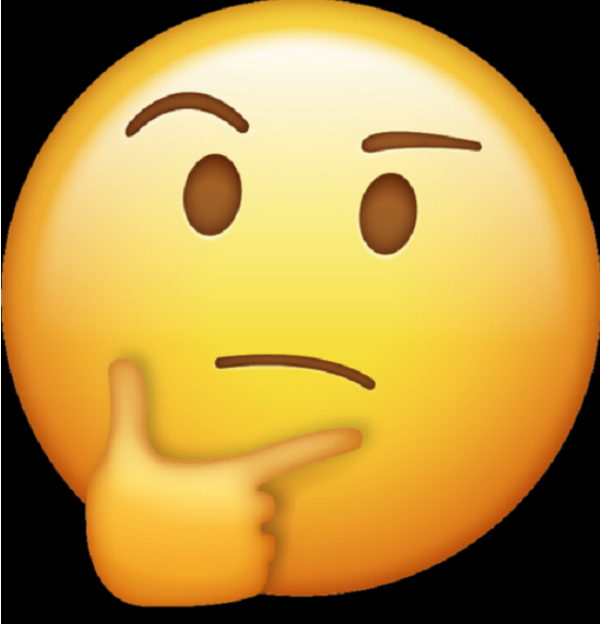


KEEPING YOUR SANITY BY UNDERSTANDING WHAT WE REMEMBER

<https://www.2thepointnews.com/keeping-your-sanity-by-understanding-what-we-remember/>



How do I remember what?

We each have, in effect, two selves: an experiencing self and a remembering self. Understanding the difference can help us make the most of our best times, and minimize the memory of our unpleasant ones.

Imagine that you're asked to hold your hand in ice water for sixty seconds. It's unpleasant, painful, and not something most of us would choose to do for fun.

Now, imagine that you're asked to do the same thing, same temperature, but then once that 60 seconds is up, continue holding your hand in the ice water for another 30 seconds. The only difference is that the additional 30 seconds will be one degree warmer than the first 60 seconds.

Which would you choose?

The shorter one, of course! After all, the initial 60 seconds will be identical in both cases, and then you're adding another 30 seconds more pain to that for the longer one.

Well, strange as it sounds, you're likely to choose the longer one.

When this was researched, after experiencing each of these, most people chose to repeat the 90 second painful experience over the 60 second painful experience.

Let me tell you why.

When we experience something painful, what our memory stores is the most painful moment and the ending. How long something lasts doesn't carry much weight.

The people choosing the longer pain were choosing from their *remembering* self. The part of our mind that stores the experiences we have. Whereas just now in the thought experiment you were choosing from your *experiencing* self. You were imagining what the experience would be as you're going through it.

This can be confusing, because while we live our lives moment to moment in our experiencing self, we hold all of our experience, integrated with our sense of self, our life story, and our understanding of how things are, in our remembering self.

Our self-concept, our sense of who we are, is primarily created around our remembering self, while we live in the moment through our experiencing self. This has implications for how we make decisions.

As Daniel Kahneman, author of *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, puts it: “The *experiencing self* is the one that answers the question: ‘Does it hurt now?’ The *remembering self* is the one that answers the question: ‘How was it, on the whole?’”

So with the ice plunge, we don't really remember that one was 60 seconds and the other was 90 seconds. The peak of pain would've been the same, since both include that first 60 seconds at the same temperature. What we remember is that the last 30 seconds of the longer session seemed a little less painful – since it was a tiny bit less cold.

That last 30 seconds of very slightly reduced pain made an impression, and because of that, we remember the whole experience as less unpleasant. So even though in reality we'll be exposing our experiencing self to an additional 30 seconds of pain, our remembering self will prefer it, because of the impression that it was less unpleasant overall.

We also remember the peaks and endings of pleasurable experiences. That's why we can have a wonderful vacation, experiencing lots of pleasure, but then if there's trouble at the end – a fight, some awful complications that are upsetting – what we remember is the peak of the pleasure, but also the negative ending. And that negative ending colors the whole experience in our memory.

From our experiencing self, we want pleasure to last a long time, but pain to be short. From our remembering self, we only remember how *intense* the pain or pleasure was at its peak, and how it ended, not how long it lasted. We represent the experience more as a snapshot of the peak and the ending.

How can we use this?

If you have something not so pleasant on the horizon – a root canal, an emotionally difficult meeting or confrontation – see if you can soften the painful memory of it with something more pleasant at the end, maybe something yummy to eat, or relaxing in some nice surroundings.

It doesn't have to be much, anything that will feel even a little better than the rest of the ordeal can help – remember the ice water was only 1 degree warmer.

And if you're the deliverer of such an experience – the dentist performing the root canal – you can help the person enduring the unpleasantness by making sure it ends well – like that extra 30 seconds of slightly warmer water in the ice bath. You may find that your patients are less reluctant to make their appointments.

Painful experiences are part of life, but you're not likely to spend money for the express purpose of the pain. You *are* very likely to spend money for the express purpose of pleasure.

If you're planning a pleasurable event, you can deliberately focus on the peak pleasure and a positive ending, as far as you're able to control for those things.

For example, if you're planning a vacation, aim to have some novel experiences that are likely to be a lot of fun – but don't worry about stretching it out or packing the whole time full of activities so you squeeze every drop possible, because you won't remember it all. Then aim to finish the trip with something particularly nice.

Of course, things happen, flights get delayed, luggage gets lost... but to the extent you can build in some nice peaks and a delightful ending, you'll remember it as a joyful time on the whole.

My Danish friends have a tradition at the end of a late-night party. They have what they call “go home soup” – a delicious bowl of soup to wrap up the evening and send you warmly on your way. More than 30 years after my friend's wedding in Denmark, I still remember that soup at the end, along with a couple of the nicest moments from the event.

So let's say you're spending money on an experience, and you have the choice of paying the same money for a very nice longer time, or a shorter time with a couple of particularly delightful events included and a lovely experience at the end. How would you plan that now?

Remember that the length of time isn't the important thing. Better to plan something particularly delightful to provide a wonderful peak experience, and arrange for a nice ending, than to plan a longer experience without those features.

(By the way, if you've been on any of Jack's trips, like I have, you know that he builds this in to every one of them.)

Living well isn't just about having the best time all the time. It's about aiming for things and experiences that make a difference, for our remembering selves.

PS: My course, *Mastering Emotions, Moods and Reactions* can help you with this part of your life in much greater detail, with deep understanding and practical skills for mastering these systems and living well. And now you can purchase the *workbook* for this course separately for \$29.95 plus shipping. You can still get the online course with the downloadable workbook at a deep discount, for \$99, if you use this code: LB99.

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