Your Mind: The Rider and the Elephant
By James Mapes

"It is a psychological law that whatever we wish to accomplish we must impress on the subjective or subconscious mind."
-- Dr. Orison Swett Marden (1850-1924), physician, writer

What a pleasure it was speaking to all of you at the F.A.R. luncheon. Your willingness to participate in the exercises made the experience memorable for me and I hope enlightening and fun for you. In this article I would like to both recap the highlights of the program IMAGINE THAT! and give you a couple of additional strategies to help you “manage your mind.”

The power of your thoughts and the effect they have on you - mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally and socially - can no longer be ignored. The development of new technology that can uncover the mysteries of the mind has given rise to Neuroscience - the study of the nervous system and brain. The understanding of human thought, emotion, and behavior has grown by quantum leaps and given rise to best-selling books such as Train your Mind-Change your Brain, Switch and The Power of Habit. We now know why and how our thoughts influence our behavior which, in turn, influence our choices and create what we experience as reality.

It is by clearly understanding the metaphor of the conscious mind as a small “Rider” sitting atop a massive “Elephant” (subconscious mind) that you gain the ability to ramp up your performance in every area of your life. You achieve this by learning and applying the tools necessary to manage your thinking - the tools which can help the Rider influence the massive power of the Elephant. You can increase the impact of your communication, ramp up your motivation or increase your performance in sports by learning to focus and apply your imagination.

The subconscious “Elephant” is basically a reflection of what is often referred to as your ‘reptilian’ brain combined with the ‘mammalian brain’. It is the conscious mind that gives you the power to visualize. Brain science proves that visualization is the most important and dynamic tool you have to influence your subconscious.

Below is a brief summary of the three most important characteristics of the Elephant and the Rider and the reason why a clear, emotionally charged, mental movie of your goal - being already completed - has such an impact. Keep in mind this one absolute
and irrefutable fact about the Elephant and the Rider: The Rider does not and cannot control the Elephant. The Rider can, however, INFLUENCE the Elephant.

The Subconscious Elephant…
1. …does not “think,” “contemplate” or “reflect” but rather reacts in absolutes such as “right or wrong,” “good or bad,” “attack or retreat.”
2. …is the core of the “emotional self” and reacts strongly to emotions and feelings, especially fear and love.
3. …cannot tell the difference between a real or an experience imagined by the Rider. (Remember the lemon demonstration?)

The Conscious Rider…
1. …is the creative visionary master storyteller who can imagine alternative paths of choice and is proficient at crafting mental movies of many possible futures.
2. …is our “self-talk,” “mind-chatter” or “inner voice.”
3. …has the unique ability to use the tool of “imagination” to influence the Elephant.

The key to understanding how your mind works and using the Rider to influence the Elephant gives you the edge to set, plan, visualize and successfully achieve your goals.

Here are three powerful strategies that give you the edge on achieving your goals.

- **Control your self-talk.** This is a major key to high performance. If you pay attention to your self-talk, you will discover that it contains a lot of negativity - self-criticism, guilt and fear. Start catching yourself when thinking negatively. Then - STOP! Breathe and say to yourself, "Isn’t that Interesting." During that moment of observing a negative fear-based thought, you give yourself a chance to “reframe” or change it to a positive. This tool will give you extraordinary power to change your thinking.

- **Look where you want to go.** Don’t think of a pink elephant! It is impossible not to. That is because the unconscious Elephant cannot hear a negative suggestion. It only reacts to the pictures and images it receives. For example, the Elephant interprets “Don’t fail” as “Fail” or “Don’t be late” as “Be late.” Be clear in your communication both with yourself and others. Paint a clear picture of the goal “as if” it was already successful. Focus on where you want to go, not where you don’t want to go.

- **Create a Better View of the Situation.** Whether or not you envision a fear-based or possibility based future, a restricted goal or a stretch goal, you will always move in the direction of your thoughts. (Recall the pendulum.)

  I have created a tool that will prompt you to mentally craft whatever goal you imagined as being bigger, brighter and better. This does work - because the Rider has the ability to influence the Elephant through repetition.

  This tool is called, “Current View of the Situation to a Better View of the Situation.” which I shorten to “CVS to BVS.” Repeat to yourself, “CVS to BVS” - 100 times, 3 times a day for one month and you will think bigger! This is less than a 5 ½ minute investment every day for 30 days that may well change your life. You can read my article entitled “A Better View” at http://jamesmapes.com/articles/a-better-view

  One of my great hero’s, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale summed it up best when he wrote: "Formulate and stamp indelibly on your mind a mental picture of yourself as succeeding. Hold this picture tenaciously and never permit it to fade. Your mind will seek to develop this picture!"