

## **Creative Visualisation**

The use of creative visualisation can be both emotional and powerful and can work in many situations. Creative visualisation is the process of having your client imagine themselves in an ideal future place, or with an optimal set of behaviours and emotional state. It has been used extensively in neurolinguistic programming (NLP) and CBT, as well as a wide range of other disciplines. In NLP, it often takes the form of future pacing, whereas in cognitive behavioural work it is usually focused on imagining the ideal self, to overcome limitations of existing patterns of thought and emotions. Both are very useful for coaching, and indeed there are many crossovers between these approaches. Resistance from clients might come from a feeling that it's all a little woolly or 'woo woo', but in fact, it's a very normal and effective way to change behaviours, habits and feelings. It is used extensively in sports, and Jack Niklaus, one of the greatest golfers of all time, famously tells how he would always imagine his very best outcome from a golf shot before he hit the ball:

I never hit a shot, not even in practice, without having a very sharp, in-focus picture of it in my head. First I see the ball where I want it to finish, nice and white and sitting up high on the bright green grass. Then the scene quickly changes, and I see the ball going there; its path, trajectory, and shape, even its behaviour on landing. Then there is a sort of fade-out, and the next scene shows me making the kind of swing that will turn the previous images into reality.

**So creative visualisation is merely the act of using the mind to improve our clarity of outcome, and how we would be in that situation.**

## **Future pacing**

In NLP, future pacing is the act of taking someone on an imaginative leap into the future to explore either their imagined state or their imagined journey to a particular outcome. The ideal self-described above is essentially the same as the first of these, in exploring the imagined state, etc. However, the imagined journey to an outcome is a unique aspect of future pacing that can be extremely effective in coaching to help a client map out a pathway to a future that seems hazy in their current state. The strength of this process is that it relies on the unconscious mind and the imagination to overcome the blocks people often set up for themselves when thinking logically. By taking the client into the future, we are presupposing that any challenges have been overcome, and therefore we reduce the client's resistance to creating the mental pathway to the solutions they need to find. The process is straightforward. Having established a clear outcome for the client, including a rich array of sensory-based information relating to it, the coach asks them to choose where the present is in the room – in other words, identify an actual location in the coaching space – and whereabouts in the room represents the future place where they have achieved the outcome. 37 The coach then physically walks with the client to the future location and asks the client to step into that time when they have achieved the outcome. The client should be asked to really imagine being in that place, and the coach may well ask the client to relive the outcome by describing what they can see, hear and feel, and what they're thinking. The coach then asks the client to look behind them, and asks, "looking back, what was the last

thing you did that allowed you to be here?” (here being the future location). Notice that the question is asked while the client is standing in the future looking backwards. This maintains the presupposed achievement of the outcome. This is very different from saying, “step back one step and now in this place what do you need to do to move forward”. In such a version, the logical and emotional blocks are being reinstated. Once the client has stated what their last step was, the coach can ask them to move back into this last step, and repeat the process of looking over their shoulder at the past, and stating what their last step was to move to the new position. Little by little, the client is walked back from the outcome all the way to the present. Now of course, we’re not expecting from this a full and thorough list of things to do. But what the coach will have created is a framework of action and a chronological journey, from which further coaching can take place. It will almost certainly have created an emotional buy-in from the client to their own future, which perhaps previously they couldn’t fully picture. 38 As a point of practice, it is useful for the coach to take the notes in this session, as this allows the client to fully engage in the unconscious process, free from the more conscious efforts needed to write notes in an orderly fashion. Future pacing is a very effective way to set up a quick but strong map of a journey that the client will undertake, and from which further coaching can take place. Here’s the process in a simple step-by-step guide:

1. Have the client describe their outcome in sensory-specific detail, and with the date, they will have achieved it. What are they seeing, hearing, feeling, etc.?
2. Identify locations in the room that represent both that present and the future time when they will have achieved the outcome.
3. Walk the client to the future location and have them recall the outcome in detail.
4. Have them look back at the last step they took, and ask what that last step they had to take was to get to their present location.
5. Once they have described that step, make notes of it and ask them to step into that last place.
6. Then repeat the process, step by step, to the present.
7. Ask what the client got from that journey and then coach from the results.

### **Summary**

Whether working with ideal self or future pacing, creative visualisation is an excellent and simple way to engage the client in a new way of thinking that circumvents more logical ways, which often carry the baggage of self-doubt, fear and uncertainty. They are also enjoyable for the client since they give them permission and space to imagine the feel of success and to picture the possibility that it can be real.