

Knowing what you want

If you don't know where you're going, it can be hard getting there. One reason why some 'problems' seem to keep coming back to us, is that we haven't really imagined what an *alternative* to those problems would actually be like. We think about the problem and we long for an *absence of the problem* – while what we really need is the *presence of an alternative*. This technique – known as 'outcome thinking' – is about really imagining the alternative realities we want to achieve. Before we can make something happen in the external world, we must often make it happen first in the internal world. The technique goes like this. (You can take someone through it by asking a series of questions.)

1. Define the problem

Try to make it as specific as possible, and make sure it's a problem *for you*.

Q: What's the problem?

A: Since I moved to a new town, I've been feeling lonely.

2. Define a positive alternative

Think of what you want instead, rather than what you don't want.

Q: What would you rather have?

A: I want new friends.

3. Make it specific

Think of your alternative as specifically as you can. Imagine what it would be like and describe it in terms of who-when-where-what-how.

Q: Could you be specific? (Or What sort of friends specifically?)

A: I'd like a group of, say, 3 or 4 friends I find interesting and that I can meet up with regularly.

4. Check it wouldn't lead to other problems

Sometimes the alternative can have unwanted negative consequences. Check that you will only get the consequences you want by asking this question and looking out for any doubts:

Q: If you could have it, would you take it?

A: Yes...

If the 'yes' is said positively, you can move on. But if there is doubt or hesitation, you may need to go over the original 'outcome' until it works.

A: ...so long as they leave me some space.

5. Look for evidence

Think what sensory evidence will let you know that you've got the outcome you want. Imagine it as though you see, hear and feel it right now.

Q: How will you know when you've got it?

A: I'll be going out with people I like a couple of nights a week. I'll get phone-calls. I'll know good places to go in town...

6. Take responsibility

Think of the part you can play to achieve the outcome. Make sure it's something within your control

Q: What will you be doing to make it happen?

A: The next time I meet someone new that I feel good about, I'll ask them to dinner.