

**Linda McDonald**  
**REACH Resources™**



**Metaphorically Speaking©**

Linda McDonald-REACH Resources™

*20 years from now I live in a small and cozy single level home in a landscape of red rock, bright sunlight and strangely exotic plant life. An open porch roof and several short and barely green trees shade the door to my home. The walkway is slate and curvy. The front door is made of wood, solid and reddish in color. My future self looks great. Her silver haired radiance beams forth. She wears colorful and flowing clothes made of some of my favorite fabrics. She extends a hand to me and draws me in, welcoming. This home is rich with warmth. The colors are earthen with deep reds, gold and warm shades of green. The furniture is solid and simple. The placement of things has a natural flow and although there is a lot to take in, it does not feel cluttered. I sense peace, calm tranquility, fun and creativity here. When I sit with my future self in the light at the back of the house, she calls me Wise Old Woman and tells me I am on the path and I know the truth. She offers me a kind and caring smile that has in it a hint of mischief. I think she knows what lies ahead for me and knows I am up to it all.*

Will I actually live in this place in the red rocks of Sedona? Will I look the way I envisioned myself? Will my life be this way? I like the idea a lot. It would be great. Or, is my vision a metaphor for my hearts desire and an expression of my core essence?

Putting on my coach hat, I want to look at this vision for the purposes of discovering core values or key qualities. When I begin working with a new client, I want to help him/her through this process to find those qualities that best describe who he/she is. What is the essence of this person before me? What is it that brings ease to his/her life? What brings the passion forward and gets the juices flowing? I want to help my client with this and I want to do it in a way that goes deep and wide.

If the “Future-Self”<sup>1</sup> vision described above belonged to a client of mine, I would hungrily write all the qualifiers onto the summary list as I hear them. And using the above story I could get a pretty decent number of them down.

*Small, cozy, single, red rock, bright, sunlight, strangely exotic, open, barely green trees, shade, curvy, solid, great, radiance, beams forth, colorful, flowing, extends a hand, draws me in, welcoming, rich, warmth, earthen, warm, solid, simple, natural flow, (un)cluttered, peace, calm, tranquility, fun, creativity, light, wise, truth, smiles, kind, caring and mischievous.*

It would be relatively easy to choose the top 5 key words that resonate most from this list and then to use the remaining as qualifiers for those key words. And there we have the client's cluster worksheet.

Some clients present their vision in a way that makes this process easy to do. Some, however, find it challenging. I have had clients who bring forward the Future-Self vision in a way that is very sparse in description. For example, *"I couldn't really make out what the environment looked like. It seemed kind of gray or background-like. I know it was myself in the future, but I couldn't tell much about how I looked. I heard my future self call me Teacher and she said I could trust my decisions. I noticed it felt calm and relaxing there. Mostly, I liked the ride on the cloud."*

Some additional probing can be helpful in bringing out more information, but I have had a number of occasions when this just wasn't enough. Typically, the next thing I do is ask questions/inquiries such as 'think of a time you felt happiest, what was that like for you? Describe the qualities of 3 people you most admire and would like to be like. What was your most passionate or joyous moment and why?' From the responses to these or other similar questions or inquiries, I may be able to add more qualities to the list. I have had occasions when even this next step was not enough.

One method I have used to dig deeper and sweep wider is to start with the qualifiers already generated and ask for more about them. One client whose qualifier list after 3 questions/inquiries was only 10 words long had offered among them independence and control. So I asked for each of those words, 'what does it mean to you to be independent/controlled?' From this additional question, a rich list of 11 new qualifiers surfaced. And, I noticed the client beginning to demonstrate a surge in energy. As my questions/inquiries move beyond the intended "exercise", some clients begin to relax. Could be that old test anxiety from early school days?\* So, I did more of the same with other qualifiers. When we finished, she had a healthy list of meaningful qualifiers with which she could complete her cluster worksheet.

A second method I have begun to explore is the use of metaphors. I attended a seminar this past year with Dr. Ron Jue in which we explored life purpose through visualizations and the understanding of our metaphors. I found myself considering the metaphors that arise in the Future-Self Visualization and wondered in what way could I use those metaphors to more fully explore key qualities.

The authors of the book, The Inner Edge (Jue and Wedemeyer) describe three levels of perception and how we most easily see the world through the five senses of our physical perception (level one). Visualization is an intuitive process and is more easily done when allowing objects familiar to us from the physical world to be a part of the process and in fact whether guided to particular objects or not, the visualiz-"er" will typically manifest physical

world icons. However, because the client is engaged in an intuitive process the icons manifested will have a deeper level of emotional significance and meaning beyond “normal” perception. (Quoted in part, pg. 139 of The Inner Edge)

In my own future self-visualization, I mention the color red several times. It is in the rock, the door and the furniture. Let’s look at the color red as a metaphor from the three levels described in The Inner Edge. (The 3 levels described below are quoted directly from pg. 140 of The Inner Edge)

Level 1: Observation - The realm of what is observed intuitively about the physical world in conjunction with the perceptions of our five physical senses.<sup>2</sup>

*A woman lives in a warm and calm environment and the home has red fabric inside, a red door and is set among the red rock of Sedona.*

Level 2: Interpretation - The realm of metaphor, where, beyond the obvious physical properties of our external reality, there are underlying symbols with a sense of emotional significance requiring interpretation.<sup>2</sup>

*The color red is a metaphor for my feelings of living a warm and rich life, full of love and vitality, where energy flows naturally and with the great power of depth and consistency.*

Level 3: Transcendent significance – The realm of transcendent significance applied to one’s life in a broader context, fully integrating the intuitive input from your icons.<sup>2</sup>

*The color red represents a part of who I am and most desire to “be” in all that I do. Because it shows up in so many places I know I wish to have it present in all I do and want to feel its presence both internally and externally.*

I believe I can apply this framework to the Future-Self Visualization process with the goal of getting a deeper and wider sense of the qualities most important to my client. After my client shares his/her Future-Self story, I can look for the metaphors and ask questions such as “I noticed you mentioned the color red several times in your story. Tell me, what is the significance of the color red for you?” or “You described the walkway as made of slate and being curvy. Can you tell me more about the walkway? And...What is the significance of this image for you?” Blending these observations with questions allows the process of interpretation to happen and also creates opportunity to explore more of the qualities important to the client.

From here I will share back with my client what they have expressed and then inquire, “How does this fit into your life as a whole?” or “What is the big picture for you here?” With this type of inquiry we can begin to explore the “transcendent significance”<sup>2</sup> and this is important in allowing the client to begin to uncover and discover the connections between our physical and spiritual realms of existence. There is “being” in all that I am “doing”.

As I scratch the surface of the role metaphor plays in communication and understanding I become increasingly intrigued with its significance. A wonderful colleague, Terri Steinbrink has

taught me a great deal about metaphor in her intuitive understanding of the way in which we metaphorically manifest through our bodies that which we most need and want in our lives. I have witnessed the power of this ability to interpret and transcend the metaphors her clients bring to her and the magic of the healing process that results. Learn more about metaphors in her paper entitled [Listening Beneath the Words](#).


This paper brings to mind further areas of exploration. For example: How metaphor can be helpful in Future-Self Visualization when the client's vision may seem frightening or depressing to them. The use of metaphor interpretation can help move them out of judging their vision to understanding its meaning and creating a richer view of the vision.

I am filled me with excitement and wonder at the possibilities for creating awareness and understanding, clarity, focus, healing and the designing of actions through the use of metaphors.

Linda McDonald, MS; REACH Resources™  
396 East St., Easthampton, MA 01027; 413-527-2178  
[info@ReachResourcesInspire.com](mailto:info@ReachResourcesInspire.com) - [www.ReachResourcesInspire.com](http://www.ReachResourcesInspire.com)  
Certified Personal & Professional Life Coach  
Organizational Psychologist  
Occupational Therapist  
Wise Old Woman

**\*The Foundation for Inspired Learning ([www.inspiredlearning.org](http://www.inspiredlearning.org)) offers the possibility of taking us to a better way of learning. Check it out.**

### References:

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2. [The Inner Edge](#), Richard A. Wedemeyer & Ronald W. Jue, Ph.D.; 2002; McGraw-Hill, Two Penn Plaza, New York, NY 10121-2298
3. Terri Steinbrink is a Spiritual Life Coach. You can reach her at Life Paths Life Coaching via email: [Goddess101\\_terri@yahoo.com](mailto:Goddess101_terri@yahoo.com)