



# Change Without Pain, Life Without Struggle™

**The Effortless Way™ of Living Your Dreams**

Dear Fellow Mind-Hacker,

Sometimes, the mind is a terrible thing.

It nags you about problems you can't do anything about. It finds reasons you can't get what you want. It tells you that you're useless, and that things are hopeless. It comes up with exciting ideas, but won't co-operate when you try to implement them. And it keeps you going in circles, trying to solve the same problems over and over.

Now, even with all the techniques and approaches I've learned over the years, the process of fixing these kinds of problems has been very hit-or-miss for me before.

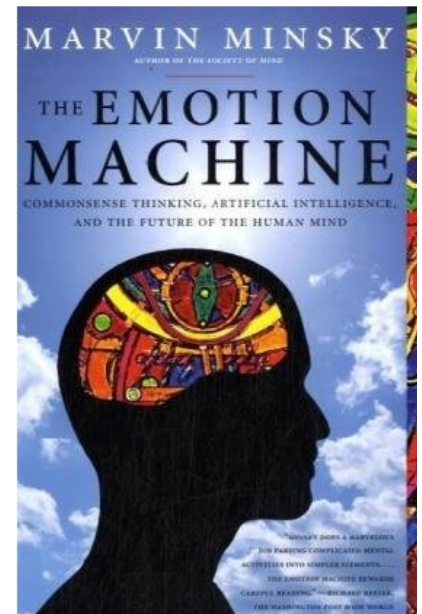
But in this month's issue, I'm going to share a little secret with you: an idea I recently learned, that has rapidly increased my effectiveness at getting my mind to "co-operate" with me when I want to get something done.

An idea that not only helps to quickly stop your brain's self-defeating behaviors, but also makes it much easier to break out of the loop, when your brain seems to be "going in circles". An idea about...

## The Muscles In Your Mind

Now, at first glance, your brain seems like it's a **single unit**. Sure, you can divide it up into categories like conscious vs. unconscious, left brain vs. right brain, reptile/mammal/primate, and so on. But even *within* those categories, we still tend to envision these things as **single units**, doing one thing at a time. After all, you can only *notice* things one at a time: thoughts and sensations seem to come into your mind, one after the other.

But I recently read an interesting book called *The Emotion*



*What if what we call "emotion" is really just the sum total of what we are (or aren't) paying attention to in a given moment? That's the premise of Marvin Minsky's book, The Emotion Machine... and it gives us a crucial insight into the ways we create both self-supporting and self-defeating thoughts and behaviors in our lives.*

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*Machine* (by artificial intelligence researcher Marvin Minsky), that presents a very different model of how the brain works, that has given me a new perspective on how to approach issues of focus, motivation, problem-solving, and more.

In the book, Minsky proposes the brain as being made up of a very large number of “resources”, each of which is operating on very simple patterns.

For example, you might have a brain resource that is always measuring “fairness” in a situation, and alerting you to unfairness. (Scientists have recently found, by the way, that dogs have a built-in “fairness” detector in their brain, just like humans do!)

Now, this idea of resources individually matching patterns fits right in with perceptual control theory (PCT), which says our brains are made up of regulators that control both physical variables (like temperature, hunger, and the positions of our limbs), as well as abstract concepts (like fairness and self-esteem). But *The Emotion Machine* takes the idea a little further, adding a crucial piece that we haven’t looked at before.

Minsky describes a particular kind of resource that he calls a “critic” — a pattern recognizer that decides which of your “resources” to use...

### **In A Given Situation!**

So let’s say you have a brain resource whose job is “finding possible flaws in a plan”. You would then have other brain resources whose job is to decide **when to use** this “find flaws” resource.

And the central idea of *The Emotion Machine* is this: an emotion is an organizing tool that your brain uses to decide **which** resources to use at a given moment in time!

So, for example, if you feel angry, then you’ll activate resources like “find ways to attack”, and **deactivate** resources like “appreciate good qualities”. If you’re in love, on the other hand, you’ll do the exact opposite.

In essence, these brain resources are like **mental muscles**: each one has a very narrow focus of operation, just like the muscles in your body. In order to actually *do* anything, you have to use several mental muscles in a co-ordinated way, each one firing in the right sequence.

And, just as your physical stance or posture determines which physical muscles you’ll bring to bear when you move or try to move another object, so too does your emotional stance — your

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“attitude”, in other words — determine which *mental* muscles will be brought into play.

And just like physical muscles, if you use the wrong ones for the job — like lifting with your back instead of your knees — you’re not only going to be less efficient, you may even injure yourself. Or at least...

## Make The Situation Worse!

So, this idea of using lots of different “mental muscles” at the same time, gives us not only a new way to *understand* natural struggling and self-defeating behavior, but also a new way to **change** them.

Because, if we look at individual mental processes like “finding flaws in plans” and “searching for correct answers”, we can see that not only does each one have an appropriate time and place for its use, there are also many times where our brains use them *inappropriately*.

So if we could learn to recognize which mental muscles are useful or not useful in a given situation, and then turn *on* the useful ones and turn *off* the less useful ones, we could dramatically improve our focus and efficiency, while significantly reducing our sense of effort and struggle.

At least, that’s what I was thinking as I read the book!

So I began asking myself,

## “How could we do this?”

First off, it was pretty obvious that the work we’ve been doing in the last six months on rights, shame, needs, self-defeating behaviors and so on, was directly related. Just as we learn to do things with our physical muscles by imitating our parents, so too do we learn from our parents *which* mental muscles to use in each situation, by combining their emotions with our own *responses* to their emotions.

So if the emotion they have is useful and appropriate to the situation, we learn a functional coping response: a **self-supporting** behavior. If it’s not as appropriate, we learn a dysfunctional coping response: a **self-defeating** behavior.

For example, one self-defeating behavior I learned from my parents was to use my “find what could be improved” mental muscles to criticize my work and notice what was not yet done, whenever someone complimented my work or when I was

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reviewing my progress. I learned this pattern from seeing my father doing it to criticize himself, and by my mother doing it to criticize me.

Now, I'm not saying I *consciously* imitated these things. When you're a kid, you just unconsciously mimic what's going on around you, because that's what our brains are built to do.

From evolution's point of view, after all, the people around you have obviously managed to survive long enough to reproduce, and so your brain is built to want to do whatever it is *they* do in a given situation: clearly it worked well enough for *them*!

And it's not just what they **do** that your brain wants you to copy, but also...

### **How They *Think!***

After all, if you have to learn to mimic *every* possible behavior for *every* possible situation, it'll take a long time and you won't be as flexible in handling new situations. So your brain tries to copy your parents' **thinking patterns** and *emotions*, not just their specific actions.

Now, it took a long time for me to come to grips with this idea, because I never consciously **agreed** with most of my parents' specific thoughts and beliefs.

What I didn't notice, however, was that even though I *disagreed* with a lot of the things they told me, I still learned to use the same mental **processes** for thinking about those things!

So for example, even though I usually disagreed with my mother's criticisms of things, I still learned to *think in terms of criticizing*.

And I learned to feel "stress about being late", to worry about "what other people think of me", and many other things that they thought and did.

Of course, we've already talked about these sorts of self-defeating emotional patterns, and have been practicing ways to enable more self-supporting emotions and thought processes like encouraging one's self, feeling loved or important, going after what you want, and all that sort of thing.

What the idea of "mental muscles" *adds* to our approach, however, is the realization that we can **fine-tune** this process in a much more effective manner, by breaking down a self-defeating or self-supporting state into the individual pieces that make it function... or **dysfunction!**

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## Tuning Up Your Brain

Up until now, the work we've been doing with rights has been a bit crude at times.

Because, when I first started trying to teach how to do rights work, I've been saying things like, "ask yourself what a supportive friend would do in this situation", in order to help people choose what attitude they want to automatically have in a given situation.

And later, I was able to refine this a bit with the D.A.R.E. model (see previous newsletters and workshops), which summarizes four major types of self-supporting responses: the abilities to desire, act, respond, and experience, in relation to one's goals or needs.

But I was **still** running into a problem when *teaching* these models, or more precisely, when trying to get people to apply them.

Because often, people would try to **do** the processes I gave them...

### Using *Different* Mental Muscles!

So, for example, while I was trying to show someone how to "think like a supportive parent", they might be criticizing themselves for not doing it well!

Now, when interacting with people one on one or during Guild workshops, it's easy for me to see when this is happening, and with a bit of patience, get them past it.

But it would still seem to take *multiple* experiences with this, before somebody would get the hang of noticing when they're **doing** these kinds of self-defeating behavior.

And, from the questions that we usually get in the Guild forums, it's very much apparent that such unnoticed self-defeating behaviors are the **number one** thing that stops people from making progress in their personal mindhacking attempts.

So what this new idea of "mental muscles" has given me is a way to teach something **explicitly**, that up until now I've always been doing *implicitly* when I work with other people, and also when making changes to myself that actually worked.

And what I've always been doing, when things have been working, is asking:

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## “How is this person thinking?”

That is, what **mental muscles** are they using to process the situation? Are they finding fault with themselves? Apologizing? Finding reasons they can't get what they want? What are they *doing* with their brain, **right now**? (Which, by the way, is why I've always been pushing you to focus on what you're thinking and feeling *in the present moment*.)

Now, this is very easy for me to do when I'm working with **other people**. After all, self-defeating patterns are pretty similar, and most of the ones my clients have are ones I've seen and fixed before, in myself or others.

Heck, even other Guild members often quite **easily** see the self-defeating patterns of newer or less-experienced members, when those members post questions in the forum.

Heck, even if you're not familiar with a specific self-defeating pattern, they're still usually pretty easy to see, as long as you aren't currently thinking in the *same* pattern yourself! And that's because, if you tend to think in the *same* self-defeating pattern as someone else, then...

## You Don't See It As A Pattern!

Because it's just **normal thinking** to you.

So, this is why getting started in mindhacking can be so difficult, depending on the number of self-defeating patterns you have. It's also why it's so much *easier* to see the bugs in other people's brains, than in your own.

After all, when we're just watching and listening to someone else, there's not much to pay attention to *besides* their thought process!

But when we're thinking in our **own** heads, we're *inside* that thought process, looking out. So the thought process we're using *colors* our thinking. And like Dorothy in Oz, wearing green glasses in the Emerald City, we think it's the **world** that's green.

When really, it's just us.

(Or, as Anais Nin once said, “We don't see things as they are, we see things as *we* are.”)

So, this is the **key** piece that the idea of mental muscles brings to the table: something I was unconsciously *doing*, but never really **teaching**: the process of intentionally observing...

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## Which Muscles Are Being Used

And when I think back on how I struggled with making various changes at various times in the last few years, I'm struck by how often the critical factor was stumbling onto noticing **how** I was thinking. That is, seeing what *thought process* I was using to create or sustain the behavior or attitude.

Because mostly what would happen, is that I'd spend a ridiculous amount of time trying to solve a problem at first. And then, suddenly, I'd notice that I was trying to use the same thought process to *solve* the problem, as I had used to *create* the problem!

This would then immediately give me a specific **target** for my mindhacking, allowing me to just apply a technique and fix it.

And until recently, I thought that this was just **the way things were**. That it was more or less a law of nature that it's harder to find bugs in your own brain, and that there was really nothing you could do about it but hunt around blindly like that.

## But I Was Wrong!

And that's really good news. Because, after I read *The Emotion Machine* (or at least the first several chapters), and started trying to apply this idea of mental muscles, it's significantly changed how quickly I can find — and **target!** — my own self-defeating behaviors.

Because what I started doing is this: when I have a problem I want to address, I immediately begin asking myself, “What mental muscles am I using right now?”

I then try to **describe** the thought process I'm using in an abstract way, like, “Finding reasons I can't get what I want” or “Searching for the right answer” or “Feeling like people don't like me”.

Specifically, I want to know what I'm *looking for*, and *paying attention to*.

So if I'm “feeling like people don't like me”, for example, then that means I am searching for, and paying attention to, evidence of people not liking me, or reasons why they might not like me in the future.

And these are effectively the “Emerald City glasses” I'm wearing, that make everything in my life look green. And the critical thing to realize here, is that as long as I'm wearing those glasses...

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## There's No Use Trying to Change Anything *Else's* Color!

Because it simply *doesn't matter* how much I try to make other people like me, or avoid things that might make them not like me, because my brain will still keep showing me evidence that they don't like me, and finding reasons why they might not like me in the future!

So this is the real reason why **all** our problems are in our heads... and can *never* be solved in the outside world.

It's also the reason for the paradox displayed by the "impatient person's prayer", i.e., "Oh lord, please grant me patience... right **now!**"

And it's also why we read self-help books about being kind to ourselves, and then beat ourselves up for not being kind to ourselves.

And it's also why, right at this very moment, you may already be beating yourself up for not seeing this sooner, or not working hard enough to have overcome this by now, or not being smart enough... or...

### STOP!

Look. Listen.

What thought process are you using, *right now*?

What are you looking for?

What are you paying *attention* to?

This is the key. This is the mental leap that I've been crudely trying to teach you to make for some time now, a leap that I didn't really understand myself. I could see when other people were not making this leap, because I could see it from the **outside**.

But I still struggled with doing it myself, because I effectively did it by *accident* almost every single time I changed something in myself.

And the *rest* of the times, I did it either by *comparing* how I was thinking with how someone more successful than me was thinking about the same situation, or through someone (usually my wife) *pointing out* how I was thinking.

But now, it's the *first* thing I look for. What mental muscles am I using? What is my brain **automatically** looking for and paying attention to in this situation?



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And we don't normally notice this, because we're too busy simply paying attention to whatever those mental muscles are automatically looking for.

## The Truth About The Truth

And the tricky thing about this, is that whatever your brain is telling you, you automatically think is **true**.

Because, well, it usually *is*. I mean, when we criticize ourselves, we are very often finding genuine faults or problems. When we wonder whether others will like us, or consider that certain things *might* make them not like us, we are often considering things that indeed might make someone not like us.

But the truth is, these "truths" don't usually *matter*. Or, more precisely, they usually aren't all that **useful** to our goals.

For example, if we really want other people to like us, it's much more useful to notice what **we** like about *them*, so that we make *them* feel liked and accepted (as we discussed in *The Secret of Personal Presence*).

But it's pretty much impossible to do this by mere *conscious* effort, while your brain is busy telling you all about how those other people probably don't like **you!**

Likewise, if your brain is continually telling you about what you "haven't done yet" — something my brain used to whine about *constantly* — then...

## You're Not Actually *Doing* Anything!

And my wife used to point this out a lot, saying things like, "You know, all this worrying you're doing about not working, isn't actually *working*." But I wasn't making the connection, because I was still stuck on how the *fact* that certain things "weren't done" was both **true** and **important**.

It just wasn't *useful*.

However, once I grasped (and started using) this idea of mental muscles, I started asking the *next* important question in dealing with mental muscles. That is:

"Is this *useful* for me to pay attention to?"

And if you're familiar with The Work of Byron Katie, you may notice a close similarity between this question and some of the Work questions like "Do I have even one stress-free reason for keeping that thought?" and "Who would I be without that thought?"

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(It's also related to "How do I react when I have that thought?" or "What happens when I have that thought?", in the sense that these questions are also implicitly asking whether it's useful to engage a particular mental muscle.)

What I've found in this case, however, is that being aware of the idea of "mental muscles" helps you to know which thoughts to apply these questions *to*. Because otherwise, we tend to *miss*...

## **The Thoughts We're Most Attached To!**

Over the past couple of weeks, for example, I was working through an issue I had, where I tend to focus on making a project "perfect" in my mind before I'd start doing any actual work on it... and then become discouraged very quickly at how much work it was going to take to get it the way I thought of it.

Well, really, I've been struggling with this issue for a lot longer than a couple weeks. I had actually realized last summer that my thinking processes were effectively aimed at making things appear satisfactory in my *mind*, but not necessarily in the real world.

And that, if I was forced to choose between "perfect in my head" and "imperfect in the real world", I always ended up choosing "perfect in my head."

But I only made progress on changing that pattern in the last couple weeks. One by one, I identified each of the mental muscles I was using to think in that way — as well as which mental muscles I was **not** using!

And then, I usually did rights work or Forgiveness to enable those other, more useful muscles, while "relaxing" and "resting" the mental muscles I'd been habitually using.

For example, one mental muscle that I still overuse a bit (but am getting much better at "relaxing") is the muscle of "searching for insight". But...

## **The Strongest Muscle Isn't Always The Most *Useful* Muscle!**

I mean, it's true that "insight-finding" is often an incredibly useful muscle to have, of course, and it's certainly one that I've spent many years developing "strength" and skill in using. But, this muscle is really **not** all that useful for actually *accomplishing* anything!

(Which is probably why I've spent so much more of my life helping other people accomplish things, than I've spent on

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accomplishing my own goals.)

Nonetheless, I was so *accustomed* to using this muscle, and had so much investment in it, that I used it constantly, even when it wasn't very useful.

After all, searching for insights can help you find ways to get things done faster or easier, but at some point, you have to stop **searching** for insights...

## **And Start *Applying* Them!**

So the next question after, “What mental muscles am I using?” and “Is that useful here?”, is “What would be useful here?” Related questions would be things like, “How do successful people think about this?”, and “How would I think if I *already had* what I want in this situation?”

And of course, it'd also be a good idea to make sure you know what it is that you want in the first place! (Questions like, “What do I not want here?” followed by, “What would I like instead?” may be important steps. here)

And the funny thing about all these mindhacking questions, is that *every question is like an exercise* for your mental muscles.

For example, a few months ago, when I first started asking what I don't want, and what I want instead, that was something I did very deliberately and consciously.

But now, that part is pretty automatic, as I'm learning to ask these newer questions... some of which are starting to become automatic as well. In essence, practicing these questions builds up a set of “mindhacking muscles”, that you can use to change your thinking in any situation.

## **The Question Is The Answer**

Now, you may have many questions of your own at this point, about how this process works. However, before you ask any of them, I strongly recommend that you simply try asking the questions that I've given you, first!

Because the questions that we most routinely ask, are most likely to be the ones connected to the mental muscles that are giving us problems.

And whatever questions you already have in your mind about this — not to mention any objections or protests that your brain has thrown up — are going to be either self-supporting, or self-defeating, in whatever way your thoughts are **usually** self-

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supporting, or self-defeating.

So I encourage you to ask yourself **right now**, about those questions or thoughts, “What mental muscles am I using?” “What am I looking for, or paying attention to?”

And then ask, “Is that useful?”

Because you may be **surprised** at what you find.

Yours in the Way,



P.J. Eby, Founder  
The Mind Hackers' Guild

P.S. Don't worry, I won't leave you hanging here. In this month's *Life-Changing Secrets* CD: “The Secret Of Knowing (And Getting!) What You Want,” I'll share with you how I switched out the mental muscles that were making it hard for me to know OR get what I wanted, and how I installed some new, more useful ones.

Plus, if you're an Associate or Insider of the Guild, then you'll also want to watch out for our March 20th MindShift workshop, *Flexing Your Mental Muscles*, in which we'll be examining these ideas and methods in more detail, and practicing them **live**.



## Members-Only Resources

If you're a Guild Associate or Insider, there's a lot more to your membership than just this newsletter and CD! Be sure to use your other resources, including:

- *The Pathfinders' Forum* online messaging service at <http://dirtsimple.org/pathfinders/>
- The March 20th MindShift™ session, “Flexing Your Mental Muscles”.
- And of course, my emails, blog articles, and videos!

—PJ