

Anxiety & Ego

Someone is asking about an approach to anxiety on stage, or at home, playing difficult stuff - Man this is great! "Anxiety is killing my airflow" This is a really good observation. I'm glad that you see it as an emotional cause to a physical problem. Because airflow, that's a physical situation that has a mental or emotional origin.

And as far as anxiety goes, there are different ways that we can approach this. We can take a purely physical approach which is: Control your breathing. Control your breathing. Breathing is a — here's another great book! "The Science of Breath". It's a tiny little book; it's like 100-120 pages, written by a couple of doctors, and a yogi. And one of the things that I took away from that, is just a simple, beautiful, elegant observation that breathing can be both active or passive. And it's a revolving door, the link between breathing and our emotional state. And you can either use your breathing to affect your emotional state, or you can also see a situation where your emotional state affects your breathing. I'll give a couple of examples:

1- You've just finished hiking up to the top of a mountain, and you're looking out over all of creation, it feels, and you're just [deep breathing] and it brings — that emotional release is something that inspires a change in your breathing pattern, very much for the better.

Also, if somebody sneaks up behind you and goes "BOO!" and scares the hell out of you, then [quick breathing], then that emotional situation changed your breathing. And then you have to- and here's where we come to the other side, the flip side of the coin which is where you have to *actively*, sometimes, use breathing [breathing slows down] to calm yourself down. Use the breathing to change your emotional state.

And that's really an important skill. Not just for playing, and not just for making sure that your airflow is unimpeded; it's just for life, man, to make sure that you have the self-control, the emotional self-control to roll with the punches as they come at you, and to stay in a healthy enough frame of mind to still respond positively or productively to whatever life throws at you. Whether it's a bout of anxiety or stage fright, or it's a friend betraying you and stealing all your shit. Whatever it is, breathing - a breathing practice that is finely tuned and

seriously a major point of devotion on your part, everyday, will pay dividends; will get you through any number of challenges.

So as far as my approach to eliminating, or trying to at least let my anxiety level come down, [deep exhalation] breathing [deep inhalation] you know, just one good breath after another. In "Blast!" we had really our spiritual advisor, as much as anything else — our acting coach in job description, but really our guru in "Blast!", George Pinney, a great man; a brilliant man, did wonderful exercises with us where every day we were doing a little bit of tai-chi, we were doing just some mindful breathing to start our classes. And we were told on a daily basis by George Pinney that "You can be anything you wanna be, anyone you wanna be; just put it on a breath, in one breath."

And maybe it takes more than one breath but at least it's a mission statement, a very good one, that you become better and better over time, at just getting that one breath [inhales] to envision how you wanna be, who you wanna be, [exhales] exhale, with that same intention, breathe in again, and that is who you are, that is how you feel. It's not always that easy, but that has got to be the goal. And that had a huge impact on me.

So basically, I'll summarize something that I put out there in every masterclass I teach, which is a two-word philosophy, not really PG; not really meant for kids' ears but, it's — there are no two better words to sum it up, but my two-word philosophy for how to approach stage fright and anxiety is "Fuck it". Here it comes. I'm not sure I'm fully prepared for this; I've got a lot riding on this performance. I see there's a lot of people with their cameras set-up, and whether this turns up to be my greatest achievement or really bad blackmail footage - fuck it; here it goes.

And the ability to do that is something I really think you gotta hone; and you've got to develop that. You have to be able to just let it go, and say "Well, you know, this is a thing I cannot change. All of this, the entire situation right now, I can't change it. The cards that are

stacked against me, are stacked against me, the things I've got going for me, are going for me.” And it's a mixed bag of positives and negatives. But it is what it is, all I can do right now is try my best, so I'm gonna make sure that my emotional state doesn't hijack and sabotage my physical actions. And I've gotta make sure that my physical state doesn't negatively affect my emotional state, you know, by playing with tension — So it's always that revolving door between the physical and the emotional or the mental, and just having control over both, and having control over the way that they affect one another through any kind of process you like.

When I was seven, I started training in Tang Soo Do, a martial art. I was right at the right age, Karate Kid came out and, you know, “sign me up!” And I was in there. And that's basically, when I was seven, was when someone first started explaining to me that “there is no spoon”, you know? And then later on it came with the yoga practice, and then after that it came with the reiki practice, and an ever-evolving meditation practice involving chanting and overtone singing, and all that.

And all these things have just, have developed over time into a pretty solid base of tools that I can rely on to help me fix the physical tension and fix the mental or emotional tension that would mess the other one up as well, you know, and that's it. It's breathing, it's keeping in mind: What is the thought that is bringing the anxiety in the first place? And it's always a survival thing, it's fight or flight instinct that's triggered by a fear of what will happen if you screw up, right? And “What happens if I completely mess up this audition? I'm never gonna win another gig”, “What happens if I mess up this performance? Nobody's ever gonna hire me again” The ego can come up with all sorts of ways to rationalize this being the most important moment of your life, and if you don't succeed with flying colors right now you're gonna- it's gonna be the end of your life as you know it.

Obviously, that's bullshit, and you gotta let it go. And that comes with [inhales, exhales] realizing that you'll always get to play another day. You know? And you'll always have another chance to — here's the kicker, here's what's most important: *It's about being there for other*

people. Why are you playing? Are you playing to get rich? Are you playing to earn yourself credit as being a great trumpet player; a great musician? Are you playing for you, or are you playing for other people? Are you playing to make people happy?

And I had a lot more, not really stage fright but nervousness — I had a lot more anxiety, a lot more situations that brought cortisol or that brought the stress on, back when it was about *me*, when it was about *me*, when it was about how good I sound — or about the music too; how much I want the music to be great. That was always a focus. It wasn't always entirely egocentric. I was, I've always been devoted to the music. But it took longer for me to hop on board and let it be about *people* that are *there* to hear you; people that are there and want you to make their day a little bit less shit; people that are there because they wanna be more inspired; people that are there because they need you; they need what you're doing. And if you keep them in mind, and you breathe, and you keep that in mind, and you breathe, and you keep that in mind, then that should keep the doomsday scenarios at bay. That should keep your mind chatter down to a minimum and allow you to stay in the moment, focused on mission number one which is: Being there for the people that are there to hear you.