



SI-20

Happier in the Zone

Stop! What are you thinking about and feeling right now? Are you in a positive zone of creativity and enjoyment, and if so, what exactly are you doing or thinking at this time? Interestingly enough, a team of psychologists at Harvard University devised a way to research this question. Using an iPhone app they randomly called subjects who responded with how they were feeling, what they were doing, and what they were thinking at the moment of the call.

When researchers analyzed the data, they found that the subjects whose minds were wandering off the present moment were more likely to report more feelings of unhappiness than those who were attentive to the present moment. One of the researchers concluded that, "In fact, how often our minds leave the present and where they tend to go is a better predictor of our happiness than the activities in which we are engaged." Those living in the moment were generally happier. You can participate in this ongoing research by visiting <http://www.trackyourhappiness.org/>.

Could performing your own zone self-check help you improve your work? All you need is a smartphone or another timer such as an iPod that can be set to vibrate or beep at random times during your day. When the timer signals you, stop, really stop, look and listen to your class or your present work environment. Observe if you are totally engaged in present-time learning and work tasks. Or perhaps you are daydreaming, future worrying, or replaying past problems. Focusing your thoughts on the present is simple and necessary for experiencing more happiness and success.

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Use this same methodology to do some personal in-class, or workspace attention-level research. Note how many of your students or colleagues appear to be part of one of the three groups: “engaged,” “multitasking,” or “disengaged.” Ask the “engaged” students or fellow workers to explain, if they wouldn’t mind, what got them into the learning or high-performance work zone. What were you doing as an instructor to promote intense concentration on learning, or what happened to create boredom and disinterest. Ask the multitaskers what they were working to accomplish and why they could split their attention and still get the work or learning done.

Chances are that you will learn some useful things about teaching in the specific ways that helps your students enter and stay in the learning zone. This exercise is also a perfect time to discuss what “being in the zone” means in any activity and how people get in the zone and stay in the zone for peak performance.

Reference: Harvard University (2010, November 11). Mind is a frequent, but not happy, wanderer: People spend nearly half their waking hours thinking about what isn’t going on around them. Found on ScienceDaily on November 12, 2010.

*~John H, (Jack) Shrawder, Exec. Director
TFS National Faculty Success Center*

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