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## Using Anxiety as a Catalyst for Self-Development

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, anxiety already permeated our day-to-day lives in the form of terrorism, mass shootings, environmental degradation, political instability, etc. Individually, we find ourselves competing against others at work, in sports and school, for jobs and social status to maintain a positive sense of self-worth. By increasing our dopamine levels to create desire, our phones, apps and social media are engineered to get us to seek rewards. At the same time, they also increase our cortisol levels keeping us in a near constant state of anxiety with the only way to relieve this anxiety a constant-check-in with our mobile devices. This destroys our ability to focus on such things like our relationships with others which are an effective source of reducing our anxiety ([Brain Hacking - 60 Minutes](#)).

Most of the time, our response to anxiety is unconscious and reactive. It allows us to survive but not thrive. In general, our unhealthy and counterproductive responses to anxiety include strategies such as suppression (e.g., with alcohol or drugs), control (effective only in the short-term), distraction (e.g., binge-watching television show, sports, and social media), and living within a safe-zone in which our anxiety is not provoked which limits our realm of potential being. At work, anxiety alone reduces productivity, while applying the coping measures above exacerbates this decline.

As paradoxical as it may sound, increased levels of anxiety because of COVID-19 and other perils afford us an opportunity for personal development and self-fulfillment if we learn to pay attention to, and be with, our anxiety to allow us to find clarity in what we value – that which feels threatened when we are anxious. We can then develop our ability to not get lost in our anxiety and redirect our attention away from it to allow us to act consistently with our values to fulfill a self-transcendent purpose that positively impacts others and our world.

Such a self-developmental relationship with anxiety requires our acceptance and an in-the-moment awareness of our anxiety and to defuse ourselves from this anxiety. It then requires the ability to be open, curious and nonjudgmental of it as it naturally emerges and dissipates. Finally, we must shift our attention to and act upon our values to fulfill our self-transcendent purpose.

Participants in the workshop learn about anxiety as a human condition and how it is experienced. They develop understanding of negative and positive aspects of anxiety, its consequences within the context of their lives and leadership, and how to use it as a catalyst for their leadership development.

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