

# **Train Your Brain: The Five Essential Skills**

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## **INSIGHT: *Key Points***

*"Like waking up from a bad dream."*

### **What Is Insight**

- Insight means understanding the factors that shape your reactions.
- Your reactions are not fixed and inevitable. They are constructed within your mind - which is very hopeful, since it means you can send them in a better direction by:
  - (A) In the moment, seeing how factors in your mind have distorted your perceptions, or intensified your reactions, or colored them negatively.
  - (B) Over the long-term, you can work to reduce these factors or control them better.

### **Kinds of Factors**

- We're going to look at several major kinds/groups of factors:
  - Temperament
  - Issues related to both autonomy and intimacy
  - Material transferred into the present from childhood
- Additional factors you should look into:
  - Attachment style: secure, insecure-anxious, insecure-avoidant
  - Gender, in both its biological and cultural patterning (nature and nurture)
  - Influences due to race and class and religion and culture
  - The Enneagram, with its nine types
  - Jung's typology of thinking-feeling/judging, sensing-intuiting, introversion-extroversion
  - The spectrum running from extreme pessimism to extreme optimism

### **Wanting to See What Is True**

- The condition for insight is you have to want to see the truth - even if it is uncomfortable.
- Reflect on the benefits to yourself and to others of you understanding the factors inside yourself that make you feel badly or act badly.
- Consider how you may be avoiding or resisting seeing those factors inside.
- Establish your true intentions about seeing the truth about yourself, good and bad
- To support your truest, highest intentions in life you could "take refuge" when you first wake each morning in good things that support them, such as your own deepest nature, or spirit or God, or Buddha-Dharma-Sangha, or in reality itself.

Similarly, upon waking you could set your highest intentions for yourself, like: "May I be clear, calm, and loving today." Or: "I know I'll stay sober today."

### **Temperament**

- These are pretty stable, largely innate characteristics of a person.
- We all have screwy, imbalanced qualities in our nature that we just have to deal with. It's not about your tendencies, it's about how skillful you are in dealing with them.
- Throughout, please consider:
  - What's your nature with regard to that aspect of temperament?
  - How has your nature in that regard affected your life?
  - How have you, or how could you, work with that aspect of your temperament?

### Baseline emotional inclinations

- This is your emotional resting state, typically a little *anxious/fearful*, or a little *wistful/melancholy/sad*, or a little *irritable/frustrated/aggressive/angry*, or a little *guilty/remorseful/ashamed/inadequate*.
- Effects: Shades your experience of life in general. Tilts your perceptions of and your attributions of intent in others. Amplifies small emotional reactions into big ones.
- How to work with it: Put in a conscious, overriding correction factor. Deliberately look for emotion-specific counter-evidence. Internalize the knowing and the experience of this evidence so it becomes a permanent part of yourself (the inner skill of Taking In).

### Orientation to the world, especially other people

- Move toward, away from, against. Note the three major types within the Enneagram.
- Effects: Primes your opening approach to people and situations. Primes your reactions. Could affect your orientation toward yourself. Often leads to mixed signals.
- How to work with it: Put in a conscious, overriding correction factor. Do appropriate experiments in which you deliberately make yourself do something that is against your inclination. Notice the evidence that it goes alright when you don't manifest your typical orientation to the world. Internalize the knowing and the experience of this evidence so it becomes a permanent part of yourself (the inner skill of Taking In).

### Range of reactivity

- From inhibited/rigid/cautious . . . through mellow/easygoing/ phlegmatic . . . to intense/volatile/labile/prickly/manic.
- Reactivity affects both emotional responsiveness and impulse control.
- There are strengths at every point along the spectrum of reactivity. For example, *inhibition* includes watchfulness, restraint, and guarding the sense doors. *Intensity* includes passion, enthusiasm, and a transparency to others.
- People who present as inhibited are often actually highly sensitive, and thus shut down to manage feeling overwhelmed by internal and external stimuli.
- Effects: Pervasively shades your response to the outer world of people and situations Also shades your response to your own inner life. *Inhibition* shuts down useful information (that comes from our responses to life) . . . *intensity* magnifies the suffering of our reactions.
- How to work with it: Put in a conscious, overriding correction factor. Do experiments where you make yourself go against your dispositional tendency. Internalize the positive results of these experiments so that they become a permanent part of yourself.

## Issues with Autonomy and Intimacy

### Introduction

- These are powerful drives fundamental to every normal human being: to be independent and to find people one can depend on . . . to be oneself and to be connected to others . . . to express the self and to receive the expression of others.

- The two drives complement each other. To explore we need a secure base (very fundamental to the attachment experiences of young children). To be close we have to feel that we won't be smothered. Individuation, being our own person gives us something of value to offer in relationships. "Fences make for good neighbors."

### The gender angle

- While both are important for everyone, people tend to emphasize one or the other in their life as a kind of overarching imperative. Men tend to put a priority on autonomy, on not being pushed around, on not being one-down in dominance hierarchies . . . while women tend to put a high priority on feeling connected, that "you are with me," on the stability of relationships.
- Threats to either of those imperatives jumps to the top of the stack if it seems threatened: it becomes the underlying, true stake in a quarrel that looks like it's about something else.

### *You can be more skillful inside yourself by:*

- Seeing differences around autonomy/intimacy as just cultural -like Swedish-Italian - with neither one being right; beware disdain for the other person's priorities or style!
- Seeing the strengths in the other person's/gender's approach
- Not presuming threats to autonomy or intimacy when they're really not there
- You can be more interpersonally skillful by keeping in mind the *imperative* of your partner. Do appropriate things to address that ongoing need, and to preempt misunderstandings that you are threatening it.

### Schizoid and narcissistic dynamics

- Most of us have some of both, but one is typically most primary.
- Each is a fundamental paradigm of relationship learned in childhood.
- In the **schizoid** dynamic:
  - The person is focused on optimal distance in relationships.
  - They are uncomfortable getting too close . . . or pursuing self-expression too fully: "the nail that stands out gets hammered down."
  - They tend to orbit others, never really landing but never attaining escape velocity.
  - While they often appear aloof, they are actually exquisitely attuned to the other person, and quite reactive (behind the mask) to the other's behavior.
  - They tend to have issues around feeling invaded, feeling like their inner resources will be plundered or exhausted by others, or that they are about to be attacked; the image of the layers of castle walls surrounding an inner keep full of wonderful treasure.
  - They often had parents who ignored, discouraged, or punished bids for closeness - for the normal needs of the child for connection.
  - They often deal with people in confusing ways in which their desire to distance and to connect are both present, in a combo move, like quarreling as a way to connect, or reporting on their feelings in an intellectualized and detached way.
  - When dealing with a schizoid person, respect for boundaries and "threat-reduction" are paramount.

- In the **narcissistic** dynamic:
  - The person longs for "narcissistic supplies," notably attention, mirroring, and prizing.
  - They often had parents who were alternately idealizing and critical, giving them a taste of the gravy train and then taking it away.
  - They react intensely to perceived slights of their value, often by devaluing others.
  - They often mask their hunger for valuing with a too-cool-for-school attitude.
  - They often seek like-mindedness.
  - They often oscillate between grandiosity and inadequacy.
  - When dealing with a narcissistic person, empathy and genuine prizing are paramount. Notice your reactions to bids for narcissistic supplies from others.
- To address **schizoid** tendencies in yourself:
  - In terms of closeness, be *aware* of the fears or other negative reactions to closeness . . . . *Let go* of them, using the methods you're learned . . . Notice that closeness is actually alright, and *take in* the experience of that.
  - Same with fears or other negative reactions to full expression of the self
  - Remind yourself that you are well protected and can afford to get close. Reminding yourself of your independence paradoxically helps you get comfortable with sustaining relatedness. Assert yourself to get the respect for your boundaries you need.
  - Remind yourself that you are much, much safer today from punishments or other negative reactions to expressing yourself. And much, much more able to deal with them if they happen.
- To address **narcissistic** tendencies in yourself:
  - Hold your yearnings for attention, prizing, etc. with tender concern.
  - Don't shame yourself.
  - Accomplish and produce in genuine ways. Beware any tendencies to expect a free ride somehow because of your wonderful potential.
  - Address the experiences of grandiosity and inadequacy as simply experiences like any other: to be aware of, to not identify with, to see the suffering in, to let go of, and to internalize wise and healthy alternatives to.
  - Notice the narcissistic supplies that come to you, and ask for more.
  - Take in the experience of narcissistic supplies down into the hungry hole in your heart, to build up resources inside.

## Childhood Material

### Why stir up that old crud? What's the use?

- To bring up material that can be processed once it enters awareness - and get rid of it!
- To experience liberating insight: "I don't need to assume that any more. I don't need to act that way any more. I don't need to worry about that any more."

### Exercise

- Bring to mind a moderately distressing or upsetting issue. Review the present-day (A) events of it, (B) reactions it stirs up inside you, and (C) how you are acting regarding it.

- Then try to sense what is young about your response to it:
  - What could be feelings linked to this upsetting situation that come from similar situations when you were a child or teenager?
  - What could be wants from your childhood that relate to this situation?
  - What could be perspectives, ways of seeing things from your childhood that have gotten involved with your reactions these days?
  - What could be postures from childhood, or strategies, or styles, or actions from your childhood that are occurring these days?