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IPM and Breathe

Golf often brilliantly demonstrates the performance myth. Jordan Spieth won The Masters in 2015. He was 21 years old. His return to Augusta the following year looked promising. Despite not playing his best golf he was leading the field at the 10th hole on the final day. What followed was more a disaster class than master class - back-to-back bogeys, a quadruple bogey and a pitch in the water. Danny Willett won. Normally when something like this happens, which is reasonably frequently in golf, one of the commentators will lament, 'Ahhh. It's a funny old game' as though it is a complete mys-tery why these things happen.

But Spieth has some spectacular company in the meltdown department. In 2013 I opened with the identical story of Sergio Garcia who gave the exact same disaster class in the 2006 and 2007 British Open plus the 2008 PGA Championship. Losing on the last day de-spite playing blistering golf all week. Further back Greg Norman was on course to win the 1996 Masters, but didn't. Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson both had a shocker during the 2006 US Open. Rory McIlroy's final round at the 2011 Masters or Adam Scott's spectacular demise at the 2012 British Open all testify to the fact that most are skilled at giving a disaster class on their day every bit as easily as they may give a master class. Of course, this drop in performance is not unique to golf, it hap-pens in all sports as well as in business. People consistently underperform in all walks of life, making poor or sub-optimal decisions so often that sometimes it's a wonder we make any progress at all. Disaster classes in business can have massive financial repercussions for the organisation and for society too, we just don't normally hear about them or get the opportunity to witness them in real time like we do in sport.

But contrary to most sports commentator's wisdom there is nothing mysterious about the sudden loss of form, the precipitous failure, the calamitous shareholder meeting or the disastrous media interview. The reason it happens, on the golf course or during the strategy offsite, is that we simply don't understand what's really driving performance in the first place. This book aims to set the record straight and reveal the secrets which, once you understand, will enable you to be brilliant every day.

To facilitate that understanding we are going to explore a number of scientific discoveries about all the levels of the human system from a diverse range of research fields including medicine, cardiolo-gy, neurophysiology, evolutionary biology, quantum physics, signal processing and systems theory as well as organizational perfor-mance, sports psychology and emotional intelligence. In examining many largely agreed upon 'facts' we will see that some astonishing conclusions become clear. Conclusions that, as extraordinary as they may seem, consist of no more than pre-existing knowledge.

Whilst this book exposes the secret science of brilliant leadership, it's important to understand that these scientific insights have not been kept secret deliberately; it's just that they are rarely known by the people who could benefit most from their appreciation and application.

This knowledge has been around for many years, sometimes decades, but each 'part' has usually only been known in academia or reported in obscure medical or scientific journals. Very few of these key insights have made it into mainstream discussion and almost none are taught in business schools or published in business literature.

And yet when we integrate these insights, they lead us to a sur-prising conclusion about ourselves – we can be brilliant every single day. We can regain the energy we had 10 years ago and become much smarter, happier and healthier. We can be more successful, enjoy better relationships and have a greater impact on our business, our society and the world.

This journey is not for the faint hearted. Most leadership books contain one big idea and a few interesting nuggets along the way. This book contains several big ideas in each chapter and the nuggets are large enough and frequent enough to start a gold rush. It brings together the critical business-related insights of the last 20 years so that we can finally appreciate the 'mystery' of performance once and for all. And the first of those critical insights, as we shall see, is that our brilliance all starts with the quality of our physiology.

In business (and sport) it's all about results. Results are how we measure success. In business most leaders are in pursuit of the same financial goals – more revenue, more profit, greater market share, a significantly improved share price and increased stakeholder value. The obvious place to look if we want to understand and improve our results is behaviour.

What are we doing? What are the key people in our team doing? What milestones are being met, what gains are be-ing made? It's behaviour that is most commonly addressed by the variety of 'business solutions' put forward by consultants and coaches. The standard approach usually involves assessing what is currently happening and deciding what needs to be done differently to improve results. Unfortunately, every manager already under-stands that knowing what needs to be done does not mean that it will get done. The answer to elevated performance does not there-fore lie in behaviour alone. If we really want to improve performance and crank out our A-game every single day, we need to look deeper into what is happening on the 'inside' and not just focus on the 'out-side' surface behaviours.

There really is no mystery to performance: our effectiveness and the results we achieve start with something much deeper in the human system than behaviour – our physiology.

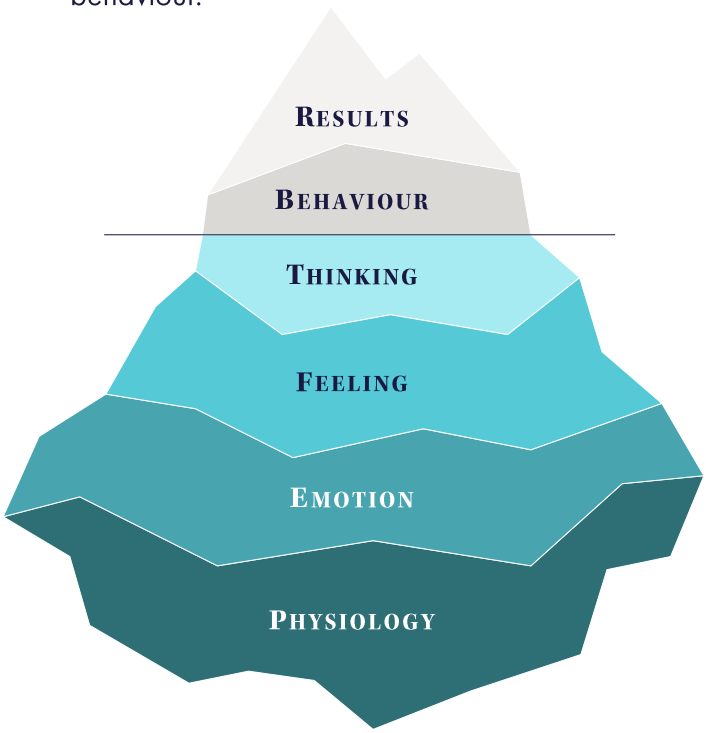
It's Your Physiology Stupid!

During the 1992 US election Bill Clinton's campaign strategist James Carville effectively drew the American people's attention to the largely ignored but critically important topic of the economy with his campaign slogan: 'It's the Economy – stupid!' Bush Senior had failed to pull the economy out of recession and was busy fighting his cam-paign on other issues. Clinton won the election.

In the same way, many of the 'solutions' to business performance put forward by the coaching and consulting industry are ineffective or irrelevant, albeit interesting, while the real catalyst for elevated performance – physiology – is almost exclusively ignored.

Just think about it for a moment...

If we want to guarantee that people actually do the right things to deliver the results we want, we need to understand what really drives their behaviour.



In order to answer that question, we need to peel back each layer of the human system, one by one, to understand the deeper drivers of performance. Firstly, what drives behaviour is thinking. What we think determines what we do.

If I'm coaching a CEO and he thinks I'm an idiot or he thinks that what I'm saying is rubbish, he's not going to do what I suggest. Why would he? He think I'm an idiot talking rubbish! Similarly, if I don't grab your attention in these opening few pages and make you think, 'Mm, this is a very different approach, I'm going to keep reading', you're going to assume this book is like every other leadership book you've ever read and you're probably not going to do anything differently. And if you don't do anything differently, you're not going to get different results. But even if I manage to change what you think it's still not enough. We need to go deeper peel back another layer.

For example, it's likely that most of the golfers mentioned earlier employed a sports psychologist to help them with their thinking or mind set. In business, you may even have employed some sort of psychometric testing to measure reasoning or analytic skills, or commissioned psychology-based coaching to help try and improve the quality of your thinking and that of your senior management team. But getting to grips with thinking isn't enough to change the outcome. Why? Because what we think or how well we think it is determined by something more fundamental in the human system, and that's how we feel. How we feel has a very direct impact on what we think. There is, of course, a reciprocal relationship between thinking and feeling. How we think affects how we feel; and how we feel affects how we think. But if thinking and feeling engaged in an arm wrestle, feeling would win every time. This is why feeling, rather than thinking, is really the primary determinant of what we do.

A salesperson may think, 'I have to make 20 more cold calls to meet my prospecting quota for the week.' But if it's Friday afternoon and they don't feel like it, what wins? Thinking or feeling? Feeling will always out gun thinking. Sure, we can force ourselves to follow through on tasks because we think they are important, but it's un-sustainable. Consider our New Year's resolutions to get fit. There's a mountain of evidence about the results that can be expected if we do. We know it's a smart thing to do and we may be able to use will-power to force ourselves to comply for a week or two. But sooner or later – usually sooner – most of us will stop going to the gym because we just don't feel like it!

When Spieth started to drop shots, his feelings took over and no amount of thinking, or sports psychology work on his mind set, could halt or reverse that process. It is not easy to overwrite a feeling with a thought, whereas a feeling of 'worry' or 'stress' can dominate an individual's thinking all day.

In order to change the quality of someone's thinking, to drive a different behaviour, improve performance and achieve better results, we actually have to change the way they feel. Every good marketer knows that. People don't buy things because they think they want them; they buy them because they feel they need them!

Let's imagine you could change how people feel. It still wouldn't be enough to consistently change the game. Why? Because how we feel is determined by something even deeper in the human system and that is raw emotion, or more accurately e-motion (energy in mo-tion).

The reason it is so hard to control or change the way we feel is because of the raw emotion that is occurring in our body without us necessarily realizing it.

Telling someone not to worry is like closing the barn door when the horse has bolted. The raw energy pulsing through their body is already in transit – it's too late. And the reason this raw energy is coursing through their body in the first place is because at an even deeper level, down in the basement of the human system, is their physiology or their biological reactions and processes.

What's driving our behaviour is our thinking, which is largely de-termined by our feelings, which themselves are the awareness of our emotions, which are made up of our physiological signals. And this is the real reason Spieth lost. His physiology changed; his emotions became turbulent and he didn't realize it. He couldn't feel it, but this physiological shift meant that he was unable to 'read the conditions'. This led to impaired thinking and poor decisions that ultimately cost him a second back to back green jacket. There is no mystery. There was just a human being not functioning at his best because he didn't understand and didn't control the myriad of internal signals and processes that need to be balanced in order to consistently per-form at his best.

There really is no mystery to performance – our effectiveness and the results we achieve starts with something much deeper in the human system than behaviour – our physiology.

If it all starts with physiology, what is physiology? Physiology is just data or information streams that each bodily system generates all the time. As you read these words your body is taking care of a million little details that keep you alive – there is constant activity. Vast streams of data are being sent and received from one body sys-tem to another in the form of electrical signals, electromagnetic sig-nals, chemical signals, pressure, sound and heat waves. We don't have to think about this information or put it in our diary, the human body is the ultimate performance machine. It just does its thing whether we are aware of it or not.

We all have this constant traffic of physiological information flowing around our body 24/7. But very few people understand its impact and fewer still have learnt how to master this traffic and generate better-quality information flow that enables better-quality performance. Learning how to change the quality of signals in our system to deliver brilliance every day is the first skill set to develop as an enlightened leader. Hence enlightenment starts with aware-ness of your own physiology, as there is not change without aware-ness. Awareness of your own physiology is called interoception.

The performance myth explained

I am constantly amazed by how often well-meaning coaches or con-sultants continue to peddle the great performance myth in an out-dated attempt to improve an individual's or a team's performance. All too often such advisors are dishing out nuggets such as, 'it's OK to be nervous before you start' or 'if you are not a bit nervous you will not perform well'. Such statements are based on the belief that we need to be 'psyched up' in order to excel. Other coaches may tell us the exact opposite and suggest that in order to perform at our best we need to be 'relaxed under pressure'.

Neither is true. Before giving a major presentation to city analysts or making a sales pitch to win a large corporate account, we don't need to be pumped up or relaxed. Neither of these determine suc-cess.

When we put our 'pedal to the metal' or hit the accelerator prior to an event, a meeting, a presentation or any performance scenario we activate our autonomic nervous system (ANS). When we try to psych ourselves up we engage the primitive 'fight or flight' response. The chemistry that drives the fight response is slightly different from the chemistry of the flight response, although they look quite similar. In flight our system releases adrenaline, which gives us a boost of en-ergy so we can run away! In contrast, when we fight our body re-leases adrenaline's sister, noradrenaline, which readies the body for battle.

If, rather than psyche ourselves up we tried to be "chilled under pressure" we are activating the other main physiological response to a threat, namely the freeze, play dead or faint response.

None of which are terribly helpful in a high-pressure business setting. Nev-ertheless, society has become obsessed by this 'relaxation response'. It is trotted out as the panacea to all ills and is often advocated by coaching professionals to improve performance. The chemistry of relaxation is much less well known. While most people have heard of adrenaline, the 'accelerator fluid', very few people have heard of the brake fluid. When we freeze or faint our body releases a chemical called acetylcholine.

In very general terms heating our system up requires adrenaline or noradrenaline, and cooling the system down requires acetylcho-line. But brilliant performance is not about relaxation or arousal. It's not about 'chillin' out', getting 'Gee'd up', fight, flight or freezing! What really determines the quality of our performance is not our autonomic nervous system (ANS) it's our neuroendocrine system (NE). The NE system determines the quality of our emotional experience whereas the ANS determines the degree of our arousal.

When we are on the right-hand side of the horizontal NE axis our bodies are in a catabolic state or 'breakdown' state. This state is underpinned by the catabolic hormones, particularly cortisol, which is the body's main stress hormone. There is a strong scientific relationship between cortisol and negative emotion. For example, people with brain tumours that produce too much cortisol often get depressed. And people suffering from depression show high levels of cortisol in their brain fluid. Consequently, increased levels of cortisol are likely to induce more 'negative' emotions. These negative emo-tions increase the cortisol still further, creating a vicious cycle and impaired performance. This is why individuals or teams often experience "losing streaks" – it's biologically underpinned. High performance is extremely difficult when we feel negative.

In contrast, when we are on the left-hand side of the NE axis our bodies are in an anabolic state or 'build up' state. This is under-pinned by a range of 'anabolic hormones', particularly dehydroepi-androsterone (DHEA). DHEA is the 'performance' or 'vitality hor-mone', the body's natural antidote to cortisol, and is associated with more 'positive' emotions. These positive emotions increase the lev-els of DHEA still further, creating a virtuous cycle and enhanced per-formance. This is also why individuals or teams can experience "winning streaks" – this too is biologically underpinned. High per-formance is obviously much easier when we feel positive. DHEA is the molecule that makes testosterone in men and oestrogen in women.

Cortisol:DHEA ratio

The ratio of cortisol:DHEA is a widely seen as one of the best biological markers for aging. A high cortisol:low DHEA ratio has also been implicated in many of the most common diseases we face today:

- Obesity: cortisol increases fat on the waist.
- Diabetes: cortisol increases blood sugar.
- High blood pressure: cortisol disrupts fluid balance.
- Heart disease: cortisol increases cholesterol.
- Cancer: cortisol impairs immune function.
- Depression: cortisol promotes negative feelings.
- Senile dementia: cortisol impairs brain function.

A high level of cortisol impairs many aspects of performance and consequently a business may underperform simply because the 'corporate cortisol' level is too high. Conversely, high DHEA levels underpin great performance. In fact, DHEA is a banned substance in the Olympic Games because of its performance-enhancing capabili-ties.

If we put the vertical 'Activation' axis together with the horizontal 'State' axis we get the performance grid (Figure 1.4). The interaction of these two critical physiological systems has been known for years and was first described by James P Henry, while professor of physi-ology at the University of Southern California School of Medicine in Los Angeles (Henry, 1982; Henry, Stephens and Ely, 1986).

What really matters when it comes to consistent performance is whether we are on the positive left-hand side or the negative right-hand side of the performance grid not whether we are in the activated top half or relaxed bottom half.

Too often the blanket antidote for stress and performance issues is assumed to be relaxation – or just reducing the level of arousal and dropping into the bottom half of the grid. People often ask if you had a relaxing weekend or holiday as though relaxation is always beneficial. This obsession is underpinned by a universal misunderstanding of how our physiology really works. There are two types of arousal – positive arousal (states such as passion or enthusiasm: top left) and negative arousal (states such as anger or frustration: top right). In addition, there are also two types of relaxa-tion. It is possible to drop into the bottom half of the axis positively or negatively.

Positive relaxation is characterized by feelings such as contentment, curiosity and peacefulness whereas negative relaxation is characterized by feelings such as apathy, boredom or detachment.

The problem is that when we drop into these negatively 'relaxed' states we are still producing high levels of cortisol and other cata-bolic hormones that will seriously interfere with our health, our ability to think clearly and ultimately our performance. In fact, the dangers are often exacerbated because people in these negative states tend to think that they are alright because they are 'relaxed'. They are not alright – physiologically speaking they are in real danger. At least when someone is in the top right quadrant of the per-formance grid, feeling angry, resentful or frustrated, they usually realize they are not in a great place and may be more inclined to do something about it.

Just because we have learnt to detach from negative feelings does not mean that the negativity has disappeared. It is still wreaking havoc with our physiology.

It is therefore essential that we are able to distinguish whether we are operating in the top right or top left of the performance grid and where our senior team is operating from. This is critical to consist-ently delivering best performance. And when our team needs to re-cuperate we must ensure we are in the bottom left not the bottom right of the performance grid.

But how we feel is determined by something even deeper in the human system and that is raw emotions or more accurately e-motion (energy in motion).

One of the primary ways that we lose our energy is through inco-herent or erratic breathing. In the same way that we use more fuel driving in the city than we do driving on the motorway, when our breathing is chaotic, we use up much more energy. Coherent breathing is like motorway driving – we travel further using less fuel, and there is less wear and tear on our system, so we not only feel younger but we conserve energy and can actually restore the energy levels that we had when we were younger.

When we are reactive, we will, by default, have a chaotic and er-ratic HRV signal, in large part because our breathing is erratic. Our job is to create a coherent HRV signal so that we become dynamically responsive instead of reactive. This can be achieved by controlling our breathing in a very specific way. If we want to impact perfor-mance, we must stabilize our physiology. The quickest and easiest way to stabilize our physiology is to stabilize our breathing.

Just think about this for a moment... When you are surprised or shocked – what happens? When you get angry or upset – what hap-pens? When you are relaxed – what happens? Your breathing is im-mediately and constantly affected by whatever is going on around you. In order to experience many negative emotional states, it is necessary to lose control of your breath. For example, 'panic' re-quires an individual to breathe in a rapid, erratic and shallow way. The first thing to 'go' in a difficult situation is our ability to breathe properly. As a result, what happens is that our breathing becomes chaotic, scrambling everything from how we feel to how we think, to what we do and ultimately our behaviour and our results.

Generating a rhythmic breathing pattern creates cardiac coher-ence. The rhythmic changes in intrathoracic pressure caused by rhythmic breathing cause the heart rate to vary in a dynamic stable way. As our cardiac physiology becomes coherent the power output of the heart increases, and this drives other biological systems to synchronize with the heart causing physiological entrainment.

The easiest way to understand this is to imagine that the body is an orchestra. The heart is the string section of that orchestra. Within the string section there is a violin, viola, cello, double bass etc. This is the equivalent of the electrical signal, the electromagnetic, the chem-ical, the pressure waves, the heat waves and the sound waves. The electrical signal (HRV) that the heart generates is like the lead violin. Rhythmic breathing is our way of taking control of the biological equivalent of the lead violin. When we do that, the electrical signal the heart generates creates the equivalent of a harmonious note (Figure 2.4) instead of an erratic, chaotic 'white noise' signal (Figure 2.5).

This strong coherent note from the heart in turn begins to en-train all the other physiological signals which releases a lot more power. Cardiac coherence basically means a stable, rhythmic heart rate variation. This can occur at various frequencies – while beating quickly in a heightened state of awareness, say during a presentation or while beating more slowly as you sit at your desk. Both are easily visible when we measure our HRV.

Figure 2.4 “Coherence” seen in anabolic states

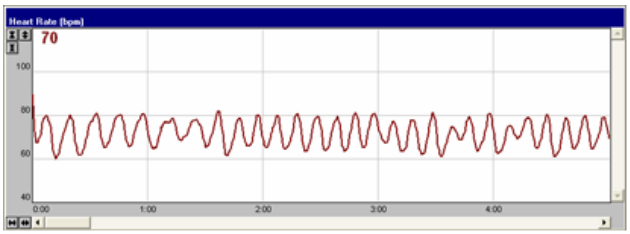
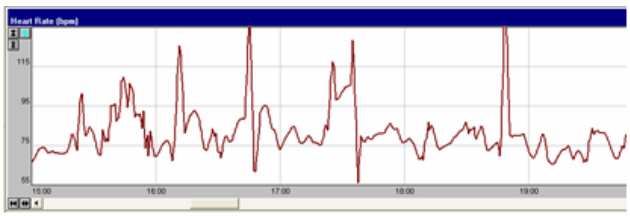


Figure 2.5 “Coherence” seen in catabolic states



Because of entrainment, once we achieve cardiac coherence via our breathing it’s much easier for the other members of the orches-tra (lungs, kidneys, brain etc) to play their own coherent notes so that the whole system plays a series of coherent notes, which creates a more balanced and harmonious ‘tune’ and this physiological co-herence facilitates ‘emotional coherence’.

The B.R.E.A.T.H.E. Skill

The conscious control of our breath is not a new concept; many dis-ciplines such as public speaking, playing a musical instrument, sport, yoga, martial arts and meditation all teach people the importance of correct breathing. Although there are several aspects of our breath-ing that we can learn to control when it comes to facilitating coher-ence only three matter :

Rhythmicity – which means a fixed ratio of in breath to out breath

Smoothness – a fixed flow rate per second on both in and out breath

Location of attention – where is our attention when we are breathing

The single most important priority is rhythm. First, we need to make our breathing rhythmic so that there is a fixed ratio between the in-breath and the out-breath. For example you may decide to breathe in for the count of four seconds and breathe out for the count of six seconds. All that matters is that whatever ratio you choose you maintain that ratio consistently – three in three out, or four in six out, or five in five out.

There is a great deal of inherent power in rhythm – a fact not lost on sports like rowing, which is all about rhythm. I had the good for-tune to work directly with the GB rowing squad going into the 2012 London Olympics and again in 2016 Rio Olympics. Three months before the London Olympics Dr Ann Redgrave, the GB squad's medical advisor, asked me to talk to all the squad coaches to explain what else was needed to win a medal above and beyond what they were already doing. As Ann explains:

#	Parameter	Explanation	Impact
1	Rhythmicity	Fixed ratio of in:out breath	Alters HRV
2	Smoothness	Even flow rate = fixed vol/sec	Alters HRV
3	Focus on heart	Location of attention	Promotes positive emotion
4	Speed	No. breaths per sec	Alters adrenaline levels
5	Pattern	Specific ratio of in:out breath	Alters CO2 levels
6	Volume	Amount of air in a single breath	Alters VO2 max
7	Depth	Location of air in lungs	Alters O2 saturation levels
8	Entrainment	Synchronisation of systems	Feeling of balance
9	Resistance	To airflow in nose & mouth	Can affect levels of anxiety
10	Mechanics	Use of accessory muscles	Alters energy needed to breath
11	Flow Patterns	Of air around the body	Alters focus of attention
12	Special Techniques	e.g. vipassana, Buteyko	varied

When rowers go out to race, they leave the coaches and the support team at the landing stage around 30 to 40 minutes before the race. They go through a prepared warm up routine and then they are required to sit on the start line for up to five minutes. Once they're on the start line what happens – self-doubt can creep in. I know because it happened to me when I was competing. You sit there, you find yourself wondering what you're doing there! It's the last place you want to be. It's exciting but also a bit frightening. Crazy thoughts go through your head. Over the last few years, I've noticed this having a detrimental effect on the performance of our rowers as they leave the start line. What was needed was something to focus the attention and emotions of the rowers at the very time when they needed to do the job, they had trained years for. Alan provided that.

After the initial presentation I worked closely with eight coaches and crews in the run up to the Games. The first thing I taught them was the importance of the BREATHE skill. For them it was particularly helpful when they were waiting nervously before the start of the race and for some rowers it made a massive difference. Of the eight crews I worked with in 2012 six of them won medals (three gold, two sil-vers and a bronze), of the of the seven crews I didn't work with only three medalled.

If someone learns to row, once they are in the boat, the cox shouts 'in-out-in-out', to help them establish a rhythm. If one person is try-ing to put the blades in the water when someone else is taking them out, the boat won't move very well. The first step toward coherent breathing therefore is rhythm.

Once you have established rhythmic breathing the second step is to create a smooth breath. It's is possible to breathe rhythmically but in a staccato 'jumpy' fashion. Coherence requires a smooth rhythm. This means we need to ensure a fixed volume of air is going in and out of our lungs per second.

Again, smoothness is also critical in rowing. Once the team has been taught to get the oars in the water at the same time in a rhyth-mic stroke, they must row smoothly through the water. If they put their blades in the water and pull really hard then let the oars drift a bit and then pull really hard again, the boat will spurt forward and then stop. What's needed is a smooth consistent stroke all the way through.

If you watch the GB rowers, you can see that they use the same amount of power at the start of the stroke as they do at the end of the stroke. It's the same in cycling. An amateur cyclist will kick off with a really big push and rely on momentum to bring the pedal back around so they can push down again and repeat. If you were to watch a professional such as Chris Froome, there is a smooth con-sistent effort all the way round the cycle, even when they are lifting their foot up. And that generates a massive amount of force, pulling them away from less able cyclists.

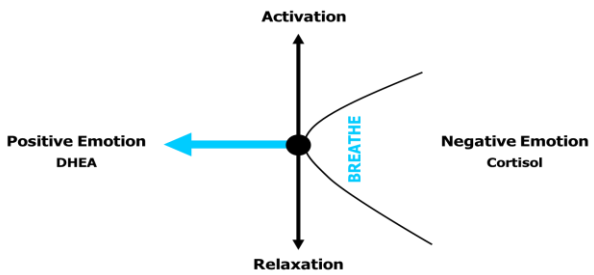
And finally, the third important aspect of our breathing is our lo-cation of attention while we are breathing. We suggest rather than abdominal breathing it's important to focus on our heart or the cen-tre of our chest. We say this for three reasons:

1.The heart is the main power station in the human system and generates considerably more energy than any other human organ or system.

2. When we feel most chaotic and our breathing and mind are scrambled, there is usually a great deal of 'noise' in our head as we wrestle to regain control. The very act of moving our attention away from all the noise and dropping it into our body is beneficial. By consciously moving our focus away from our head and into our body we facilitate faster coherence.

3. When we focus on our heart or the middle of our chest, we are more likely to experience a positive emotional state because the heart is where most human beings experience their positive emotion. We say: 'I love you with all my heart', we don't say 'I love you with all my amygdala' or 'all my knee'. I don't love my sons with 'my anterior cingulate cortex' even though that's probably where the information registers. We feel the sensation of love in the centre of our chest. Thus, when someone has a positive emotional experience it's usually felt in the centre of the chest, so consciously shifting our attention to that area can facilitate positive emotion, which in turn moves us to the positive side of the universe of emotions. Figure 2.6 demonstrates the impact of rhythmic and smooth, heart-focused breathing by getting us to the midpoint of the universe. Ultimately the only way to get over to the left, positive side and stay there is by engaging positive emotions (which is the topic of the next chapter) but breathing creates the platform on which everything else – health, happiness, cognitive ability and elevated performance, success and influence – is built.

Figure 2.6 Impact of Correct Breathing



When we breathe rhythmically and smoothly, we create a coherent HRV signal. This then stabilizes our physiology and creates cardiac coherence – turning our HRV pattern from chaos to coherence as illustrated in Figures 2.4 and 2.5. This allows us to maintain our self-control in highly charged situations, prevents our brain from shutting down and enables us to think clearly and become more perceptive.

Plus, it gives us a better chance to change the way we feel and, prevents the unconscious expenditure of our most precious energy reserves.

The easiest way to remember this breathing technique is through the BREATHE acronym:

Breathe

Rhythmically

Evenly

And

Through the

Heart

Everyday.

If you control your breathing, you are in charge of your physiology. Events, situations and other people won't be able to scramble your thinking and make you reactive, which can often be disastrous for business. Michael Drake, the CEO of Cognita and previous MD of TNT Express for Asia Pacific, explains how he uses the BREATHE skill all the time to improve performance:

I use the coherent BREATHE technique I've learnt on a daily basis, even outside of work. I play golf and I will do the rhythmic breathing a lot. It gets my heart rate to a level that will provide clarity of thought and help execution. It's the same before a big speech. I think about my breathing and what I'm going to do. I get my heart under control. Just the notion of taking two minutes to think about how I am feeling is beneficial... it builds confidence, and for whatever reason, I see the results in my performance. I feel calmer, more confident and focused, and all those things can only be beneficial in terms of performance.

The Complete App

We have developed a health and wellbeing App, the Complete App, embedded in which is some biofeedback software. Using a Kyto sensor that clips on your ear, or a Polar chest strap or a Mio wrist strap, that sends a Bluetooth signal to the App, you can see what is happening to your heart rate variability. The Complete App has a programmable breath pacer that you can follow to enable you to shift your heart rate from a chaotic signal into a coherent signal. These devices are designed to help you train your breathing pattern to generate greater levels of coherence and they are especially useful at the start of your leadership journey because they provide a visual guide to what your heart is doing right now.

The Complete App also allows you to experience just how much control you have over your heart-beat and how different it can feel when you achieve coherence.

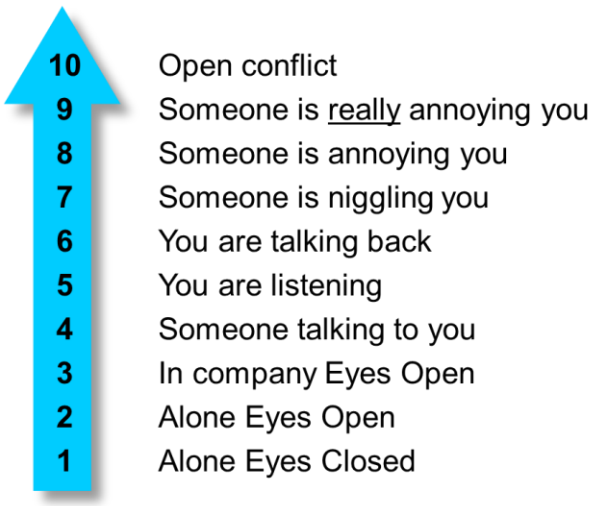
Although we've been measuring HRV since 1996 it never ceases to amaze me how dramatic this information can be for executives. I've literally seen grown men cry when they realize that they can control their own response to stress and pressure. And they can see and feel the immediate effect rhythmic breathing can have on their system and how easy it is to generate coherence when they know how to do it. Suddenly, they have access to a skill that can change something they didn't think they could change.

Hierarchy of Practice

The starting point for getting your system under control is to get your breathing under control. Don't underestimate its power or how quickly the skill can desert you when you need it most. It is important therefore to practise the BREATHE skill. You need to gradually build up your ability to create and maintain physiological coherence in increasingly difficult situations.

Start by practising alone with your eyes closed and work up the hierarchy of practice (Figure 2.7) until you can use the technique successfully in open conflict.

Figure 2.7 The Hierarchy of Breathing Practice



Using Complete App you should be able to generate a coherent pattern within a couple of minutes. We have used this with children as young as three years old and people as old as 80 years with equal success. People often ask: how much should I practise? My answer is that you cannot overdose on rhythmic breathing but do not obsess about it because the obsession will make your breathing chaotic again! Instead, simply practise whenever you remember. Use any down time you have such as waiting for a meeting to start or when travelling. If you find just 10 minutes a day to practise this BREATHE skill, soon rhythmic

Instead, simply practise whenever you remember. Use any down time you have such as waiting for a meeting to start or when travelling. If you find just 10 minutes a day to practise this BREATHE skill, soon rhythmic breathing and physiological coherence will be-come your default pattern. When it does you will discover that you are much less reactive than you were before. And you'll have much more energy. Plus, once you have your breathing under control you can start to develop your emotional coherence and get the whole orchestra playing in tune.


Complete