

Coach Thyself: Six Rules for Successful Affirmations

IT'S NOW 33 YEARS SINCE SHAKTI GAWAIN PUBLISHED HER CLASSIC BOOK, CREATIVE VISUALIZATION. In that time, affirmations and visualizations of cherished positive outcomes have moved from a new-age fringe into the offices of doctors and Olympic coaches, not to mention a wide range of therapists and healers. Steadfastly rehearsing experiences you deeply desire, simply using your mind, really works. Whether the rehearsals are spoken aloud, written down, repeated mentally in sequence with the breath, or simply imagined—they can seriously help change your life. But there's a definite art to this that many sources don't teach. Here are six guidelines that ensure much more successful practice.¹

1. Keep it Short and Sweet. This rule of thumb applies both to how many desired outcomes you can work on at a time, and also to how complex or detailed any one outcome might be. Whatever higher spiritual principles may be at work, it all begins by auto-suggesting your sub-conscious. Thinking of this part of yourself as a kind of 5 year-old child is helpful. Don't work on more than 2-3 goals at once, or rehearse long, abstract sentences. "I've found a great job; it pays well and pleases me," is great. But, "A perfect employment situation, which pays at least... and is... and allows me to... has arrived in my life," is not going to excite the 5 year old in you. If you are going to cover more ground, make sure the sentence remains direct and simple—"I'm safe, healthy, happy, and loved," for instance

2. Positives Only Please. Try this sometime with someone you know well. Over the course of half an hour, sprinkle your conversation with some negative injunction like "don't be angry with me." Do this enough, and the "don't" will be overwhelmed by the repetitive attention drawn to "be angry with me." The person will start to become angry.

It's the same with affirmations. A basic skill here, in this area and in life as a whole, is therefore to turn your negatively stated desires into positives. Replace what you don't want with what you do want. "I'm no longer depressed in the evenings," won't work. What's the positive? "I'm peaceful, even buoyant after dinner these days."

3. Persistence Makes Perfect. How many times have you heard certain advertising slogans? If you are old enough, "the pause that refreshes," and "things go better with..." associate immediately with Coke. These affirmations of the soft drink's effects were strengthened by millions of repetitions. And while you typically only need tens or hundreds of rehearsals to establish a new truth in your beloved 5 year-old's scattered attention span—you too need to put in the effort. Do the work!

4. Strong Feeling Makes Magic. But as you really do the work, your attention will wander, eventually, even during those devoted repetitions. Expect cycles of denial ("I can't...), boredom ("ho hum"), and then, increasingly, peaks of enthusiasm (wow! this feels REAL!). It is those peaks when you feel the excitement and joy of an outcome being actual that have the deepest effect. In truth, very often the reason you don't already have the outcome is that you cannot accept the feelings associated with it.

5. Remember the Future with Gratitude. A shortcut that works for many people is to think, speak, feel (or sometimes even act) as if you are looking back in time on a change already in place. So put things in the past tense—"Wow! I got the job that pays and pleases!" Then—this is crucial--slow down for a second and work on feeling exactly how you would respond if it had already happened. It's a psychological fact that gratitude helps. It's still short and sweet to say, "Thanks so much for handing me that job that pays and pleases!"

6. Let the Ends Create the Means. What this says is: focus on general goals and stay away from details about how they will happen. Time and again in this work the same thing occurs. Something seems unlikely or even impossible. Then it comes to pass in a way you could not have imagined. The steps look perfectly natural afterwards, even though the effects on your life might be miraculous. But you cannot try to tell either your "5 year-old" sub-conscious, or the Greater Reality how to create your desires. Don't micromanage the Great Mystery. Stoke the fires of belief and maintain all the innocence of a trusting child.

There's quite a lot of wisdom in these six guidelines. Still, there are one or two more points worth making. If you are reaching for important outcomes that have eluded previous efforts, then it's good to adopt a rhythm. Work the affirmation hard and often on the waxing moon, for instance, and rest it (forget it...) while she wanes. Then, if it hasn't manifested yet, pick it up again at new moon. Often, with such outcomes, internal energy created by the affirmations has to first clear away some old blocks. Look for these to surface as you work. ▲



¹ *Though I've focused mainly on verbal affirmations here, several of the guidelines apply to visualizations as well.*