Presents

Upshift, Downshift,
About Shift

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Brain References
The term downshifting describes a natural brain phenomenon – the brain’s response to a perceived lack of safety.

Some authors use this term (Hart, Barron, Pearce, Caine).

Others use “reflective” and “reflexive” (Sylwester).
McLean’s Triune Brain Model can help you to understand downshifting more easily.

Each brain layer contains distinct functions – although all systems interact continually at some level.

The brain can shift up and down through these layers as if they were gears.
Compare brain downshifting to vehicles with an automatic transmission

The degree of downshifting reflects the degree of threat perceived by the automatic transmission (or the brain)

Downshifting is designed for and best utilized for bonafide threats in the short term only
In situations that involve trauma, crisis, fear, or any type of threat (anything that triggers a sense of helplessness) the brain tends to direct its attention and energy automatically toward lower brain areas attempting to access functions it believes will promote safety.

Experiences a sense of anxiety – not the excitement of a challenge.
Reptilian Layer – 1\textsuperscript{st} Gear

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Brain Stem and the Cerebellum

- Processes present \textbf{tense only}
- Perceives \textbf{positives} (subconscious)
- Tends to dominate when threat is perceived
- Houses stress responses (fight-flight, tend-befriend, conserve-withdraw)
- Provides an awareness of the outer sensory world
Reptilian Layer, Cont’d
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- Compare to the “id”
- Carries perception that *I am here and it’s all about me* (egocentric)
- Doesn’t use language but able to perceive it
- Houses the Reticular Activating Systems that influences one’s Extraversion-Introversion
- Is usually the last portion of the brain to die
Mammalian Layer – 2\textsuperscript{nd} Gear

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Limbic System Structures

- Perceives \textit{present and past tenses}
- Perceives \textit{positives} (subconscious thoughts)
- Processes the sense of smell directly
- Directs immune system function
- Processes information 80,000 times faster than the thinking brain layer
Mammalian Layer, Cont’d

- Transfers information from short to long term memory
- Assembles associations for memory recall (search engine)
- Compare to the “ego” – recognizes *I am here but so are you*
- Generates emotional impulses
- Provides foundation for relationships with its tools of emotion
Neo-Cortex Layer – 3rd Gear

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Cerebrum (eight lobes)

- Registers awareness of present, past, and future tenses
- Perceives positives and negatives
- Provides functions related to consciousness
- Decodes most sensory stimuli (smell is decoded in the emotional layer)
- Compare to the “superego” – can think of the good of others
Pre-frontal cortex contributes executive aspects (e.g., abstract thought, metaphor, planning, goal-setting, paying attention, conscience, willpower, morality)

Limitless potential for processing concepts

Uses all forms of language with complex analysis

Can process 125 bits of information and 40 bits of human speech per second
Undesirable Consequences

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- Fail to recall (e.g., people tend to recall less than 15% of what was told to them during a crisis)
- Decrease in cognitive learning
- Develop or activate phobias
- Accelerate the aging process
- Alter immune system
Experience a reduced ability to take cues into consideration

Less able to engage in complex mental tasks (e.g., ↓ creativity)

Fail to see interconnectedness or generate solutions for problems

Reactivate old learned beliefs / behavior patterns / addictive behaviors regardless of available information
Valid Fear  
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Alerts you to actual / potential danger

- Identify the worst thing that could happen
- Evaluate possibility versus probability
- Can you do anything about the situation?
  - ✓ If yes, take appropriate action
  - ✓ If no, practice the Serenity Prayer ...
Imagined Fear

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Typically represents learned behaviors related to negative thinking

- Sabotages problem-solving
- Is unlikely to improve the odds
- Can be unlearned

✔ To change the way you feel, you must change the way you think!
Identify symptoms you tend to exhibit when you are downshifted

- sighing, defending, stonewalling, arguing, crying, yelling, avoiding, pouting, whining, fighting, bullying, jumping to conclusions, taking things personally, overreacting, isolating, overcomplying, overconforming

Sadness in response to a situation of loss may or may not involve downshifting
Anxiety Gender Differences

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Girl Brains
More difficulty coping with death or permanent separation

Boy Brains
More difficulty coping with parental fighting or divorce
The effects are more intense and last longer
#2 Upshifting

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Identify factors that have triggered your downshifting in the past -- so you can be better prepared in the future

- Trauma or crisis…
- Illness, fatigue, over-work…
- Perceived negative experiences …
- What others have said to / about you …
#3 Upshifting
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Identify patterns of behavior you tend to exhibit related to your downshifting

- Offender, victim, or other?
- When and where?
- Appropriate or not?
- Length of time downshifted?
Your Strategies
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Upshift using a pre-planned strategy

✓ Think of something funny and choose to laugh
✓ Engage in positive self-talk
✓ Sing, meditate, pray, recite a mantra
✓ Exercise (especially cross-lateral)
✓ Access your support system
Strategies, Cont’d

- Picture yourself in a safe place
- Contract with yourself to “deal with it later in the day”
- Engage in a task over which you can have some control
- Identify something to appreciate (it is physiologically impossible to be fearful and appreciative at the same time)
Downshifting typically occurs automatically

- Develop strategies to prevent unnecessary downshifting
- Learn to identify quickly when you are in a downshifted state
- Pre-plan strategies to upshift as quickly as appropriate
If communication isn’t going well, think downshifting

Your behavior may trigger another brain to downshift

The degree of downshifting reflects the degree of threat perceived by that other brain
You cannot upshift another brain—you may be able to do something to help the other brain feel safer, which might allow it to upshift on its own.

Ask yourself: “What can I do to help enhance that brain’s sense of safety?”

Here are a few suggestions.
1. Speak Affirmingly

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Use short, positive, present-tense words and statements so all brain layers can perceive the information.

Say what you want to have happen as if it’s already occurring; avoid saying what you do not want to have happen.
Avoid sending mixed messages

The message content of the communication is conveyed by:

- Words - 7% to 10%
- Tonality / inflection: - 15% to 38%
- Body language - 55% to 75%
3. Avoid Asking “Why?”
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“Why did you (or didn’t you) do that?”

Why questions typically indicate the person should have done something else.

The perceived anxiety can cause the brain to downshift.

Try asking for information in a different way.
Suggestions

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• What did you hope would happen?
• When you made this choice what did you think might happen?
• What could you do differently next time?
• What can you do to course-correct now?

Most people do about the best they can at the time with what they know . . .
Each brain is unique and will never perceive anything exactly the same as your brain does.

If the other brain is anxious due to the arguing, it may downshift even further or stay downshifted longer.
5. Provide Options

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The brain tends to feel safer when it can:

✓ Make a choice, however simple
✓ Exercise some control over something

Consciously set up the environment to provide as many options as possible
6. Communication Tips

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Communicate at eye level

Mirror sensory language style

Solicit input and feedback

Avoid demanding agreement

Acknowledge the other’s point of view
7. Use Humor

Mirthful laughter helps promote comfort, relaxation, and a sense of safety

Laugh at yourself and at the vagaries of life

Avoid laughing at others

It is difficult to remain upset when brains are laughing together
Conclusion
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Used appropriately, downshifting is a natural and valuable phenomenon that can help keep you “safer”

Used inappropriately, it can result in undesirable consequences

Your brain is your bottom line—use it by design for success!