

## Mind Gym

*Achieve More by Thinking Differently*

Sebastian Bailey, PhD, and Octavius Black

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### KEY CONCEPTS

Though there are often circumstances in life that people cannot control, what they can control is how they think and behave in response to those circumstances. **Mind Gym** provides techniques individuals can use to control and change their thoughts and actions in order to have more successful lives:

- Resetting the mind from automatic thinking to conscious, attentive, optimistic thinking.
- Taking control of actions and overcoming procrastination.
- Deepening connections with others and adopting an “I’m Okay/You’re Okay” mind-set.
- Persuading others in order to enhance personal relationships and achieve objectives.
- Resolving conflict by breaking destructive communication patterns, engaging in authentic dialog, and removing drama from relationships.
- Letting creative juices flow to accentuate inspiration and innovation.
- Minimizing stress in order to maximize bliss.

### SUMMARY

#### INTRODUCTION

Sometimes life’s circumstances are out of people’s control. However, how individuals think, feel, and behave as a result of those circumstances is very much within their control. It is simply a matter of learning to think, react, and respond in positive and productive ways. In **Mind Gym**, authors Sebastian Bailey and Octavius Black

share scientifically based exercises and techniques anyone can use to train the mind to think positively and productively, including resetting thoughts, taking control, deepening connections, persuading others, resolving conflict, letting creative juices flow, and minimizing stress. The result is a more successful, fulfilling life.

## RESET THE MIND

Though individuals might believe they have little to no control over how they think, react, and respond, the reality is quite the opposite. Recognizing and consciously exercising the ability to control one's thoughts, reactions, and responses can be life-changing.

### Flip the Switch on Automatic Thinking

Many people operate on *autopilot*, unconsciously and habitually repeating established thought processes and behaviors. This tendency can lead to dissatisfaction and a lack of fulfillment. However, individuals can lead more directed, satisfying, and productive lives by learning to focus on both internal thoughts and external conditions and then actively switching between the two realms. The steps to achieving this objective are:

- Becoming aware of one's inner voice.
- Eliminating self-critical thoughts.
- Increasing engagement with the outside world by paying attention to one's surroundings.
- Being present in the moment.

*The truth is, you have control of your thoughts, reactions, and responses. And once you understand how powerful that choice can be, you'll be able to change more aspects of your life than you can imagine.*

### Think Like an Attentive Optimist

Optimists tend to see the positive in most situations and attribute negative circumstances to external forces. Pessimists tend to look for the negative in any situation and internalize responsibility for whatever goes wrong.

Compared to pessimists, optimists enjoy many benefits, such as living longer and achieving more; therefore, becoming more optimistic is a desirable aspiration. However, a little bit of pessimism can pay off at times, especially when the decision-making stakes are high or adopting too rosy an approach compromises credibility.

Attentive optimists seek a realistic balance by taking responsibility for events while maintaining a positive attitude and self-image. The first step to achieving this balance is to identify optimistic and pessimistic traits in others and then look for these traits in oneself. The next step is to increase optimistic thinking by keeping a daily journal of good thoughts and experiences. Lastly, ongoing candid self-analysis can help an individual maintain a balanced perspective.

## TAKE CONTROL

Some circumstances are beyond an individual's control, while others are well within it. Recognizing when and how to take action are important steps in gaining a sense of control over one's life.

### Take Charge

There are two types of mind-sets: reactive and proactive. *Reactive* people are fearful, feel powerless to influence the course of their lives, and avoid taking action. *Proactive* people let go of what they cannot change, turn their attention to what they can change, and take action in a positive direction. Even small actions can make a big difference.

Taking charge of one's life begins with understanding whether one's own *locus of control* is external (reactive) or internal (proactive). Then, an individual can evaluate all possible actions available for changing a given situation and take steps toward effecting that change.

### Start a New Chapter

When people say they cannot do something, most of the time they really mean they will not do it. Doing or not doing is mostly a matter of choice. Fear is often the motivator behind inaction.

*Proactive thinkers always focus on what they can do to improve a situation. As a direct result, they achieve more and feel more in control. They are in charge.*

Decision making takes place within the existential cycle of doing, contemplating, preparing, and experimenting. Some people never move beyond what they are currently doing in life. Others might contemplate a change, but never prepare for it. Some get as far as preparing for a change, but then decide not to make that change because of the catastrophic fantasies they envision as a result of it. Individuals who complete the cycle *cross the Rubicon* by committing to the change.

To effectively manage change, individuals must recognize where they tend to stay in the cycle, evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of that position, and then systematically work toward conquering their fear of change.

### End Procrastination Now

Procrastination can be a destructive habit, but like any other habit it can be overcome. People procrastinate because they:

- Have become complacent and over-confident.
- Are avoiding the discomfort of doing something they do not want to do.
- Fear they will fail.
- Are waiting for the right emotional climate in which to take action.
- Are performing other actions to mask the procrastination.

The first step to overcoming procrastination is to identify the motivator behind it and the form the procrastination takes. General techniques individuals can use to put a stop to procrastination of all kinds include:

- Committing to working on a project in consecutive, five-minute increments.
- Motivating themselves by setting short-term goals and rewards.
- Establishing unbearable personal consequences for the procrastination.
- Being open about their tendency to procrastinate and enlisting others' support.

### DEEPEN CONNECTIONS

Fulfilling interpersonal relationships make for a fulfilling life. Individuals have control over the quality of their relationships with others.

### Get in the Right Relationship Mind-Set

Every individual has a *relationship mind-set* that represents that individual's thoughts and attitudes toward others. This mind-set is developed in childhood based on a person's interactions with caregivers. The four mind-sets are:

1. *I'm Okay/You're Okay*: People, including oneself, are inherently good.
2. *I'm Okay/ You're Not Okay*: An individual feels superior to others.
3. *I'm Not Okay/You're Okay*: An individual feels inferior to others.
4. *I'm Not Okay/You're Not Okay*: All people are bad.

The objective is to adopt the I'm Okay/You're Okay mind-set, which is achieved through:

- Positive self-affirmations.
- Taking actions, even small ones, to improve a situation.
- Applying personal strengths as often as possible.
- Acknowledging others' praise.
- Eliminating negative thinking.
- Creating positive explanations for others' behavior.
- Looking for the good in other people.
- Being patient and allowing for others' mistakes.
- Lowering expectations of others.
- Forgiving.

*When you improve your relationships, something else amazing happens: Your whole life feels more rewarding.*

### **Bid for Attention**

Relationships are built or broken based on the small, ongoing interactions people have with one another every day. These interactions can be described as *bids*—overtures that require a response. Often these interactions are unconscious. The type of bid communicated out and the type received back determine the quality of the interaction, and thus the quality of the relationship.

*Toward bids* are positive and often create a virtuous cycle of ongoing positivity. *Against bids* are negative and generate bad feelings. *Turning-away bids* express disinterest and generate hostility and defensiveness. By recognizing his or her own and others' bid styles, a person can deliberately modify his or her bids to create more positive relationships.

### **Get the Best from People**

Understanding what motivates others is the key to getting the maximum benefit out of a relationship. Individuals tend to fit into one of four motivational styles:

1. *Carers* seek harmony and want to be liked and appreciated.
2. *Drivers* are goal oriented and like to make things happen quickly.
3. *Professionals* are very thorough, analytical, and process oriented.
4. *Adapters* combine the other three styles to fit the situation.

Individuals who want to accomplish their goals should build upon their own and others' strengths as well as modify their own behavior to better accommodate the other styles.

### **PERSUADE OTHERS**

Influencing others can be challenging, because most people believe they are right. However, persuasiveness can be a very powerful tool for achieving objectives.

## Win Hearts and Minds

Persuading others is based on understanding the reasons behind their thoughts and feelings and then appealing to those reasons. There are nine tactics for influencing others:

1. *Reasoning* is the fact-based, logical staple of influencing that is applicable to most situations.
2. *Inspiring* seeks to sway people based on emotion and possibilities and works well when a logical argument is weak.
3. *Asking questions* is an approach that engages the other person in the outcome and is effective when there is an imbalance of power.
4. *Cozying up* leverages an existing bond between individuals and works well with peers.
5. *Deal making* is an effective tactic when there is something of equal value to trade.
6. *Favor asking* only works well in mutually caring relationships.
7. *Using silent allies* is a successful tactic when the person to be influenced is fearful about risk and wants to fit in.
8. *Invoking authority* is a standard practice in hierarchical situations in which objectives need to be accomplished quickly.
9. *Forcing* is the least effective method of influence because it does not truly influence, it simply commands.

## Impress Everyone

Charismatic people win others over with their personalities. Luckily, charisma is a developable trait. Techniques for increasing one's charisma include providing hope, being passionate, establishing connections with others, matching words with actions, using emotionally compelling and descriptive language, being generous with words, drawing mental pictures that tap memories, telling good stories, injecting the element of surprise, and putting others at the center of the story.

*Conflict exposes your boundaries. It helps relationships move forward. It creates better solutions at work—many innovations are the derivatives of disagreements.*

### Give Great Feedback

Building successful relationships with others requires providing authentic, positive, and developmental feedback.

Praise is one of the easiest ways to enhance interpersonal relationships, but often people are reluctant to offer it because they think it is unnecessary or they feel awkward providing it. The best praise is delivered on time, without the need for reciprocation, and within a receptive environment.

Counsel is equally important for guiding others to do and be their best, but it must be used with care. The hallmarks of well-done developmental feedback are objectivity, directness, and respect.

## RESOLVE CONFLICT

Conflict is inevitable. However, techniques for successfully resolving conflict can turn a bad situation into a good one.

## Detox Relationships

Individuals can develop destructive communication patterns with specific partners. The following suggestions for breaking those patterns will deactivate six *nasty argument poisons*:

1. *Assuming*: Making assumptions about another person's experience can be overcome through empathy, agreement, or an honest observation of the facts.
2. *Generalizing*: Recognizing the exceptions and keeping to specifics can derail the tendency to generalize about another's behavior.
3. *Attacking*: Casting a person in a positive rather than a negative light and trying to understand his or her perspective can reduce the impact of negative statements.
4. *Rejecting*: The words "no" and "but" can be transformed into a positive by replacing them with the words "yes" and "and."
5. *Defending*: While attacks inspire the desire to defend oneself, owning responsibility and expressing empathy can move the conversation in a positive direction.
6. *Interrupting*: It is always best to let the other person completely have his or her say before responding.

### Navigate Difficult Conversations

The following six principles provide the foundation for authentic dialog in which all parties seek resolution:

1. Strive for clarity on what each participant desires as an outcome.
2. Approach the conversation with empathy, openness, and honesty.
3. Ensure each participant shares his or her story.
4. Avoid retreats and attacks by acknowledging others' concerns and reaffirming goals.
5. Remain even-tempered in the face of an attack.
6. Mutually create a plan of action, even when a solution has not emerged.

*Creativity is achieved not by the way your brain operates or the way you present yourself to the world as much as by the tools and processes you use to overcome challenges.*

### Take the Drama Out of Relationships

Sometimes individuals find themselves in similar destructive conversations, but with different people. Recurring conversation patterns stem from the individual not recognizing the repetitive behavior and/or receiving an emotional reward from it. In either case, it is the individual who needs to make a change, which requires one or more of the following tactics:

- Recognizing and then strategizing with conversation partners about how to break the habit.
- Controlling one's own responses when engaged in conversation.
- Leaving mid-conversation to take a break.

### LET THE CREATIVE JUICES FLOW

Creative thinking is an increasingly valuable skill that can be developed by anyone.

#### Overcome Creative Blocks

The key to becoming more creative is to remove the filters that influence perception. While these filters are useful for making sense out of the world on a day-to-day basis, they can block creative thinking. Five common filters are:

1. Making assumptions about the problem based on existing knowledge.
2. Presuming to already know the solution based on similar problems.

3. Imposing real-world parameters over a situation instead of thinking outside the box.
4. Allowing expertise to interfere with alternative solutions.
5. Being too literal.

Individuals can boost their creativity by setting objectives, establishing a time limit for generating ideas, looking for quantity rather than quality ideas, suspending judgement, recording ideas as they come, and allowing for ambiguity.

*As our world becomes more systematized, hyper fast, and process driven, the ability to think creatively becomes a premium skill—a valuable asset in the workplace and in your personal life . . .*

### **Master the Tools of Creativity**

Creativity-enhancing tools can ignite inspiration and unearth innovation. These tools include:

- Generating a list of opposites to reveal new options.
- Breaking a goal down into its parts and then recombining the parts in new ways.
- Freely associating words that seem to have no relationship to one another.

### **Tap the Unconscious Mind**

People think on three levels:

1. Automatically, as they navigate their daily lives.
2. Through active problem solving by the conscious mind.
3. Within the intelligent subconscious, where imagination takes place.

Creative thinking is enhanced by expanding on the capabilities of the subconscious mind. This expansion is achieved by allowing an idea to incubate in the subconscious, actively daydreaming, or performing *stream-of-consciousness* writing (where ideas flow freely without form).

## **MINIMIZE STRESS, MAXIMIZE BLISS**

Stress is now such a common component of daily life that people are actually becoming accustomed to it. While excess stress can be debilitating, there is an optimal level of stress that can improve performance and add zest to life.

### **Make Stress Work**

Stress can be represented as a curve that begins with *calm*, rises into *eustress* (the level of stress that provides optimum performance and satisfaction), declines into *distress*, and if not alleviated, culminates in *extreme stress*. Individuals can monitor and control the effects of stress by developing an awareness of where they are on the curve in any given situation and then taking steps to either increase or reduce their stress levels.

### **Combat Stress**

There are nine techniques for overcoming excess stress:

1. Alter the assessment of the situation toward a less catastrophic view.
2. Alter the assessment of the outcome toward a less negative view.
3. Reframe the situation in a more positive light.
4. Celebrate the positive rather than focusing on the negative.



5. Apply mental energy constructively instead of worrying about the situation.
6. Take a break from the situation in order to rejuvenate.
7. Garner support from others.
8. Mentally explore options rather than chastising oneself.
9. Confront the situation and take action to eliminate similar stressful situations in the future.

### **Switch the Mind Off**

The mind and the body are connected. There are physical techniques individuals can use to help their minds function better. Relaxation is an important element in improving the mind's functioning. Breathing and visualization are two relaxation techniques that give the mind a rest.

When people are stressed, they breathe with their chest rather than their diaphragm. This type of breathing is shallow and does not allow the full amount of oxygen required for improved physical and mental functioning. Individuals can relax their bodies and improve their mental processes by learning to breathe properly at all times and taking deep, diaphragmatic breaths when stressed.

Visualization allows individuals to create a relaxing picture in their mind that helps reduce the physical and mental effects of stress. Visualization is not only relaxing, it can also help individuals achieve their goals. Athletes sometimes use visualization to improve their performance. For example, golfers often visualize an upcoming golf stroke to increase the likelihood they will perform that exact shot.

### **CONCLUSION: BACK TO THE BEGINNING**

People's perceptions change throughout their lives. Perceptions from the past are especially powerful, and can strongly influence perceptions in the present and future. However, all of a person's life experiences—past, present, and future—shape how that person thinks. The mind is constantly developing.

Exercising the mind expands its capabilities and can result in increased satisfaction and fulfillment in all areas of life. Every individual has control over this effort and should take the time to regularly exercise his or her mind. Working out the mind and the body is a lifetime endeavor.

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## FEATURES OF THE BOOK

**Estimated Reading Time: 5–6 hours, 336 pages**

**Mind Gym** by Sebastian Bailey and Octavius Black provides exercises and techniques any individual can learn and practice in order to reprogram the brain and achieve a more successful, fulfilling life. Most chapters include worksheets and diagrams to make the concepts concrete. Each chapter ends with specific beginner and advanced exercises. The book can be read cover to cover, or (depending on their needs) readers can choose from among four predesigned programs and read the chapters that make up each program.

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## FURTHER INFORMATION

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