

Leveraging Your Reticular Activating System

***“We should never let reality interfere with our dreams.
Reality can't see what we can see.”*** —Simon Sinek

An essential component of designing your life is **envisioning**. The objective of this process is to create a mental picture of your future that includes everything that is important to you and represents your unique version of a fulfilling and satisfying life. The next step is to define goals that support that image. This visualization and goal setting process will establish clear guidelines for creating a financial and life plan that aligns with your values and priorities.

In his book *Getting Things Done*, author David Allen provides insight regarding the effectiveness of this approach to planning and preparing for the future. He wrote, “We know that **the focus we hold in our minds affects what we perceive and how we perform.**” He further explained that when individuals focus on something they identify as being important to them, that attention and intention will generate ideas and thought patterns they would otherwise not have had. He also emphasized that “even your physiology will respond to an image in your head as if it were reality.”

This seemingly magical phenomenon is due to the **Reticular Activation System—a formation at the base of the brain that is the gateway to our conscious awareness.** Allen explained:

Just like a computer, your brain has a search function—but it's even more phenomenal than a computer's. It seems to be programmed by what we focus on and, more primarily, what we identify with.

Therefore, when visualizing the relationships, experiences, and quality of life you would like to have in the future, it is important to remind yourself that the secret to realizing your dreams is maintaining that image in your mind. In fact, the greater your understanding of what is truly most important to you, the easier it will be to **“paint a mental picture” of your life that is both motivating and inspiring.**

Nonetheless, you may still feel reluctant to establish important goals until you know exactly how and when you will achieve them. This desire for clarity is understandable, but will stall your progress and undermine your potential. In *Personal Coaching for Results*, the late Lou Tice explained:

*...it's a mistake if you think you have to know exactly **how** you're going to achieve a goal before you commit to it. When you operate that way, you cripple yourself unnecessarily and limit your scope severely. You're goal-setting inside a box that is only as big as your present knowledge.*

As an antidote to this crippling mindset, Tice recommends employing “end result thinking”—a methodology and belief that leverages the power of the Reticular Activating System. He explained that when an individual commits to a goal, they are assigning a higher level of meaning and purpose to the outcome. In a sense, they are declaring, “This is important to me.

This matters.” **A surprising consequence is that your awareness will be heightened in amazing ways.** You will begin to identify helpful resources and creative ways to achieve your goals that you previously had not recognized.

In *Appreciative Living*, Jackie Kelm wrote that **“images are a much more powerful method for mobilizing change than concrete steps or programs.”** Therefore, as you set goals for the future, it is important to envision and articulate the various elements you want to include in your financial and life plan. Whatever you identify and claim for yourself will become the internal compass guiding all of the big and little decisions you make along your life’s journey.