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Coaching World

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Margaret Moore, MBA

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She co-leads the National Consortium for Credentialing Health & Wellness Coaches, which is developing national standards, certification and collaborative research. She is co-author (with Bob Tschannen-Moran) of the first coaching textbook in healthcare, the "Coaching Psychology Manual" (Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins, 2009), and (with Paul Hammerness) the Harvard Health Book, "Organize Your Mind, Organize Your Life" (Harlequin, 2011). This article is a preview of the next Harvard Health/Harlequin book (forthcoming in 2015).

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From Surviving to Thriving

One of the most popular songs today (with more than 300 million YouTube visits), Katy Perry's "Roar" speaks to the power of the human life force to make the world a better place. Katy sings from her jungle perch, "I am a champion and you're going to hear me roar."

Sadly, our collective roar is weighed down by the realities of being human today. Gallup's 2013 "State of the American Workplace" survey shows that only 30 percent of Americans are emotionally engaged in their work. Meanwhile, findings from the Centers for Disease Control reveal that two-thirds of American adults are literally weighed down by overweight or obesity, while 95 percent aren't enjoying the physical energy unleashed by engaging in the top health behaviors, including daily exercise and adopting a Mediterranean diet.

The big and brilliant human prefrontal cortex, upon which we depend to move the human race onto a better trajectory, is struggling under terrible operating conditions: chronic deprivation of sleep and reflection time, a low-octane diet, nervous-system overload, and inadequate fuel sources (e.g., meaningful purpose, creative expression, physical movement and more heart-to-heart moments).

The vast majority of us are just surviving or even languishing—far from thriving, certainly not roaring. This state of affairs is an unimaginable waste of human life force, potential and competitive advantage. It's also generating a tsunami of chronic

Ten Primary Capabilities of Being Human



Source: "Coaching the Multiplicity of the Mind," by Margaret Moore (in *Global Advances in Health and Medicine*, July 2013, Vol. 2, No. 4, page 78-84.)

disease—consider the fact that today, even teenagers are being diagnosed with early-stage heart disease and type 2 diabetes—that is poised to wreak economic and social havoc in the next few decades.

How can we help ourselves and our clients shift from rapidly wearing out our hardworking human genes to getting them to sing, dance and even roar? Given the immense diversity and complexity of the human genome, it's not surprising that an individual can spend an entire lifetime figuring out how to get his or her genes to thrive. Professional coaches can accelerate this experimental process by helping people better engage a set of primary capacities or needs that have been shown by researchers to be vital to human well-being (see graphic on opposite page). Let's take a quick tour.

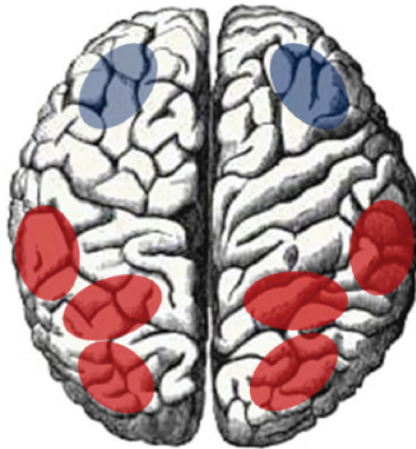
1. Mindfulness

A good starting point is to begin tuning into the signals sent by our genes, which work ceaselessly to get our attention. Negative emotions and physical sensations indicate that some needs of our genes are not being met, while positive emotions and physical sensations are signs that some needs of our genes are being met. Not only is emotional intelligence a vital skill for emotional thriving, so is what my collaborator, psychologist Jim Gavin, and I deem body intelligence: the awareness of, knowledge of and engagement in health habits that generate physical energy and thriving.

To develop emotional and body intelligence, simply move your conscious attention into a 'brainset' Harvard psychologist Shelley Carson calls the "mindful absorb" brain state (shown at right).

Note that the prefrontal cortex (top of drawing) is blue, signifying cold. In this mindful brain state

you are not thinking, analyzing or planning; instead, attention moves deep and back into the sensory, or "experiencing," brain regions. Regular visits to this brain state increase awareness of whether you are moving toward or away from thriving in a given moment and over time.



2. Body Regulation

Along with all living organisms, humans have a primary need for a healthy and calm equilibrium of our physiological systems—a need to move from chaos to homeostasis, over and over. As Stephen W. Porges outlines in his polyvagal theory, our bodies seek a balance of exertion with rest and recharge. They strive for homeostasis, stability and a healthy autonomic nervous system, balancing sympathetic (stress) and parasympathetic (rest and recovery) activity. Listening to the body's signals tells us when it's time to calm the nervous system, which calms the mind and improves brain function in the short term and delays disease and death in the long term.

3. Autonomy

Psychologists Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, who have studied human motivation for three decades leading to their robust theory of self-determination, conclude that autonomy—the drive to march to

one's own drummer—is a primary organismic need. To thrive, we need to be authentic and author a life aligned with our values. Autonomous motivation that taps into one's life force is not only a standalone force for thriving, it is the type of motivation that enables elusive habits, including healthy eating, exercise, and weight loss and maintenance, to be sustained. It is a far superior fuel source to external motivators, such as incentives, prizes, or the fear-based "stick" of external or internal critics.

4. Making Meaning and Purpose

Clinical psychologist Paul Wong is the most passionate spokesperson for the importance of making meaning and purpose beyond oneself in each moment, in each domain of life and over the arc of a lifetime. In his forthcoming chapter, "Viktor Frankl's Meaning Seeking Model and Positive Psychology," he keeps alive the legendary psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor's story, told in "Man's Search for Meaning," of how an unshakable purpose was essential to surviving four concentration camps. A sense of a higher purpose is a potent source of life fuel, especially when times are tough. For example, a team of researchers at Chicago's Rush Alzheimer's Disease Center and Rush University Medical Center found that a sense of life purpose significantly improves cognitive function in people with Alzheimer's disease. Meanwhile, Barbara Fredrickson and Steve Cole made scientific headlines in 2013 with their experiment showing that people with a low level of life purpose had three impaired gene pathways in their immune systems, while people with a high level of life purpose had healthy gene expression of their immune systems. Our genes appear to reward us for being connected

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to a cause larger than ourselves by fighting off cold and flu viruses and other invaders that could make us ill.

5. Relationships

Serving others, taking care of others, and being compassionate and kind are important sources of human thriving. Indeed, Deci and Ryan identify relatedness as another innate psychological need. In *“Love 2.0: How Our Supreme Emotion Affects Everything We Feel, Think, Do and Become”* (Hudson Street Press, 2013), Fredrickson encourages us to “make love all day long,” i.e., to infuse each moment in another’s company with your full attention, your head and heart in it together. In addition to simply feeling good, sharing positive emotions with others creates micro-moments of connection which calm the nervous system and improve brain function. Over time, these micro-moments accumulate to help delay disease and avoid early death. Compassion for negative emotions experienced by ourselves and others is Mother Nature’s soothing balm. Just like crying babies, negative emotions need a warm, appreciative embrace to settle and allow us to get on with our day.

6. Confidence and Competence

Confidence—what Albert Bandura put on the map as the psychological

term “self-efficacy”—is a strong predictor of successful performance in work goals and creating new health habits. As Henry Ford suggested, “Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t—you’re right.” Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory identifies competence as the third primary need, suggesting that acquiring new knowledge and skills, applying our chief strengths, and continually growing confidence are all vital lifetime pursuits. A wellness-focused coaching engagement can get us on the right track, instilling confidence in the ability to combine a full work and family life with a focus on self-care and well-being: exercising safely, cooking well, keeping weight stable, sleeping peacefully and taming the overwhelming frenzy brought on by a “life switch” stuck in the “on” position.

7. Curiosity and New Experience Seeking

Psychologist Todd Kashdan asserts that curiosity is a primary driver of human well-being, writing, “When we experience curiosity, we are willing to leave the familiar and routine and take risks, even if it makes us feel anxious and uncomfortable. Curious explorers are comfortable with the risks of taking on new challenges. Instead of trying desperately to explain and control our world, as

a curious explorer we embrace uncertainty, and see our lives as an enjoyable quest to discover, learn and grow.”

Our primary need for new experiences—to explore, learn and change—is easy to see in curious children but is often squashed by the demands of adult life. This is an important capacity for adapting to an ever-changing world: being ever-curious, never taking anything for granted including one’s assumptions and beliefs. Life is just one big set of experiments with unpredictable outcomes. Indeed, Kashdan notes that declining curiosity is one of the important early signs of dementia and Alzheimer’s disease. You may recall Frank Zappa’s quote: “A mind is like a parachute. It doesn’t work if it is not open.”

8. Creativity

We also readily see in children a primary capacity to be creative, generative, imaginative and spontaneous, but these traits often seem out of reach for adults, with our overscheduled days and overstretched minds. Creativity improves both mental and physical health. It works best when our brains are unleashed to wander about, unplugged from deadlines and goals. This part of us has fun brainstorming, playing games and being impulsive. When in full flight it produces flow

BOOKS

Curious?: Discover the Missing Ingredient to a Fulfilling Life, by Todd B. Kashdan (Harper Perennial, 2010)

Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us, by Daniel H. Pink (Riverhead Books, 2011)

Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ, by Daniel Goleman (Bantam Books, 2005)

Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience, by Mihaly Csíkszentmihályi (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008)

Love 2.0: Finding Happiness and Health in Moments of Connection, by Barbara Fredrickson (Plume, 2013)

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success, by Carol Dweck (Ballantine Books, 2007)

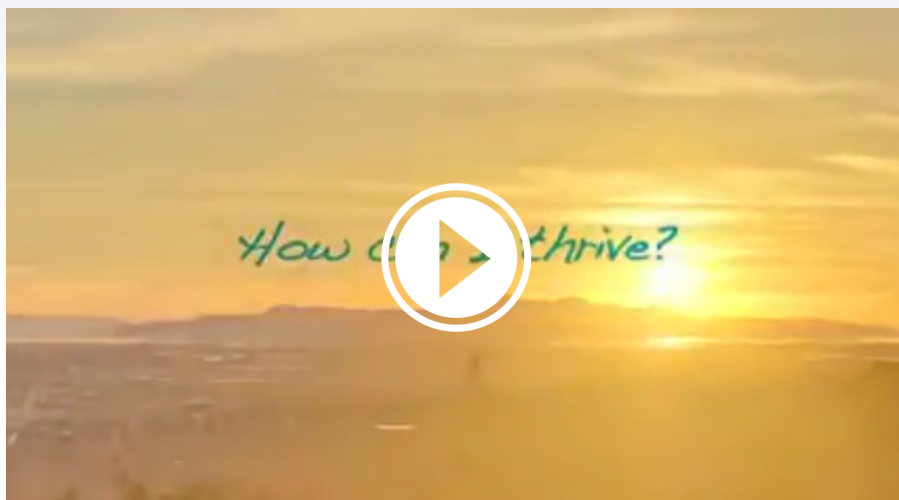
Organize Your Mind, Organize Your Life: Train Your Brain to Get More Done in Less Time, by Margaret Moore and Paul Hammerness (Harlequin, 2011)

Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself, by Kristin Neff (William Morrow, 2011)

Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control, by Albert Bandura (Worth Publishers, 1997)

Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation, by Edward L. Deci and Richard Flaste (Penguin, 1996)

Your Creative Brain: Seven Steps to Maximize Imagination, Productivity and Innovation in Your Life, by Shelley Carson (Jossey-Bass, 2012)



WATCH NOW! Meg Moore's "How Can I Thrive?"

Also check out **"Strive to Thrive."**

states that Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced cheek-sent-me-hi) describes as key to optimal well-being—those moments when we are enjoying an activity so much that we lose track of time. Without undue effort, we execute the activity to the best of our abilities. While the workplace is the best place for experiencing regular flow states, most people do not let themselves enjoy flow states every day because their minds are polluted by overwhelming to-do lists and distractions.

9. Executive Function


Thank goodness the brain has a primary capacity to be organized, plan, regulate our emotions and impulses, and keep us on track to get through to-do lists and meet our

goals. This capacity is highly polished in the workplace (although often at the expense of other capacities described here). Those among us with attention deficits need to work harder to build self-regulation skills, and to learn to set aside disruptive emotions, impulses and distractions so that we get the important stuff done. Executive function gets a powerful boost when we tame our frenzy, exercise regularly, sleep well and eat a Mediterranean diet.

10. Standard-setting

As the most social animals on the planet, humans share a primary need for approval, appreciation, validation and fair treatment. No man is an island. We want to be accepted and valued by our tribes.

This capacity allows us to set the bar or standard, to set goals for our performance and then evaluate and judge that performance in ourselves and others across all domains of life, from getting good grades at school to dying well. "Am I good enough?" it asks. At its worst, this capacity is difficult to please. It can be an inner critic, scanning for flaws and faults, or a perfectionist, ever raising the bar. According to findings from the Gender and Body Image Study, only 11 percent of women over the age of 50 report satisfaction with their bodies, their inner critics depleting their self-esteem every time they look in a mirror. At its best the inner standard-setter is accepting and content, setting the bar to challenge performance, while adopting a learning mindset when performance falls short.

Unleashing our collective "roar" is the life calling, the higher purpose, for a whole new generation of thousands of professional Health and Wellness Coaches. This small army has emerged in the past decade to focus on unleashing positive mental and physical well-being and make a dent in the epidemics of chronic disease and overweight. But frankly, we need all hands on deck—not only coaches, but anyone who wants to join this effort. Let's all roar together. 

ARTICLES AND CHAPTERS

"Body Intelligence: A Guide to Self-attunement," by Jim Gavin and Margaret Moore (<http://www.ideafit.com/fitness-library/body-intelligence-a-guide-to>)

"Coaching the Multiplicity of Mind: A Strengths-based Model," by Margaret Moore (in *Global Advances in Health and Medicine*, July 2013, Vol. 2, No. 4, pages 78 – 84)

"Emotion: The Self-regulatory Sense," by Kathrine Peil (currently in press, *Global Advances in Health and Medicine*)

"Facilitating Health Behaviour Change and Its Maintenance: Interventions Based on Self-Determination Theory," by Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, et al (http://www.selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/2008_RyanPatrickDeciWilliams_EHP.pdf)

"A Functional Genomic Perspective on Human Well-being," by Barbara L. Fredrickson and Steven W. Cole,

et al (<http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2013/07/25/1305419110.short>)

"The Polyvagal Perspective," by Stephen W. Porges (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1868418/>)

"Viktor Frankl's Meaning Seeking Model and Positive Psychology," by Paul Wong (in *Meaning in Positive and Existential Psychology*, edited by Alexander Batthyany and Pninit Russo-Netzer [Springer, 2014])