

MANAGING FIGHT OR FLIGHT

EP #46

“Do I need a life coach?” You’re listening to Episode 46, with Rhiannon Bush

Welcome to the Do I need a life coach? Podcast. We’re here to discuss the ins- and outs- of the life coaching industry and give you tools to use, to see for yourself. I’m your host, Rhiannon Bush. Mother, management consultant and a passionate, certified life coach.

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So we’re here to talk about fight or flight.

- 1. Who here has heard of that before, and knows what that means?**
- 2. Who here has experienced it before and can recall a time when it’s happened to them?**
- 3. Who here tends to fight?**
- 4. Who here fly or flee?**

Today, we’re to very discuss the impact of fight or flight.. call it stress, call it fatigue... we’ll cover this and then discuss the impact of chronic stress. I’ll attempt to speak your language, although you’ll pick up very fast that I’m not medically trained, but I’ll try.

We’re also going to get a little woo woo today. Is that ok? We’re going to do some powerful, subconscious work to clear anything residual that may be sitting there for you.

We’re going to discuss what happens in the brain neurologically, hormonally...

Then, we’re going to discuss strategies for

- a) Dealing with it in the moment**
- b) Recognising and working with any residue it close to the time**
- c) Dealing with it longer-term**

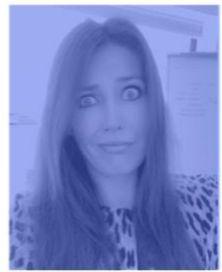
Before we give you strategies, we need to clear some stuff first for it to be completely effective, ok?

In summary, my goal for this workshop is to:

- 1. First, bring your awareness to how you respond to things happening in your environment, in the moment they happen.**
- 2. Then to identify what is and what is not in your control.**
- 3. Then to give you strategies to cope – in the moment, after the event and well after to make you healthier – mentally, physically, spiritually, and more resilient.**

Sound ok?





[Elicit] What do you want to get out of this?

I used to work as a Stage Manager for musical theatre. I loved it and I worked for a while at the Concourse Theatre in Chatswood. This theatre had a special feature and that was an electronic fly system. So when you go to a show, sometimes things like set pieces, even people, drop in from the sides and the ceiling to create new scenes. They're traditionally done manual – as in someone is there and actually handles a rope to pull or release the beam at the top which is attached to that set piece and that's how it works. And in the Concourse theatre, this was done with an electronic system. The problem was that the buttons weren't instantaneous. When you program these things you program them to music – usually a live orchestra sitting below the stage in the orchestra pit, and as a stage manager, you cue people or programs – such as lighting, to work with the music the orchestra is playing.

One of the shows I stage managed was the Russian National Ballet and as stage manager, I was using the electronic fly system which had been, to an extent, programmed. Right from the get-go, it wasn't going to plan. They were delays or they were slightly early... they weren't timed with the music and this caused stress to the performers, and even more to the Russian directors. Which were three, seriously tall, burley Russians who barely spoke English and every time something went wrong, they would yell at me backstage.

Never in my life have I ever wanted to run away. I've been through some pretty confronting situations in the industries I've worked in, haven't we all?, but this was the first time I've ever felt so threatened that my entire body was telling me to run. It was the first time I've ever truly experienced fight or flight. I can still remember exactly where I was sitting, I can still see their silhouettes and not what they were saying but the way they spoke to me. It was intimidating and awful.

I've also had instances where I've been totally caught off-guard by something somebody has said and my brain has had what we call a 'brain fart' (Episode 23) and I've just not been able to think of a come-back. Has anybody else experienced that?

Where somebody's yelled at you or said something and you literally can't think? And then 10 minutes later you think to yourself "ohhh I wish I'd said...." ? And all the really witty come backs come to you and you just wish that'd happened in the moment and you could've used them? Anybody?

'The homeostatic definition of stress: A condition where expectations, whether genetically programmed, established by prior learning, or deduced from circumstances, do not match the perception of the environment. This discrepancy between what is observed or sensed and what is expected or programmed elicits patterned responses.' M.D. Walter B. Cannon, 1915





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There's a lot of research on conditioning. I'm not sure this is a great approach as I'm not convinced the long-term health effects will be there if we condition ourselves to becoming used to being threatened. I believe it to a degree, but I also don't think it's a strategy I want to share with you. Instead, I want to give you strategies to understand how you react, because you'll react differently to the person sitting beside you based on so many factors – how you were raised, trauma you've experienced, your genetics, your brain. So many variables. So it's also important to consider in this work that you can't compare, or worry about somebody else doing it differently to you. You are unique and you have to work with how you and your body respond and go from there.

Our brains

When we experience fight or flight, our brain and mind (brain being the physical brain, mind being our mental state) does incredible things to keep us safe. This is always the prime directive of the unconscious mind – to keep us safe. It's how multiple personality disorder happens, it's how we repress memories, forget things, remember things.. our mind is truly amazing and so much of it we don't understand.

In truly basic terminology, we have three brains:

- 1. Our reptilian brain (exhibited by lizards and snakes) which is located in the base of our brain above our spinal cord, mediates instinctive behaviours – including fight or flight, hunger, sexual pursuits.**
- 2. The next is our Limbic System or 'mid-brain' and this brain allows us to have feelings and to exhibit more complex behaviours – such as nurturing, participation in social dominance hierarchies, etc.**
- 3. Neo-cortex which is our higher-cognitive functioning. Our Neo-cortex is why we're the highest order of mammalian on the planet, and contains our pre-frontal cortex in the frontal lobe and. Our Neo-cortex enables us to have complex social interactions, varying degrees of awareness, ultimately consciousness. We can dream, achieve goals, set goals, plan, reflect.. because of the size of our PFC.**

So... we're hit with a situation or a person, or maybe actually hit like MMA or boxer, and our brain goes straight from focusing on strategy or whatever else – to manage or mediate the situation, to fight or flight mode.





Our cerebellum, located in our reptilian brain, is extremely quick and helps us learn and control the timing of motor sequences. So when we learn to walk, run, it's repetition that strengthens the myelin sheath around our neural pathways to speed up our motor-coordination.

On top of this, we have our central nervous system (brain and spinal cord) and our autonomic nervous system (heart rate, respiration, temperature, circadian rhythms) which has two components:

- 1. Parasympathetic nervous system**
- 2. Sympathetic nervous system – prepares the body for immediate action at the expense of body regulating functions such as digestion... or in our case, reasoning. When overstimulated from excessive stress, i.e. every day fight or flight, is hard on the body**

And they often act in opposition to each other. So if we think about caveman days, you'd have to hunt your food before you could eat it. Your sympathetic "fight or flight" system would increase heart rate and respiration, etc. and divert blood away from your digestive system to your muscles to allow you to be active and get that task done.

Then, you've got to bring your parasympathetic nervous system back into power, and this slows down your overall metabolism and direct blood flow to your digestive system, allowing you to extract the nutrients you need from your successful chase. This allows for healing.

The perception of a threat – i.e. being chased by a lion or yelled at by a patient, activates our sympathetic nervous system. A hardwired response we're biologically programmed with and when this is activated, our pre-frontal cortex goes offline. We can't think or strategise, our brain releases norepinephrine and we just have to act. Then our brain releases epinephrine to rebalance our system and return to 'homeostasis'?

Just as we have receptors for things outside the body – tigers, threats, light detectors (photoreceptors), we have sensors inside the body that detect things like blood pressure, temperature, carbon dioxide levels. This information is used to maintain homeostasis and this is where fight or flight can have long-term negative impacts. If we can't clear the negative emotion and release it, our bodies become entirely out of wack because they begin to regulate according to things like blood pressure.

Our carotid artery in the neck has receptors that sense blood pressure. If the receptors send high blood pressure signals via the vagus nerve to the brain brainstem, which releases acetylcholine (hormone?) to slow down the heart.

One important controller of the autonomic nervous system is the hypothalamus – which is involved in controlling body functions – hunger, thirst, temperature, fatigue, circadian rhythms. So it'll start coming together now.





- **The brain reacts to threat**
- **The sympathetic nervous system activates the fight or flight response, also called an acute stress response**
- **The reaction is very rapid and happens unconsciously**
- **Adrenaline adds strength momentarily**
- **If the threat goes on, the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis activates**
- **The HPA axis keeps the sympathetic nervous system active as long as needed by releasing cortisol**
- **When the threat passes, the parasympathetic nervous systems begins to return the body back to balance (20 mins)**

When in fight or flight we experience:

- **Dilation of the pupils**
- **Dry mouth**
- **Fast breathing**
- **Heart pounding**
- **Tense muscles**
- **Slow digestion**
- **Sweating of the palms**

These are associated with high circulating levels of cortisol released by the adrenal gland.

May differ considerably between individuals, women and men.

Women - accumulation of fat around the waist frequently accompanies chronic stress, inhibited digestion, men experience reduction in sex drive and a risk of erectile dysfunction. Both women and men may experience depression, hair loss, heart disease, weight gain, ulcers. Even alcoholism and fibromyalgia have been linked to chronic stress.

These problems can occur even if no real threat is present in the environment. Excessive light or noise, feelings of entrapment, social subordination an include stress. Stress can also add to sleep and other health problems.

[Elicit] how about you?

- **Overeating?**
- **Over drinking?**
- **Sleep?**
- **Connection with partner?**

Write down some things you may be experiencing that you may not understand or that you know are associated with stress. These are for your eyes only.





Before giving you strategies to deal with your environment and what you're faced with, we need to clear some residual things that may be lying around.

I've installed one for when I'm working with clients and they tell me really heavy things I'm not often exposed to, for the purposes of stopping me reacting. Everybody stand up for me.

The first step is choosing where you'd like to install this. For me, it's on my thigh and it's just a thigh tap because it's subtle, I can do it under a table or standing and nobody knows about it. You can do it there, it's a good spot. Another spot is on a knuckle. Think of it like a button and when you press this button, you'll be able to access whatever emotions you install with this button, instead of what you may be experiencing in the moment. Sounds a little loopy right? But it's actually so powerful.

Know that your anchor is there whenever you need to use it. And when in life, you feel that feeling, top it up. Press it.

You can do this at home and 'boost' it if you need to. Or if you think of a better example, you can just go there, feel the feelings, see what you saw, hear what you heard and at the height of the feeling, press your anchor.

Now, if somebody happens to threaten you or challenge you moving forward, and you use your secret weapon here, how will you feel about it instead?

If, for some reason, you're finding calming down difficult, then I'd recommend box breathing. Does anybody here do yoga or pilates?

Ok so it's very simple:

- **Breath in for 4**
- **Hold for 6**
- **Release for 8**
- **Hold for 7**

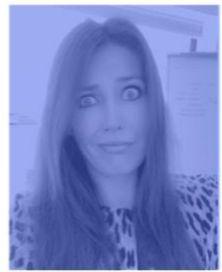
You'll find when you start to breath, it'll be fast, but after doing 3 rounds, you'll be able to slow it down and regain control. The best thing about breathing is that nobody knows you're doing it. Regulating your breathing is really important.

Stand up. Let's try it together. We're going to do 10 rounds.

How do you feel?

Long-term emotions are stored in the body. What we repress, remains. So releasing these emotions is so important for our long-term health. There are several ways to do this.





- 1. Does anybody remember when Princess Diana died? I remember exactly where I was when I found out and while I wasn't upset about it, I remember so many people crying.**
- 2. Watch a sad movie. Has anybody seen a movie, not a particularly sad one, but balled their eyes out? And thought 'gee it's sad, but not that sad'? This is our unconscious mind releasing negative emotions. That's it. And it's so important. So if you're ever having a big cry, make sure you let your tears reach your chin. That way your unconscious knows you've let go of that emotion. There are several strategies I have for dealing with this. The first is – when you need to have a good cry, have a good cry. Allow yourself to let it go.**
- 3. Prioritise your sleep. As we've spoke about, our autonomic nervous system is responsible for our circadian rhythm which is our sleep. Be aware of the half-lives of caffeine and alcohol. Sleep is important and absolutely messes with your hormones.**
- 4. Pick your timing for when you make decisions: [Metaphor] Mark Zuckerberg, Gary V... T-shirts. Dopamine, mid-brain example.**
- 5. Laugh / Play**

If you need something more cathartic, especially if it's one person 'stealing your energy', there's an exercise to try.

Schedule in time to implement the strategies you think will work for you. Have a great week!

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Hey! Before you go, I always find reviews really helpful when looking for new information or insights...

I you've found this podcast valuable, please take a minute to write a quick review about what you've found most beneficial for you, so other people can benefit from your insights, and listen in too. I would LOVE that!

Also, if there are any topics you'd like me to cover specifically about life coaching or the life coaching industry, visit rhiannonbush.com to contact me. Thanks for joining and I'll see you in the next episode of Do I Need A Life Coach?!

Please note, this transcription may not be exact.

