

# BRINGING EMOTIONAL MASTERY INTO EVERYDAY LIFE

By

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# BEING WHAT YOU WANT TO SEE

## Bringing Emotional Mastery into Daily Life

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*Jennifer Day, St Petersburg,  
Florida, 2007*

# BEING WHAT YOU WANT TO SEE

*“Be the change you want to see in the world”*

Mahatma Gandhi

~

*‘The real measure of spiritual development,  
lies in how a person manages disturbing emotions.’*

Dalai Lama, 2000

*PART 1*

*“Be What You Want to See”*

EMOTIONAL MASTERY ~  
CONDUCTING LIFE WITH CARE & INTELLIGENCE

## INTRODUCTION

*I felt my blood boiling. How dare my mother say I was lying?! I knew what I had seen! If my brother had said he had seen it, my mother would never accuse him of lying! Why didn't she trust me? Why was she always telling me I was wrong? It made me so angry I could scream – and at the very next moment I did. I screamed at the top of my voice, "You cow!" as I slammed the door in my mother's face with all the force my hand could muster.*

*The sound of the breaking glass was like a whip cracking – short and sharp. I found myself looking at my own arm in the center of the door where the pane of glass had been, my mother's shocked face staring at me from inches beyond my hand. Blood began trickling onto the floor, and a stinging sensation spread up my arm like a glove.*

*"Now look what you've done!" my mother exclaimed, collapsing into a chair. "You're completely mad!"*

*I felt suddenly numb – and very, very alone.*

Many of us have had experiences when our emotions seem to come out of left field and completely take over, making us act in ways that are, at best, inappropriate and at worst abusive or even dangerous. In effect we become slaves to our emotions, which become relentless masters controlling our thoughts and our actions and even our health. When emotions such as anger, frustration, jealousy, abandonment, sadness, loss, disappointment or other emotions 'take over', we feel out of control and inevitably, in retrospect, regretful. After it is all over we desperately wish we could have the chance to go through the experience again but to handle it very differently – that we could manage our emotions in such a way that we feel good about ourselves afterwards, instead of uncomfortable, stupid, shameful or embarrassed. In fact, if we could all master our emotions better and express them appropriately without causing harm or regret, we would probably be in a lot better shape than we currently are – personally, in relationships, as parents, families, communities and globally.

When I had this realization, many years ago, it started me on a long, extensive and often complicated personal and professional journey in search of effective emotional mastery; *long* because although there are hundreds of personal development techniques in the world, not many of them offer the accessible information and practical tools I was looking for; *extensive* because I did not want to leave a stone unturned and so studied every alternative approach to emotional mastery I came across; and *complicated* because at the time, the information that made sense to me was either not validated by science (as yet) or for some other reason not accepted by academia, so I found myself in ‘cutting edge land’, learning about, processing, combining and pioneering tools and methodologies that were being taught and used in sometimes somewhat unconventional settings. These tools and concepts have now, thankfully, been studied enough and have produced sufficient significant positive results that they are no longer considered ‘woo woo’! Personally, I have been fortunate enough to participate in or witness a number of these validating studies, but my most convincing argument for the power of emotional mastery (as outlined in this book) is not any scientific study at all but my own human experiences; my experiences of the enormity of changes and indeed transcendence that I and my many hundred clients have experienced and seen in our lives. My greatest hope is that this book will help you experience such transformation too.

*Jennifer Day*

## CHAPTER 1

### *Emotional Mastery ~ The Key*

*“Anyone can become angry – that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way – this is not easy.” Aristotle*

Emotional mastery is, in a nutshell, the capacity to differentiate healthy from unhealthy emotions - emotions that serve us from emotions that don't - and to appropriately express and self-regulate ones emotions in ways that are healthy and that do serve us. It is an innate ability we all are capable of developing, an ability that when developed can help us draw on our emotions for our own and others' benefit rather than allowing our emotions to control us and lead us to make often regrettable choices. When emotional mastery is applied in everyday life, we have the sense of being able to manage our thoughts and emotions during stressful times rather than being a victim of them; we have the sense of being in charge of our life path. This is something most people I know would like to achieve! It is one of the primary motivations behind the ever-increasing drive towards personal growth and lifestyle improvement.

Emotional mastery has been considered a virtue since Aristotle's time. There is even an ancient Greek word for it; *sophrosyne* which loosely translated means “care and intelligence in conducting one's life”. However, as Aristotle pointed out, this is not necessarily easy! Frustration, irritation, annoyance, disappointment, anger, and other distressing emotions that get out of control are usually expressed in verbal outbursts (that we tend to regret) or even in physical lashings-out, that later leave us feeling shame and guilt. Anxiety, insecurity and worry can result in blundering performances at best, and emotions such as resentment, insecurity, inferiority or jealousy can give us thoughts and often actions, that don't even feel like they belong to us! On the other hand, when we attempt to achieve the emotional mastery we want, we invariably end up controlling our emotions to the point of immobilization. Without any channel of expression our emotions become constricted, ‘stuffed’ in our bodies, causing stress, depression, tension, and often resulting in illness. Either of these methods for ‘handling’ our emotions affects the brain in ways that lower

our abilities to think clearly or creatively, and neither of them results in true *applied* emotional mastery – the care and intelligence in conducting our lives that we really want.

*Most people viewed Mike as highly successful; he was CEO of his own business and his yearly pay amounted to what most people take home in a decade. He lived in a large handsome home on two sprawling acres with his beautiful wife and their three gifted children, ten minutes drive, (in his spanking new Ferrari), from his office. Mike was tall, attractive, and in good physical condition from his twice weekly swims and his daily trip to the gym. He loved music, especially the blues, was an avid meditator, and although not a keen reader, would skim through and discuss the latest self-help books with his friends on a regular basis. Close to perfect though his life seemed to others, Mike was frequently stressed, angry and unpleasant to be around.*

*Although he dearly loved his wife Clare, Mike experienced an inexplicable and growing irritation with her and felt compelled to criticize her every move. He criticized her the moment he noticed she had put on a pound or two; he criticized her spending and the time she put into decorating their home; he criticized the way she made smoothies in the morning, the time she took to manage the house during the day, and the way she dressed in the evening. Then he berated her for ‘never smiling anymore’. But it wasn’t just his wife he was annoyed with; at work he also criticized several of his managers relentlessly, and showed increasing impatience with his personal assistant and others in his office. He just couldn’t help himself. Only his children did not get the brunt of his stressed state, although he had noticed that the youngest son, Joshua, avoided him at all costs, as if he experienced his anger in the ethers!*

*One day while flipping through one of his self-help books Mike came across a Stress Questionnaire he decided to complete. In his response to the question ‘What percentage of your time do you feel stressed?’ he replied 80%. When requested to ‘Name the emotions you feel when in stress’ he responded with two words, ‘Numb’ and ‘Crazed’. The final question ‘Do you feel you are in control of your emotions?’ he responded with a resounding ‘No’.*

So how do we learn to better handle stress and our emotions? How do we cease being at the mercy of our emotions and learn to regulate them enough so that we behave and express ourselves in a way that we can feel good about, physically, mentally and otherwise?

Although popular, counting to ten is not known to be the most effective tool in terms of achieving any permanent change, and techniques that we learn by role-playing when we're *not* in an emotive state tend to make themselves absent in our memory bank when we *are*! Reading books *about* emotions, or going to classes about *concepts* of managing moods and emotions don't necessarily do much good either. All these things are attempting to address emotional issues cognitively, through the use of the intellect – rather like addressing an English speaking person in Norwegian, trying to put out a fire in the basement by pouring water on the attic floor, or telling a one-year-old to behave like an adult – it does not compute! Because emotions are more powerful than thoughts, the intellect or logic will almost always be overridden by emotions in any highly charged or difficult situation - unless of course the logic triggers another emotion more conducive to the situation!

*Clare felt responsible for Mike's feelings. She felt she wasn't living up to his expectations of her and that if she would only try harder to please him, he would stop being angry and critical. But no matter how hard she tried Mike just became more and more critical. She wanted to speak to him about it, but the words somehow got stuck in her throat and she resigned herself to her lot, internalizing her emotions and her thoughts. Although her friends advised her to seek help, she was adamant that there was nothing to be done except for her to 'keep it together'.*

*One day, a close friend she had confided in pointed out that the perpetual stress and tension was starting to show up in the children and in their behavior. This startled Clare and at first she would not admit that she had noticed changes in all the children. However, her friend would not let it rest and began pointing out some of the changes; the eldest at twelve, Christopher had gone from being slightly irritated by his younger brother to bullying him physically every day. Fights erupted three or four times nightly, with nine-year-old Joshua always ending up with bruises and in tears. Additionally, Christopher's schoolwork was steadily declining, and Joshua was becoming introverted and had reverted to sucking his thumb at night. Five-year old Kate appeared to be the least affected, although she had taken to sleeping in Mom's bed again. Clare's stubborn refusal to acknowledge the truth was replaced by her maternal instinct; her emotional need to 'protect her young' was triggered. She agreed to talk to Mike and to seek help.*

Although it has become both common and popular to seek help in therapy, - and indeed most find great benefit from various types of therapy -, there comes a point where the eternal ‘therapy question’ ‘Why?’ – ‘Why is this happening to me? Why am I like this? Why do I feel this way? Why do I have this disorder?’ - is not as significant in our day-to-day lives as the question “What can I do about it, NOW?” As we go about our humdrum days, moment by moment dealing with the proverbial stuff that hits the fan, interacting and reacting with our environment and other people, we need realistic, ‘in the moment’ help. Now more than ever we need *practical tools* – tools that address our stress and our emotions as we experience them, tools that are easy to *apply* to an emotional state, and that quickly and effectively help us to manage our stress responses and emotions so that we ultimately become masters of our own actions and behavior, ‘*conducting our lives with care and intelligence*’, not only for our own benefit but for the benefit of those around us and for the world at large.

This book aims to provide such practical tools. It is indeed a practical book, written on the backs of hundreds of people who have tried and tested the approaches offered and experienced their transformational effects, time and time again; in workshops and as private individuals on their personal and professional growth journeys. It is also written with recognition of the human need to understand the biological and scientific facts behind any ‘new’ approach. Having been blessed with several collaborations that have resulted in familiarity with some of the vast amounts of recent scientific research done in the fields of neuroscience, psychoneuro-immunology, and emotions, I have for many years endeavored to translate pertinent information into a usable format for my clients. Certainly I am not the first to recognize that there is a distinct void between brilliant scientists with their hugely beneficial research results, and regular people and everyday life; for most people the relevant questions are: *How does this information – any information - help me in my daily life? What are the practical implications when I get out of bed and start my day? How do I use the information to improve my interactions with the people in my life?* In the pages that follow I attempt to answer these questions. I also offer many practical tools, - tried and tested processes and skills that are actually very easy to apply in any busy life. They are by no means a replacement for therapy or any other support you may be accessing in your life, but rather intended to be a bridge, a very practical bridge, between effective concepts, - most of which have solid scientific validation - and your everyday life.

The narratives that illustrate the processes are all based on actual people and true events, though names have been changed to protect privacy. The exercises in each chapter are there to ground the information from that particular chapter in personal processes and experiences, as well as to help you develop some very real-life skills for emotional mastery that can be easily and practically applied to the point where they become, for you, a way of being.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Human Beings; Designed for Advancement*

*“Man’s main task in life is to give birth to himself, to become what he potentially is.”* Erich Fromm

Human beings are just that – human *beings*. We are not ‘human doings’ or ‘human havings’. Yet our focus tends to be on *doing* and *having*. We can be all but obsessed with what we or someone else does. ‘What do you do?’ is the first question most of us will ask someone we have just met, - that is unless we already know, at which point we may launch into questions about what the person has. ‘Where did you get that jacket?’ or ‘Is that your Mini Cooper parked outside?’ Our natural propensity towards advancement coupled with our 21<sup>st</sup> century focus on the material and status, will inevitably lead us in this direction – unless we make a concerted effort not to go there. In which case we may attempt a ‘deeper’ conversation that allows for the ‘human being’ we have just met to feel at ease enough to express their true nature; their ‘being-ness’. However, advancement will still be in our consciousness. Our thoughts will always go to progress, whether it be consciously or subconsciously comparing ourselves to others, admiring others’ progress in some area, feeling envious of others’ achievement, or readying ourselves to elaborate on our own recent transformation or impending prospects. We are designed to ‘look up’, to grow, to improve, to transcend. That is as fundamental a fact about human nature as is our need for food, shelter, safety and sex.

We come into this world with innate curiosity and an urge to keep growing and moving beyond what has already been attained. In fact, if we did not have this urge to learn and grow we would die. We need to learn about our surroundings and how to handle them for our very survival; to defend ourselves against danger, to provide sustenance and shelter, to belong and be a part of a family or ‘tribe’. The brain is ‘hard-wired’ to learn and to improve, to build a resource library of information from which to understand and respond to our world. The brain gathers this information through

each and every one of our senses. Our sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, all send information to the brain which creates connections and patterns, contexts within which to understand all future information and respond appropriately. For example, if as a young child we are left alone for several hours feeling abandoned and afraid, we may seek to hide each time we hear an unexpected sound. We will register the sights, sounds, smells, etc. that are associated with the event to recognize the context within which we feel abandoned and afraid. If this procedure is repeated day after day for a given length of time and we are seeing the same surroundings, hearing the same sounds and smelling the same scents, this will create a pattern in our perception which when re-experienced will trigger a recognition and a resulting feeling of abandonment and fear, and the urge (for example) to hide. As a species, the greater our ability to recognize a pattern – particularly a pattern that is perceived as threatening - and to view it within the context of everything else, the greater the advantage we have for survival.

Once the need for survival has been met, the urge to keep growing and moving beyond what we have already attained translates into a need for advancement to another level of knowledge, of ownership, and of performance - hence the focus on ‘having’ and ‘doing’. In today’s society this seems however, to have run away with us! Our entire modern industrial and technological culture bears witness to this focus on doing and having, - we are forever trying to *do* better so we can *have* more money and things so that we can *do* more of what we want, all because we believe that *doing* more so we can *have* more will make us *be* happier. In fact this is not the way it works at all – *having* things never made anyone happy! The equation actually works in reverse: we will only be satisfied with what we have when what we do to attain it is an expression of who we are; our beliefs, our values, our delights and our outrage. Only when we can *be* the unique being each one of us is – when we know our own strengths and weaknesses, what gives us joy and sorrow, what is important to us, what are our natural talents and predispositions, and what drives us - will we have a strong, sustainable foundation to *do* what we do best with clarity, focus and a sense of purpose; at that point we will find we *have and attract* what we desire – or we find we are content with what we have. Ultimately, we will enjoy it all the more, for it will be a natural progression that includes “I am” as well as “I do” and “I have” – a ripple effect!

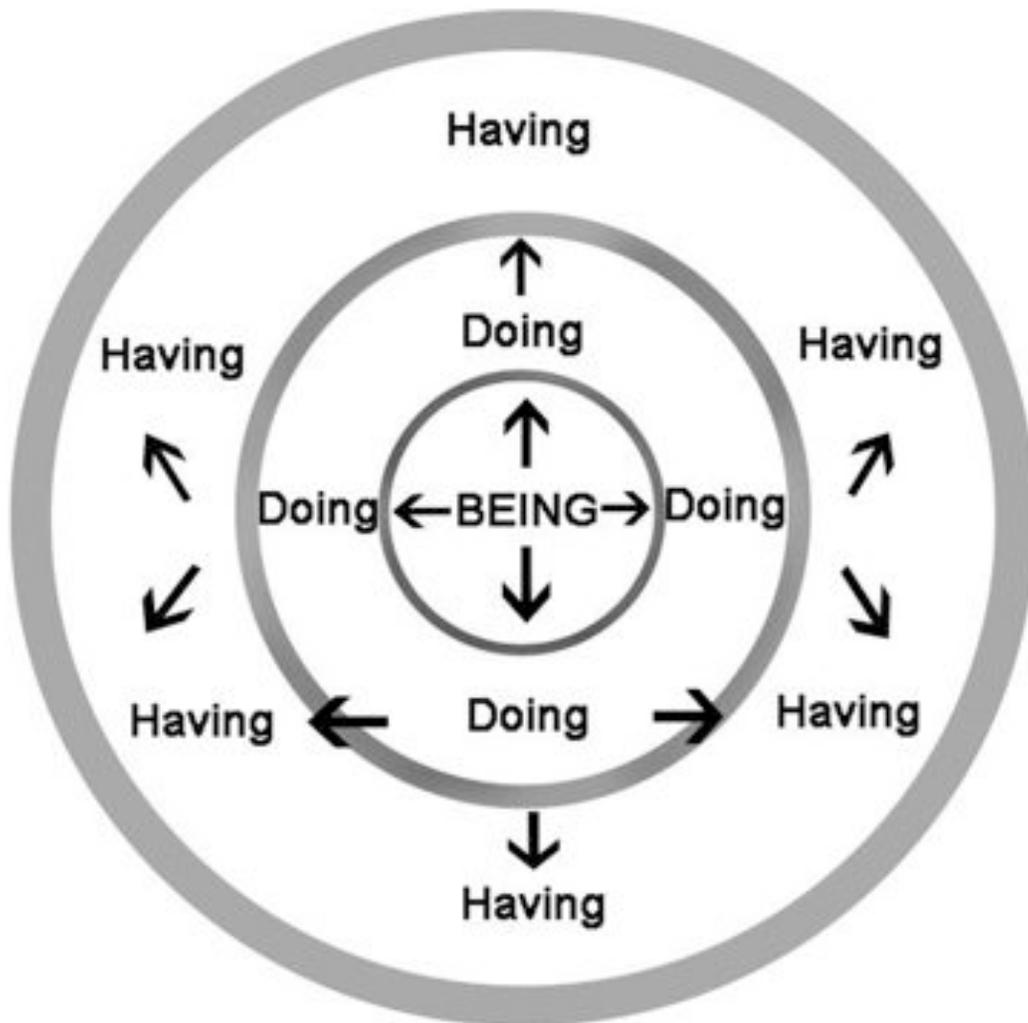


Figure 1

*Mike knew he was in trouble because the way he felt did not match the life he was living. He knew he was becoming increasingly belligerent and disagreeable, but he couldn't seem to help the way he felt nor control the way he acted. He questioned himself continuously; how could a man who had achieved everything he had ever wanted, feel so unfulfilled and dissatisfied? He decided to work more, but the more he worked the more stressed he became and it just made matters worse. He bought himself another car, but aside from the few fleeting moments of gratification it didn't change anything. Even his morning meditations were becoming less enjoyable, as he found himself unable to focus and his mind wandering. He bought new meditation tapes and a fancy meditation chair, but his motivation as well as his concentration was increasingly more difficult to maintain. More often than not, as he drove to work he already found himself feeling irritable. Coffee helped momentarily, but within an hour he was feeling disgruntled again. No matter what he did or acquired, the feeling did not change. It was right after this realization that Clare said "We have to talk!"*

*She began, tentatively, by asking him how he felt. He acknowledged that he felt stressed and 'a bit irritable', but was apprehensive about admitting the extent of it.*

*"It's not that bad," he said, somewhat defensively. "It's merely that I've got a lot on my mind. It's a huge responsibility running this business, and you and the kids just reap all the benefits!"*

*Clare pointed out that they were also all being affected by his behavior. She talked about what was going on with the children and how she herself felt. "We are all feeling the brunt of your stress and anger, Mike. And your relentless criticism really hurts me. I feel like a victim, and I hate feeling like this!"*

*Clare cried and Mike felt guilty, but nothing was really resolved because Mike did not understand what was going on inside him, and he didn't have the know-how to change it. When he finally agreed with Clare that they needed help, it was because he realized that for all the great work he did and all the great things they had, he felt dissatisfied and unfulfilled, and he was making everyone else miserable.*

Transcendence must occur within our *being* first, in order for advancement in what we *do* and what we *have* to be wholly satisfying and fulfilling, for within our need for advancement is also a deep need for fulfillment. Conversely, when we believe that *having* and *doing* is all there is, we end up

seeking to meet our need for fulfillment through acquiring more, achieving more, and busying ourselves more. We begin to identify with what we have and what we do; “I am what I have” and “I am what I do”, become our beliefs, driving us relentlessly to have more and do more, creating a vicious cycle that leads to ever increasing amounts of stress, and the need for fulfillment never fully satisfied.

Breaking this cycle involves first understanding that our very core foundation is our ‘being-ness’ – we are human *beings* first, with a deep-seated need for advancement, fulfillment and a coherent state of *well-being*. It involves re-connecting with the knowledge in our very soul, that first “I am what I am”.

### EXERCISE #1

Make a list of all the aspects of your life that are working for you. Make another list of all the aspects of your life that are not working.

What is working	What is not working

EXERCISE #1 (continued)

Write down what you would like to change and what would be different if your life experiences were to be the way you really want them to be.

If you were guaranteed to succeed, what would you change?

How would it make things different from the way they are today?

When complete, note which of the changes and differences fall into the *'being'*, *'doing'* or *'having'* categories.

### CHAPTER 3

## *The Biology of Emotions and Positive Change*

*“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” Viktor E. Frankl*

When we find ourselves in a situation where we are ready to make a change, to grow, to learn something new, we are predictably interested, motivated, focused, ready to absorb the information we are presented with, to process it, maybe question it, and interact with it until we have understood and integrated its very essence. When this has occurred, our retention and capacity to recall our newly acquired information requires little or no effort. This optimal learning state is a state of openness, growth, and mastery. It is a state that is actually quite natural and inherent to us as human beings.

There are essentially two ways in which we learn and grow; through integrated thinking, when learning is a response to information received in a safe and emotionally supportive environment, and through conditioned survival, when learning is a response to perceived threat.

*When Mike and Clare had their first meeting with me, Mike’s stress level was clearly high, as was Clare’s unhappiness. As they talked about their experiences and their feelings it became evident that some discord had existed in their relationship for a number of years.*

*“I think I have been discontent and critical for many years!” Mike said. “In fact my business success is probably due to my drive for perfection - a perfection that I never actually feel I achieve!”*

*They had agreed when they married that Mike would put all his energy into the business, and Clare would stay home and raise their children; a classic model that Clare admitted was no longer working.*

*“I feel betrayed in a way, that I am raising these children almost on my own. Although I agreed to that, it was under the assumption that there would be loving support, not constant criticism.”*

*As our conversations progressed, Clare realized she had ‘learned’ some behaviors from their interactions that she had been hitherto unaware of; apologizing in a small voice almost as soon as Mike walked in the door, and other submissive expressions of ‘ a meek and dutiful wife’ had become the norm, although this was not in keeping with her personality at all. Many years of apprehension and feelings of inferiority and betrayal as well as the constant tension had caused her to feel unsafe emotionally and as a result she had developed these ‘defensive’ behaviors .*

*“It’s just not me, but I do it anyway, as if I’m programmed!” she exclaimed.*

### CONDITIONED LEARNING - FOR SURVIVAL

What we learn in order to secure our survival occurs in the area of the brain known as the limbic system, often called the ‘emotional brain’. A function of this part of the brain is to make an evaluation; to receive information from all our senses in order to determine whether we are either safe, or threatened and in need of defending ourselves.

The limbic system encompasses a part of the brain called the amygdala as well as an area known as the hippocampus, each having a specific function in the learning and reactive process. The amygdala is involved in creating and storing our emotional memories, - i.e. the feeling of abandonment and fear when mother puts you in the crib and leaves you, - and the hippocampus is involved in creating and storing the context within which these memories exist, - i.e. mother’s facial expression, her back walking away, the smell of her perfume, the door closing, etc. -.

All human experiences are filtered through this part of the brain, its function being to answer the question, ‘am I threatened?’ In order to answer this question, the ‘emotional brain’ looks to match the new experience to anything vaguely similar in its storage of known ‘threats’. If a match is found, the amygdala ‘alarm bells ‘ ring and the ‘thinking’ or logical reasoning part of the brain is effectively bypassed. The alarm bell’s instructions are first sent straight to the body (heart, stomach, lungs, etc) to prepare for action and respond to the perceived threat. This process happens at immense speed and is entirely unconscious. Following this immediate ‘trigger’ response, news of the threat eventually reaches the ‘thinking’ brain, or cortex, which then may modify or inhibit the response that is occurring. If on the other hand no match is found and the ‘emotional brain’

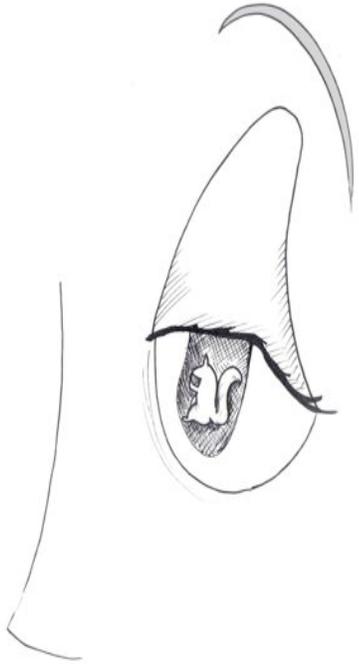
determines that no threat is present, information regarding the new experience continues to the cortex for appropriate responses.

In Clare's case, the perceived threat was Mike's criticism, which usually occurred upon his arrival home in the evenings. So as soon as she heard the door open she would feel emotionally threatened, 'prepare for action' and respond to the perceived threat with self-protective apologies and submission, her *learned* defensive position.

### INTEGRATED LEARNING

Learning that enables change and facilitates growth & transformation on the other hand, emerges from a state of openness and receptivity. As opposed to the defensive state, this state of receptivity involves full activation of the cerebral cortex or frontal lobes of the brain, which is the part of the brain situated at the front, just above the eyebrows. It is what differentiates us from other species, and plays a major role in intellectual thinking, problem-solving, creativity, etc. When this part of the brain – often referred to as the 'thinking brain' – is involved, integrated learning occurs.

Integrated learning is most clearly described by educator David Kolb as occurring in a sequence, consisting of **experience**, **reflection**, **abstraction** and **active testing** (Kolb 1984). We have an **experience** (for example, we hear and see something such as a squirrel moving towards our newly planted flowerbed), which is followed by an internal observation of or a **reflection** on what we have experienced, (relative to whatever references our brain recognizes from past experiences, - such as having seen squirrels dig up plants in their search for buried nuts - giving context to the experience). An **abstraction** or idea is then generated (in the front part of the brain), determining what the appropriate response should be, (such as 'if I clap my hands together loudly, the squirrel may retreat'), and when and where it should be carried out ('I will do it immediately!'). Finally, signals are sent to the appropriate body parts for the action or 'motor' (**active testing**) to be carried out (hands clap frenetically as we run towards the flowerbed). When the action or 'testing of the idea' is carried out, a resulting new experience is initiated (for example the squirrel runs away but so too does our hitherto happily snoozing cat), and the whole process begins again. Within this one process, the integrated learning may be that clapping can be appropriate to get rid of a squirrel, but that we must consider the greater environment and other critters as well.



Each 'integrated learning' process (see brain illustration Fig. 2) occurs with great speed, and is repeated over and over again, millions of times a day.

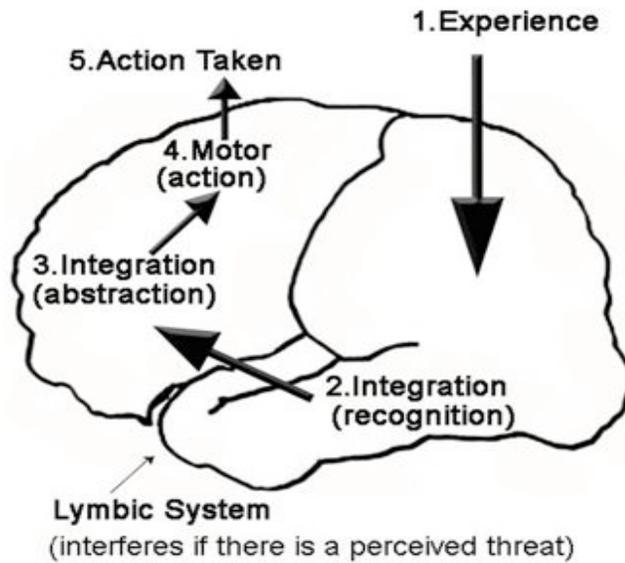


Figure 2.

The proper function of the cerebral cortex (or 'thinking brain') requires a feeling of safety and emotional support. If the limbic system or emotional brain detects a threat, this part of the brain becomes inhibited and will not function as well because the physiological signals it receives will be alarm signals provoking shut down and survival responses. Only when the limbic system perceives that there is no threat, can the cortex function creatively, without interruptions, at its full potential.

This need for safety and emotional support is very well illustrated by ‘Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs’ (Fig. 3) a concept developed by psychologist Abraham Maslow more than fifty years ago. It gives a very clear visual picture of basic human emotional needs and the order in which they can be met. As with any structure, human beings need a strong foundation and that foundation, according to Maslow, is the knowledge that we are able to survive and be safe, - without giving it too much thought! Only then can we begin to meet our other needs; our need for love – to love and be loved - , our need to feel a sense of belonging, to develop self-esteem and finally, to self-actualize - to realize our highest values, visions and dreams. For each developing stage to be effective, the one beneath it must be established. If, for example safety is not taken care of, there is little use in attempting to build self-esteem, or even to feel a sense of belonging. If we don’t feel safe, meeting our need for ‘SAFETY’ is the level at which we will operate and behave – no higher. For any sustainable change or growth to take place we must look at where on this pyramid we spend most of our time, emotionally. The lower we are on the Pyramid, the more defensive and further away from growth and transcendence we move.

### MASLOW’S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

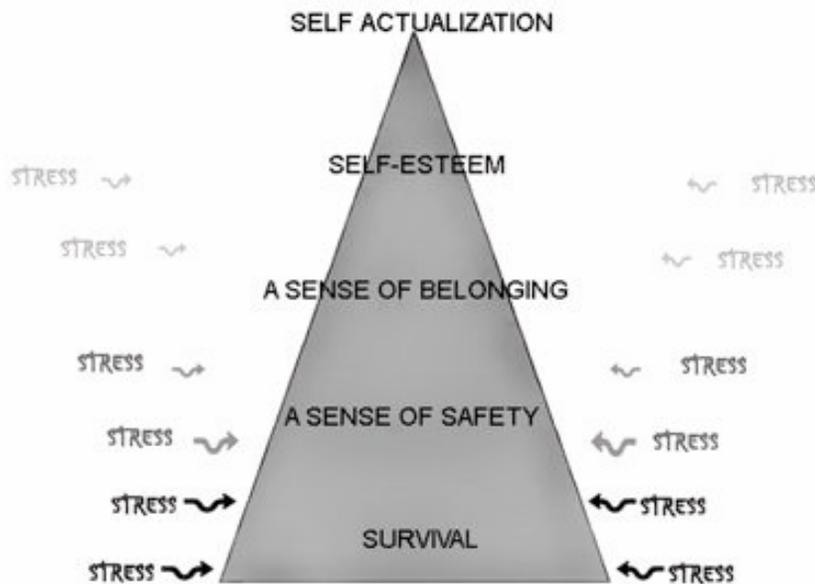


Figure 3

Maslow found that in order for someone to function well at each level, with few exceptions, the needs of the preceding levels must be met. Naturally, we cannot expect to have all our needs, emotional or otherwise, met at all times or in all environments, and we can make this concept considerably more complex. However, simply put; if the needs at each stage are not met in *any* environment, we become unable to progress effectively towards the next level of fulfillment. For example, if we are in ‘survival mode’, everything else is irrelevant. Or if we do not feel safe, we are unable to feel a meaningful sense of belonging or to experience balanced, sustained feelings of love. If we do not feel love, loved, or a sense of belonging, we will not be likely to succeed at building a sustainable, positive self-image or esteem, etcetera. (more about this in Chapter 13).

Additionally, we must *perceive* that our needs are being met. When stress is present, a person’s perception is clouded and distorted which also results in an inability to progress towards the next level of fulfillment. And the lower we are on the Pyramid, the more vulnerable we are to the damaging effects of negative stress!

## STRESS & PHYSIOLOGY

Traditionally, stress has been (and still is) linked to success, achievement and performance (i.e. most of us expect to have some stress in order to succeed, - in fact many still speak of their stress as if it is something to be proud of – in which case it is usually referred to as ‘good stress’), yet if we are too stressed or in too much distress to perform whatever task is needed, we are told to ‘calm down’, in other words to reduce our level of exertion. The significance of the role of exertion is further reinforced by the commonly offered encouragement that ‘*you need to be a little nervous to perform well,*’ while others will assert that you need to be calm and centered to perform successfully under pressure. Typical examples of this are seen around tests and exams. Many believe they need to be in a heightened state of exertion, (excited, nervous, ‘hyped up’). Others believe they need to be in a calm state, indifferent to the stress. So which is it; do we need to be calmer or more energized to perform well? The answer is that *neither* increased nor decreased levels of exertion make the brain work significantly better; the brain’s performance is much more

dependent on the emotional state of the person. Our level of exertion plays a decidedly secondary role to the underlying emotional state. If someone experiences a heightened state of exertion or energy combined with a negative emotional state, (see following diagram, lower right hand corner), the most common response is to reduce the level of energy. However, this does not, on its own, solve the problem and does not effectively address the brain's limbic system and its messages of threat and distress; calming techniques do not necessarily enhance the receptive state we need to be in for growth and learning. If you *are* able to calm someone who is experiencing excessive energy coupled with a negative emotional state – by whatever means; talk, movement, drugs, - you will often merely reduce their current level of activity, but their *emotional experience* will not necessarily have been addressed. If this is the case, stress hormones such as cortisol will still be poisoning their system, and the result will either be that the feeling and behavior recurs, or that the person becomes indifferent, apathetic or bored (see lower left hand side of quadrant) and is still not very open or responsive to change, advancement or learning of any kind. If on the other hand someone has a low level of exertion coupled with a *positive* emotional state (upper left hand corner), 'feel good' hormones such as DHEA (dehydroepiandrosterone, otherwise known as 'the youth hormone') are being released into the system and as a result he or she is probably very receptive, interested and content; if a positive emotional state is combined with a increased levels of energy and exertion (top right hand corner), the feelings will tend to be excitement, passion, enthusiasm and even the experience of what athletes call 'the zone'.

## THE PHYSIOLOGY OF EMOTIONS

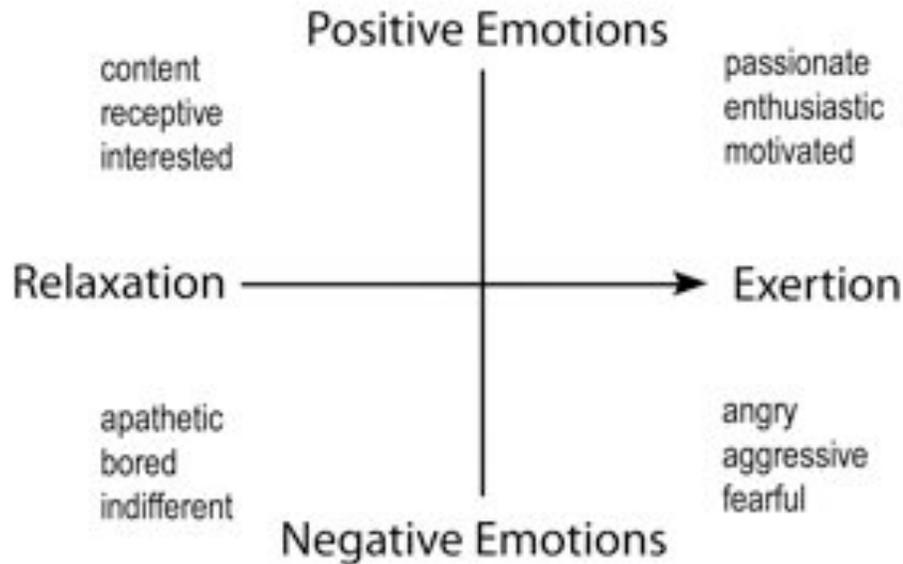


Figure 4.

*Gradually, over several sessions without Mike present, Clare revealed more of her feelings. She had believed she wasn't good enough for Mike for many years, and the more he criticized her the more she took that as confirmation of her belief. As a child she had never felt good enough for her father either, and we soon identified this as a belief pattern she experienced with just about all men. Whenever she needed to show Mike something she'd done, explain a charge to their credit card or otherwise account to Mike, she became nervous and edgy, her hands became clammy, her breathing shallow. When he questioned her she would experience what she called a 'brain freeze' making her unable to think straight. She had wanted to start her own decorating business for some time, but whenever she brought up the idea with Mike, he would remind her of their 'deal' and tell her she probably wasn't capable of running a business anyway.*

*"It has made me feel so frustrated and angry, I went to my doctor who prescribed anti-depressants. But they didn't really help – they just made me feel numb, so I stopped taking them. But now I look at the boys and they both seem to be heading in the same direction! Christopher doesn't seem to care about school anymore; he's either angry like his father, or apathetic like I was when I was on*

*meds, and he's not even on anything! Joshua just seems to becoming more and more quiet and withdrawn and it scares me. Even Kate seems more anxious. I don't know what to do about it all!" She was clearly disturbed. When I showed her the quadrant though, she lit up with an almost instant understanding. "That's us!" she exclaimed. "In a nutshell. All at the bottom! And our so called solutions so far have only pushed us way over into the left hand corner!"*

Sadly, as many doctors will testify, more and more of us in our society are living our lives in the lower half of the quadrant. Unless we are also able to take better charge of how we feel, to consciously move our emotional state up towards the top of the quadrant and activate the release of beneficial hormones, stress hormones such as cortisol will continue to poison our system, lowering our immune system and speeding up our journey towards an early grave. Conversely, if we are able to alter our emotional state, find a way to feel more positive about a situation, the cortisol poisoning will stop and instead, beneficial hormones such as DHEA (dehydroepiandrosterone, otherwise known as the youth hormone) will begin to permeate our system, boosting the immune system, slowing down the ageing process, and helping the brain to work better.

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save their relationship and  
how their children transform  
from angry, depressed, &  
anxious to happy, calm, and  
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### **About the Author**

Jennifer Day is a best-selling author/co-author of 6 books, two of which have been translated into ten languages. A popular speaker and Coach in both the US and UK, for almost two decades she has specialized in emotional intelligence and 'in-the-moment' stress management, with parents & children and in organizational management. Formerly a professional choreographer and dance teacher, she is a graduate of The Institute of Stress Management and developed her coaching methodology after 9 years of studying various approaches (alternative and conventional) to the management of emotions. Her work has been the subject of several research studies, on both sides of the Atlantic.

For more information about Jennifer Day  
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