

## How's Your R.A.S.? Making Your Brain Work for You

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How's my what? My RAS? Is that the latest electronic gadget that my kids are going to be bugging me to buy? Is it new technology for my car?

No, RAS is the widely recognized abbreviation for *Reticular Activating System*. And yes, everybody has got one. Actually, it's a very vital part of your brain. About the size of your little finger, your RAS is a group of cells located at the base of your brain stem that have the vital function of keeping you from system overload.

All of us are constantly bombarded by the sights, sounds, smells, and other sensory stimuli that are around us 24/7. Mercifully, our RAS "filters" out those extraneous sensory events that are of no interest to us. Frankly, we simply couldn't handle them all. The downside to this little miracle device is that it also filters out stimuli that may be of great interest to us—especially if we don't understand how to "set" our filter.

Just to demonstrate the RAS in action, have you ever noticed that right after you bought a car that suddenly it seemed that every other car on the road was the same color and/or make of the car that you just bought? Actually (of course) they were there all the time. Your RAS was just filtering them out so that you didn't even see them. Other familiar examples include your suddenly hearing your name being paged in a crowded airport in and amongst the multitude of PA announcements that your brain simply blends into the background noise, or the incredible ability of a mother to be awakened from a sound sleep by the cry of her baby while sleeping soundly through all the other nighttime noises.

### Using Your RAS



Why is any of this important to ministry leaders? As you know, one of the primary functions of leadership is to shepherd the vision of the organization. One of the best ways to advance the organization toward a vision is to find multiple ways to keep that vision in front of the members of that organization. By so doing, you are "setting the filter" of their RAS so that they will be alert to the opportunities and events that will contribute to the realization of that vision. If your people are looking for those things, they will find them. If they aren't—they won't. Pretty obvious, isn't it?

Another incredible application of the RAS is the simple act of writing three or four things every day that you are grateful for. You may be familiar with this idea as a "gratitude list." This simple action can change a person or group's attitude almost overnight. Why does it work? Because the filter is now set to look for things to be grateful for

instead of just looking for things that cause unrest or anxiety. Again, they were there all the time, but were being filtered out. How powerful is that? Challenge your congregation to write a gratitude list every day for 30 days. We can confidently promise you that you'll be glad you did. You feel like you're leading a new church.

We've included a simple little tool to help clients develop a list of ways to keep a vision in front of an organization without sounding like a broken record (although sometimes that may be appropriate as well!). Click here to access the [Vision Tool](#), and begin to purposefully set some filters.

*Jerry Graham is a certified coach and coach trainer who helps pastors and ministry leaders become the leaders they were meant to be. Meet Jerry at [www.TheCoachingPair.com](http://www.TheCoachingPair.com) or [www.CoachingPastors.com/Graham.html](http://www.CoachingPastors.com/Graham.html).*