

RENEWNEWS



RENEW helps people who juggle work, family and community commitments sustain (or regain) their enthusiasm, effectiveness and purpose



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The Mystery of the Mellow Mice

by Linda Hawes Clever, MD

Brain research is starting to reveal why things we've done for millennia, such as reflecting, conversing and planning, actually work. Now we know some of the reasons that RENEW works. RENEW uses brains to accomplish our vision: to reignite the human spirit to thrive and to make a positive difference.

For example, why should the adage, "Take time to smell the roses" be so familiar? Why should a walk in the woods be so refreshing? Here's why: MRIs show that experiencing Nature changes blood flow in the brain so that the centers for empathy, altruism and short-term memory get a welcome bath. Reciprocally, the centers for fear, anxiety and depression settle down. You can even look at a picture of Nature and feel better!

Recall the toe-tapping song's advice, "You've got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative..." It turns out that merely 20 seconds (!) of recalling good times, accomplishments or gratitude can dampen your irritable amygdala's penchant for clanging. The amygdala is a center for the aforementioned fear and anxiety. Imagine the lift your brain and you would get if you spent a few seconds to remember smiles and practice your strengths.

Getting to the mellow mice, NIH-funded gene transfer studies at Stanford suggest that slowed breathing caused by the absence of 175 very specialized nerve cells decreases activation of the locus coeruleus in the brain stem. The locus coeruleus is responsible for arousing — even agitating — the entire brain. So, slow deep breaths cause less activation of the locus, and this in turn means less brain-wide distress. Picture these mice chilling out and grooming themselves (stroking their whiskers and curling their eyelashes) and generally enjoying life. We could all use some of that. That's what the relaxed breathing of yoga and meditation can do.

Finally, laughter is indeed one of the best medicines. Laughing starts in the brain and spreads. At least for awhile, laughing can lower blood pressure, relieve asthma, and get you through tough times. It can connect you with others. It can lower tensions and heal divisions. As a friend said, "It fixes a whole bunch of stuff."

Stay tuned. Sources such as university and scientific publications, and even National Geographic will report more about how you can adjust your brain and your brain can adjust you. The line between agitated and activated may thin, yet it is at least somewhat manageable. As the song urges "...spread joy up to the maximum, bring gloom down to the minimum, have faith..." [and breathe deeply].

New Panel of Advisors Awe with Accomplishments

Marsha Vande Berg is a non-executive corporate director and published expert on Asia Pacific's Investment, policy and corporate governance environment. She holds a Master's from Duke University; and a Ph.D from Vanderbilt. As consultant, she briefs clients on risk factors and investment in international markets. As a volunteer director, she serves on the RAND Center for Asia Pacific Policy board; The Asia Foundation President's Leadership Council and the Japan Society. She is a continuing Distinguished Career Fellow at Stanford and co-chairs its alumni Steering Committee. She is a member of International Women's Forum.

Kathleen Burke is a graduate of Washington State University with a B.A., Political Science, and of Georgetown University Law Center. For seven years she served as Executive Director of the Stupski Foundation, focused on K-12 public education reform. Previously she spent 20 years in the financial services, blending legal, human resources and executive management experience. Her private sector career culminated as Vice Chairman of Bank of America in San Francisco, CA and head of the Corporate Human Resources and Corporate Diversity Development groups. Kathi has served on numerous non-profit boards in the Bay Area. She is currently a trustee of Mills College, a director of Envision Education, and a member of the Human Capital and Talent Management Committee of the Board of Directors of Beneficial State Bank. Kathi is also a member of the International Women's Forum.

"1440" Engages Minds and Ignites Hearts

A new "multiversity" located in the redwoods edging Silicon Valley, 1440 merges quiet, deep learning time with trusted faculty and curricula, delicious food and sleep, and opportunities for seekers to connect with themselves and each other. The goals are to enjoy, restore, and reenergize. Goodness knows that is important for the not-for-profit leaders who will gather on the gorgeous campus for a special Service Week in early September. Bay Area nonprofit staff, board members, and key stakeholders, as well as select national nonprofit representatives, will flock to participate in the various sessions. At the invitation of Center for Excellence in Nonprofits, 1440's partner, RENEW will give a three hour workshop on "Practical Ways to Do Great Work and Have a Life, Too!" We relish working with *and* networking with nonprofit professionals who engage in such an essential spectrum of service.



People are Talking!

"This is a new angle!" said a representative of Stanford's HIP while planning a RENEWing program for the HIP coaches...

"RENEW is the "one thing" that does it for me every time! I can sincerely say that this Conversing About Nursing group has sustained my soul in my professional and personal life over these past 15 years. The genius is in the weaving of our shared stories into a multicolored cloak of true belonging, which seems to settle in just as we are saying goodbye. RENEW gives me the inspiration to continue to follow my heart, to reach for my true gifts, those of the Self, and to continue to bring the light of hope into the world of work, family and community." Anne Pera, RN, BSN, HN-BC, PHN