

Agency Is:

- what allows you to pause, evaluate, and act when you face a challenge;
- about being *active* rather than *passive* — reacting effectively to immediate situations and planning effectively for your future;
- lost when you become too overwhelmed — you can no longer evaluate your circumstances, reflect on challenges and opportunities, make creative decisions, act in ways that open up possibilities for a meaningful life on your own terms;
- what humans have always used to *feel in command of their lives*;
- essential for coping with the obstacles that life throws our way and building a healthy fulfilling life



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Erosion of Agency

- Linked directly to the crisis levels of anxiety we see in current times
- When we don't have agency: problems fester, plans don't get made, leaves us with a constant sense of worry about what's not getting done and the impending consequences of inaction



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Confidence and Agency

- Confidence is linked to the ability to meet significant challenges.
- Those who are more confident (feel more in charge of their lives/ connected to their sense of agency) = less anxiety and overwhelm, even when placed under highly challenging pressure situations.
- Sympathetic nervous system (fear/aggression when threatened — fight or flight) seesaws with parasympathetic nervous system (returns the mind/body to calm and homeostasis).
- Instead of trying to lower worry/anxiousness, encourage a confidence that can help keep stress away.
- Low-agency/stressed people = near constant state of fight or flight. Always on high alert.



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“Action seems to follow feeling, but really action and feeling go together; and by regulating the action, which is under the more direct control of the will, we can indirectly regulate the feeling, which is not.”

William James



7 Principles for Building Agency

Behavioral Principles

- Control Stimuli
- Associate Selectively
- Move
- Position Yourself as a Learner
- Manage Your Emotions and Beliefs
- Check Your Intuition
- Deliberate, Then Act

Cognitive Principles



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7 Principles for Building Agency

- **Control Stimuli** - cut back number of distractions in immediate environment — increases ability to choose where attention goes, increases concentration, bolsters creative thinking, less susceptible to impulsive acts and poorly thought-out decisions
- **Associate Selectively** - surround self with healthy, empathetic, open-minded, candid, and supportive people — boosts mood, elevate motivation, improve overall health and well-being
- **Move** - Focus on movement, nutrition and rest necessary to keep active and in balance — increases mental/physical strength/stamina



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7 Principles for Building Agency

- **Position Yourself as a Learner** - actively question, listen, learn as part of daily routine — deeper understanding of the world around you (expands knowledge and capabilities)
- **Manage Your Emotions and Beliefs** - cultivate greater self-awareness — identify and bring order to strong feelings/beliefs that could misguide you (navigate with greater confidence)
- **Check Your Intuition** - learn to access your intuition and use it wisely — provides valuable guidance
- **Deliberate, Then Act** - use a defined deliberation process — identify and weigh options in a contemplative, inclusive, rational way



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Control Stimuli

- The closer you are to your smart phone, the more it acts like mental kryptonite (*Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*)
- The more time people spend on Facebook, the worse they felt and the less satisfied they were with their lives (*University of Michigan researcher, PLOS ONE*)
- People watching news coverage of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing reported higher acute stress 2-4 weeks after the tragedy than people who had direct exposure to the events at/near the bombings (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of American (PNAS) journal*)

Agency begins with what you let into your mind!

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Control Stimuli

- 86% of adults report being constantly or often connected to their electronic devices. (*The American Psychological Association's 2017 Stress in America survey*)
- To detox: find regular times to completely unplug and stay away from all devices — this will lower stress, maintain better mental health, help break the chronic compulsive behavior many of us have to constantly check in with their electronic devices (*APA recommendation*)
- Stress caused by the news (as opposed to stress caused by your life) is unique in its ability to trigger a sense of hopelessness — increases the risk of developing depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (*The Upside of Stress, Kelly McGonigal*)

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Control Stimuli

- There's a neural basis for how we share emotions — we are wired to replicate the moods of others, both positive and negative
- For every happy friend in your network, your own chance of being happy rises by 9%. For every unhappy friend, your chance of being happy decreases by 7%.



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Associate Selectively

- Hang out with people with high agency.
- Surround yourself at every stage of life with supportive, open-minded, optimistic people — will have an enormous positive impact on your state of mind and your physical health (critical building blocks of personal agency.)
- Buddha: “Avoid the company of the immature if you want joy.”



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Move

- Feeling stuck on a task? Overwhelmed? Literally get yourself up and move — any amount, no matter how small, is beneficial.
- Pay attention to your body so that you can provide it with what it requires to be healthy and in balance.
- If your body is out of balance, your mind is out of balance.
- Engage in physical movements in multiple ways, rest adequately, and eat nutritious food.
- Your agency is driven by your energy.



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