With

Mental Contrasting, The Culture Code (extract), Coyle, 2018

High-purpose environments are filled with small, vivid signals designed to create a link between the present moment and a future ideal. They provide the two simple locators that every navigation process requires: *'Here is where we are'; and 'Here is where we want to go.'*

The surprising thing, from a scientific point of view, is how responsive we are to this pattern of signaling.

A few years ago a professor of psychology named Gabriele Oettingen set out to perform what might rank as the most basic psychological experiment of all time. In fact, you can do it right now. It goes like this:

Step 1: Think about a realistic goal that you'd like to achieve. It could be anything: Become skilled at a sport, re-dedicate yourself to a relationship, lose a few pounds, get a new job. Spend a few seconds *reflecting* on that goal and imagining that it's come true. *Picture* a future where you've achieved it.

Step 2: Take a few seconds and *picture* the obstacles between you and that goal as vividly as possible. Don't gloss over the negatives, but try to see them as they truly are. For example, if you were trying to lose weight, you might picture those moments when of weakness when you smell warm cookies, and you decide to eat one (or three).

That's it. It's called ***mental contrasting***, and it seems less like science than the kind of advice you might come across on a late-night infomercial: *Envision a reachable goal, and envision the obstacles.* The thing is, Oettingen discovered, this method works, triggering significant changes in behaviour and motivation.

In one study, adolescents preparing for the PSAT who used this method chose to complete 60 percent more practice questions than the control group. In another, dieters consumed significantly fewer calories, were more physically active, and lost more weight.

Mental Contrasting (Cont.)

Mental contrasting has also been shown to improve the ability to interact positively with strangers, negotiate deals, speak in public, manage time, improve communication, and perform a range of other skills.

As Oettingen wrote, “The conjoint elaboration of the future and the present reality makes both simultaneously accessible and links them together in the sense that the reality stands in the way of realizing the desired future.”

... in these experiments, motivation is not a possession but rather the result of a two-part process of *channeling your attention*: Here’s where you’re at and Here’s where you want to go... what matters is establishing the link and consistently creating engagement around it. What matters is telling the story.

“*The neurological truth is that stories create reality, triggering cascades of perception and motivation. The proof is in brain scans: When we hear a fact, a few isolated areas of our brain light up, translating words and meanings. When we hear a story, however, our brain lights up like Las Vegas, tracing the chains of cause, effect and meaning.*”