



freshwaysforward

TRAIN YOUR BRAIN !

How are you thinking about the things you want (or don't want!) in your life?

Many of us are becoming familiar with the idea that what we think about influences what we attract into our lives. You may have recently come across the book or film *The Secret*. Although the messages feel somewhat slanted towards attracting wealth and prosperity, the lesson is a good one: you get what you focus on. This is the law of attraction. It's a compelling idea that sometimes seems a little elusive. You may be wondering 'how can I make this happen more easily in my life?'

Knowing *how* to focus can make the world of difference. A colleague of mine once helped a client create a list of what she wanted in a mate. It was very thorough, outlining what attributes she would like in a potential partner and relationship. A week later she went away for a few days and met someone who fitted all of her criteria. She found they instantly got on well, shared wonderful conversations and many laughs. They really clicked. However, she saw a real problem with what she had attracted.

Hence, a little advice on 'focusing' in the right way. The first trick is to be specific about what you want and need. Clarify what that ideal job or home would look like. If it's a new job we need to be clear about things such as the type of company we want to work for, what kind of activities and responsibilities we are interested in, what benefits are important to us and so on. (Notice this is a rather different approach to opening the paper to see what's available. Start with what you want!)

Take time to consider your outcome. What would it be like to be relaxed and having fun in a relationship? What would you be doing differently? How would you know you were relaxed? What would 'fun' look like? And write the outcome down. Research shows that goals are more likely to be achieved if they are on paper.

Another trick is to get into the habit of focusing on what you actually *want*. It's common to focus on what we don't want; to not be in debt, to stop feeling angry or impatient with someone, to feel less stressed. You can see where our attention is going. Our focus is on debt, anger, stress.

If I asked you to *not* think of a blue tree for the next few seconds, could you do that? For a few moments, don't think of a blue tree ... Ok, so what are you seeing in your mind's eye right now? A blue tree, I suspect. Herein lies the problem! This happens because your brain has to think of the tree before it can *not* think of it. The brain has to form the object or idea (blue tree or stress) before it can choose to not think about it. In the meantime, a lot of attention (and energy) is being spent on that blue tree, when you might want a green one instead!

If a client says to me, 'I'm stressed out and don't want to feel so tired all the time' I ask, what do you want instead? Sometimes they have to think about that for a moment because it's a new way of looking at their problem. After some thought they might say 'Well, I'd like to have more energy to enjoy playing with my kids'. Great, now we're getting somewhere – this is what to focus on!

Now, this doesn't suddenly cause the person's tiredness to dissolve and their energy levels to go through the roof (although it will probably energise them). What it does do, is shift their focus to a positive outcome. Now their attention automatically flows towards what they want, making it easier to find new ways of bringing energy and enjoyment into their life.



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How does this work then? How do we attract what we want or need? Here are two ways of looking at it. On the one hand, some might say that if you 'ask' the universe for something, perhaps through your thoughts, writing it on paper or through prayer, the universe or God will take care of it. Ask and you will receive, says the bible. For people with a religion, and for those with no religion, this can be a compelling explanation.

Another way of looking at it is a little more scientific – from the world of neurophysiology in fact. Have you noticed that once you've decided to buy something new like a piece of furniture or a jacket, you start to notice chairs or jackets wherever you go? Did you notice that when you bought a car in the past and started driving it around, you suddenly saw a lot of cars like yours on the road? They were everywhere, right? Or at least it seemed like it! The clever RAS system in our brain makes this happen. Our reticular activating system (RAS) is designed to process information about our wants and needs, filtering incoming data and sorting for what is important. When we are out driving along or perhaps passing shops, it is 'sorting' for a tailored black jacket or that car you really like.

Writing triggers the RAS, thus explaining the value in capturing your goals on paper. The RAS then sends messages to the cerebral cortex, essentially 'switching on' our attention to automatically sort for what we are aiming for. Even when you're not consciously paying attention to your outcome (you might be busy cooking dinner or running a meeting at work), at an unconscious level the RAS is working away like a faithful beaver, checking and sorting, checking and sorting.

So, what of the woman who found this great connection with someone but still had a problem? Well, the trouble was that this person who fitted her criteria for a mate, was in fact a woman! She'd made a fantastic new friend, but discovered her list didn't include the item 'male'! Her RAS system was sorting for all the characteristics she'd paid attention to, and not the ones she hadn't.

Now someone else might easily capture all the key criteria for their RAS to process, but this story serves as an example of how precisely it can help you attract into your life what's important to you. Clarifying what you would like to have happen is the first and most important step towards creating what you want in your life. Finding the ways and means to do so will follow. The philosopher Epictetus said "First say to yourself what you would be; and then do what you have to do."



Tid bits and tips: Inspiration from people who change the world

1. On the 10th of September, Dame Anita Roddick, founder of the Body Shop, passed away. She suffered a brain haemorrhage following a long illness with Hepatitis C. When the world loses such a person, it's a sobering reminder to me that we can all make a difference. Now that there is one less loud voice doing so, it seems even more important to recognise the impact each of us can have in the world, and that in making a difference, we are honouring a life such as hers. Her website tells you more about the life she lived and how, among other things, she spearheaded ethical trade 30 years ago. It mentions how she loved to say "the job of a citizen is to keep his mouth open."



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Her husband recently wrote: "A piece of Anita is in that part of you that reads a label to find out if your mascara was tested on rabbits, or your lotion contains organic, fairly traded ingredients. Anita is in that part of you that says 'I'm beautiful the way I am.' She is in that part of you that thinks 'I have a great, crazy idea, and I'm going to make it a reality.'" www.anitaroddick.com

2. Deepak Chopra was in Auckland recently and I was fortunate enough to go along and hear his uplifting and fascinating take on who we really are in this life. He is at the absolute cutting edge of discovering how we exist in this life, the body and mind connection and collective consciousness. He has written more than 50 books and is respected around the world for his contributions to our understanding of health, healing and consciousness. Discover his teachings and resources here at www.chopra.com.

He is also a key figure in the Alliance for Humanity, a global group of social conscious people with the intention of helping create personal and social transformation globally. See how these people are seeking to change the world at www.anhglobal.org.

3. One person did it:

Muhammad Yunus is a Bangladeshi banker and economist. Thanks to his brainchild of microcredit financing, which provides small loans to individuals in developing countries, 17 million people around the world have been helped to run small businesses for themselves and their families.

Kate Shephard, a Scots-born woman living in NZ, led a suffragist movement that would begin to right the inequality that lay between men and women around the globe. Consequently, on the 19th of September 1893, New Zealand led the rest of the world in granting voting rights to women.

Anita Roddick started the Body Shop in 1976 selling 15 products in a small shop in Brighton, UK. Her husband had the idea of franchising the store. In 2004 the Body Shop had 1980 stores, serving over 77 million customers worldwide, and it was voted the second most trusted brand in the UK. She has gifted tens of millions of dollars to charities around the world.

*"If you think you're too small to have an impact,
try going to bed with a mosquito."*

Dame Anita Roddick