

Working with what works

Rick Hanson states that if you spend a lot of time being stressed, dissatisfied or depressed, you naturally develop a stressed, dissatisfied, or depressed brain.

The more you follow a certain track, the more engrained it becomes. The good news is, that you can train yourself to follow a different track, one that focuses more on inner peace, positivity and general satisfaction.

You can compare it to a little forest path. Say you normally always take the same route when walking through the woods. One day you decide to try a shortcut. At first this new path will be difficult to walk and will require more energy. Because this path is unpaved, and you'll need to cut through some bushes and thorns first before you can walk it.

You might be dissuaded to take the new path and return to your familiar route, even if it's longer.

But if you take this new path again, you'll see it's already become easier, because the bushes have been flattened and some of the thorns are still crushed.

The more you start to follow this new path, the more it becomes a full-fledged path, and others might be inspired to follow it too.

The old path, on the other hand, will become overgrown and will become increasingly difficult to walk.

In a similar way, you can train your brain to think more positively, work with what works and be grateful for what is.



“Water the flowers, not the weeds”

Fletcher Peacock

You can consciously choose to water flowers instead of weeds, by choosing to water the good seeds. You can do this by cherishing and feeding into joyful moments

Rick Hanson does this according to four steps:

1. Pay attention to spontaneous positive and joyful experiences, or actively seek them out. For example: you can invite friends over, exercise, do yoga, ... Focus on feelings of gratitude, satisfaction, connectedness and inner peace.
2. Then really hone in on those experiences. Engage all your senses and make it as rich as possible. Feel to the fullest.
3. Grant yourself time to enjoy the experience to the fullest. Savour the moment and let it soak in.
4. When you become more experienced, you can link positive moments to negative experiences from the past to create new associations. But first build up some experience by repeating steps 1 to 3.

Even though the above steps seem simple, they are everything but. Given the stresses of day to day life, it can be very challenging to reflect on pleasant moments. However, even a few seconds are enough for information or feelings to sink in and form new connections in your brain.

