

# Bringing dreams to life

Some people have lost touch with their ability to dream of the future. "What's the point in fantasizing?" they say. "These hopes and desires are nothing but pipe-dreams." Others are amazed when their 'fantasies' seem to come to life. "I was day-dreaming recently about finding a job doing something I love, and suddenly this opportunity presented itself. What a coincidence!"

But what we now know, thanks to our growing understanding of how the brain works, is that dreams come to life not by chance, but precisely *because* we dared to pay attention to them.

The reticular activating system (or RAS for short) is a system within the brain that filters the kind of information that reaches our consciousness. Imagine that you are in a room full of people chatting. You may be paying attention to the person opposite you while all the rest of the noise in the room is just general 'hubbub'. However, if somebody within earshot says your name, your brain will hear it and prompt you to turn and wonder what's going on. The reality is that you can hear every single word of the conversations that are going on around you; yet if your brain tried to process all of that incoming information, it would be overwhelmed.

The RAS filters and prioritizes sensory information to let the mind be focused and alert.



The job of RAS is to act as a gate-keeper, filtering out what is unimportant and allowing in only what has been tagged as significant. If someone suggested that red was a significant colour for you, you might begin to notice lots of red cars, red clothes, red flowers etc. The red items were there all the time, but until they were tagged as significant, you would not have noticed many of them.

And so if you allow yourself to create a vivid picture of the future you want, and particularly if you invest in it emotionally, this picture will be tagged by your RAS as significant. As a result, the filter system will allow you to notice and take in helpful supportive information that was previously filtered out.

For example, supposing you have realised how much you would love to create a beautiful garden, and you have allowed yourself to paint a clear picture of it in your mind. Suddenly you will begin to notice TV programmes, magazine articles, overheard conversation, educational courses or other opportunities.

Many of us have lost touch with our dreams and aspirations, putting them away in a drawer marked 'unrealistic' or 'childish'. But if we allow ourselves to reconnect with our dreams, we may be surprised by the 'coincidences' that will suddenly come our way.