

Questions: Laurel Mellin, *Wired for Joy* (Hay House, June 2010)

**1. *Wired for Joy* begins with: Imagine yourself in the spring of the year 2020—the daffodils are in bloom, the weather is gorgeous, there are children playing, and you pick up the paper to find one of the strangest headlines you’ve ever read: “Drug Companies Having Bake Sales to Raise Funds.” Why?**

Stress is not a risk factor for disease, it is the disease. It causes people to reach for a drink, junk food, or the remote. It is the root cause of depression, anxiety, heart disease, diabetes, and other leading causes of death.

These detrimental consequences aren’t just due to the stress we are experiencing in the moment. They come from the way our brains get wired to react to these everyday stresses. Our brains process current stress in the context of all similar stresses in our past—even our evolutionary past. So while there are no lions chasing us, our emotional brain sees them everywhere. And the effects are cumulative—one stress builds on another and another and another.

An attorney who used EBT, the method I’m talking about in this book, once told me that if EBT were ever put up for sale, a drug company would snap it up, and then make it disappear because it treats the wiring that causes stress, and it does so with simple, universal tools rather than medication.

**2. Why is *Wired for Joy* revolutionary?**

Right now, Americans fill approximately 4,545,000,000 prescriptions each year—16 for every man, woman, and child in the country. And the reported serious side effects from prescription drugs have increased four times faster than the total number of outpatient prescriptions. Until recently, we saw diseases as problems brought about by an amalgam of factors. Now, we know that most diseases are just symptoms of stress.

The tools in *Wired for Joy* are based on the new findings in brain science, which have been discovered thanks to magnetic imaging. Within the past decade it has been shown that the adult brain can grow new neurons, thus making it possible to rewire the biological pathways that are triggered when you face stress. *Wired for Joy* gives you a cheat sheet to help you train your emotional brain to process stress rather than get mired in it.

### **3. Where does joy fit in?**

In *Wired for Joy*, we are treating stress with a high dose of joy. The brain can't be in stress and joy at the same time. Given enough intensity one can wipe out the other. Using the five simple tools presented in this book, you can learn to cut stress off at the pass by triggering a surge in neurotransmitters, the hormone associated with joy. Imagine being in a meeting with stressed out co-workers, and deftly using these tools to switch your brain back to joy...not to mention turning on all the positives that come with it—clarity of thought, creativity, insight, vibrancy, productivity.

### **4. What is the cause of addictions?**

Addictions are based in the wiring of the emotional brain. This area of the brain is the home to our emotions and our instincts, and it processes information about a situation very quickly—at about 20 million pieces of information per second compared to our rational neocortical brain which processes about 40 pieces of information per second. So while the primacy of logic over passion rules the Western culture, as a people, we are actually ruled by a brain that is survival driven and fueled by passion.

Because the emotional brain reacts so quickly, it is the first respondent to any situation. This was important in the days when our ancestors were being chased by lions as the neocortical brain wouldn't process the situation quickly enough to get you out of harm's way. And still today during stressful moments, the lower parts of the brain are in charge. They are reflexive and quick, but not logical. So they make false assumptions, such as “I don't matter” or “I have no power,” and these assumptions become the unconscious codes by which you live.

All memories, including these assumptions, are strings of nerve cells, or neurons, that are linked in a pattern. And when this pattern is activated, you think you don't matter or you don't have power. In the emotional brain, these negatives register as a threat to your survival, so you turn to something which makes that feeling go away—even if it's a superficial and temporary cure. This external device—sugar, fat, alcohol, cigarettes, or even softer addictions like videogames, texting, people pleasing—changes that feeling of hopelessness, so the brain links it with survival. With EBT, we can erase the wire that triggers this false relationship. Instead of trying to force ourselves to stop our bad habits, something that never really works, we can select the offending wire and erase it.

**5. One of the endorsers of *Wired for Joy* called it the missing link in health care. Another said it was a “gift from science” to the reader. Why?**

Walk into the waiting room at any doctor’s office and of the ten people you see, eight are there because of stress. We now have the capacity to clear out those waiting rooms. EBT has the potential to revolutionize health care by rewiring the brain to process stress rather than having to mop up its downstream effects with drugs, procedures, and devices. The EBT techniques presented in *Wired for Joy* give you the tools to switch from feeling lousy to feeling great.

Psychotherapy is expensive, and people are too stressed out to have the time for it. Instead you become your own therapist, switching off the stress buzzer that is jammed on and using the brain’s natural drive to return to joy—the best state for survival.

**6. What are the 5 tools of EBT and why do they work?**

Have you ever tried to meditate when you were stressed out? It’s almost impossible because of how the brain is organized. All of us have brains that downshift from having the top part of the brain, the neocortex, in charge when we are relaxed, to the reptilian brain, the reflexive, extreme lower part when we are stressed out. Altogether there are 5 brain states, or levels of stress. In each state a different area of the brain is in charge. So in EBT you learn how to move through your day, checking in and identifying your brain state, 1 is joy and 5 is stressed out, and then you use the tool for that brain state to switch your brain back to joy.

**7. What are the advantages of knowing about brain states—yours and others?**

You can learn how to identify not only your brain state but also the brain states of your boss, your child, or your partner, and knowing what state they are functioning in at a particular time can help you can make better decisions about how to handle a situation. A physician from Denver said to me, “I check my husband’s brain state, and when he’s at 5, I know it’s not a good time for me talk about our bills.” He just can’t discuss them on a helpful level when he’s in Brain State 5.

All people process stress the same way. It’s not a matter of gender, race, age, or sexual orientation. So once you learn how to identify the brain states, you have the inside scoop on how to communicate more effectively with anyone. Using these tools with others is one of the most

effective ways to make your life better: you'll have fewer unnecessary problems and more love and connection.

Yet the primary reason to know the brain states is that you need to know your own so you can use the most effective tool for switching your brain back to brain state 1.

## **8. What is a World at 1?**

The ultimate goal of EBT is to give us the tools to switch our brain states to the state of peace, joy, and power that is associated with the long-term survival of the species. People who are in that brain state of joy don't blow up the planet. They don't pollute. They don't hurt others. We are all egomaniacs when at Brain State 5 and we are all the most compassionate people on Earth when in Brain State 1.

This method is about changing your wiring so Brain State 1 becomes your natural comfort zone. You use the tools to gradually move up your brain's set point. Most of us are wired at 3 (a little stressed) or 4 (definitely stressed), and each use of the tools weakens the wires that promote stress and strengthens those that promotes feeling great. With practice, the highly plastic brain finds a new set point in that state of feeling present and rewarded, and then stress symptoms—the overeating, the sleep problems, the high blood pressure—tend to fade and people experience a spiritual deepening. When the brain is in balance, people are aware of the grace and mystery of life. They become a beacon of light not only in their own lives but also in the lives of others. That joy travels from brain to brain; it's contagious. And this is the best hope for saving the planet—not laws or guns, but a brain state of peace and power from within. Imagine a world at Brain State 1.

## **9. Is this stress management meets neuroscience?**

Precisely. The detrimental effects of stress aren't based solely on how stressful our environment is, but on how repeated hits of stress set up the brain to process stress less and less effectively. At some point the cumulative stress becomes so high that the very brain structures that protect us from stress are cannibalized by stress—they are damaged by being in a constant state of stress. We need to rewire our brains so little everyday stresses don't seem to be threats to our survival. We need to reconsolidate these wires to enable us to cope.

**10. What makes you say that people are capable of joy, that you can have it by choice, not chance? Is this a happiness book?**

The human brain is unique in that the prefrontal cortex—the center of consciousness—interacts with the reward centers of the emotional brain. That means you can use thoughts to activate pleasure. If you have the tools to process stress, you can train your brain to move back to states of intense natural pleasure, which further quashes the stress response. This not only helps us avoid the detrimental personal effects of stress, but also helps assure the long-term survival of the species. When we are in joy, we are cooperative, compassionate, and thinking clearly.