

SEED YOUR BRAIN

Google's "AI" (which, like all "AI" is neither artificial nor intelligent) produced this description of the term 'seed your brain':
According to Lisa Feldman Barrett, "seeding your brain" means changing your present experiences to influence how your brain predicts the future.

Why does it matter how your brain predicts the future? Because - strange as this sounds - your brain's prediction determines what you experience.

The story we've all been told goes like this: brains perceive incoming information, then they process it to see if it's useful, and then perform an action...like store it or forget it or act. We're supposed to visualize our brain like a computer, but they actually work in exactly the opposite way!

Rather than first allowing information in, our brains expect certain things to happen because of our past experiences. This is called "predictive processing." We do not simply perceive information, the brain expects what sensory information will come next! It then compares its predictions to the sensory input we receive and adjusts accordingly. (Which is why we might not see something that is right in front of us!)

Anil Seth, author of "Being You: A New Science of Consciousness," phrased it in this way: *"It seems as though the world is revealed directly to our conscious minds through our sensory organs," but "we never experience sensory signals themselves, we only ever experience interpretations of them."*

"We don't see the world as it is, we see it as we are" - Anaïs Nin

Lisa Feldman Barrett's work suggests that our brains also create emotions. Based on our culture and our past experiences, we expect facial expressions to help us 'read' others. She agrees that your brain uses your past to construct your present, and that you can invest energy in expanding your present experiences to cultivate new predictions; the seeds for the future.

She says: "Learning new emotions words is good because you can learn to feel more subtle emotions, and that makes you better at regulating your emotions. For example, you can learn to distinguish between distress and discomfort. This is partly why mindfulness meditation is so useful to people who have chronic pain - it lets you separate out the physical discomfort from the distress. I think understanding how emotions are constructed widens the horizon of control. You can cultivate or curate experiences in the now and, if you practice them, they become automated enough that your brain will predict them in the future."

Brains process a lot of information. Since there are limits to the amount of information they can process at one time, our brains take shortcuts and predict the present - and the future - based on the past. They then make adjustments when "prediction errors" arise.

But let me slow down for a minute.

Before we think any more about how we think, let's consider what are brains were created to do. Lisa Feldman Barret's research indicates that brains did not evolve to remember facts, paint pictures, learn languages or cook. Even though they help us do all these things and more, our brains developed to manage our complex physical bodies; to regulate our mental and organ

functions, to sense the environment, and to keep us away from things that will harm us. They do this, for the most part, pretty darn well.

Predicting and maintaining things on the outside of the body is trickier.

One example is predicting emotions. We feel emotions in our bodies: our hands or foreheads may sweat, we smile, we grimace, we may cross our arms. These acts may have meaning to us, but is the meaning the same to others? We've been told that a smile means the same thing around the world, but does it?

As a child, I learned in school, in various groups and from the people around me, that a smile is welcoming and friendly. Barrett's research has shown, however, that a smile may simply indicate submission. And my own experience has shown me that a smile can mean "whatever" or even disdain. Have you seen a variety of smiles, too? How many other facial expressions are like smiles? (all of them)

We can now see how we project our beliefs and our predictions on to the way we experience the world. Our predictions literally change what we see. Now we can see our power: if we want to, we can change what we predict to see which will change our experience, which would change our opportunities which would impact our life in every way.

Returning to Barrett's quote again: "*seeding your brain*" means *changing your present experiences to influence how your brain predicts the future*" now has a deeper meaning.

But I know that I don't have to tell you that there are many times and places where we may not be able to change much about our 'present experiences.' In these moments,

it's important to remember what Viktor Frankl told us in *Man's Search For Meaning*:

"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

Changing our attitude will literally change what we see and, therefore, what we experience.

"You can complain that roses have thorns, or you can rejoice that thorns have roses."
- Daniel Dennett

Here are some seeds that you might wish to plant...some...or all.....now...or later....
(There's no template; take your time and grow with care...)

SEED YOUR BRAIN:

1. WITH PREDICTIONS

Our past experiences have put predictions in our minds that may no longer be valid. For instance, a lot of kids had a very tough time in school. (Myself included.) We developed a prediction that education was not for us and school was a place we did not want to be. We may have missed opportunities because we did not look for good things; we focused on what we did not like. Now that we're adults, however, we are the masters of our learning! We can learn whatever we want to learn and we can learn alone or with others.

2. WITH WORDS

Increase your vocabulary to improve your understanding of yourself and others. By learning new words to describe your emotions: your frustrations, your hopes and why things matter to you; you will be able to see more possibilities. You will also be able to hear in greater detail and find deeper empathy when others talk. Improving your listening skills can also help you hear

seemingly small comments...that could open doors!

3. TO BUILD TRUST

Trust in yourself: in your competence and in your contributions.

Trust in others: it's very important that we learn how to build incremental trust in one another.

And trust in the future: in many ways, the businesses, philanthropy and our government have betrayed our trust. None of this is new. That does not mean we should give up...in fact, now is precisely when we must grow into our full power to build a democratic future that works for us and for our families, friends, communities and nation. Powerful forces constantly plant seeds of confusion and distrust, including fake care, fake expertise, fake risk management, and much more. It's time we look to one another to focus on what we want to build, and then demand that the businesses, philanthropy and government serve our agenda...together...instead of us being at the mercy of theirs.

4. TO BE CURIOUS

Wonder! Ask 'why?!' And keep digging when you receive or discover only shallow answers. (for example: "we don't have the money to improve the school") Most of us were told to 'stop asking questions' when we were young. Now that we're in charge of our lives, it's time for us to shake off that old 'prediction' to start asking hard questions of anyone with any claim to 'authority' or 'charity'. Seed your predictions with courage and remember, there are no stupid questions. Ex: why did the news tell only one small fraction of a huge story? And why do they include weird music in the background...like a movie? What are the ads REALLY trying to sell?, etc... And remember: when you ask questions, listen to the answers. Asking "attack" questions is the opposite of curiosity.

5. TO IMPROVE YOUR EFFICACY!

Seed your predictions to be on the lookout for potential problems...and to be cautious...so you can make careful decisions. Over-confidence is not only a waste of time and money, but it can also be quite soul crushing, with a potential ripple-effect of depression, isolation and more. "Measure twice, cut once." Seed your mind to question your assumptions. It will be more effective in the long run!

6. TO FOSTER CARE AND INCREASE CHARITABILITY

We are all imperfect. What we want from others is what we must offer to others. Seed your brain to be patient and generous with others, knowing everyone is dealing with a lot of pressure these days.

7. THROUGH READING.

Read something that challenges your beliefs! Read something that teaches you about a culture or place you are not familiar with. Read a "classic" novel. Read a play. Read a variety of printed stories about the same topic. Read to build your vocabulary. Read to understand a wide variety of perspectives, concepts, cultural values.

8. TO REDUCE STRESS AND DISRUPT CATASTROPHIZING.

Worry and anxiety don't make things better. Instead, they can give us pain and make us ill. "*Worrying is like a rocking chair: it gives you something to do, but it doesn't get you anywhere.*" Get off the rocking chair and work on something you care about. I know I cannot stop the suffering in the world. I can feel paralyzed by that thought. But my paralysis will help no one, so I look at one thing I can do and I do it...knowing I can expand my options once I get started.

"Do not wait, the time will never be just right. Start where you stand and work with

whatever tools you may have at your command. - Napoleon Hill

9. IMAGINATION

Imagine your future through simple things like waking up in one year, 5 years, 10 years... What color is the room you slept in? Are there pictures on the wall? If so, what are they pictures of? When you get out of bed, are you cold? Are you warm? What will you eat for breakfast? Jane McGonigal says: *“Every time you remember a future that hasn’t happened, you rate that future as more likely. The more vivid details the details are, the more likely you are to start to believe it could totally happen.”*

Here are two ‘hacks’ for the predictive brain from Andy Clark:

One, is to change the words we use to frame our own thinking. A classic self-affirmation involves writing a list of positive characteristics (abilities, skills or personality traits) before meeting for an interview or taking a test.

Two, is to reframe the anxiety that we feel during those events - and others - as preparation for peak performance, rather than doom or fear of failure.

REMEMBER: You’ll need to take good care of your body, to make sure your seeds can grow! Your brain is an organ and, for instance, it needs water to function well. More sleep, exercise and a healthy diet can help you change the signals coming from your body.

Returning to society after prison will be a challenging transition. The changes you’ve experienced in your life have given you skills that you can share with others. People who have changed very little through the years will have a hard time with the rate of change in today’s world. You will be able to guide them through uncomfortable times. School

does not prepare us for life; so we must help one another.

To get a much better idea of the concepts above, here a few books to check out:

PREDICTIVE PROCESSING...including UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS:

* 7½ Lessons about the Brain - Lisa Feldman Barrett
(also: How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain

* Being You: A New Science of Consciousness Anil Seth

* The Experience Machine: How Our Minds Predict and Shape Reality Andy Clark

CLEARLY IMAGINE THE FUTURE

* Imaginable: How to See the Future Coming and Feel Ready for Anything - Even Things That Seem Impossible Today Jane McGonigal

SELF DETERMINATION THEORY:

* Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation Edward Deci

“When the winds of change blow, some people build walls and others build windmills.”

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Anonymous

“As the owner of a predicting brain, you have more control over your actions and experiences than you might think and more responsibility than you might want.”

- Lisa Feldman Barrett

One final note: It might be in your best interest to seed your brain with a healthy mistrust of “A.I.”