

The Reticular Activating System

Your Automatic Goal Seeking Mechanism

Part of your brain is known as the Reticular Activating System - or **RAS**. Your RAS plays a vital part in your ability to achieve goals.

Imagine that you're walking through a busy noise airport passenger terminal. Think of all the noise - hundreds of people talking, music, announcements, luggage carriers. How much of this noise is brought to your attention? Not a lot. True, you can hear a general background noise, but not many of us bother to listen to each individual sound.

But then a new announcement comes over the public address system - saying your name or maybe your flight. Suddenly **your attention** is full on. Your RAS is the automatic mechanism inside your brain that brings relevant information to your attention.

Your reticular activating system is like a filter between your conscious mind and your subconscious mind. It takes instructions from your conscious mind and passes them on to your subconscious. For example, the instruction might be, "listen out for anyone saying my name".

There are some interesting points about your RAS that make it an essential tool for achieving goals.

First, you can deliberately **program** the reticular activating system by choosing the exact messages you send from your conscious mind. For example, you can **set goals**, or say **affirmations**, or **visualize** your goals. Napoleon Hill said that we can achieve any realistic goal if we keep on thinking of that goal, and stop thinking any negative thoughts about it. Of course, if we keep thinking that we can't achieve a goal, our subconscious will help us NOT achieve it.

Second, your reticular activating system cannot distinguish between 'real events' and 'synthetic' reality. In other words it tends to believe whatever message you give it. Imagine that you're going to be giving a speech. You can practice giving that speech by visualizing it in your mind. This 'pretend' practice should improve your ability to give the speech.

In his classic 1960 self-help book [Psychocybernetics](#), Dr Maxwell Maltz discusses our automatic goal seeking 'servo-mechanism'. He doesn't use the words reticular activating system, but it is the same process.

What we need to do is to create a very specific picture of our goal in our conscious mind. The RAS will then pass this on to our subconscious - which will then help us achieve the goal. It does this by bringing to our attention all the relevant information which otherwise might have remained as 'background noise'.

The reason psychocybernetics is so important is that the RAS will prevent our goals messages getting through to our subconscious if our self-image is not congruent with our goals.