

Episode VI - The Hidden Jewel - Stress Science

Dagne: (Directly into camera) Hi I'm Dagne Crane. Welcome to our 3rd Infinite Potentials video webcast: The (A?) Hidden Jewel - Stress Science. Because of the economic crisis we jumped ahead to discuss Economic Order in Episodes 4 and 5. But now we can discuss the Infinite Potential modules in a more logical sequence. Adam, what do you mean by the Hidden Jewel?

Adam: Because it is as though most people are walking down a pathway (in a beautiful forest?), somewhat depressed and bored with their eyes cast down so they fail to see a sign hanging from a tree which says: "Priceless, life transforming jewel just behind this tree. PS IF YOU DO NOT ACQUIRE (PICK UP) THIS JEWEL YOU WILL SUFFER UNNECESSARILY - A LOT!"

D: So close but yet so far. Everyone gets stressed out sometimes. But most don't think of stress as a science. Define stress for us.

A: Some of us believe that stress science is one of the most important - perhaps the most important physical and mental health science there is - far more profound - far more capable of transforming quality of life than most realize. Hans Selye probably first applied the word stress to specific mind/body phenomena affecting all of us. The word stress came from engineering and it actually means change. So we might also think of stress science as change science as it applies to health. Thinking of it this way also leads to the insight that there is good stress and bad stress, or I prefer healthy stress and unhealthy stress. So there is a science and art to reducing the unhealthy stress (think change) in life and increasing the healthy stress (change).

D: So, what disorders are stress related?

A: It would probably be easier to talk about the few disorders that are not stress related. About 1950 the American Medical Association believed that about 10% of disorders were psychosomatic or stress related. By 1970 the AMA felt that about 90% of disorders had some stress related aspect. I think I can demonstrate how 100% of what goes wrong or right with any human being has a stress component. Some feel that since stress refers to the changes that happen to the mind and body a case could be made that even attempts to heal can produce both healthy and unhealthy stress.

D: For example, chemotherapy, even hypertension and many other medications can be fearsomely stressful. So, if stress science is such a big deal why don't we know more about it?

A: Because stress science is boring to most people even though it is one of the most powerful and reliable ways to improve the quality of life and even performance. It should be one of the most exciting things anyone would want to learn about - better than rock concerts or movies or making money or almost anything you can name.

D: What about religion or spirituality?

A: I think true religion or spirituality or any kind of coherent, creative thinking naturally emerges and is enhanced by skillful stress management. In fact, I think virtually all self actualization systems consider excellent stress management skills an absolutely fundamental foundation and first place to begin serious work on oneself for virtually everyone.

D: That certainly has been and still is true for you and I. Why don't people realize that there is no choice but to learn stress skills because without them frustration, suffering and unhappiness is inevitable?

A: Part of the answer is that our medical educational industrial complex has little incentive to bring stress science into the healing process except in a fairly superficial way. For one thing, if people practice stress management health care costs are drastically reduced. And despite what is said publicly most of the established order does not want to reduce health care costs because they believe that would also reduce profits. One example is a study done in the 70's indicating that appropriate and timely stress management and psychological intervention would reduce overall health costs more than any other strategy. Yet, due to what I assert is misguided lobbying, most funding for stress science interventions has been eliminated in favor of medication and other approaches that the status quo deems more lucrative. .

D: Taking a pill teaches the patient nothing about self regulation. What's the other part of the answer?

A: This is even more difficult and probably painful for most of us to face.

D: How so?

A: I think it relates to a sense of responsibility. If you go deep enough into stress science and the steps which must be taken in order to apply it most of us have to give up our excuses. Because stress science is really based on self knowledge. And this kind of self knowledge points to the insight that our own choices, lifestyle, etc. play a huge role, usually the biggest role, in what goes wrong and what goes right for us.

D: I hope you are not annoying our listeners.

A: Me to. Sounds awfully self righteous doesn't it?

D: It does. Like you know and the rest of us don't get it.

A: Terrible things can happen to any of us at any time. We can be so devastated that it is hard for us to take responsibility until we heal a bit and our minds become more clear. I don't want to make people feel worse about themselves. But those who can take the most personal responsibility are by far the most likely to heal more quickly, have the best lives and highest most consistent quality of consciousness.

D: Doing the best you can with what you have to work with. (pause) Sometimes we just need unconditional love for awhile. Unconditional love is an absolutely mysterious force that can transform any situation.

A: Yes mysteriously so. Probably the ultimate human potential. (Pause) One of the hardest aspects of teaching stress science is how to help people motivate themselves to learn about it so they - we can reap the benefits.

D: I know lots of people who have attended your seminars think you are good at this kind of motivation.

A: Thanks, but how do we help folks make a breakthrough now in 20 minutes or less?

D: Convince us that learning about and practicing stress management is choicelss and help us learn the basics.

A: When most of us think about health care reform we focus on how the insurance companies, the pharmaceutical industry, doctors, health care professionals and government bureaucrats must change their behavior.

D: For the sake of the economy and quality of life they must change. I think it is a national emergency.

A: Of course, but we must develop a national discussion about individual responsibility.

D: You sound like a conservative. But I know you, we are both independents - conservative about some things like personal responsibility and self sufficiency yet liberal about creating a sensible, social, safety net. Too many of us think that whatever is wrong with us a pill or a procedure will fix it. (Pause) But what is the most important determinant of individual health?

A: A senior scholar at the Institute of Medicine, Michael McGinnis, estimates that only 10% of early deaths are caused by sub standard medical care. About 20% stem from social and physical environments and 30% from genetics. The biggest contributor by far is behavior at 40%. (Sam make a pie chart?)

D: Wow! If we factored in the way skillful stress managment influences genetics, environment even medical treatment then that 40% would grow to a bigger number, don't you think?

A: I do.

D: What is the easiest, most efficient way that normal people can make sure they get the benefits of stress science working for themselves?

A: Basics. I guess first see the importance of it. If the interest, the excitement is there then the rest comes relatively easy. (trng journal?)

D: But how do we make stress learning exciting?

A: That's what we are doing as best we can. People learn things because its a fun thing to do or because of fear.

D: Or both. (pause) Fear as a motivator can have bad side effects and doesn't seem to work so well. So, give us some basics. Help us out here.

A: Make it as simple as possible but no simpler. I like to think in terms of the three nervous systems.

D: Voluntary, that's the muscular system, autonomic that's the emotional system and central - the brain and nerves etc.

A: Right. A classic way to learn is to start with the easy or gross and move toward the more subtle.

D: So begin by learning to relax the muscles.

A: Exactly, then work on breathing to influence the autonomic system.

D: If muscles are very relaxed and breathing is rhythmical and natural then there are many techniques for quieting and developing and even evolving the central nervous system.

A: All of this combined and done in a simple and natural way is what I mean by teaching yourself your own personal path of meditation and contemplation..

D: If you take stress management far enough then a unique form of personalized meditation emerges?

A: So far as I can see it works like that.

D: Recently, you were one of the first inductees to the Brain and Biofeedback Museum and Hall of Fame and yet you haven't brought up biofeedback at all. Why?

A: I think of biofeedback as an advanced almost extreme stress management strategy. I intended to discuss it later. If you learn the basic stress science techniques and then apply biofeedback you can amplify the effectiveness of some of those techniques by up to ten times.

D: That's 1000%!

A: That's why we devoted decades to it. It is a wondrous technology of self knowledge. I consider biofeedback to be still in its infancy.

D: And knowing yourself is, perhaps, the most important kind of knowledge.

A: Yes! I think everyone agrees with that. Actually, one of the most powerful motivators to learn stress science comes naturally if a person has the insight that it is possible to actually know oneself better. And it can be relatively simple and easy.

D: If a person sees how much fun self knowledge adventuring is....

A: Almost anything can happen.

D: That's why we call this the Infinite Potentials Series.

D: So, how can the ordinary person learn how to apply stress science in his or her own life?

A: Make it a top priority because every area of life will get better. My old friend L. John Mason wrote a classic book that has been a godsend to many. A Guide to Stress Reduction.

D: What about your book? MindFitness Training? Especially chapter four which is over 100 pages long. You also provide an introduction to Neurofeedback.

A: Which is an advanced, radical stress science application. Think change science.

D: That's pretty motivating. How do we help folks build a motivational fire in themselves?

A: Fire! That's the key! Fire means energy. Most people will be powerfully motivated if they realize that excellent stress skills are the fastest, best way to build energy.

D: What kind of energy?

A: Life energy. Physical, emotional, mental, creative energy.

D: Almost everyone wants and needs more energy. Especially as we get older. How does this energy thing work?

A: The organism is an energy generating system. However, the maladaptive stress response drains energy faster almost any other factor. If one learns how to relax the muscles then the energy used to maintain unnecessary muscle tension is conserved,

D: And breathing correctly while relaxing the muscles also reduces energy wastage in the autonomic or emotional system.

A: If one can do that then it becomes possible to quiet the central nervous system. Unnecessary and counter productive thought diminishes.

D: What does all of this saved energy go? It must be building up.

A: Right! And when the energy builds up to a certain point there is a kind of explosion. And that explosion is the creative process.

D: It takes enormous energy to be creative!

A: Once again, you get the final word, honey.

D: (Into camera) We will continue focusing on stress science - the Hidden Jewel in Episode 7. OK Adam, you can relax now.

A: Very funny cutie. (High five)