

THE COACHING HUB

Podcast Episode 36 - Neuroplasticity

Ruth Kudzi: Reprogramming the brain doesn't mean that you are going in there, fishing around and having an operation, it's about creating those new neural pathways. The brain is like plastic, it can be molded and we can develop new connections which allow us to think, feel, be and act differently.

Hello, and welcome to the Coaching Hub Podcast with me, your host, Ruth Kudzi. If you're a coach or you're coaching curious, this is the place for you. We're going to be talking all things coaching, personal development and business development in a really fun way. You're going to hear live coaching sessions, and you're going to come away with tools and techniques that you can practically use and take away. If you enjoy this podcast, I would love you to subscribe, and if you really enjoy it, give me a review. Today, I'm talking about one my favorite topics, the topic of neuroplasticity or reprogramming the brain. And, we're going to be getting deep into how this works.

So, when I talk about the power of coaching, I love to get into the science. I love to look at how behavior changes. Because, I think that when we, as coaches, understand what is going on with the brain, with the body, for our clients, we can help them make more powerful transformations. We can help them make more enduring transformations, and we can also really understand what is going on with us too. So, it works for us as coaches to develop our own self-awareness, to make changes that we want to make. And, it also works for our clients, for them to make those lasting transformations. So, if we want to create a longer-term behavioral change, we know it happens in the brain. Our behavior, if we want it to last, it needs to be underneath the iceberg.

You know I talk about the iceberg a lot. But, at the top of the iceberg is our visible behaviors, and underneath, we have our values, our needs, our strengths, our beliefs, our thoughts, our feelings and our emotions. And, we are not going to be able to change that pinnacle, it's going to be on very shaky foundations unless we change what's underneath. And, we see reprogramming your brain all the time. I think there's a study that I talk about a lot, which is a Black Cab Study. And, this was quite a revolutionary study when it came out. So what they did, is they examined the brains of black cab drivers before they did The Knowledge, and then they all did The Knowledge. And, The Knowledge is an exam

where black cab drivers learn all of the streets in London. And so, they did it before, and then they did the exam, and then looked at their brains again. And, what they saw is a change in the structure of their brains.

They'd already noted, when they'd done studies on black cab drivers before, that there was an increase in the grey matter, in the hippocampus area found at the base of the brain. So this time, they looked at 79 people who were doing The Knowledge, who were doing that test, and that can take between two and four years to complete. And, they looked at their brain's using MRI scans. And, they compared them to people who are non-taxi drivers. And, those who'd done The knowledge, they increased the size of their posterior hippocampus section, which is at the front of their brain. They reprogrammed the brain. It was evident the brain is plastic, even when we're adults, meaning that we can adapt and learn new tasks.

And, they were able to see how the structure of the hippocampus changed with external stimulation, with learning something new. And, that was one of the first studies that really showed that the human brain is plastic. And, if we think about people who've had a brain injury, and had some kind of trauma to the brain, then we know that people are able to relearn. People are able to build new neural pathways, and able to do things that they maybe have done in the past or even that they haven't done before. So, this idea that we're always losing brain cells, but we can always build new pathways, new ways of being, thinking. So, reprogramming the brain doesn't mean that you are going in there, fishing around and having an operation, it's about creating those new neural pathways.

The brain is like plastic. It can be moulded, and we can develop new connections which allow us to think, feel, be and act differently.

Now, what's interesting is, there's been a lot of research into how long does it take? We're obsessed with time, aren't we as humans? How is it take for me to reprogram my brain? Okay. I want to have a new belief, a new thought, a new way of being, a new way of acting. So, how is it going to take me? And, there have been some studies that have said that it can take, "As little as 21 days." However, it is quite a difference between times. Actually, when you're looking at how long it takes somebody to build a new neural pathway, it can take anything from 18 days, so I think it's 137 with a median of 66. So, there is a range and it does depend on the individual. And actually, the evidence suggests that it depends on a few other things to. Depends on your focus. How focused are you in changing what you want to change?

Are you really taking the time to think, feel, and act, and be through this change? There is evidence that visualization of you being that person who's made that change and created the neural pathway can help you to be more successful as it's laying the foundations for that pathway. And by doing that, and future pacing, and tapping into how we want to think, feel and act, we're enabling our brain to go there. And then, we have to focus on

doing it. We have to focus on the action. We have to focus on the emotion and the thoughts. So, focus is really important. Visualization helps. And, I think it's that relentless focus that [inaudible 00:06:48], like this is what I really want. And this is a thing, we can change neural pathways. Carol Dweck has done research, we can change neural pathways, and the way that we are in our personality, if we want too. The research suggests that personality is the most enduring of all of our traits.

We need to want to change. We need to have that intent. It needs to be important to us. It needs to be anchored to a really strong reason why. Somebody has an accident, and they're not able to walk, if they have a really strong reason why, and they don't have a physical reason why they can't walk, if it's a reason in their brain, then they are likely to walk because they can reprogram their brain. If there's a physical reason, obviously it's going to be different. If their brain has been damaged for some reason, then there is a great possibility that they are able to create those new neural pathways. I want to be really clear here. I'm not saying that everyone can do this, but I'm saying that if you've got a really strong intent, and it is not physical and it is in your brain, then we can see these people who are able to relearn how to walk, relearn how to talk.

It's not easy, but if you have that strong intent. And obviously, that is going to be impacted by other things. Emotion is important. So, a positive emotion, in order to set the intention of the behavioral change of that change before you go there, that can really help you to engage more of your brain. And equally, when BJ Fogg talks about this in his book, *Tiny Habits*, we are not going to make a long lasting behavioral change, if we're doing something that doesn't evoke a positive response. So, if we hate running, and we keep saying that we're going to run, making this commitment to running, but actually we don't feel a positive emotion when we run, it's going to be difficult for us to build that over time. Because, the brain likes positive reinforcement. We like positive reinforcement. We want to feel good. We're pleasure seekers as humans.

So, this is your get out of jail pass, this is your permission slip to do things like exercise that you enjoy. There was even an article in *Women's Health* about that this month. So tap into a strong, positive emotion to set your intention for the change that you want to make. Focus on what you want to change. Take time to visualize, and imagine you have been successful with that. What it looks like, feels like, how you are, and go there, and then do the work. Commit to daily visualization, thoughts and action, which will help you strengthen your neural pathways. And then, practice and celebrate your success. See it as a way forward. We know from lots of research done with people like Joe Dispenza [inaudible 00:09:54] that there's a lot of research about the power of neuroplasticity. And of course, there are other factors that impact it. So, when we're talking about individuals, really, it's about creating a new neural pathway.

Remember, I always give this analogy, if you're skiing... And, I've only been skiing a couple of times, but I can see this really visually. If you're skiing, and you get onto the

slopes, the easiest way is to go down the path that everyone else has gone down. The snow is packed, it's a path that's easy. It's much harder to go onto the fresh snow and ski. So, the majority of us, do the easy thing, and we do that in our brains too. If we had a way of being, thinking, doing, acting, feeling for all of our lives and we're in our thirties, or forties, or fifties, or sixties, then our default is to go back to that way of thinking, feeling, being, doing. And, what we need to understand is that by going back to that, of course we're reinforcing it, but if we can then help ourselves to refocus on the new way, we will strengthen that pathway.

We will make that new run in the snow much easier to go down for our brains, and over time, that can become our preferred one. So, when you're looking at making changes, be aware that sometimes you're going to go back to those old behaviors, sometimes under stress, that's going to be where you go back to, and that is okay. All of this work, it doesn't mean that you suddenly don't feel sometimes there's emotions, and you sometimes don't go back to those beliefs. Of course, you can change them, and when you uncover them, or when you think something has been uncovered and it hasn't, it's just a sign to go back. That's all it is. And, it may be that under stress things come up, and it's another sign that we can work on things. So, you may want to combine this work with uncovering and dismantling your limiting beliefs that are stopping you move forward.

Paying attention to your thinking, so you're aware of your triggers, which can mean you go back to old patterns and ways of being. So, you may want to do both. You may want to dismantle those old beliefs, which you may want an experienced coach or therapist to help you with, as well as building the new ways of being. But remember, every single one of us has the power to create new neural pathways. We are able to change the way that our brain thinks and feels, and the way that we show up. But, we need to have that intent, we need to have that purpose. We need to have that real motivation, and that why behind us. And when we do, powerful things can happen. This is why I talk about neuroscience in coaching.

I think that understanding that powerful behavioral change means that we can support our clients better. Understanding that 21 days or 66 days may not be relevant to our clients, but focus, commitment, repetition is, and that time to integrate. If you've enjoyed this, I'd love you to leave me a review, subscribe and share on social media, and come in to my free community over on Facebook, The Coaching Community. Take care. Thank you for listening to the Coaching Hub Podcast with me, Ruth Kudzi. If you enjoy this, I would love you to join my Facebook Group, The Coaching Community for more of the same.