

Psychocybernetics

Dr. Maxwell Maltz – 1954

Psychocybernetics is a book about changing behavior. The key to behavior is self image – it sets the boundaries for what you can and cannot do. Our self image seeks to give appropriate feelings and accomplish goals based on data fed to it through ideas, beliefs, interpretations and opinions rather than through logic or intellect. The sum of those feelings is what we call experience.

Our experience reflects our opinion of things we see or that have happened to us. Often our experiences are not what actually happened, because we have filtered our reactions through our prejudices and previous observations. If our earliest self images were developed with harmful prejudices, then we will tend to interpret things in a way that maintains these attitudes. This is because once an image or an idea is accepted we act on it as true and do not tend to question it.

Our **goal** then is to find a self image that is realistic and acceptable to us. Our **problem** is that our unconscious wants to do and see things the way we have always done and seen them – right or wrong. The **rules** that we must operate under are...

1. All actions, feelings and behaviors are consistent with our self image.
2. Our self image can be changed and, once it is, many habits are easily changed because they no longer are consistent with our self image.

The **key** to this self image change is that the human nervous system cannot tell the difference between actual and vividly imagined experiences. As a matter-of-fact this is the reason worry and lack of self confidence tends to breed failure – we imagine that we have failed and then look for ways to verify this “fact.” The **tool** we will use to change ourselves is imagination. The **method** is creative mental picturing. Through creative mental picturing, we will learn, practice and experience new habits of thinking, imagining, remembering and acting. This method can also be used to set ongoing goals and solve problems.

Our mind is made up of a conscious portion and an unconscious portion. It is the job of the conscious portion to select goals, keep our unconscious advised as to what is going on around us, and pay attention to what we are doing (concentration). Our unconscious functions like a thinking computer, utilizing only information given to it by our conscious. Its job is to interpret information in relation to our self image and to solve problems.

The job we will ask of our conscious is to select a goal for ourselves, relax so as to reduce or eliminate external stimuli, and concentrate (creative mental picturing) on our goal and factual information regarding that goal. We want to force a positive and successful mental image into our unconscious in such a way that it cannot be greatly changed by our prejudices. As this is done we are also asking our unconscious to solve the problem of how to reach our goals. If we are persistent in this process our positive images will gradually replace our negative images and we will find ourselves changing more and more of our behavior to accommodate our new self image. After dealing with our self image, this process works very well on any goals we may select.

First Step: Consciously determine a true goal. If we are unable to pick out a particular goal then that becomes our goal. As we become familiar with the process we can deal with several problems or goals at the same time.

Second Step: Learn to relax. Self hypnosis is not required, but can be used to speed up the process. Relaxation reduces external stimuli, allowing us to concentrate.

Third Step: Concentrate on the goal and develop a vivid mental picture of how we are going to feel, act, and be when the goal is achieved.

Fourth Step: Repetition of 2nd and 3rd steps daily or more frequently. The immediate goal is to be totally familiar with our success feelings and to “switch them on” whenever we start to doubt ourselves.

The remainder of the book details the second and third steps.

As we begin this program we have to remember that answers to questions or problems come, not from the conscious, but from the unconscious mind and we cannot “demand” answers immediately or through logic. We must “allow” our unconscious to work for us.

RELAXATION:

When we relax we are eliminating both physical and emotional tension in our body. Anger, worry, and fear all build on tension and an elimination of tension eliminates these feelings. We are also creating an environment in which we can change our beliefs and reactions. Most of our beliefs were formed without effort or pressure and they will have to be changed in the same manner.

In learning to relax we need to first learn to reduce our response to outside stimuli. Events are not what disturb us – our response or reaction to these events is what creates tension. Therefore, our goal is to eliminate our response if it does not assist us in reaching our goal.

We then need to control worry. Worry is a negative response – either in thoughts or tension – to something that has happened or something we are afraid will happen. The solution is to determine that we are going to live, emotionally, only in the present. Therefore, we either take note of the worry and do something positive with it (assists us in reaching our goals) or totally ignore it because it serves no purpose in our life. Use the past and future to learn or plan and if they cannot help in these areas do not let them affect the present.

Relaxing between different types of tasks – even for only a minute – allows us to begin the new task with calmness and a mind uncluttered with emotions carried over from the previous task. This enables us to approach problems with a broader perspective – allowing for more different types of solutions (creativity) – and usually results in more complete solutions.

Lastly, we need to set aside a relaxation period each day so that we can maintain contact with ourselves, review and set goals, and plan future actions.

A successful method for relaxing is to mentally build a quiet room to which we can retire anytime we choose. This room should be furnished just the way we like and have just the view we want, but inside it should be totally quiet. Take time in building this room and picture everything in vivid detail. By retreating into this room whenever we choose, we set up a positive habit pattern that allows us to relax practically on command.

DEVELOPING and WORKING TOWARD GOALS:

There are conscious things we can do to solve problems...

1. Assume the answer already exists – somewhere – and we will recognize it when we see it.
2. Have an intense desire to solve the problem, accompanied with diligently thinking about all angles of it.
3. Do not be discouraged because the “means” to the solution are not apparent. We must “picture” our feeling when we have accomplished our goal.
4. Put up with failures because they define the path to our solutions.
5. We must act first and trust our creative imagination to work for us. We must not “jam” it by trying to solve all problems “logically” before taking action. Only the action itself brings the creative imagination to bear.

To go about developing goals or solving problems we have to understand how our creative imagination (unconscious) works. It has two methods of operation...

1. When the answer (goal) is known and the problem is how to reach it...
 - a. A direction is taken, solutions are tried, and errors are made and corrected until the goal is reached. Errors are part of the solution and are not to be feared.
 - b. Once a successful response is found it is remembered and previous failures are forgotten.
 - c. As learning takes place the direction becomes clearer and directions become more refined.

2. When the answer (goal) is unknown and the problem is how to find it...
 - a. If the entire situation (problem and answer) is thought of as a whole, then the answer becomes the “right sized brick” to complete the whole.
 - b. The information is reviewed and the memory scans the brain until the “brick” is found.

There is apparent access – in both types of problems – to knowledge that transcends sensory functions. Access to this information source appears to be available through the unconscious, and logical analysis, based upon existing information, seems to screen out our ability to recognize this information. This is another reason not to try to force something out of the unconscious.

Thus both the conscious and the unconscious portions of our minds are used to set goals and solve problems. Typically we ignore the unconscious portion of our brain and try to force answers out of our logical conscious mind. Since it was not developed to solve unknowns, but to give direction and to reduce answers to logic, it cannot function effectively for most people. This is the reason for emphasizing relaxation and mental picturing.

CREATIVE MENTAL PICTURING:

The imaginative use of creative mental picturing is the most powerful tool we have in communicating directly with our unconscious. Creative mental picturing is a vivid, imaginative portrayal of ourselves performing certain tasks or acting in certain ways that demonstrate to ourselves that we have reached a goal. Our nervous system cannot tell the difference between this vivid, detailed picture and our actual performance. This is the same thing that happens when we imagine we see something that frightens us- we act the same as if we had actually seen what we only imagined. Therefore, if we set up a mental image and repeatedly portray it to ourselves we will begin to act as if this image was real and our other actions will begin to fall in line with this image. We will become what we imagine.

To effectively use mental picturing we need to practice some rules...

1. Set aside a period each day to practice.
2. Relax as completely as possible.
3. Make the mental pictures as vivid and detailed as possible.
4. Do not demand of yourself that you act or react a certain way “tomorrow,” but simply imagine yourself acting and reacting appropriately and successfully.

Mental picturing profoundly affects our ability to learn because a major factor in our learning process is the thought of an objective and the desire to reach that objective. Suddenly those things relating to that objective are important and need to be learned to carry us toward that goal. Learning those things becomes not only interesting, but easy.

There is one catch to the use of mental picturing. We must have a conscious belief in what we are picturing. If we feel negative about ourselves it is difficult to change unless we recognize that this negativeness is wrong for us. Therefore, we need to use our conscious mind to prove to ourselves we need to change. There are two “standard convictions” humans seem to have that can help us.

1. We are each able to do our share and exert a certain amount of independence.
2. We should not be forced to suffer indignities to our image.

These convictions allow us to analyze our behavior and honestly say, “I want to change.” We can now use our rational mind to help us.

Both behavior and feeling spring from belief and when our behavior or feelings are not what we want we need to ask ourselves why, trace down the belief responsible, and ask the following questions...

1. Is there any rational reason for such a belief?
2. Could it be I am mistaken?
3. Would I come to the same conclusion if it were someone else?
4. Why should I continue to act and feel as if this were true if there is no good reason to believe it?

These questions tell our unconscious that our actions are not being consistent with our desired self image. If the answers indicate we have “shortchanged” ourselves then we should get indignant or even angry. Rational thought must be accompanied by deep feeling and conviction to be effective in changing belief.

There are many ways to trigger our creative mental picturing. Some common ones are: flash cards, pictures, a tape recording, self hypnosis, writing a phrase.

Now that we understand mental picturing and its ability to penetrate the unconscious; and we have some ideas of how our unconscious or creative imagination works, we need to know how to free up this part of our mind – to maximize its use.

1. Worry about something before you take action. Once you decide on what course of action you will follow relax, follow through with the action and do not worry about consequences.
2. Make plans for tomorrow, but live only in the present moment.
3. Try to do only one thing at a time.
4. If you have spent a good deal of time with a problem without being able to solve it, review it once again and then sleep on it.
5. Relax while you work – it eliminates worry and reduces fatigue.

SUMMARY:

- We started out saying we wanted to change our self image, but change came hard because we also wanted to maintain our old habits.
- We said we wanted to get through to our unconscious to change these habits.
- To do this we first needed to relax.
- Then we needed to use our imagination to develop vivid mental pictures of what we wanted to do and be.
- These pictures could “fool” our nervous system if we convinced ourselves that they were, or should be, true.

By “fooling” our nervous system we could change our self image, and then our old habits would drop away naturally, because they no longer were compatible with our self image.