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choice

the magazine of professional coaching

COACHING
THE
**WHOLE
SYSTEM**

Hormones,
neurotransmitters
& coaching

THE IMPACT
OF COACHING
ON THE **BRAIN**

**BODY,
BRAIN &
BEHAVIOR**

Changing Minds

How coaching
changes the brain,
body and more

CHANGING OUR CLIENT, CHANGING OURSELVES

Coaching and the mind-body connection

How does coaching impact the mind? Is the mind limited to the brain or does it include the body and more? Does working with the body affect the brain and therefore the mind? How is the brain altered via coaching? How is mindfulness used in coaching?

Join us as we explore the impact of coaching on the brain and the body.



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By Barbara B. Appelbaum, PCC, MBA, MAT

As a coach, your objective is to help people live more fulfilling lives in which they thrive, not merely exist. Using various techniques, you help them become the best version of themselves. As clients come to you complaining of being stuck or dissatisfied, you might also notice them being physically ill due to anxiety, stress or fear. Understanding neuroscience and the role it plays in your coaching practice can enhance your ability to facilitate positive change for your clients.

NEUROSCIENCE & YOUR BODY

Coach training teaches that how you think affects how you feel, and how you feel influences how you behave. Numerous holistic experts also espouse a synergy between the body and mind. How do we know that to be true? Are the mind and brain synonymous or different? And how does coaching influence the brain and body?

First, let's get acquainted with your brain. The human brain weighs about three to four pounds, consists of 80 percent water and 20 to 25 percent oxygen/glycogen, contains over 100 billion neurons, and is the consistency of soft butter. Once thought to be finite or static, the brain is now known to be malleable, leading to the understanding of brain plasticity. Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections that allow neurons (nerve cells) in the brain to compensate for injury or disease.

Second, what constitutes your mind? The mind is tangible conscious thought, affecting you emotionally and physically. Consider the last time you were anxious. Did you perhaps experience a nervous stomach, feel nauseous or experience a pounding headache? When last you were frightened, did you experience a rapid pulse, quick temper or inability to focus?

These symptoms are representative of stress. Stress is a measure of your body's resistance to real or perceived threats or circumstances beyond your control. And how you respond to stress is called your fight or flight response; your brain's survival mechanism. Triggered too often, it creates a ripe environment for illness to take hold causing your body physical distress.

COACHING & THE BRAIN

According to Richard Carmona, MD, MPH, FACS, 17th Surgeon General of the United States, in his book *30 Days to a Better Brain*, although we are living longer we are not necessarily living younger. He advocates keeping our brains healthy to support our active bodies, and discusses avoiding stress, anxiety and depression because they play major roles in keeping our brains healthy.

This can be accomplished by changing our behavior to be more resilient, which is important to long-term brain health. Negative self-talk – the gremlin, or false thinking – adds to stress, which leads to oxidative stress, which in turn leads to diminished brain health.

As a coach, you can shift your client's thinking to be more present in the moment, less fearful and more

optimistic, which stimulates neuroplasticity and leads to substantial changes in behavior. Through the coaching process you can slow down degeneration and even enhance cognitive function. When you teach a client to think, feel and act healthy, their brain stays healthy. And when their brain is healthy, they can think, feel and be healthy.

NEUROPLASTICITY, MINDFULNESS & AWARENESS

No matter what type of coach you are, mindfulness is one of several techniques to promote neuroplasticity while minimizing stress. Through a practice of mindfulness, you can coach a client on how to reduce stress by bringing their attention to the present moment, focusing on reality not perceived threats or fear thereby allowing opportunity for positive emotional and physical growth.

Studies show that continued negative thinking will change a person's brain chemistry; shifting negative self-talk through coaching is a good conduit to better brain health.

In yoga there is a term, "monkey brain," which is used to describe the restless nonstop chatter of your thoughts; not being able to focus as your mind jumps around from one thought to another, or as I like to call it, "bright shiny object syndrome." An experienced coach helps a client focus and be mindful, which then promotes neuroplasticity in the brain, creating new synaptic pathways permanently changing behavior for the better. New, positive ways of thinking, feeling and behaving will become habit as the client, in essence, re-wires their brain.

Additionally, coaching provides accountability, which helps a client create mindful patterns of behavior. By understanding neuroplasticity, the coach offers empathetic support

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to the client through which positive behavioral change can seem more feasible.

It removes the perceived threat of feeling accused, normalizing the situation for the client, and it assists with understanding the root of emotions so the client can make better decisions. This inspires emotional and physical changes that positively influence the brain and body while normalizing reaching out for help as something to be appreciated or congratulated not critiqued.

COACHING MINDFULNESS

When coaching a client to be mindful, you are teaching them to be present to the moment, understanding that now is all they have. The past is simply a memory and the future is an intangible.

Deep breathing is a simple exercise to become present to the moment. Breath is a person's life force, ebbing and flowing as the body's energy with each inhalation and exhalation.

When a client starts to feel anxious or stressed, teach them to stop and take a deep, slow, intentional breath. As they focus on the inhale, pause, and then slowly exhale, they not only become more present, they physically slow down their heart rate and calm their nervous system. It offers the mind and body the opportunity to reconnect, relax and rejuvenate.

By understanding and employing neuroscience in your coaching, you can help your clients achieve positive change. •

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