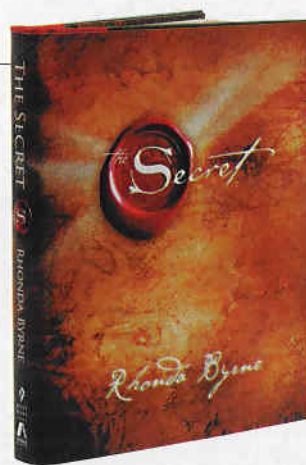


REVEALING THE TRUTH ABOUT THE SECRET



Chances are you're already in on *The Secret*. Published last November, the self-help best seller has 5.25 million copies in print and, with boosts from TV shows, the think-positive juggernaut created by Rhonda Byrne, a TV and film producer, shows no signs of slowing down. The "secret" is "the law of attraction." Simply put, *The Secret* says that by thinking positively and visualizing the good things you want to happen—financially, romantically and careerwise—you can help lure those positive events into your life. Is this real help—or hocus-pocus? We asked four experts for their views.

Visualizing what you desire is a powerful tool that can help bring about change in your life. But positive thinking, visualization and guided imagery are just wisps of dreams if they aren't backed up with action. If all you do is visualize, then you are taking a simplistic, "magical thinking" approach to making things happen. Also, *The Secret* doesn't talk about the *nature* of what you want. When I was a kid I wanted to eat cotton candy all the time, but my parents knew that it couldn't be my sole nourishment. The same principles apply here—you need to be sure that you understand

why you want something. **Kirwan Rockefeller, Ph.D., author of *Visualize Confidence: How to Use Guided Imagery to Overcome Self-Doubt***

At the heart of *The Secret* is what's called the "fundamental attribution error," the notion that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. *The Secret* implies that whatever happens, the person affected is responsible. This is blaming the victim inappropriately and

crediting the beneficiary of good fortune just as inappropriately, which is destructive. One thing the book is right about is that people like others who are happy. Research shows that optimism and happiness are good for you and make you more successful. **Jonathan Haidt, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology at the University of Virginia**

T*he Secret* adopts the veneer of science to make itself sound legitimate, but it doesn't actually use any real science correctly. It's easy to throw out scientific terms and ideas and say that visualization reflects the natural law of the universe—which makes it sound as though *The Secret* is based in hard science, but actually, it would just give physicists a good laugh. That's particularly true of this "law of attraction" that says the energies you send out draw the same kinds of energies back to you. In science and physics, it's opposites that attract. So if the laws of science were relevant here, you'd have to say that if you think positively, negative things will happen to you.

Benjamin Radford, managing editor of *Skeptical Inquirer*, "The Magazine for Science and Reason"

This is modern packaging for positive psychology. When you are receptive to experiences and seeing things in a positive light, you open yourself up to all kinds of opportunities. I teach people to be optimistic, focus on the good instead of the bad and be grateful for things that happen to them. But if you put your goals down on a piece of paper, they don't automatically come to be. Writing down what you want helps you focus on it. Knowing where you are going helps you get there. But a cosmic force isn't going to make you reach your goals. **Phyllis S. Zilkha, Ph.D., practicing psychologist in New York City**

By
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