

A window into our emotional state

Conflict exists for an individual when their thoughts and emotions are not in harmony with the things they do. This conflict may be regarding any aspect of their life, for example, with important relationships or in the workplace. Regardless, resolution of conflict is an integral part of achieving emotional wellness for every person.

Interestingly, neuroscience now informs us that unresolved emotional conflicts are bad for our physical health, in addition to the unpleasant feelings of anxiety, depression, anger, resentment, etc. In a negative emotional state, our *sympathetic* nervous system is in the ascendancy, our body's physiology is escalated and 'fight or flight' activation is prevailing. With this heightened level of arousal, our body's systems and organs are not operating in harmonious and synergistic ways. Damaging health outcomes may arise if these negative emotional states are predominant and frequent.

Conversely, the presence of positive emotions activates the *parasympathetic* nervous system which serves to moderate heightened or debilitating arousal, allowing all the body's systems and organs to function in a more synchronised manner. Additionally, our cognitive capacities will be optimised and so our memory will improve, our decision making and clarity of thinking will be maximised and creativity and problem-solving abilities are boosted.

Psychologists, coaches, and many others encouraging superior performance will teach awareness and mindfulness; being mindful of our emotions, being mindful of our thoughts, helpful or otherwise. If our awareness and therefore our mindfulness assists us to shift into more positive states of mind, and thus feel more positive emotionally, then our performance will inevitably improve as a consequence. Mindfulness, as Amy Saltzman so eloquently defines it is "paying attention, so we can choose our behaviour". Being aware, as opposed to being mindless, assists us to manage our behaviour and thus, positively influence the performance outcomes.

Accordingly, it is helpful to have awareness of our emotional state and this is now possible by tracking our heart rate variability (HRV) in real time. Science informs us that erratic HRV is observed in the presence of negative emotional states while a smoother HRV is present when a person's prevailing emotional state is positive. In this way, we can track our emotional state by using new biofeedback devices that measure HRV and guide us toward more healthy and productive emotional states. This can mean that any time we focus our attention on positive emotions such as gratitude, compassion and joy, we have the capacity to change the way our heart performs and so positively influence our body's functioning also.

So, in these contemporary times of high stress and the increasing incidence of chronic diseases, perhaps it is time to reflect on our emotional health. Maybe to do so may be to change our life, or maybe, to prevent a premature end. Or maybe, to simply be happier, healthier, more content, and successful. Enjoy!

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