



Christine Romani-Ruby

You Only Achieve What you Believe

A common phrase used by competitive athletes that reinforces the importance of mental imagery is: “You only achieve what you believe.” Many successful athletes discuss the feeling of being in the “zone” when they performed their best. Many discuss practicing by imagining themselves reaching their goal whether it is crossing a finish line or scoring a shot. The study of Sports Psychology classifies this as imagery and simulation, and the research is there to show that rehearsing in your mind does improve performance.

So, this is a wonderful tool if you are training athletes, but what about our weekend warriors and those New Year’s resolutions? There is really not much of a difference; it is just that the vision or image will change. For example, your client may imagine herself back in her favorite jeans, or he may imagine mowing the grass without strain. These folks are training for events; they are just not competitive sports. Imagery can help here in the same way that it helps in the instance of training any athletes.

Professionals recommend beginning to use imagery techniques gently and gradually. Start with a short amount in a quiet, relaxed environment. For example, help your clients by introducing them to imagery in a cool down session or in a yoga class or Pilates class. Ask them to take a moment to imagine themselves achieving their goal, whatever it may be. See if you can get them to feel, taste, smell, and hear the result. Let them focus on the details such as feeling the flow of a golf swing, hearing the sound of a large crowd, feeling how their clothes fit, or being pain free. Use all of their senses. Rehearsing this regularly will help your client to get into the habit of practicing mentally as well as physically.

The ability to use the mind for imagery and simulation can take some time and practice. An effective way to build these skills is in a Pilates class. The basic principles of Pilates include: concentration, control, flow, and precision. In class, the instructor uses verbal cues and imagery to assist the client in controlling their body and engaging the core muscles. Joseph Pilates encouraged mind over muscles. He stated that our body should obey our mind. Many professional athletes are taking advantage of the mental training that Pilates can provide, and they are seeing results in their athletic performance. Other less famous participants are finding Pilates to

be a fantastic tool to help them to focus on their goals and control their outcomes.

As an example of how Pilates exercise uses imagery for relaxation and calm, try a simple Pilates breath that is used with every exercise. Sit up straight on the edge of your chair. Inhale through your nose as you attempt to expand your ribcage to the sides. Imagine the air going deep down into the back of your ribcage. Now exhale through your mouth slow and steady as if you were going to just flicker a candle with your breath. (Try not to blow out the candle.) Try this again. Inhale through your nose while thinking of your ribcage opening to the sides; then exhale through your mouth while making a “Ha” sound and drawing your navel to your spine. One more time, inhale bringing the air deep into the back of your ribcage, exhale as you draw your ribs down and into the front pockets of your jeans.

Just taking the time to focus on our breathing can help us in beginning the practice of using imagery to exercise more control over the physical as well as the mental aspects of our lives. It starts with reducing stress and evolves into imagining goals and building confidence. This is just one more small way that we can add to the lives of our customers, and become an important part of their total well being.

There are several theories on how mental imagery works. Some feel that imagery can help to create a mental blueprint for performance, similar to rehearsing your lines for a play. Others hypothesize that mental imagery facilitates a change in psychological state by building self confidence and motivation. For our clients, it does not matter which of these is correct, because either will assist them in their life goals. Self confidence and motivation can be very successful attributes for a weight loss program or a post-rehabilitation program, and having a mental blueprint for good biomechanics during activities of daily living is always useful. Help your clients to achieve what they believe, both physically and mentally, through imagery. When your clients achieve, so do you! **CS**

Christine Romani-Ruby is a Physical Therapist who uses Pilates as an imagery tool in rehabilitating her patients and clients. For more ideas on how to incorporate Pilates into a complete program for well being, visit www.phipilates.com.



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