Neuroscience & Self-Coaching

Organize Your Mind

Agenda

- Epidemic Trio
  - Distraction + Self-regulation + Obesity
  - Brain models for self-help
  - Six rules of order to organize your mind
  - What’s your first step?

Distractions cause 8,000 car crashes a day

www.distraction.gov
Self-regulation is the social pathology of our times.

- Choose the moment? or
- Choose the future?

Willpower (2011): Roy Baumeister, PhD

Brain Models for Self-Help

- The Emotional Life of the Brain – Richard Davidson, PhD
- The Willpower Instinct – Kelly McGonigal, PhD
- Mindsight/The Mindful Brain – Dan Siegel, MD
- Buddha’s Brain - Rick Hanson, PhD
- You are not your Brain, The Mind & The Brain – Jeffrey Schwartz, MD
- Your Brain & Business, the Neuroscience of Great Leaders - Srini Pillay, MD
- Your Brain at Work - David Rock

Brain Models for Self-Help

- The Winner’s Brain - Jeff Brown, PhD, Mark Fenske, PhD
- Your Creative Brain - Shelley Carson, PhD
- Organize Your Mind, Organize Your Life - Paul Hammerness, MD, Coach Meg
Changing our Minds

“A mind once stretched by a new idea… or new understanding will never fully return to its original dimensions.”

William James (1842-1910)

A mind once stretched by a new idea...

People are generally better persuaded by the reasons which they have themselves discovered, than by those which have come into the mind of others.

Pascal’s Pensees, 17th century
Our brains learn by making new connections

Insight to action to insight to action to insight...

Lasting change – imagine a new brain network
The ideal mind/brain?

- Nourished
- Calm
- Zestful
- Positive
- Motivated
- Focused
- Confident
- Creative
- Resilient
- Connected

Rules of Order

Sweep your brain clean

- Tame frenzy
- Sustain focus
- Manage distractions

Rules of Order

Get above the forest to the big picture

- Harness working memory
- Generate leaps of insight
- Connect the dots
What is frenzy in the brain?

Negative emotions arising from the limbic system which intrude and impair functioning of the pre-frontal cortex

What is frenzy in the brain?

- Stress
- Worry
- Anxiety
- Sadness
- Frustration
- Irritability

Inner critic frenzy
Outside frenzy

Frenzy gets in the way of focus
- Internal or external
- Big or small

Tame frenzy – self-awareness
- Activate your inner Sherlock Holmes
- Notice when your emotional state is agitated, edgy
- When are you most calm? Most frenzied?
- Where is the frenzy coming from?
  - Longstanding internal sources of frenzy
  - Big sources of external frenzy
**Tame frenzy – self-awareness - NAME**

- Gently stop and name the emotion
- Like a child that cries, the emotion is asking for attention
- Naming an emotion enables the pre-frontal cortex to notice the emotion and let it go

**Tame frenzy – self-awareness - APPRAISE**

- Appraise whether the emotional state is a valid one – are you over-reacting?
- Engage the thinking areas, the areas of cognitive control (e.g. pre-frontal cortex)

**Only 20% of adults are thriving mentally**
Positive emotions & thriving

- Level of positive emotions predicts level of resilience
- Tipping point ratio is 3:1
- [www.positivityratio.com](http://www.positivityratio.com)
- 80% of adults have ratios below 3:1

Positive emotions improve cognitive function

- Open-minded
- Flexible
- Creative
- Adaptable
- Peripheral vision
- Big picture

Tame frenzy: Engage heart, lungs, muscles

Build new habits which bring calm:

- Exercise
- Meditate
- Mindfulness practices
- Breathe
- Sleep
Attention in the brain

- Key component of Executive Function
- Pre-frontal cortex, Anterior cingulate cortex
- Normal attention capacity ~ one hour
- ADHD ~ “minutes..seconds..what was the question?”

Psychology of Optimal Experience

Flow

Challenges
- Anxiety
- Worry
- Apathy
- Boredom
  
Skills
- Arousal
- Control
- Relaxation
- High
- Low

Stretch a little outside your box

...
Sustain focus

- Inventory times of peak attention
- Get more out of flow-producing activities

Harness your drive

- Deliberately initiate mindful attention
- Tell your brain what your goals are
- Mind training – practice, practice, practice
Sustain focus

- Everything in moderation – take a brain break
- Mind wandering
- Recharge your brain

Apply the brakes: Stop/go paths in the brain

- The brain has pathways for stop and go
- Effective inhibition is:
  - a key component to executive function
  - the fundamental deficit in ADHD

Apply the brakes (impulses, distractions)

- Stop the focus and go with the distraction
- Stop the focus and take a break
- Stop the distraction and go with the focus
Apply the brakes (impulses, distractions)
- Tune into emotional response to distraction, what need is calling to be met
- Have a head to heart conversation

Apply the brakes (impulses, distractions)
- ABC – Awareness, Breathe, Choose
- Consciously choose between Camp Spontaneity and Camp Sobriety

Short-term memory + attention
- The brain can hold a variety of things in short-term memory
- The brain uses short-term memory for analysis, problem-solving, and creativity
How to harness working memory

- Sleep and rest (sleep on it)
- Exercise
- Repetition

Brain Fitness [www.nognt.com](http://www.nognt.com)

Harness working memory

- Write things down (by hand)
- Journal
Harness working memory

- Have a reasoned debate
- Go back & forth between CNN and Fox News, or New York Times and Wall Street Journal

Harness working memory

- Gesture with your hands

Harness working memory

- Two heads are better than one
- Get a partner or coach!
The flexible brain

- No multi-tasking
- Deep focus, leaping to another deep focus

Set shifting – cognitive flexibility

- Get light on your cognitive feet
- Bust your silos

Set shift - Generate leaps of insight

- Shift from mental to physical
Set shift - Generate leaps of insight

- Welcome the opportunity to shift
- Make a beautiful decision to shift
- Jump with confidence

The brain – making connections

- New ideas and perspectives emerge from the combination of sustained focus, working memory, and set shifting
Rise to the big picture

- The clouds clear and the big picture appears!

Rise to the big picture

- Frenzy is tamed just by knowing you have a path from the forest to the big picture

What's your first step?

- Tame frenzy
- Improve focus
- Manage distractions & impulses
- Harvest working memory
- Be cognitively agile
- Connect the dots
One’s own self is well hidden from one’s own self:
Of all mines of treasure, one’s own is the last to be dug up.

- Friedrich Nietzsche

Neuroscience & Self-Coaching – Q&A

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