

## Chapter 1 : Diane Tice & Roy Bauerster, Handbook of mental control - PhilPapers

*Key Topics: It covers the multiple dimensions of mental control - its causes, consequences, and components, and draws on current research within social, personality, cognitive, developmental, and clinical psychology.*

The quality of your life is largely determined by the quality of the mental states you live in day to day – states like love, anger, happiness, fear and excitement. There are two main ways to control your state of mind. Either by controlling the way you use your physical body, or by controlling your focus of attention and the way you interpret it. What happens in your life does not determine how you feel. How you feel is only the result of how you are using your own mind and body at any moment. No matter what happens in your life, you are in control of your own state of mind. Make sure to use that ability to put yourself in a state that is appropriate for what you want to achieve. In most cases, would it not be nice to be in a highly positive mood most of the time? People in our society often turn to external means such as food, alcohol, cigarettes or drugs to elevate their mood, but with the techniques you are about to learn you will not have to depend on anything outside of yourself to change the way you feel.

**Physiology** Every emotion we feel has a way of using our body associated with it, a specific physiology. In the same way that an emotional state affects our body, we can consciously make changes in our physiology and instantly produce the desired emotional state. Best of all, you already know the physiology of successful, powerful, confident and happy people. All you have to do is to move, stand, talk, breathe, gesture and use your facial expression as if you felt a certain way, and you will actually feel the feelings that go along with that physiology. Your body will lead your mind. For example, a person who is depressed will look down, talk slowly, have shallow breath, slackened facial muscles and will be physically hunched over. Conversely, a happy and positive person will smile, talk faster, raise their shoulders, lift their head and breathe deeply. We also become happy when we take action towards something that is important to us, while on the other hand depression comes from inertia. You cannot be sad and busy at the same time. Try this right now. Sit the way you would be sitting if you felt absolutely successful. Put the look and the smile on your face that you would have if you felt totally happy and excited. Breathe the way you would be breathing if you felt strong, proud and full of energy. Look up, hold your back straight, push your shoulders back and chest up. Now, without changing any part of your physiology, try to get depressed. It is difficult because when you hold the physiology of a winner your body is sending that message to your brain. Keep in mind that part of your physiology is not only the use of your body, but also its condition. If you are suffering from physical pain, lack of sleep or a bad diet that is going to affect your mental state as well.

**Mental Focus** The only things we are going to have feelings about are the things we focus on, and we can only focus on one thing at a time. You can control what you are focusing on by what you are picturing in your mind, saying to yourself and paying attention to. This gives an almost unlimited number of choices. You can focus on past experiences, future expectations, the present moment, your self-talk or even your own imagination. Every one of us right now could get into a state of absolute joy, by thinking of all the great things in life, just as we could have everything and still be unhappy if we always focus on something negative. If you find someone who is incredibly happy, the reason is probably that they focus continuously on what makes them happy. You can experience this too by focusing continuously on what you want, what you have got and what is great about every situation, and as a result you will feel incredible. You will start to enjoy life much more, because you will be focusing on the most positive aspects. In addition, you will increase those positive things because you always get more of what you focus on in life.

**Representations** It is not only what we focus on that determines our mental state, but also how we represent things in our minds. Everything we experience in life will be processed through our own internal representations, and by changing the pictures and sounds involved we can instantly change the intensity of our state or transform it completely. Let us look at some ways to increase and decrease the emotional strength of our representations. As an example of reducing emotional intensity we will change the representation of a negative memory. Think of a major uncomfortable memory and notice the images and sounds that come to mind. It is how this memory is represented that determines your emotional reaction to it, so let us do a simple exercise to change it. Start by disassociating yourself from

the memory by stepping out of it, so you can no longer see yourself in it. For example, you can pretend that you are sitting in a cinema watching the experience as if it were a movie. Now start changing the visual and auditory representation of that memory to make it more enjoyable. Change objects, colors and sounds to representations that make you smile or even turn the whole memory into a cartoon. Especially, change disturbing elements of the memory, for example by shrinking them down, making them black and white or moving them off into the distance. If it is a person bothering you then give them a comical voice, absurd clothes and a small stature. Once you have improved the memory play it backward and forward, faster and faster about 10 times. Every time you go through it, you can change it again to make it even better. Play with the way that you are representing it and rerun it until just thinking of it makes you smile. The images and sounds of each of our memories hold emotional associations, and they are not always empowering. This technique is a way of interrupting the patterned response and changing it. By making these kind of changes in your internal representations you reprogram the way that you feel about your focus of attention – whether it is a memory, a person, a piece of food or anything else – so that it no longer triggers the negative response. Next, we will increase the emotional intensity of positive emotions. For instance, to put yourself in a great state, think of a time in your life when you did something that made you feel absolutely fantastic. Visualize the memory as a mental movie in vivid detail and step into yourself in that movie. Imagine seeing and hearing the experience again and feel that fantastic feeling. Make the image bigger, brighter and bolder, make the sounds louder, the colors richer and the feelings stronger. You can also change aspects of the movie – such as making yourself look even more powerful and confident. For auditory representations you can add a good soundtrack or hear the cheers of the crowd as you run through the movie. You can use these kinds of representations anytime you want to improve your day to day emotional states. They are also useful for overcoming fears, amplifying your motivation and changing how you feel about things. It is your mind so make sure you represent the world in a way that serves instead of hinders you. Anchors This technique is one of the most powerful methods available to change our state of mind. You can use it to instantly go from whatever you are feeling to a peak state immediately. From afraid to excited, angry to laughing or feeling bad to feeling strong and resourceful. It is based on the fact that whenever we experience two things together for a while with emotional intensity one will automatically remind us of the other. Anything that happens consistently that is unique and specific while you are in an intense feeling state will get linked up, or anchored in your mind. You can anchor any specific sight, sound or touch to any resourceful state such as humor, excitement, happiness, creativity, confidence or flow. You can then trigger that state whenever you need it by just repeating that stimuli. You can also look for and take advantage of the anchors you already have linked up to positive emotions, such as specific memories, songs, idols, quotes, pictures, posters, diplomas or sceneries. Creating Anchors Before you create an anchor you first need to choose a stimulus, one that is easy and discreet so you can use it anywhere. It can be either an auditory, visual or physical stimuli such as a specific word, phrase, visualized image, touch or gesture. Just be sure it is not anything too common, or the anchor will diminish itself. When you have found one to use, you need to put yourself in the emotional state you want to anchor in. For this example, let us pick confidence. Think of a time when you felt absolutely confident – or imagine what it would be like to be completely confident. Then enhance the emotional intensity of that time through your representations, to make it even better than it was. See what you saw before, only bigger, brighter and bolder. Make it clearer, more solid, more colorful and closer. Hear what you heard, loud and clear, and really feel the powerful confidence flow through you. Step into the picture so you are absolutely there again and right at the peak of the emotional response, trigger your stimulus to associate it to the feeling. Repeat this process at least six times, using different peak moments of confidence. During the peak state you can also think about situations in the future when you would need this state and you will get back that feeling when the future situation actually arrives. Once you have created the anchor, you can test it by first getting yourself out of that state and then triggering it again using your stimuli. If you have done it properly, you will go back into the anchored state. The more you repeat the anchoring and the more intense your state, the stronger the anchor becomes and the longer it will last. You can use this technique to create a whole set of anchors for different empowering states. You can affect your state by changing your physiology and focus.

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