THE BUIDLING BLOCKS OF HAPPINESS

WEEK 2

POSITIVE EMOTIONS THROUGH THE BODY

RECAP

So last week we spoke about the P in PERMAV how to listen in to our negative emotions for information and how to actively cultivate positive emotions.
We learnt how to cultivate especially gratitude which is one of the most powerful emotions for making us feel happier about our life. It shifts our focus to what is good rather than what is bad or missing.

THIS WEEK

This week we are staying with the positive emotions theme - P in PERMAV.
But this time we are going to learn how to use our bodies to activate positive states.

The truth is that our bodies influence our happiness as much as our minds do. As we can boost our health and lower our stress levels through how we think, so can we lower our stress levels and improve our biological health directly through embodied, physical interventions.

In fact, our bodies offer us a super-highway to generating positive emotions like calm, joy, exhilaration, enthusiasm, serenity and equanimity to name only a few.

There are many ways to cultivate positive emotional states through our bodies by satisfying our senses, listening to uplifting music, looking at something beautiful, tasting something delicious, touching someone. These are all pathways but that requires an external stimulus to the body.

Today we are going to talk about the ways you can access positive emotions directly through the body and not needing any external input: namely through EXERCISE, BODY POSTURE and BREATHING.

EXERCISE.
We will dedicate a whole session on exercise later in the program, and how we can deliberately use it to support our physical and mental health.

So, all of us know how great we feel after a walk or a swim or a run and how physical activity can immediately lift our mood. The one thing to onboard today is that exercise is not a nice-to-have. It is vital for a fulfilled, happy, healthy life. More about this in session 7.

BODY POSTURE

One of the most practical ways to shift your emotional state is through body posture.
Do you know that your posture, the way you sit and stand, and even your facial expression send signals to your brain and that in turn sets off a whole biochemistry of domino effects that directly impacts your emotions and your mood?

There is a study that shows that if you ask one group of people to keep a pencil in their mouth while the control group does not, the group with the pencils report higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction, because the brain reads the expression as smiling and can’t distinguish between a real smile and the pencil-induced smile.

Just in this moment try it for yourself. Let your head hang down, and your shoulders droop and your chest cavity collapse inward. What is the feeling it conjures? Loss of power, low energy, even hopelessness?

Now try the opposite – sit up or stand up straight. Drop your shoulders and broaden them, push out your chest, drop your chin… and smile. Now what are the emotions you feel? Perhaps alertness, agency, energy, and perhaps even an increased feeling of presence and personal power? Posture really matters.

Amy Cuddy's famous Ted Talk on power postures makes the point very well when she advises people to get into power postures before they go into a meeting or present on stage.

The next time you have to go into a meeting, and if you want to show up at your best and inspire those around you, or at the very least influence them positively, polish your posture. It impacts how you feel about yourself and how you show up in the world.

The next time you need to get out of a negative emotional spiral, use your body - square your shoulders, sit up straight, breathe deeply, smile - and feel the emotions shifting.

BREATHING
One of the most powerful ways to directly affect the parasympathetic nervous system in the body, and to directly impact your heart rate and your blood pressure and the emotions that go with it, is through the breath.

Today I will teach you one of the simplest and most powerful tools that will help you take control of your emotional life.

The 4-7-8 breathing technique acts like a bodily short circuit that bypasses the brain. The breathing practice directly calms our bodies, especially in high-arousal states of fear, anger, stress, anxiety, and frustration. Once our body’s arousal has been short-circuited and has returned to a state of calm, our mind can’t help but to follow, and so we create the space to choose more wisely how to respond to the situation.

This simple technique can save your job, your marriage, and even your life.

And this is how you do it.

**The 4-7-8 Tranquilizer**
Sit somewhere comfortable.
Exhale completely to prepare.
Now inhale for 4 counts …1-2-3-4

Hold your breath for 7 counts ….1-2-3-4-5-6-7

Now blow out gently as if you are blowing on the flame of a candle but not to blow it out - blow out gently for 8 counts …. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8.

It is simple: **in four 4 counts, hold for 7 and out for 8.**

Do this four times only and you will immediately feel how your nervous system calms right down and how your mind feels calmer and clearer and more peaceful than before.
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I do this practice whenever I wait at a traffic light or in a queue or when I am waiting for a Web page to open or some big file to download. Every time I feel my stress-levels rise or my impatience or my anxiety, especially before a big presentation or giving a talk, I stand tall push out my chest, smile and do my 4-7-8.

But what is even more important and more wonderful, is that the more we practice, the more it changes us at a neurological and biological level. Every time we notice our motions being hi-jacked and choose to practice 4-7-8 we grow new neurological pathways for getting calm in the heat of the moment. The more we practice, the more we become what we repeat - a calm person who is the master of his/her mental and emotional state.

And this is truly exciting, that we can over time and with small daily steps we can re-wire how we are and show up in the world with more wisdom and grace.

Happy breathing.

Next week we will talk about how to increase **E**ngagement in our life, the E in PERMAV, and how to get into that much-desired high-performance state of flow.