

Building resilience.

ACTIVITY FOCUS: AN 'ENERGY RESET' THROUGH DEEP RELAXATION

Often, for people who are under significant pressure, fight or flight is constantly being triggered by time pressure, workload volume, high expectations and challenging personalities. It is the constant triggering of the fight or flight response over time that can wear the body down and make us vulnerable. Unfortunately, some people have been in this highly activated state for so long they think it's normal. They don't really notice anymore. It's like the fans in the room. We don't notice them unless someone turns them off.

DEEP RELAXATION IS LIKE TURNING THE FANS OFF

The antidote is an innate physiological response in the body known as the Relaxation Response that shuts down Fight or Flight. First identified by Dr. Herbert Benson from the Harvard Medical School, the Relaxation Response is a naturally occurring 'program' prewired into all humans. You don't have to train for it, you just have to create the right conditions that will activate it. And one way to create these conditions, is to do a Deep Relaxation.

HERE'S HOW TO DO IT:

Step 1: Get the Inside Edge podcast. Your first step is to access the Inside Edge audio program/podcast on Transister.fm. If you haven't already done so, follow this [link](#) to subscribe to the podcast on whatever device you use to listen to podcasts. For the purposes of this activity, we will use the episode 23: Deep Relaxation.

Step 2: Find a place where you won't be disturbed for 25 minutes. You need a quiet environment where you won't be disturbed. No phones ringing, knocks on the door etc. If you are listening on your phone, you may want to silence notifications and put it on "do not disturb" mode so calls don't come through.

Step 3: Get comfortable. This means comfortable for the body when it is deeply relaxed; in other words, your body feels well-supported. If sitting, keep your back against the back of the chair, feet flat on the floor, hands resting open on your lap, legs uncrossed. Sitting up straight not slouched. If you are lying down, put something under your head if you like, and something under your knees if they bother you. The only problem that can emerge with lying down is that you fall asleep. Obviously having a nap is a good thing, but it is not the same thing as a Deep Relaxation!

Step 4: Press play. In order to go into a deeply relaxed state, we require something on which to focus our attention. In this case it will be the voice of Dr. Peter Jensen. He will guide you through the relaxation exercise. There will be background music. Your job is to pay attention to what he is saying and just follow along with his

instructions. It is the anchoring of your attention on a single thing, in this case Peter's voice, that will activate the Relaxation Response.

Let's talk a little bit about the problems you might run into while doing this:

- 1. You can't stop your mind from wandering.** That's okay, the mind is like a monkey – it runs everywhere. Just notice when you have become distracted and bring your attention back to Peter's voice. That is part of the training in any mental discipline: concentration, mindfulness, meditation, and Deep Relaxation.
- 2. You find yourself judging or evaluating.** The relaxation response requires a passive attitude. You need a passive attitude, the mind of an observer rather than an analytic. In other words, you just need to give it a good try without judging and evaluating yourself, the voice, the process, etc. If you notice yourself judging yourself (e.g., "I mustn't be doing this right, I don't feel relaxed") or evaluating the process ("Why did he say that? What is he trying to do?") observe those thoughts, and, without criticizing yourself, bring your attention back to the voice and follow along.
- 3. You find yourself falling asleep.** If you are tired, there will be a strong tendency to fall asleep. Many of the athletes we work with do this prior to going to sleep at night or if they wake up in the middle of the night with tension. If this is your tendency, you may want to do it sitting up.
- 4. You experience a fear around loss of control.** Generally, people find the exercises very pleasant and enjoyable. The odd person may experience fear around loss of control as you start to relax. Notice it – just watch the anxiety parade go by and return to the voice. If it continues to disturb you, just open your eyes and stop. You will always be in control of yourself and can stop at any time.
- 5. If you are someone who is dealing with personality disorder, schizophrenia, or any dissociative disorder, this exercise could be contraindicated for you.** Please check with your medical practitioner.

DEBRIEFING YOUR PRACTICE

As you reflect on the relaxation you just experienced, consider the following:

- How did it go? What did you experience?
- Were you able to stay with Peter's instructions?
- What reactions did you notice in your body?
- How are you doing now?

IN SUMMARY

The benefits of Deep Relaxation training are numerous. It is, in fact, more regenerating than sleep. It can't replace sleep, but it can boost your energy significantly, allowing you to deal with pressure and lack of sleep better. The physiological benefits of Deep Relaxation are significant: lowered oxygen consumption, lowered heart rate, lowered blood pressure if elevated, lower levels of lactate and muscle tension (source of anxiety), and the production of alpha waves in the brain.

Like any skill, the ability to focus and stay alert while doing the exercise will vary from day to day. But remember, the only definition of a good Deep Relaxation is one that you did. Do not fuss about how well you do it. The benefits are accumulative, like fitness. The more regularly you train, the better you become at relaxing in general. You will develop a strong reference point for being relaxed that will allow you to assess and adjust more quickly when the challenges you face start triggering Fight or Flight. And the health and energy benefits are indisputable.

Good luck and enjoy using this powerful and multi-faceted Resilience tool.