

## 12 Simple Ways to Change Your State

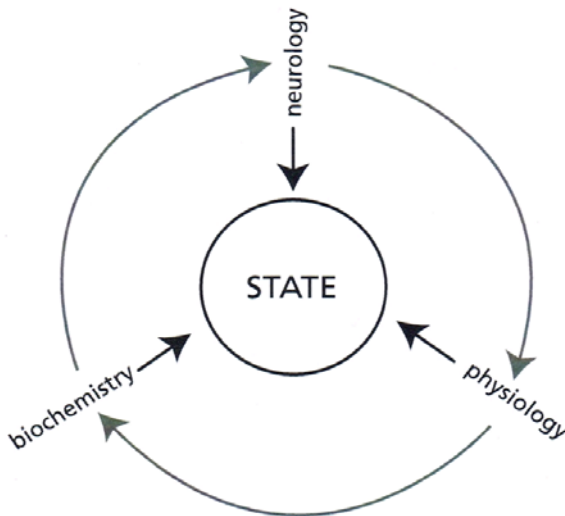
**Robert Holmes, Th.D., PCC**

*"We are not offering a treatment plan or a therapy,  
We are offering options, choice and the possibility of planning a different future"*

**Dr. Ian Snape, on the Nature of Coaching**

In today's wellness focussed environment we see more working together between medical doctors, psychologists and life coaches. And that's great. I have a client, let's call him Paul, who has been clinically diagnosed with three separate and fairly serious mental disorders. He suffers from long bouts of euphoria followed by long bouts of depression, an inability to connect with his emotions and low grade social anxiety. Paul is exactly the sort of client a life coach can help, especially if they have a working knowledge of neuroscience.

A person's state affects every other part of their experience of life, and every state can be influenced, changed or affected. We move naturally from elation to depression and back again. There are three main inputs making up a person's state: physiology, biochemistry and neurology. We have choice, freedom and the possibility of planning a different future by affecting change in these three elements in the diagram below (copyright The Coaching Space 2014):



- *Physiology* looks at our breathing, stance, dress and movement.
- *Biochemistry* looks at what cocktail of chemicals are running around the blood stream, the way food affects mood, disease and medication.
- *Neurology* looks at beliefs, perceptions, neuroplasticity and the unconscious mind.

Paul's rather serious mental health conditions are crippling his relationships, have damaged his finances and affected his world. He can work on 12 separate areas to positively change his state and alter his experience of life radically. This is not a 12 step program, but rather an account of some of the suggestions I made to Paul about influencing his state hour by hour and day by day. Let's go through them briefly one by one.

## **Physiology**

### *1. Breathe deep*

We started Paul with some deep breathing exercises. It relaxes the autonomic nervous system (ANS), bringing the parasympathetic (the brake) and sympathetic (the accelerator) into concert with each other. Deep breathing also relaxes the enteric nervous system (ENS) via deep vagal stimulation which assists digestion.

### *2. Stand straight*

This is an experiment I had Paul try in a long straight hall way. I invited him to shuffle down it, slightly hunched over, looking down like an old person. Then at the end, he turned around, stood upright, lifted his head and walked back with authority. Outward change affects inward experience dramatically.

### *3. Dress for success*

Just as smiling makes us happy and when we are happy we smile, dress can change our mood for the better. Paul was going for a job interview and dressing snappy gave him more confidence!

### *4. Get moving*

I suggested Paul take a walk every day. According to Dr John Arden (author of the Brain Bible) doing 30 minutes of moderate exercise a day has a more positive effect on depression than all of the anti-depressants on the market. It releases endorphins, which give a natural high.

## **Biochemistry**

### *5. Load up on neuropeptides*

We then looked at Paul's diet. Foods are loaded with a cornucopia of the precursors of emotion – called neuropeptides. For example, Chocolate (anandamide), coffee (caffeine) and eggs (choline) all lift mood. Simple carbohydrates (cookies, candy, cake) take mood down.

### *6. Element deficiency*

Depression and pessimism can be associated with low levels of Omega-3s (found in fish) and iron deficiency (iron rich foods include red meat and beans). Lack of thiamine has been linked to introversion, anxiety, fatigue and poor mood. Paul decided it was a good idea to get more cereal, grains and cauliflower into his diet!

### *7. Disease*

The presence of yeast or an abundance of the wrong gut flora (bacteria) affect mood and state negatively. These can be dealt with using probiotics and a balanced diet. Disease can debilitate, cause fatigue and alter mood and perception. Doctors can prescribe antibiotics and other medications to treat disease. Paul scheduled a visit to his local GP for a full health check.

### *8. Medications*

I also suggested that Paul review all his medications with his Doctor. Even something as simple as ibuprofen for headaches (originally designed for swelling) can affect mood when taken over the long term. Its side effects include nervousness, irritability, annoyance, anger and depression.

## **Neurology**

### *9. Beliefs*

What a person believes radically affects their experience of life. According to Dr. Philip Zimbardo our view of time radically affects how we live and experience life. We looked at whether Paul was future-oriented – always waiting for his chance to come, past-orientated – living in the past, present-hedonistic – enjoying the now or present-fatalistic – simply putting up with what he has now.

### *10. Perceptions*

We played with ways of altering Paul's perceptions of his experience. You can try this too sometime. When you are speaking on the phone, see how slouching or standing affect your tone and mood, your sense of authority or ability to cut the call off when you are ready. Next time someone is going on and on at you over the phone, try turning it sideways, away from your ear, and simply let the words flow past you – not affecting you. You could also try simply standing up when you want the conversation to stop (as though you are getting ready to leave).

### *11. Neuroplasticity*

Our minds are not fixed but have infinite capacity to adjust, amend, learn and change. But our brains do tend to hardwire circuits that are used a lot. Neurons that fire together wire together, so to help Paul change his state and mood, we explored some strategies for thinking differently about things so he could wire in some new circuits.

### *12. The unconscious mind*

As we grow, we all find ways to cope with life. Children throw temper tantrums, burst into tears or storm away to get what they want. Many of these behavioural response patterns become part of an unconscious way of dealing with things. Paul, like many adults, had given scarce consideration to these old, learned programs – ways of dealing with reality. It was time for a mental upgrade, and some new patterns for dealing with life.

As mentioned at the start, these are just some examples of ways to use physiology, biochemistry and neurology to manage state. It is not a 12 step program. I encourage you to explore the ideas for yourself. Try them out, see what works for you and share what you learn.