

Chapter 10

Rewriting Your Patterns

If we are going to help you rewire your system to change your blood pressure, we're going to have to help you rewrite your patterns and reset your thermostat. As stated earlier, many people get so bombarded by events and negative emotions that their system stays stuck in a negative pattern of responses. Those negative emotions create chaos, psychologically and physiologically, which can become so familiar that it feels normal. The greatest news is that by using your heart you can rewrite those patterns without as much time and effort as you may think.

Writing New Patterns

Do you remember learning how to drive? What an anxiety-provoking experience that was for most people! You had to learn each step. It required lots of cortical brain function. Your cognitive skills had to be used over and over: *Hold the steering wheel at ten o'clock and two o'clock. Put on your turn signal. Look over your left shoulder. Check the rearview mirror. Now check the side view mirror; now look over your shoulder again. Now change lanes. Prepare to turn left. Put on your turn signal*

again. Foot off the gas; now gently apply the brake. Now, hand-over-hand, turn the steering wheel. Now recover, back to straight again. Now more gas.

Exhausting! And that was just learning how to make a turn. Ultimately you had to learn how to do something as complicated as parallel parking. It required lots of focus, and attention, and calculation, and experience, and repetition.

If you were asked today how you drive your car to work or to the grocery store, you'd probably name the route you take. But if asked specifically how you operate your car to get from point A to point B, you'd have no recollection of all those steps. Now you are able to drink your cup of coffee, answer your cell phone, and speak to the other person, all while driving a two-ton machine, often at high speeds and with multiple manipulations. And you get to work just fine. How does that happen?

After performing the same tasks over and over, repeating each step many times, these actions eventually become automatic. They are performed by a lower portion of your brain, saving your cognitive areas for matters such as evaluating driving conditions, or navigating through unfamiliar territory.

When actions become automatic, they have imprinted a pattern that has become familiar. Once this happens, messages are sent much more quickly and easily along the pathways of the nervous system. More traffic along the familiar pathways creates easier travel. We refer to this as *rewriting the neural architecture*.

Fortunately, you can rewrite the neural architecture in your stress response system, even if you've had the same responses to situations multiple times. Once the research team at the Institute of HeartMath learned how the brain and the heart were interacting, we saw the potential for grooving

new pathways using the “master pendulum.” With a little practice, you can change your internal habits.

Here’s a story from a grateful patient, S. H., that describes her process of rewriting.

For the past five years, every time I went to the doctor my blood pressure was elevated. I passed it off as white coat syndrome. Last time I went to the doctor he said that since it was elevated every time, he would assume that I do have hypertension. I used a blood pressure monitor at home and found out that indeed my systolic blood pressure was running around 140–145. I was not able to lower it below that. My diastolic pressure was fine. I had tried to avoid facing the facts.

My doctor did some tests to rule out other problems like kidney dysfunction or salt imbalances in my system. After those came out negative, I considered that my stress level and out-of-balance emotions might be the source of my high pressure. I can be a pretty high-amp person. Then I took a little time to reflect on just this past year. I was functioning at a very high level in my job, bringing in more sales than I ever had. I remodeled and painted my home. I faced some of my biggest fears, and had some other physical challenges. I had lost two close friends to cancer. Could I possibly have reset my system to believe that stress was the norm?

A very close and respected friend gave me the advice that I would be able to calm myself and reset my system. I knew that many people had good results lowering their blood pressure using the HeartMath tools. So I set out to do it.

I began by taking short time-outs during the day to use the Quick Coherence technique. First I would tune in to how I was feeling inside. Next I would take a few seconds and tell myself I was going to calm myself. Next, I would take about twenty or thirty seconds to breathe a feeling of calm in and out of my heart. Then I recalled a time I felt very calm and peaceful inside, such as sitting on the top of a ridge with friends quietly looking out over the mountain ranges.

I have been doing this for about two weeks now. I stop and do it whenever I catch myself with too much “amp” inside, or when I have an emotional reaction to something, or catch myself holding my breath. By being more conscious all day long as to whether I was relaxed or not, I discovered that I was moving too fast and out of sync.

After one week, I began to get some readings between 120 and 138, mostly in the lower range. This gave me hope. I added two special ten- to fifteen-minute Heart Lock-In sessions [the technique you will learn in this chapter] to my day, while listening to Doc Childre’s Heart Zones music. I focus on calming myself and sending appreciation to myself for doing this and then sending appreciation to others. More and more during the day when I catch myself getting overly concerned or upset about something, I say to myself, “It’s just not worth it” and do a Quick Coherence exercise.

When I am deeply relaxed my systolic blood pressure runs lower. I am now able to actually feel inside when my blood pressure is up. I feel a nervous feeling running in my veins and it is more difficult to

relax. So I stay with Quick Coherence, repeating the steps, until I feel myself relax deeply.

I know I have to stay very diligent to reset my system. I often wake up with the adrenaline running in my system. But I feel there is real hope in applying the HeartMath tools to reset this. I have made a commitment to myself to stay very steady with my practice.

Heart Lock-In

The final technique you will learn in this book is called Heart Lock-In. While there are a number of other HeartMath tools and techniques, the use of Neutral, Quick Coherence, and Heart Lock-In will be the most helpful to you in lowering your blood pressure.

The Heart Lock-In technique is to be used daily, to help sustain coherence to rewrite your pathways and make a psychological and physiological habit out of more beneficial responses. This technique builds on the steps that you've already learned, with slight modification.

1. **Shift** your attention to the area of the heart and breathe slowly and deeply.
2. **Activate** and sustain a genuine feeling of appreciation or care for someone or something in your life.
3. **Send** these feelings of appreciation or care toward yourself and others.

After shifting your attention to the center of your chest, and breathing slowly in and out through your heart, send these feelings of appreciation or care to yourself and others. Sending feelings may seem strange at first, but everyone

unconsciously sends feelings to their bodies and to other people all the time.

Your Energies Do Affect Others

Did you ever wonder why some people always seem to affect you negatively, while others always seem to make you feel great? Relationships between people, at home or at work, are based on the same principles of coherence and chaos. The very powerful heart signal is not only causing contractions in your heart muscle. That big signal is doing lots of things to you—physically, emotionally, and mentally, as we've seen. Remember how we discussed that the strong electromagnetic field generated by the heart can be measured well outside your body? The latest research from our laboratory has shown that these signals are also picked up by other people's nervous systems.

Your stress and negativity really do affect other people, just as your positive emotions have an effect. The Heart Lock-In technique helps you to become more conscious of this process. By learning to intentionally send positive emotions to yourself and others, you sustain coherence longer and increase its positive effect.

A good place to start step 2 is to appreciate *yourself* for a minute or two. There are probably many things about yourself that you could appreciate. Go ahead—nobody's looking. If you have trouble finding something, simply appreciate yourself for reading this book and making a sincere effort to lower your blood pressure and improve your health. You are in charge here. This isn't your doctor telling you what you have to do, or writing you a prescription. It isn't anything that's going to give you side effects (except the "side effects" of having cortical facilitation and possibly improving your

health, your home life, and your work life). Now appreciate yourself for practicing these tools. You're taking the time, and doing something for yourself, as simple as it may seem.

After appreciating yourself—really feel that appreciative attitude—just shift a little and radiate that appreciation out to others. You might pick members of your family for this exercise today. Tomorrow you might pick people who have helped you out in times of need. Or your book club, or your tennis group, or people you are close to at work or at your church. Simply expand the focus of your appreciation outward from yourself to those around you.

Sustaining Coherence

Try to sustain appreciative feelings and attitudes in a Heart Lock-In for five minutes or longer. The longer you can do this and hold it, the better it is for you and your system. You're learning to sustain coherence.

Remember, if your thoughts wander or you are distracted in some other way, it's not a problem. Just go back to Heart Focus and Heart Breathing. Once you've gotten back into your heart breathing rhythm, simply return to appreciating yourself and then radiate appreciation out to your chosen group for this session.

When to Practice Heart Lock-In

Practicing the Heart Lock-In technique for ten or fifteen minutes every day—all at once, or divided into two or three sessions—helps to very quickly groove beneficial pathways driven by coherence. It's ideal to spend some time at the beginning of each day doing this, before the horns in your world start blowing, and the phone calls start pouring in, and

the e-mails start flooding your in-box. Why not start the day with a coherent program playing in your system?

Most people find that doing a Heart Lock-In a couple of times a day helps to accumulate energy and recharge their emotional system. It cushions the impact of day-to-day stress and reduces energy drain. Doing a short, midday Lock-In is very effective for offsetting the feeling of afternoon drag. That drag results in less focus and motivation. It's also a time when you might be tempted to snack or grab another cup of coffee to pump up your energy level. Let Heart Lock-In reenergize your emotional system instead.

Another time to use Heart Lock-In is just before sleep. Many have found that doing the Heart Lock-In technique at this time promotes a more restful sleep and is especially helpful with insomnia.

Practicing the Heart Lock-In technique while listening to background music that lifts your spirit can increase its positive effects (McCraty et al. 1996; McCraty et al. 1998; McCraty, Atkinson, and Tomasino 2001). Coauthor Doc Childre has created two music CDs that are designed to be used with Heart Lock-In to facilitate coherence and emotional regeneration (see "Learn More About HeartMath").

Heart Lock-In helps to rewrite the old, automatic programming and to lock-in a new pattern so that when you need to quickly use Neutral or Quick Coherence in the heat of the moment, the coherent pattern and pathway becomes more accessible, and eventually preferred.

In a short while, and with some regular practice, you won't have to stop and recall all the steps of the tools. For example, with Heart Lock-In, all you'll need to remember are the key words: shift, activate, and send. Your "switch" will be readily available to you. You will find that simply shifting your attention to your heart will start the cascade of positive

reactions inside, just as your old habits triggered the negative reactions.

You have control over your programming. Now have some fun and use these tools. You will be surprised to look back and see how often you were hijacked by your old responses, and how effective your new responses have become.