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Learn To Lean (In).

The mind is the most powerful, complex computational system on earth. In today's lifestyles of SMART technologies and advanced algorithms, just like Google and Facebook can somehow take the latest topic, product, or service you've researched online and magically find matching advertisements to post on your social media feed within minutes, so too are our minds quickly gathering, calculating, and interpreting at speeds we cannot fathom.

At less than 2% of your total body weight, your mind literally shapes the world you live in. It interprets your wants, your needs, what's happening around you and in you, and produces signals when any of these processes are satisfied, accepted, dismissed, or rejected. It rehearses the past and even seemingly predicts the future. No need to explain the neuroscience behind this. It matters not that the mind is made up of 52 sections with trillions of transmitters and receptors. The great thing about our minds is that we do not necessarily have to know how something works to experience it working.

One of the most delicate points I've experienced in my 10 years as an autonomously Licensed Professional Counselor is how fast this complex computational system is operating. It is said that the human mind processes a signal at a speed of roughly 100 miles per second. Consider this for a moment, the international space station orbits the Earth 15 times a day at 17,000 mph. Last month, SpaceX sent the heaviest, most powerful rocket of all time into space and it didn't even touch its potential top speed of nearly 39,000 mph under that payload. Yet, there is a small, soft tissue inside your skull weighing roughly 3 pounds, that holds less than two-thirds of a cup of blood, and consists of 75% water that transmits information at 360,000 mph.

So how do you change a thought traveling at hundreds of thousand of miles per hour? Just as water travels along the path of least resistance, so too does our mind retrieve, process, and flow in a similar fashion. So, the answer? Simply put, my bias is you cannot stop it. Psychotherapy is the use of a psychological method to create a desired outcome and/or overcome problems in desired ways. There are several strategies and theoretical orientations that therapists use to facilitate the personal, ongoing, developmental change desired. When it comes to stopping something with that kind of velocity, well, you may never stop the thought. You can, however, make room for it and lean in.

We live in such a fast-paced, daily grind, push forward kind of world with demanding expectations, responsibilities, addictions, wants, needs, relationships, situations, and so on. While talking with a licensed mental health professional can certainly give you the space to safely acknowledge, express, and learn new ways to process uncomfortable thoughts and feelings as opposed to pushing away from them, psychological change (that is, the direction in which your thoughts lead to action) occurs by changing the manner in which you relate to the experience. It is an attention as much as it is an intention.

How you choose to identify and relate to unwanted thoughts and feelings is key. The fantasy of living a worry-free, totally satisfied, positively-controlled kind of life is something of a fantasy developed in the Western world and fueled with the advent of new marketing strategies implemented to amplify customer purchasing power shortly after World War II. Just look at how commercials changed from

advertising the practicality of a product to highlighting how our lives would become “easier” with that product. Western philosophy, and even some religious perspectives, attempt to eliminate the attention of what some call suffering.

Suffering is a universal experience and the process of calculating this suffering is happening, again, at ridiculous speeds. You may trace suffering back to an origin or you may not. Regardless, how you practice relating to unwanted thoughts and feelings is a personal discovery of both attention and intention. There is no one size fits all approach. Even manuals depend on how you personally relate to the instruction. Phrases like “one day at a time,” “clean your own side of the street,” “forgive and forget” are all micro attempts at learning new ways to relate and produce a desired outcome. How you produce that outcome depends entirely on paying attention to your “processing” and intentionally “programming” your response.

- Relate to criticism and faultfinding with seeking first to understand and compassion.
- Relate to confusion with mindfulness and curiosity.
- Relate to defensiveness and dishonesty with openness and humility.
- Relate to yelling and screaming with eye contact and soft-spoken words.
- Relate to chaos and the unexpected with support and encouragement.
- Relate to negativity and privilege with gratitude and appreciation.
- Relate to reactivity with intentional pause.

We may not have the power to change the speed of the immediate but we all have the power to change the direction of and relationship with our experiences. By denying or pushing away from the uncomfortable we bind up and hold captive the very outcomes of acceptance, encouragement, and connection that we seek throughout our human existence. If you have trouble finding new ways to relate to people, places, and circumstances, find new ways to relate to those thoughts and feelings. Lean in, give attention, and produce intention. Quickly, your mind is calculating.

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