

Reference: Internal Distractions, Part 1

INTRODUCTION

Why do insults stay planted in the mind, sometimes for decades? Why is it one day personal performance sets new records and another day past failures can hinder clarity of thought and good decision making?

The answer is negativity. In general, negative events, encounters, and people make a bigger impact on the brain due to the brain's "negativity bias." Simply put, the brain is built with a greater sensitivity to unpleasant news. The bias is so automatic that it can be detected at the earliest stage of the brain's information processing. As information enters the brain through the five basic senses, the emotional centers of the brain receive the external stimuli first before the thinking centers of the brain. This is one way the brain's negativity bias can be a distraction to personal performance.

THINKING BRAIN VS FEELING BRAIN

To help illustrate this automatic response, consider that every human has two brains, a thinking brain and a feeling brain. The thinking brain is the outer layer and the feeling brain is the inner layer, something now visible through technologies in neuroscience.

As a person comes into contact with bad news, the feeling brain retrieves the information first and automatically responds using the human stress response system. It is only when the individual engages in a thought process using mental and emotional skill sets that an "optimal" state can be achieved. *Optimal* is defined as the best result possible under given conditions; a healthy balance between the thinking brain and feeling brain.

Researchers validate that the brain reacts more strongly to stimuli it deems negative. These stimuli cause a greater surge in electrical activity, thus our attitudes are more heavily influenced by downbeat news than good news. This directly impacts a person's ability to make critical decisions during the most routine or complex tasks.

THE NEGATIVITY BIAS

The negativity bias is the notion that bad news impacts the brain more than positive news. Unpleasant thoughts, disruptive emotions, or social interactions all impact the brain in different ways that can hinder human performance.

This includes harmful or traumatic events from the past that seem to stick in the mind forever, having a greater effect on a person's psychological (mental) state and abilities to adhere to a standard. The tendency to remember negative events also affects performance in all domains of life, both personal and professional.

In other words, something very positive will generally have less of an impact on a person's behavior and attitude than something negative. The negativity bias has been investigated within many different applications, including the creation of thoughts and a person's perception of self and others. The negativity bias can also hinder attention-span, learning, and memory, and disrupting decision-making during risky or distressful situations.

The Security System

Emerging medical technology is revealing new insights on the brain and the role the mind plays in day-to-day decision making, both consciously and subconsciously.

The brain has many functions, one of which is a security system; our mind naturally seeks what is wrong and our mind interprets these negatives as threats. When the brain's internal alarm system goes off the body's stress response system kicks in with intensity, at times without notice, causing our emotions and moods to change rapidly.

As it pertains to human performance and human error-reduction, research validates top performers in high-performance professions learn to regulate negativity bias by developing new mental and emotional



The mind is always thinking - thoughts from the past, present, and future are randomly popping up throughout the day. Random negative thoughts can be a distraction to personal performance.

skill-sets. These skill sets engage specific thought-processes routinely throughout each day and during high-stress situations.

Self Practice: Three-to-One

Top performers develop a standard daily routine for regulating negativity bias. This task requires mental self-discipline and repeating specific thoughts. These routines and mental thought processes directly align with many human performance strategies and controls such as self-checking and peer-to-peer evaluations.

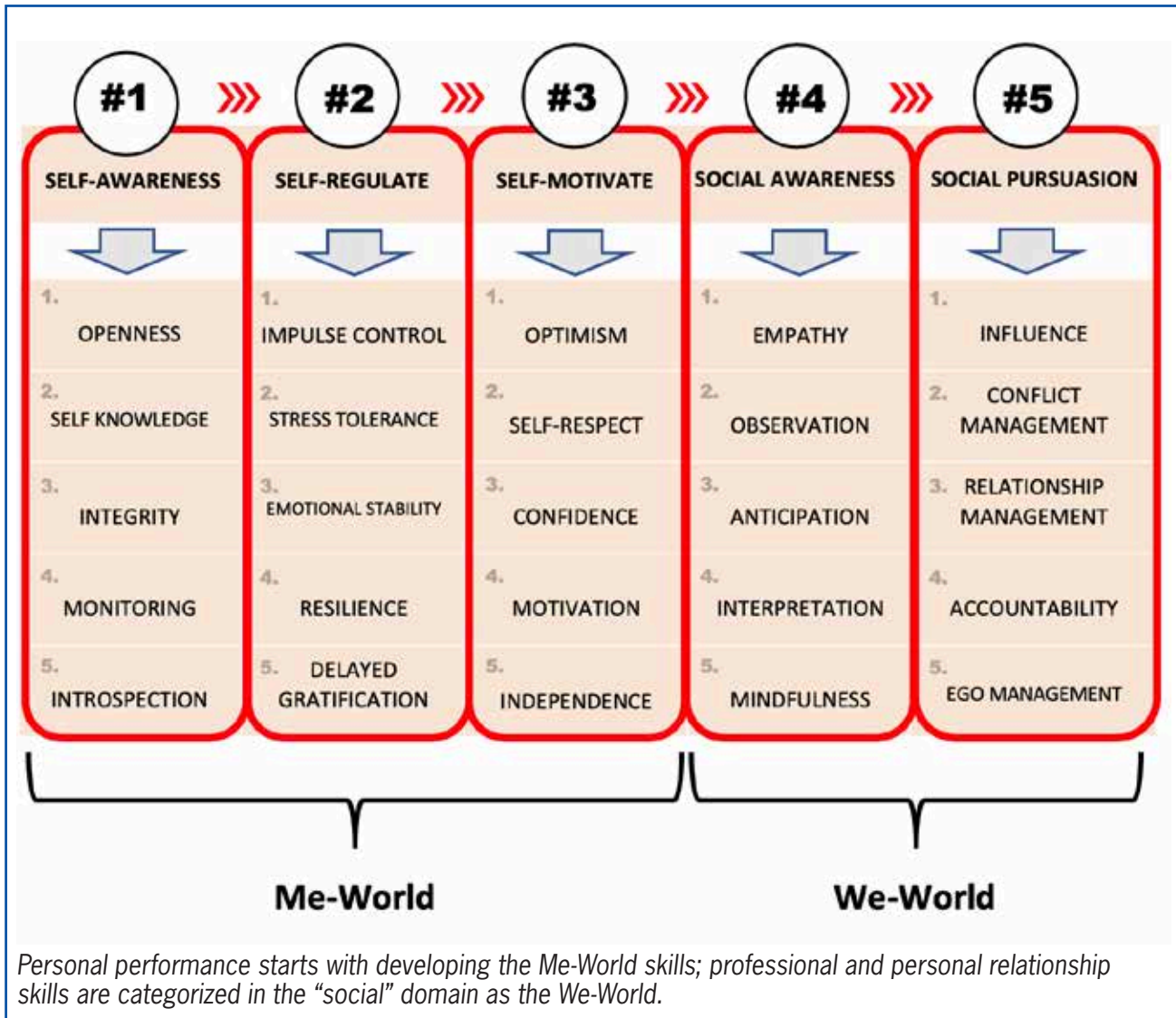
Whenever a negative thought enters the mind, one should immediately replace it with three positive thoughts. Three positive thoughts to every one negative thought strengthens both mental and emotional skill sets, a healthy activity that positively impacts the emotional centers of the brain. This practice helps a person navigate the negativity bias. Additional benefits include clarity of thought and decision making in the moment based on new perceptions of self and social awareness.

Simply put, humans are feeling creatures first and thinking creatures second. Negativity bias will directly impact emotional states of the brain as part of the stress-response system. Once the emotional centers respond, disruptive thoughts and emotions can become a distraction, which hinders good decision-making (optimal performance).

As it pertains to high-risk professions or tasks, the negativity bias can directly impact performance for both beginners and novice employees. The key to optimal performance is to recognize the negativity bias and engage mental and emotional skills sets throughout the day.

SOCIAL DOMAINS

Negativity bias means the same bad news at work or at home can impact decision-making in every aspect of a person’s life. It should come as no surprise to learn negativity bias plays a powerful role in one’s personal and professional relationships. As humans, every relationship with another individual is categorized as a “social” domain.



Researchers have found an ideal balance between negativity and positivity in the atmosphere between two people. There seems to be some kind of thermostat operating in healthy relationships—those that demonstrate mental and emotional skills—that consistently regulates the balance between positive and negative interactions in all “moments of truth.” A moment of truth is defined as any social interaction; these can occur via verbal or non-verbal communication or by more modern means, using social media or mobile device(s) to send messages.

Individuals developing strong emotional intelligence skills learn to adapt their behavior to the changing demands of their social interactions or moments of truth. By learning and developing social-perception and social-effectiveness skills (see #4 and #5 in the diagram) both individuals take personal responsibility for one another’s mental and emotional states – even when disagreements or discord are present. By developing new social skills such as empathy, anticipation, relationship management, and accountability, an individual is able to regulate their own positive and negative impressions as well as positive and negative influences of others.

Social Practice: Five-to-One

The magic ratio for relationship management or managing a healthy moment of truth between two or more individuals is five positive interactions to every negative interaction. It is the frequency of small positive acts that matter most when mitigating the negativity bias; a ratio of five positive acts to each negative one. Each of the two or more individuals engaging in positive interactions creates a healthy climate to mitigate mental and emotional disruptions.

As long as there are five times as many positive social interactions or moments of truth versus negative feelings and negative interactions, the individuals in the social domain mitigate the individual negative bias.

CONCLUSION

In short, personal matters and personalities can be dealt with more effectively by developing an individual’s social domain skill sets using two simple models supported by science and research: a personality-style model and the emotional intelligence competency model.

Personality-style models provide an individual with tremendous self-knowledge and critical insights to personal behavior as well as a framework, proven and valid when learning to understand behaviors and interactions with others.

The emotional intelligence competency model now provides a measure for individual skill development and improving one’s abilities in the social-domain. The development path starts with the foundational skill-sets of self-awareness and self-regulation. These two set of skills become the cornerstones for developing social skills and abilities to enable effective problem solving, rapid adaption to change and meaningful conflict resolution.