

Transcript of Be Well Lead Well® Connect Audio Series on Physiology of Wellbeing, Stress, and Leadership, Part 2 – Interoception  
Produced by Wisdom Works Group, September 2023  
Voiced by Renee Moorefield, Phd, CEO of Wisdom Works Group

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

[MUSIC PLAYING] Interoception is a doorway to knowing yourself. I think that's beautiful. And it's also an important skill in leadership. Most of us experience stimulating lives and work, often too stimulating. We are on our devices for hours. We engage in meeting after meeting. We deal with challenges at work and home. And if we're not operating from a sense of inner regulation and wellbeing, we're more apt to get stressed by all sorts of things.

From 00:00:32 to 00:00:48

[MUSIC PLAYING] 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 00:00:48 to 00:01:24

[MUSIC PLAYING] 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 assessment, development, certification, 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.

From 00:01:24 to 00:02:19

In this four-part audio series, we're exploring principles of the autonomic nervous system. That division of the nervous system, which is typically not under our control voluntarily, yet shapes our experience and effectiveness. In the first audio, I talked about the principle of neuroception, the ability of your autonomic nervous system to continuously assess the situation you're in for safety and danger. Through neuroception, you're constantly asking, "Is it safe here?" not as a conscious thought, but as part of your innate biological detection system, a neuro-radar that's within you and outside of your conscious perception. You use this power all the time. Please check out the first audio in this series to learn more about neuroception and why it matters to how you lead.

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

In this second audio of this four-part series, we'll explore another valuable principle linked to your autonomic nervous system. And that's interoception. This isn't a typical word for most of us. In-ter-o-ception. I recently ran across a book called Sensational by Ashley Ward, a professor of animal behavior, which suggests that we have up to 53 senses. I think that's mind-blowing. People generally agree on the five basics: taste, touch, smell, sight, and hearing. You can think of interoception as another one of our amazing senses.

From 00:03:03 to 00:04:03

Your autonomic nervous system oversees an untold number of vital physiological functions, such as maintaining your body temperature, digestion, and heart rate, without you having to do a thing and without your awareness. Interoception is about sensing these signals inside you. Using interoception, you can become more aware if your heart is beating fast, your breathing is shallow, or your stomach is gurgling, bringing inputs from your autonomic nervous system forward as useful information for your life and work.

I like how my colleague, phenomenologist Gabriel Kram, talks about interoception in his book, *Sing the Body Electric*. He says that some people call this awareness bodily intuition. Some people call it a felt sense. He goes on to say that interoception is the living, present moment embodied flavor of what it feels like to be in our bodies in this moment.

From 00:04:03 to 00:04:26

If contacted, attended to, and approached with discernment, it generates a reliable, non-cognitive field of information through which we can experience our lives. It is a doorway to knowing ourselves. Interoception is a doorway to knowing yourself. I think that's beautiful, and it's also an important skill in leadership.

From 00:04:26 to 00:05:10

Most of us experience stimulating lives and work, often too stimulating. We are on our devices for hours. We engage in meeting after meeting. We deal with challenges at work and home. And if we're not operating from a sense of inner regulation and wellbeing, we're more apt to get stressed by all sorts of things. For instance, we may find ourselves suddenly reactive to an email that on a day that we're feeling well resourced and rested wouldn't bother us at all.

Instead of reacting out of swirling thoughts or emotions, interoception can help you notice and use the physical signals you're receiving about your current state of being as a source of information for responding effectively.

From 00:05:10 to 00:06:32

A quick example of this, I once coached a senior leader of a global food company, a man I'll call Neil. When Neil was feeling drained, he exploded in anger at people at the slightest aggravation. No surprise, this created an environment where his team shut down and their wellbeing engagement and performance at work eroded. Once Neil and I developed a trusting coaching relationship, I taught him how to do a simple body scan and suggested he practice it three times a day to build his skills for interoception.

Neil thought I was a bit crazy, but he agreed to experiment with this practice because he sincerely regretted how his outburst affected his team. After about a month or so, during one of our coaching sessions, he admitted he'd become angry again in a team meeting, but this time, instead of venting at people, he paused and became aware of the tightness in his chest

and throat. And he told his team what he was noticing. They were stunned, as you can imagine, by his vulnerability. He had owned his stress instead of taking it out on them. Then they started talking about how to support each other during the particularly stressful business quarter they were in. Neil said it was the first time they'd really connected as whole human beings, and it was the beginning of changing how they worked together for the better.

From 00:06:32 to 00:07:45

The practice of interoception can be transformational. Yet interoception isn't just about noticing when you feel something's off. Think of a time of high thriving, of high wellbeing for you. On your personal wellbeing scale from one to 10, you'd rank this time as a nine or 10. You can choose a memory from any period of your life. You know, maybe you're thinking right now of a fantastic vacation with family or friends, a job or a work team you love, or playing sports or a musical instrument. Pick a high thriving experience that means something to you. It feels personal. Your memory may come to you as images or symbols or colors or sounds or in any other way. Now, as you hold that memory in your awareness, turn your attention to your body. Perhaps your jaw or shoulders or hips have relaxed. Or your breath has deepened. Or your belly has softened. Or you feel a glimmer of lightness or tingling across your chest.

From 00:07:45 to 00:09:00

I've asked thousands of leaders to do this practice and comments I frequently hear are cues they get from within. "I felt vitality coursing through me." "Every fiber of my being felt alive." "I was out one with myself." "I felt grounded, centered, expansive, all at the same time." We know we're thriving in part because of our interoceptive experience of ourselves. When you realize you're trembling because you feel cold, so you put a jacket on to get warm, you're using interoception to make a simple decision.

Interoception can inform complex situations too, such as when you become aware of the knot in your stomach as your boss has a project needs to be fast-tracked. You may understand her instructions rationally, but your gut is telling you something's amiss. Different factors affect how accurate we are in our skills for interoception. Past traumas and mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression as examples, can alter our perception of the cues we get from our bodies. And many of us don't tap into the power of interoception much at all.

From 00:09:00 to 00:09:54

Now, in some situations, such as a crisis, ignoring your body's signals may be adaptive in that moment. If you're hurt in a car wreck, yet need to save a child who is stuck in the back seat, your physical pain is likely the last thing on your mind. Yet your nervous system doesn't consider mind and body as separate. They are intimately intertwined. Ignoring your body's signals as a way of operating in life and work can limit your ability to lead well. The novelist James Joyce once wrote in one of his books, "Mr. Duffy lived a short distance from his body" to highlight how we often live and lead from a place of disconnection. We are in our thoughts, yet a short distance from the world of wisdom of our bodies and missing out on the richness of ourselves.

From 00:09:54 to 00:10:29

As a leader, why should you care about interoception? Because interoception provides you with another source of intelligence, a somatic or embodied intelligence, for understanding yourself and others, for listening, for gaining deeper insight into situations, and for making decisions. When you honor this intelligence, you have a greater chance of engaging in relationships and tasks as a whole person, a whole leader with a greater sense of adaptability, growth, and wellbeing, the kind of leader who is committed to thriving personally and creates environments for others to do the same.

From 00:10:29 to 00:11:12

So how can you make this principle of interoception practical in how you lead? Well, here are a few ways to begin. Learn how to connect with your body in the present moment and honor your body's signals. One way to build your skills for doing this is through a regular body scanning practice, like I used with my client, Neil. Make this practice a daily habit, maybe even set a timer on your smart device to notify you it's time to do it. While scanning your body from head to toe, just notice what you notice without judging it as good or bad, right or wrong. I've included a link to a guided body scan practice in the show notes to support you.

From 00:11:12 to 00:11:48

Another way to build your skill for interoception is to become more conscious of how you engage in movement. For example, consider participating in a physical activity, such as walking or weightlifting, not just for the sake of burning calories, losing weight or getting stronger, but for the sake of building a greater awareness of what your body has to say. This is about movement as a practice of mindfulness.

From 00:11:48 to 00:12:10

Finally, when making an important decision as a team, ask each person not only for their opinions, ask for their interoceptive input. Okay, this may sound a bit strange, but there's a reason why we often say we have a gut hunch or intuition about something. Our bodies have incredible processing capabilities. Becoming body-wise can help inform our decisions. Get support with this from a professional coach or other wellbeing practitioner if you need it.

From 00:12:10 to 00:12:41

That's plenty on the principle of interoception for now. If you wanna dive deeper into the science of the autonomic nervous system and how it works, or the concept of interoception, please check out the audio show notes because I have listed excellent resources there. In part three of this four-part series, we'll talk about why self-regulation, another principle linked to your autonomic nervous system, has become imperative more than ever for you to know as a leader.

From 00:12:41 to 00:13:43

Now, I believe every person possesses an innate capacity to thrive and evolve. And I believe we can lead 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 their teams, their organizations, and the world, as well as in their own lives. To learn more about how we can help you thrive, visit [wisdom-works.com](http://wisdom-works.com) or [bewellleadwell.com](http://bewellleadwell.com). We look forward to advancing thriving with you. [MUSIC PLAYING]