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The Move to Think Clearly

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Ever feel stuck in your thinking? Sometimes we develop neurological road blocks which prevent us from easily communicating with all areas of the brain. Instead of clarity, we have trouble remembering, putting things together, understanding even the simplest of things such as a person's name or where we left our papers or how we clearly communicate the agenda. Does this sound familiar?

On the other hand, we all have days when our thinking is very sharp! We easily and precisely express our thoughts, we are spontaneous and creative, and we feel infallible. These days are golden and we are certainly in touch with our potentials. Everything we do falls easily into place. Don't we often wish every day was like this?

Neurologically, our mind and brain and body are communicating very differently on these different days.

Unfortunately some days are not so golden. In fact, some are down right gray. We stumble with our words and expressions, our creativity is blocked, and we feel crabby or depressed. Everything is a struggle and things just seems to fall apart.

Highways of the Brain

Neurologically, our mind, brain and body are communicating very differently on these different days. On golden days, our neurological pathways are much faster and direct. This brings clarity to our mind and permits endless connections and

travel possibilities through the nerve networks in split second timing.

Physically, the reptilian brain maintains balance in biological and physical functions. Blood pressure is normal, food digests well, and breathing is even. Our internal organs function like clockwork.

Emotionally, the limbic system (that part of the brain which handles our emotions) is at ease. There is no danger of a fight or flight alarm reaction or the withdrawal of the possum response. We feel balanced and alert, and we welcome challenge. Attention seems effortless and we remember things easily. We're at peace with ourselves and others and we feel compassionate toward our family and society.

During this time, the neocortex (the brain location of the intellectual and creative faculties) communicates easily between the two hemispheres, clearly receiving visual, auditory and kinesthetic information. All of this allows us to pay attention to details while not losing sight of the big picture. We feel creative and intuitive, and we express and articulate thoughts very logically. Communication flows freely between all parts of the brain. If we could drive down those neuronal pathways, it would be like driving on a smooth, high-speed highway, a modern autobahn.

On the other hand, "gray day" neurological pathways are more like bumpy, unpaved roads, full of muddy potholes and bridges that are washed out. Confusion reigns as we run into road repairs and bottlenecks. Instead of a direct route, we are forced into

detours. We struggle with finding our way and we miss connections and interchanges. Travel through the connections between the different parts of our brain becomes slow and torturous.

Feeling the Difference

While this is just an analogy, you can easily see for yourself how different your body and brain respond in different situations. Try the following exercise. Read through it first, then allow yourself to experience it fully.

First, picture yourself having a "golden day," one of those days when everything is easy and effortless; or think of a specific activity that's easy and fun for you to do. Close your eyes and really get into the day or the activity, reliving the experience at this moment.

Like super highways, neurological connections that are maintained properly serve us well.

Now mentally scan your body beginning with the feet. Don't judge or analyze, whatever you notice is okay. Be aware of any tension or bracing in your muscles and any feelings you have. Notice whether your feet are tense or relaxed. Move up through your calves, thighs, hips and seat. How's your lower back? Tummy? Chest and upper back? Notice how your shoulders, arms, hands and fingers feel. How about your neck, your jaw, face and head? How do you feel

emotionally? Take as complete a picture of yourself as you can, being very aware of how you feel during a golden day.

The good news is recent scientific studies have linked particular movement activities which can act as road repair and road construction for the nervous system.

Now picture one of those days when nothing seems to go right and everything seems to take extra effort, or an activity you do that always seems to be a struggle. Relive this experience as intensely and clearly as you can. Do the same body and emotional scan with this gray day in mind. How does your body and mind react to the gray day?

After finishing the scan, take a few minutes to contrast this gray day with the golden day experience. Identify the differences between how your body feels on the golden day and how it feels on a gray day. Now picture that "golden day" again. Notice how the body and mind begin to shift in how they feel and process information.

Taking Charge

Like super highways, neurological connections that are maintained properly serve us well. But those bumpy dirt roads, bottlenecks and detours, the neurological connections of gray days, do not.

According to Carla Hannaford in *Smart Moves*, when we are under stress a survival response is orchestrated by the brain stem. Adrenaline is released into our systems. Blood flow is increased to the heart, lungs and large muscles- preparing us to fight or flee. Our senses become hyper-sensitive (so we know where danger lies). Our capacity to selectively focus and control our thinking and memory is greatly lowered. Muscles in the lower back, neck and spine contract (or lock) and we have a decrease in cerebral spinal fluid around the brain.

All of this inhibits our ability to function effectively and capably. After a while these bumpy roads and detours become a habit. Instead of peak performance we get stuck in gridlock.

Or, as Phil Nuernberger in *Strong and Fearless: The Quest for Personal Power* points out, when we withdraw from life and become depressed, we de-energize our system, and everything becomes more difficult. This is called a Possum Response. Now our connections are slowed, challenges become overwhelming, and we can't seem to focus. Instead of over-energized, we become under-energized, and we feel lethargic and uninvolved. Our internal systems are inhibited and we simply don't have the physical and emotional support we need to accept the challenges we face.

By making the right moves, we can create a super highway in our nervous system and make the work of our mind much easier.

The good news is recent scientific studies have linked particular movement activities which can act as road repair and road construction for the nervous system. Hannaford reports that coordinated movements appear to stimulate the production of neurotrophins, the natural substances which promote growth of nerve cells and increase the number of neural connections. Movements activates myelination, a fatty layer which insulates nerve fibers and allows for faster nerve transmission. It also protects against damage and dissolution. In essence, these movements stimulate and help establish healthy and efficient pathways. They help re-balance and re-energize the system.

In other words, we don't have to settle for gray days. There are a number of things we can do to help ourselves. We have the power to determine whether or not we travel on a neurological autobahn, or we bump, grind and drag down poorly maintained neurological back roads. By making the right moves, we can create a super highway in our nervous system and make the work of our mind much easier.

Whether its a shut-down in the limbic system (that part of your brain which handles emotions) or an extended detour to the frontal lobes (thoughtfulness and planning), we are all in need of some neurological repaving. Thanks to the pioneering work of Paul Dennison Ph.D., founder of Brain Gym and the Educational Kinesiology Foundation, there are very specific movement activities which stimulate and enhance our gray matter. If you want to think more clearly, pay closer attention to details, decrease stress and have a more positive attitude to meet the challenge of your work day, there are simple exercises to enhance neurological communication. It is simply a matter of skill.

Deborah Nuernberger, MSED, is a certified Brain Gym educational kinesiologist and educator. She trains executives as well as children in enhanced learning skills for high performance. She is an integral part of the Critical Action Training® (C.A.T.) program of Strategic Intelligence Skills.

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