

The Science of the Connection Practice



The Connection Practice is a skill set that unites empathy and insight to accelerate growth. Empathy is attained through a conscious connection to feelings and needs, and insight is attained through coherence.

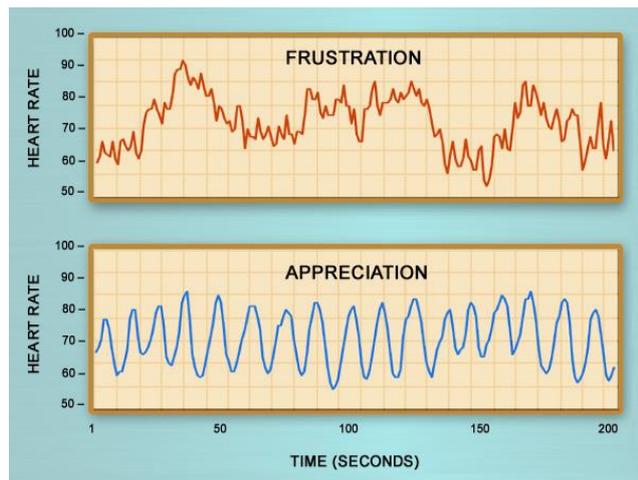
The synergy in this partnership maximizes our social and emotional intelligence, builds resilience and enhances performance.

Insight Through Coherence

Scientists use the term “coherence” to describe a physiological state in which the nervous, cardiovascular, hormonal and immune systems are working efficiently and harmoniously. It is a state that improves brain cognitive function and our overall sense of well-being.

Institute of HeartMath research shows that when we are in a state of incoherence from negative emotions, such as frustration, our heart rate variability pattern is erratic. Positive emotions like appreciation create coherence, as shown by a rhythmic, even pattern.

Because the heart is the strongest biological oscillator in the body, when it generates a coherent signal, it draws the other biological oscillators into synchronization, most importantly, the brain. When the heart is in a coherent mode, it can override the amygdala in the brain, which gets triggered by emotional memories. As an example, a person bitten by a dog when he was a child may have a recurring negative emotional response (fear, anger) whenever he sees a dog. If he has learned to sustain coherence, over time he can extinguish this reaction.



The Institute of HeartMath developed the Quick Coherence Technique to help people achieve coherence. It has three steps:

1. Heart Focus
2. Heart Breathing
3. Heart Feeling of Appreciation

HeartMath research has shown that students who practice coherence before exams perform significantly better in math and reading and have an improved capability for learning. Coherence also enhances our creativity and gives us more reliable access to the insights that help us make wise choices.

Connection

This aspect of the Connection Practice is inspired by Nonviolent Communication (NVC), developed by Dr. Marshall Rosenberg. The four steps of NVC are:

1. Observations – a description of what we are seeing, hearing or touching, specific to time and context, and free of judgment, criticism or analysis.
2. Feelings – a description of our emotional state, the result of a perception of a need being met or unmet (e.g., happy, sad).
3. Needs – something we require to sustain and enrich our life. Needs are universal and do not refer to a specific person or thing. Examples of needs are clarity, respect, to be heard, to matter.
4. Requests – clear, positive, concrete words that request clarity, connection or a specific action in order to satisfy a need.

The essence of this model is the understanding that human beings share universal needs. Connecting to our own needs and to those of others, through empathy and honesty, is the key to reliably accessing our compassion.

Guessing the feelings of others is the first step in giving empathy and is more powerful than it seems at first glance. In a UCLA research study called “Putting Feelings into Words”, 30 participants were shown photographs of people who were emotionally upset, and then were asked to label the emotion (for example, “angry” or “fearful”) while the researchers measured the response of their amygdalae. The researchers found that naming the feelings in this way reduced the amygdala’s response.

In a control group, the participants looked at faces and selected a name underneath them that corresponded to the person’s gender, like “Harry” or “Sally” while the researchers measured the response of their amygdalae. The researchers discovered that the amygdala – the part of the brain that sounds an alarm in time of danger – was *less* active when an emotion label was attached to the upset face, compared to when a name was attached. This leads us to believe that when the amygdala has been triggered, naming feelings reduces its reaction. Naming feelings is the first step in the Connection Practice.

The Power of the Connection Practice

Irrational reactions of the amygdala can lead to conflict and violence. The synergy between insight and empathy in the Connection Practice has a powerful impact on extinguishing our reactions and accessing our best intelligence. Daily practice is encouraged and is strengthened by using *The Connection Process Daily Workbook*.

Visit www.RasurInternational.org to learn more about the Connection Practice.

