

The Changing Seasons of our Personal & Professional Lives

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Learning for a Life Well-Lived

Topics

- As the Seasons Change
- Seeking the Subtle Change of Seasons
- Four Obstacles to Subtle Seeing
- A Self-Compassionate Approach to “Important – Not Urgent” Life Change
- Parting Thoughts: Three Tools for Greater Well-Being
- Thoughts and Questions





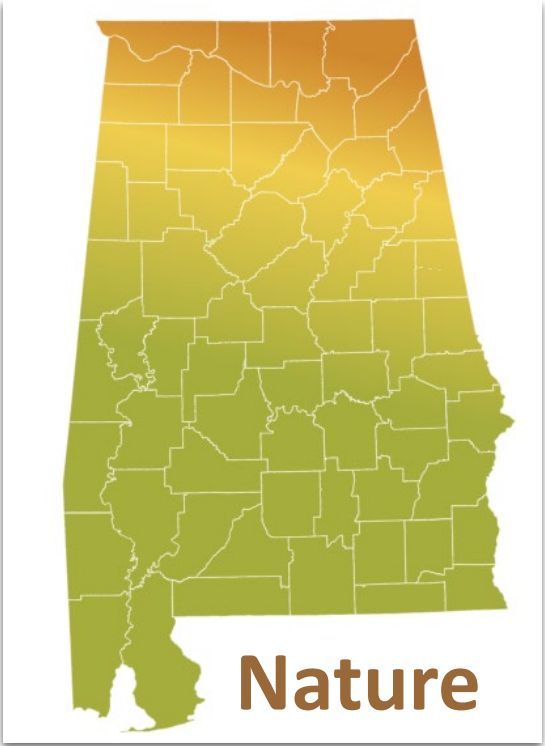
As the Seasons Change

■ Three types of seasonal changes



The Fall Equinox: 1:50 AM
(central) Sept 23, 2023

Calendar &
Movement of
Heavenly Bodies



Personal

Seeking the *Subtle* Changes of Season



I. Important and Urgent	II. Important; Not Urgent
III. Urgent; Not Important	IV. Not Urgent; Not Important

Stephen Covey's Four-Quadrant Time Management Model

- Subtle...**
- *Not* the “important and urgent” crisis and loss
 - *Not* the constant demands of the “urgent but not important”
 - *Not* the hiding places of “neither urgent or important”
 - But the **“important not urgent”** – which we may have to seek out because they are not in our everyday field of awareness

Four Obstacles to *Subtle* Seeing



1. *The rat on the wheel syndrome.* Over-worked, over-committed, over-stimulated, exhausted, too tired to think
2. *The din of others' voices.* Uncritical acceptance of other people's opinions, judgments, standards, expectations, aspirations, world-views and social personas
3. *Fear.* Underlying contextual stress but also the fear of what we'll find and it will call us to do/change/ become.



4. Our Biology - Our Two Brain Systems



Right Hemisphere

90%

Intuition & Instinct

- *Subconscious and fast*
- Seat of beliefs, emotions, habits, values, intuition, imagination, connects new learning with old
- Looks at the world holistically
- Automates much of daily life
- Non-verbal
- Always “on” 24/7
- Scans for “danger” (physical or psycho-social) and alerts us to fight, flee, or freeze
- Manages scarce mental energy by streamlining decisions

**Autopilot | Guardian |
Dot Connector | Energy Manager**

10%

Left Hemisphere



Executive Thinking

- *Conscious and slow*
- Seat of higher-order reasoning, social intelligence, feelings, will power, decision making and “adult” self-disciplined behavior
- Looks at the world incrementally – fixed and named
- Smart – but small, sequential, and slow
- Heavily dependent on working memory only 3-4 “chunks” at a time
- Easily distracted & tired

**Higher Order Thinker |
Adult | Planner | Social and
Emotional Navigator**

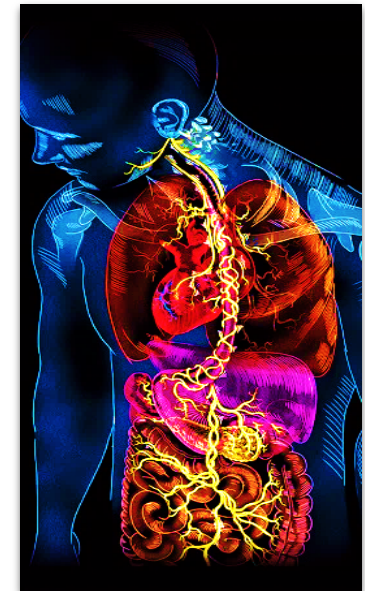
The “Brain” in the Gut



- The gut has a mind of its own, the **"enteric nervous system"**
- This system sends and receives impulses, records experience and responds to emotions
- The gut contains 100 million neurons - more than the spinal cord and about the same as our dog's brain



- Its nerve cells are bathed and influenced by the same neurotransmitter drugs
- The vagus nerve connects the brain in the head with the gut; 80% of connections are bi-directional



The Brains “Chemical Soup”



Pleasure

- **Endorphin** – Runner’s high, released in response to stress and pain, services to mask the pain
- **Dopamine** – Generates good feeling for finding something we have sought after or satisfaction for task accomplished
- **Serotonin** – Feeling of pride
- **Oxytocin** – Social feelings of friendship, love, trust

Fight, Flee, Freeze

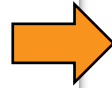
- **Adrenaline** – under conditions of threat (real or not), redirects blood flow, and carbohydrate metabolism
- **Noradrenaline/ Norepinephrine** – prepares muscles and heart for response to acute threat
- **Cortisol** – the primary stress hormone, increases glucose in the bloodstream, enhances your brain's use of glucose and prepares body to repair tissues

Example of Response Sequence



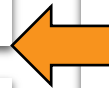
Challenging Event(s)

- COVID -19
- Toxic politics
- Social challenges
- 24-hours news and social media
- Financial pressure & uncertainty
- Random acts of violence
- Stressed relationships (near and far)
- Natural disasters
- Ever-changing work environment



Our Human Response

- 24/7 alert
- Fight, flight, or freeze response
 - Vision narrowed
 - Higher order reasoning diminished
 - Social and emotional navigation impaired
 - “Adult” response is degraded
- Long-term stress hormones i.e., cortisol can lead to:
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Digestive problems
 - Headaches
 - Heart disease
 - Sleep problems
 - Weight gain
 - Memory and concentration impairment



The Lived Experience

- Fearful, negative, reactive, unsettled, isolated
- Hunkered down

90% of Thinking is Unconscious

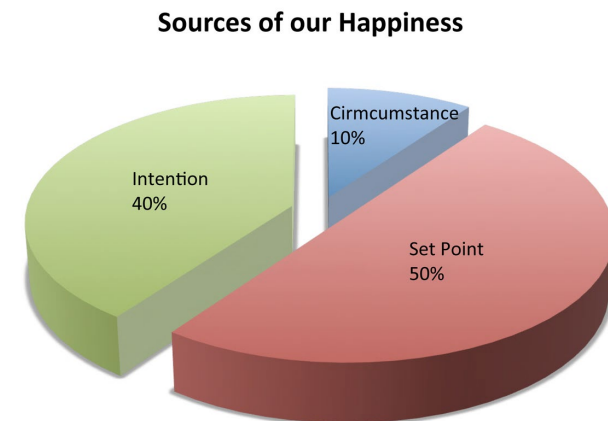


- Human retina transmits to the brain approximately 10 million bits of info per second; other senses add 1 million bits per second
- Of the 11 million bits of information per second that is taken into our body, only 40-50 bits per second reach our consciousness
- **We think 12,000 – 60,000 thoughts per day; 80% are negative** (*National Science Foundation*)
- “So fast are our reactions that consciousness is frequently left out of the loop” (Coates, p. 79)
- Perhaps the primary purpose of our consciousness is to veto, or moderate decisions already made

Negativity is Inheritance - Not Destiny



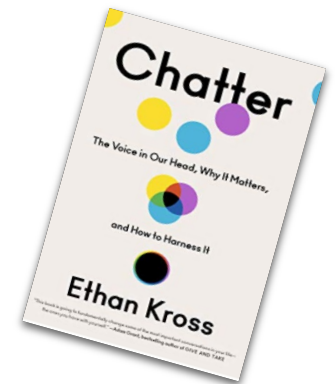
- We are negative by nature!
 - **Our biology evolved to keep us safe, not happy** (*Rick Hanson*)
 - The mind is like Velcro for negative experiences, positive experiences are like Teflon (*Rick Hanson*)
 - It takes ~3 positive experiences to 1 negative to be “flourishing” (*Barbara Frederickson*)
- Happiness is on average about 50% genetic setpoint and 10% life circumstance. **We can intentionally address the remaining 40%** (*Sonja Lyubomirsky*)



We Talk to Ourselves - Constantly



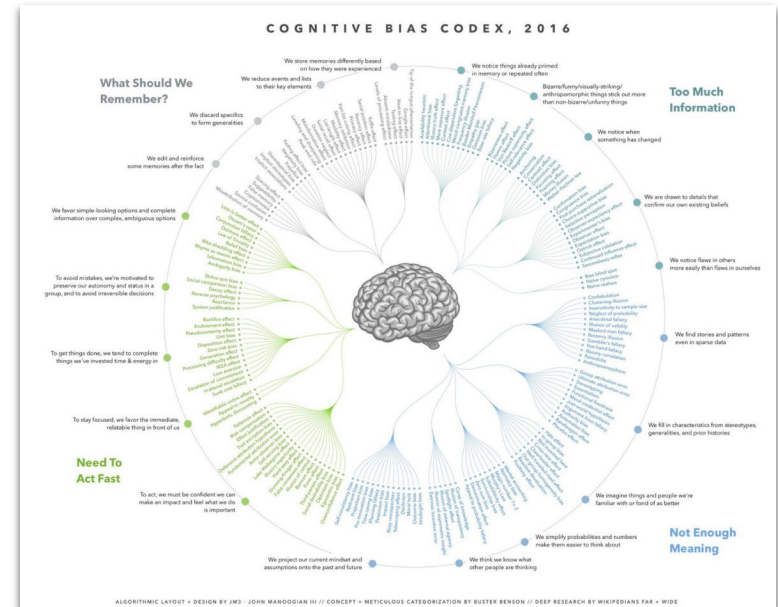
- **“We talk to ourselves. And we listen to what we say.”**
- Our inner voice is active about 50% of our waking hours
- 33-50% of our waking hours we are not living in the present moment
- We talk to ourselves at a rate equivalent to 4,000 words per minute (and that is *not* a typo)
- **The inner voice is a basic feature of the mind.** It enables us to:
 - Pay attention to our thoughts and feelings
 - Demonstrate self-control
 - Set, strive for, evaluate progress toward goals
 - Run mental simulations and “what if’s”
 - Navigate and “storify” everyday life
 - Inform **“the most foundational psychological story of all: our identities”**



Our Thinking is Habitually Hijacked



- Automatic, subconscious brain uses mental shortcuts – heuristics - to save energy
- Used when we need to act fast, have too much or too little information, or when we need to remember
- Cognitive bias are “normal,” self-protective, and mostly helpful



- Don't trust your first solution – it is typically wrong/incomplete
- Individually and collectively we have “habitual” bias which seem “common sense” but can lead us astray when we have to decide



Challenges to Seeing the Subtle Changes

- The **barriers** to seeing and responding to subtle change:
 1. The rat on the wheel syndrome
 2. The din of other people's voices
 3. Fear
 4. Biology

I. Important and Urgent	II. Important; Not Urgent
III. Urgent; Not Important	IV. Not Urgent; Not Important

- **The calls to look deeper**

- When I hear myself saying ... I'm so busy, I don't have time to think (or for myself)!
- When I relinquish my decisions to others i.e., everybody says (or does, or pretends to be doing)
- When I distract myself with the "not urgent and not important"
- When underlying fear and stress begin to feel "normal"
- When there is no joy, no sense of excitement, no energy – just duty, the grind, and a grayness to life



Four Steps to Making “Important – Not Urgent” Life Change

Step 1: Get Off the Rat Wheel!



- Create quiet time for personal thinking
- Find a quiet space
- Get your thoughts out of your head and onto paper or electrons
- Relax and take a deep breath
- Speak kindly to yourself – be gentle in word and deed



Step 2: Listen to Your Own Voice



- Make this private and personal work
- Share when ready – but not prematurely and then only with those with a “need to know”
- Seek advice judiciously
- Set aside the din of social media and “experts”



Step 3: Be Not Afraid

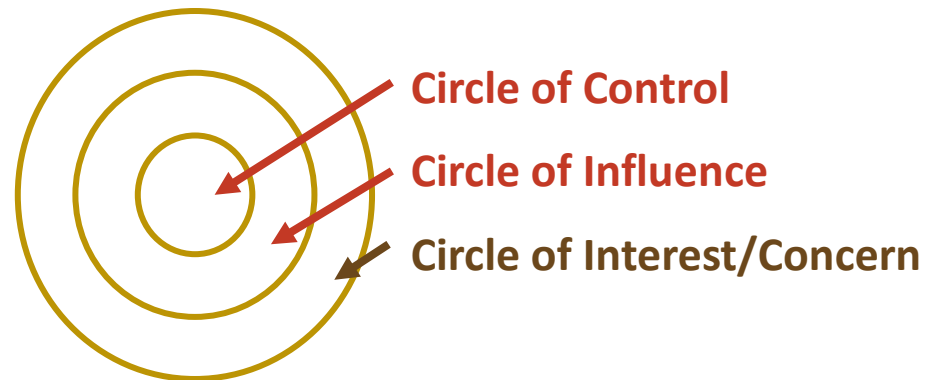


- We can accept the default and hunker down – fearful, negative, reactive, unsettled, and isolated
or
- We can seek and claim our own well-being and happiness –
with intention, attention, and effort



Step 3: Be Not Afraid

- Think of this as exploratory – you don't have to do anything of this – the choice is yours
- Open the lens wide and look deeply – but then narrow the field to the manageable and meaningful few items
- Have confidence in yourself (i.e., self-efficacy/ internal locus of control)
- Focus on what you can **control** and **influence** in your personal life – let go of the rest!



Step 4: Make the Process Your Own



- **Set the stage - physically and psychologically**
 - Find a quiet place. Turn off and put your phone out of sight. Spread out. Be comfortable. Take a deep breath - quiet yourself. Come to your senses (literally) and center yourself. If it is your tradition, ask for guidance and wisdom.
- **Ask yourself some open ended questions**
 - In my life, what are the things where I am feeling a nagging sense of concern?
 - If I am completely honest with myself, what is setting off my alarm?
 - What areas in my life need attention, but I am ignoring?
 - What do I "know" about my life but am hiding from because they are hard or messy or scare me?
 - What am I feeling? What is my heart say that my brain doesn't want to hear? What does my brain say that my heart doesn't want to hear?
- **Write - just write**
 - Don't edit, don't spell check, don't analyze, don't judge - get the thoughts out of your head and out where you can see them

Step 4: Make the Process Your Own



- **Take a break - literally and figuratively!**
- **Review and edit what you have written and ask ...**
 - Are some of these items new i.e., things that you didn't realize were there?
 - Are there any of these that are unrecognized crisis (i.e., Quadrant I: Important and Urgent) that call for immediate action? Highlight them and make them a priority for action!
 - Are there any "world hunger" issues outside of your spheres of control and influence? Cross them out and "take them off the table"
 - Are there any of these that are in Quadrant III (Urgent, not Important) or Quadrant IV (Neither Urgent or Important)? Cross them out. Don't clutter your mind
- **Consider the Quadrant III (Important, Not Urgent)**
 - What are the key themes?
 - Are some items related and should be combined? If so, do so
 - Are there some that are fuzzy and need refinement to make them actionable? Clean them up

Step 4: Make the Process Your Own



- **Take a deep breath and return to center**
- **Choose**
 - Looking at your Quadrant III (Important, Not Urgent) potential areas of change is there one that speaks to you as a place to start experimenting? Check in with both your head and heart. Resist the impulse to take on all of them or too many. Just pick one area to work on and save the others for the next round
- **Refine and make it inspiring for you**
 - Take the new "change effort" and rewrite it into something meaningful (and inspiring). Play with the words until they speaks to you. Make sure though it is actionable. Write it down someplace that **you** will see it
- **Making it real and tangible**
 - Ask yourself, what would it take to really embrace this change? Using both heart and head, what would it look like, feel like, be like? Write down your vision
- **Strategize**
 - Lay out a step-by-step plan. Use little steps and are really actionable within the context of your real life. It doesn't have to be a perfect plan, just begin making it real

Step 4: Make the Process Your Own



■ Experiment and Tune

- Give yourself a week to work on taking Step 1 and then evaluate - again privately with "sacred" time and space. Review the results, tinker, keep at it. Do not share or let anyone "rain on your parade" until you feel steady about your goal and progress

■ Trust and Care For Yourself

- Making substantive change is not easy. Just don't take on more than you can do. Don't get discouraged, a little progress on an important goal is worth far more than a lot of pretty words and hand-flapping. Honor both your head **and** heart - it takes cooperation from both to transform change efforts into a habit. **Be self-compassionate and talk nice to yourself!**



The Professional Application

- Focus on the “subtle season changes” – those just out of awareness
- Steps 1-3 the same
 - Get off the rat wheel!
 - Listen to your own voice (at least initially)
 - Be not afraid
- Step 4 – basically the same process

I. Important and Urgent	II. Important; Not Urgent
III. Urgent; Not Important	IV. Not Urgent; Not Important

Good tools for narrowing the focus and explaining your thinking





Parting Thoughts: Three Tools for Greater Well-Being

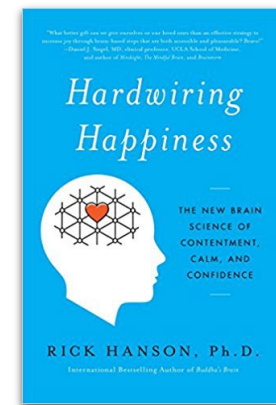
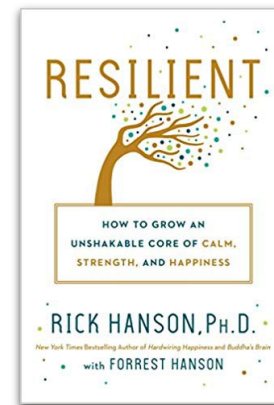
Tool 1: Savoring



■ Taking in the Good

- Consciously recognize the good, and consciously turn it into a good experience
- Really enjoy the experience – stay with it to strengthen the memory trace
- Let the good experience sink in – relish it
- **Savor!**

“Our bodies were designed to keep us safe, not happy”
Rick Hanson





Tool 2. Be Grateful!

■ Gratitude

- Gratitude is an emotion, but it comes from the attitude or belief of noticing the goodness, noticing what we're receiving in the world
- Sustained and daily practice of gratitude leads to better physical and mental health

■ The Three Blessings Practice

- Each evening write down three things for which you are grateful and why – they don't have to be big things
- Do this for 21 days
- Don't repeat blessings
- Go back and review them from time to time





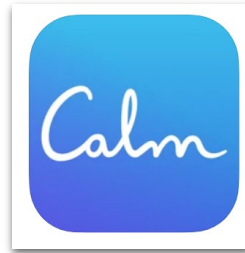
Tool 3. Mindfulness

■ Mindfulness is...

- Maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts and accepting our thoughts and feelings without judgement
- “Awareness of what is happening in our experience as it is happening” (Rohan Gunathilake)
- Practice can be faith or spiritually based or not
- Many practices confirmed by modern neuroscience
- Over 30,000 “Mindfulness” books on Amazon
- Interested and a neophyte? Good sources to explore...



Mindful.org



Calm.com



Thoughts or questions?



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