

## **Lesson 3**

# **Propel your optimistic thinking and re-energise during your work break**

### **Introduction**

Want to know the secret to a competitive advantage?

Relaxation.

Being a busy professional, you might think it's impossible to slot relaxation into your routine when time is in short supply.

However, by setting aside a few moments each day to relax, your mindset will be more than worth the little effort it takes.

Taking regular work breaks gives us a well-earned respite from work tasks. Charging your mental battery means you can be your best after resting.

Guided imagery is a form of focused relaxation during which you bring to mind calm scenes. It draws on your ability to daydream and gives you another tool to increase your optimistic thinking by using all your senses to improve your mood and reduce stress.

It's a practice that's easy if you stick with it.

### **Science**

Studies have shown that just 10 days of daily relaxing break-time activities, in which you can 'switch off' from work tasks, reduces fatigue and re-energises you for the rest of your working day.

Guided imagery brings about changes in heart rate, blood pressure and respiratory patterns due to the mind-body connection. It can reduce fatigue and stress, relieve pain, and improve your mood and quality of life.

One of the greatest benefits of guided imagery is the power it has when it comes to creating more optimistic thinking.

## Value

Learning guided imagery techniques gives you gentle and convenient ways to reduce stress, lessen anxiety, and manage fatigue. It's easy to practice whenever and wherever you are.

The health benefits are wide ranging.

Studies have shown that regularly practicing guided imagery leads to reduced emotional exhaustion, negative affect and improved quality of life. It's a powerful way of re-energising and fostering optimistic thinking.

## Exercise

The first exercise is a guided imagery script and can be carried out anywhere safe, perhaps a 'chill out' room at work, or other office space.

The second exercise applies if you have access to the outdoors during your work break.

### Exercise 1: Guided imagery script

1. Find a place where you won't be disturbed and you can be still and quiet for a few minutes.
2. Sit back in your chair or lie down. Rest your hands on your lap and loosen any tight clothing.
3. Let's start with two deep, cleansing breaths and on the breath out, feel your body sinking into the chair or floor
4. Now let's do some 3/5 breathing, breathing in gently and slowly for a count of three and out for a count of five.
  - Be aware of air filling your lungs, your stomach expands and your chest remains still.
  - Place a hand on your stomach to make sure you're doing this correctly.
  - As you breathe out, your stomach deflates.
  - When the outbreath is longer than the in breath, it brings about the relaxation response.
  - Do this three or four times and on the last outbreath, let your eyelids drop down, closing your eyes.

5. Allow your natural breathing pattern to resume, experiencing pleasant and even breaths for a minute.
  - As you breathe in, inhale comfort and warmth.
  - As you breathe out, exhale stress or any problems.
6. Pay attention to your feet on the floor, or your legs and arms wherever they're leaning against; your head on the cushion, back of the chair, or floor. Become more aware of your contact points.
7. Whilst you're relaxing, picture a setting that's peaceful and calm.
  - Be there in your mind. You might be imagining a garden with lush green trees, a white sandy beach, a meadow with beautiful, colourful flowers, or a cool freshwater lake.
  - What can you see?
  - Add detail to the scene and perhaps a path that leads off into the distance that you start to walk on through your picture.
  - Pause for a moment and breathe in this zen-like scene, feeling ever-more relaxed and calm.
8. Now imagine sitting in a special spot in your scene. Notice the sounds...
  - Can you hear birds?
  - Are leaves rustling as a breeze gently blows through emerald green trees?
  - The rhythmic break of waves?
  - The soothing whooshes of grasses swaying in the wind?
  - Notice any moments when it's completely silent.

To savour any pleasant moments, pause to drink in the sounds and experience the scene with your ears. Imprint in your memory a sound that will help you return to this place in the future.

9. When you're ready, gently remove yourself from the scene, perhaps walking back on the path in your mind.
10. Redirect your attention to your breathing and the circulation of breaths around your body.
11. Now, be aware of your body and its contact with wherever you're leaning against.
12. Count down from five to one, open your eyes and take time before moving.
13. Notice how you feel now and remember to tell someone else if it was a positive experience.

## **Exercise 2: Savouring nature guided imagery script**

1. Take yourself to a quiet and safe spot outside in your work break, where you won't be disturbed for at least five minutes.
2. Sit down on a bench or on the ground under the canopy of a tree, with its protective branches wrapping all around you. Rest your hands on your lap and loosen any tight clothing.
3. Let's start with two deep, cleansing breaths and on the breath out, feel your body sinking into the bench or ground.
4. Now let's do some 3/5 breathing, breathing in slowly and gently for a count of three and out for a count of five.
  - Be aware of air filling your lungs, your stomach expanding and your chest remaining still.
  - Place a hand on your stomach to make sure you're doing this correctly.
  - As you breathe out, your stomach deflates.
  - Do this three or four times and on the last outbreath, let your eyelids drop down, closing your eyes.
5. Allow your natural breathing pattern to resume, experiencing gentle and even breaths for a minute.
  - As you breathe in, inhale comfort and warmth.
  - As you breathe out, exhale stress or any problems, perhaps saying a relaxing word such as 'relax' or 'calm.' You might notice how your body feels – heavy, light, comfortable, achy, relaxed, warm, or cool.
6. Whilst you're relaxing, fix your gaze on a point of focus.
  - Concentrate on the shape, structure, colours, whether it has a reflection, or if it's still or moving.
  - Absorb it in its entirety. If any thoughts cross your mind, gently put them to one side, as right now, your focus is on this object.

7. Now, soak up the sounds around you, noticing the pitch, volume, and any silences between the sounds...

- What can you hear?
- The rustling of leaves blowing gently through the trees?
- The quiet whispers of grasses rocking in the wind?
- The distant passing of an aeroplane?
- The far-off muttering of colleagues going about their business?
- Notice any moments when it's completely silent... Savour any pleasant moments.

Pausing to absorb calming sounds and experience the scene through your senses imprints in your memory a sound or word that will help you return to this place in the future.

8. When you're ready, redirect your attention to your breathing and the circulation of breaths around your body...
9. Now, be aware of your body and its contact with wherever you're leaning against.
10. Count down from five to one, open your eyes and take time before moving.
11. Notice how you feel now and remember to tell someone else if it was a positive experience.

## **Wrap**

Now that you're feeling relaxed and refreshed, you will bring those feelings into the rest of your day. Battling your way through the minefield of work-life balance is very much an individual thing, but there are ways you can reach the balance that works for you.

Getting the right work-life balance is critical if you're to be both productive and successful.

## **Next steps**

If you're struggling with work-related thoughts or emotions during non-work time, the next lesson is designed to help you separate the two.