

Patric Barbieri, M.Ed. Executive Director, LABBB Collaborative

e-mail: Patric.barbieri@gmail.com

Title of Workshop

Positive Anxiety

Brief Descriptions (2-3 sentences)

Anxiety can be described as a state of being overwhelmed, futuristic thinking, perfectionism; followed by physiological symptoms that grip and paralyze us. There is a stigma associated with having anxiety and we are on a mission of trying to help ourselves and others rid ourselves of these thoughts and feelings. "Anxiety" is not a permanent state, it is a flow of thoughts and feelings we choose to call anxiety. If we can learn to understand this energy, accept the feelings associated with it, we will realize that these thoughts and feelings can actually be positive, inspirational, and motivational that drives us to be productive and successful.

Learning objectives

- To change our perception of Anxiety
- To learn how thoughts, impulses, feelings, emotions perceived as anxiety can help us, drive us and motivate us
- To stop pushing "anxiety" away or have a goal of getting rid of our Anxiety
- To understand Rest-Digest vs fight or flight

Application of the presentation

This presentation will provide important shifts in perceptions about anxiety. Our world perceives anxiety symptoms as negatives, but they actually have many positive attributes that are ignored. These thoughts and feelings are not all negative and for many can be used for a source of motivation and productivity. Most of us have heard of fight or flight but less about rest and digest. Perhaps our understanding of rest digest can prevent many of our symptoms through meditation, yoga, or other healthy exercises.

Positive Anxiety

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Last month my workshop was how to bring Mindfulness into organizations. In LABBB we were trying to solve the problem of anxiety in our students and staff.

Today presentation is the prerequisite of how I got involved and started on personal practice and a journey of healing for almost 40 years to understand anxiety. What is it that Wakes us up to this understanding?

I am passionate about both of these topics. If I gave this talk 10 years ago this talk it would have been quite different. We are learning more and more about these issues.

I was conflicted with putting the word “anxiety” in the title, But I had to draw some connection/attention to what I was trying to communicate. The title may seem like an oxymoron because we see the word POSITIVE then ANXIETY which is perceived as negative. Is it a negative?

This is a Generalization, we are LABELING a flow of thoughts, feelings, senses and impulses. It is not stagnant.

If we break down anxiety, it is made up of positive ingredients., but sometimes it leads to symptoms, something that doesn't feel good; we call those symptoms “anxiety.”

Example: Today for breakfast I had a Smoothie: Kale, blueberries, Kefir, avocado, vanilla protein powder (Vitamix, Looks GREEN healthy, it is healthy)

- When we hear Smoothie, we think HEALTHY.
- Some Smoothies look GREEN and look healthy but are loaded with sugar = bad
- Just because it is a “Smoothie” doesn't mean it is Healthy.
- Just because it is “Anxiety” doesn't make it bad. We are labeling by our symptoms, which is it?
- The ingredients of Anxiety are positive.

1. FLOW: Talk, CODE, Breathing Practice, Questions, Relaxed. Not overwhelmed. No PPT. Just be here listening, practicing.

My Background:

- **Early-80s:** Studied in Beijing China 1985
 - **Qigong / Tai Chi Chuan Meditative movement (health) Wushu**
- **Late 80's:** Studied at Insight meditation in Cambridge, Retreats, personal practice
- Early 90's: Brought Mindfulness in my classroom. Wrote articles about it in the journal of RT.
- **2000's:** Practiced in all of LABBB, classrooms, meetings. This practiced became part of our Core Values, We offer full-day retreats for all our staff. All my meetings start or end with breathing.
- **What I am sharing today worked for me for two reasons:** 1. Changed my perception of what anxiety was 2. Role of Mindfulness practice in identifying Cooling response.

Music example: MODES (Concept vs implementation) Mindfulness is misrepresented as a panacea in the role of healing.

Mission is to change the perception of Anxiety to help others. Took much longer for me to understand it than it should have.

1. Started with a Personal Journey: Worcester Academy

- **Had a choice College or Prep school to play hockey**
 - Complained parents / Coaches didn't give me a chance to make my own decision
 - **Prep school expectation was to do well academically**
 - I was motivated but was not prepared for academic pressure.
 - **Jeans and t-shirt to Suit jacket and tie, 2 hours at your desk.**
 - Competitive environment
 - **Hockey started, thought they would take it easy, (Worked harder than I ever had before because I didn't want to fail)**
 - Made it through the season symptoms came later.
- Springtime...1st class, dizzy, out of body experience, thought I was going to fall over. Wake up in the middle of the night.
- Doctor's did every test possible. You are healthy
- **Psychologist (Said you have Anxiety, this was 1982) We talked about my past life...not how to deal w/ anxiety symptoms**

- I struggled with “Anxiety” for the rest of my life off and on. They LABELED IT, and I believe internally I had something bad.
- Still have symptoms today, but I **understand it** and can deal with it much better.
- **I got it in the form of heart palpitations, racing heart, fear something is going to happen.**
- I had more panic attacks than constant anxiety
- **Father had anxiety**
- **Interestingly, People would say you look so relaxed. How can you have anxiety? You deal with difficult issues easily (that is not anxiety, that is performance or doing) Inside was a storm but, I could manage it externally.**
- I told this story to my staff many years ago. In the past, I would have never talked about it.
- **Read every book possible. It was an obscure article I read that changed some of my thoughts then stopped obsessively reading article after article**

2. STOP: Code, Breathing, Questions

2.The mistake I made was going through most of life thinking I had to get rid of what they called “Anxiety” to be normal, to be successful, to not be weak. “Led to believe People who had anxiety were at a disadvantage.” It was actually the opposite.

- **I was only learning what anxiety does to me. The symptoms, reacting to them.**
- Instead of understanding the ingredients of anxiety... is not a permanent state. Mindfulness roots are called mind states.
- **My Goal was looking to get rid of it. Get rid of the symptoms.**
- Jon Kabat-Zinn, I was saying it was hard to move forward in my mindfulness practice because I was stressed at work. You have the best place to practice. Changed everything about my perception. Batting cage.
- **My perceptions changed when a mindfulness teacher said, “Why would you want to get rid of it?” I said, “it doesn’t feel good.” But anxiety is good because you are Awake all the time. But TOO much!**
- Antibiotic, good and bad bacteria.

- **Wakefulness**
- This is why I started talking about Positive Anxiety. I started to think that I was **given something positive**. Acceptance...I had something that others didn't. I wasn't embarrassed. There was nothing to get rid of.

2. Perceptions were similar to "Working Out"

- We may go to the gym and we lift weights, swim, tennis, plyometrics, treadmill. It is an aggregate of exercises we call "working out" and it is good for us. It is healthy.
- Too much exercise what happens? Overdo it. Adrenal stress.
 - Burnout
 - Inflammation
 - Dizziness
 - Heart Palpitations
 - Decrease in energy
 - Physical problems
- Too much exercise leads to physical symptoms. People get sick from overdoing it.
- Would we ever relate to those exercises as being Negative? No, we just say, "We did too much."
- **Mind/Brain work. What happens when we do too much constantly at the computer, studying long hours, pushing ourselves. Worcester...**
 - Burnout
 - Inflammation
 - Dizziness
 - Heart Palpitations
 - Decrease in energy
 - Physical problems

EXERCISE IS GOOD FOR US, but if we got heart palpitations, we wouldn't say it is BAD for us. We would say we overdid it.

BRAIN WORK research, reports, studying is GOOD...But if we got headaches, heart palpitations we wouldn't say studying or working hard is bad for us. We would just say we need a break.

We did too much of something good.

In the next section I will show how I changed my relationship with Anxiety and saw it as a positive with potential consequences.

3. STOP: Code, Breathing, Questions

3. What is Anxiety? In my training of mindfulness, I was taught it was the flow of Thoughts and Feelings. Mind states. Transient.

- Hard to understand this when it just paralyzes you, shuts us down.
- **It's a Word that describes our symptoms.**
- Exercise "Workout" ingredients: Aerobic, anaerobic, strength training, stretching, etc.
- **Anxiety ingredients**
 - Heighten wakefulness
 - Motivation
 - Drive
 - Consistently
 - Discipline
 - look for quality (perfectionism)
 - Planner, structured
 - Lead
 - Worry that you won't get it done on time. Think of the future
 - Refuse to fail
 - Grit
 - OCD
 - Competitive
 - Productive / efficient
- Think of Anxiety as positive like Exercise. They are the SAME.
 - Physical: Lifting weights, treadmill, spin, all good for us.
 - Mental: Motivation, Drive, quality, discipline, all good for us.
 - Anxiety, wakefulness, drive.

Change our Perceptions. If I had a choice, I would choose these attributes. I **Choose to perceive them as Positive Drive and Motivation.**

- BUT If we do too much our body becomes Overstimulated. Just like too much Exercise.
 - Burnout
 - Inflammation
 - Dizziness
 - Heart palpitations
 - Decrease energy

THIS WAS A BIG SHIFT: **Nothing wrong with me. I don't have anything.**

4. STOP: Code, Practice, Questions

4. **Edge of Control. Over-Stimulation.** Today I know my body well. Mindfulness helped that. But it is a fine line and if I cross it, I get symptoms.

- Race Car Driver. To be competitive has to drive always on the edge of losing control. If you lose control you crash. **It is such a thin line. This is how many of us go along each day.**
- **We are on that edge, we don't manage our time well, rest, we end up losing control and we get symptoms over stimulated.**
 - Burnout
 - Inflammation
 - Dizziness
 - Heart Palpitations
 - Decrease in energy
 - Physical problems
- **Mindfulness is important here; it is not a panacea just makes you aware of what is going on.** I wasn't aware of how to use it.

5. STOP: Code, Practice, Questions

6. **COOLING vs HEATING modes. Stops you From Crossing the line. Getting overstimulated. When we are on that EDGE of control, our Mindfulness is simply knowing when to go into cooling mode.**

Your GOAL should not be to get rid of anything. Don't push it away. Accept that that you may be overdoing it.

Yin and Yang, cooling vs heating: What is acupuncture? Stimulate or block

Do any of you have eye twitches? A small sign.... I think to time to cool

If I have a stronger heartbeat? I think cooling

Too much adrenaline, the body is over-stimulated? Need to practice cooling

- **Think of it as Cooling an engine. An engine drives your car, but it will overheat if it is not constantly cooled. What cools it, the radiator.**
- We don't have a radiator that automatically goes on and off for us. Before we hit fight or flight. Well we kind of have something but it isn't useful for us.

8. Rest Digest or Fight or Flight? (Fight or Flight? A way to describe a body doing exactly what it is supposed to do, that is GOOD, it protects us. BUT how many times do you hear someone say, "This is positive? Your body is healthy by the way it is reacting.

- "Rest and digest" is the practice of cooling the system. It is the radiator. This is the practice I needed.
- I moved away from fight or flight. This is what our body naturally does to protect itself.
- Mindfulness says, "Hey you are about to cross that line. Rest Digest Cools. Radiator goes on automatically. Rest Digest doesn't you have to manually do it."
 - My body is in inflammation mode, too much adrenaline, not slowing down, constantly moving, taking in information
 - I look at what happened months ago. This is when it starts to manifest...August.... October.

Exercise. I hurt my back, went to doctors, chiropractors, you name it. It all felt good. But it was Transient. When I rested, when I stopped training I got better.

- **Rest-Digest Applications. The Cooling**
 - Is exercise good? Not necessarily if you are overheated or have too much adrenaline. We have always been told that is. "Go work it off"
 - Hard strenuous exercise is good in the short term, not in the long run.
 - Meditation / Mindfulness
 - Cooling Foods
 - Walking
 - Tai Chi
 - Gratitude
 - Too much Alcohol, Computer, phone time

6. STOP: Code, Practice, Questions

