

# Using Nervous System Science to Help Coaching Clients Locate Creative Energy Reserves

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We used to picture that our nervous systems created one continuum of energy within our bodies, ranging from highly active states to sluggishly passive states. New science helps us see that we actually have two different types of nervous system functioning—one for when we feel safe and another for when we face life-threatening danger.

## *Renaissance Energy*

Looking back in time, we can recognize the creativity that blossomed during the Renaissance period in Europe when people sensed safety again following the bubonic plague. The return to safety after a time of great danger creates such a sense of relief that we might picture a *renaissance* period as an “up time” and a *plague* period as a “down time.” But looking more closely, we begin to recognize that both times had their own unique versions of ups and downs.

In a *renaissance* period, we feel safe to fail. We feel free to invite inspiration, to experiment and to have many of our experiments fail as a natural part of the path of discovery. We probably do not like the disappointment that accompanies failure, but we sense that learning to move through disappointment has value.

*Plague* times bring rising and falling feelings too, but the rises and falls have a very different quality than the ups and downs in a *renaissance* period. A time of *plagues* brings huge swings between furious efforts to force solutions and a foggy kind of robotic survival.

## Unhealthy Growth?

Because we experience *renaissance* times as good times and *plague* times as bad times, we can focus on the growth that is possible during the *renaissance* times and imagine constant growth as good. We begin to believe that constant growth is a sign of health when it is not. In the body, constant growth is cancer. What is good about *renaissance* times is the sense of freedom to have growth and decline. In *renaissance* times, we feel freedom to both succeed and fail.

As science helps us have a more accurate picture of nervous system functioning, we can encourage clients out of *plague* mentality and into *renaissance* mentality by offering assurance that failure is an important step toward discovery. Inventors fail many times on their path to creating products and services.

Frantic effort to force constant growth breeds fear of failure—*plague* mentality. Desperately groping for solutions elicits nervous system functioning that exists in our bodies for times when we are trapped by a predator. When facing predators, we first shoot into fight-or-flight response. Fight/flight offers short-term superhuman ability, but that energy is not sustainable. When we are not able to create solutions by desperate fighting or fleeing, we shut down bodily functioning. We move into dissociative states resulting in a lack of presence.

## New Scientific Understanding

Our nervous systems do not offer a midlevel functioning between fight/flight and shutdown. If we are facing a predator, we want to bounce back and forth between short-term fight-to-the-death motivation and a hopeless-feeling lack of motivation. We want to have superhuman bursts of fighting-fleeing attempts and the kind of lack of presence that could make a predator lose interest.

However, short-term hyperfunctioning is only worth the resulting depletion of energy reserves in dire circumstances. Fight/flight often results in the body's shutting down to create a lack of presence that makes death less painful when it finally comes. Neither of these states are a sustainable way to live—only a way to survive and eventually die.

## Creativity Coaching

Because science helps us have a more accurate picture of our nervous system functioning, we can now encourage clients out of *plague* mentality and into *renaissance* mentality. Creativity energy builds when we use the nervous system functioning that exists in our bodies for times when we sense safety—times when we know predators are out there somewhere in the forest, but those predators are not infringing on our habitat presently.

Coaches can invite nervous system functioning that makes space for creativity by:

- Educating clients about the two different types of ups and downs—one for when we sense safety and the other for when we face life-threatening danger
- Offering assurance that while failure brings a kind of loss, failure does not equal death
- reminding clients that there is great value in letting go of some ideas in favor of other ideas
- Inviting expression of feelings of disappointment, regrouping, and getting back to the drawing board, as they say with a kind of playful enlightenment that makes space for creativity

In *plague* mentality, the brain shuts down. We cannot sort through ideas to determine the next steps on the inventive path. As we help clients sense that failure is not life-threatening, we invite *renaissance* mentality, opening space for the play that births creation.

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