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Out of Our Minds

Friday, May 04, 2007

12:51 PM



Emotional mapping
Curt Rosengren on Tech

Imagine wandering around a city and being able to look back and see your emotional responses to your environment mapped out. With a process he calls emotional mapping, an artist in San Francisco is doing just that.

As cartography projects go, Christian Nold's approach to charting the peaks and valleys of urban landscapes is decidedly unconventional.

First, he outfits volunteers with global positioning system devices and the sensors used in lie detector tests. Then, he sends his subjects out to wander their neighborhoods. When they return, Nold asks them to recount what they saw and felt when the polygraph recorded a quickened heartbeat or an elevated blood pressure.

Check out Nold's web site for some examples of emotional maps. They're fascinating.

As I looked at the maps, another idea bounced into my brain. What if we did something like that to track emotional reactions not through a physical landscape, but through a chronological landscape?

So many of us go rushing through our days so busy, so focused, or just plain desensitized, that we stop paying attention to what we're really experiencing. How cool would it be to use something like this to do a kind of end-of-day review. We could look at the spikes and say, "What was that all about?"

It might be a great tool to help us start doing something that so many people forget to do...simply noticing. Noticing what's going on around them. Noticing what they're responding to. Noticing why they're responding that way.

The more we notice, the more we have a chance to do something about it. Whether that is noticing something positive and exploring how to incorporate more, or noticing something negative and looking for ways to reduce or eliminate it.

5 comments

Whitney - 5/10/2007 11:18:39 PM

Years ago, I tried biofeedback as a way to combat tension headaches and migraines (both of which I was having a lot of at the time). The idea was that if I became more aware of my body's reactions, I could take steps to lower my stress and ward off a headache.

With little sensors attached to my skin and scalp, the counselor would ask me to talk about my day or my week, whatever came to mind. As the sessions went on, she'd ask about specific individuals whose names she'd heard or about specific projects. Then we'd watch the muscle reaction on the machine's monitor screen. It was difficult to deny when something was bothering me because the machine picked up everything. It was also easy to see who or what had a calming influence on me.

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She'd equate different reactions to things like "A 40-pound child sitting on your shoulder" or "A 250-pound man standing on your back." I learned to pick up the nuances in my muscle tension, remembering what the 40-pound child felt like as compared to the 250-pound man. More than a decade later, I can still do this.

Learning to read these signals has been good for identifying people who are not good influences in my life. It's also been good for conflict management, because I can feel my body reacting long before frustration, defensiveness, or anger reach my brain or my mouth.

I wish more people could take advantage of biofeedback. But, for now, at least I can better manage my side of the relationship.

✉ [Curt Rosengren](#) - 5/8/2007 1:56:18 PM
Great thoughts!

I think paying attention is probably one of the most under-rated tools for positive change we have at our disposal. I think that many of the places where we feel a disconnect in our lives - whether it is with how we spend our days, or the degree to which we access our intuition, or something else - are the result of simply not paying attention.

Anything that can help us build a habit of paying attention, and get us asking questions like, "What is/was happening here" can't help but have a positive impact.

✉ [Judy Martin](#) - 5/6/2007 1:28:11 PM

Hello Curt,
Nold's site is an interesting find and begs further debate on a deep level regarding the way we emotionally respond to our surroundings, especially our working conditions. It would be neat to map the emotional connections that emerge throughout our work day.

The intense feelings one might have when reacting to a meeting with a manager at work, trying to respond to the demands of a client, or the pressures of deadlines would really send that polygraph off the charts.

But while using a machine to read our response to such stimuli might bring attention to that which rocks our souls, perhaps cultivating or sharpening intuition is truly the wave of the future. I think it's about awareness, listening to that deeper level of consciousness, and following through with appropriate responses.

I think if we're quiet enough - we can hear beyond what any machine can share with us.

✉ [simm](#) - 5/6/2007 12:41:20 AM
Dear Curt,

Thanx for the article.... I LOVE THIS IDEA, you've shared ! It makes me wonder if this concept, that Christian Nold has come up with... of mapping volunteers responses with sensors from lie detectors, while outfitted with global positioning devices, could be the start of something so much more, too !

It could be a way to cure so many of the problems that are irking us, if we could have a way to see what it is we are doing, during the course of our days, that make us happy.

.. If we could get some insight from a polygraph reading about our emotions and could get a sense of what is happening to us emotionally, as we go thru our day... wow !

I think we could really be able to figure out what is making us happy... !

Then we could be able to not only change our cities, as Christian Nold, is proposing, but, perhaps we could map out, our emotions during the course of our day and practically find out how to follow our bliss.

Now that really fascinates me !

Please get me signed up now ! .
As an Acupuncture Physician, I see people that are so scared of their emotions, that they are literally making themselves sick.


Currently I am working with a machine that helps people produce more endorphins and encephalons. I use this machine with my acupuncture treatments and find that it is a wonderful adjunct that can help people start to heal even faster, from everything from psoriasis, (often caused by stress), to insomnia and even migrain headaches. So finding a way to determine when you are actually able to produce "happy & healing" chemicals, on your own, during the course of your day, could be such a great tool ! ... to actually map out, what we need to do, to be healthy and find happiness !

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