

Mindful Work

Pro-active positivity

The human brain is **predisposed to notice threats**; we're naturally vigilant.

Psychological experiments (read Barbara Fredrickson) show that we are about three times more likely to notice negatives than we notice positives. We also tend to think that people who give criticism are smarter than those who give praise, and that the negative perspective is contagious (read Rick Hanson).

It's the difference between carrots and sticks; the latter seem to have far more urgency.

We have a **built in vulnerability to threats**, whether it's about speaking up at a meeting, seeing business or personal threats rather than opportunities, or dumbing down in front of charismatic managers. People identify angry faces faster than happy ones.

This is hardwired into the brain, with the left hemisphere (language and logic) being more focused on positive experiences while the right hemisphere (spatial awareness and face recognition) is more focused on negative ones. The speed at which negatives or dangers are identified and stored as simple memories, by the amygdala, is also much quicker than the way positives are noticed and stored.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentimihalyi suggests that to counteract this tendency, we must:

"learn to control our consciousness and direct our attention to activities which provide 'flow' activities which give positive feedback and strengthen our sense of purpose and achievement."

The starting point for re-programming our perceptions is mindfulness.

By **intentionally tuning-into** the signals in the body or thought patterns, we become more familiar with the sensitivities that hum away in the background.

Once we've become more familiar with this background vigilance, we can start to intentionally **shift our attention to 'nice' things**.

Like any mind training, do something a lot and it becomes a new habit. So go do it, now! And breathe more deeply as you do, so that the dopamine release (the feel-good hormone) is felt and that makes you more likely to want to experience it again. While you get used to this new habit, pair it with reducing dopamine inhibitors such as coffee, sugar and alcohol.

Exercise - positive outlook

Decide, right now, to look around the room and notice something nice. It might be the grain of the wood on the desk, the sparkle of the ring on your finger, or the flight of a bird outside. These beautiful things surround us, if only we make time to notice them.

Repeat at least 10 times a day for just a minute or two. Perhaps link this practice to other regular events, like having a drink, going to the loo, for two rings of the phone before you answer it etc.