

tips&tools

Anchors - Gaining Resourceful States

This article explains how to use a psychological technique called Anchors to adopt a more positive approach to any situation.

Commonly used in sport they are now popular in management.

Anchors - Gaining Resourceful States

Anchors

You may remember the famous experiment of Pavlov, the Russian scientist. Pavlov noticed that his dogs salivated whenever he gave them food. He decided to try ringing a bell when he gave the dogs their food. He did this a number of times. Then he would bring food in and ring a bell and let the dog see and smell the food. They salivated and got excited. Then he tried ringing the bell even when no food was present - the result? The dogs still salivated. They had learned to associate the bell with food and so eventually even just the bell created the state.

This story is a simple example of an anchor. The salivation was anchored by the bell. Humans are more complex than dogs but we too can have anchors - stimuli which produce a state in us.

In the famous TV programme, 'The Heist', Derren Brown takes a group of ordinary, law abiding people through a series of 'motivational training sessions'. Without realising it, they are developing strong associations between images, actions and music with feelings of power and a desire to take risks. In other words, Derren Brown is deliberately forging an anchor among participants. One so strong, in fact, that when he sets up the various cues in a real-life situation, several of the participants voluntarily attempt armed robbery on a security guard. Anchors can be pretty powerful.

Most people have some simple everyday anchors, which have been unconsciously created. Some of them might be undesirable - such as the urge to buy chocolate every time you go to a petrol station, or to have a cigarette every time you drink alcohol. Others are more useful - playing a specific piece of music to get in the party mood, or wearing a piece of clothing that makes you feel good before a job interview.

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Using Anchors Positively

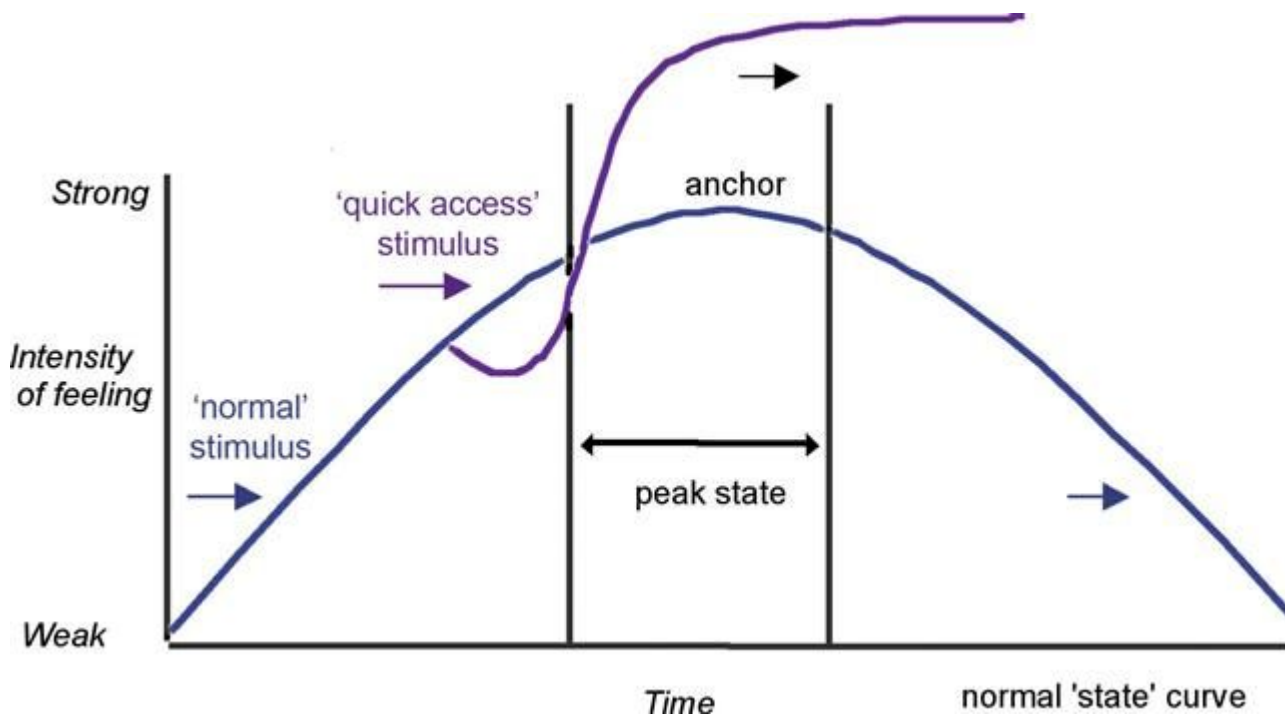
Wouldn't it be good if you could create your own powerful anchors, to access positive states on demand? Well, the good news is, you don't have to be Derren Brown to do this. In fact, people use them all the time - from the All Black Rugby team performing the haka before a match, to the CEO who always presses the back of their hand to gain confidence before an important speech.

You might want to create an anchor to:

- relax and gain poise during a difficult negotiation
- feel confident before delivering a presentation
- access a calm state of mind in order to manage stress

Peak states

The illustration below shows how an anchored state compares to a normal state:



In this case you can see how an anchor gives you speedy access to a more resourceful state. And you don't have to go through the elaborate build up to get to a peak state. An anchor helps get us to a state which:

- is more intense than the 'normal' state
- is much quicker to get to
- lasts for longer
- has a 'quick access' stimulus



Creating your anchor

Anchoring is a process you need to practice. There are five basic steps to achieving an anchored state:

1. Recall a past experience where you were successful: make it as vivid and intense as you can

You might need an anchor to help you relax and gain poise during conversations or negotiations that make you angry and stressed out. For this, you need to recall a situation where you felt compassionate, calm and positive. You might recall a happy moment with friends, a time when you helped out a stranger, or a moment during your professional life when you successfully sorted out a problem for a colleague. The important thing is that you can vividly recall those positive feelings of calm and compassion.

You need to go right back to that time. Float down into your body. What do you see? What sounds do you hear? What feelings do you have?

2. Give yourself a specific physical stimulus as the experience reaches its peak

It needs to be something that you can do quite easily without anyone noticing, but it must be unique. So as those feelings of calm and control reach maximum intensity you might press together the little finger and thumb of your left hand.

3. Change from the peak state to return to normal un-stimulated state

Stop your physical stimulus and think about something completely different for a few minutes.

4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 several times until the stimulus and the state are anchored

5. Practice using the anchor to check that it works effectively

Try using anchors to:

- boost your confidence before an important meeting or presentation
- remain calm and poised during a difficult negotiation
- relax and feel calm after a challenging discussion or confrontation
- power up to a more energised and productive state to meet a deadline
- turn on a burst of creativity to solve a crisis

If you're repeatedly suffering from the same 'mindset blocks' to your performance, try using anchors and see the difference it makes.



What's next?

If this article has interested you and you wish to discuss it further, please contact Bernard Ross at The Management Centre on +44 (0)20 7978 1516, or [click here to send him an e.mail.](#)

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