

Programming Healthy Habits of Today for Tomorrow

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As children we learn new behaviors easily and effortlessly because there is a constant stream of feedback from parents, teachers, friends and family which motivate us to act in a certain way. How it works is quite simple- good feedback makes good feelings and we unconsciously seek to have those feelings more, so we repeat the behavior. Bad feedback makes us feel bad and subsequently we avoid doing that behavior again with the goal of avoiding those bad feelings. Just because we're adults doesn't mean our learning patterns change all that much -- we still require positive reinforcement to develop habitual, unconscious behavior patterns.

What does this mean for targets of workplace bullying? As you develop communication skills (both internally; talking to yourself -- and externally; talking to bullies) and learn to handle bullies in ways that work best for you, it's critical that you follow up any of the new, useful behaviors with positive reinforcement to turn those skills into unconscious habits. One effective way to do that is through "future pacing" using visualization.

Future Pacing

Future pacing means taking the positive experience (or skill) and fully imagining (visualize) yourself doing it in the future.

To be as effective as possible in programming your unconscious behavioral patterns, let's start by having you remember a one-time event where you effectively handled a workplace bullying situation. This event can be one small component (ex. you maintained eye contact) or it can be more general (ex. you easily and effortlessly

explained yourself in a calm, controlled manner). Whatever behavior you want to replicate, simply find a one time event when you did it in your past -- preferably in the recent past -- and get a clear picture of it in your mind.



Begin by re-experiencing the event through your own senses -- what did you say, do, feel, etc. when you used that behavior? Imagine going through it all again and, if you want to, add extra components to the visualization that make it even more powerful. An example would be to add in the sound of cheering and applause, or a friend giving you thumbs up, in the background. When you have it the way you want it, stop and really notice your success ... specifically, feel it and say something to yourself which confirms that you did good.

Having that feeling in mind, imagine a time in the near future -- like a week from now -- and, this time, see yourself from outside your body doing the behavior in a different situation where you're dealing with a bully. You are now a witness to the event; really focus on noticing the "you" in the imagined future event doing the behavior



and then feeling that awareness of success immediately afterwards (go ahead and put that cheering section in again!). As soon as you've done that, go further into the future -- imagine a time a few months from now -- and see yourself doing it again in a different situation. Watch as you successfully use the behavior and feel good about it. Finally, do it again even further in the future -- next year perhaps. Watch yourself easily and effortlessly do the behavior automatically in response to bullying and see yourself feeling great about it!

Third Time's a Charm

When you are learning new anti-bullying tools and techniques, even from the very first time you use them in dealing with a workplace bully, you can go away and future pace that ability. Future pacing a new behavior using visualization like this tells your unconscious mind that it should automatically connect good feelings to the habit of acting or speaking that way.

The big key here is doing at least 3 imagined future events so your unconscious learns to connect them (to program it even deeper in your mind do it 7 times).

To reiterate that pattern again:

1. Pick a behavior you want to use automatically.
2. Recall using that skill effectively, remembering the event as if re-living it in your own body, and be certain to feel good about it (if necessary you can add/increase that positive feeling of success, for example, add your own cheering section!).
3. Imagine a new event in the future and, as if you are a witness to it, watch yourself use that behavior successfully and then feel good about it.

4. Imagine another event even further in the future and, and again, as a witness, watch yourself successfully use the behavior and feel good about it.
5. Finally, imagine a third event even farther out in your future and, once more as a witness, watch yourself effectively use the behavior automatically and it feels great.

For people who require a more external sense of validation, a way to modify this technique of future pacing is to tell someone about doing the behavior successfully and having them react in a healthy and supportive way. The step of telling someone after doing the behavior can be added to the imagined future events immediately after seeing yourself successfully do it; however, be certain to remember that in future events you should still imagine being a witness - watching yourself tell the person as you get the positive feedback.

Now you know you can take any newly-found useful tool for dealing with your unique situation and train yourself to automatically use it. By adding this one, a simple visualization technique, you have now greatly increased your chances of overcoming workplace bullying - you can picture it now, can't you?

Dr. Daniel Scott is the Author of Verbal Self Defense in the Workplace and a professional Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) Trainer and Consultant with a Research Doctorate in Metaphysical Science. With input from colleagues around the world, he combined tactics from the gentle art of Aikido with information from the science of NLP and Language Patterns of Ericksonian Hypnosis to develop his 6 step model for Verbal Self Defense. His book is available on Amazon, and includes a forward by Catherine Mattice.

