

Easier Can Be Better

Tremendous energy can be poured into changing old patterns and behaviours. When you identify some quality of yourself that is not working for you, the tendency is to place enormous attention on changing it to a satisfactory behaviour. For most of us, that is accompanied by our internal critic working overtime, that voice within us that speaks into our middle ear about how we don't measure up, won't amount to much, and are under performing. The more effort we exert to change, the greater this voice that articulates all the accumulated negative feedback of our past becomes. It can become a riot in our mind. Even without the critic, and there appear to be the fortunate few with that blessed silence, focussing on changing old patterns tends to be a long and relatively unrewarding process.

Neuroscience has identified that once a neural pathway is established, and only a few repetitions are needed for the brain to adopt and establish a new pathway, it is almost impossible to remove. The best approach for change is to bed down another pathway, and place attention on asserting that behaviour until it becomes dominant. Rather than remove the old pathway, the idea is to create a newer, more productive, and more frequently used, pathway that makes the less productive pathway irrelevant through disuse.

I had an experience of this recently. Following significant surgery I had earlier last year I have found my confidence



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Abstract

When confronted with behaviours and beliefs that impede your performance, focussing on the desired outcome can have a superior outcome over directly addressing the problem behaviour or belief.

Keywords

Behavioural change, coaching approach, inner critic, neuroscience, patterned behaviour, personal change, personal transformation

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when facilitating groups markedly diminished. The degree of nervousness prior to running a session was significantly greater than my pre-surgery experience, and after I completed a session I found my critic undermining me for the most insignificant of reasons. However, when I was actually in front of the group running the session I had almost none of those issues, finding myself comfortable and increasingly fluent in my facilitation. On a recent weekend programme, the struggle against these before and after pain-laden attacks on my psyche were particularly pronounced. Rather than fretting over the behaviours that were undermining me, I shifted my focus by firstly sharing very simply with others I trusted that I was anxious, struggling, and otherwise authentically expressing and naming my experience in the moment. This had the effect of diminishing the energy building up around the anxiety, and curbed it. I then found that my capacity within a session improved because my warm up to it was cleaner, and the post-session internal shame game also diminished. As the multi-day programme unfolded I continued this practice and found that the confidence was easier to achieve as I owned my anxiety without making a big deal of it. I consciously placed

my attention on the outcome I was seeking, a fluid and confident facilitation session. My focus and attention was very much placed on the outcome I sought rather than on changing the old pattern of anxiety, and the transition felt relatively smooth.

When you have an unproductive behaviour that is dominating you, perhaps you can identify what you would prefer to do instead, and find ways of asserting

that behaviour, rather than condemning and “changing” the old one. Some ways of supporting and enabling such change in oneself can be journalling, enlisting the support of a coach, and developing awareness of your inner mental and emotional world to determine the most opportune intervention to offer yourself.

This can be a fabulous area to explore within coaching.

For more information related to themes in this article, refer to chapter 11 (Purposeful Forward Movement) of: Harrison, S. G. (2012). [*Appreciate the Fog: Embrace Change with Power and Purpose.*](#) Auckland, New Zealand: Xlibris Corporation.

Coaching can support you create the best outcome when working with areas covered by this article.

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