

BELIEVE IT!

BECOME IT!

MODULE FIVE



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BECOME IT!

MODULE 5

Power Belief # 4 “I Use Positive Experiencing to Become My Ideal Self”

**“We are what and where we are because we have first imagined it.”
Donald Curtis**

I Imagine Things in Great Detail Which Become Like Real Experiences

How did you learn that you're good at some things and not good at others? **You experienced success and failure from your earliest years and you built beliefs about yourself based on these experiences, and on the way people reacted to you.** For example, during your first years at school, if you excelled in art, your work was praised. If you repeatedly bungled math problems, you were reproved. You learned, from experience and other people's reactions, that you were a good artist and a bad mathematician. Consciously and unconsciously, you developed your self-picture from your experiences and the input of others.

If you have a poor self-image in any area of your life because of past negative experiences, there is good news! **You can improve your self-image by creating new, positive experiences to replace the old ones.**

You may ask, “Can beliefs from a past which is riddled with failure and nearly void of successes be changed years later?” Absolutely! Studies show that one is never too young nor too old to *change negative beliefs* and start living a joyous life.

The key is in the way you acquired your *positive* self beliefs in the first place: by positive experiences. Now here's some great news:

**Positive Experiences Can Be Simulated;
They Can be Created “Artificially” in Our Minds!**

You see, the very nature of the human brain and nervous system allows you to literally *create experiences* in your mind. Experimental and clinical psychologists have proven:

- **The nervous system cannot tell the difference between an ACTUAL experience and an experience IMAGINED IN GREAT DETAIL.**
- **Your nervous system reacts obediently to what you think or imagine to be true –**

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whether it's actually true or not. In other words, people always feel, act and behave according to what they *imagine to be true* about themselves and their circumstances.

We all possess the ability to create images in our minds. By realizing that our feelings and behavior are a result of what we imagine to be true, we can change these feelings and behavior by changing our mental pictures.

Dr. Maxwell Maltz was one who discovered these truths, through a number of experiments. Dr. Maltz wrote:

B The human brain and nervous system are engineered to react automatically and appropriately to the problems and challenges in the environment. For example, a man doesn't need to stop and think that self-survival requires that he run if he meets an angry grizzly bear on a trail. He doesn't need to decide to become afraid. The fear response is automatic. First, it makes him want to flee. The fear then triggers bodily mechanisms which 'soup up' his muscles so he can run faster than he has ever run before. His heart beat is quickened. Adrenalin, a powerful muscle stimulant, is poured into the bloodstream. All bodily functions not necessary to running are shut down. The stomach stops working and all available blood is sent to the muscles. Breathing is much faster and the oxygen supply to the muscles is increased manifold.

B All of this, of course, is nothing new. Most of us learned it in high school. What we have not been so quick to realize, however, is that the brain and nervous system which reacts automatically to environment is the same brain and nervous system which tells us what the environment *is*. The reactions of the man meeting the bear are commonly thought of as due to "emotion" rather than to ideas. Yet, it was an idea – information received from the outside world and evaluated by the forebrain – which sparked the so-called "emotional reactions." Thus, it was basically *idea* or *belief* which was the true causative agent, rather than emotion – which came as a result. In short, the man on the trail reacted *to what he thought, or believed or imagined* the environment to be. The 'messages' brought to us from the environment consist of nerve impulses from the various sense organs. These nerve impulses are decoded, interpreted and evaluated in the brain and made known to us in the form of ideas or mental images. In the final analysis it is these mental images that we react to. (*Psycho-Cybernetics*)

You act, and feel, not according to what things are *really* like, but according to the *image your mind holds of what they are like*.

You have certain mental images of yourself, your world, and the people around you. And you behave as though these images were truth – reality - rather than the things they represent.

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Let us suppose, for example, that the man on the trail had not met a real bear, but a movie actor dressed in a bear costume. If he thought and imagined the actor to be a bear, his emotional and nervous reactions would have been exactly the same. Or let us suppose he met a large shaggy dog, which his fear-ridden imagination mistook for a bear. Again, he would react automatically to what he believed to be true concerning himself and his environment.

It follows that if our ideas and mental images concerning ourselves are distorted or unrealistic, then our reaction to our environment will likewise be inappropriate.

Realizing that our actions, feelings and behavior are the direct result of our own images and beliefs gives us the leverage needed for changing our personality, gaining skill, and living joyfully.

Mental pictures offer us an opportunity to “practice” new traits and attitudes which otherwise we couldn’t do. This is possible because, again – your nervous system cannot tell the difference between an actual experience and one that is vividly imagined. If we picture ourselves performing in a certain manner, it is very nearly the same as the actual performance. Perfect mental practice helps to make perfect.

One of the many experiments done years ago (this experiment was reported in *Research Quarterly*, 1956) which validated these statements is briefly described in the following:

Mental Free-throws

In the experiment, there were 3 groups of free-throw-shooting basketball players. The first group practiced throwing free-throws every day for 20 days - 20 minutes a day. The second group never practiced (they were tested on their free-throw shooting ability, like each group, on the first and last days). The third group never touched a ball. Instead, they spent 20 minutes each day for 20 days just IMAGINING they were sinking free throws. They imagined it in great detail. The result? The first group improved 24%. The second group didn’t improve at all. The third group - the boys who just imagined the ball going through the hoop - improved 23%!

In the April, 1955 issue of Reader’s Digest, an article by Joseph Phillips told about how the great, undefeated chess champion Capablanca lost the championship to a rather obscure player named Alekhine. The chess world was stunned by the upset. Phillips told how Alekhine had trained for the match, “very much like how a boxer conditioned himself for a fight. He retired to the country, cut out smoking and drinking and did calisthenics. And for three months, Alekhine played chess *only in his mind*,’ preparing for the moment when he would meet the champion.”

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I Practice in My Head

Here's another example: Artur Schnabel was a world famous pianist. He took lessons for only seven years. Artur explained that he hated practicing for any length of time at an actual keyboard. When questioned about his limited amount of practicing, as compared with other concert pianists, Schnabel said, "I practice in my head."

C. G. Kop, of Holland, was a recognized authority on teaching piano. He recommended that all pianists "practice in their heads." A new composition, he said, should be first memorized and played in the mind before ever touching fingers to the keyboard.

Alex Morrison, a world-famous golf instructor, actually worked out a system of mental practice. It enables the golfer to improve his score by sitting in an easy chair, and practicing mentally. Morrison said, "The mental side of golf represents 90% of the game. The physical side 8%, and the mechanical side 2%. Morrison told how he taught Lew Lehr to break 90 for the first time, with no actual practice whatsoever. The golf instructor explained that "you simply need to have a clear, detailed mental picture of the correct process. You must 'see in your mind' where you want the ball to go, and have the confidence to know that it is going to do what you want. Then, in your actual golf game, your subconscious mind takes over and directs your muscles correctly. If your grip is wrong, or your stance isn't in the best form, your subconscious will take care of that by directing your muscles to do whatever is necessary to compensate for the error in form."

Every Accomplishment Created First in Imagination

Dr. Maltz explained that successful men and women have, since the beginning of time, used 'mental pictures' and 'rehearsal practice' to achieve success.

- Napoleon, for example, 'practiced' soldiering in his imagination for many years before he ever went out onto an actual battlefield.
- General Norman Schwarzkopf, in an interview after the victory in the Persian Gulf War, described how he played out his battle plans in his mind before committing troops to combat.
- Gymnastics champion Mary Lou Retton has described how she rehearsed every routine in her mind, visualizing every step, every leap and turn, every hand placement before putting her body through an actual performance.
- Conrad Hilton imagined himself operating a hotel long before he ever bought one.
- Henry Kaiser said that each of his business accomplishments was realized in his imagination before it appeared in actuality.
- Juliet McComas, concert pianist, said, "If I visualize the keyboard, I can practice in an airport or at my kitchen table. It's just as useful as actual practice."

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- Arnold Schwarzenegger, movie star, and Governor of California, maintains, “As long as the mind can envision the fact that you can do something, you can. I visualized myself being there already, having achieved the goal already.”

Form a Picture and “See Yourself” succeed

What does this mean in terms of *believing and becoming*? This creative mechanism within you can help you become your ideal “self,” if you will form a picture in your imagination of the person you want to be and “see yourself” in the new role.

Four ways to use this skill:

1. Take 15 minutes each day and relax your body as much as possible in a comfortable place. Close your eyes. Create a mental motion picture of yourself as you would like to be. Imagine, in great detail, your ideal self. Imagine your face radiant and smiling; your body at its optimum shape and fitness level; your clothes well-fitting and nice. Imagine (in great detail) doing something extremely well that you enjoy doing, with the people around you appreciative and admiring.

Regarding one’s self-image, Dr. Maxwell Maltz noted:

Your present self-image was built upon your own imagination pictures of yourself in the past which grew out of interpretations and evaluation which you placed upon *experience*. Now you are to use the same method to build an adequate self-image that you previously used to build an inadequate one.

Set aside 30 minutes each day where you can be alone and undisturbed. (*Paula’s note: I believe 15 minutes is sufficient*) Relax and make yourself as comfortable as possible. Now close your eyes and exercise your imagination.

Many people find they get better results if they imagine themselves sitting before a large movie screen – and imagine that they are seeing a motion picture of themselves. The important thing is to make these pictures as vivid and as *detailed* as possible. You want your mental pictures to approximate actual experience as much as possible. The way to do this is pay attention to small details, sights, sounds, objects, in your imagined environment.

Details of the imagined environment are all-important in this exercise, because for all practical purposes, you are creating a *practice experience*. And if the imagination is vivid and detailed enough, your imagination practice is equivalent to an actual experience, insofar as your nervous system is concerned.

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The next important thing to remember is that during this 15 minutes you see yourself acting and reacting successfully, ideally. It doesn't matter how you acted yesterday. You do not need to try to have faith you will act in the ideal way tomorrow. Your nervous system will take care of that in time – if you continue to practice. See yourself acting, feeling, “being” as you want to be. Don't say to yourself, “*I am going to act this way tomorrow.*” Just say to yourself, “*I am going to imagine myself acting this way now – for 30 (15) minutes – today.*” (*Psycho-Cybernetics*)

**“Imagine how you would feel if you were already the sort of personality you want to be.”
Dr. Maxwell Maltz**

If you have been shy and timid, see yourself moving among people with ease and poise – and *feeling good* because of it. If you have been fearful and anxious in certain situations – see yourself acting calmly and deliberately, acting with confidence and courage – and feeling expansive and confident because you are.

This exercise builds new “memories” or stored data into your mid-brain and nervous system. It builds a new image of self. After practicing it for a time, you'll be surprised to find yourself ‘acting differently,’ more or less automatically and spontaneously – ‘without trying.’ This is as it should be. You don't need to ‘take thought’ or ‘try’ to make an effort now in order to feel ineffective or act inadequately. Your present inadequate feeling and doing is automatic and spontaneous, because of the data, real or imagined you have built into your automatic mechanism. You will find it will work just as automatically upon positive thoughts and experiences as upon negative ones.

2. As you go through your day, when you aren't focusing on something else, take a “mini-vacation in your mind.” This is easily done with practice. You simply create in your mind a wonderful place where you're very happy. For some, this is a lovely, richly decorated palace; for others, it is a walk along a warm, clean, sandy beach at sunset with someone they love. For still others, it is a simple, yet beautiful room with a large, comfortable bed . . . and a big window looking out onto a pond and a garden of well-manicured trees and flowers. Wherever you go in your mind, that place needs to be seen in great detail. Touch the palace walls, smell the ocean, feel the soft pillow on the bed. Are you with me here? Can you visualize it? You can go on this mini-vacation whenever life gets stressful or you just need a mental break.

Dr. Norman Vincent Peale suggested,

Fill your mind with all peaceful experiences possible, then make planned and deliberate excursions to them in memory. You must learn that the easiest way to an easy mind is to create an easy mind. This is done by practice. The mind

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quickly responds to teaching and discipline. You can make the mind give you back anything you want, but remember the mind can give back only what it was first given. Saturate our thoughts with peaceful experiences, peaceful words and ideas, and ultimately you will have a storehouse of peace-producing experiences to which you may turn for refreshment and renewal of your spirit. It will be a vast source of power. (*The Power of Positive Thinking*)

3. The third way you can use this marvelous tool of visualization – to become your best self – is to heal yourself from past pain. Everyone who has experienced emotional pain and heartache knows that it is very real and extraordinarily difficult to forget. Although you cannot erase the past, you can help yourself heal with visualization. Here's how: When a painful memory forces itself into your mind, **label** it with "Here it is" and then **replace** it with a thought about how the person *should have acted*. Instead of letting your mind re-play the experience as it was, use your power of visualization to imagine what it should have been like. Then **focus forward** as you extend the image into the future, but in a positive way instead of the way it 'played out' negatively. Here's an example of how you do this: A painful incident from the past comes into your mind and you think to yourself:

Here it is. I'm seeing my father hit me . . . but I am now reversing that and visualizing him walking into the room and we talk to each other. We don't get angry, and he doesn't hit me. After we talk, he hugs me and tells me he loves me. Dad, if you knew then what you know now – you wouldn't have hit me. I forgive you, and I'm now thinking about how you love me . . . and about how our relationship is now. (If the relationship is good, that's easy. If not, do this) I am thinking about how I would like our relationship to be . . . I'm thinking about how much more kind you are now. You know, this helps me with my resolve to be a good parent. I learned some good things from you, but I also learned about things I'll never do to my children. So it wasn't all bad . . . I learned, and now I'll be a better parent because of you.

4. A fourth way you can use visualization is to imagine yourself in the future, doing something that you are going to do: a presentation at work; meeting with the boss; working toward a goal; achieving a goal; taking a vacation with your family; being patient/kind/forgiving, etc; visiting relatives during the holidays; and on and on. Again, you create mental pictures in your mind – in great detail. You imagine every part of the experience. Here is an example of what I do. I think to myself,

I'm going to give this presentation to my department in 24 hours. I've prepared well, and I know the material. I will imagine what it will be like. I'm going to get up tomorrow morning with a positive, upbeat attitude and look forward to the presentation. I'll put on my black suit, my hair will look great and I'll feel really good about my appearance. I can see myself right now...yeah, I look good! After a healthful breakfast of orange juice,

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two eggs and whole wheat toast, I'll go through the presentation highlights out loud, so it will be on the tip of my tongue. Then I'll take my briefcase and drive to work calmly because I've left plenty of time to get there. As soon as I get to work I'll email the department and remind them of the meeting. I'll answer my mail and pick up my presentation hand-outs. On the way to the meeting, I'll get a drink of water, and then confidently open the door of the boardroom. Inside, I see my colleagues looking at me with admiration and respect. I go to the front of the room and lay out my materials. I stand in front of the group confidently -- with my shoulders back and smiling -- anxious to begin. As I present, I am articulate and witty. I remember to speak slowly enough to be understood, and I patiently answer every question. My co-workers are interested in my information and enjoy the meeting. Afterwards, I thank them for their interest and participation and I graciously accept their compliments."

Do you see how it works? Your success in manifesting the "ideal" outcome is built upon powerful laws of the mind; so, *of course* visualization works!

Now, *what if* something unanticipated goes wrong on the day of your presentation – the car doesn't start, or during your presentation you're asked a question you can't answer, or the overhead projector didn't work, or your co-workers were critical and unappreciative? Although you don't expect those things to happen, you can prepare yourself mentally by thinking like this: "If something unfortunate happens, I'll handle it calmly and stay in control."

Imagine in Great Detail and Visualize Yourself as the Person You Want to Become

It's important to understand that although your visualization necessitates high expectations for yourself, you have control only over your behavior. Your high expectations for ideal conditions and other people's positive behavior *may* not ever be realized. For example, you might have to deal with traffic that you couldn't anticipate, or rude co-workers who don't appreciate you. Remember, that *your responsibility* lies in how you react to your challenges . . . the way you deal with problems. The tricky part is learning how to think, "I can only control what I do; their behavior is not my problem." And then *let it go*; blow out the match before it burns you. Now, if things go wrong with your presentation, that's another matter. You need to evaluate, learn, and use your mistakes as stepping stones to future success.

"Believe in the self you are now in the process of becoming."

Dr. Leslie Weatherhead

Dr. Leslie D. Weatherhead, author of *Prescription for Anxiety*, has valuable advice relative to visualization. He remarked,

If we have in our minds a picture of ourselves as fear-haunted and defeated nobodies, we

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must get rid of that picture at once and hold up our heads. That is a false picture and false must go. God sees us as men and women in whom and through whom He can do a great work. He sees us as already serene, confident, and cheerful. He sees us not as pathetic victims of life, but masters of the art of living; not wanting sympathy, but imparting help to others, and therefore thinking less and less of ourselves, and full, not of self-concern, but of love and laughter and a desire to serve. Let us look at our 'real selves' which are in the making *the moment we believe in their existence*. We must recognize the possibility of change and believe in the self we are now in the process of becoming. That old sense of unworthiness and failure must go. It is false and we are not to believe in what is false.

And Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick explained, "Hold a picture of yourself long and steadily enough in your mind's eye and you will be drawn toward it. Picture yourself vividly as defeated and that alone will make victory impossible. Picture yourself vividly as winning and that alone will contribute immeasurably to success."

**"Great living starts with a picture, held in your imagination,
of what you would like to do or be."**

Dr. Harry Fosdick

It took Jack, age 53, many years to complete his Masters Degree. Jack reported that what got him through the tough times was "visualizing what I wanted." He said, "I never lost the vision. If you see it in your mind, you will eventually gravitate toward it." His advice? "Day dream a lot! See yourself enjoying your dream!"

Susan, age 29, used visualization to help her through childbirth. In her words: "I wanted to experience childbirth without medication. I tried to relax and visualize the entire process. I told myself that I was in control of the pain; it was not in control of me. I thought, '*You can handle the pain and make it through.*' And I knew the power of the mind over the body: if I allowed myself to think for one moment that the pain was unbearable, it instantly became so! However, as soon as I returned to thinking I could control it - that the pain was for a purpose - I could endure it; the pain lessened and I was able to make it through the contraction."

Kathy, age 28, was miserable while struggling to overcome an eating disorder. Kathy explained that during her challenging days "I tried to keep in mind all the things I wanted to do in my life such as get married, have a family, excel in a career. I thought about how my behavior would prevent me from reaching my goals. I would also try to remind myself that I was not a quitter and the way I was behaving was in fact the easy way out. My advice is to believe in yourself and know that you can do whatever it is you want to do."

Review these facts and consider how you can use them to become your ideal self:

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- Anything you imagine to be true is accepted as true by your subconscious mind.
- An imagined experience is perceived and acted on by your subconscious mind exactly the same as a real experience.
- Your behavior follows what you believe to be true.

For those who desire an answer to the question, “Exactly how does this work?” I’m including a brief explanation of how the left and right sides of the brain function. Bobbe Sommer, of the Maxwell Maltz Foundation, explained it in her book *Psycho-cybernetics 2000*. The following is just a portion of the information learned from neuropsychologist Roger W. Sperry’s split-brain experiments that earned him a Nobel prize.

How Does This Work?

Communication between the two halves of the brain (right and left hemispheres) is controlled principally by a bundle of nerve fibers called the corpus callosum. Sperry and his students studied patients in whom this nerve bundle had been surgically cut in an attempt to control epileptic seizures. In these people the two brain hemispheres functioned independently of one another. Sperry found that each half of the brain has its own conscious thought processes and its own memories.

In 97% of us, the left brain controls the ability to produce and understand speech; the right brain enables us to form, store and respond to sensory data, such as when we put on our clothes, find our way to a known location or recognize a face. When a word was flashed to a split-brain subject’s right hemisphere, she was unable to speak the word. The “verbal” left brain had not seen the word; the “visual” right brain knew what it was, but could not speak it. When a subject’s right brain was shown a picture of an apple, he could not name the object; but when his left hand (controlled by the right brain) was then given several unseen objects to choose from, he identified the apple.

**The left brain is logical, analytical and reasonable.
The right brain is intuitive, impulsive, and passionate.**

The left brain comprehends an object by its name; the right brain by the way it looks or feels. When you’re doing your taxes you use the left side of your brain. When you are afraid of something, it’s the right side at work. It has not been fully established what causes these differences in function, but it seems clear that the abilities of both cerebral hemispheres are necessary for a full human existence.

Generally, we think of the left brain as working with the conscious mind, while the right brain tends to partner with the subconscious mind. That’s why simply using “willpower” often becomes “won’t power;” because, since the way you behave is intimately bound up with your

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self-*image*, you're not going to change it by attacking the problem with the part of your brain that deals in *words*. Trying to change your behavior through your left brain (talking about it instead of visualizing it) is frustrating because it doesn't work very well.

For example, Spencer could tell himself logically that there was no reason why he should be afraid of public speaking. His left brain would say, "There isn't anything to be afraid of – the people in the audience are just like you. It will be fine!" But in his right brain, Spencer *saw* himself standing awkwardly in front of the group and blubbering his way through a presentation. All the logic in the world wasn't going to change that image! You see, his right brain simply *couldn't process the logic* it was given because it only deals with how things *look or feel*. And so, my readers, it follows that:

The key to positive change is to create positive images and experiences with the right side of the brain AND to use positive communication (including good self-talk and helpful affirmations) with the left side of the brain.

"I Often Replay My Wins"

Has a story ever changed your life? Occasionally, I hear a story that gives me an "ah-ha!" moment. I love it when that happens! Here's a true story:

One summer during the 1950's, a bright Stanford University student labored over a difficult physics problem. Finally, he decided to ask his father for help. This young man's father was not just any ordinary guy – he was a Nobel-prize-winning scientist. As the wise scientist studied his son's problem, he asked, "Isn't this problem similar to one we worked on last week?" His son answered, "Yes, I guess so . . ." Then his father asked, "Well, what have you been thinking about this week . . . I mean, when you were walking along, or in the shower, or driving? Weren't you thinking about this problem?" His son admitted that, no, he didn't think about the problem at all. The brilliant father then asked a question which his son never, ever forgot. He said,

"What do you think about when you don't *have* to think about anything?"

His son admitted that he didn't think about science. And then, with a sad expression on his face, the wise father remarked, "Then you better not be a scientist. You should go into whatever field you think about when you don't have to think about anything."

I would like to ask you that same question. "What do you think about when you don't *have* to think about anything? Where do you allow your thoughts to take you?"

Your answer is a marvelous indicator of your self-image. People who are emotionally healthy focus on positive things like:

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- their past achievements
- what they can learn from the challenges in their lives
- their goals
- how they can help others

People who are emotionally unhealthy spend their time thinking negatively. They:

- berate themselves for past failures
- blame others for their problems
- resent people and they plan ways to “get even”
- think about their weaknesses and the reasons they’re unhappy

Consider your thoughts carefully. Ralph Waldo Emerson reminds us, “**A man is what he thinks about all day long.**”

I’d like to suggest:

When you don’t *have* to think about anything, replay your wins!

Replaying your wins is just what it sounds like. During moments when your mind isn’t required to produce something significant, think about the times in your life when you did something well – when you accomplished something you’re proud of. Think about the good things in your life, the happy moments. Recall, for example, the times when you’ve won something, like a promotion, a scholarship, a race...even a spelling bee! Think about loved ones and people whose lives you’ve touched for good. Remember happy moments that make you smile. And think about those things whenever you’re tempted to be negative, to blame others, or to insult yourself because of weaknesses or bad decisions in the past.

Imagine your mind as producing an ongoing stage or movie presentation. In the Theater of Your Mind, you can play whatever scenes you choose. What I’m suggesting is that you flick back on your wins every chance you get; especially during those times when you don’t *have* to think about anything.

Here are ideas of past ‘wins’ you can imagine in great detail, and some positive questions you can ask yourself:

- I remember the time when my friends and I were... That was such fun!
- I remember that wonderful teacher who really cared about me...
- I remember how Mom used to..... And Dad always....
- I sure appreciate how my brother (sister/grandma/uncle) cares about me. He...

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- I learned a lot from that experience. I learned to.... And now I'm better at....because of it.
- I love this weather! I can...now, but I can't during the other seasons.
- I sure enjoyed winning that.... You know, I was pretty good at that!
- I love those people. They are so kind and good. I remember when we...
- I sure do enjoy a good book; I learn so much! From that book I learned...
- How can I use this information to be a better person?
- What I can do today to improve myself?
- What I can do to help lighten someone's load today?
- What's great about today?

In William Shakespeare's play "As You Like It" he wrote: "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players... And one man in his time plays many parts."

During your moments on life's stage, shouldn't one of your parts be the optimist . . . the builder-upper . . . the believer . . . the joyful one? Flick back on your wins every chance you get, and, as you are lifted by the positive pictures you create in your mind, you'll be better equipped to lift others.

Before we leave this Power Belief, I'd like to share a wonderful story told by Rachel Naomi Remen, MD. She is the author of the outstanding book, "*My Grandfather's Blessings*" (Penguin Putnam).

Years ago, I cared for a desperately sick two-year-old boy with bacterial meningitis. Deeply unconscious, Ricardo lay in a nest of IV lines and monitor cords, his tiny body almost hidden by the technology that supported and documented his struggle to live. His mother, a slight Filipina woman, sat at the foot of his bed day after day. She even slept there, sitting in her chair and leaning forward across the mattress. Whenever any of us came to examine Ricardo or draw blood from him, we would find her there, often with her eyes closed, one hand under her baby's blanket. She was holding on to his foot.

After he began to recover and the life-support equipment was withdrawn, I asked her about this. She smiled and looked away, a little embarrassed. But she told me that for all those days she had felt that his life depended on her holding on to his foot. Moved, I asked her what had been going on in her mind all that time. Had she been praying for his recovery? No, she told me, while she was holding his foot, she would just close her eyes and dream her dreams for him.

Day after day, she would watch him grow up. She would imagine taking him to his first day of school, see him learning to read and to write and play ball, sit in church at his first communion, watch him graduate from high school, dance at his



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wedding. She would imagine him as the father of her grandchild. Over and over and over again. She flushed slightly. “Perhaps,” she told me, “it made a difference.

Dr. Remen then added, “Sometimes we may strengthen the life in others when we have an image of the future and hold on to it fiercely, much as Ricardo’s mother did.”

“The most interesting people are the people with the most interesting pictures in their minds.”

Earl Nightingale

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