

Positive emotions are good for your physical health

Neuroscience informs us that unresolved emotional conflicts are bad for our physical health. In a negative emotional state, when our *sympathetic* nervous system (like the throttle in a car) is most active, our arousal levels are heightened and 'fight or flight' responses are common. With escalated levels of arousal, our body's systems and organs are not operating in harmonious ways. Damaging health outcomes may arise if these negative emotional states continue indefinitely.

Conversely, the presence of positive emotions activates the *parasympathetic* nervous system (like the brake in a car) 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.

Sometimes we get stuck in a negative emotional state and we would benefit by some trigger to shift this state. The practice of mindfulness is one such trigger. By becoming aware (or mindful) of our emotional state, we are turning our attention to something other than our emotion, in that moment. We activate a different part of our brain, the emotional processing is subdued, and so we can *choose* a behaviour that is more helpful and positive to our 'in-the-moment' needs. The choice may be to take a deep breath, to have a break, or get some exercise, or just to think before we act.

In this way, it is helpful to have *awareness* of our emotional state. One innovative way to do this is by tracking our heart rate variability (HRV) in real time. Science confirms 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. It is now possible to use new and affordable biofeedback devices that measure HRV and guide us toward more healthy and productive emotional states. By focusing 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.

As a business owner, your mind and your body are critical business assets. If you optimise your emotional health, you will assist with the maintenance of good physical health also. Are you managing this critical risk factor in your business?

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