Acquiring Mental Resources
For Lasting Happiness

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Mental Resources for Lasting Happiness
Mental Resources Support Happiness

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

- Encoding ➔ Consolidation
- Activation ➔ Installation
- State ➔ Trait
Neurons that fire together, wire together.
We become more **compassionate** by repeatedly installing experiences of compassion.

We become more **grateful** by repeatedly installing experiences of gratitude.

We become more **resilient** by repeatedly installing experiences of resilience.
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?
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

Mental Resources

Time

① Decline
Four Learning Curves

Mental Resources vs. Time

1. Decline
2. No growth
Four Learning Curves

- **Decline**
- **No growth**
- **Linear growth**

**Mental Resources** vs **Time**
**Four Learning Curves**

- **1. Decline**
- **2. No growth**
- **3. Linear growth**
- **4. Exponential growth; learning how to learn**

![Graph showing different learning curves over time](image-url)
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. Have a beneficial experience.

Installation
2. Enrich it.
3. Absorb it.
4. Link positive and negative material.
   (Optional)
Have It, Enjoy It
Key Resources for Fundamental Needs
The Evolving Brain

Cortex
("primate/human")

Subcortex
("mammalian")

Brainstem
("reptilian")

Cerebellum
Three Fundamental Needs

Safety  Satisfaction  Connection
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Connection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vigilant</td>
<td>Grateful</td>
<td>Included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sturdy</td>
<td>Glad</td>
<td>Empathic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determined</td>
<td>Accomplished</td>
<td>Kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protected</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Just</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>Ambitious</td>
<td>Worthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxed</td>
<td>Enthusiastic</td>
<td>Confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>Contentment</td>
<td>Love</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Societal Implications
Repeatedly taking in experiences of safety, satisfaction, and connection develops an increasingly unconditional core sense of fullness and balance, rather than deficit and disturbance.

This is the foundation of lasting happiness.
With a stable internal sense of fullness and balance, of fundamental needs already met, people are less vulnerable to fear and anger, greed and possessiveness, and “us” against “them” conflicts.
Keep a green bough in your heart, and a singing bird will come.

Lao Tzu
See www.RickHanson.net/key-papers/ for other suggested readings.

Selected References - 2


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Additional Materials
Major Neural Mechanisms of Learning

Sensitizing (or desensitizing) existing synapses
Building new synapses
Altered patterns of gene expression in neurons
Building and integrating new neurons
Increased ongoing activity in a brain region
Increased connectivity of brain regions
Altered patterns of neurochemical activity
Information from hippocampus to cortex
Modulation by stress hormones, cytokines
Slow wave and REM sleep
Pilot Study on the HEAL Process

- A randomized waitlist control pilot study on the Taking in the Good course (46 subjects), not yet peer-reviewed.

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

- After the 7-week course and also at 2-month follow-up, pooled participants also reported significantly 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)
The Negativity Bias

During the 600 million year evolution of the nervous system, avoiding “sticks” was usually more consequential than getting “carrots.”

1. So we scan for bad news,
2. Over-focus on it,
3. Over-react to it,
4. Install it quickly in implicit memory,
5. Sensitize the brain to the negative, and
6. Create vicious cycles with others.
## Distal, Proximal Mental Learning Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distal</th>
<th>Proximal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Personal relevance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
<td>Alertness, sense of novelty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View of pos. exper.</td>
<td>Arousal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth/Lrng mindset</td>
<td>Valence, valuing, reward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>Granularity of attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>Interoception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling supported</td>
<td>Maintenance, repetition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of safety</td>
<td>Meaning, elaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imagery, metaphor</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enacted, shared with others</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Benefits of Mental Learning Factors

Benefits of both types of learning factors:
• Increase learning from present experience
• Prime NS for future beneficial experiences
• Heighten consolidation of past experiences

Proximal factors have additional benefits:
• Regulate experience directly
• Increase initial processes of consolidation
• Are under volitional control
The Four Ways to Offer a Method

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

- Take a few minutes to explain it and teach it.
- In the flow, encourage enriching and absorbing, using natural language.
- Encourage people to use HEAL on their own.
- Do HEAL on regular occasions (e.g., end of a therapy session, meals, just before bed).
# Resources for Avoiding Harms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Action, venting</th>
<th>Accurate appraisal</th>
<th>Protection, calming</th>
<th>Relaxation</th>
<th>Feeling alright now, making a plan</th>
<th>Big picture, peace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Weakness</td>
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<td>Helplessness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freezing, immobilization</td>
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<td>Inflated threats</td>
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<td>Alarm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worry, fear</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Irritation, anger</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
# RESOURCES FOR APPROACHING REWARDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Resource</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What I don’t have</td>
<td>What I do have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarcity</td>
<td>Enoughness, fullness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disappointed, sad</td>
<td>Gratitude, gladness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration, failure</td>
<td>Accomplishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bored, numb</td>
<td>Pleasure, excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grief</td>
<td>Loved and loving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving up</td>
<td>Aspire, lived by good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drivenness</td>
<td>Already satisfied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Resources for Attaching to Others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Resource</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Left out, excluded</td>
<td>Belonging, wanted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequacy, shame</td>
<td>Appreciated, respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignored, unseen</td>
<td>Receiving empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely</td>
<td>Friendship, caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to others and oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resentment</td>
<td>Recognize it hurts you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envy, jealousy</td>
<td>Self-compassion, take action, good will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling stifled</td>
<td>Skillful assertiveness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>