Loved into Being: Practical Insights from the Neuroscience of Relationships

FACES
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Rick Hanson, Ph.D.
www.RickHanson.net
1. Feeling Cared About
2. Calm Strength
3. Compassionate Assertiveness
4. From “Them” to “Us”
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Feeling Cared About
So many people have helped me to come to this night.
10 seconds of silence. I'll watch the time.
We’ll take a little longer.
Mental Resources for Healthy Relationships
Mental Resources
Support Relationships

Resilience
Mindfulness
Secure Attachment
Self Regulation
Compassion
Self Worth
Mental Resources Are Embedded In Brain Structure
Mental resources are acquired in two stages:

- Encoding
- Activation
- State

➤

- Consolidation
- Installation
- Trait
Neurons that fire together, wire together.
We become more **compassionate** by repeatedly installing experiences of empathy and compassion.

We become more **secure** by repeatedly installing experiences of feeling cared about.

We become more **resilient** by repeatedly installing experiences of calm strength.
Steepening Personal Growth Curves
Activation without installation may be pleasant, but it has no lasting value.

What fraction of our beneficial mental states ever become neural structure?
Stone age brains in the 21st century
The Negativity Bias
How stress changes the brain
The same research that proves therapy works shows no improvement in outcomes over the last 30 or so years.

Scott Miller, Ph.D.
Professionals and the public are generally good at activation but bad at installation.

This is the fundamental weakness – and opportunity – in much coaching, psychotherapy, human resources training, and mindfulness programs.
Four Learning Curves
Four Learning Curves

- 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 maximize the conversion rate from positive states to beneficial traits?
Learning Factors

Environmental – setting, social support

Behavioral – activities, repetition

Mental – motivation, engagement
Learning How To Learn
Have a Beneficial Experience
Enrich It
Absorb It
Like a Nice Fire
Link Positive & Negative Material
Neuropsychology of Learning

**Activation**
1. **H**ave a beneficial experience.

**Installation**
2. **E**nrich it.
3. **A**bsorb it.
4. **L**ink positive and negative material.
   (Optional)
Have It, Enjoy It
In the Garden of the Mind

1. Be with what is there
2. Decrease the negative
3. Increase the positive

Let be. Let go. Let in.
Mindfulness is present in all three.

“Being with” is primary – but not enough.
We also need “wise effort.”
Feeling Caring
Being Caring

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Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A’s go first). Then take turns, with one person speaking while the partner mainly listens, exploring these questions:

- How was that practice for you?
- Any reflections so far?
Self-Compassion

Compassion is the wish that beings not suffer, with warm-hearted concern. Compassion is sincere even if we can’t make things better.

Self-compassion simply applies this to oneself.

To encourage self-compassion:

1. Get the sense of being cared about.
2. Bring to mind beings you care about. Find compassion for them.
3. Shift the compassion to yourself.
“Anthem”

Ring the bells that can still ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That’s how the light gets in
That’s how the light gets in

Leonard Cohen
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Calm Strength
The good life, as conceive it, is a happy life. I do not mean that if you are good you will be happy; I mean that if you are happy you will be good.

Bertrand Russell
Being for Yourself

• Bring to mind someone you are for. Find a sense of caring, support, being loyal, standing with someone as an ally. Know this stance toward someone.

• Apply this stance, this feeling, toward yourself.

• Recognizing your difficulties and burdens. Recognizing injustice applied to you. Recognizing the impacts on you.

• Finding determination that you not be mistreated, that you cope with challenges, that you be truly happy, having a good life as best you can.
Feeling Basically Alright Right Now

- Tuning into the body’s signals that all is well right now
- Aware of breathing going fine . . . the heart beating . . . awareness itself keeps on going no matter what arises . . .
- Letting go of the past, not worrying about the future. Noticing that at least in this moment you are OK.
- Being alright, you can let go of any need to struggle with anything unpleasant.
- Feeling alright sinking into places inside that haven’t . . .
Feeling Strong

• Recalling times you felt strong . . . Determined . . .
  Standing up for others or yourself . . . Enduring . . .

• Opening to these experiences of strength . . . Feeling them in your body . . .

• Strength sinking into you . . . You becoming strength . . .

• A spacious strength that lets others flow through . . .

• In relationship and at peace . . .
Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A’s go first). Then take turns, with one person speaking while the partner mainly listens, exploring these questions:

How was that practice for you?

Any applications for clients?
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Compassionate Assertiveness
Three Kinds of Relationships

I-Thou:
• Recognizing others as beings, persons
• Not liking, approval, agreement

I-It:
• Little or not sense of the other as a being
• Using others as a means to one’s ends

It-It:
• Bodies in space, moving past each other
Can you treat yourself as a Thou?
Balancing Autonomy and Intimacy

Two great themes in human life: independence/dependence, separation/joining, autonomy/intimacy, me/we

Autonomy helps you feel safe in the depths of relationship, and intimacy nurtures the “secure base” that helps you dare greatly.

Feeling autonomous and strong, you’re more able to manage conflicts in peace.
Open Strength

• Getting a sense of boundaries around you . . . Fences, shields . . . People, the world, are over there and you are here . . . Boundaries you control and can adjust . . .

• Beings who care about you are inside with you . . . Supporting you, protecting you . . .

• Feeling strong in your breathing . . . In your arms and legs . . . Determined, enduring . . . Strong . . .

• While sustaining the sense of both strength and boundaries, also opening to others around you . . . Others in your life . . . With a spacious strength that lets others flow through . . .
Healthy Assertiveness

What it is: Speaking your truth and pursuing your aims in relationships

What supports it:
• Being on your own side
• Knowing where you stand (facts & values)
• Refuges, wellsprings, allies
• Focus on big things, let go of little ones
• Health, vitality
If you let go a little, you will have a little happiness. If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of happiness. If you let go completely, You will be completely happy.

Ajahn Chah
If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each person’s life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm any hostility.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
There are those who do not realize that one day we all must die.

But those who do realize this settle their quarrels.

The Buddha
Healthy Assertiveness – How to Do It

- Know your aims; eyes on the prize
- Treat the other as a Thou: compassion
- Practice unilateral virtue; dignity, gravity
- Wise speech; non-violent communication
- Establish facts; bound the problem
- Find the deepest wants
- Focus on the future
- Make clear plans, agreements
- Scale relationship to its true foundation
Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A’s go first). Then take turns, with one person speaking while the partner mainly listens, exploring this question:

Either with a personal relationship or helping a client with one:

How could you apply this approach of healthy assertiveness?
From “Them” to “Us”
The Social Brain

The survival benefits of social capabilities have driven recent brain evolution.

Mammals and birds have more cortex (to bodyweight) than reptiles and fish.

More social primates have more cortex.

Much of the brain’s recent tripling in size is for social capabilities (e.g., empathy, language). The growing brain needed a longer childhood, which required greater pair bonding and band cohesion.
“Us” and “Them”

Within-group cooperation, between-group aggression

Individual variation

Strong inclinations toward cooperative sociability, but easily overridden by threats, fear, grievances, payback

Reactive aggression is intensified and often exploited by economic, cultural, and religious factors.

If there are two wolves in the heart – one of love and one of hate, one that sees a vast circle of “we” and one that sees a small circle of “me” – which one will you feed?
In between-family fights, the baboon’s “I” expands to include all of her close kin; in within-family fights, it contracts to include only herself.

The explanation serves for baboons as much as for the Montaguses and Capulets.

Dorothy Cheney and Robert Seyfarth
Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A’s go first). Then take turns, with one person speaking while the partner mainly listens, exploring these questions:

Who has treated you as an “it” or a “them?”

Who have you treated as an “it” or a “them?”
A human being is a part of a whole. [We] experience [ourselves, our] thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest . . . A kind of optical delusion of consciousness.

This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us.

Our tasks must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

Albert Einstein
Feeding the Wolf of Love

• Feel cared about yourself
• Don’t over-identify with “us”
• Release aversion to others
• Focus on similarities
• Recognize, have compassion for suffering
• Consider “them” as young children
• Recognize good things about “them”
• Reflect on how we are all in this together
• Self-generate kindness and love
Kindness and Goodwill Practice

• Bring to mind someone who has been good to you, someone it is easy for you to care about.

• Find warm feelings for this person . . . Good wishes, such as “May you be safe . . . Healthy . . . Happy . . . At ease.” Taking kindness, goodwill as your focus of meditation.

• Repeating for other beings you know: friend . . . neutral person . . . difficult person

• Radiating kindness and goodwill in widening circles . . . Including the people in this room . . . In this city . . . In this country . . . In this world . . . Nonhuman animals . . . All living things . . . Omitting none . . .
See RickHanson.net for other good books.

See RickHanson.net for other scientific papers.


• 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


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

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