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ON THE CUTTING EDGE OF
**STRESS
MANAGEMENT**



EMOTIONAL BRAIN TRAINING WITH DR. LAUREL MELLIN

WELCOA★
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ON THE CUTTING EDGE OF **STRESS MANAGEMENT:**

EMOTIONAL BRAIN TRAINING

with

DR. LAUREL MELLIN

ABOUT **LAUREL MELLIN, PhD**



Laurel Mellin, PhD is the founder of Emotional Brain Training (EBT), a health psychologist and an associate professor of family and community medicine and pediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco. She is a New York Times bestselling author and develops certification programs and interventions on EBT. She has three children and lives in Marin County, California.

ABOUT **RYAN PICARELLA, MS, SPHR**



As President of WELCOA, Ryan works with communities and organizations around the country to ignite social movements that will improve the lives of all working people in America and around the world. With a deep interest in culture and sociology, Ryan approaches initiatives from a holistic perspective that recognizes the many paths to well-being that must be in alignment for long-term healthy lifestyle behavior change. Ryan brings immense knowledge and insight to WELCOA from his background in psychology and a career that spans human resources, organizational development and wellness program and product design. Prior to joining WELCOA, Ryan managed the award winning BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee (BCBST) Well@Work employee wellness program, a 2012 C. Everett Koop honorable mention awardee. Since relocating to Nebraska, Ryan has enjoyed an active role in the community, currently serving on the Board for the Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition in Omaha. Ryan has a Master of Science in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Northern Arizona University.

Work stress has a direct impact on health, happiness and productivity, so it is an important component of workplace wellness. Many people think that matters of the emotional brain are off limits in the workplace, but Dr. Laurel Mellin's revolutionary brain-based EBT method aims to change all that. Read on to learn about this important next step on the frontiers of wellness, made possible because of advances in neuroscience.

★ **RYAN PICARELLA** As the founder of Emotional Brain Training (EBT), what is EBT and what made you first interested in this particular area?

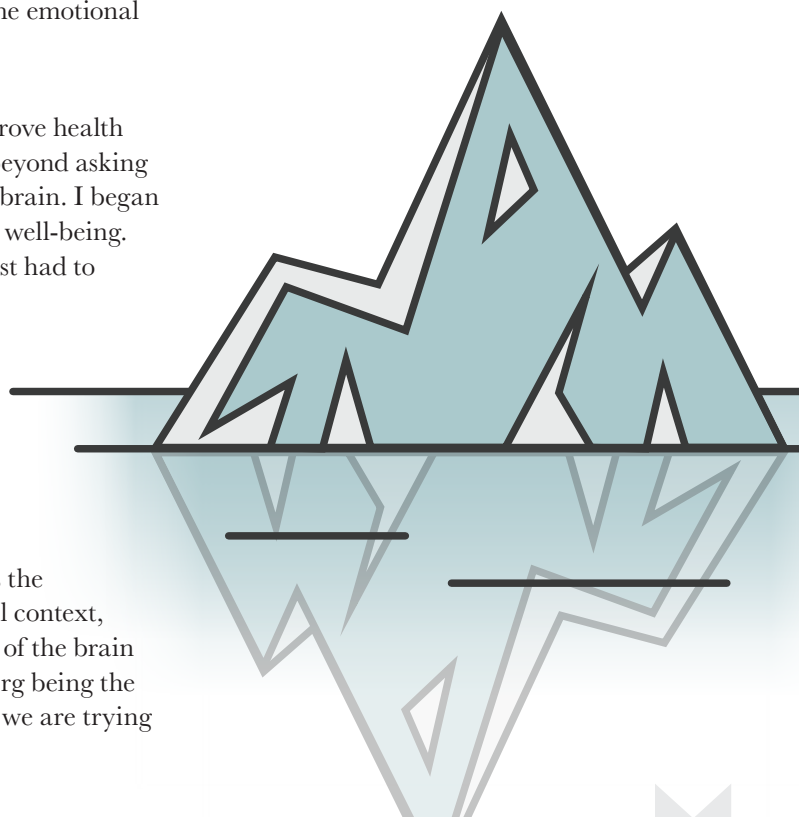
DR. LAUREL MELLIN EBT is a remarkably simple way to get into the unconscious mind, the emotional brain. Since the brain is the controller of our day-to-day life, it is important to know what part is the real powerhouse. That is the unconscious mind. It is the emotional brain. I began as a young faculty member at the University of California in San Francisco with the charge of leadership in the adolescent medicine program in the United States specific to obesity. Now, if that is not worth a good laugh or a good cry—because trying to control food behaviors for out of control teenagers is a challenge. What I began to realize is that you could teach them what to do, but they would not do it. As I looked into the literature, way back then, it was really clear that there was something going on in the emotional brain that was fueling these drives to overeat.

If I could possibly tap into that, perhaps we could meaningfully improve health and well-being in this country. That is exactly what I did. I moved beyond asking people to do things without changing their drive into the emotional brain. I began providing them with tools to give them that sense of connection and well-being. They *could* do the logical things like eat healthy and exercise; they just had to learn to harness their emotional brain and unconscious mind.

★ **RP** It sounds like your approach kind of cuts through the prescription and gets right to the heart—or brain—of matter.

DR. LAUREL MELLIN Exactly. The tip of the iceberg is the thinking brain. There is this huge iceberg down below. For historical context, in 1900, the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud proposed a model of the brain with the unconscious mind being the iceberg and the tip of the iceberg being the conscious mind, which we now know is the prefrontal cortex. When we are trying

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to be healthier, we are learning what to do in our thinking brain. But the emotional brain is in the driver's seat. Unfortunately, what happens is it collects all of this information in the unconscious mind whether it is good information or just a glitch of absolutely false information. But it does not discriminate between the two.

Part of evolutionary biology is we repress all of this wisdom, strength, and goodness, as well as the glitches, in our emotional brain, and we just use the tip of the iceberg instead. Freud went into dreams and a lot of different analytical methods of trying to look at that emotional brain. Because of the science that we have now that he did not have back then, we know that you can actually harness the power of the emotional brain. Give people the control to tap into those emotional drives and keep the ones that are working for them. What EBT has done is provide skills to actually erase and rewire the drives and memories that are not working well for us.

★ **RP** What types of things come out of the emotional brain? Why is it so important?

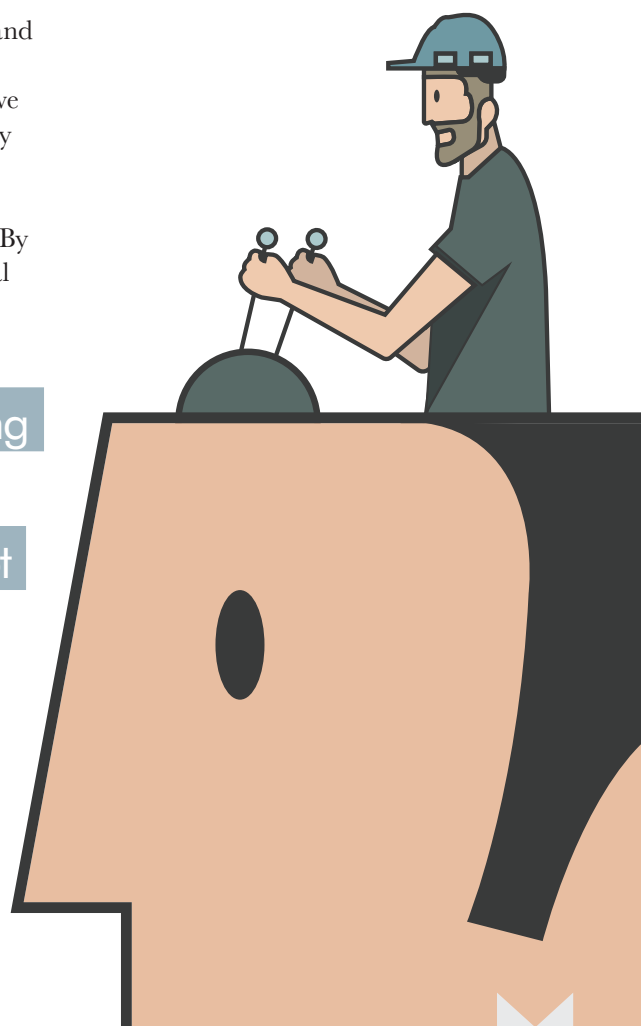
DR. LAUREL MELLIN It is so important because essentially, we are not necessarily that aware of our emotions, sensations and drives. We just know them by the fact that we are eating cookies, spending too much money, or we keep reacting the same way with our spouse even though it does not really work. But this brain is so strong that it easily overwhelms thoughts. That is why right now in our culture, most of our caretaking or healing is done through cognitive change or awareness and mindfulness. That is fine as long as we are in a state of connection and well-being. But the problem is when we remember emotionally, there is no sense in our body we are only *remembering* something. So, the moment some old wire or some old memory gets activated in our emotional brain, we are no longer in charge. All of a sudden, we have that cookie. All of a sudden, we respond to a coworker in a way that does not really work. All of a sudden, we send that e-mail we know we should not send. By being able to have a simple system of figuring out what is going on in the emotional brain, we can reduce stress and heal the past so it does not keep popping up again and again.

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★ **RP** There is certainly a growing interest in stress. Are you seeing a growing interest in the emotional brain as well?

DR. LAUREL MELLIN Absolutely. We all know that the number one epidemic worldwide under all of the other epidemics, like drug abuse, depression and anxiety, obesity and diabetes, is stress. That is at the very root of these other

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conditions. We know we *have* to get good at stress. That is why I am really surprised that in the United States, people do not have even the vocabulary that is consistent with the neuroscience. They think stress is just in the environment or stress is a need to relax. It is not at all that.

Stress actually infiltrates our unconscious mind and creates circuits, pathways, and feedback loops so we keep repeating that stress even when the situation does not warrant it. EBT is not the kind of method that is only appropriate for people who already have symptomatology like depression, anxiety, addiction, feeling stuck or stalled, being overweight or having diabetes. Even for these people that seem to have the charmed life, the stress is so overwhelming now. Our brains were not set up for the current state of information overload, technology, speed of change, and competition. Even the best and brightest who seem to be doing really well do not have a toolkit of the skills, really simple techniques, to take charge of their emotional brain. Because if we do not have the tools to take charge of that emotional brain, we really are not in complete control of how we respond. We are not our best selves. That hurts us on so many emotional, spiritual and relational ways. It just is not a way for a company to do its best work.

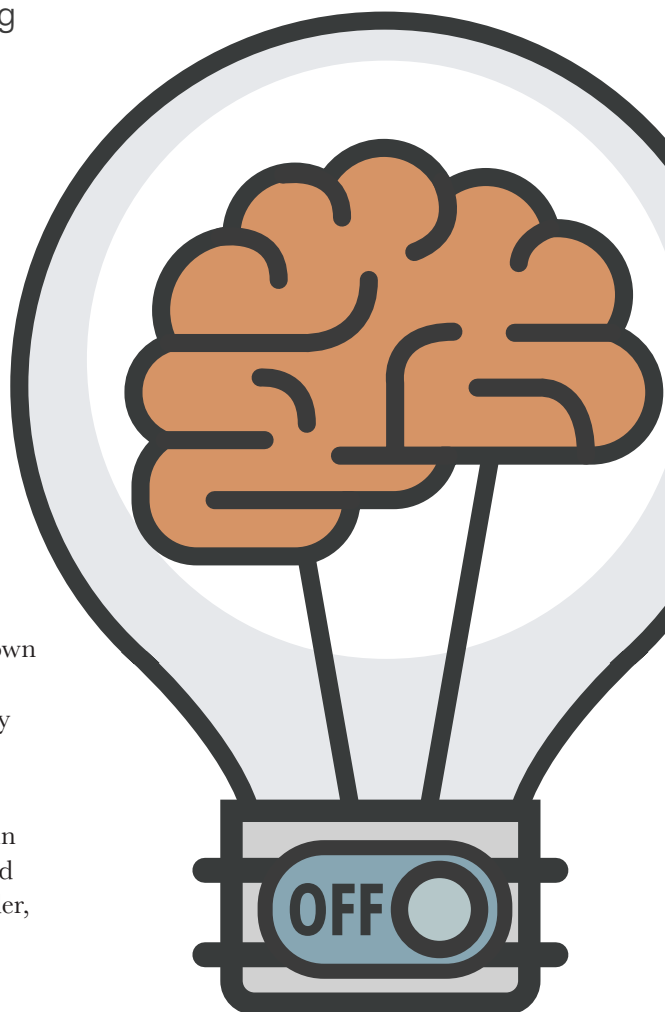
★ **RP** Is emotional brain training complicated? Is it something that anybody can begin to learn to do?

DR. LAUREL MELLIN Ryan, it scares me how simple it is. It also makes me in awe of the nature of life and the beauty of life and the simplicity of life. Because back when Freud was involved it became more and more complicated. You are supposed to go and sit on the couch. But fortunately, with EBT, we approach the brain in a very simple way. We approach it from neurophysiology and neuroplasticity. Those are very long words, but what they mean is that we look at how the emotional brain functions. Because it is the controller of stress, emotions, attachment, creativity and spirituality. It actually has five different levels of stress in it. For each level of stress, there is one perfect pathway and one simple tool to spiral out of that stress and back to that state of connection. To use the tool, it takes somewhere between one and three minutes.

Let's say that you are in a staff meeting that is not being run very well, and you feel so frustrated that you cannot stand it. You can actually go down to a full-blown stress response and either shut down emotionally and say nothing or ramp up and say things you later regret. But with either option, you are not going to really contribute what you or your company needs you to contribute.

Essentially, this method is so simple that I first taught it to children. It is the kid in us that is the one that is overeating, wanting to rabble-rouse or wanting to go and hide. It is interesting that the tools work the same no matter what your age, gender, or any other way of categorizing people. The tools work the same because the emotional brain is what we all have. Our emotional brains all work the same.

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The idea is that you first learn just to take three deep breaths; which anyone can learn to do. Then after you do that, you begin to notice that you can connect with your body. You are aware of your body. The thinking brain behind your forehead is trying to attach the emotional brain, which is the lower brain. Because the lower brain has no feelings, when you attach, you experience it in your body. You have that nice flow. I am having it right now in my chest and down my abdomen. That kind of connection is what we are after. Now, if that were all that was necessary, we would not need EBT because you can do that with mindfulness. You can take three deep breaths. But the issue is that emotional brain, as I mentioned, could be in five different levels of stress.

Each different level has a different brain area in charge. That is why stress management is not one size fits all. There is a different pathway in the brain for each level of stress.

★ **RP** Is the goal to end up in a stress level of one?

DR. LAUREL MELLIN Right. There are five states. State one is brain state one. You feel great. That is best for your health. You have no drives for excess. You are creative. You are cooperative. You are loving. You are compassionate. You are full of energy and cannot wait to go for a walk. Two is where you feel present. But there is no glow. There is not that warmth of knowing that you are doing the right thing, that feeling that what you are doing really matters. That it is mattering to the planet and to other people. Three is a little stressed. Four is definitely stressed. Five is stressed out.

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When you are in four or five, you cannot get that sweet connection and sense of purpose so you are trying to do the right thing, and the brain fills in the gap. The brain needs to be rewarded with unstoppable drives for artificial responses, whether it is technology, sugar, alcohol or sitting in front of the TV until late at night. All of these are just strong emotional drives coming out of being at brain state four or five. That is often what happens when employees don’t have the skills to check in with themselves throughout the day and clear away that stress so they feel great when they go home.

Rather than being happy with their kids and loving to their spouse or partner and enjoy a really pleasurable evening, instead by the end of the day they are going to be at brain state four or five. They are going to start blaming themselves for the excesses of the evening. But it is not their fault.

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It is that they do not have the skills to spiral up out of four and five. In fact, they might not even want the extra food, the extra drink and the long night of television. It is just a skill insufficiency.

★ **RP** I know you have had the opportunity to work with thousands of people build these skills. Do you think that in your experience that Americans have a stress problem?

DR. LAUREL MELLIN My Lord, absolutely, and it is getting so much worse. It got decidedly worse between 1980 and 2000. Since 2000, it has gotten much worse. It is really now at the point that there is so much stress overload. It is really killing the country. In fact, I am just about to write a book on that topic.

Essentially, now everyone is so stressed out. It is not just the vulnerable people who had really hard childhoods, but it is really for all of us. I live in a small town just north of the Golden Gate Bridge. I was talking to someone in the town council. He said, we do not know what is going on, but everyone is arguing. Everyone is polarized. It figures that, if we are most of the time at a four, it becomes a set point. That is its new norm. For example, you can go through all of the stress we have now. Then someone also loses a parent or gets a divorce or has a sick child. Maybe they just took over their coworkers' job because that person was not being replaced. Then, they have twice as much work. Their set point is going to become a four or a five, at which instead of being able to be flexible and fluid, productive and imaginative, there is gushing of stress hormones. In those states, we are fight, flight, or freeze, whether we want to or not.

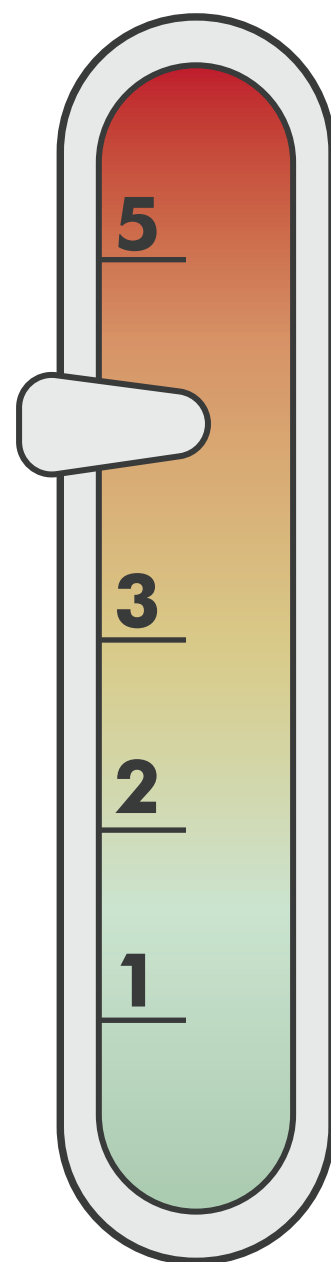
We need more science on this, but my own observation is our set point used to be two and a half. Then it went to three and a half. The national set point now is around four. That means we are disconnected, overwhelmed, lost, confused and very vulnerable to even small business stress from our daily life. It will trigger those circuits in the brain. Then we are really stuck. Then we have to think harder and try harder, which gives us more stomachaches and more excesses.

★ **RP** Where does this continual rise in stress come from? You mentioned technology as a theory.

DR. LAUREL MELLIN Yes, absolutely, and first of all, appreciate that the emotional brain does not evolve quickly. You and I (and everyone listening to or reading this) are sitting here with an emotional brain that is basically a hunter and gatherer brain. What we like to do is hunt, and what we need is what hunter and gatherers have, which is a pretty boring life.

We use technology with EBT. We use it on our platform to teach people these skills and provide these stress tools from anywhere. But technology is also causing people to connect with their phone, and their computer, and their tablet. This impacts their ability to connect emotionally with the deepest part of themselves and to connect on a deep emotional level with others. We know that the human brain

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needs one thing: love, connection in order for us to be healthy and happy. When we do not have that emotional connection, that loving connection, we lose our connection to spirituality. We lose our connection to the deepest part of ourselves and to other people. We lose our inherent wisdom and intuitive knowledge.

Instead, we get very concrete. We function more like a two or a four-year-old instead of an adult. The overwhelming speed of change, information overload and competition all have made our brain obsolete. To fill in the gap between the old brain (the hunter gatherer) and the brain we really need to be our best selves going forward in real-life, we use the EBT tools. That makes all the difference in keeping us from going to the top of the hill and separating our sense of self from reality. It helps us be a part of this amazing world, to fill in the gap between the brain we have and the brain we need for modern times.

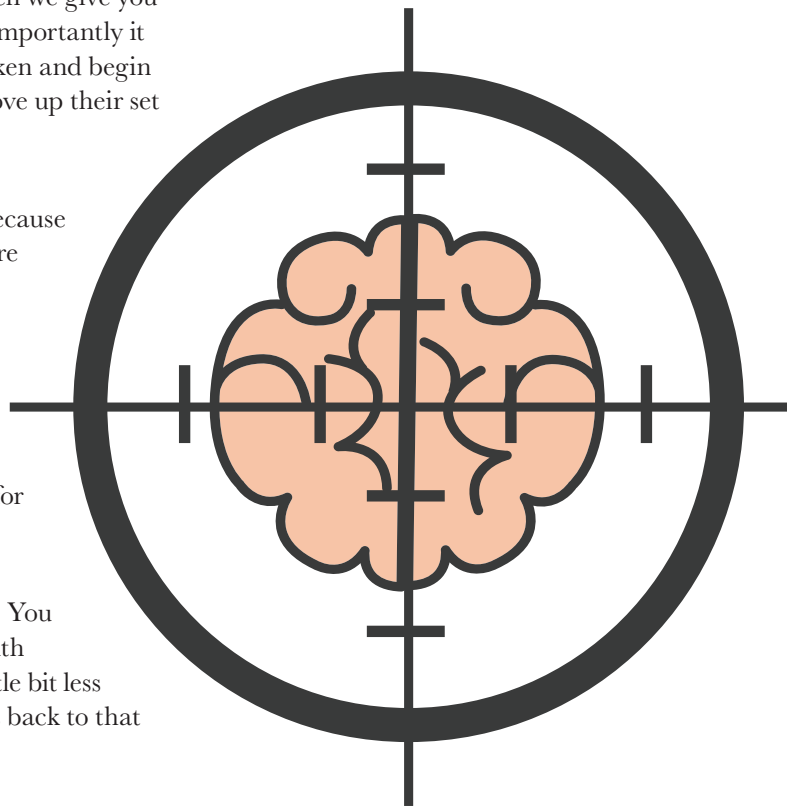
★ **RP** You hear sometimes that some amount of stress is good. What would be your response to that?

DR. LAUREL MELLIN Actually, that is such a perfect question. We have a lot of slogans in EBT because unlike therapies or other treatments, EBT is a whole lot of fun. The reason it is fun is because the emotional brain loves to have a good time. It does not like to be bored. It likes to be interested. We say, “If it is not fun, it is not EBT.” Another one of our slogans is “*stress is the new joy*”. The reason for that is strictly from neuroscience. Being at a four feels rotten, and when we give you a tool to spiral up out of it, you get an instant stress reduction. More importantly it rewires the circuit at brain state four. When we use that tool, we weaken and begin to erase old memories or triggers and people gradually are able to move up their set point.

We still tell people they need to go down in four or five sometimes. Because you have a big project due, you’re faced with a big challenge or you are having a big fight with your partner. If you do not go down to four or five and get challenged, your brain does not open up to change. You have a challenge of seeing if you can really connect with yourself and really see that person, and feel love for them and talk to them about it. All of those really important challenges take you down to four. By feeling better, your brain gets better. It updates those expectations. We need that stress. In fact, two major problems for employers are: 1) if there is too little stress or 2) too much stress.

When you have too little stress, you get neurotransmitter imbalances. You go home at night and do things you wish you had not in terms of health behaviors. If you are too stressed, ditto. What we need is to have a little bit less stress, but still, a lot of stress, and the tools. We can process that stress back to that state of connection and joy.

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★ **RP** What are some of the health and well-being benefits to individuals that work with EBT? How long does it take to start seeing the benefits?

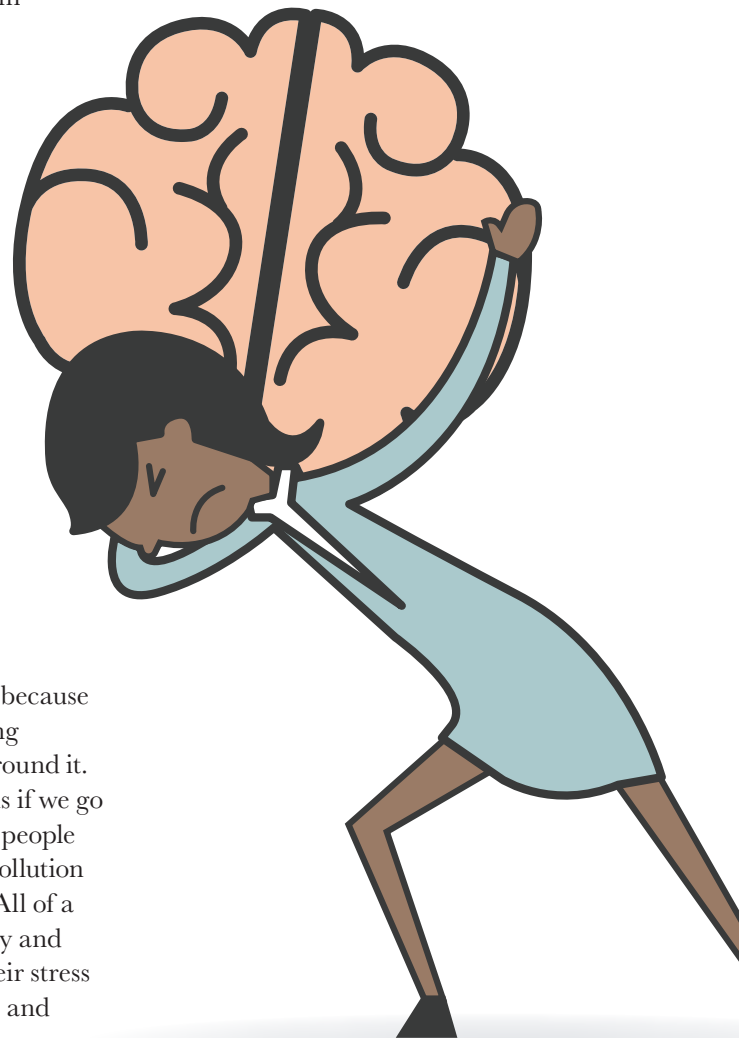
DR. LAUREL MELLIN That is such an important question, Ryan. It being that I am a researcher at the University of California San Francisco, I am involved with a network of researchers who are interested in EBT as well as clinicians. Because doctors are tired of knowing that so many of their cases could be solved through EBT, but we aren't really treating stress in a neuroscience-based way that it really is about what happens in the brain. The research [from UCSF, University of Kentucky, Cornell Weill, University of Chicago] has shown that after seven weeks of EBT there is a 30 to 40 percent decrease in stress, depression, and anxiety. There is weight loss. There are changes in behaviors in just seven weeks. Now, that is the application of EBT where you show up in a telegroup. You come once a week for a half an hour or an hour. You practice it with other people. The reason for that is the emotional brain, the social brain, does not like to be alone. You can use this also through a basic membership and just learn the tools through the video. That is fine. But people who want to get better results faster go in telegroups just in half an hour or an hour a week.

After 18 weeks of EBT—again, in a small group—we found that there was significant improvement even two and six years later in weight, depression, anxiety, health, well-being, productivity and addiction. We know that when we are dealing with the emotional brain, relatively small interventions can sometimes yield amazing results because we are going to the root cause.

★ **RP** Often organizations shy away from creating programming around mental health because they do not want to get involved in employees' personal lives. Do you think helping employees manage stress is in any part the job of the employer?

DR. LAUREL MELLIN I think it is the business of employers because if they do not deal with it, they are going to have a lot more problems being responsive to their customers and to their investors. There is no getting around it. The emotional brain each of us carries around has no walls on it. It means if we go into a work environment and there is emotional pollution going on, other people are at four or five, even if we are at a one, that stress and that emotional pollution from other people goes right into our brain whether we want it to or not. All of a sudden, we find ourselves grumpy or just not as creative and not as healthy and happy. The good news about EBT is that we tell people they can learn their stress number. We don't have to talk to them about the E word—their emotions and feelings.

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We really need to help people at all levels of the corporation to be their best selves. In fact, the best and the brightest people tend to be at set point one or set point five. Because there is so much responsibility that leaders have now, a lot of high expectations. They are feeling pulled in all directions. The best and the brightest either move through that with stress tools so that they really are doing what they are doing for the higher order purpose, and for integrity, for authenticity, for overall well-being, for the good of the company, the planet, and other people. Or, there is so much stress that they flip to a five where they get stuck and stalled. They start doing things—power can corrupt—that they wish they had not later on.

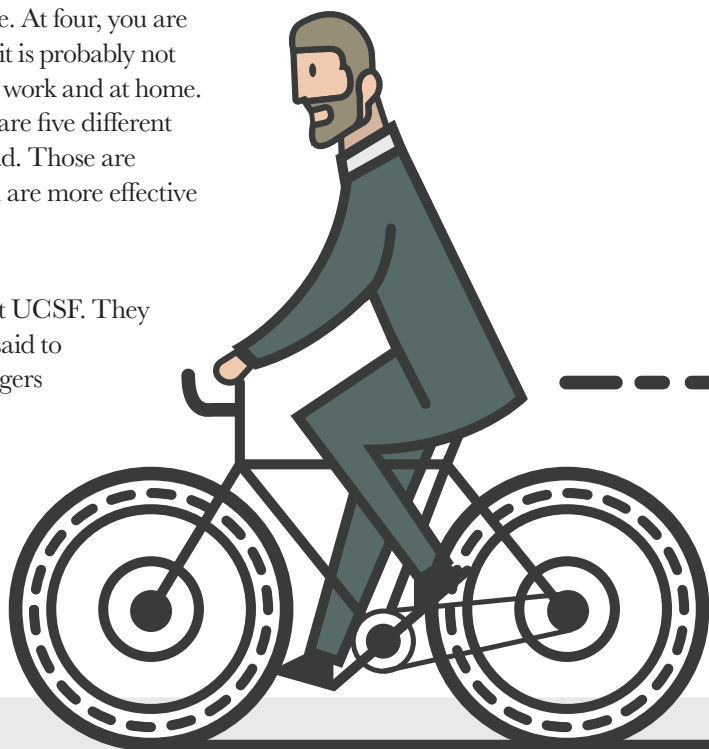
★ **RP** What would be a recommended strategy that you would have for a health promotion professional if they wanted to start implementing some of the EBT concepts into their organizations or their work?

DR. LAUREL MELLIN Well, going back to the idea of if it is not fun, it is not EBT. Remember each of these tools. You can go visit the website, or join a group, or get involved online. Each one of these tools is evidence-based. Each one is based completely on neuroscience. It works for everyone. You can trust the tools.

The first thing that I teach people is that, your brain has five different levels of stress. If you do not know your stress number, you are not going to be able to make good decisions. Because if you are at five, you are not going to be engaging with anyone. At four, you are probably going to have to save that e-mail for later and redo it because it is probably not the reflection of your best self. You need to know your number. Both at work and at home. This is what you do with that information. Let people know that there are five different levels of stress. It is normal to be in all of them. Four and five are not bad. Those are moments of opportunity to spiral up and update your brain so that you are more effective at work. It is also great to use at home.

For example, I just went to dinner the other night with my colleagues at UCSF. They are neuroscientists. We sat down to dinner, looked at each other and I said to Linda, “How are you doing?” She put her hand up. She had all five fingers splayed. She was giving me the signal that she was at five. Okay, that’s fine that she was at a five. I was running at two. I put a little two fingers up there. You can develop this joy and this sense of freedom and self-acceptance about numbers. What EBT does is give you an escape from that stuck state, triggered state, and stalled state, and spiral up. It allows us to stop procrastinating, get that project done, and feel great about it. 📌

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Learn 5 Neuroscience-based Solutions to Stress In the Workplace

Free video and downloadable Information from EBT Founder Dr. Laurel Mellin. Go to:

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