



## Tips & Thoughts from MYT Group, LLC.

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### The Power of the Present

By: Art DeLorenzo, CLU, ChFC, CFP, MSFS, MEd.

At one time or another almost everyone spends time reveling in the past. We enjoy the memories of loved ones who have passed away, moments in time where we were thrilled with a wedding, the birth of a child, the honor of an athletic achievement or business success, or the joy of a meaningful friendship. We also spend time in the future. We think about our retirement and imagine the freedom we will have to travel and see our children and our grand children. Or we imagine the big anniversary trip to Paris in three years or a big year for our fledgling firm or that awesome shopping trip with our college friends to San Diego.

Well this piece is all about staying present and why we need to wisely spend more of our thinking time there. Simply put it is to reduce stress. We know for a fact that as stress levels increase, the endocrine response to stress cortisol builds within us. How much of this corrosive element can our bodies stand and is there a way to let us know if we are reaching a dangerous threshold? It does not appear that there is an easy answer to this question but never-the-less, there is an answer: **Use the positive power of the present to reduce stress and limit cortisol.**

In a low stress environment, our blood flows evenly throughout the body, including the brain. When calm circumstances change and threat escalates, the blood supply at the front of the brain starts to flow to the back of the brain where the basal ganglia & amygdala reside. The basal ganglia serve to minimize the energy drain our bodies experience by allowing us to put the keys into the ignition without conscious focus. Sort of like an automatic pilot feature on an airplane. The amygdala is our fight or flight control center. When we are threatened, it is responsible for turning on the adrenalin we may need to address the challenge.

The frontal cortex, the part that resides just behind our forehead, is where we store recent memory. It's the place where reasoning takes place. It's where we "out think" problems. So if the blood is drawn away from this part of the brain our ability to do that thinking declines as our stress rises. The more we respond to stress with fear and anxiety the less we think. The more we think, the less we over emote.

Think about the brain & body as interdependent entities. The brain has to do a ton of work; it has to regulate our heart rate, our blood pressure, our temperature, our digestive system, our endocrine system, all of our vital organs, all of our muscles. Imagine that it must be aware of the amount of energy that is needed to do all of this work and that it has to pace the energy out though the day so there is enough to allow us to thrive. In essence the brain doles out the energy economically making sure there is enough to go around. There is calm and it is called homeostasis.

Now add a sudden jolt of adrenalin because we choose to get irritated or frustrated by the idiot driver. Not angry. Just irritated or frustrated. The brain checks the need for the blood to start rushing to the back of the brain and our heart rate goes up. The blood pressure goes up. The respiratory system demands more and the equilibrium is broken. Five minutes later when it has dawned on us that we should not have taken the incident personally we return to calm but we now also have a dose of cortisol swashing around inside of us. An hour later, at work, an angry client has misread their monthly statement and has raised your cortisol level again by insulting your intelligence. Then there is a policy change that wipes out a potential bonus and to top it all off, your tried, proven, and trusted administrative assistant announces he is moving to another state as his wife just received a terrific promotion. Given all of this, you walk into the house and discover that the folks there are in your judgment inappropriately happy.

There are a couple of ways to deal with this situation. First every time our body produces a jolt of cortisol to keep us upset, take a few days vacation. That will work as you all know how invigorated we are after a nice vacation. It's not a practical remedy however and so we move to choice two, exercise. 20 to 30 minutes of walking up and down stairwells in your office building or a stroll outdoors when weather permits 3 or 4 times a week will help. While doing so, leave the cell phone or blackberry at your desk and think about your family or past joyous life experiences. Of course a more rigorous combination of aerobic and strength exercises will build a solid firewall and serve you better.

In combination with exercise, there are other ways. A reliable process is the time honored practice of meditation. In India to do some mountain climbing in 2007, I had the opportunity to visit with a Tibetan Monk in Kalimpong. I asked him what advice he could offer to folks who easily get irritated or frustrated. He responds by saying we should empty the tank. For a few moments I slightly nod in agreement but finally, despite my embarrassment, I tell my interpreter that the wisdom I was trying to display has failed me and I do not understand. The Monk wisely proceeds to explain that westerners fill the tank (with gas) and then we run around wildly all day long. To help offset this we should empty the tank. What he suggested we do is empty the mind of any left-over junk from the previous night's sleep by starting the day with 10 to 15 minutes of meditation. This way we start the day at zero irritation or frustration and when the idiot driver cuts us off we are better prepared to manage our fight or flight process.

Finally, to help pace us through the day we suggest returning to where we started with the positive power of the present. This is a simple Mind Skill™ that will help you routinely manage the energy flow between the brain and the body. My colleague, Dr. Fred Luskin suggests that what works wonders is the simple act of appreciation. At mid morning, take 1-2 minutes to sit back in your chair close your eyes and reflect on the goodness in your life. You are warm. You are neither hungry nor are you thirsty. You are safe. You are healthy, enough so you could comfortably go to work. The odds are that all of your immediate family members are healthy as well. This process gives the body a chance to send a message up to the brain saying thanks for the break, life is good. Repeat the process at lunch time after your 20 to 30 minute walk but now take 5 or 6 minutes. At mid-afternoon, go back to the 1 or 2 minute time frame and when the day ends, you will have more energy and a better disposition when you get home. You will have routinely emptied the tank and be ready for the most important roles you will ever play in life, being a loving mate and parent.

Should you choose not to make these changes in your life style, there is a good chance you will get to have the rest your body regularly screams for; you may get sick. You see, your body was asking for a rest but you drove the brain to do otherwise and because it worked you kept doing it despite all of the health information you had read. So now you will rest and if you are lucky and can return to work, you will be adding new chemicals to the ones your body naturally produces and we call them medications. In addition, you will now have the negative side effects of these medications to add to your load. So, the last word is it's a better value proposition to learn the positive power of the present now and start to build new pathways in your brain that replicates these suggestions while you are healthy.

*This article was written by Art DeLorenzo, CLU, ChFC, CFP, MSFS, MSEd. He along with Rick Aberman, Ph.D. and Frederic Luskin, Ph.D. are co-owners and co-founders of MYT™ Group, LLC.*

*MYT™ Group, LLC teaches emotional competence and forgiveness skills which have been proven to increase productivity while lowering stress and improving quality of life. You can learn more by logging onto their website at [www.maximizeyourtalent.com](http://www.maximizeyourtalent.com) or contacting them in NYC at 1.212.249.0923 or Art's cell phone at 1.646.707.4324.*