

IN PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

IMAGERY: THE BODY-MIND CONNECTION



P EOPLE WHO SUCCEED PHYSICALLY AS WELL AS MENTALLY—ATHLETES, dancers, runners, and entertainers—are imbued with feelings and states of inspiration that are deeply personal to them. Some athletes, however, are not aware of what inspires them to excel, while others utilize the sources of their inspiration to motivate and propel themselves to enormous feats of achievement. These athletes can typically cite dramatic examples of the deepest kinds of personal inspiration. In 1983, Eamonn Coghlan became the first person to run under 3:50 in the indoor mile. He broke the record shortly after the death of his father and both his boyhood and college coaches. In visiting their gravesites before the race, he came upon a newly inscribed epitaph on his coach's gravestone. It read: "Don't quit until you're beaten; fight back to an even greater victory, not only in competition but in life."

In the journey of life that we are all on, many of us seek to find the greatest fulfillment and attain mastery of life, either in our personal or professional lives. Deep inside each of us, at our core, resides an Inner Athlete, whose passion moves us to be the best we can be, with an intuitive belief that there is more to be experienced—more success—more power—more love—more wisdom. For most of us the core contains untapped potentials, skills and God-given talents. The greatest achievers possess genetic talent, for sure, but it's their tremendous passion and desire in the pursuit of personal excellence that fuels their greatest achievement.

The methods for tapping into one's passion are available to every-

BY JAQUELINE LAPA SUSSMAN

one. By utilizing the tools from the playing fields of psychology and sports, each person can bridge the gap between his potential and his performance, and can uncover his innate, natural ability.

Akhter Ahsen's Eidetic Imagery is the tool to link the mind to the physical and emotional responses of our body.

A corporate executive who wanted to be at the top of his career had just received a big promotion and was given added responsibilities, money and perks. He was thrilled, but the thought of public speaking in his new position made him nervous. He took public speaking lessons from a well-known agency and received helpful advice but he realized that inwardly, he was still afraid.

He wanted to discover an inner confidence that would naturally overcome his fear of speaking. He tried Eidetics.

First, he was asked to see an image of himself delivering a speech. In the image he saw that he froze before the audience, that his heart was held in and seemed to almost stop beating. He was tense.

Next, he was asked to remember a time in his childhood when his heart was beating strongly with natural excitement and exuberance, an instruc-

ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD DOWNS

From the Sidelines

tion to bring out his natural "high." An image suddenly popped into his mind. He saw himself playing baseball. He was up at bat and hit the ball deep into center field. He heard the cheering of his teammates and shouts of "run, run, run." He was thrilled, filled with elation; his heart was beating strongly as he ran. Excitement, exuberance, elation coursed through him while seeing the image. He realized that this was his natural high. He had experienced this high before—when he asked his wife to marry him, when he learned to fly an airplane, when he was promoted at work. It was familiar to him when breakthrough, exciting things happened.

As he saw the image he felt power, excitement and energy filling him. With this sense of power he was instructed, "Now see yourself giving a speech. Giving a speech is like making a really good hit. See yourself swing the bat, your heartbeat comes forward, let the good swinging feeling of the bat come forward and flow into giving your speech."

He responded, "I see the bat in my hand and my heart beating. I swing the bat powerfully. I feel good, confident, and powerful. I see myself give a speech. I feel good, strong. I swing the bat—I give the speech—I feel the 'high.' The excitement of swinging the bat is transferring to giving a speech. I can see that they are the same thing, the same potent expression of me."

He practiced this image before his first big speech and reported: "When I got up there a tremendous physical feeling came over me in the middle of the speech. I was exhilarated, I was relaxed, my heart was beating strongly and I spoke right from my heart and gut. All the energies I needed were right there and I did great. I mastered my fear."

By bringing back the image of hitting the baseball, he reconnected to a high state of natural exuberance. Adding the heartbeat helped him to focus his power and added physical potency to his ability.

Positive states of well-being and relaxation, and high states of inspiration, are our genetic birthright, and provide us with an energetic approach to life. High states are imbued with a spirit of exuberance and imagination, frequently associated with experiences in childhood. These states are often lost due to the demands of adult daily living. To attain success, these high states, positive attitudes, or "expectation highs" must be retrieved to gear us up before the big event and sweep us to victory.

MIND-BODY CONNECTION

Eidetic Images' main gift is that it lets one access deep, inspired abilities to perform, arising from one's own innate knowledge, and puts one's body and mind together so that one is not struggling with tremendous effort.

A runner who used an image to condition his mind and body to gain maximum stamina with the least possible energy output described how his image of water was so effective for him.

"I always have an image of water," the runner told me. "It's a place I go to for strength and power. I see myself running a very long run, but I am not on hard ground, but on a stream, no, actually it's like I am the stream and the water is rejuvenating me. The water for me is a place of energy. I go to the water for strength and power. It's a very calming state."

I emphasize the word calming because to people not initiated in the mind-body connection, exercise and running, as well as any highly active sport, are strenuous activities that put our mind and body into an energized and

stimulated state. But what this runner is telling us is that peak performance for his activity is to make a connection to the stream and flow with it in a calming state. It is that calming affect that will give him the stamina to endure, to make his legs and arms fluid so that they feel lighter and looser.

Breathing was another significant sensation experienced by the runner. The pacing of his heart and lungs were regulated by the sensation of a drumbeat and the sound of the wind as he exhaled. Often it is the beat of the heart that the mind connects to. When you put the heart and imagination together, you get into a high state. When you add heartbeat to the image, you are focusing your power.

As I mentioned above, the mind-body connection is not a new phenomena. Knowledge and use of the mind-body connection have been around since the ancient Greeks and has been used by Tibetan mystics for centuries.

Modern sports stars describe the sensation of opening up one's self to that stream of effortless energy and power as "being in the zone." The zone is available in one degree or another to all of us. People who are exceptionally successful are able to put themselves into a high state of sustained concentration, sometimes with trance-like qualities; a mind-body connection. And, it's not limited to sports and other physical activities; sales people do it, trial lawyers in front of a jury do it, I do it when I am in front of an audience.

It's available to all of us once we learn how to tap it. The mind-body connection is both physical and mental. The images we see are stored in our brains and trigger neurological, chemical, and electric signals that flow to

When you have attained the positive mind-body connection through an image, the feeling inside you is exhilarating, as if every cell in your body is alive and your nervous system is one-on-one with your mind, creating a peak performance state.

the body. When negative images from our history come up in our minds, such as, "you are not good enough," we get knee-jerk responses that keep us from succeeding. With some simple techniques we can turn the knee-jerk responses into positive responses that make us winners.

Imagery research over the past quarter century has demonstrated that Eidetic Images send neural signals from the brain to the body's nerves and muscles, affecting not just our emotional and mental states, but our bodies, as well. Inside our minds exists a hologram of vast information about life. Our brains are incredibly sensitive, powerful and complex machines that regulate and affect the functioning of our bodies and the equilibrium of our physical, mental and emotional states. It is now widely accepted in scientific communities that the body and mind are indelibly interconnected and researchers have concluded that there is no distinct separation between the two. In fact, body and mind, with their mysterious and subtle links are indeed one back and forth, uninterrupted flow of chemicals and neurological signals. The Eidetic Image is a vehicle for working with the body-mind connection.

When you have attained the positive mind-body connection through an image, the feeling inside you is exhilarating, as if every cell in your body

From the Sidelines

is alive and your nervous system is one-on-one with your mind, creating a peak performance state.

It is these exuberant, surpassing, inner mental states that create the winning edge for an athlete and propel his or her body beyond normal human capacity. These qualities of the Spirit—being one with one's self—are exactly what creates success; it's the fuel driving the passion to exceed beyond what's imaginable. But it is imaginable and possible for all of us through imagery in every aspect of our lives.

HIGH IMAGING

There is an avenue that accesses extraordinary mind-body states. These inherent states are truly our "gifts of the gods" and are known as "High Imagery."

High Imagery brings to the surface our most striking and potent abilities, which aid in going beyond the influences that have limited us. While High Imaging is being used here in a sports and physical activities context, it is obviously a factor in any area of life where there is a pursuit of excellence. "I want to be President," the child says, but Mommy says, "You can't be President." And, guess what? There is now a damper on that young girl's aspiration to be President. Our perception, especially our self-perception, determines almost everything about us.

Images are vehicles that change perception when introduced into the mind.

When you have an image in your mind that shifts your perception and brings you into a positive state of mind, you get the will and determination to excel. Images function like keys that open hidden mental and attitudinal powers within us. They provide illumination, direction and power that emerge from deep within.

We've all seen pictures of that state of incredible, frenzied ecstasy a whirling Dervish achieves by using his mind to generate adrenaline. In a similar manner, all of us can energize our will power to motivate ourselves to succeed. World-class athletes usually use visual images to get a rush of adrenaline and other body chemicals to supercede in their performances. We can overcome our limiting self-perceptions and tap into the storehouse of genetic potential that resides within. The more powerful we perceive ourselves to be, the better we can feel about ourselves and the more we can accomplish in our lives.

SILENCING THAT VOICE OF DEFEAT WITHIN US

True champions see problems and obstacles as new opportunities to perform to their fullest potential. Eidetic Images are effective tools with which to identify problems and obstacles and discover creative new ways to use these obstacles as stepping-stones to success. To succeed we need to silence the critical voice and understand and face our inner oppressors, find our inner power to overcome the past limitations, and unleash our genetic gifts from within.

I have worked closely with Rick Peterson, pitching coach for the

Oakland A's. Rick has coached, worked with, and has been associated with some of the best athletes in the world, from Cy Young Winners and MVPs in baseball and basketball to Olympic Gold Medalists.

I asked Rick how he uses Eidetics in enhancing the performance of the people he coaches.

Rick said that he studied the Eidetic Images of the people who shaped his players, such as their parents and teachers, and anyone who left an indelible mark on them. One thing a coach will want to do is find out what negative triggers are in his players. The objective in every sport, at every level, is to keep improving. We've all experienced the criticism of a dominating figure in our life. It is difficult to perform, constantly hearing the

echo of a critical voice. A simple process silences that voice, and allows us to hear the cheers from our spirit.

"That critical voice from the past has to be dealt with, with compassion and forgiveness," Rick said. "Through imaging, we have to change that voice into a voice that produces a positive response in the player. And, if we fail to change the voice it will sabotage the player's efforts. It literally amounts to rewiring the mind-body connection."

An example of Eidetic Imaging that leads to "rewiring" the mind-body connection involves a college basketball player who seemed to have everything going for him to become a championship-level player, but he tightened up under pressure.

His first image was to see his parents. He saw his mother on the right, his father on the left. Next, he saw himself making a three-point jump shot from thirty feet back, while keeping mother in mind (i.e., using his mother as a filter). He saw himself rise high above the other players, his arms go up, the ball lifting off, sailing across the court to drop in the net. His psyche eye saw his mother watching him off to the side, a smile of encouragement on her face. "I felt her support and passion. She was always there for me, encouraging me, telling me I was good enough to make it. When I see her I feel like the ball in my hand is connected to the basket, like I'm connected to both of them."

Next he saw himself trying to make the same shot, keeping his father in mind. "I knew instantly that it was going to be different. My dad was so damn nervous about everything I did that he made me nervous. It was always so important for him that I win. When I missed a shot he would talk about it for days, drive me crazy. He made me feel bad, like I wasn't good enough if I missed a shot. Suddenly every shot of the game became something vital, blown out of all proportion. His nervousness made me nervous!"

He never doubted his father's love for him. "When I touched my mom's body in the image it was warm, and so was my dad's. I know they both loved me and that my dad really loved me as much as my mom, but man, he just got under my skin with that thing about having to be perfect. Nobody's perfect."

What he learned from imaging is that when he was in a tense situation, the nervous, disapproving image of his father surfaced, triggering



From the Sidelines

an emotional response and an electronic, neural jump from his mind to his body, causing his body to tighten just enough to take off the sharp edge from his shots. He needed to "rewire" the images that sent failure signals to his body when the going got tough.

As Rick puts it, "Imaging helps us gain a perspective about ourselves to see where our strengths and weaknesses are. Players I coach need to go deep to their sources of energy, and re-program the wiring of the mind-body connection allowing the light within to shine its brightest." The bodi-

People who are exceptionally successful are able to put themselves into a high state of sustained concentration, sometimes with trance-like qualities; a mind-body connection.

ly response you experience and the meaning that provides insight will be highly personal.

We all have a diamond within that we need to reach to let the glow of our spirit connect to our physical, mental, and emotional energies and potentials.

Through images like those that follow: Physical Preparation Image, Sports Action With Filters, and High Executive Performance, athletes and others involved in pursuing excellence in achieving their goals can perceive the play of energies within their bodies and may access their most potent and glorious genetic abilities.

Imaging is easy. All you need to do is get into a comfortable position, follow the directions set out below and allow yourself to "see" the images in your mind's eye. Experience the images, feelings, body sensations and/or meanings that come as you see the image.

PHYSICAL PREPARATION IMAGE

This image gets you prepared to do physical events by putting you in a calm and relaxed state of mind with intentionality directed toward the upcoming activity.

See that you come into an empty place.

This empty place is where your energies come together.

See that you are preparing to launch out.

Concentrate on this feeling of coming together in this empty place and getting ready for the activity.

See that your energies are coming together.

See that you are getting ready.

See that you are going to launch out.

See that you will do the impossible.

HEART-DRUMMING IMAGE

This heartbeat image can be used when engaging in any sport or physical activity (running, dance, soccer, etc).

Remember, your heartbeat becomes stronger during physical performance.

Now, feel your heartbeat and see that it pumps stronger.

See that you can hear the drumming of your heart. There is imagination in this heartbeat. As your heart beats, it goes in rhythm with your imagination.

See yourself performing and let the heart beat.

You become stronger, your performance is more pleasurable and easier to release.

How does your performance change when you add the image of your heart?

SPORTS ACTION WITH FILTERS

See yourself involved in a physical activity.

Perform an action in regard to that activity (hit the ball, jog, pedal the bike, lift weights.)

As you perform the action, keep your father in mind. What do you see?

How does it affect your performance?

As you perform the action, keep your mother in mind. What do you see? How does it affect your performance?

The object of performing a physical activity while using our parents as "filters" is to assess where we have blocks to our performance. We may also tap into power and enhanced ability. In most cases, we are not getting full strength from both parents.

HIGH EXECUTIVE PERFORMANCE IMAGE: FOR PEOPLE IN BUSINESS.

There is no difference between sports and executive performance. Where the executive overcame his fear of speech making by using his childhood images of playing baseball, you may use all the above image instructions by replacing the word "sports" with the specific area of executive performance or skill required. For instance, I have re-written the above exercise for executive performance by changing just one word.

See an image of performing in an executive activity you enjoy.

See what you love about it, what makes you high as you do it.

Let this high feeling envelope you. Feel it in your body.

Let it get you high.

This is the passion in your performance.

See that you perform your executive duties with this high feeling.

This is the power in you. *W*

For more than 20 years, Jaqueline Lapa Sussman has applied the techniques of Eidetic Imagery as a speaker, teacher and counselor. She is the close associate and protégé of Dr. Akhter Ahsen, leading theoretician in the field of Eidetic Imagery. One of the foremost Eidetic Imagery practitioners in the world, she has trained executives in government, healthcare professionals, CEO's and athletes, and has lectured at the faculties of several universities. She conducts workshops in the U.S. and abroad on relationship and intimacy issues, in facilitating leadership and creativity in corporations and business, and in women's potentials. Sussman is the author of the book *Images of Desire*, and her new book, *Freedom From Failure*, is due out in February 2003. She is Director of the International Imagery Association and Editor of "Imagery Today," an international newsletter covering the imagery movement. Ms. Sussman lives in Weston, CT with her husband and two children and has a private psychotherapy practice, both here and in New York.

1. This article is an excerpt from Jaqueline Lapa Sussman's latest book, *Freedom From Failure*, to be released early in 2003.
2. Akhter Ahsen, Ph.D., the world's leading scientist and theoretician in the field of mental imagery, founder of Eidetic Imaging, author of thirty books on mental imagery and Editor of the *Journal of Mental Imagery*, with whom I have worked for over twenty years.