

Adopting the Right State for the Right Stage

How Changing Your State Can Change Your Life

IMAGES: SS



State management refers to the thoughts, feelings, energy levels, and cognitive functioning which is the ability and inability to use one's mind to recollect, store, and use information effectively that translate into outer and observable behaviours.

THE ability to manage your internal state is one of the most important skills you can acquire. Your state is like a sponge that soaks up the energy from your thoughts, feelings, and actions. Hence, each thought that we have will produce a corresponding feeling. The actions that you take can create patterned behaviours. This can recur in your life for better or worse. All these produce feelings which reside in the body. Your thoughts and

feelings filter and select perception, influence decisions, language patterns, and hence frame communication, trigger emotions, affect health, performance, awareness of self, and ultimately drive behaviours.

Recently, I was doing some of my banking transactions while lining up at the bank when suddenly I heard screams and shouts from the guy in front of me who had just answered a mobile call. He was loudly chastising a bank officer from ano-

ther bank, accusing them of bad service, criticising them for abusing their authority, and being indifferent to his needs. Immediately upon putting down the phone, his teeth were grinding, his face looked disgusted and flushed. This was followed by angry mutterings which sounded like a suppressed torrent of abuse in the absence of the service provider. To add to it, he could not keep his cool by the time he reached the bank teller about 15 minutes later.

When you choose to influence and regulate your state of mind, it would determine the results of your execution and how others respond to you. It has a powerful effect on your resourcefulness and comfort in any situation. Yet, most people think state management is beyond them and have never been taught the skills they need to internally manage their state. As time passes, we encounter tonnes of

By Granville D'Souza

experiences and hence naturally change and access different states frequently, but for most of us, it is done unconsciously and with little choice.

When unpleasant situations arise, it is vital that you believe you are not a victim of what is happening inside you and that you can take full control. Similarly, when joyful states emerge, we may not know how to sustain or accelerate them. For most of us, states come and go like weather patterns. We experience them as if they are beyond our control.

Monitor and Check Your State

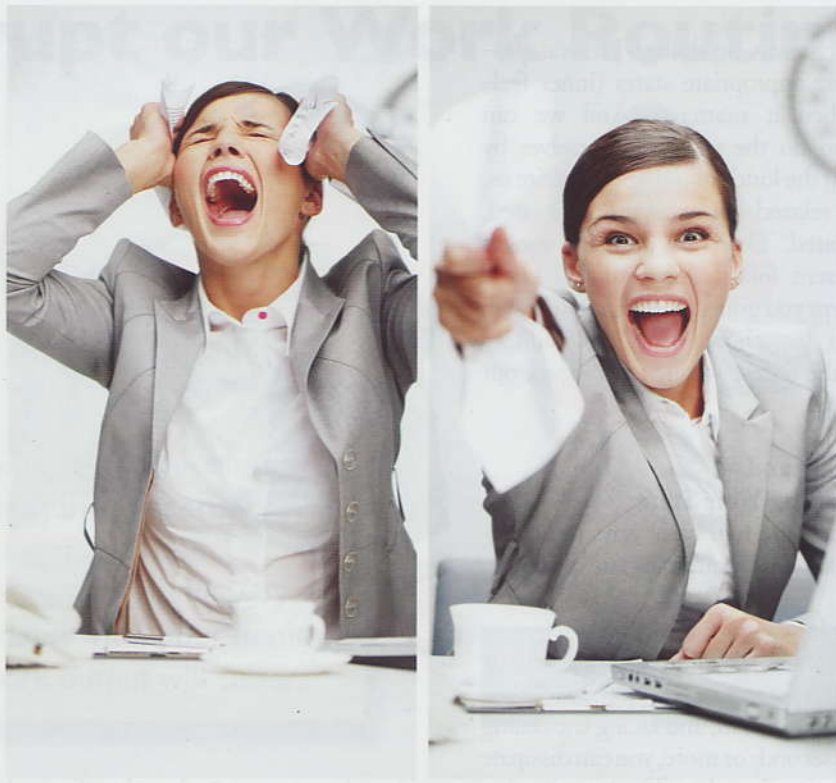
We need to set limits, alarms, and subtle shocks when things get out of hand. For example, two of my values which I hold strongly are respect and being considerate. When either is violated, my hot buttons get majorly pressed. For example, when driving, if another motorist selfishly pops up in front of me suddenly to steal away the parking lot after I have waited there for 15 minutes, I get ready for battle. My mind goes wild in such instances, and my primal instincts and predatory male tendencies emerge quickly.

But rather than getting ready for confrontation or teaching them a lesson, I have learnt to set up an internal early warning system to notify me of important unconscious red flags. You can learn how to respond to unresourceful states, how to understand their meaning, derive their benefits, and move on with those benefits to better states. So, here's a tip:

Know the signals when you are losing it by practising STOP.

- S is for Signals. When I am angry, my fist starts to clench and my jaw tightens, my mind goes wild, and I start to plan my reaction.
- T and O go together and it is Try to do the Opposite by unclenching, loosening the jaw, and telling myself to "Let go right now". Whatever signals that tighten, just be present with them and loosen up.
- P is about Practice.

You will be surprised that physiologically, many things happen when you loosen up and relax. It reduces the heart rate, reduces blood pressure, and the mind starts to focus on solutions.



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How to Change Your State

We should not compare ourselves with robots because we are far superior. However, there are instances when we must learn to press the right buttons to be in the most resourceful states at the appropriate moments. We can be programmed if we choose to adopt the right behaviour when it is called for. We can learn how to maintain a state for focus or pleasure, how to anchor states for future use, and how to transfer resources from one state to another.

I recently came back from a programme with an excellent life coach, Tony Robbins. His words are still ringing in my head and they are: "change your state and you'll change your life". I would like to share a few things he did at the seminar.

- I am not used to sitting for more than eight hours during a seminar. He went on for 14 to 15 hours each day. However, at least every hour, we would dance to the music, get into groups of

threes and teach each other aerobics, jump a lot, push our hands in the air, and all these were designed to change our state. Even though I was jetlagged, I have to admit I can estimate three to four yawns in six 15-hour seminar days. Those activities did a world of good.

- When the sessions required focus, we were conditioned to be focused, alert, and excited in a grounded way, and the trigger was a bell. Just sit straight, take a deep breath, and focus on universal positive energy passing through like a beam through the top of your head to the base of your feet.
- When participants had breakthroughs, there was a peculiar celebratory music where the group of 1,800 would celebrate the joys experienced by the progress made by one individual, clapping with full energy and giving group hugs. This was a typical experience of group energy.

What was he doing? He was programming appropriate states (inner feelings) when it mattered. And we can choose to do the same for ourselves by collecting the kinds of music that excite us, keep us relaxed, pumped up, motivated, and inspired. There are different strokes for different folks. Only you will know what keeps you going, moving, or focused. Research has shown that the auditory sense is the fastest avenue to influence our inner state.

Managing and Maintaining Your State

There are four basic ways to deliberately change your internal state of mind.

1. Physiology

The state of mind is influenced by your physiology. By closing your eyes, tilting up your head, and facing the ceiling for three seconds or more, you can dissipate unproductive thoughts. They start to disappear and lifts your energy while you keep that negative thought in focus, says Jim Fanin, a life-strategist and sports coach. By maintaining a confident, motivated, and active posture, you will feel more energetic and hence be perked up, alert, and ready to embark on bigger challenges. You have heard the incantation "fake it till you make it" but you don't have to fake it. Just adopt the right posture and consciously elevate your energy. At sporting events like soccer and basketball, players need to pick themselves up immediately from a setback so they punch the air and pump themselves up. This increases energy and sends messages to the mind that something important is happening. You can use this to help your motivation and resolve.

2. Visualisations

Progressive success in the mind pre-empted and prepares one to do the same in real life so imagine vivid images of yourself attaining your goal. Replay these fantasies as often as you can since practise makes perfect and your mind will settle for no less than what it wants to see and your behaviour will be in sync.

3. Affirmations

This is the auditory equivalent of visualisation. Affirmations are repeated, ener-



getic, and empowering thoughts directed to oneself. However, when you say it with belief, saying it out loud and with emotion, the effect becomes more powerful. Your body then registers and synchronises with the cognitive concoction of your affirmation. It is a direct auditory instruction to your brain and body. Examples are: "I am passionate, driven and unstoppable in my quest to be a ..., I am in control, I love what I do and I am in the process of being, doing, and having all that I deserve". Repeat it over and over and really believe it.

4. Mindfulness

The most important action you can take is to practice mindfulness. Mindfulness is a state of active, open attention on the present. When you are mindful, you observe your thoughts and feelings from a distance, without judging them good or bad. Instead of letting your life pass you by, mindfulness means living in the moment and awakening to experience. There are many thoughts that are ticking in our minds. The quality of your thoughts is directly related to the quality of your feelings because positive thoughts produce positive and happy chemicals in the mind or body like serotonin, dopamine, and endorphins. When we are stressed, cortisol and adrenaline are produced.

Your state can be managed by practising mindfulness. You might not be used to asking yourself if your thoughts and actions are useful or if they are serving you. When I coach people, I seem to notice that they are too bothered about the future, that is, what they want and how much they want it. There are claims that the past is over and so just focus on what is ahead but there is a lot to learn from our past. However, one of the main ways to get what you really want is to focus on your present actions and thoughts. You may not have a perspective on what is useful to you based on the rapid rate at which your life is going, hence these are questions you can ask yourself.

- How am I presently feeling? List about five emotions.
- From the five, pick a couple of the more difficult ones like frustration or tension.
- What is the source of these feelings?
- What thoughts are causing these feelings? Are they valid? Are they continuous? Can I dispute this? Is it worth holding on to? How can I substitute it since it's not serving me?
- Is there another way to represent this thought so that different feelings accompany them?
- If I focus on an outcome I want, what useful thoughts should I hold on to and develop?

Mindfulness allows you to dissect some of the fleeting thoughts that surge across your mind and body without much notice. This, together with the other state management skills, are skills you will use and benefit from the rest of your life. They will improve your career, your relationships, your health, and your happiness. ✍

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