



Living Dangerously

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Are you living dangerously? If you're "normal" and research indicates that at least 96% of us are, then, in fact, you're not really living at all – you're simply existing. What passes for your life is in fact an ongoing automatic treadmill of habitual, reactive self-fulfilling prophecies.

You see, years of psychological research proves that normal people devote only around 1% of their mental capacity to living in and experiencing the only time and place you can be – here and now. So, if you're "normal" and if you want to call your daily experience "living", then, you are indeed living dangerously, because you are in constant danger of reacting habitually to everything thing that's going on around you and, as a result, never really living life to the full. What's worse, you are in constant danger of not appreciating the opportunities of the here and now. You are in constant danger of never really living your life at all.

Why do you think that people indulge in extreme sports? Why do people free-fall from airplanes? Why do people hang-glide or bunjie jump? Why do people enjoy skiing so much more than lying on a beach? For the short time that one free-falls or dangles from the end of a rope, those people are actually experiencing the joy of living – living dangerously in a completely different sense. Because, in those few exhilarating moments, they are fully involved, fully focused, fully turned on to the complete experience of just that moment – just that here and now.

Research at the universities of Chicago and Milan proves conclusively that "peak experiences" are fully appreciated because the individual's attention is completely engrossed in the experience. The same research indicates that, in our so-called normal everyday lives, we are rarely if ever engrossed in what we are doing. That's how researchers have been able to state that the normal person only invests 1% of their attention in the here and now.

Wouldn't it be great if you could hit that natural high every day – in the course of your ordinary everyday life? Well, you can, by simply deciding to pay more than 1% of your attention to whatever it is you're doing, right here, right now. You see, recent research from the field of neuro-psychology indicates that the brain cannot distinguish between a natural high that results from some outside stimulus (like bunjie jumping or skiing) and one that results from you simply paying more attention to the present moment. And the universities of Chicago and Milan have come the conclusion, based

on decades of research involving thousands of participants, that your happiness and success is directly linked to whether or not you are engrossed in the here and now.

Put more simply, your ability to be happy and successful is directly linked to your ability to pay attention. Normal adults have long-lost that ability as a result of what psychology calls “automaticity”. Automaticity enables us adults to do repetitive tasks without paying them any attention. That’s great – because we don’t need to give our undivided attention to putting one foot in front of the other to walk across a room. Nor do we need to become engrossed in the physical act of driving a car. An accountant doesn’t need to re-learn how to analyse a balance sheet every single time he or she reviews a set of accounts and a doctor doesn’t need to perform a medical examination on all the patients in his or her waiting.

That’s fine. But the problem with normal “living” is that everything, sooner or later, becomes repetitive. So everything becomes habitual and automatic. Furthermore, psychologists have discovered that automaticity prevents you from paying attention to things that you’ve actually decided to pay attention to! The result is that the normal adult is incapable of paying attention to the extent that we live automatic, repetitive, habitual, reactive lives. And, that being the case, we are disconnected from our ability to be happy and successful.

The solution, however, is extraordinarily simple. As children, we were expert at paying attention. A young child, having been given a new toy, experiences that toy with all five senses. Have you ever seen a two- or three-year-old engrossed in a new toy, or even the packaging it came in? They see, feel, hear, smell and taste the toy (or the packaging!). Therein lies an important lesson for us adults. We need to begin again to use our five senses to bring ourselves more into the present moment. For it is in the present moment that we experience the reality of reality – and it is in the here and now that we can start living our lives to the full, rather than simply existing.

Presence in the here and now is the key to happiness and success, the happiness and success that you really, really want. Thirteen years of work with my own clients confirms that, when we are present, we are “flow” as scientifically defined by the University of Chicago. When we’re in “flow” great things happen, we start truly living, we start truly experiencing the ease with which we can achieve happiness and success – effortlessly.