

THE POWER OF PRACTICE – COVID 19 (PART 4)



As COVID 19 continues to dominate all forms of media, it is becoming apparent that an increasing number of people are struggling to maintain a healthy frame of mind – especially as the reports of death rates and associated tragedies continue. As a result, the mental health ramifications are now quite rightly being assessed.

The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge made an impassioned plea this week for us not to forget the importance of taking care of our mental well-being, whilst meeting the mounting demands in relation to our physical health. This is because the effects of lockdown and the associated cabin fever, isolation and lack of freedom, are increasingly taking their toll.

There is already a lot of useful advice out there from organisations who prioritise mental health, like The Mental Health Foundation, Mind, The National Institute of Mental Health, World Federation for Mental Health, Sane and others. One of the primary suggestions being made is the need to establish some order and structure in one's day. When we use our time in more useful and productive ways, we are less likely to be pulled into the vortex of negativity and feelings of despair.

These mental health organisations are also encouraging us to minimise our news consumption. We've talked a lot about positive self-talk in the previous articles and so we want to underline that it's critical to follow this advice – because it will impact on your internal monologue. So, please keep your consumption of media coverage to a minimum, as it could unsettle and destabilise you.

In this fourth part of COVID 19 – A Mental Health Response, we want to focus on The Power of Practice – because knowledge alone is not enough to improve one's mental health. We have to put that knowledge into practice – we have to act.

In the three previous articles we believe we've laid a very good foundation for exploring this subject of practice by providing an overview of the relationship between the mind, brain and body. We highlighted how we can either be victims to our thoughts and feelings through our inaction, or we can become the conductors of our own orchestras, producing the most magical masterpieces.

One of the primary principles that underpins our work at Reach is 'Miracles are Made'. Many of us sit around waiting for a miracle to occur, not realising that we have the power to create miracles. If you are looking for or desire positive change, then you need to actively create the conditions for that miracle to manifest in your life – otherwise it simply will not turn up.

Firstly, you need to make a plan. What is it that you want to achieve? The more clearly you can articulate this and conceptualise it in your mind, the more likely it is to emerge. Einstein famously said that "Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination

encircles the world.” Writing down your vision or recording it in some other way gives your imagination something concrete to work with.

The more clearly you can ‘see’ your hopes and your dreams on the screen of your mind, your desires for that very best life, whatever that means for you, the more likely it is that one day you will stand in that miracle, looking out at the world from that place.

We call this kind of visualisation conscious daydreaming, where you take one of the mind’s greatest assets, imagination, and you mould and sculpt it into something beautiful. The more we visualise positive images and outcomes, the more we hardwire peace and joy into our brains, which in turn promotes physical and psychological well-being.

Positive change can be engineered by imagining the outcomes you wish for, even when the conditions to create that outcome do not currently exist. Visualising in this way propels us to do what’s required to improve our realities and as we take the necessary action our visualising ability is enhanced – and so a virtuous cycle is created.

The interesting thing about the brain is that it doesn’t care whether we’re actually sitting on a sun kissed beach, with cotton wool clouds overhead and a gentle breeze caressing our bodies, or if we are simply imagining being in that place – both experiences are treated equally. And so the brain doesn’t discriminate between remembering that most magical day 10 years ago and enjoying something in this moment. Both events flood the mind, brain and body with the most wonderful array of mood enhancing neurochemicals and healing hormones.

So, even if we are denied access to that magical holiday, a reunion with our dearest friends, sitting enjoying the most incredible symphony or show, our minds have the capacity to travel through space and time. We can either reconnect with beautiful experiences from days gone by, which we can relive and savour, or through our imagination we can experiment with those things not yet experienced, those dreams and desires not yet known.

Exploiting this propensity of the mind and brain to treat a visualised experience in the same way as an actual experience, is a powerful way to take control of our inner world. By doing this we are not defined by the external circumstances that can often shape our attitudes, outlooks and moods.

The primary invitation in this article is to become masters of our own minds through the power of practice – and both planning and visualisation make this more likely.

The research data around meditation and mindfulness is increasingly showing how engaging in some form of mental rehearsal improves brain health and all other biological markers, such as the pH of the blood, which influences so many things about human health. Blood pressure, which we know has a bearing on the integrity of the heart and the cardiovascular system, is also improved by spending time thinking and visualising in a positive way. Blood sugar level is another health marker which is enhanced by developing an inward-looking habit; this means taking time out each day to travel through time and space, taking refuge in positive silence.

Positive silence isn’t an absence of sound, it’s where we use the quiet and stillness that can be found within to cultivate a positive frame of mind and in doing so we can transcend our worries, anxieties and fears. We can peel away the layers of sadness, pain and trauma and return to a place of authenticity and peace that has either been forgotten or yet to be discovered.

Below are two templates to help you develop this positive silence. These are examples that over 40 years we have seen work time and time again. We hope you will try them on for size.

Make yourself comfortable and as far as possible, take yourself away from any distractions. You need to do these exercises for at least 12 -15 minutes to get the maximum benefit – you can of course do longer if you prefer.

Treat the dots in the script as pauses to allow the mind to imagine what it is you are inviting it to see. Don't hurry your way through, otherwise the full impact of this contemplation will evade you...

My Special Place

I take my mind to a special place... a place that means something to me... my special place might be somewhere familiar... but equally it could be a place that I have not been to or know... either way, it is a place that makes me feel safe and at ease... I allow my mind to gently transport me there... I'm not in a hurry... it takes as long as it takes... I enjoy the process... once there, I am flooded with the feelings that make this place special to me...

Something very warm is emerging from deep inside me... it's a feeling of knowing that from the sanctity and security of this place, my mind can enter the realm of infinite possibility... a world where I'm able to imagine the most wonderful of things...

I can see emerging, on the screen of my mind... an image of myself waking up into my ideal day... I see my very best life unfolding before me... my day starts thoughtfully and peacefully... I'm calm, balanced and strong... as a result I am able to meet the day with grace and poise... my day is filled with meaning and purpose and my life is rich with good connections and friendships...

I see myself carrying out and fulfilling my tasks mindfully... putting the best of me into everything I undertake... I realise it's not the action that I perform that matters most... it's the way I perform the action that counts... so from the seemingly inconsequential, to the significant decisions and choices I make... I put the same quality of energy into both... which is so satisfying... when I get the small things right... the big things automatically follow...

I can see myself creating wonderful habits throughout the day... I am kind and forgiving of myself and others... and as a result I grow in compassion and confidence... the time I spend with myself is nurturing and quietly joyous... and I share the fragrance of my positive feelings with those around me... but it doesn't end there... I choose to share those feelings with the world... I can see myself as a lighthouse... emitting my good energy into the world... which also uplifts me...

I can see that energy connecting with the positive energy that's already floating in the ether... conspiring for the greater good of us all... I can see this clearly on the screen of my mind... and as I become part of the positive energy spinning around the globe... then my own dreams automatically come to fruition...

Now, the right people, connections and opportunities turn up in my day... this current of positive energy helps me to effortlessly move towards my goals and dreams... I can see a life where each day begins in a positive way... and regardless of how the day unfolds, I grow out of every experience... as a result, I grow into my very best self... such a beautiful feeling... to realise that whatever I decide to do with my life... being loving and kind to myself and to others is the highest goal of all...

I watch joyfully as my day unfolds exactly as I want it to... and even where that isn't the case... I see my responses being calm, stable and wise... I promise to visit the fertile fields of my imagination regularly... because there I am able to grow many wondrous things...

You can modify this template to suit yourself and personalise it in any way. We would recommend recording it and listening to it daily, or at least every other day, for the greatest impact. Remember, recording something in your own voice (and repeatedly listening to it) is a very powerful way of deepening the impact on your unconscious mind. This is because your voice is the one that your mind most recognises. You might find at first that this leads to some resistance to what you're saying, but if you persevere, then you will find yours is the voice that can most influence and change the patterns and drivers in the unconscious mind.

If you'd rather not record it, then find some time to read it aloud, if you have the privacy to do that, pausing and reflecting before moving on to the next bit. When you've done it once or twice this way, you probably won't need the script and you can feel your way through it, just relying on your own words and preferred way of doing it. You can of course do it in your mind, if you like or if don't have privacy.

Below is a set of positive statements. It would also be helpful to record these or write them down, to extract the full benefit they offer.

The most important thing, whatever you choose to do with either of these exercises, is to include them in your routine. They will greatly improve your mental hygiene...

Synergy is the Answer

Meeting the needs of my mind, body and spirit is essential to my sense of well-being...

Every day I actively seek out ways to stimulate and support my mind...

Every day I enjoy finding ways to nurture and care for my body...

Every day I pursue those things that give my life meaning and purpose...

My environment is also an essential part of maintaining inner peace and confidence and I find ways to make it a sanctuary...

I sing, I move, I dance through my day. This brings me great joy and health...

I read, I listen and I watch those things that move and uplift me... those things that make me smile and laugh...

I seek out meaningful connections, which are nurturing and enriching... and encourage me to grow...

For no reason at all I perform as many acts of kindness as I can throughout the day...

I immerse myself in gratitude, giving thanks for the big things, but never forgetting to celebrate the small things too...

From the moment I open my eyes, I try to find joy in everything that I do...

I know that every moment offers me the opportunity to become more whole, more complete and content... so I savour each moment...

Every day I look forward to strengthening the fortress of my mind... I feel safe and secure there and so I'm happy just being...

I ask for little and give a lot and that sustains me in every way...

Synergy reminds me that it's not one thing that will keep me stable and well, it's the meeting of the needs of my mind, body and spirit that will help me to achieve that outcome...

Synergy also reminds me that the environment is the soil in which my mind, body and spirit grow, so I need order and peace around me...

The more I practise feeding my mind in this way, the more I am immunised against the turbulence of life...

Peace is only ever one thought away...