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Contents

Please Read This First	2
<i>Terms of Use</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Disclaimer.....</i>	<i>2</i>
Contents	3
About the Author	5
Introduction.....	6
Who Said You Can’t?	7
Try a Game a Day	9
Lateral Thinking.....	10
<i>Getting More from Games</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Add Interest to Your Walks.....</i>	<i>11</i>
Water – the Wonder Fluid	12
Sleep Right.....	13
Exercise	16
<i>Exercise with Someone Else</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Start Simple and Cheap</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Don’t Try Too Hard</i>	<i>17</i>
Improve Your Social Networks	18
<i>Keep a Positive Attitude.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Fly with Eagles.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Get a Diary – Fill it with Successes.</i>	<i>19</i>
Memory Matters	20
<i>Some Memory Inhibitors.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Good Memory Tactics</i>	<i>21</i>
Maintain Your Student Status.....	22
Learn by Teaching	23
Keep Learning.....	24
Secret of Proper Practice.....	26

Effects of Net Surfing on Your Brain.....	27
Benefits of Relaxation	28
<i>Just the Facts!</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Self Talk Tips.....</i>	<i>28</i>
Be More Creative	30
Meditating for Busy People.....	31
<i>Focusing.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>If You Feel Discouraged.....</i>	<i>34</i>
Important and Useful Terms	35
Resources	36
You are On Your Way.....	37

About the Author

Drew Forster loves to challenge himself physically and mentally.

He believes that most people do not make the best of the talents and abilities which they have.

"I see many people who are coasting along, or even sliding backwards in their personal and professional lives. They often feel that their lives are 'okay' and will probably improve someday."

"But, they could be missing out on some great experiences because they are not ready to grab them or are overlooked when important decisions are made. Some may get a second chance, but others will wonder why they missed out and those chances won't come their way again."

"With people living longer, more people are at risk of dementia and other diseases in their later years. Health services are limited and costly, so we need to maintain our health so that we have options if we ever need them."

"I wrote this book to help everyone make the best of their abilities, encourage their children to develop their natural talents and self-confidence and avoid stress."

"The suggestions and tactics in my ebook will help anyone that wants to make the best of every day of their life!"

Introduction

The most important frontier which science is researching is your brain.

I wrote this ebook to help you to understand the current situation so that you can:

- ✓ Know what is really possible
- ✓ Review claims about products in this area
- ✓ Make good decisions about what you do to maintain and improve your brain power.

Most of the media coverage focuses on the risks of being affected by dementia and other related conditions. I will give some information about that so that you are better informed.

But, I am mostly focused on what we can do to improve our well-being and potential at whatever age we are now.

The situation is constantly evolving.

There are no surefire methods for becoming a genius if you aren't one already, or avoiding dementia.

The suggestions in this ebook will help you make the best of your abilities, including any which you have neglected.

Our brains have much more potential than most of us realize. Many of us were discouraged from exploring our potential creativity or other aptitudes because of limited resources or restricted opportunities during our school years.

I will help you to release and make the most of those possibilities.

Just reading the book will help you to make better decisions, save you becoming more stressed and even save you wasting money on “wonder products”.

Using those ideas and tactics which appeal to you might help you have a more exciting and enjoyable life.

Who Said You Can't?



Many people are unaware of their potential abilities and talents because they were either told that they didn't have them or were discouraged from using them early in life.

Many schools use systems which focus on providing skills and knowledge in a few selected areas which are believed to be the most useful for the children in later life.

The adults who were our mentors and role models when we were young often gave us much the same advice as they received when young.

That doesn't take account of the new opportunities and improvements available to most of us because of ongoing incredible changes in technology and social structures.

Those mentors also may influence our belief in ourselves because of their financial circumstances, life experience and accrued prejudices.

When we take their well-meant advice and instructions in, we start to limit the options we will be able to fully exploit in later years.

Those experiences will reduce our own confidence.

Most people break through the barrier when they realize that they are losing options to improve their lives and start to actively expand their opportunities.

Do you have any negative self-beliefs which you are letting block you from improving some area of your life?

Even where you failed to achieve something in the past, you have gathered more experiences and knowledge since that happened.

Maybe it's time to try again!

Each time you try to improve your results, you get some benefit even if you don't achieve full success with the project.

This is a very important message for our children.

They are pounded daily with the need to succeed all the time.

People who lose by even the smallest margin are mostly forgotten, while everyone is expected to focus on the winners.

But, if those people we overlook don't give up, there is every chance they will become successful and have long and fulfilling careers as well.

I remember a story about some actors that were always very busy playing supporting roles.

They rarely got the star treatment but were recognized by people in the industry as being reliable and skilled.

While many stars had relatively short careers and some had major problems, the actors in the story were very happy and successful in their work and private lives.

Some got star roles at times and always seemed to make good use of the opportunity.

They were successful and respected as much as the stars even though their pay was less.

Money is important, but it is not the only yardstick.

Try a Game a Day

You can help keep yourself mentally sharp by playing games or doing puzzles.

The degree of difficulty is up to you. You will benefit from even simple tests because you give your mind a break from your work and other worries of the day.

Word puzzles, from the simplest "Find-a-Word" to the hardest cryptic puzzle can give you a mental challenge.

Use a computer if you want to but there is more value in using your pen and paper some of the time at least.

You involve different parts of the brain and modes of thinking when doing things manually instead of constantly relying on your keyboard or touchpad.

The next Chapter suggests some very simple ways to get into the habit of bring out new ideas.

Lateral Thinking.



Lateral thinking is a useful exercise when applied to leisure and also our business activities.

We usually do most of our regular tasks the same way we have always done them. We know that we will get the same sort of result we always get and we know how much time and other resources we will need for it.

If we are happy with the usual outcome, we probably don't feel like trying to improve it.

But, it can be a useful exercise to review how we do something and try to work out how to improve our method. We might save time or get a better outcome.

But, the extra mental effort will also be valuable in itself. If you find a better way to handle the flood of email you get every day, you would have some extra time which may only be small each day but a significant amount each month.

It's okay to keep the tasks simple – there is worthwhile value in the mental stimulation and growing confidence in your own abilities.

You could start with something easy, maybe a game you play regularly.

Getting More from Games

We can easily get more enjoyment and mental stimulation from the games or puzzles we do if we try to develop our own versions of that type of puzzle or game.

Have you ever tried to make up new games, or variations of standard ones, for yourself?

Just pick any game or puzzle which you enjoy and try to think of variations which might give you more enjoyment. This can be very stimulating and does not require anything much except a pen and paper. You might want to also use a simple art program to create some pictures.

You might even develop something which you could sell but there would be some value for you just in the mental exercise.

Add Interest to Your Walks

Walking is a great exercise but doing it the same way each day can become less interesting.

When you go for a walk, try a different area than the one where you usually go.

Take a small pad of paper and a pen with you.

Before you start your return walk, write down what landmarks you can remember.

Check them as you make your way back and see how much you get right.

This task has some practical value in helping you to memorize the route you need to use. A friend uses this idea as a game for his young children when they travel in their car.

The children try to remember landmarks, signs and animals they see and write them down when they get to the destination. On the return trip, they tick the items which they noted correctly before.

Water – the Wonder Fluid

Water really is really important to our health.

Our level of hydration (the water available to our physical system) has a powerful effect on the ability of the various parts, especially the brain, to function properly.

The brain is claimed by some researchers to be the first organ to show negative effects when our hydration level drops significantly.

The signs of increasing dehydration may include minor but increasingly frequent memory lapses.

You should focus on drinking about six to eight glasses of actual water each day.

Some people make a serious mistake by counting the amount of water in other liquids they consume each day as part of their water intake.

Unfortunately, those things we add to water may interfere with our body's ability to actually use the water!

Fruit juices, caffeine and other liquids may lock up some of our water or cause the body to expel it more quickly through our kidneys so that we don't get any value from it.

Reducing your intake of those other liquids will help your body make best use of the water you provide for it.

Always spread the intake of water through your day.

You can cause problems for yourself by taking an excessive amount of water in a short period, such as during a run in hot weather.

Sleep Right

Research continues on the importance of sleep in maintaining our health and body functions, including short and long-term memory.

Some important results have already been announced.

In the 1980's the results of research on some patients who had severe epilepsy changed scientists' long-held theories about memory and brain relationships.

It was previously accepted as fact that memory was a function of the whole brain.

But, after doctors removed a small part of their brain in line with their usual treatment at that time for severe epilepsy, these patients lost the ability to compile new long-term memories.

That ability could not be repaired, but they were able to improve their use of other memory functions.

[This underlines a basic point about science "facts" - all of them are subject to the results of later research when better technology is available.]

Good sleeping habits will improve our general health and missed or interrupted sleep will have measurable negative effects on all of us.

The sleep needs of people at different ages vary. But, some of the common beliefs about good sleeping habits are way off the recommendations from today's research.

Babies need more than any other group.

According to many recent reports, most adults need about eight hours of sleep each night.

All children attending school may need as much as adults because of the demands of their study and other activities. They definitely need settled sleep on school nights so that they can properly absorb the information and skills they learned the previous day. It is important that they establish good sleeping patterns and a preparing for sleep routine which makes it easier for them to get the sustaining rest which they need.

Proper sleep patterns allow our bodies to make repairs and retain new memories safely, among other vital things.

It is believed that our subconscious completes the storing of new skills and information we learned the previous day while we are asleep.

If we miss or interrupt that sleep, our recall and ability to use those new skills may be lost or reduced.

We all sometimes have interruptions to our night’s sleep because of toilet visits, calls from our children or other circumstances.

These are not usually a problem but researchers advise that we get the most rest and other benefits from blocks of sleep where we can pass through complete cycles of all the stages of sleep.

If we get many interruptions, our bodies and mental processes will inevitably suffer.

If this happens to you, ask your doctor for a check-up and suggestions of ways that you might be able to improve your sleep pattern.

This is too important to just get some over-the-counter preparation which may make us sleep without ensuring that we actually rest.

Sometimes, over-the counter mixtures” may also mask some condition which your doctor would recognize and need to treat.

Here are some of the factors which you can review to help improve the quality of your current sleep pattern.

Avoid distractions in your bedroom: Keep the bedroom for sleep and sex. Put any TVs and other devices in other rooms so that you can develop a routine where you relax from your alert state to one which helps you sleep.

Avoid reading or doing any work-related tasks just before you sleep.

Keep your bedroom isolated from outside noise and bright lights.

Otherwise, your low quality rest will soon start to affect your productivity during the rest of the day.

Many people have a tradition of a snack and a drink before going to sleep. The snack will cause your digestive system more work at a very

inconvenient time. All that you consumed is likely to cause your sleep to be interrupted for at least one toilet visit during the night.

Each interruption to your sleep costs you in at least two ways:

- 1)** The sleep pattern your body was doing when you woke will stop and the benefits of it lost.
- 2)** You will lose a minimum of ten minutes from your actual sleep time; half when you were waking up and the other five minutes while your body gets back into sleep mode.

The value of “power naps” is supported by much of the research. If you have the opportunity, why not try it?

Most people find that these short sleep sessions help them become more relaxed and able to work more effectively.

But, they do not reduce the need for the usual amount of sleep which you should have each night.

The night sessions are the only ones where your system has enough time to cycle through the different levels of sleep and do any necessary repairs.

Exercise

Exercise is very important for getting the maximum from every part of our lives.

If we are out of shape, we cannot expect to get the best results from any of our activities or plans.

Some people start some sort of exercise program at least once a year. They are full of enthusiasm but the appeal drops away faster than the pounds.

Some ways to help you stick to it until you reach your goals are listed below:

Exercise with Someone Else

Having another person along can make a real difference.

Their presence and enthusiastic support will help you stay committed to turning up and trying a little more to make your goal. That’s often the main benefit people get from many expensive membership programs. So, having a friend along saves you money as well!

You can also support each other when the road gets steeper or the weather is unpleasant.

Then, you can also help each other celebrate each small goal you reach.

If you can’t get someone to fit in with your schedule, ask your dog! Many people find that having their dog with them keeps them motivated to do their daily miles. Someone who is walking with a dog is more likely to get smiles from other people to smile more and they are also more likely to start conversations.

Start Simple and Cheap

Instead of investing in new gear and a Club Membership, get under way with simple options using equipment you already have.

You can invest in special equipment and clothing when you decide which particular types of exercise are best for you to reach your goals with.

Use your bicycle or hire one if your don’t own one.

Go swimming. Get a jump rope and some small weights.

Keep your money in your pocket until you decide whether or not you need specific equipment or the discipline of professional support.

Don't Try Too Hard

Research suggests that even just three thirty minute sessions of brisk walking each week can make a difference over time.

It's not just the big goals that matter: When you have been exercising at one level for just a few weeks, your body will start to work more easily and your self-confidence will grow.

Almost anyone can do some form of exercise: If you have medical reasons which limit your options, ask your doctor or your local Government Health Office for advice about programs or other resources which would be suitable.

Where you exercise can make a difference: If you have the option, get outdoors in a park or other pleasant area. You will find it relaxing and enjoyable than trying to jog or ride through a built-up area. The absence of car exhausts will also improve your experience.

Before you start any exercise or other significant change in your routine, get a thorough check by your doctor.

Improve Your Social Networks

Depression is a major problem in itself.

There can be many reasons that people withdraw into themselves.

They may be overloaded with work or family responsibilities or slowed down because of illness. Any of these pressures may reduce and delay their desire to restart the social interaction which they previously enjoyed.

But, one of the most significant factors in avoiding depression and other problems, like poor memory, is having strong social networks.

If you join a community group, take a course to learn something you have wanted to know more about or just get more involved in activities you already do, I guarantee that you will get a boost in your level of beneficial brain activity, just from meeting and getting to know a wider variety of people.

Here are some simple ways to improve your connection with people in all areas of your life.

Keep a Positive Attitude

We all have times where we are under pressure or are disappointed because we don't get the results or appreciation we expected.

Some people cannot let those memories go. They keep thinking about them which makes them become depressed and negative in their outlook.

If we have suffered because of the actions of others, that can also be limiting our confidence and desire to take opportunities.

We must recognize that the future is not controlled just by what has happened previously.

We can learn from errors we made and expect better results in the future.

If you can either forgive or forget their actions, your mind will be better able to concentrate on what you need to do to move forward.

Fly with Eagles

Look for inspiration and support by associating with people that have the sort of attitude you admire.

Reduce your exposure to doom and gloom from the media.

Think about the sort of people you associate with each day. Are they supportive of your dreams and efforts or do they re-inforce your negative thoughts and expectations?

Misery loves company but it doesn't give you much to smile about.

Get a Diary – Fill it with Successes.

If you don't already keep a diary, start one.

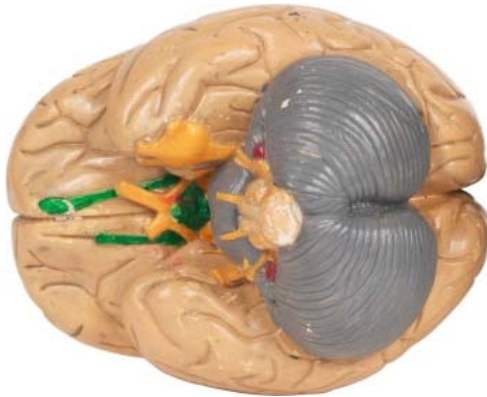
Be sure to record something positive in your life almost every day.

Over time, you will build up a store of small and larger successes which you can refer back to when you strike an obstacle in your daily life.

Many of us are held back by a common desire to dwell on our disappointments and hassles with other people.

Turning that around by thinking about our positive experiences and results acts as an antidote to negativity and a spur to achieve more so that we have more of those good feelings.

Memory Matters



One of our most valuable abilities is our memory power.

It is still the subject of much research and debate.

But, there are many ways we can improve our memory, although results can vary widely between individuals.

Some Memory Inhibitors

These causes of poor memory function will be familiar. But, the reminder may encourage you to reduce them so that you get the best results from your efforts to use your memory better.

Lack of Sleep: I've detailed some information about this in the section on sleep. The only way to get over this is to give yourself the time and proper conditions for restful, uninterrupted sleep.

The improved ability to absorb information and skills and then use what you have learned should be significant enough to prove the point.

Lack of Attention: This is one of the simplest problems to overcome. People that don't remember other people's names and other information usually did not make enough effort to get the information in the first place.

Multitasking: One thing which has caused people to have poor recall of important information is using multitasking. Multitasking was a popular and widely endorsed "fact" which encouraged people to do more than one task at the same time. They believed they could be more efficient but further study showed the results were rarely as positive as we were told. Some of the original researchers said their results were misinterpreted by others.

The basic flaw is that our brains need time to switch from a particular task to any other. If we try to do two or more at the same time, our ability to handle each is impaired to some degree and we also lose time because our brains take a small but measurable amount for each switch.

Some people are naturally better able to handle these switches, so they may seem to be actually able to multitask. But, the most common view today is that nearly everybody will get better and more consistent results by doing things one at a time.

Alcohol and other drugs: Alcohol affects our body in a number of ways, none of which improve our brain functions.

You've probably known people that said they were better speakers or socializers when they had a couple of drinks. But, they weren't, except in their own imaginations. Usually, the alcohol was a prop which they imagined relaxed them. Actually, the effects were much less positive or desirable.

But, a small amount of red wine drunk with good food and in good company gives your body some valuable anti-oxidants.

Good Memory Tactics

Breathing Exercises: These are easy to do. They will have benefits for your health, brain function and attitude. Although we all breathe a lot every day, it's easy to improve how we do it.

That will improve the rest of our lives without any downside at all.

Exercise: is a booster of your brain and other body systems. Do it regularly in manageable doses for best results.

Focus: Giving full attention to the matter at hand is vital for best results.

Brain training gets you used to focusing better.

But, there is another important factor, your brain must recognize and pay less attention to those factors which are unimportant.

Good food: This is essential. For best results, give yourself time to eat slowly and chew it well.

Maintain Your Student Status

Almost everyone assumes they know more about the pet subjects (or everything in some cases) than anyone else.

Some experts tell their students to assume that they have a good grasp of the subject to prime their self-image and hopefully make a great impression on other people.

But, that doesn't work for long if they cannot demonstrate they really do have the practical skills along with the knowledge.

That could make other people less impressed and willing to engage with them.

It can also reduce their chances to learn enough to really become an expert!

A friend had an amazingly wide knowledge and practical grasp of many subjects. Her “secret” was that she felt everyone knew something valuable which she didn't about each subject.

Instead of showing how much she knew, she listened and tried to learn from all of the people she met.

Everyone likes to have an audience and most responded well. Her attitude encouraged cooperation and everyone learned and achieved more.

She had plenty of opportunities to learn things which improved her skills and knowledge. Some of the people she connected with were very modest experts who rarely attracted attention.

She didn't hesitate to share some of her knowledge with them, but being receptive instead of always grabbing the center stage, like many of us like to do, got the connections off to a better start.

Learn by Teaching

We all have things which we are good at. That might be something we do in our business, hobby or anything else.

That can be used in a brain-stretching exercise with practical benefits for you and someone else as well.

Work out how you would teach another person to do what you learned to do.

You just need to write out your instructions as clearly as possible from memory.

If you have not done this before, you may find it surprisingly hard to set down the steps clearly enough on your first try.

Check it for any errors and make corrections if you want to.

Then, ask someone to read through, or even try out, the instructions.

If your "student" completely understands and follows all the steps, congratulate them and yourself!

You have probably dealt with people that have not clearly explained things to you at some time.

Now, you will better understand it is not as easy to do as you may have previously thought.

It's a great way to "get into someone else's shoes" for a few minutes.

Keep Learning

You can also keep your brain exercised by learning new information or skills.

Some people feel that will happen if they just surf the Internet and learn more and more information.

But, the most effective way is to look for material with a connection to your current interests or a subject which you might like to become more involved with.

To get the best from new information we get and make the best use of it, it is important to filter what we input to our brains.

Many people have become unquestioning sponges who take in whatever other people or the media offer us.

That has the danger that we are only getting other people's views on what is important. Their views of what is important may reflect genuine belief or they might really be trying to convince us about a product or a point of view they are paid to promote.

Even worse, some of that material may be wrong but we accept it because we're programmed to do it over time.

That misleads us and also wastes our time.

When you're discussing any topic with someone, give them time to make their points. You can filter it according to your own knowledge and beliefs even without any need to always contradict that person. Then, you both enjoy and learn from the discussion without needing to change either person's views.

It's far better to control what we hear and watch so that it helps us keep up to date. The amount of useful information will increase when we can give our time and attention to each item.

When someone helps you to learn something new or improves the way which you do something, be sure to thank them.

To get the greatest benefit from what you've learned, make sure that you use the new technique or knowledge a few times in the first seven days after you get the information.

Getting enough sleep will help your mind as well as your body to properly absorb and retain the information.

Another way to improve your retention of a new skill is to help someone else learn it. You reinforce your knowledge and ability while you give them the information and help them improve.

Demonstration, where possible, is always better than just telling someone how to do something.

This process will reduce the time you will need to become truly proficient.

Secret of Proper Practice

When I was learning the piano as a child, I was told to practice each piece as often as possible, so that I could become a very good player.

But, that is not the best way to approach learning any new skill.

As I continued to play the piano for my enjoyment and for friends when they visited, I always learned new music by repeated playing of the same piece.

Sometimes there was one or two spots in some pieces where I usually had trouble.

I never overcame the problems with some no matter how many times I replayed the pieces in private.

Regular practice will get you a basic knowledge. But, it will not help much if there are a couple of steps which you have more trouble with. Just repeating the whole task will make you more nervous of the difficult parts and reduce your ability to improve your performance of the whole procedure.

It won't make you a better exponent of whatever you are learning to do.

Some research now suggests that the way to overcome such difficulties may be to concentrate on doing just the section of the task which is giving you trouble several times and not just as part of the whole task.

When I started to try this, I got better results. And, it is not usually difficult to fit in the improved action when I do the whole piece.

This has apparently been widely used in sport and other areas but not publicized very much.

Effects of Net Surfing on Your Brain

Did you know that using the Internet could have a strong effect on the wiring of our brains.

This may sound alarming but there are also some important and positive things suggested by results from the tests.

This can be beneficial for some activities but the research indicates that we can lose some of our ability for deep thinking and dealing with stress!

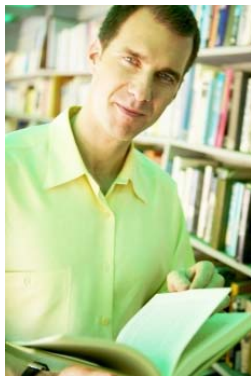
*Nicholas Carr reported that the studies suggested that some web surfers could lose some of their ability for deep thinking but, on a more positive note, some of them also became better at accepting and dealing with new information or other stimuli.

The studies suggested that this change could take just a few hours to become part of their normal patterns of behavior.

The most important and encouraging possibility suggested by the test is that plasticity of the brain is maintained through our life. That is dependent on our ability to look after ourselves and that we do not suffer any injury or impairment which reduces that ability.

Another point of great interest is that the rewiring can be changed back in a fairly short period so we can operate with about the same level of efficiency that we had before the first controlled change to our brain patterns!

Do you have some favorite activities you might use to reduce the effects of the Internet on your brain's operating patterns if you want to try this?



My favorite way is to read a good book in printed form. I believe that this provides useful mental exercise and maybe a good laugh or two as a bonus!

Focusing on the printed word is relaxing and encourages you to think as you read.

* *"The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains"*,
copyright

©2010 Nicholas Carr. *Publisher W.W. Norton and Company June 2010*

Benefits of Relaxation

When we try too hard, we seldom succeed.

But, there can be longer term and more expensive consequences for some time into the future.

Learning to remain or become relaxed in most situations can be very helpful.

These tips will help you whether you are frequently stressed or when you face some particularly important event.

Just the Facts!

Many people build up the importance and potential consequences of a future event without having all the necessary information.

Our subconscious can make almost any little blip on the horizon into a major problem if you encourage it.

The best antidote to fear is reliable information.

Your first question should be, "What is the chance of any effect on me?"

If it's unavoidable, what is the worst possible outcome?

Then, check what you can do between now and the event to deal with it.

Most problems will be downsized considerably at this point. You will have a better focus on the others and your subconscious will be primed to research it for you.

Until you've done a thorough evaluation, you will just damage any chance you have to deal with the problem because your imagination will conjure up worse possibilities.

At the same time, dwelling on the problem will make you project negativity to everyone you deal with.

That will make people less willing to spend time with you, so your options to relax and get help with the problem will be severely reduced.

A realistic perspective and a smile will help with most problems.

Self Talk Tips

We all talk to ourselves. It is built-into our systems;

Everyone has a continuous and often unnoticed conversation between their conscious mind and their subconscious.

It usually does not cause most of us any harm at all.

It becomes a problem when it interferes with our ability to notice and react to what is happening around us.

It will also make us put negative statements and worries into our subconscious.

The subconscious controls the input of that information and opinion into the vast storage area.

It does not filter the information.

Most importantly, it uses the input to decide what instructions it sends to the various systems that it controls throughout our body.

This means we can be limited in our ability to improve and use our skills and talents if we tell our subconscious that we have limitations which don't reflect the real situation.

This may be one factor why some people can do better when they are under the influence of hypnosis or other factors than what they are able to do in daily life.

You can improve the results you get in many areas if you can improve the input you put into your subconscious.

Your subconscious accepts whatever it gets.

Tell it you can jump higher or be more confident and it will send those signals to the relevant systems.

Of course, you must be careful to match your statements to your actual capacity at that time.

But, you can improve your results by presenting your subconscious with statements about your ability to achieve better results while you are actively practising those skills.

Be More Creative

Becoming more creative does not always require you to enroll in a special course.

You probably have much more creativity than you use.

A lot of people had their willingness to explore those qualities blocked by the reaction of their parents, school system or other authority figures that influenced their early years.

These people often feel their natural interest in using some latent talent bubbling up but they block it because they no longer have any confidence in their ability.

If you want to start painting or writing or just producing better ideas to use in your business, start by giving yourself permission to do it.

Finding time to try new ideas is usually just a matter of reducing the time we give to activities like watching canned TV programs and using that time to experiment.

Unlike some people, I believe that using computers is not always bad for your personal creativity.

You can find many programs, paid or free, which can help you get started in some craft or skill.

Then, you can do some of those ideas manually with paper and pen when you have a little knowledge of the basics.

Another way is to look at what your young children are taught - Their text books are useful for adults who want to learn about something new.

They have plain language and are always focused on keeping everything simple and setting out the way to success in very simple steps.

Another way to learn as children do is to watch some of the information programs provided for them. Some are dull and others can be hard to follow because they contain too many special effects that get in the way of the instruction. But, there are many good ones out there, too.

The time spent finding the right materials will not be wasted because you will learn a lot about good and poor ways to present information which you can even use with adults.

Meditating for Busy People

There is wide agreement that we learn more and are more productive when we learn to relax.

One of my favorite ways to relax is by using a simple form of meditation. Meditation is widely accepted as a way to reduce stress, focus better and help our bodies stay well.

I cannot guarantee how good the results you will get from using meditation will be.

It depends on your own circumstances and receptiveness to the idea of achieving better outcomes by relaxing rather than striving harder as we do in most areas of our lives.

You want about forty minutes for your first thirty minute session, including set-up time and for getting back into your regular routine afterwards.

Arrange a time when you can have some privacy, fairly loose clothing, a mat (so you aren't annoyed by fleeting aches in your legs) and a timer.

Music is optional but so many people I know like some gentle music, I suggest you try it a couple of times at least.

Arrange that someone else will handle any interruptions from visitors, phones or anything else.

You may find it helps to do some gentle stretches before you settle in your meditation position. These will get some extra oxygen into your lungs and loosen any mental or physical stiffness which has been caused by the stressors of your activities before your session.

Do not over-do any exercise. Even the gentle stretches can cause damage or at least discomfort if your body is not in reasonable condition.

Settle your breathing. Make sure that you take each breath deep into your lungs without putting pressure on yourself.

You have many options for the position you use for your sessions. You can sit or lay down flat and have your eyes shut or open.

Unless you feel intense discomfort with a particular set-up, give each a few sessions for your body to become comfortable with it.

Focusing

You also can try different kinds of focus with your sessions. Select whatever type you like best from the next few paragraphs and get started.

Commit yourself to using that type of focus for at least a week or two – even a month, before trying another type.

Meditation is a journey, not a race. There is no point where you have got everything that meditation can give you. Pushing yourself could mean that you will take longer to get the benefits you want.

The first type which I tried was breath focus, where I followed my breath from my nose to my lungs and then all the way back out again.

I feel that was a good choice because it gave me something I could focus on which reduced the effect of any distractions around me when I was just starting to meditate.

It also helped me to become aware of problems with my posture and shallow breathing, practicing breath exercises so that I drew air deeper into my body. Also, making changes to the way I stood and sat improved my physical well-being.

Start your session by feeling your breath flowing in through your nose and slowly descending deep into your lungs. Then, imagine it going up again and taking the waste products out through your mouth and away.

If you rest your open hands on your belly, you may find that you are only drawing the air into the chest area, like I was. Doing some deep slow breathing until you can feel your belly rise when the air is drawn right down will get more oxygen into your system from every breath you take.

Some people find it difficult to imagine this journey of their breath into and then out of their body. It may help you to think of it as drawing a colored light instead of the invisible air. "See" the light travel through you nose, throat and down to your lungs.

Rest for a couple of seconds when it has reached the lowest point.

Then, change it to a grey or black cloud that you gently push back up and out of your body.

I have also used another pattern which I call “body focus”.

When you are in the position you chose for your session, start by focusing on your toes and silently tell them to relax.

When you feel them relaxed, just move your focus up to each part of your body in turn and relax it.

Then, move your focus up again.

You can also use an object as your point of focus when meditating. This might be anything small like a dish of water, a crystal or a point on the wall in front of you.

Some people use a sound such as, “Om” or anything else which you repeat slowly and steadily through your session.

Some people use their sessions to focus on a question which relates to their spiritual beliefs.

Meditation is also possible where you don’t focus on anything in particular but let your mind gently absorb the effects of your surroundings.

I think this may be more difficult than the other kinds I’ve described when you are just starting your meditation sessions. It’s easier for inexperienced people to have a point of focus.

But, people that use it on a regular basis believe that it helps a lot in strengthening their mental focus and dealing with the stressors and interactions of daily life.

Many people can’t avoid thinking about how much longer their session will take.

To reduce this source of distraction, use a silent electric timer set for the length of your session. Timer with an audible tick may be a source of distraction for you in your early sessions.

Keep the face of your timer turned away from you during each of your meditation sessions. Otherwise, the temptation to check how long has elapsed will be distracting and hard to resist in your early sessions.

Set it to buzz when your time is done.

Your progress will be better if you arrange two sessions of equal length each day.

Don't try sessions of more than twenty minutes each to start because it will be hard to complete them.

When you have had a little experience with meditation, you should be able to get some benefit from a session of only ten minutes.

You can try that any day when you have been under any kind of pressure and have somewhere that you can get away from everyone for just that long.

Don't dwell on your impressions of each session. In the early stages, you will lack enough experience to judge the quality of the session.

If you form a negative view of your ability or possible lack of progress, you will start to feel discouraged.

Just be a little patient.

You should notice a difference in your level of relaxation within a few weeks. Those closest to you may actually notice and comment on it even sooner.

If your partner is willing to do a few sessions with you, that can help you both to progress more quickly.

If You Feel Discouraged.

Some people reach a point where the two sessions a day pattern starts to feel too much because there are many other demands on their time.

This is something which can happen with anything that requires commitment, of course.

But, it usually indicates that you are near to a higher level of accomplishment.

Sticking with your sessions for another couple of weeks will probably find you feeling much more aware of the benefits which have come from your effort and application.

I think of the time and effort to meditate as an investment which doesn't pay off right away but will help me a lot over time.

If I give up, I could lose a lot of potential future benefit.

Important and Useful Terms

Brain Training: methods which are believed to maintain and possibly improve a person’s cognitive function.

Fluid Intelligence: The way we compare a person’s ability to handle new problems and deal with unfamiliar situations when we cannot just gather information to find a solution.

Neurogenesis: the creation of neurons. The level of this activity is used as a measure of the level of brain activity.

Workplace Memory: Acquired knowledge and manual patterns which help us to deal with tasks we have handled before.

Resources

Support for Benefits of Meditation:

This report is about research which suggests that Mindfulness practise may encourage improvements in regional brain grey matter density.

[http://www.psyn-journal.com/article/S0925-4927\(10\)00288-X/abstract](http://www.psyn-journal.com/article/S0925-4927(10)00288-X/abstract)

From "Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging, Volume 191, Issue 1 , Pages 36-43, 30 January 2011

You are On Your Way

I hope that you have found some techniques and tips in my book which you are anxious to start using or, maybe, have already started to get some benefits from.

Some things will require more patience and commitment before you will see or feel any significant benefit.

I have tried to keep theory and opinion to a minimum. Everything that is here is based on experience and research where people have benefited from using the techniques.

But, you have to choose those which best suit your particular needs and circumstances.

Always ask your doctor before beginning any new form of exercise or change in your diet, especially where over-the counter preparations are involved.

A positive attitude helps in any endeavor and attracts other positive people to you.

The more you try, the luckier you get!

Lewis Forster

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