Conscious of the Unconscious (Do NOT use the blacked-out information.)

Work with your unconscious, rather than trying to browbeat it into submission.

"The conscious mind determines the actions, the unconscious mind determines the reactions; and the reactions are just as important as the actions." ~ E. Stanley Jones

Last month, I talked about the Huna perspective on the unconscious mind (unihipili) and how the ancient Hawaiians worked with it to release negative emotions to maintain their physical and emotional health. The article raised a number of questions about the unconscious that I’d like to address.

Theories about the unconscious vary widely within psychological circles, from the Freudian view that it’s a storehouse of socially unacceptable desires, traumatic memories, and painful emotions to cognitive psychology’s perspective that the unconscious mind is simply a bundle of cognitive processes that we’re not aware of, not an entity in itself.

The truth is that it’s hard to prove any of these theories. Just as we know that the universe is vast, we know the unconscious mind is powerful. And like our research into space, our knowledge of the unconscious mind is limited by the scientific equipment we have available to observe it. So we end up subscribing to theories we find most useful. For me, that means the perspectives of Huna, Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and Jung.

To laypeople in Western cultures, the unconscious mind has been viewed as an enemy, a murky power that swooped in to sabotage our conscious desires. It became the scapegoat for every failure, mistake or unwanted reaction. More recently, people have come to think of the unconscious mind as a tool they can consciously use to get where they want to go. They bludgeon the mind with affirmations then wonder why they aren’t working.

But [we can treat] the unconscious mind with a lot more respect. They believe that the unconscious has specific, important roles to play and duties to perform. They see the unconscious mind as having a wisdom of its own that should be honored. And they emphasize working with the unconscious rather than trying to browbeat it into submission or ignoring it.

You don’t need a PhD in psychology to work effectively with your unconscious, but you do need to understand a few basics. Here are a few of the aspects of the unconscious that I teach my students in Huna and NLP, and how they apply to you.

The Unconscious Mind:

- **Preserves the body:** One of its main objectives is the survival of your physical body. It will fight anything that appears to be a threat to that survival. So if you want to change a behavior more easily, show your unconscious how that behavior is hurting your body.

- **Runs the body:** The unconscious handles all of your basic physical functions (breathing, heart rate, immune system, etc.). [According to ancient Hawaiian teachings], unconscious holds the blueprint of your body as it is now and also the blueprint of your perfect health. Rather than telling the unconscious what perfect health looks like, try asking it what it knows and what you need for better health.

- **Is like a 7-year old child:** Like a young child, the unconscious likes to serve, needs very clear directions, and takes your instructions very literally. So if you say, “This job is a pain in the neck,” your unconscious will figure out a way to make sure that your neck hurts at work! The unconscious is also very “moral” in the way a young child is moral, which means based on the morality taught and accepted by your parents or surroundings. So if you were taught that “sex is nasty,” your unconscious will still respond to that teaching even after your conscious mind has rejected it.

- **Communicates through emotion and symbols:** To get your attention, the unconscious uses emotions. For example, if you suddenly feel afraid, your unconscious has detected (rightly or wrongly) that your survival is at risk.
• **Stores and organizes memories:** The unconscious decides where and how your memories are stored. It may hide certain memories (such as traumas) that have strong negative emotions until you are mature enough to process them consciously. When it senses that you are ready (whether you consciously think you are or not!), it will bring them up so you can deal with them.

• **Does not process negatives:** The unconscious absorbs pictures rather than words. So if you say, “I don’t want to procrastinate,” the unconscious generates a picture of you procrastinating. Switching that picture from the negative to the positive takes an extra step. Better to tell your unconscious, “Let’s get to work!”

• **Makes associations and learns quickly:** To protect you, the unconscious stays alert and tries to glean the lessons from each experience. For example, if you had a bad experience in school, your unconscious may choose to lump all of your learning experiences into the “this is not going to be fun” category. It will signal you with sweaty palms and anxiety whenever you attempt something new. But if you do well in sports, your unconscious will remember that “sports equals success” and you’ll feel positive and energized whenever physical activity comes up.

There’s much more to the unconscious mind. In fact, my latest book is focused on the unconscious, how it works, and how to work with it. But even just understanding the basics above will help you harness its power.

Mahalo!

Dr. Matt