Making Things Better

Out in the **world**

In the **body**

In the **mind**: How are you practicing with that?

What are you learning and growing?
Stressors
Stressors Challenge Our Needs

**Safety**: contamination, disease, death

**Satisfaction**: losses, roadblocks, pains

**Connection**: separation, conflict, isolation
... Worsened by

Unpredictability, lack of control

Relentless pace, less respite and recovery

Fatigue, accumulated wear and tear
... and the Negativity Bias

As the nervous system evolved, avoiding “sticks” was usually more consequential than getting “carrots.”

1. So we scan for bad news,
2. Over-focus on it,
3. Over-react to it,
4. Turn it quickly into (implicit) memory,
5. Sensitize the brain to the negative, and
6. Create vicious cycles with others.
Velcro for Bad, Teflon for Good

The negativity bias
What can we do?
Mindfulness Buffers Stressors
Mindfulness is sustained present-moment awareness of your inner and outer world. It is aided by steady attention, acceptance, and compassion. Along with it could be moral purpose, skillful efforts, insight, and growth.
Mindfulness of Breathing

As an experiment, see if you can remain steadily mindful of sensations of breathing in your chest.

Let sounds, thoughts, etc. pass through awareness while you remain focused on sensations.

As we finish, be aware of one or more things that helped you stay mindful.
With mindfulness, we can be with difficult experiences without resisting them or getting swept away by them.
Mindfulness for Health Professionals

Some representative findings:

- Improved patient care due to greater self-monitoring (Epstein et al., 2008)
- Reduced depression and anxiety; increased empathy (Shapiro et al., 1998)
- Decreased burnout by reducing emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Cohen-Katz et al., 2005)
- Improved quality of life by reducing stress and increasing self-compassion (Shapiro et al., 2005)
Becoming More Mindful

Take a mindful minute (or more) daily.
Slow it down.
Return to the present.
Step back from reactions.
See the big picture.
Enjoy being mindful.
Mindfulness Can Help Build Resilience
Resilience is the psychological capacity to recover from adversity and pursue your goals despite challenges.

It helps you survive the worst day of your life and thrive every day of your life.
Personal resilience is the result of multiple inner resources, such as grit, gratitude, and compassion.

As challenges increase, so must our resources.
The majority of our inner resources are acquired, through social, emotional, somatic, motivational, attitudinal, and cognitive learning – which is fundamentally hopeful.
And Which Means Changing the Brain For the Better
Learning proceeds in two stages:

Encoding ➞ Consolidation
Activation ➞ Installation
State ➞ Trait
Key Mechanisms of Neuroplasticity

(De)Sensitizing existing synapses  Building new synapses
Building and integrating new neurons
Altered gene expression
Altered activity in a region  Altered connectivity among regions
Changes in neurochemical activity (e.g., dopamine)
Changes in neurotrophic factors (e.g., BDNF)
Modulation by stress hormones, cytokines
Information transfer from hippocampus to cortex
Slow wave and REM sleep
Neurons that fire together, wire together.
We develop greater **grit** by repeatedly installing experiences of determination, patience, fortitude, etc.

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We develop greater **gratitude** by repeatedly installing experiences of thankfulness, etc.

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We develop greater **compassion** by repeatedly installing experiences of empathy and kindness.
Experiencing alone is not learning! Activation *without installation* may be pleasant, but no trait resources are acquired.

What fraction of our beneficial mental states lead to *lasting* changes in neural structure or function?
With mindfulness, you can sustain embodied attention to the beneficial experiences that are the seeds of positive traits, and help them take root in your brain and thus your mind.
Turning States into Traits: HEAL

Activation
1. Have a beneficial experience

Installation
2. Enrich the experience
3. Absorb the experience
4. Link positive and negative material (Optional)
Have It, Enjoy It
Three Breaths

Breathing while feeling your chest as a whole
  Calming, grounding, noticing you’re alright right now

Breathing while feeling caring
  With compassion for suffering

Breathing while feeling cared about
  With gratitude for others
Growing Inner Strengths

Take in the good many times a day.

Identify one or two key strengths you’d like to grow; look for daily opportunities to experience them; take in those experiences.

At least a few minutes each day, come home to a basic authentic sense of peacefulness, contentment, and love.
Keep a green bough in your heart, and a singing bird will come.

Lao Tzu
References
Suggested Books

See [RickHanson.net](http://RickHanson.net) for other good books.

See www.RickHanson.net/key-papers/ for other suggested readings.


Suggested References - 2


