

Chapter 6 of Psycho Cybernetics by Maxwell Maltz

Relax, and Let Your Success Mechanism Work for You

Stress has become a popular word in our language. We speak of this as the age of stress. Worry, anxiety, insomnia, stomach ulcers have become accepted as a necessary part of the world in which we live. Yet I am convinced that it does not have to be that way.

We could relieve ourselves of a vast load of care, anxiety, and worry if we could but recognize the simple truth that our Creator made ample provisions for us to live successfully in this or any other age by providing us with a built-in Creative Mechanism.

Our trouble is that we ignore the automatic Creative Mechanism and try to do everything and solve all our problems by conscious thought, or "forebrain thinking."

The forebrain is comparable to the "operator" of a computer, or any other type of servo-mechanism. It is with the forebrain that we think "I," and feel our sense of identity. It is with the forebrain that we exercise imagination, or set goals. We use the forebrain to gather information, make observations, and evaluate incoming sense-data, form judgments.

But the forebrain cannot create. It cannot “do” the job to be done, any more than the operator of a computer can “do” the work.

It is the job of the forebrain to pose problems and to identify them—but by its very nature it was never engineered to solve problems.

Don't Be Too Careful

Yet that is precisely what modern man tries to do: solve all his problems by conscious thought.

Jesus said, “Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?” Dr. Norbert Wiener tells us that man cannot even perform such a simple operation as picking up a pen from a table by conscious thought or “will.”

Because modern man does depend almost entirely on his forebrain, he becomes too careful, too anxious, and too fearful of “results,” and the advice of Jesus to “take no thought for the morrow,” or of St. Paul to be “careful in nothing,” is regarded as impractical nonsense.

Yet this is precisely the advice that William James, dean of American psychologists, gave us years ago, if we would but have listened to him. In his little essay “*The Gospel of Relaxation*” (collected in his book *On Vital Reserves*), he said that modern man was too tense, too concerned for results, too

anxious (this was in 1899), and that there was a better and easier way:

“If we wish our trains of ideation and volition to be copious and varied and effective, we must form the habit of freeing them from the inhibitive influence of reflection upon them, of egoistic preoccupation about their results.

“Such a habit, like other habits, can be formed. Prudence and duty and self-regard, emotions of ambition and emotions of anxiety, have, of course, a needful part to play in our lives. But confine them as far as possible to the occasions when you are making your general resolutions and deciding on your plans of campaign, and keep them out of the details.

“When once a decision is reached and execution is the order of the day, dismiss absolutely all responsibility and care about the outcome. Unclamp, in a word, your intellectual and practical machinery, and let it run free; and the service it will do you will be twice as good.”

Victory by Surrender

Later, in his famous Gifford Lectures (collected in The Varieties of Religious Experience), James cited example after example of persons who had tried unsuccessfully for years to rid themselves of anxieties, worries, inferiorities, guilt feelings, by making conscious efforts, only to find that success finally came when they gave up the struggle consciously, and stopped trying to solve their problems by conscious thought.

“Under these circumstances,” said James, “the way to success, as vouched for by innumerable authentic personal narrations, is by . . . surrender . . . passivity, not activity—relaxation, not intentness, should be now the rule.

Give up the feeling of responsibility, let go your hold, resign the care of your destiny to higher powers, be genuinely indifferent as to what becomes of it all. . . . It is but giving your private convulsive self a rest, and finding that a greater Self is there.

The results, slow or sudden, or great or small, of the combined optimism and expectancy, the regenerative phenomena which ensue on the abandonment of effort, remain firm facts of human nature.”

The Secret of Creative Thinking and Creative Doing

Proof of the fact that what we have been saying is true can be seen in the experience of writers, inventors, and other creative workers. Invariably, they tell us that creative ideas are not consciously thought out by forebrain thinking, but come automatically, spontaneously, and somewhat like a bolt out of the blue, when the conscious mind has let go of the problem and is engaged in thinking of something else.

These creative ideas do not come willy-nilly without some preliminary conscious thought about the problem. All the evidence points to the conclusion that in order to receive an “inspiration” or a “hunch,” the person must first of all be intensely

interested in solving a particular problem, or securing a particular answer.

He must think about it consciously, gather all the information he can on the subject, consider all the possible courses of action. And above all, he must have a burning desire to solve the problem.

But, after he has defined the problem, sees in his imagination the desired end result, secured all the information and facts that he can, then additional struggling, fretting, and worrying over it does not help, but seems to hinder the solution.

Henri Fehr, the famous Swiss scientist, said that practically all his good ideas came to him when he was not actively engaged in work on a problem, and that most of the discoveries of his contemporaries were made when they were away from their workbench, so to speak.

It is well known that when Thomas A. Edison was stymied by a problem, he would lie down and take a short nap.

Charles Darwin, telling how an intuitional flash came to him suddenly, after months of conscious thinking had failed to give him the ideas he needed for *The Origin of Species*, wrote, "I can remember the very spot in the road, whilst in my carriage, when to my joy the solution occurred to me."

Lenox Riley Lohr, former president of the National Broadcasting Company, wrote in the *American Magazine*, how ideas that had

helped him in business came to him. "Ideas, I find, come most readily when you are doing something that keeps the mind alert without putting too much strain upon it. Shaving, driving a car, sawing a plank, or fishing or hunting, for instance. Or engaging with some friend in stimulating conversation. Some of my best ideas came from information picked up casually and entirely unrelated to my work."

C. G. Suits, who was the chief of research at General Electric, said that nearly all the discoveries in research laboratories came as hunches during a period of relaxation, following a period of intensive thinking and fact-gathering.

Bertrand Russell wrote in his book *The Conquest of Happiness*, "I have found, for example, that, if I have to write upon some rather difficult topic, the best plan is to think about it with very great intensity—the greatest intensity of which I am capable—for a few hours or days, and at the end of that time give orders, so to speak, that the work is to proceed underground. After some months I return consciously to the topic and find that the work has been done.

Before I had discovered this technique, I used to spend the intervening months worrying because I was making no progress; I arrived at the solution none the sooner for this worry, and the intervening months were wasted, whereas now I can devote them to other pursuits."

Many creators report that they get their best ideas either in the shower, while walking along the beach, or otherwise being in or around water. Perhaps the “flow” of water leads to the flow of ideas.

The other “activity” that often leads to creative insights is sleeping. If you have a question you’d like an answer to, or a project you’re working on that you’d like to accomplish with greater ease, you can instruct your mind before going to bed to be open to useful information and to remember it upon awakening. Keeping a notepad and pen on your nightstand to record the insights as they come is a good idea. When you use this approach, you can quickly find yourself getting ideas that greatly surpass anything that comes to you while awake.

You Are a “Creative Worker”

The mistake we make is assuming that this process of “unconscious cerebration” is reserved for writers, inventors, and “creative workers.” We are all creative workers, whether we are stay-at-home parents, schoolteachers, students, salesmen, or businessmen.

We all have the same “success mechanism” within us, and it will work in solving personal problems, running a business, or selling goods, just as it will in writing a story or inventing.

Bertrand Russell recommended that the same method he used in his writing be employed by his readers in solving their mundane personal problems.

Dr. J. B. Rhine, the botanist and author of *Extrasensory Perception and Parapsychology: Frontier Science of the Mind*, said that he was inclined to think that what we call “genius” is a process; a natural way in which the human mind works to solve any problem, but that we mistakenly apply the term “genius” only when the process is used to write a book or paint a picture.

The Secret of “Natural” Behavior and Skill The Success Mechanism within you can work in the same way to produce “creative doing” as it does to produce “creative ideas.”

Skill in any performance, whether it be in sports, in playing the piano, in conversation, or in selling merchandise, consists not in painfully and consciously thinking out each action as it is performed, but in relaxing, and letting the job do itself through you.

Creative performance is spontaneous and “natural” as opposed to self-conscious and studied. The most skilled pianist in the world could never play a simple composition if he tried to consciously think out just which finger should strike which key—while he was playing.

He has given conscious thought to this matter previously—while learning—and has practiced until his actions become automatic and habit-like. He was able to become a skilled performer only when he reached the point where he could cease conscious effort and turn the matter of playing over to the unconscious habit mechanism that is a part of the Success Mechanism.

Don't Jam Your Creative Machinery

Conscious effort inhibits and jams the automatic Creative Mechanism. The reason some people are self-conscious and awkward in social situations is simply that they are too consciously concerned, too anxious, about doing the right thing. They are painfully conscious of every move they make.

Every action is “thought out.” Every word spoken is calculated for its effect. We speak of such persons as “inhibited,” and rightly so.

But it would be more true were we to say that the person is not inhibited, but that the person has inhibited his own Creative Mechanism. If these people could let go, stop trying, not care, and give no thought to the matter of their behavior, they could act creatively, spontaneously, and be themselves.

When you set a goal, it's very important to keep in mind that most of the time you will be in “journey mode.” This means you will be focused on the process and the actions you need to take to get where you want to go—most of the time.

If your goal is to climb Mount Everest, and you are only thinking about being at the top, you “jam” your success mechanism in the present. You've got to take care of each step along the way.

Focus on the journey the majority of the time—and occasionally (once or twice per day when you visualize) tune into the goal. Then get back into journey mode and simply turn your goal over

to your subconscious or Success Mechanism, to guide you there without effort.

People who want to improve their financial situation must heed the same advice. If you continually obsess about where you are as well as where you want to be financially, you're less likely to get there.

Program the goal—then get busy on the process—and if you don't know the process yet, give yourself space to allow the process of "how" to come to you. The "how" will come to you when you're relaxed—not when you're tense or trying to force your way through the process.

Four Rules for Freeing Your Creative Machinery

The First Rule: "Do Your Worrying Before You Place Your Bet, Not After the Wheel Starts Turning."

I am indebted to a business executive, whose weakness was roulette, for the above expression, which "worked like magic" in helping him overcome worry, and at the same time function more creatively and successfully.

I happened to quote to him the advice of William James, mentioned earlier, to the effect that emotions of anxiety have their place in planning and deciding on a course of action, but "when once a decision is reached and execution is the order of the day, dismiss absolutely all responsibility and care about the

outcome. Unclamp, in a word, your intellectual and practical machinery, and let it run free.”

Several weeks later he burst into my office as enthusiastic over his “discovery” as a schoolboy who has discovered his first love. “It hit me all of a sudden,” he said, “during a visit to Las Vegas. I’ve been trying it and it works.”

“What hit you and what works?” I asked.

“That advice of William James’s! It didn’t make too much of an impression when you told me, but while I was playing roulette it came back to me. I noticed any number of people who appeared not to worry at all before placing their bets. Apparently odds meant nothing to them. But once the wheel started turning, they froze up, and began to worry whether their number would come up or not.

“How silly, I thought. If they want to worry, or be concerned, or figure odds, the time to do that is before the decision is made to place a bet. There is something you can do about it then, by thinking about it. You can figure out the best odds possible, or decide not to take the risk at all.

“But after the bets are placed and the wheel starts turning—you might as well relax and enjoy it—thinking about it is not going to do one bit of good, and is wasted energy.

“Then I got to thinking that I myself had been doing exactly the same thing in my business and in my personal life. I often made

decisions or embarked upon courses of action without adequate preparation, without considering all the risks involved and the best possible alternative.

“But after I had set the wheels in motion, so to speak, I continually worried over how it would come out, whether I had done the right thing. I made a decision right then that in the future I would do all my worrying, all my forebrain thinking, before a decision was made, and that after making a decision, and setting the wheels in motion, I would dismiss absolutely all responsibility and care about the outcome.

“Believe it or not, it works. I not only feel better, sleep better, and work better, but my business is running much smoother. I also discovered that the same principle works in a hundred different little personal ways.

“For example, I used to worry and fume about having to go to the dentist, and other unpleasant tasks. Then I said to myself, “This is silly. You know the unpleasantness involved before you make the decision to go. If the unpleasantness is all that important to cause so much concern, and not worth the worry involved, you can simply decide not to go. But, if the decision is that the trip is worth a little unpleasantness, and a definite decision is made to go—then forget about it. Consider the risk before the wheel starts turning.”

“I used to worry the night before I had to make a speech at a board meeting. Then I said to myself, “I’m either going to make

the speech or I'm not. If the decision is to make it, then there's no need in considering not making it—or trying to mentally run away from it.”

“I have discovered that much nervousness and anxiety is caused by mentally trying to escape or run away from something that you have decided to go through with physically. If the decision is made to go through with it—not to run away physically—why mentally keep considering or hoping for escape? I used to detest social gatherings and go along only to please my wife, or for business reasons. I went, but mentally I resisted it, and was usually pretty grumpy and uncommunicative. Then I decided that if the decision was to go along physically, I might as well go along mentally—and dismiss all thoughts of resistance. Last night I not only went to what I would formerly have called a stupid social gathering, but I was surprised to find myself thoroughly enjoying it.

The Second Rule: Form the Habit of Consciously Responding to the Present Moment

Consciously practice the habit of “taking no anxious thought for tomorrow,” by giving all your attention to the present moment.

Your Creative Mechanism cannot function or work tomorrow. It can only function in the present—today. Make long-range plans for tomorrow. But don't try to live in tomorrow, or in the past.

Creative living means responding and reacting to environment spontaneously. Your Creative Mechanism can respond

appropriately and successfully to present environment—only if you have your full attention on present environment—and give it information concerning what is happening now.

Plan all you want to for the future. Prepare for it. But don't worry about how you will react tomorrow, or even five minutes from now. Your Creative Mechanism will react appropriately in the "now" if you pay attention to what is happening now. It will do the same tomorrow. It cannot react successfully to what may happen—but to what is happening.

LIVE IN DAY-TIGHT COMPARTMENTS

Dr. William Osler, author of *A Way of Life*, said that one simple habit, which could be formed like any other habit, was the sole secret of his happiness and success in life. Live life in "day-tight compartments," he advised his students.

Look neither forward nor backward beyond a 24-hour cycle. Live today as best you can. By living today well you do the most within your power to make tomorrow better.

William James, commenting on this same philosophy as a cardinal principle of both psychology and religion for curing worry, said, "Of Saint Catherine of Genoa it is said that 'she took cognizance of things, only as they were presented to her in succession, moment by moment.'

To her holy soul, the divine moment was the present moment . . . and when the present moment was estimated in itself and in its relations, and when the duty that was involved in it was

accomplished, it was permitted to pass away as if it had never been, and to give way to the faces and duties of the moment which came after.”

Alcoholics Anonymous uses the same principle when they say, “Don’t try to stop drinking forever—merely say, ‘I will not drink today.’”

STOP, LOOK, AND LISTEN!

Practice becoming more consciously aware of your present environment. What sights, sounds, odors are present in your environment right now that you are not conscious of? Consciously practice looking and listening.

Become alert to the feel of objects. How long since you have really felt the pavement beneath your feet as you walk? The Native Americans and the early pioneers had to be alert to the sights and sounds and feelings of their environment in order to survive.

So does modern man, but for a different reason: Not because of physical dangers, but because of the dangers of “nervous disorders” that come from confused thinking, from failure to live creatively and spontaneously and to respond appropriately to environment.

This becoming more aware of what is happening now, and attempting to respond only to what is happening now, has almost magical results in relieving the “jitters.”

The next time you feel yourself tensing up, becoming jittery and nervous—pull yourself up short and say, “What is there here and now that I should respond to? That I can do something about?”

A great deal of nervousness is caused from unwittingly “trying” to do something that cannot be done here or now. You are then geared for action or for “doing,” which cannot take place. Keep constantly in mind that the job of your Creative Mechanism is to respond appropriately to present environment—here and now.

Many times, if we do not “stop and think” about this, we continue to react automatically to some past conditioning. We do not react to the present moment, and the present situation, but to some similar event out of the past.

In short we do not react to reality—but to a fiction. Full recognition of this, and realization of what you’re doing, can frequently bring about an amazingly quick “cure.”

DON'T FIGHT STRAW MEN OUT OF THE PAST

For example, a patient of mine became jittery and anxious in business meetings, theaters, church, or in any formal gathering. “Groups of people” were the common denominator.

Without realizing it, he was attempting to react to some environment out of his past where “groups of people” were a significant factor. He remembered that, when he was a child in elementary school, he had wet his pants, and a cruel schoolteacher had called him up in front of the class and

humiliated him. He reacted with feelings of humiliation and shame.

Now one factor in the situation—" groups of people"—was reacted to as if it were the entire past situation. When he was able to see that he was "acting as if" he were a ten-year-old schoolboy, as if every gathering were an elementary school class, and as if every group leader were the cruel schoolteacher, his anxiety disappeared.

Other typical examples are the woman who responds to every man she meets "as if" he were some individual man out of her past; the man who reacts to every person in authority "as if" he were some individual authority out of his past.

The Third Rule: Try to Do Only One Thing at a Time

Another cause of confusion, and the resulting feelings of nervousness, hurry, and anxiety, is the absurd habit of trying to do many things at one time.

The student studies and watches TV simultaneously. The businessman, instead of concentrating on and only trying to "do" the one letter that he is presently dictating, is thinking in the back of his mind of all the things he should accomplish today, or perhaps this week, and unconsciously trying mentally to accomplish them all at once.

The habit is particularly insidious because it is seldom recognized for what it is. When we feel jittery, or worried, or anxious in

thinking of the great amount of work that lies before us, the jittery feelings are not caused by the work, but by our mental attitude—which is “I ought to be able to do this all at once.”

We become nervous because we are trying to do the impossible, and thereby making futility and frustration inevitable. The truth is: We can only do one thing at a time. Realizing this, fully convincing ourselves of this simple and obvious truth, enables us to mentally stop trying to do the things that lie next, and to concentrate all our awareness, all our responsiveness, on this one thing we are doing now.

When we work with this attitude, we are relaxed, we are free from the feelings of hurry and anxiety, and we are able to concentrate and think at our best.

THE LESSON OF THE HOURGLASS

Dr. James Gordon Gilkey preached a sermon in 1944 called “Gaining Emotional Poise,” which was reprinted in Reader’s Digest and became a classic almost overnight.

He had found, through many years of counseling, that one of the main causes of breakdown, worry, and all sorts of other personal problems, was this bad mental habit of feeling that you should be doing many things now.

Looking at the hourglass on his desk, he had an inspiration. Just as only one grain of sand could pass through the hourglass, so could we only do one thing, at a time. It is not the job, but the way we insist on thinking of the job that causes the trouble. Most

of us feel hurried and harried, said Dr. Gilkey, because we form a false mental picture of our duties, obligations, and responsibilities.

There seem to be a dozen different things pressing in on us at any given moment; a dozen different things to do; a dozen different problems to solve; a dozen different strains to endure. No matter how hurried or harried our existence may be, said Dr. Gilkey, this mental picture is entirely false.

Even on the busiest day the crowded hours come to us one moment at a time; no matter how many problems, tasks, or strains we face, they always come to us in single file, which is the only way they can come.

To get a true mental picture, he suggested visualizing an hourglass, with the many grains of sand dropping one by one. This mental picture will bring emotional poise, just as the false mental picture will bring emotional unrest.

Another similar mental device that I have found very helpful to my patients is telling them: "Your Success Mechanism can help you do any job, perform any task, solve any problem. Think of yourself as 'feeding' jobs and problems to your Success Mechanism as a scientist 'feeds' a problem to a computer.

The 'hopper' to your Success Mechanism can handle only one job at a time. Just as a computer cannot give the right answer if three different problems are mixed up and fed in at the same time, neither can your own Success Mechanism.

Ease off on the pressure. Stop trying to cram into the machinery more than one job at a time.” You can have many goals, but concentrating on just one at a time will help you accomplish far more than attempting to focus on many at once.

Get the fire of desire started within being single-minded about one goal and the flame will naturally spread to the others without you forcing it.

The Fourth Rule: Sleep on It

If you have been wrestling with a problem all day without making any apparent progress, try dismissing it from your mind, and put off making a decision until you’ve had a chance to “sleep on it.”

Remember that your Creative Mechanism works best when there is not too much interference from your conscious “I.” In sleep, the Creative Mechanism has an ideal opportunity to work independently of conscious interference, if you have previously started the wheels turning.

Remember the fairy story “The Elves and the Shoemaker”? The shoemaker found that if he cut out the leather, and laid out the patterns before retiring, little elves came and actually put the shoes together for him while he was sleeping.

Many creative workers have used a very similar technique. Mrs. Thomas A. Edison has said that each evening her husband would go over in his mind those things that he hoped to accomplish the

next day. Sometimes, he would make a list of the jobs he wanted to do, and problems that he hoped to solve.

Sir Walter Scott is reported to have said to himself, whenever his ideas would not jell, "Never mind, I shall have it at seven o'clock tomorrow morning." Vladimir Bekhterev, the Russian neurologist who is considered to be the father of objective psychology, said, "It happened several times when I concentrated in the evening on a subject which I had put into poetic shape, that in the morning, I had only to take my pen and the words flowed, as it were, spontaneously. I had only to polish them later."

Edison's well-known "catnaps" were far more than mere respites from fatigue. In *The Psychology of the Inventor*, Joseph Rossman said, "When stumped by something, he would stretch out in his Menlo workshop and, half-doing, get an idea from his dream mind to help him around the difficulty."

J. B. Priestley dreamed three essays, complete in every detail: "The Berkshire Beast," "The Strange Outfitter," and "The Dream."

Fredrick Temple, an archbishop of Canterbury, said: "All decisive thinking goes on behind the scenes; I seldom know when it takes place . . . much of it certainly during sleep."

Henry Ward Beecher once preached every day for 18 months. His method? He kept a number of ideas "hatching" and each night before retiring would select an "incubating idea" and "stir it up" by thinking intensely about it.

The next morning it would have fitted itself together for a sermon. August Kekulé's discovery of the secret of the benzene molecule while he slept, Otto Loewi's Nobel Prize-winning discovery (that active chemicals are involved in the action of nerves), and Robert Louis Stevenson's "Brownies," which he said gave him all his plot ideas while sleeping, are all well known.

Less well known is the fact that many businessmen use the same technique. For example, Henry Cobbs, who started his business in the early 1930s with a ten-dollar bill and built a multimillion-dollar mail-order fruit business, kept a notebook by his bedside to jot down creative ideas immediately upon waking.

Vic Pocker arrived in America from Hungary with no money and unable to speak English. He got a job as a welder, went to night school to learn English, and saved his money. His savings were wiped out in the Great Depression.

But in 1932, he started a small welding shop of his own, which he called Steel Fabricators, and which became a profitable million-dollar firm. "I've discovered you have to make your own breaks," he said. "Sometimes in my dreams I get ideas for licking problems, and wake up all excited. Many's the time I've gotten out of bed at 2 a.m. and gone down to the shop to see if an idea would work."

I recommend you read this chapter a few times.

This chapter from Psycho Cybernetics contains timeless truths about how to let the power of what MALTZ calls "your built-in

Success Mechanism” lead you accomplishing the goals you set for yourself.

I highly recommend the whole book. Get the Expanded Edition with with additional material by Matt Furey. It’s available on Amazon in paperback and Kindle editions.

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