



Stanford eCorner

'Happiness is an Inside Game'

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March 08, 2017

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/5115/Happiness-is-an-Inside-Game>

Leadership coach Shirzad Chamine, author of the bestselling book "Positive Intelligence," compares the two opposing sides of the brain: the left, where negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, shame, guilt and regret originate; and the right, which is responsible for positive feelings like curiosity, empathy, joy, resolve and gratitude. "Your highest performance is going to be through the path of positive emotions," Chamine explains.



Transcript

with the fight-or-flight type of response and the fight-or-flight brain. This is much bigger than that. Fight or flight is mostly the limbic system, the brain stem type of thing. And it's mostly about the fear and danger. But what we really at the end realize is that there's something much bigger than that that overall we ended up calling the survivor brain. And what the survivor brain is, of which the fight or flight is just a small part, is a part of your brain that is basically tasked with having you survive not just physically but also emotionally. And, as a kid, you actually have a challenge of how you navigate the emotional challenges and survive with your identity intact. And it ends up being something that gets aided by this region of your brain. The problem with this region of the brain and one of the things that had happened to me, look at the emotions that this region of the brain is capable of producing. When this region of your brain is activated, you can't help yourself.

You will be feeling negative emotions. Not just anxiety, anger, disappointment, but shame, guilt, regret. All of these nasty, negative emotions that you feel are emotions that you feel when the survivor part of your brain is activated. And of course, by the way, in the book, there are a couple of chapters on the different brains. So there's a little bit of generalization here, since not of all the left brain is part of the left brain. There's a lot more detail to this, but right now what I'd love for you to pay attention to is that actually there are two brains, the other brain being what we call the positive intelligence brain. It's an entirely different region. When that region is activated, you feel positive emotions like curiosity, compassion, joy, creativity, peace, calm, resolve, gratitude. When you look at this chart, what immediately strikes you is, if you are in search of happiness in your life, what you realize is, happiness is an inside game. If you're able to activate the PQ region of your brain, the positive intelligence, or PQ region of your brain, you will be feeling positive emotions that have you feel kind of happy.

And even if you are in the middle of a great challenge and a great crisis. The opposite is also true. If you happen to be in the middle of paradise, but your survivor brain is activated, you can't help yourself. You're gonna be feeling negative emotions and not very happy. But it also has a huge impact on performance. And the impact on performance is, all the body of research that I was telling you about coming from those four branches of science shows that your peak performance, your highest performance is going to be through the path of positive emotions. Your highest performance comes from the brain that is calm and centered and focused and able to see possibilities and be creative. All of these things happen in the PQ region of the brain, not in the survivor brain. So your path to highest performance and what I call stress-free peak performance is by learning how to activate the PQ region of your brain. And what had happened to me, one of the things that happened to me in my meltdown is that what we now know about the survivor part of the brain is that it kind of loops on itself.

Once you get going, you have an internal loop and an external loop. Negativity creates more negativity. And once you start looping on yourself, it's kind of hard sometimes to get out. And I had gotten into a loop based on the stress that the job was

creating for me that I had not been able to get out. Stress, by the way, is the key thing, is the key fuel that begins to shift you to the survivor part of your brain. And as the survivor part of your brain gets going, it helps create cortisol, stress hormones, so it actually feeds on the stress. So that's the kind of loop that you get yourself into.