The Practical Neuroscience Of Lasting Happiness

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Rick Hanson, PhD.

www.RickHanson.net
Two Wolves in the Heart
Inner Strengths

Understandings
Capabilities
Positive Emotions
Attitudes
Motivations
Virtues
Inner Strengths Are Built From Brain Structure
Mental resources are acquired in two stages:

- Encoding
- Activation
- Installation
- Trait

- Consolidation
- Installation
- Trait
Neurons that fire together, wire together.
Experiencing doesn’t equal learning.

Activation **without installation** may be pleasant, but no trait resources are acquired.

What fraction of our beneficial mental states ever become neural structure?
Professionals and the public are generally good at activation but bad at installation.

This is the fundamental weakness – and **opportunity** – in much health care, psychotherapy, human resources training, and mindfulness programs.
Velcro for Bad, Teflon for Good

The negativity bias

bad experiences

good experiences
Four Learning Curves

Mental Resources

Time

① Decline
Four Learning Curves

Mental Resources

Time

- **① Decline**
- **② No growth**
Four Learning Curves

- ① Decline
- ② No growth
- ③ Linear growth

Mental Resources vs. Time
Four Learning Curves

- **1.** Decline
- **2.** No growth
- **3.** Linear growth
- **4.** Exponential growth; learning how to learn
How can we increase the conversion rate from positive states to beneficial traits?
How to Take in the Good: HEAL

Activation
1. Have a beneficial experience

Installation
2. Enrich the experience
3. Absorb the experience
4. Link positive and negative material (Optional)
Have a Beneficial Experience
Enrich It
Absorb It
Like a Nice Fire
Link Positive & Negative Material
Conditions for the Link Step

- Divided awareness; holding two things at once
- Not hijacked by negative; if so, drop negative
- Positive material is more prominent in awareness.
Have It, Enjoy It It
Let’s Try It

Notice relaxing as you exhale
Create a sense of gratitude
Create a feeling of caring about someone

For each of the above:
Have the experience. Enrich it. Absorb it.
It’s Good to Take in the Good

• **Development of specific inner strengths**
  – General - resilience, positive mood, feeling loved
  – “Antidote experiences” - Healing old wounds, filling the hole in the heart

• **Implicit benefits:**
  – Shows that there is still good in the world
  – Being active rather than passive
  – Treating yourself kindly, like you matter
  – Rights an unfair imbalance, given the negativity bias
  – Training of attention and executive functions

• **Sensitizes brain to positive: like Velcro for good**
Keep a green bough in your heart, and a singing bird will come.

Lao Tzu
Our Three Fundamental Needs

- safety
- satisfaction
- connection
Needs Met by Three Systems

- **Safety**
  - Avoiding harms

- **Satisfaction**
  - Approaching rewards

- **Connection**
  - Attaching to others
The Evolving Brain

Cortex ("primate/human")

Subcortex ("mammalian")

Brainstem ("reptilian")

Cerebellum
Can You Stay in the Green Zone When:

- Things are unpleasant?
- Things are pleasant?
- Things are heartfelt?
### Some Types of Resource Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoiding Harms</th>
<th>Approaching Rewards</th>
<th>Attaching to Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling basically alright right now</td>
<td>Feeling basically full, the enoughness in this moment as it is</td>
<td>Feeling basically connected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling protected, strong, safe, at peace</td>
<td>Feeling pleasured, glad, grateful, satisfied</td>
<td>Feeling included, seen, liked, appreciated, loving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sense that awareness itself is untroubled</td>
<td>Therapeutic, spiritual, or existential realizations</td>
<td>Feeling compassionate, kind, generous, loving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pet the Lizard
Feed the Mouse
Hug the Monkey
Coming Home

Peace
Contentment
Love
Think not lightly of good, saying, "It will not come to me."

Drop by drop is the water pot filled.

Likewise, the wise one, Gathering it little by little, Fills oneself with good.

Dhammapada 9.122
Thank You
See RickHanson.net for other good books.

See **RickHanson.net** for other scientific papers.


Key Papers – 2


- Hanson, R. 2008. Seven facts about the brain that incline the mind to joy. In *Measuring the immeasurable: The scientific case for spirituality*. Sounds True.


Where to Find Rick Hanson Online

**Hardwiring Happiness:**
The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence

www.rickhanson.net/hardwiringhappiness

Personal website: www.rickhanson.net

Wellspring Institute: www.wisebrain.org

youtube.com/drrhanson  facebook.com/rickhansonphd