HEAL:
Understanding and Learning to Use Simple Steps to Create Lasting Happiness

Redwood CAMFT
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It’s Good to Be Happy
What Is Happiness?

Hedonia

Eudaimonia
Benefits of Happiness

- Feels good (duh)
- Better health
- Longer life
- Greater resilience
- More success
- Stronger relationships
- More cooperative, giving, and loving toward others
How to Be Happy
What Shapes Your Course?

Challenges

Vulnerabilities

Resources
Where Are Resources Located?

World

Body

Mind
Resources in Your Mind

- Understandings
- Capabilities
- Positive emotions
- Attitudes
- Motivations
- Virtues
Two wolves in the heart
INNER STRENGTHS ARE BUILT FROM BRAIN STRUCTURE
How do you get these inner strengths into your brain?
Experiencing Positive Neuroplasticity
Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A’s go first). Then you’ll take turns, with one partner mainly speaking while the other person listens, exploring this question:

**Speaker**: What are some of the good facts in your life these days?

**Listener**: Find a sincere gladness for the other person.

**Both**: Repeatedly take 5-10 seconds to feel and register enjoyable, beneficial experiences
Self-Directed Neuroplasticity
Mental activity entails underlying neural activity.
Rewards of Love
Repeated mental activity entails repeated neural activity.

Repeated neural activity builds neural structure.
Neurons that fire together, wire together.
We can use the mind
To change the brain
To change the mind for the better
To benefit ourselves and other beings.
Positive Neuroplasticity
A Neuron
The Neuropsychology of Learning

Learning – changing neural structure and function – has two stages:

From **short-term** memory buffers to **long-term** storage

From **state** to **trait**

From **activation** to **installation**.
Inner strengths are grown from experiences of them – activated states – that are installed as traits.
You become more compassionate by installing experiences of compassion.

You become more grateful by installing experiences of gratitude.

You become more mindful by installing experiences of mindfulness.
Installation
Installation

Installation
Installation

Installation

Installation
Most experiences of inner strengths are enjoyable.

They feel good because they are good for us and others.
The Missing Link
Without **installation**, there is no learning, no change in the brain.
We’re good at activation but bad at installation.

This is the fundamental weakness in most patient education, human resources training, psychotherapy, coaching, and mindfulness training.
The same research that proves therapy works shows no improvement in outcomes over the last 30 or so years.

Scott Miller
Meanwhile your painful, harmful experiences are being rapidly converted into neural structure.
The Negativity Bias
Unpleasant Experiences In Context

- Life contains unavoidable unpleasant experiences. Resisting them just adds to the stress, upset, etc.

- Some inner strengths come only from unpleasant experiences, e.g., knowing you’ll do the hard thing.

- But unpleasant experiences have inherent costs, in their discomfort and stress.

- Many inner strengths could have been developed without the costs of unpleasant experiences.

- Most unpleasant experiences are pain with no gain.
The Brain’s Negativity Bias

As our ancestors evolved, avoiding “sticks” was more important than getting “carrots.”

1. So we scan for bad news,
2. Over-focus on it,
3. Over-react to it,
4. Install it fast in implicit memory,
5. Sensitize the brain to the negative, and
6. Create vicious cycles with others.
Vicious Cycles in the Brain

- Amygdala initiates stress response ("alarm bell")
- Hippocampus:
  - Forms and retrieves contextual memories
  - Inhibits the amygdala
  - Inhibits cortisol production
- Cortisol:
  - Stimulates and sensitizes the amygdala
  - Inhibits and can shrink the hippocampus
- Consequently, chronic negative experiences:
  - Sensitize the amygdala alarm bell
  - Weaken the hippocampus: this reduces memory capacities and the inhibition of amygdala and cortisol production
  - Thus creating vicious cycles in the NS, behavior, and mind
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Velcro for Bad, Teflon for Good

The negativity bias

bad experiences  good experiences
The brain is good at learning from bad experiences but bad at learning from good ones.

Even though learning from good experiences is the primary way to grow resources in the mind.
The Negativity Bias
Stone age brains in the 21st century
Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A’s go first). Then you’ll take turns, with one partner mainly speaking while the other person listens, exploring these questions:

What do you think, so far?

How does the negativity bias operate in one or more of your clients?
Taking Charge of Your Brain
Getting the Good Stuff into Your Brain
Have a Good Experience
The Two Ways To Have a Beneficial Experience

**Notice** one you are already having.
- In the foreground of awareness
- In the background

**Create** one.
How to Create A Beneficial Experience (background)

Look for good facts in:

1. Immediate situation
2. Current or recent events
3. Stable conditions
4. Your character
5. The past
6. The future
7. Bad situations
8. The lives of others
9. Your imagination
10. Care about others
11. Directly evoke a beneficial experience
12. Produce good facts
13. Share about good facts with others
Turning a Good Fact Into a Good Experience (background)

- Bring awareness to your body.
- Soften and open yourself.
- Be a little active in your mind, recognizing aspects of the good fact that naturally elicit an experience.
- Imagine how another person might naturally feel in response to the good fact.
- Have kindness for yourself, encouraging yourself to have a beneficial experience.
How to Enrich an Experience

- Duration
- Intensity
- Multimodality
- Novelty
- Salience
Let’s Try Enriching Compassion

Create an experience of compassion, bringing to mind one or more beings that you wish did not suffer (stress, pain, loss, hunger, trauma).

Have the experience.

Enrich it through:

- Duration
- Intensity
- Multimodality
- Novelty
- Salience
Absorb It
How to Absorb an Experience

- **Enriching** makes the experience more powerful. **Absorbing** makes memory systems more receptive by priming and sensitizing them.

- Intend and sense the experience is sinking into you.
  - Imagery – Water into a sponge; golden dust sifting down; a jewel into the treasure chest of the heart
  - Sensation – Warm soothing balm

- Giving over to the experience; letting it change you

- Letting go of resisting, grasping, clinging: “craving”
Link Positive and Negative Material
HEAL Yourself

Have a positive experience.

Enrich it.

Absorb it.

Link positive and negative material.
Have It, Enjoy It
Let’s Try It

- **Notice** the experience present in awareness that you are basically alright right now.
  - Have the experience.
  - Enrich it.
  - Absorb it.

- **Create** the experience of gratitude.
  - 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
  - Key resources – For challenges, deficits, wounds

- 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 Tsu
Study on the HEAL Process

- With collaborators from the University of California, a 2013 study on the HEAL course, using a randomized waitlist control group design (46 subjects).

- Course participants, compared to the control group, reported more Contentment, Self-Esteem, Satisfaction with Life, Savoring, and Gratitude.

- After the course and at two month follow-up, pooled participants also reported more Love, Compassion, Self-Compassion, Mindfulness, Self-Control, Positive Rumination, Joy, Amusement, Awe, and Happiness, and less Anxiety and Depression.
Combined Sample: Depression (BDI) & Anxiety (BAI)

Mean Score

Pre-Course | Post-Course | 2-Months Later

BDI

BAI
Perspectives on Cultivating Inner Strengths
In the Garden of the Mind

1. Be with what is there.
2. Decrease what’s harmful.
3. Increase what’s beneficial.

Let be. Let go. Let in.

Mindfulness is present in all three.

“Being with” is primary – but not enough.
We also need “wise effort.”
Join us for *Cultivating Inner Strength - Monastic Daylong [Dana - No Fee Day]*
with Ayya Anandabodhi and Ayya Santacitta on
**Sunday, July 8**
from 9:30 am - 5 pm.

(Photos by Ed Ritger)
Practical Uses of the HEAL Process
Targets of TG

- **Thoughts** - expectations; object relations; perspectives on self, world, past and future

- **Perceptions** - sensations; relaxation; vitality

- **Emotions** - both feelings and mood

- **Desires** - values, aspirations, passions, wants

- **Behaviors** - reportoire; inclinations
The Four Ways to Offer a Method

- Doing it implicitly
- Teaching it and then leaving it up to the person
- Doing it explicitly with the person
- Asking the person to do it on his or her own
Using HEAL in Trainings

- Take five minutes to explain its rationale and teach it explicitly.

- In the flow, occasionally encourage enriching and absorbing, using natural language.

- Tell people they can use HEAL outside of class to deepen internalization of what they’re learning.

- Don’t use HEAL when it’s inappropriate (e.g., radically choiceless awareness, highly self-critical about any kind of performance).
Adaptations for Children

- All kids benefit from TG. Particular benefits for mistreated, anxious, spirited/ADHD, or LD children.

- Style:
  - Be matter of fact: this is mental/neural literacy.
  - A little brain talk goes a long way.
  - Be motivating: benefits, “be the boss of your own mind.”
  - Down to earth, naturalistic
  - Scaffold based on executive functions, motivation, and need for autonomy.
  - Brief, concrete
Uses for Children

- Registering curricular skills and other resources
- Motivation for learning; associating rewards
- Seeing the good in the world, others, and oneself – and in the past, present, and future
- Seeing life as opportunity
- Strengthening the sense of being an active learner
- Developing child-specific resources
Synergies of HEAL and Mindfulness

- Improved mindfulness enhances HEAL.

- HEAL increases factors of mindfulness (e.g., self-acceptance, self-compassion, distress tolerance).

- HEAL heightens learning from mindfulness:
  - The sense of stable presence itself
  - Confidence that awareness itself is never disturbed
  - Peace of realizing that experiences come and go
Obstructions to Taking in the Good

- General
  - Distractibility
  - Blocks to self-awareness in general

- Specific
  - Fears of losing one’s edge or lowering one’s guard
  - Sense of disloyalty to others (e.g., survivor guilt)
  - Culture (e.g., selfish, vain, sinful)
  - Gender style
  - Associations to painful states
  - Secondary gains in feeling bad
  - Not wanting to let someone off the hook
  - Thoughts that TG is craving that leads to suffering
Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A’s go first). Then you’ll take turns, with one partner mainly speaking while the other person listens, exploring these questions:

How could you use HEAL with one or more of your clients?

In particular, how could you work through blocks in your clients to having and internalizing beneficial experiences?
Growing Key Strengths
What – if it were more present in the mind of a client – would really help?

How could the client have more experiences of this mental resource – that are internalized in the brain?
Biological Evolution

- 4+ billion years of earth
- 3.5 billion years of life
- 650 million years of multi-celled organisms
- 600 million years of nervous system
- 200 million years of mammals
- 60 million years of primates
- 6 million years ago: ancestor with chimpanzees
- 2.5 million years of tool-making
- 150,000 years of *homo sapiens*
Evolutionary History

The Triune Brain - (P. MacLean 1990)
Three Stages of Brain Evolution

- **Reptilian:**
  - Brainstem, cerebellum, hypothalamus
  - Reactive and reflexive
  - *Avoid* hazards

- **Mammalian:**
  - Limbic system, cingulate, early cortex
  - Memory, emotion, social behavior
  - *Approach* rewards

- **Human:**
  - Massive cerebral cortex
  - Abstract thought, language, cooperative planning, empathy
  - *Attach* to “us”
# Meeting Three Core Needs

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<tr>
<th>Need</th>
<th>Signal</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Unpleasant</td>
<td>Avoiding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
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<td>Approaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>Heartfelt</td>
<td>Attaching</td>
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Mental Resources for Challenges

Safety – Grit, protection, relaxation, feeling alright right now, peace

Satisfaction – Gratitude, gladness, accomplishment, contentment

Connection – Belonging, appreciation, friendship, compassion, love
Psychological Antidotes

Avoiding Harms
- Strength, efficacy --> Weakness, helplessness, pessimism
- Safety, security --> Alarm, anxiety
- Compassion for oneself and others --> Resentment, anger

Approaching Rewards
- Satisfaction, fulfillment --> Frustration, disappointment
- Gladness, gratitude --> Sadness, discontentment, “blues”

Attaching to Others
- Attunement, inclusion --> Not seen, rejected, left out
- Recognition, acknowledgement --> Inadequacy, shame
- Friendship, love --> Abandonment, feeling unloved or unlovable
The Reactive Red Zone

When there is a presumed or felt deficit or disturbance of safety, satisfaction, or connection:

The body fires up into the stress response; outputs exceed inputs; long-term building is deferred.

The mind fires up into:

- **Fear** (Avoiding)
- **Frustration** (Approaching)
- **Heartache** (Attaching)

The brain in allostatic, *Reactive*, **craving** mode.
Reactive Dysfunctions in Each System

- **Avoid** - Anxiety disorders; PTSD; panic, terror; rage; violence

- **Approach** - Addiction; over-drinking, -eating, -gambling; compulsion; hoarding; driving for goals at great cost

- **Attach** – Insecure attachment; borderline, narcissistic, antisocial PDs; “looking for love in all the wrong places”
The Responsive Green Zone

With no presumed or felt deficit or disturbance of safety, satisfaction, and connection:

The body defaults to a sustainable equilibrium of refueling, repairing, and pleasant abiding.

The mind defaults to a sustainable equilibrium of:

- Peace (Avoiding)
- Contentment (Approaching)
- Love (Attaching)

The brain in homeostatic, Responsive, minimal craving mode
Pet the Lizard
Feed the Mouse
Hug the Monkey
Choices . . .

Or?

Reactive Mode

Responsive Mode
Coming Home, Staying Home

Positive experiences of core needs met – the felt sense of safety, satisfaction, and connection: peace, contentment, and love – activate the Responsive mode.

Activated Responsive states can become installed Responsive traits. Responsive traits foster Responsive states.

Responsive states and traits enable us to stay Responsive with challenges.
Peace

Contentment

Love
Cultivation Undoes Craving

We rest the mind upon beneficial states so that the brain may gradually take their shape.

This disentangles us from craving as we increasingly rest in a peace, contentment, and love that is independent of external conditions.

With time, even the practice of cultivation falls away – like a raft that is no longer needed once we reach the farther shore.
Flowers Pulling Weeds
The Fourth Step of TG

- When you are having a positive experience:
  - Sense the current positive experience sinking down into old pain, and soothing and replacing it.

- When you are having a negative experience:
  - Bring to mind a positive experience that is its antidote.

- In both cases, have the positive experience be big and strong, in the forefront of awareness, while the negative experience is small and in the background.

- You are not resisting negative experiences or getting attached to positive ones. You are being kind to yourself and cultivating positive resources in your mind.
The Tip of the Root

For the fourth step of TIG, try to get at the youngest, most vulnerable layer of painful material.

The “tip of the root” is commonly in childhood. In general, the brain is most responsive to negative experiences in early childhood.

Prerequisites
- Understanding the need to get at younger layers
- Compassion and support for the inner child
- Capacity to “presence” young material without flooding
Psychological Antidotes

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Societal Implications of Positive Neuroplasticity

For most of the time our human and hominin ancestors have lived, it was not possible to meet the core needs of everyone. But now the resources and know-how exist to do this. How we handle this unprecedented opportunity will be the central theme of this century.

Improving external conditions is vital – but not enough. Many affluent people dwell in anxiety and anger, frustration and drivenness, and hurt and ill will.

Repeatedly internalizing Responsive experiences develops a “green brain” that is harder to manipulate with threats and fear, greed and consumerism, and “us” vs. “them” rivalries. A critical mass of “green brains” will bring a tipping point that changes the course of human history.
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
Suggested Books

See www.RickHanson.net for other great books.

Key Papers - 1

See www.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.
Key Papers - 3


Key Papers - 4


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