



How and Why Coaching and Therapy Work

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Freud, who was one of the pioneers of psychotherapy, and also incidentally did a lot of coaching with his patients, was a neurologist and wanted to be able to explain his treatment in biological terms. At the time we did not know that much about the brain, so much of what he did was based on his observations, interpretations, and probably hunches. While I do not subscribe to everything Freud said, he definitely made some major inroads into understanding why we think, feel, and act the way we do. Today, with the advances in neuroscience, we are now starting to understand exactly why the so-called “talking cure”, together with practicing changes in behaviour, do in fact bring about the kind of change we want. Thanks to the research in neuroscience we now have a good idea of what happens in the brain during coaching and psychotherapy. And all sorts of other types of therapy as well.

Mostly people come for help because of thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviours that are causing them distress. Or, they want to live a better life and so want to change whatever it is that is holding them back. What we now know, is that to make the changes, requires changing how your brain is wired.

What happens in your brain when you think and act?

Essentially, how you think, feel, and act is based on how your brain is wired. From the time you are born (in fact even before you are born when you are still in the womb) all your experiences, all your observations, all your interpretations of what is happening around you, all your thoughts, feelings, and actions are being wired into neural networks in your brain. When you think a thought, or take an action, those neurons wire together to form the neural network associated with that thought or action. Once the neural network has been established, every time you think a thought, say words,

or take an action, the neural networks for the thought or word or action fire. Everything you think or do is represented as a neural network in your brain. So, there is a biological basis for what you think, what you say, and how you behave. And it is encoded in your neural networks in your brain.



You can rewire your brain and you do it all the time

Fortunately, neuroscience has also shown us that it is possible to change our neural networks. They form because of learning and change with new learning. So, the purpose of coaching, therapy, counselling etc, is to help you change your neural networks. It is to help you rewire new neural networks that represent better thoughts, more positive feelings, and get you to behave in ways that move you towards a healthier mental life and the achievement of your goals.

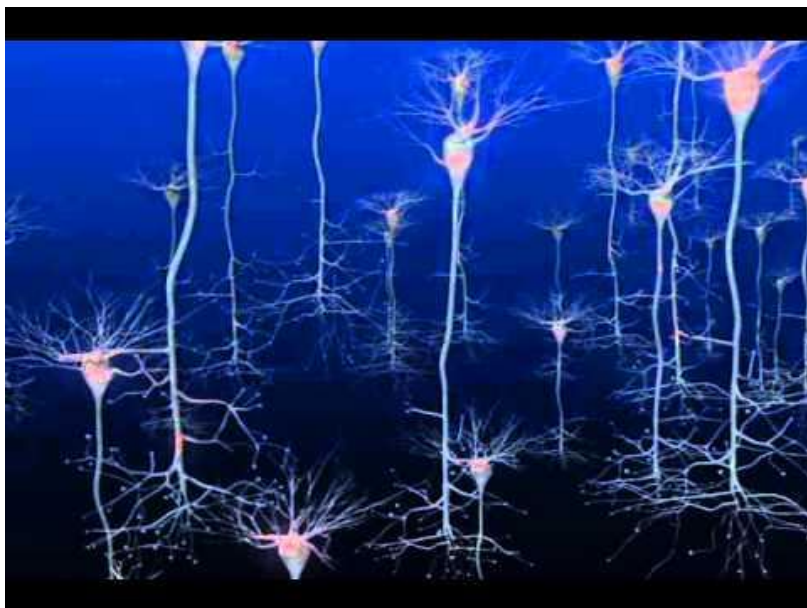
Every time you think a thought a neural network fires in your brain. The more often you think it the stronger the neural network becomes. The same thing happens in the brain when you take an action. So, if you are often thinking thoughts that make you anxious or stressed then that neural network is becoming very strong. (This has actually been observed to happen in research). The more you practice behaviours and habits that sabotage you, the stronger those neural networks get. The stronger the neural network the more likely you are to default to that way of thinking or feeling or acting. And those thoughts, feelings, and actions are going to dominate how you go about your day and live your life.

The purpose of coaching (counselling, therapy) is to change your neural networks that

are resulting in destructive thinking, unhappy emotions, and self-sabotaging behaviours. And that is done through letting the old neural networks that are not helpful to you fade away (this happens if you don't use them), and rewiring new neural networks with the thoughts, feelings, and actions that you do want, and that will give you the life you want.

Repetition is key to learning

How do you form new neural networks? The same way that you formed the old ones. Through experiencing life. When you talk you are rearranging your neural networks depending on what you talk about. When you sit with someone and talk about new ways of seeing a situation or interpreting what has happened to you then you are rewiring new brain patterns. When you learn new skills you are wiring new neural patterns. When you practice behaving in different ways your brain is rewiring new networks. The more you practice thinking the right thoughts, talking the right talk, and taking the right actions, the more those thoughts, words, and actions become hardwired into the brain and the more automatic the new ways become. The discussions you have, the techniques you learn, the tools you have to practice using, are all designed to rewire your brain so you get to change your life for the better. So that you get to live a life that you want and that makes you happy.



Neurons Firing

One session doesn't do it either, unless you practice a lot what you learned in your session. You don't get six pack abs through one gym session. Like the muscles, the neural connections respond to repetition. Repetition is key to changed thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. We know that repetition wires stronger neural networks, and the more you repeat something the more it eventually becomes an automatic response. When you start out making changes you need to be very conscious of how you think and act, but as time moves on, you eventually make the changes habitual, and that is when you really see a change from coaching (therapy, counselling). That is when you start to automatically think and act in ways that are mentally healthy, that make you happy, and that help you achieve the goals in life you want to achieve.

Coaching and therapy work because these are controlled environments in which specific discussions and actions designed to rewire neural networks happens. Thoughts, beliefs, stories, actions, and habits that don't serve you are deliberately altered through sessions to create new thoughts, beliefs, stories, actions and habits (represented as new neural networks) that do serve you.

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