

Take control of you!

I DON'T FEEL LIKE DOING THAT TODAY!

HOW TO GET YOURSELF INTO THE RIGHT STATE

by Dave Rawlings



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01751 417765

www.changeworkcoaching.com

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What determines the state you are in at any moment?

What state are you in now?

Is your awareness high? Is your energy low? Can you feel a fluttering sensation in your abdomen? Are you thinking about your next meal? Are you sitting upright? Are your muscles tense?

“State” is the term for the collection of mental, physiological and emotional processes that are running, all together, at any particular moment.

Your state is part of your response to some event: either external to you, and referenced through your senses, or internal. For example, your response to praise from another person might be to run a particular set of thoughts, feelings and physical movements (including a certain way of breathing) that you call “embarrassed” or “pleased” - or “smug”! The stimulus comes through your vision and hearing, resulting in the state.

Alternatively, the stimulus could come entirely from within. You just think of a time when someone praised you and the same process runs. You immediately find yourself in the same state.

There’s a great example of a state being triggered by a sensory stimulus in Proust's "À la recherche du temps perdu" ("In Search of Lost Time", or better known as "Remembrance of Things Past").

It’s "the madeleine" incident*.

* Proust, M. *Remembrance of Things Past. Volume 1: Swann's Way: Within a Budding Grove*. For the relevant passage (in English!) go to: <http://www.haverford.edu/psych/ddavis/p109g/proust.html>

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In this, Proust writes vividly about how the taste of a piece of madeleine cake, not experienced for many years, immediately transported him back to a particular time and place in his childhood. And even before he was able to recall anything about the past event, he felt the emotion, the pleasure associated with it.

This is the most famous example of "anchoring" in literature. Not only is the memory of the event (in terms of images and sounds) stimulated by the taste of the cake, the STATE (mental, physiological, emotional) that Proust was in at that time is triggered even faster.

These anchors are set all the time - usually without us noticing. This is how a piece of music, a place, a smell or a certain face can evoke feelings - even when we can't consciously recall the association.

Nowadays we have techniques for doing this deliberately so that we can be our best whenever we want. We can anchor the state.

Anchoring exploits the idea that "We already have the resources we need". The "resource" here is the memory of a time when we experienced the desired state. The anchoring technique (described below) allows you to attach that state to a "trigger" that you choose - so you can "fire" it at will.

So, take the time to recall a specific time when you were feeling particularly confident, competent or in some other way resourceful, and anchor it. You'll then have an invaluable tool to raise your performance in any situation.

Anchoring a positive state

This is probably the simplest and one of the most effective techniques in Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). It involves choosing a trigger to associate with a desired state. For this exercise, I'd recommend that you press the thumb and first finger of your right hand together – firmly but not too hard – as the trigger.

Preparation

- Find a quiet, comfortable place where you won't be disturbed.
- Take time to become focused on what you are doing – putting the problems and concerns of the day on hold.
- Work through the exercise, giving yourself plenty of time to experience each stage.
- It's best to read the instructions through a few times before you start so that you can remember steps 3 - 6 without referring to the text. This way you'll be able to maintain the desired state much more easily. Alternatively, you might try recording yourself reading the steps out loud, with long pauses between each one. Better still, ask someone you trust to help you by reading out the instructions – pausing at each step until you signal that you're ready for the next one. You can return the favour by helping them through the method as well. It isn't necessary to reveal any of the details of your past experiences - or your imagined ones - if you don't want to.
- You may well want to close your eyes while you're doing the exercise.

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Process

1. Choose the state you want to anchor. To make the steps clear I'll use the example of "pride", but you can substitute whatever you want, e.g. "calm", "excited", "confident".
2. Recall a time, place or event when you know that you experienced the state. For example, you may remember feeling supremely proud after winning a prize or award for something that you are very good at. Or it may just be a particular occasion when you know you did a brilliant job. The main thing is to make sure you find a memory with strong feelings attached to it.
3. Imagine yourself fully back in the experience, seeing through your own eyes rather than watching a movie of yourself. Take your time to fill in as much detail as you can: what you could see, hear, feel, taste and smell. Make it as vivid as you can – even exaggerating some parts of the memory.
4. Assume the same posture that you were in – perhaps standing up straight, smiling, breathing deeply.
5. Notice what you are feeling now. Are you getting the same feelings inside that you did back then? Really crank that feeling up.
6. Just as the state approaches its peak, set the anchor (press finger and thumb together) and hold it until the peak. (It's important to do this just before the peak and not just after, as you may anchor the declining state.) Release the anchor as soon as the peak experience begins to decline.
7. Now, "break" the state by doing something like: clapping your hands, getting up, stretching, thinking about what you're having for tea, etc.

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8. Test the anchor by “firing” it (press you finger and thumb together). If you don’t immediately experience the desired state you may need to repeat the setting process – perhaps several times, remembering to break the state in between.
9. Now imagine a future occasion where you will want to be in the state you’ve just anchored. Practise using the anchor in that imagined time and feel the effect it has.
10. Use the anchor any time that you need to. The more often you use it the more effective and reliable it will become. If you don’t use it, it will gradually fade.

A variation on this routine is the "**Circle of Excellence**", where a state of confidence is anchored to an imaginary circle on the floor around you. When you step out of the circle you imagine leaving the state inside. Next time you need to perform "on your feet", e.g. making a presentation, you conjure up the circle on the floor in front of you and then step into it.

1. Recall a time when you experienced feeling confident, being "on fire"!
2. Take your time to build it up – what could you see, hear, feel at the time? Make it brighter, bigger, louder until you feel the state as strongly as you did then.
3. At the peak, set the anchor – imagine a circle on the floor around you, brightly coloured and humming with power! Take a few moments to cement the association between the circle and the feeling.
4. Step out of the circle, imagining that you are deliberately leaving the state in there.
5. Break state, i.e. get into a neutral state: not particularly excited or depressed. (Think about something else, get up, walk around.)

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6. Test by “firing” the anchor – conjure up the circle just in front of you and step into it.
7. If you don't immediately re-experience the desired state then repeat the whole process, concentrating on maximising the feelings before you set the anchor.
8. Imagine a future occasion where you will want to be in the state you've just anchored. Practise using the anchor in that imagined time and feel the effect it has.

With practice you'll be able to recognise when an event has triggered an internal process that leads to a negative state. You can then choose to stop that process and not go there, perhaps deliberately adopting a more resourceful state that helps you to deal with the situation.

One crucial factor, particularly when replaying past events, is whether or not you are **associated**. In this state, you will experience the memory (or the imagined situation) as if you were there - seeing through your own eyes. This is great for pleasant memories, as the associated state brings with it all of the emotions that were experienced in the actual event. However, it's a disaster for unpleasant or traumatic experiences. For these, it is better to be *dissociated*, as though watching yourself in a movie, perhaps from above or through a window.

People will follow your lead more easily if you are in the right state: confident, resourceful, totally committed.

Where can you use this?

The anchoring technique is most obviously valuable for those times when you're feeling nervous, tired or just sad. Life tends not to respect these

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feelings and still makes demands on you regardless of your state. So it's a fantastically useful skill to be able to choose how you feel.

It's also useful in less obvious ways, such as in this example from my own experience:

What happens when you're really concentrating on something, maybe working on figures or composing an important e-mail, and someone interrupts you?

Do you resent the intrusion – and then let them see that you do? Perhaps you fly off the handle completely and put on a display of aggression (that you may have to apologise for later).

I used to react negatively to interruption, at the mild end of the spectrum, but still quite unfriendly in effect and (frankly) in intention. It was as if part of me wanted to let the other person know that they were unwelcome so that they wouldn't do it again. Even as I spoke to that person, my mind was still on the task and it must have been very obvious that I wasn't really focused on them.

I came to realise that this was very unsatisfactory. It was just as much part of my job to help and support the people in my team as it was to get on with my own tasks – in fact more so! This is where the anchoring technique, along with visualising myself using it, made an enormous difference to me – and my people.

I imagined myself in a state of intense curiosity about the other person and what their problem was. After anchoring that state I then mentally rehearsed being interrupted, pausing for a second to "switch off" what I was doing, firing my anchor, smiling and then, almost exaggeratedly, turning to face them full-on.

After a couple of instances of using this routine, it became automatic and I didn't have to think about it at all. Apart from the immediate improvement in others' experiences of me, there was an unexpected spin-off in the great pleasure I found in behaving in this way. It's good to be good!

Things to remember

- Your state is the combination of physiological and mental processes going on within you.
- You get into a particular state as a response to external stimuli or just from a sequence of thoughts.
- States become anchored to memories of people, places or objects and to sensations of smell, taste or touch.
- You can create an anchor deliberately by associating a trigger with the state.
- To do this successfully you must actually **be in the state** when you set the anchor.
- You can get into the state by remembering what it was like when you experienced it before.
- Setting an anchor provides you with a shortcut back to that state.

More Help

For help in applying these techniques, or other aspects of personal development, please call me, Dave Rawlings, on 01751 417765. I'm always delighted to hear from readers with no obligation.



Change Work Coaching
Sunset House
Appleton le Moors
York
YO62 6TE

Tel: 01751 417765
www.changeworkcoaching.com

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