



# When What You Are Doing is No Longer Working

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**D**oes it seem like your life is not working the way it did? Perhaps your life was not working before and that led you to the healing profession you now practice. You love working with your clients. However, things are not quite like you imagined or you were in the flow earlier, but now something has changed.

When life is not working, it could be a signal that you are slightly off-track. We each have our own life path and do our best to move in alignment with that path. If we do not pay attention, however, we could trip, bump into an obstacle or step off the path.

If you feel like things are not working like they used to, it could be your signal to make a slight shift. Review all aspects of your work and your life. Did you decide that you wanted to focus on a certain type of client group, but find that working with them does not bring you joy? Perhaps there are a few clients who seem to exhaust you, but you believe you should help everyone who comes to you. What if you really want to spend more time with your family, but you feel obligated to work full time because you have a lot of clients in need? When what you are doing is no longer working, it is time to take a step back, examine what is really going on and make a course correction.

Most likely you are caught in a mindset that is driving

your behavior. Perhaps this behavior was helpful in the beginning, but it can become limiting as our lives change. However, if we are not mindful, we can get stuck and wonder why we are not happy. It helps to know a little about how our brains work, because when we are stuck in a specific mindset, it takes some effort to change to a new, more enlivening one.

When we are born, we are wired to pay attention to our senses — the light we see, the sounds we hear, the smells, etc. As we grow, we develop beliefs based upon our experiences and what we observe — do not touch the stove, warm baths feel good, blue is the best color in the world and mashed beets are not food. Our brains learn what we pay attention to and create neural pathways. These neural pathways are awash with emotion and shape how the mind perceives information and data. You might think of them as shortcuts to information.

Unfortunately, our brains are like Velcro regarding negative input. Scanning for threats at all times, our brain is looking for anything negative — whether the threat is real or a mindset. Even neutral information is considered negative. This brain pattern ensured that we were on guard against lions, tigers and bears. It was and remains a survival mechanism. As you probably know, this constant search for threats contributes to modern day stress levels. Because of this





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propensity we can easily get stuck in certain mindsets and not aware that we are in a neural rut.

Perhaps you have a value that you want to be as involved as possible in your child's life. Also, you have a mindset that you should meet all the requests of your clients. Today you may have planned to leave work at 5:30 pm so you can take your daughter to soccer practice. One of your regular clients calls at 1:00 pm begging to see you today and he can only come at 5:00.

This is where it is helpful to know how your brain works. The phone call from your client triggers a stress response. Your amygdala fires and sends a message to your limbic system to release hormones which send more blood to your large muscle groups, stops your digestive system and shortens your breath. This happens before your pre-frontal cortex (the part of your brain that is designed to make decisions and over-ride the amygdala) can respond. Unfortunately, as you try to sort out how to respond to this request and your desire to take your daughter to soccer practice, your amygdala continues to fire, sending more cortisol through your system. It is reinforcing a stress loop that slows down an already slower processing pre-frontal cortex. You have been emotionally hijacked by your mindset.

This situation would not be a challenge if you had a different mindset. Perhaps you were not able to accommodate a request from a client in the past - who then went to another business and never returned. You felt horrible about the situation and the resulting loss of the client. Most likely you had a negative emotional reaction and thought that in the future you would not turn down client requests because you would lose business. Within seconds you created a strong neural pathway. Every time you receive a special request, your brain remembers the loss of the client (without your conscious awareness) and your neural pathway becomes even stronger.

*"Whatever we repeatedly sense and feel and want and think is slowly but surely sculpting neural structure."* (Rick Hanson, *Hardwiring Happiness*, 2013)

The above situation is an example of how mindsets can be created. But what if you have mindsets that were developed long ago that are now creating unhappiness and suffering for you? Check the list below to see if any of these mindsets seem familiar:

- I am not as successful as \_\_\_\_\_.
- If it were not for me, nothing would get done.
- I cannot ask for help or support unless I am in total crisis.
- If I say no, people will not like me.
- If I keep racing, I will finally catch up with everything I need to do/complete.
- The only way to get ahead is through hard work.
- I am not sure my services are worth what I am charging.
- I like things to be done right and I am the only one who can do things right.
- It helps me to think about all the things that can possibly go wrong so I can be prepared.

If any of the above look, sound or feel familiar to you, you have a mindset that is limiting your ability to be flexible. That mindset is getting in the way of you being happy as well as limiting your ability to change. When life is no longer working the way it did in the past, it is time to review our mindsets and make changes.

Okay, but given all that information about how the brain works, how it scans for the negative, how we create strong neural pathways unconsciously, etc., how do you create a new mindset? How do you give up what is not working? First, determine what your underlying belief is that is getting in the way. Second, make a list of all the different situations in which this mindset is inhibiting you. Third, create a new mindset that allows more freedom and flexibility for you. Lastly, and this is the tricky part, when you craft that mindset, you need to infuse it with positive emotions.

Here is a process I have used myself and recommended to my clients. It helps if you have a journal writing practice. If you do not journal regularly, that is fine,



but you will want to use a pen/pencil and paper for this process.

**Step 1:** Set a timer for five minutes, finish the sentence below. Write as quickly as possible without self-editing. The objective is to get your innate creativity involved in the process, not your critical self. Believing \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in your mindset) \_\_\_\_\_, blocks my ability to \_\_\_\_\_.

When you have finished, read what you have written. Is there anything else that comes to mind? If so, add it now.

**Step 2:** Craft the language of your new mindset. It is important to use positive language. If your limiting mindset is, "If I say no, people will not like me," a few possibilities to create a new mindset are: "I make good choices about where and how I spend my time and energy." "I am thoughtful regarding the choices I make." "I feel positive about making conscious choices for how I spend my time." Make sure you write your new mindset in language that fits you.

**Step 3:** Attach positive emotions and sensations to the new mindset. You are building new neural pathways (basically re-wiring your brain) and washing them with emotion helps to fully engage the brain.

- A. As in Step 1, set a timer for five minutes and, as quickly as possible - write all the new opportunities that are available to you with this new mindset.
- B. Now make a list of your favorite smells, sounds, tastes, views/pictures, body sensations and positive emotions.

For example:

Smells: lavender, sheets dried in the sun, freshly cut grass, a pine forest.

Sounds: birds singing in the morning, waves crashing on the shoreline, the sound of children laughing.

Tastes: the taste of your favorite food, cool water on a hot day, the taste of a juicy, ripe apple.

Views: a soft sunrise full of pinks and blues, a brilliant sunset, light sifting through trees, the face of someone you love.

Sensations/emotions: the feel of a warm, soft blanket or of your favorite piece of clothing, the emotions you felt the last time you laughed until you cried, how you feel when you walk in nature. Add the memory of a positive experience and the wonderful emotions that go with that memory.

**Step 4:** As you read your new mindset statement, focus on it and engage your senses, imagine the smells, sounds, tastes, views, sensations and emotions that relate to your new positive mindset. The more richly you can engage your senses the more it helps create a strong neural pathway. If you are struggling to identify a sense that supports the new mindset, for example a taste, select one of your favorites. When you have read it a few times, say it out loud. Again, engage all your senses.

**Step 5:** Go through this exercise of engaging your senses while you read or say your new mindset three times a day. Pay attention to how you feel each time you do so. How does your body feel? Do you get a slight surge of energy? Do you feel a small tingling in your hands? Perhaps your breath deepens and slows down - or - you may feel a deep sense of peace.

Whatever you feel, notice it and pay attention to the difference. Practice this process until you can feel the richness and power of the new mindset when you say it out loud.

Congratulations, you have created a new mindset that opens new possibilities and opportunities for you! We do not need to feel stuck or unhappy; we have the ability to create new mindsets at any time.

As Henri Bergson, a French Philosopher said, "*To exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly.*" €