



May, 2018 In The Know Summary

## **YOU ARE NOT YOUR BRAIN**

**The 4-Step Solution for Changing Bad Habits, Ending Unhealthy Thinking, and Taking Control of Your Life**

by Jeffrey Schwartz and Rebecca Gladding

### **What Did We Discuss?**

[Kori Diehl](#) facilitated a discussion on the book *You Are Not Your Brain* by Jeffrey Schwartz. The book presents strategies for “Self Directed Neuroplasticity,” methods for helping yourself change bad habits and redirect negative or unhealthy thinking.

### **The Four Steps**

1. Relabel – Identify your Deceptive Brain Messages (DBM), i.e., false thoughts that take you away from your true goals, and the uncomfortable sensations; call them what they really are
2. Reframe – Change your perception of the importance of the DBMs
3. Refocus – Direct attention toward an activity or mental process that is wholesome and productive
4. Revalue – Clearly see the DBMs for what they are; they have little to no value

### **Key Concepts from the Book & Highlights from the Discussion**

- Veto Power – The ability to refuse to act on a deceptive brain message, sensation, habitual response. You have thoughts, and you decide whether or not to take action on those thoughts.
- Deceptive Brain Messages (DSM) – DSMs are any false or inaccurate thought or any unhelpful or distracting impulse, urge, or desire that takes you away from your true goals and intentions in life, or from your true self. These thoughts trigger us all the time. When you have a DSM, question where the thought comes from. Focusing on the DBMs and trying to make the uncomfortable sensations go away leads to automatic, unhelpful habitual responses. Favorite quote: “Don’t believe everything you think.”
- Difference between “mind” and “brain” – You can make choices to break habits. Schwartz has worked a great deal with patients who suffer from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). He teaches his patients to use “veto power” to avoid compulsions.
- “True Self” versus “Emotional sensation not based in truth” – How do you look at this dichotomy holistically? Both “selves” are real, and both are part of you. Consider: Where does each come from?
- From Victor Frankel’s book *Man’s Search for Meaning* – Our thoughts are real, but you can question them. There is a space between stimulus and response. The freedom is in that space. It is the freedom to choose your reaction.
- When we focus on negative self-talk, what we focus on gets enriched and deepened. Goal: Be aware, but do not focus on, negative self-talk.
- Analogy – We can never change the path of the Colorado River going through the Grand Canyon. But we can carve out a tributary and reroute some of the water. In the same way, we can build new, positive habits and ways to react and respond to our thoughts.

- “Catastrophizing Thoughts” – This is worst-case-scenario thinking. When you think, “This is the worst thing that could ever happen,” look for one thing that can disprove that thought. And that gives you relief. Key is to extend space between stimulus and response.
- What is the distinction between “Desire” and “Expectations?” Consider the example of reaching and maintaining a healthy weight. Desire does not motivate me (“I want to weight xx lbs.); however, expectation does motivate me (“I expect to take a walk today.”)
- Hebb’s Law – “Neurons that fire together, wire together.”
- “The Free Won’t” – You are responsible for what you do with the sensations, once they arise. You have choice, including the choice to ignore or say “no” to an impulse or desire. “The brain decides what will grab you. The mind decides what you do when you are grabbed.”
- Martin Seligman talks about the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* – Before Positive Psychology concepts were taking hold in society, there were 1500 references to depression in the DSM, and only one reference to joy. The bottom line: there is a lot left to study related to joy, but research has focused on depression and related challenges.
- “What you practice becomes stronger.” – Anne Suh
- “You are where your attention is.” – Bill Pullen
- “The Five A’s” – The qualities and gifts we all naturally seek out from the important people in our lives
  - attention
  - acceptance
  - affection
  - appreciation
  - allowing – safe to express all that you feel

### Strategies Worth Trying

- When you have a negative thought, consider your values and compare the two. Can both exist in the same space?

### Applications for Coaching

- The book focuses on looking back, and coaches look ahead to the future. How can coaches use these techniques?
- Future Studies is about creating values based options for the future that compel me to take action in the current moment. Think about coaching as “anticipatory anthropology.” What we are trying to do is research the future and create it. Coaching questions: “What do you want in the future?” How are we going to create that?

### Related Resources

- [Related Blog by Laura Mendelow](#)
- Marilee Adams, *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life*
- Rick Carson, *Taming Your Gremlins*