

Transcript of Be Well Lead Well® Connect Audio Series on Physiology of Wellbeing, Stress, and Leadership, Part 3 – Self-Regulation  
Produced by Wisdom Works Group, September 2023  
Voiced by Renee Moorefield, Phd, CEO of Wisdom Works Group

From 00:00:00 to 00:00:27

[MUSIC PLAYING] This isn't just about being well. It's about working well and leading well. You can help people connect with their own capacity for thriving, for feeling internally well-resourced for the complexities and demands in their lives and work, not as an abstraction, but as a felt experience.

From 00:00:27 to 00:00:39

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 00:00:39 to 00:01:15

Welcome, everyone. My name is Renee Moorefield. I'm CEO of Wisdom Works Group. We're 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 fosters organizations and a world where everyone can thrive.

From 00:01:15 to 00:02:19

In this four-part audio series on wellbeing, stress, and leadership, we're exploring principles of the autonomic nervous system, that division of the nervous system which is typically not under our voluntary control, yet shapes our experience and effectiveness. In the first two audios, I talked about the principles of neuroception and interoception. You can think of these as resources to help you live and lead from a sense of safety, connection, wellbeing, and resilience. Please check out those first two audios in this series to learn about neuroception, interoception, and their application to how you lead.

In this third audio, we'll focus on another principle linked to your autonomic nervous system, and that's self-regulation, the ability to understand and shift your own responses in ways that help you live and lead well, in this case, by adopting attitudes and behaviors that support the health of your autonomic nervous system.

From 00:02:19 to 00:02:44

Now, when you study the autonomic nervous system, you'll come across words like regulated and dysregulated. For a system in the body that's so incredibly multifaceted and complex, these words honestly seem too binary for me. However, I'll use these words in this audio to

keep things really practical, plus link to resources in the show notes for those of you who want to dive into the nuances.

From 00:02:44 to 00:03:19

When your autonomic nervous system is regulated, you're likely to experience yourself as more fully connected with yourself and others, more present, more grounded, clearer in your thinking, mentally and emotionally more open, adaptable, welcoming, and expansive, able to seek perspectives beyond your own points of view without defensiveness, to bring both in rather than either or thinking to the paradoxes and challenges you face, and to learn and grow through your experiences.

From 00:03:19 to 00:04:47

Basically, from a state of regulation, you're likely to experience yourself more internally well-resourced to handle whatever emerges in your life and work. A regulated autonomic nervous system allows you to respond flexibly with situations that arise throughout your day. And let's face it, your days are not static, they're dynamic. You're called to bring your life energy to all sorts of circumstances, from handling a customer crisis to getting your kids off to school to inspiring your team. The ability to move between one situation and another fluidly with agility is part of leading well.

Among other things, a regulated nervous system helps you take risks when you need to. It helps you lead with a sense of listening, a curiosity, and empathy. It helps you keep your emotional reactivity in check. And it even helps you bring a sense of equanimity and lightness to your responsibilities. You're also more apt to recover more quickly from those times when you do get overstretched or exhausted--and we all do.

From 00:04:27 to 00:05:12

The principle of self-regulation is part of adapting and thriving in the middle of ever-changing circumstances. And it's at the heart of what it means to lead effectively. Some models of wellness and healing, such as our Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine, even equate this ability to adapt and thrive as what it means to be psychologically and physiologically well. Now, our autonomic nervous systems know how to dysregulate, too, and thank goodness for that. Your autonomic nervous system reacts to changes both inside and outside your body, plus helps every part of your body connect with every other part. So, dysregulation is an invaluable form of feedback that your system is out of balance for some reason.

From 00:05:12 to 00:06:09

In our modern lives and work, most of us can relate to having a nervous system that's dysregulated at some point. In a recent global poll by Gallup, 28% of employees say that they experience burnout very often or always. That is over a quarter of employees, and it's significant. A state of chronic dysregulation can show up as feeling on constant high alert, a lack of clear thinking or brain fog, perceiving people and situations in a negative light, overreacting or underreacting to situations often without awareness, being protective or

defensive, this can be expressed in a variety of ways. For example, distrusting others, trying to take control of a situation when you don't need to, or sticking with what's familiar even when change is needed.

From 00:06:09 to 00:06:55

A state of chronic dysregulation can also show up as feeling exhausted and depleted, those times when you don't feel you're recovering fully from intense projects or stressful periods, or even from the activities of your day, so that you're bringing a sense of depletion from one day into the next. We pay a high personal cost for operating this way. Over time, our chronic dysregulation, our chronic stress, can develop to a host of physical, mental, and social health challenges, such as high blood pressure, migraines, sleep disturbances, digestive issues, depression, anxiety, and breakdowns in our relationships. And our organizations and societies pay a high cost too.

From 00:06:55 to 00:07:25

Now remember, we're talking here about chronic dysregulation, chronic stress. The word chronic is key here. Having stress in your life isn't harmful. In fact, in the right doses, adversity, change, and challenge build our resilience and stress tolerance, and they help us develop positive, effective coping skills that can last a lifetime. Through the right amount of stress--not too much, but certainly not too little--we become hardier and more adaptable.

From 00:07:25 to 00:08:23

Think about a time when you were stretched, perhaps your first time in a new job, or when you became a new parent, or when you found a new love in your life, or that time you traveled to an unfamiliar culture. By engaging in change, you likely learned something new about yourself and you grew as a human being.

In her research, Stanford psychology professor, Alia Crum, shows that rethinking our relationship with stress is key. She found that viewing stress as a helpful and natural part of life that everyone deals with is linked to better health, emotional wellbeing, and productivity at work, even during times when stress is high. This means framing your body's stress responses, your body's signals of stress as helpful rather than debilitating and perceiving yourself as able to handle and even thrive through stress.

From 00:08:23 to 00:09:26

Chronic stress now is a different story. We often feel chronically stressed out when we experience a real or perceived loss of control in our lives and work, when we face a great deal of uncertainty, when we feel disconnected from others and ourselves, when we feel stuck. Those four elements-- loss, uncertainty, disconnection, and stuckness-- are in large part why the global pandemic impacted us so much, and we continue to deal with its after-effects. When we are chronically stressed, we are neuroceptively primed to see people and situations as potential threats.

To explore this more, check out the first audio in the series. I want to pause here to say that if you feel like you're operating from a state of chronic stress, please reach out for support, such as a mental health therapist, a physician, a coach, or an appropriate wellness practitioner. It is vital for your personal life, your ability to lead, and for everyone you touch.

From 00:09:26 to 00:11:19

Let's do a quick check-in. Wherever you are, notice your internal state of being if it feels safe for you to do so. What is your experience of your thinking, your emotions, your energy level, your body right now? Just become aware of your whole self, without judgment. And whatever state you're in is just the state you're in right now. Now while your attention is turned inward, take a few nourishing breaths. Breaths with ease, gently lengthening your inhalation and your exhalation, allowing your gaze and hearing to widen and soften. While you continue to breathe, allow the muscles to relax around your eyes and your ears and your jaw and your throat and your shoulders and invite this relaxation to make its way through your whole being. With this simple act of breath and awareness, notice any shift that's occurred in your experience of yourself.

This simple practice that took us a minute or so drew on three principles we've explored in this audio series so far-- neuroception, connecting with your nervous system's answer to the question, "Is it safe here?" Interoception, bringing feedback from your body into your awareness. And self-regulation, taking action, such as through mindful breathing, to make a shift in your state of being.

From 00:11:19 to 00:12:01

As a leader, why should you care about the principle of self-regulation? Because self-regulation is about adopting those attitudes and actions that promote your effectiveness through your wellbeing and allow you to embrace, challenge, and change. It can enable you to lead from a regulated nervous system from a state of wellbeing and to reconnect with that state time and time again when you get off track. From this state, you're not only apt to be more effective, you're naturally be an invitation for others to thrive.

From 00:11:55 to 00:13:03

How can you make this principle practical? Here are a few ways to begin. Build self-regulation practices into your daily routine. Our felt experience of wellbeing can arise in the moment as we regulate our autonomic nervous system. We deepen our ability to make the state of psychological and physiological wellbeing our default response to situations when we learn how to proactively connect to it.

So, what practices help you show up in your life and leadership from a state of inner wellbeing? For me, getting plenty of good rest has become key, particularly as I've gotten older. When I'm not rested, my window of tolerance for a lot of stimulation and change starts to close, and I get edgy and oversensitive. So beyond doing what it takes to get a good night's sleep, I regularly take a 20-minute nap or do a guided, non-sleep, deep rest practice, what's called NSDR, in the

middle of my day. I've included a link to that practice in the show notes in case that would help you.

From 00:13:03 to 00:13:26

Our wellbeing leadership assessment, Be Well Lead Well Pulse, also outlines many science-based pathways for regulating your nervous system, for example, connecting to your sense of inner wonder, reconnecting to a deeper purpose that matters to you, and reaching out for social support. I've linked information about that assessment in the show notes so that you can check it out.

From 00:13:26 to 00:14:05

A second step you can take to build self-regulation into your leadership is to know your stress profile. Every one of us has unique stress signals that tell us we're dysregulated and out of balance. Earlier in this audio, I mentioned a few common signals. What signals occur in your thinking, emotions, body, and energy that let you know you're under or overstressed, that you're feeling under threat in some way? Use the power you have for interoception to figure this out. The second audio in this four-part series can assist you.

From 00:14:05 to 00:15:11

And third, use your stress signals as a prompt to make a positive shift in your state of being whenever possible. For example, if you find yourself in a heated disagreement and notice a knot in your stomach and your jaw is clenching, try the 90-second rule. Neuroscientist Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor says, "When a person has a reaction to something in their environment, there's a 90-second chemical process that happens in the body. After that, any remaining emotional response is just the person choosing to stay in that emotional loop." To be honest, my emotional stress loops sometimes feel a lot longer than 90 seconds, yet I love her rule of thumb. Step away from the situation for 90 seconds or longer. Get a drink of water, take a walk, do whatever it takes to unplug from the situation and reconnect with your sense of wellbeing. Your stress signals are letting you know that you're surviving the situation, not thriving in it. And most challenges need you to show up thinking, relating, and making decisions at your best.

From 00:15:11 to 00:15:53

Finally, invite people on your team to do these activities, too: to build self-regulation practices into their daily routine, to know their stress profiles, and to use their stress signals to benefit them and the team. How can you make the practice of working from states of thriving, from inner regulation and wellbeing, a norm in your team's culture? This isn't just about being well, it's about working well and leading well. You can help people connect with their own capacity for thriving, for feeling internally well-resourced for the complexities and demands in their lives and work, not as an abstraction, but as a felt experience.

From 00:15:53 to 00:16:35

If you wanna dive deeper into the science of the autonomic nervous system and how it works, or the concept of self-regulation, please check out the audio show notes. I've listed excellent

resources there. In part four of this four-part audio series, we'll talk about co-regulation, another principle linked to your autonomic nervous system, and how applying it can enable you to lead well. Now, I believe every single person possesses the innate capacity to thrive and evolve. And I believe we can lead work-in-work environments where people leave more refreshed, more capable, and more well than when they came.

From 00:16:35 to 00:17:16

Thank you for being part of a growing community of leaders who wanna amplify thriving in their teams, their organizations, and the world, as well as 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]