

Using Imagery to Enhance Your Life

By Jeanie Marshall



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Jeanie Marshall is Personal Development Consultant and Coach with Marshall House. She loves to encourage and witness her clients' success. She has an M.S. in Human Resource Development and Organization Development.

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Marshall House
1223 Wilshire Boulevard, #300
Santa Monica, CA 90403
(310) 392-1987

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*"Imagination is more important than knowledge.
Knowledge is limited.
Imagination encircles the world."*

~ Albert Einstein

Images are powerful and enliven life! You can't buy them at the corner grocery store; you create them from within. They travel on, in, with, and through words. Both images and words are created by and reflect your consciousness, intention, and meaning.

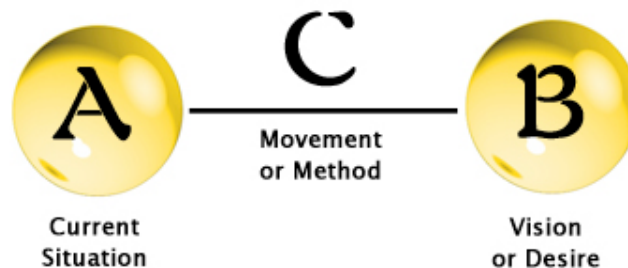
As a writer, speaker, and frequent communicator, I love and rely heavily on words. Many people believe that words are the key to communication. Yet words are only one aspect of relating to others. Images can be more creative than words or actions. However, when images, words, and actions align with each other, all are especially creative.

Fundamental as A, B, C

I have a model in mind whenever I talk with a client. The model involves two questions:

Where are you now?
Where do you want to be?

Sometimes I ask these questions directly and audibly; sometimes I just listen and watch for images without asking direct questions. Everyone constantly transmits messages about both places.



A: Current Situation. The place to start is where you are. Consider a shopping mall map. X marks where you stand. The current situation is the starting place, and remains the starting place if you continue to focus your attention here. While it can be cathartic to include evaluation and history, choose brevity rather than long-windedness when describing an uncomfortable situation if you expect to move from it. When the current situation is one you desire to recreate again and again, constant focus is beneficial.

B: Vision. The vision is where you desire to be (e.g., the mall's book store, third level). Your work is to create a compelling vision. When you think about your life, of course, B is more than a map location. It's a place in consciousness, which includes your preferences, desires, dreams, and goals. You create the most compelling visions using intentional imagery.

A and B Together. You carry with you both your current situation (A) and your vision (B). You see the world through either, depending on the focus of your attention. If you focus on and expect a dreadful interaction with your boss, you collude to create a dreadful experience. If you focus on and expect an empowering

interaction, you create an empowering experience. You constantly create your relationships with your expectations and focus. The world responds to you based on your emphasis of either A or B.

C: Movement/Method. When you move from A to B, you use some method or path (C). Your focus of attention propels you. The method might be comprehensive or short-term, effective or haphazard. The path might be circuitous or direct, bumpy or smooth, obvious or obscure. You move in the direction you look.

Simple as A, B, C. I described the process in the most efficient and effective order: (1) succinct description of A plus (2) clarity of B reveals (3) options of C. The more compelling the vision, the more obvious are the options to move toward and embrace B.

In an uncomfortable current situation, first recognize the discomfort and then intentionally focus in a more pleasant direction. Focusing constantly on the discomfort only creates more discomfort, because what you give your attention to expands. So, recognize the discomfort and give it a name (e.g., conversation with Ellen). With the current situation simply defined, you can more easily shift your attention to B by thinking and talking about your dreams, hopes, and expectations. The key is to make B more familiar than A.

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”
 “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.
 “I don't much care where--” said Alice.
 “Then it doesn't matter which way you go,” said the Cat.
 “--so long as I get somewhere,” Alice added as an explanation.
 “Oh, you're sure to do that,” said the Cat, “if you only walk long enough.”

— Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

The Alice Effect: A, C, B. Assume you're in a current painful or uncomfortable situation (A) with a person, place, thing, idea, or yourself. Truly, this uncomfortable current situation can move you (C). Swirling in a cesspool is movement; however, movement alone can't get you where you want to be without giving your attention to or toward B.

Compelling Vision. With a compelling vision to draw and inspire you, your path is more pleasurable, even with bumps and confusion. You'll move where you want to be if you point yourself toward B. You create the kind of relationships you want by giving your attention to the elements you appreciate in relationships.

When A and B are One. When you're clear about your vision, the Universe handles the methods and details, opening pathways for you to experience your vision as the current situation. Before or after you experience one vision, a new one emerges, keeping the process in continuous motion.

Images are a Natural Part of Life

Everything starts with your thoughts; all thoughts are accompanied by images, whether or not words or actions are involved. Images and thoughts are so interrelated that sometimes it's hard to distinguish them. Frankly, it's not necessary. Lump them together or separate them. The principles of creating all aspects of life are the same, whether you apply them to images, thoughts, words, or actions.

You have your own unique images, symbols, and impulses. Many are natural and spontaneous. Some images are splashes and flashes you may not fully comprehend. Others may be as clear as you see with your physical eyes. Some arrive in your nighttime dreaming, forgotten or remembered in the morning or days later. Others emerge through processes or techniques like goal setting, meditation, writing or reading poetry, or conversations with yourself or others.

To become more aware of images that occur to you naturally, set an intention to notice them. With an intention to be more aware, prompt your awareness by asking yourself, "What image relates to this specific idea or thought?" Or, "What image represents an empowering relationship with my friend?" Or, "what image helps me to be successful in this project?"

Choosing and Using Techniques

As you discover and work with techniques, don't give your power away to them. Let techniques help you find the power in you. A technique gives you a focus. Techniques are like bicycle training wheels. When riding a bike feels natural, you remove the training wheels. When you embody the skill that's the purpose of the technique, you no longer need the technique. If continued use comforts you, don't abandon the technique. Just remember the power is in *you*.

Discover, identify, create, and play with images and techniques to focus your attention. Train yourself to direct and redirect your attention. Use imagery to sharpen or soften your focus, lift your consciousness, and enhance your relationships.

Re-frame a Situation for Empowering Change

An empowering image can re-frame a situation or be a comforting distraction from a difficult situation. For example, Brad told me about a behavior pattern he recently decided to change when talking with his boss. He denounced the old behavior, calling it "insane" and "silly." I suggested he re-frame and re-name that characterization to think of the old behavior as a "step," a viable way to manage himself in the past. He's changed, so his behavior must change.

With the "step image," Brad's shoulders immediately released tension. He saw himself on a stairway, moving upward. In his mind's eye, he began to create interesting stairways: colorful, spiral, or marble. His attitude continued to lift upward as he moved up his stairway, diverting himself from the specific, uncomfortable situation. When his attention returned to the relationship with his boss, he still felt empowered. When his empowerment waned, he had a meaningful image on which to refocus his attention.

The step image gave Brad a new way to see change generally in his life, an empowering way to integrate this specific change more fully, and a continuing process to integrate increasingly more empowering future changes. He'll always be changing — *always*. Now he has a series of steps, or stairs, to direct movement in more

enjoyable ways. The steps/stairs might be with him for many years, or he might find other appropriate images.

All change requires movement. When you want to intentionally change some aspect of your life, start by recognizing the need for change. After practicing disempowerment for a while, the first glimmer of change is often met with clumsy awareness. With practice, you embrace empowerment more fully.

If your life is going exactly as you want, you needn't make intentional changes. Continue what you're doing; changes will occur naturally. However, if you feel disempowered in some aspect of your life, work intentionally with images to enhance momentum toward more satisfying experiences.

From Resentment to Appreciation with Imagery

Helen resented her boss's disempowering way of treating her. When she suggested white, Jake chose black; when she suggested black, he chose white. He found fault with projects that were 99% excellent, rarely alluding to the excellence. His stated position was that he expected excellence. In fact, he expected and looked for something that was wrong and discounted the excellence that showed up.

Her expressed feelings pinpointed the starting place: guilt about her contempt for him and incompetence at creating a problematic relationship. She wanted to change the dynamics to be more satisfying.

As Helen spoke about Jake, I listened to her words and watched for images surrounding her thoughts. As her words expressed imagery (for example, black and white), she provided clues for the imagery work that would be most effective for her. Using only black and white, we created gray by merging them. Gray in any shade isn't very vibrant, but thinking of white as the combination of all colors, and black as the absence of colors, we generated greater imagery. Colors became an integral part of Helen's imagery work.

Helen articulated another image, "feeling like he was hitting me over the head." This diminished her clear thinking, especially in

Jake's presence. I asked what the object was. A hammer? A sponge? To her, it felt like a hardcover book. We worked with this image to divert her attention from Jake to a picture she could easily have power over in her mind's eye. She learned to identify and change the book.

We discussed the book's attributes. The title – what was it and could she change it? The size – how big was it and could she make it bigger or smaller? How does he hold the book – using one or both hands?

Once in the spirit of imagery, we imagined Helen sitting in Jake's office. One time, the book was Peter Drucker's *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices*. We envisioned Jake stop in midair before hitting her, taking the book in both hands, putting it on the desk, and finding the chapter "Developing Management and Managers." We both tuned into this image and watched an enlightened expression change Jake's face. Then he closed the book, picked up her report, and gave careful, constructive feedback that was empowering to both. As we played with these images, I noticed Helen's face and head relax.

One day, Jake telephoned Helen while he vacationed at his Cape Cod cottage. He described the ocean breeze, his favorite drink, and the porch facing the beach. He was mellow, charming, and receptive to her ideas. In her mind's eye, she saw his setting. More importantly, she visualized how mellow he was. When tensions are particularly stressful, she imagines him at his cottage, mellow. Jake may or may not relax, but even if Helen just imagines *him* mellow and receptive, *she* relaxes.

All this imagery work is for Helen; it's not intended to manipulate Jake. As Helen imagines certain pictures of effective interactions, Jake is far more likely to step into her picture and participate with her. Interactions are co-creative. When Helen imagines upcoming interactions as empowering, the actual interactions *are* more empowering.

Words and actions flow from images, thoughts, and expectations. Form follows thought.

The most potent images are ones the client articulates. Sometimes I suggest an image I think the client will relate to or, as with Brad, I'll suggest an image when a disempowering image is so strong it blocks new ones. I don't force images on the client. I listen and look; I'm a witness and a guide.

Empowering Images for You

You see the world through your own eyes. Others' perspectives might be interesting, even enlightening, but **your** focus determines **your** experiences. As with a photograph or an oil painting, you and your friends can look at the same picture and see different perspectives -- too many to articulate or agree on. While you may agree on the picture's general subject, if you look at the left corner while someone else looks at the right corner, you see different pictures — you each see different images. All are valid.

You know when your images are empowering by how you feel. If you feel pleasant feelings and sensations, the images resonate with your visions and desires, and therefore are empowering. Unpleasant feelings and sensations mean the images don't resonate with your visions and desires, and are disempowering. You create your experiences in the direction of your curiosity, whether you feel good or not.

Natural and Intentional Imagery

Natural imagery is imagery you don't really think about or plan; it's familiar, practiced, and/or spontaneous. Intentional imagery is imagery you deliberately evoke for a purpose.

Here's an example of natural imagery: when you say, "I'm working at my computer," you naturally transmit images of work, attitudes about work, and elements of your environment. How strongly you associate with these images and the listener's receptivity determine the extent they're transmitted and received.

Here's an example of intentional imagery: you say, "I'm working at my computer" with an intention to assure your boss that you're confident about completing the project on schedule, so you imagine

yourself triumphant and you envision the project completed — packaged, bound, or delivered.

Here's an example of conflicting words and images: if you say, "I'm working at my computer," when you're doing something else, you send out mixed messages. Your words say something that is different from the situation. Your intention is to deceive, which may or may not be overtly noticed, but the mixed vibration will be felt on some level.

The words are the same in these examples. The intentions, attitudes, images, and meanings differ. Your vocal inflection helps convey meaning, but the images and attitudes most powerfully transfer the meaning.

Natural imagery happens all the time, with or without your awareness. Intentional imagery occurs with your forethought or effort. Both are important and work together. The process of creation works whether the images are positive or negative; whether they feel good or not; whether you're awake or asleep.

Your starting place is recognizing the images you currently transmit. What do you see, imagine, touch, taste, intuit, or hear inside you? Also, pay attention to what you pay attention to.

If you currently find yourself in uncomfortable situations, you're using negative images — naturally, intentionally, or in some combination. If you currently find yourself in desired situations, you're using positive images — naturally, intentionally, or in some combination. And, of course, you experience varied results with different mixes: natural, intentional, positive, negative, mild, strong, etc.

The most effective communicators (trainers, professional speakers, actors, etc.) use overhead slides or props or demonstrations to maximize their effectiveness in combining visual and auditory components. I, too, advocate such techniques. However, the visual imagery I'm speaking about occurs in the energy field, not seen through physical eyes. That sight is inner sight; the process is imagination.

If you talk to a group about a tomato, everyone creates unique images of the tomato. If you elaborate with juicy words while you imagine a delicious, ripe, red tomato, your listeners' mouths might begin to water as mine is now. One listener may prefer a tomato right from the vine with a little basil, another imagines eating a succulent tomato in an arugula salad, another bites into an imagined beefsteak tomato on a medium-rare hamburger on a bun with lettuce and pickle. And have you ever eaten a tomato with a squeeze of lime?

Everything you manifest on the physical plane is a process of co-creation. Sometimes you co-create what you like or prefer and sometimes you co-create what you don't like or prefer. Your creations depend on where you put your attention. If you give your attention to resentment, you're in a relationship with resentment, and so you co-create with resentment. If you give your attention to peace, you co-create with peace. You don't need to ask permission of the other (person, place, thing or idea) to be a partner, just give your attention to the other, and you're in partnership.

WYSIWYG

WYSIWYG (phonetically Wizzy-Wig) is an acronym for What You See Is What You Get. The term became popular when Apple announced the first computer that displayed a screen that looked like a desktop: what you saw on screen was what you got in print. I apply that phrase to the idea of imagery, slightly expanding the words to clarify the meaning. What you see in your imagination is what you get in your life. What you draw in your inner vision, you draw into your experiences.

If you worry about a relationship with someone — dreading meeting your in-laws or your boss's boss — you imagine not-wanted ideas and images. If your feelings of dread are peppered with images and expectations of fears or ridicule, the more likely you'll experience the very dynamic you worry about. When the images are truly graphic, you manifest the worried-about condition more quickly and more often.

If your worries become topics of conversation, you energize your negative expectations further. This pattern creates a cycle:

experience a difficult situation, think about and/or discuss the situation, experience a new difficult situation either with the same person or others, and so on. If you experience the cycle long and often enough, you must be intentional to break the pattern. The familiar and practiced responses continue to expand until you interrupt the cycle.

All this may sound like really bad news. But it's *good* news because if you want to change your experiences from what you don't want to what you *want*, you can change your images and expectations to create what you want and where you want to be. When changing a long-time habit of focusing on not-wanted ideas, it may take time being consistent with focusing on wanted ideas to experience consistent, desired results. Your creation may not have the exact details as the imagery, but the essence will be the same if you're consistent about focusing on the thoughts and images you want. And so, you must practice. The more fun you have practicing, the more likely you'll practice consistently. Consistency is key.

Tammy Takes Flight

Tammy once feared airplane travel. Most of her flights were problematic in some way: unusually bumpy, mechanical problems, cancelled flights, etc. Her travel stories were entertaining and sometimes hilarious. What she didn't understand was how her engaging images in her storytelling created more of the same experiences.

Since travel was, and still is, integral to her job, this dynamic impacted her job effectiveness, work and personal relationships, and health. She arrived at meetings frazzled, stories flowing from her lips as if rehearsed in the taxi ride from the airport. More attention was focused on Tammy's latest travel than on her job competence. Her relationship with travel polluted her other relationships.

I asked about her latest trip so I could hear her words and see the images. I knew she could improve her experiences. What a storyteller! She presented details of travel maladies that the best screenwriters would envy or admire. Her own screenplay played out in her travels, sprinkled with colors, fascinating shapes, and peppy

dialogue. I helped her write a new screenplay, based on scenes she wanted to experience.

Using her images, I helped her create a more empowering story about her recent trip, energizing it to match the entertainment of her disempowering stories. Sometimes I suggest clients stop talking about their problems and shift their attention to different subjects; however, Tammy is a brilliant storyteller with an eager audience, so helping her tell stories in more empowering ways was the better strategy.

When clients first work with me, they rarely understand they're the creators of their own lives. I plant seeds to articulate this during moments of readiness. Rather than convince Tammy that by changing her storytelling she'd change her future travels, I suggested she explore telling her stories differently to feel better about the latest trip.

I knew she'd trust my suggestions more if I related them to the present situation rather than future travels. She needed a direct experience of changing her focus and watching her travel improve. One thought at a time. One step at a time.

Tammy and I have worked on many different subject and situations in her life. All situations interrelate. Travel was the most dramatic and sometimes traumatic part of her life, so it often had her attention. As Tammy began using intentional imagery before, during, and after travel, she more easily used intentional imagery to enhance her relationships with others, increase her job effectiveness, improve her health, stabilize her income, and fine-tune her work and life balance.

Tammy now finds most of her travels extremely pleasant. More importantly, her colleagues are far more interested in her creative ideas than her travel. When she tells travel stories, she focuses on wonderful people and enjoyable experiences. On some flights she even meditates!

Trust Unlocks the Willingness to Explore

In my client sessions, trust is a key element. I don't demand my clients trust me; I help them trust themselves. They tap their self-trust when trying unfamiliar techniques. I match a technique with each client to resonate with specific needs. Sometimes it's a tried-and-true technique; sometimes it's so fresh and uniquely for the person that I'm not aware of its fullness until later. As trust builds, I express increasingly more empowering ideas.

I encourage the client to take the next step toward empowerment and success, the one most accessible from the starting place. If I suggest a client take three steps in one leap, trust dissolves and the process loses effectiveness. One step at a time builds trust for the next step. As the client notices results in the present situation, the next step is natural. This is practicing. This is relationship building. This is incremental change.

Referring back to the earlier model, as Fundamental as A, B, C, trust expands when understanding that A is a distinct place in consciousness which is different from B. To move effectively from A to B is a process, not an instantaneous leap.

Blocks and the Perception of Blocks

People often believe that blocks in their energy field prevent them from doing (or not doing) something. It's really the *belief* in the blocks that prevent them, not the blocks. It's important to start where you are and work with the blocks or beliefs enough to the perceptions. You do not want to become an expert on the blocks, you want to move from where you are to where you want to be.

An empowering relationship to a block can include blasting it into little pieces, walking around it, stepping over it, or changing it into a more appealing form. You can make it smaller and less imposing or bigger and more ominous. I find with excessive attention on a block, the latter happens.

Sometimes people become such "block experts" that they can't focus on anything else. If someone blames another for a block, I recognize this is the person's perception, without expressing wrong

doing or self-blame. When the person is ready, responsibility for creating one's own life — including blocks — is a natural, empowering step.

If someone puts great certainty or validity in a block, I honor that the person isn't ready to relinquish it. Ultimately, the most empowering approach is to place the attention elsewhere because the block, and even its perception, will diminish or disappear when it's not fed energy. In the meantime, I engage with my clients to make the block less disempowering.

I start with the client's description of the block and encourage increasingly more empowering images. For example, a brown glob that represented Jane's ineffective boss became a pink parakeet, which sang for a while and then flew away when she and her boss opened communications. David imagined his right knee, with debilitating pain that prevented his running, as an iron gear in need of oil, which he lubricated three times a day in two-minute visualizations. One week later he returned to light jogging, and later ran the Boston marathon.

These are examples of the clients' images, not mine. Each client is unique, so the images are, as well. Just like everything in life, images change. Some images change naturally; some images change intentionally. By working with images that represent conditions, it's possible to move more quickly through relationship problems. I was Jane's third coach for her troublesome six-year relationship with her boss. Our client sessions were filled with more strategies than pink parakeets, but she flew further and faster with that image than any other single strategy, because we stopped focusing directly on the troublesome relationship!

I knew David's knee pain had a long history, but if we had had conversations about that history, we'd have spent years unraveling the meaning because for each discovery, there would be more to uncover. He wanted to run the marathon successfully; he wanted to run his consulting business more effectively. His "oiling the gear" visualization distracted him in just the right amount to accomplish both. Now, five years later, he continues running both marathons and a multi-million dollar consulting business.

Meditation is a Quiet Revolution

People are meditating on trains and planes, as they jog or hike, in their showers and gardens, and in the middle of a workday. Meditation quiets the mind, but doesn't really stop it because the mind is designed for thinking.

I define meditation broadly, more in terms of its essence than its form. Meditation is a state of consciousness rather than a function of time, place, activity, position, quietness, or stillness. Meditation calms you, focuses your attention, enhances your relationships, and helps you be more receptive to energy and imagery.

During a meditative experience, it's most advantageous to focus on a non-contradictory thought or subject. Examples are: a silently repeated mantra; a soothing sound (music, a constant or rhythmic noise, a voice in guided meditation); an interesting visual image, such as a Mandela or sphere. If you prefer open-eye meditation, focus on a burning candle, swaying tree, or grains of sand. If you prefer moving while meditating, focus on your footsteps or a rolling brook as you walk.

People relate differently to meditation. Some experience detached sensations or feelings of lightness; others experience euphoria; others lose consciousness and awaken to expanded consciousness. Some feel calm afterwards; others feel exhilarated. Some are more aware of their physical senses; others transcend their physical senses. Some fall asleep; some awaken. Meditation may be universal, yet it's still a highly personal experience.

Before, during, and after meditation are fertile times to work with intentional images and visualizations. Some people open themselves to receiving empowering images in their meditative awareness; others focus on previously identified empowering images to lift their consciousness during meditation.

Images — just like meditation practices — give the mind a place to rest. They are a pleasant distraction from stressful situations, especially those that appear to have no resolution.

Create Your Relationships With Empowering Images

So, inspire yourself to be creative. Create images. If you perceive a challenge in your life, identify an image to represent the challenge, then describe attributes of the image such as texture, distance, size, color, shape.

Change the image into whatever pleases you: let pink lollipops represent sweet love; let a waterfall remind you to be in the flow of life.

- Envision the back cover of the book you want to publish next year.
- See yourself and your boss eager to greet each other as friends.
- Imagine tension uncoiling between you and a neighbor, turning into a pleasant image.
- Envision effortless, enjoyable travel.

Make your images playful, realistic, silly, formal, surreal, impressionistic, or any quality you want.

What you see in your imagination, you manifest in your life. What you draw in your mind, you draw into your reality. WYSIWYG. Life is as fundamental as A, B, C.