

Focus and the Reticular Activating System (RAS)

LOA says “you get what you focus on”—and psychology says “yes, that’s true!”

The focusing mechanism in your brain is called the Reticular Activating System (RAS). There are millions of bits of information going on around you all the time. If you were aware of it all you would go crazy—in fact, you wouldn’t be able to function. It is like your computer; when you have a lot of things running at the same time it might lag and even freeze. Therefore, your mind tries to be efficient. The role of the RAS is to selectively focus on ONLY the inputs that are important and relevant. The way it knows what data is important is either:

- a) it is required for your survival or
- b) it is a match for what your unconscious mind both believes and expects.

For example, have you ever had a name of something you wanted to say but could not get it out and then several hours later you are doing something else and the name suddenly comes to your mind? That happened because you had given a command to your unconscious mind and your RAS continued to look for the answer, event though you were not aware of it.

Here are some other examples: when you buy a new car, you’re going to start seeing them everywhere. If you’re thinking about how to get new contracts for your photography business, you’re ears will pick up the conversation in the adjacent aisle in the store where someone is talking about their upcoming wedding. This is what happen to me when I opened up a photography company when I got my first contract. When you’re in an airport and there are things being called out through the speakers and a lot of noise, however, you probably won’t even notice anything unless they call your name or flight because to your RAS those statements are a priority.

Ask yourself “why does everything always go wrong for me” at the grocery store and you’ll find yourself feeling irritated when you notice that your line is slow because of trouble at the register, while you fail to notice the inspiring act of kindness taking place behind you. If you stub your feet in the morning and think “today is going to be a bad day” then you may find that a lot of things go wrong.

Remember that your mind is a command center so it is constantly looking to create what you think life should be. This is why your statements, beliefs, and even what you visualize is so powerful, at a psychological level.