

Why we need an emotional gymnasium

INTRO

Hello Everyone, some of you look like you've been working out. I can see that you're fit. I always thought that I was fit until I hit a wall of stress that was unexpected.

I found three secrets to emotional health that could remove the unique duress I faced. I'm going to reveal one of those secrets to you right now. Please stand.

Let's start by shaking our hands like this. Now wiggle your arms. Add in your legs. And do what you can to shake any other part of your body.

Thank you. You can stop and take your seat.

While you may have felt a bit silly with this exercise, it did one special thing for you. The shaking motion allowed you to...

Shake off your stress.

In the moment, you forgot about your worries. You also felt your muscles let go and relax. This shake-it-off exercise is one of three secrets I learned during the most devastating time in my life, thanks to a wise man who shared the three secret exercises that I'll be giving you today. It will be my gift to you.

CULTURAL NEED

Before we unpack these stress reducing gifts, let's consider how our culture deals with stress. Would we all agree that going to a gym typically makes us stronger and improves the quality of our life?

Yes, I think so.

Just the other day, a buff guy came up to me with the intent of asking me out. He started the conversation with pride in his voice saying, "I hit the gym five days last week."

I couldn't blame him for trying and I was gentle in my response, "That's awesome."

Did that sound like I was leading him on?

I hoped not. Just in case, I followed up with a statement I was proud of, “I see a therapist once a week.”

He took off faster than the Road Runner.

You see, our culture praises those who work out at the gym, but looks down on those who work out their emotions.

ANTIDOTES

Today, I’m going to tell you three secret antidotes that will empower you to embrace the world of emotional gymnasiums, where you can work out those negative feelings of suffering loss, coping with stressful situations, and stopping self-sabotaging behaviors.

When you experience the loss of a loved one, face a difficult financial situation, or struggle with a traumatic event, how do you respond?

How we respond determines the quality of our life going forward.

I was fortunate to learn about working out in an emotional gym, but it was years after poor attempts at dealing with the loss of my best friend to a fiery plane crash. It was then, that I first learned that we have to exercise our emotional muscles.

AIRPLANE STORY

I was seven years old. I had just moved to Korea from Japan. I stood frozen watching bright red flames engulf a crashed airplane during a live TV broadcast. The flames raged over clothing and luggage rolling across the ground.

The reporter continually updated the list of injured passengers, and the casualty list. My mom's face dropped when she hung up the phone. She pulled me to herself and sat me down on her lap.

"Honey," mom said. "Yoko and her family were on the plane."

My ears perked up and my throat tightened. I could feel my heart beating hard, but I

didn't understand why. I focused on my mom. I needed to know everything that happened.

“Yoko’s mom, dad, and little brother are at the hospital”

My eyes flooded with tears. I could barely see my mom through the blur of water pouring down my face.

“What about Yoko?” I asked.

Mom answered in a soft voice, “She is missing.”

I knew there was something more. I knew mom knew...

I realized that my mom had repositioned herself and put a hand on my shoulder. Her next words were spoken very carefully.

“She was missing but when they found her, a pole had pierced through her head and she did not make it.”

I turned back to the TV and watched more of the plane's debris consumed by the violent red flames. I cried in my bed all night long.

When I woke up, my life was very different. I carried a deep pain in my broken heart. The TV was still presenting the traumatic event with its escalating body count.

Then something funny happened inside of me. When the reporter updated the count of those missing, I wished Yoko was still missing. I played a mental game thinking they would soon find her alive and well. My grief was toying with me.

Have you ever lost someone close to you?

It is painful to lose someone close to us.

As a child, I moved 9 times internationally, attending 13 schools in 5 countries. Every time I moved, I felt the loss of relationship, having to separate from the people I came to love.

The older I got, the larger the pile of losses mounted from my childhood. It drove me to

research the topic of loss. I learned an amazing fact. It was sad and oddly funny at the same time. I found that 100 out of every 100 people...die.

We all face loss. Loss is an integral part of our life. Whether it's a life-threatening health condition, a break up or divorce, or moving away from loved ones, we all face loss.

In that moment, I understood that I needed to get to an emotional gym.

I needed to prepare my emotional muscles to face what I'd experience in my coming teen and adult years. I needed to make emotional work outs a part of my daily practice in life. I had to get myself to an emotional gym.

At the time when I needed it most, a wise man shared with me three secrets to emotional health. But before I learned this lesson, which I will soon share with you, I learned that I needed an emotional gym for more than loss. I needed it to counteract stress.

FIRST JOB

My first job out of college was a simple job, or so I thought. The boss called me a matchmaker because all I had to do was match the sales orders with its payments.

Have you seen a miserable matchmaker?

No matter how hard I tried, they would refuse to meet each other eye-to-eye. My boss yelled at me and I disliked my work, so I quit.

Have you ever done something stupid?

Like quitting a job before having another one lined up?

Within three months I was broke and couldn't pay the rent. My steady diet was ramen noodles. I'm telling you, I was poor.

I was so poor I couldn't even afford the flavor pack.

For months I lived under constant stress. I had no idea where I could get money or how to put food on the table. Plus, I had the burden of paying off my college loans.

I thought that I was used to stress as a student. You know what I'm speaking of. The pressure of getting good grades, advancing into the accelerated program, and going to interview after interview hoping you say just the right things.

Add to this the new responsibilities of having an apartment and a car. I needed to get to an emotional gym to de-stress.

My mountain of losses in life were being covered over by a deluge of stress.

That's when I learned that I was capable of self-sabotage—a behavior that can be created from our overwhelm.

CHRIS' STORY

I have a friend. His name is Chris. He gave me permission to share his story. When he did his best on a science exam he scored one of the highest in the class. He beamed with delight and proudly took his exam score to his Dad.

The yelling was so loud, you could hear his dad's words outside shouting, "Why can't you get a perfect score?"

The belt came off and Chris was struck again and again.

How would you feel after being top in your class and being beaten for not having a perfect grade?

Chris was hurt and discouraged. He underperformed for years because when he did his best, he would still be reprimanded.

As an escape mechanism, instead of studying, he got into watching movies and playing videogames. His grades dropped and fed his shame and low self-esteem.

I learned that Chris had self-sabotaged his future.

This fall Disney had the opportunity to purchase Twitter, but after seeing the negative social media bashing of people online, Mr. Iger passed on the opportunity.

You see, he understood that over the past two dozen years the suicide rate in America has

gone up 33%. That's right, during the surge of social media, we've seen a dramatic increase in people being hurt.

American suicides are now at their highest in 50 years with 129 reported suicides per day.

Today, we need an emotional gym to prepare ourselves for the losses, stresses, and self-sabotaging behaviors we will face later in life.

Just like heading to the gym 3-6 days a week to strengthen our muscles, we need to spend a minimum of one day a week preparing our emotional muscles.

I faced several severe traumas in my life, but thankfully I learned three secrets to overcoming my circumstances by working out in an emotional gym. I'm going to share these three secrets with you now as a gift for your life.

The first one you've already tried at the beginning of my talk. It's called body shaking.

BODY SHAKING

Did you know that animals don't get PTSD but people do?

Trauma therapist Peter Levine, in his book Waking the Tiger, says that animals don't get PTSD because once out of danger, they shiver and shake to release the trauma from their bodies.

When we were younger, we threw tantrums to shake off our emotional pain. But these behaviors were discouraged so we were conditioned to suppress our emotions.

Have you seen a dog shaking their leg?

That's when they are shaking off trauma. We all have various levels of trauma from events in life. The cause might have been a teacher who embarrassed us in front of a class to a parent who caused physical and emotional injury to us like my friend Chris.

Body shaking has helped me cope with my own trauma.

When I was in high school, I didn't fit in. At lunch time I didn't know who to eat with. I would take my lunch bag to the bathroom, shut the bathroom door, and eat alone on the toilet.

I carried this pain into college. I processed the pain by not only crying, but by shaking to release the emotional toxins stored in my body.

The shaking worked. It brought me during my most turbulent times. I was amazed then, and I'm still amazed today, at how physical shaking drastically improves our emotions.

The second secret exercise in an emotional gym is JOURNALING.

JOURNALING

Journaling is a great way to transfer emotional clutter from our mind onto paper. As we scribe our thoughts and emotions, we quickly learn what important to us.

When one of my family members was admitted to the hospital, I did not know how long

they were going to be there or why they were taken in. I was frustrated by the unknown.

My emotions got the best of me. I was overwhelmed with fear. My life started to spiral downward until I remembered to exercise my emotions in a healthy fashion. I entered the emotional gym by journaling.

Writing down all my fears, frustrations and stress onto paper helped me focus on the priorities in life. I was able to clear my mind. Soon, I was able to think clearly and determine my next steps to learn more and support my family.

There are famous people like Abraham Lincoln who used journaling and letters in the face of adversity. Lincoln was able to get a lot off of his chest by writing high-spirited letters. Thankfully Martha made sure most did not get mailed.

The second exercise of journaling allows us to dump our emotions onto the page, rather than internalizing it into an ulcer. And who knows how

many people have been spared my sarcasm thanks to me releasing my feelings into a journal.

Comedy is another secret exercise done in the emotional gym.

LAUGHTER

Have you ever noticed how perfect everyone else is in social media?

I couldn't help but notice how perfect my friends and acquaintances looked on Facebook and Instagram. But my life, not so much.

There is something natural about comparing myself to others on social media. I know it's not healthy, but it seems to be the only way to learn more about them.

Well, I suppose I'm not really learning about them, just about their best selves. In any case, looking through social media caused me a great deal of stress. After all, I came across pathetic. I was far from being found by Hollywood or even followed by new associates.

The secret exercise from the emotional gym for battling the effects of social media was laughter. I arranged to hang out with several friends at an improv show. We laughed and laughed, I could barely breathe.

Laughter has many benefits. When we are laughing, our body releases endorphins, which makes our body feel good. It relaxes the tension in our muscles.

Many patients have reported that they don't feel pain when they are laughing. Many reported cases reference the role laughter played in curing a illnesses such as cancer.

Arthur Koestler said, "Laughter and weeping, the Greek masks of comedy and tragedy, mark the extremes of a continuous spectrum; both provide channels for the overflow of emotion; both are."

Next time we face an incident somewhere on the tragedy spectrum, we can head to the theater for a good dose of continuous laughter.

I have experienced various and numerous incidents of trauma and tragedy. I found the secret to releasing those emotional pains to be exercising in the emotional gym of my life.

To do so, I've needed to be intentional about going to the emotional gym a minimum of one time per week to deter and weaken the hold that loss, stress, and self-sabotaging behaviors have on us.

My three favorite exercises are body shaking, journaling, and laughing. They are my gift to you. I hope you take them to your emotional gym every week to ready yourself for the next time you feel like you've hit a wall.

To your emotional health, cheers!

T H E E N D