

Transcript of Be Well Lead Well® Connect Audio Series on Physiology of Wellbeing, Stress, and Leadership, Part 1 – Neuroception
Produced by Wisdom Works Group, September 2023
Voiced by Renee Moorefield, Phd, CEO of Wisdom Works Group

From 00:00:00 to 00:00:20

[MUSIC PLAYING] We deepen our capacity for living and leading from wellbeing as our norm when we intentionally connect to our sense of safety, our inner balance, and regulation, plus learn how to reconnect with it when we feel dysregulated and off track. This is fundamental to human thriving.

From 00:00:20 to 00:00:38

You're listening to Be Well Lead Well Connect, where we unpack the latest research, approaches, practices, and case studies to help leaders make thriving a new standard of success.

From 00:00:38 to 00:01:36

Welcome, everyone. My name is Renee Moorefield. I'm CEO of Wisdom Works Group, a firm that makes the science and cultural insights about human thriving practical for leaders using our Be Well Lead Well platform of assessments, development, education, and strategic advisory services.

My team and the growing Be Well Lead Well community across the globe are interested in the kind of leadership that foster organizations and a world where everyone can thrive. And I believe this kind of leadership assistance all of us can take. We can lead as managers, as parents, as neighbors, as friends. It is a responsibility and a joy to lead in ways that elevate the wellbeing, the potential, and the growth of people. And with this kind of leadership, no aspect of our life is untouched.

From 00:01:36 to 00:02:19

In this four-part audio series on wellbeing, stress, and leadership, I'll address a part of our physiology that I believe deserves more attention, and that's the nervous system, specifically the autonomic nervous system. That division of the nervous system, which is typically not under our voluntary control, yet shapes our experience and effectiveness. We'll talk about how to use four principles linked to the autonomic nervous system, including neuroception, interoception, self-regulation, and co-regulation. These may sound like quite technical terms, but they're actually highly pragmatic when it comes to leading well.

From 00:02:19 to 00:03:14

Why talk about the nervous system? Well, most of us are dealing with a lot of disruption, complexity, and demands in our lives and work. We can feel like changes affecting us are compounding with one change piling up on top of another and no end in sight. This can contribute to becoming overstressed, overwhelmed, and reactive if we act without awareness.

I've definitely been there personally. As leaders, one of the biggest shifts we can make is to operate from a state of wellbeing in the moment.

To become more mindful of the subtle and not so subtle cues we're getting from our autonomic nervous systems and to use that feedback to connect with ourselves and others in healthier ways. This will go a long way in fostering environments where people can be well, grow well, and collaborate well to achieve results.

From 00:03:14 to 00:03:57

Through my work with leaders around the world and in my own company and my own life, I've learned over and over again promoting environments where people thrive is fundamentally about how we show up together and the how greatly affects the results we can accomplish together.

For a moment, imagine the people who will be in your next meeting. Now consider, every person you're holding in your mind's eye will arrive to that meeting already in some state of being. This includes you. No one goes to a strategy meeting or a coaching session or their child's baseball game or a doctor's appointment as a blank slate.

From 00:03:57 to 00:04:44

People are swimming in an ocean of media, whether it's news about climate change, the rise of artificial intelligence, or politics. People are dealing with losses, traumas, cares, joys, and pressures at home. People are trying to figure out their ambitions, situations, and relationships at work. And we're often navigating all of this from reactive and stressed-out states instead of states of wellbeing.

Simply put, we come to every moment with a lot already happening within us and shaping how we show up. When you acknowledge this fact, you are appreciating that people are unique, whole human beings, and perhaps without even knowing it, you're also appreciating the autonomic nervous system.

From 00:04:44 to 00:05:01

The autonomic nervous system amazes me. Right now, your heart rate, blood pressure, respiration, digestion, and body temperature among countless other activities are being cared for without you having to do a thing. You don't need to tell your intestines to digest what you just ate or your heart to beat. Your autonomic nervous system manages these and a host of physiological activities without you having to think about them. I find this awesome. And your autonomic nervous system isn't solely managing your physiology. It is also continuously assessing the situations you're in for safety and danger.

From 00:05:27 to 00:06:22

The psychologist, Dr. Stephen Porges, coined this phenomenon as a neuroception. I think that's an interesting word, neuroception. It's the first of our four principles linked to the autonomic nervous system that we're exploring in this audio series.

Neuroception means you're constantly asking, "Is it safe here?" not as a conscious thought, but as part of an innate biological detection system, a neuro-radar within you that's outside of your conscious perception. We are hardwired at birth with the power of neuroception. Dr. Porges explains, this is why a baby coos at a caregiver, but cries at a stranger, and why a toddler enjoys a parent's embrace, but can view a hug from an outsider as an assault.

From 00:06:22 to 00: 07:36

You use this power all the time. Think of a situation where you were called into someone's office who, from your point of view, dominates everyone at everything. You likely felt anxious or unsettled. Your body unconsciously shifting into states of defensiveness, such as fight or flight, or you felt immobilized where you could feel yourself shutting down. You were physiologically readying yourself for protection instead of connection, based on your body's neuroception that the situation wouldn't be safe enough to fully be yourself.

Your autonomic nervous system is constantly working behind the scenes of your daily existence to monitor for cues of danger or safety. Our need to feel safe affects every aspect of our lives from how we think and act, to how we develop relationships to our felt experience of wellbeing in the moment. One of my colleagues, a phenomenologist, Gabriel Kram, even defines the notion of wellbeing as an experience that can naturally arise when you spend more of your present moments in the neuroception of safety and connection, rather than threat.

From 00:07:36 to 00:8:27

We deepen our capacity for living and leading from wellbeing as our norm when we intentionally connect to our sense of safety, our inner balance and regulation, plus learn how to reconnect with it when we feel dysregulated and off track. This is fundamental to human thriving.

From 00:08:28 to 00:08:39

Why should you care about neuroception as a leader? You should care because having the sense of, yes, I'm safe enough here, is essential for people if you want them to bring their higher order capacities for strategic thinking, creativity, trust, collaboration and other prosocial behaviors that are so crucial to building healthy relationships, engaging in healthy conflict, producing innovations and getting work done.

If you want people to foster work environments where they are effective, grow and thrive individually and together, you need to care about neuroception. From the neuroception of safety, our connection system is more apt to come online mentally, emotionally and in our actions. This is vital for developing healthy families, thriving teams and organizations and the productive functioning of institutions across our planet.

From 00:08:58 to 00:09:35

Understanding neuroception has become imperative in the turbulent, high intensity times we're living and working in. For example, right now most of the global organizations my team works with are transforming themselves to bring about more innovation, efficiency, impact and growth. Yet most leaders forget that organizational transformation by its nature kicks off a great deal of uncertainties for people, from employees and customers to other stakeholders. And most people don't like uncertainty any more than stock markets do.

From 00:09:35 to 00:09:59

Organizational transformation requires people to change the way they think, relate and work together, all of which is more likely to happen when people feel connected to a sense of internal safety and wellbeing.

So how can you make this principle of neuroception practical in how you lead? Well, there are numerous ways. Here are three to experiment with.

From 00:10:00 to 00:10:32

First, recognize that every person on your team is continually and usually unconsciously assessing if it's safe enough to authentically be themselves at work. And they bring a lifetime of personal history of when it was and wasn't safe to do so. You do too. Acknowledging this alone can expand your perspectives possibly even softening judgments you hold about some people, including yourself. I believe this recognition is foundational to better leadership.

From 00:10:32 to 00:11:08

Second, commit to fostering work cultures where everyone is expected to contribute to a psychologically safe and well work environment for themselves and others. You cannot control how safe people feel when they show up for work. That's their responsibility and their journey of development. However, you can be purposeful about cultivating work environments that honor people as whole human beings rather than only human resources. Where people know you genuinely care about their wellbeing and development. And people care about the wellbeing and development of each other.

From 00:11:08 to 00:12:16

Of course, this starts with you as a leader. So third, realize that your sense of internal safety, your sense of wellbeing radiates. As a leader, if you're feeling dysregulated, your stress is not only narrowing your thinking and decisions, it is having an outsized impact on your team. I'll say more about this in the third audio of this series where we explore the principle of self-regulation. For now, get into the habit of checking in on your own state of being.

For instance, before heading into a meeting with your team, ask yourself, what is my experience of myself right now? If your answer is, "I'm off kilter" or "I'm depleted", consider what you can do to make a positive shift in the moment. For me, some form of movement,

such as a quick walk or a physiological sigh, usually helps me reconnect with my inner equilibrium, at least for the moment. And when it doesn't, I try to be honest up front in the meeting that I'm not at my best or reschedule the meeting to a better time.

From 00:12:16 to 00:12:35

Remember, you're a human being, not a machine. This isn't about you showing up perfect or happy or always in flow with your work. It's about becoming more aware of how you're being well affects your ability to lead well. Getting in tune with the feedback from your autonomic nervous system can support you.

From 00:12:35 to 00:13:13

I've kept this audio short and practical on purpose. If you want to dive deeper into the science of the autonomic nervous system and how it works or the concept of neuroception, please check out the audio show notes.

I've listed excellent resources there. In part two of this four-part audio series, we'll talk about interoception, another principle linked to the autonomic nervous system and how it can enable you and the people you lead to access a remarkable source of intelligence, the body's wisdom, in relationships and decisions.

From 00:13:13 to 00:14:11

I believe every person possesses an innate capacity to thrive and evolve. And I believe we can cultivate work and work environments where people leave more refreshed, more capable and more well than when they came. Thank you for being part of a growing community of leaders who want to amplify thriving in teams, organizations, the world, as well as their lives overall. To learn more about how we can help you thrive, visit wisdom-works.com or bewellleadwell.com. We look forward to advancing thriving with you. [MUSIC PLAYING]