" and "I know how to do this, it's ok"

She finds some relief from her nervousness but is still very worried about committing to the project. She feels like her affirmations are a waste of time.

Language: phrase your affirmation in future tense

Like most affirmations, Jeanette's are phrased in present tense as if they are true. Herein lays the first stumbling block. Describing what we *want* is a good start. However, **it's important our affirmation feels real**. When we say to ourselves "I love my job" when it's not yet true, our emotions and thoughts can tend to compete with the affirmation. Jeanette found that when she said to herself "I know how to do this", her internal voice kept popping up saying, "But you don't really know how to do it. What if it goes wrong? You don't want to screw up your career!" When part of us resists in this way our efforts can get hijacked.

When we **describe what we want in future tense**, such as "I will have a job I love", it's easier to agree with so we're more likely to feel as if all of us is on board. Our unconscious mind also knows it hasn't happened yet, so it knows to strive for it. More about this shortly.

Fresh Perspectives on Healing Depression

This month sees the publication of my article on healing depression through NLP in the July issue of Her (Business) Magazine.



It's wonderful to be spreading the word in this way, and I have had people calling and saying "I felt like you were writing about me!" and feeling excited about making an appointment.

Her Magazine is available in bookstores now.



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Jeanette's affirmation now becomes:

"I'll be feeling confident, knowing deep inside that I can do this and grow from the experience, and I'll be seeing others acknowledge my achievement, and be feeling a warm glow inside as a result."

Observe: use positive language to acknowledge where you are right now

As we've noted, in Jeanette's case her mind knows she still feels nervous. Even when this is the case, we can support our affirmation using positive language. In doing this, we are acknowledging our current reality *and* reminding our mind what we want.

Using positive language is not what is often termed 'positive thinking', which is a fairly broad concept. This is a particular style of using language to talk to yourself and others about what you want; what you want to affirm. For example, if I wake up in the morning with a sore throat I could pay attention to the ache in my throat and think to myself "I wish my throat wasn't sore". However, what do I want? Most likely, I'd like to have a throat that felt *good*. So instead, I'd say to myself "My throat doesn't feel totally comfortable today". It's true *and* it is *towards* what I want.

Why is this important? I have talked in previous articles about how our brain processes information. You can try this out. For the next few seconds, don't think of a blue tree. Just keep *not* thinking of a blue tree.

Now, most likely you are seeing some kind of blue tree in your mind's eye! Why? Because, your unconscious mind has to think of something before it can *not* think of it. So, when Jeanette thinks "I'm not feeling fully confident yet" rather than "I'm really nervous", her brain automatically pays attention to confidence. It has to think about feeling confident to make sense of the thought.

Now, that may not cause her nerves to totally disappear in that moment. However, if it was you, what would you rather your mind was thinking about most of the time? Nervousness or confidence? Where attention goes, energy flows. We all know that when we want to create a new habit, the more we do it the sooner it becomes automatic.

Jeanette decides:

"I'll be saying to myself 'This is great' and 'It's OK that I don't know how to do this part right now, let's find out what I need to know.'"

Visualise: see yourself in the future with the affirmation met

When Jeanette is forming her outcome she is also visualising what she wants to have happen. In her mind's eye she sees herself feeling relaxed, confident and enjoying her work a couple of months from now.

When you **see yourself with your outcome out in the future** it creates a set of instructions for the unconscious mind. Seeing yourself in a picture in this way is called *disassociation*. It helps your mind know that this thing you want hasn't happened yet, so it will automatically begin working towards it for you whenever possible. Our mind is constantly sorting for information from the world around us and inside ourselves, and it naturally links this information up to what we're thinking about (which is hopefully what we *want*, not what we don't want!).

Embody: support your affirmation and take action in now

How can you support your affirmations? While Jeanette was using her affirmations regularly, in between times such as driving to work in the morning, those negative thoughts would creep in; "What if it goes wrong? You don't want to screw up your career!" As she explained it, her positive energy was being sapped by these recurring thoughts. Her new outcome includes the kind of thoughts that will support her goal and when she catches herself doing negative thoughts, she brings herself back to what she wants instead. **Align your behaviour with your affirmation**



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Jeanette decides:

"I'll be focusing on my past experiences that tell me I can complete this project successfully."

Jeanette also had a buzz of questions whizzing around in her head about the project that were causing her to worry. She added this action to her new affirmation:

"Right now I can go and ask questions about the project so that I can think about the facts rather than worrying."

Allow yourself to be in control of your behaviour and progress, because what you do *now* makes a difference to what happens in the future. Besides, it's only *now* that exists - the future hasn't happened yet! **Decide what actions you can take now. Ask yourself, what do I need to do now (one small thing) in order to support my affirmation/ outcome?**

So a useful structure is:

In any given moment (ie it could happen at any time!) ...

I will be ... doing ...

seeing ...

feeling ...

focusing on ...

saying to myself ...

on or before ... (date)

And right now I will ... (your action(s) in NOW)

Now you might be saying to yourself, wow, that's a pretty long-winded approach. It does take longer than forming a one-sentence affirmation. It took Jeanette about ten minutes to think through this, and it will probably impact the next 2-3 years of her career. She found it was worth the extra effort!

Find out next month about how you can even more fully integrate affirmations for yourself, and in the meantime try some of these ideas and see what happens! Have a fantastic month.

Thanks to Lynn Timpany (NLP Trainer and Master Practitioner) for sharing her insights with me for this article.

*"There is only one success –
to spend your life in your own way."*

- Christopher Morley

Tid bits and tips: Must-Do's this Winter

Wow, with this weather it certainly feels like winter has arrived! So what are you going to do for yourself and your loved ones to warm up and feel inspired in these cold months? Here are some must-do's for the coming weeks!

◆ See a film that will inspire the daylights out of you!

Have you seen *Pay It Forward* with Helen Hunt? How about *Life is Beautiful*? Or *Billy Elliot*? And if you've seen all of those, I can highly recommend *The Weeping Camel*, a movie-documentary following the everyday life of a family in Mongolia. It is a heart warming film providing a glimpse into another life, and a special part of our World.



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◆ **Snuggle under your duvet with a good book!**

My pick right now is *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle. Treat yourself to an hour wandering around Borders poring over the shelves!

◆ **Take an evening class!**

Have you often thought to yourself "I'd really like to learn to salsa" and it's still just a thought? Or would you like to learn how to sew or sculpt or paint or use your home computer (or digital camera!) or speak Spanish or ... anything! Start looking now for classes next term and get into it!

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