

Forcing Brain Processing, Bottom-up

And no longer fighting a neuro-battle you'll always lose

Fall 2021

Starting at the lizard brain...

So I wanted to give you a smooth work-flow for passing through the gates of your brain's prioritized behaviors... but the suggestion, most realistically, would be... follow what we discussed in the Deeper Details and Implications episodes. The hierarchy of processes that were outlined and the ways that they relate, fairly directly, to trauma recovery. Together, I think they do a good job of providing the stepping stones to getting through some real shit.

Instead of repeating them at you, I'll list both processing flows out for you in a document (the end of this one), so you can take a look at them together.

And, as long as we're talking about integrating these episodes together, before you get started on today's exercise, you might want to revisit the tips and tricks to keeping this process rolling without your head following suit.

Consider those the helpful reminders to proceed and pervade your biologically-determined brain processing procedure... and the ways to prevent a whole mess of processing events from waiting for you, again, down the line.

But, today we're talking about the other way you might want to guide your transit through what honestly feels very, very bad, often powerless, and debatable if you'll ever come out the other end... Starting at the bottom, just like your brain processes do, and working your way upwards.

By this, I mean... recognize that if your head isn't working right, there's a good chance you need to tap into something deep down inside yourself before you're going to get clear skies observable from the penthouse up top. So, you're going to have to do something that I, personally, suck at.

Notice your body still exists.

Put your attention into it. Sift out the physical pains from physical factors and illnesses - which, in and of itself, might require some weeks or months of getting back to a healthy, less reactive place. And then determine what feelings are still actually floating around on the inside.

When and where are you having survival responses? Do you have any idea why, or is it a lingering stress? How can you tease those responses apart from your normal degree of physical discomfort?

Figure out what's triggering survival or stress reflexes in your body. Is there a memory or a looming pressure that's creating "do or die" narratives, coursing through your veins? Or are you exhausted from parasympathetic activations? And, if so, what holding patterns or points of defeat are present in your brain, body, and external life? What's got you hibernating instead of fighting?

If you get through the survival system stage, you're ready for the next body-based processing.

What ARE the other sensations going on, on an emotional basis? That deep, dark, "void," what's that about? The churning, knotting stomach - what messy emotional ball would you attribute that to? What's up with the subtle, but actually pervasive and secretly gut-wrenching, sadness you're holding on to?

Start pinpointing sensations inside your body, specifically in your chest and guts, and getting CURIOUS about what they are, what they're related to, and what they mean. And I mean that. You're going to have to ask yourself "what's up with this and why," and the answer can't be general such as "my life sucks." DEFINE what memories the emotions are connected to. Lean IN TO THEM, without any distractions, and ask yourself questions.

What the fuck is this. Why. How long has it been there.

Force yourself to start with the emotional processing, and I bet you'll find yourself transitioning into the experiential memory processing in no time at all, which is where you'll get your answers. They'll *tell you* what you're feeling about, more likely than not. Feel a pang, explore the sensory memories and immersions that come with. See it, hear it, feel it.

As you start having experiential flashbacks that are connected to the emotions, you'll also get those partial narrative memories.

Now you can start to see what you're REALLY upset about - it's probably your INTERPRETATION of events. What stories are you telling yourself from your cognitions leading to emotional changes, which probably lead back into more shitty cognitive events. OR what

stories are your emotions telling by influencing thought uprisings that might become ruminatory or difficult to make sense of?

This is where you're going to spend the most time, I would guess. Just piecing together the patches of unfinished work contained in the body and lower brain - your emotional, experiential, and narrative memories - and then actually trying your hand at analyzing what you think of them, altogether.

Which, yeah, is going to be an unpleasant process. You'll probably be here for a while, swimming around in old details while trying to keep yourself grounded in the moment. But try to keep your feet underneath you, as you ask a bunch of questions about the information that's tripping you up and try to make sense of it all.

Why is this such an enduring emotional event? Is it caused by your own thoughts ABOUT the event? Is it because you can't make up your mind about how you FEEL about the event? Do you have dueling information leading you in two different directions? Are you just hung up on this data because you're confused, overwhelmed, or unable to fit it cleanly within your usual view of your self?

If so, start to wonder about the quality of that information, before you wonder about the cumulative quality of your being as a living organism.

What's realistic? What's skewed by memories of other events? What's an assumption? What's an old thinking pattern popping up? What's someone else's opinion? What's your shame monster, shitting all over your experiences with tales of your terrible nature? Why has this particular pain point been hanging out for so long? What isn't resolved about it? Have you ever TRIED to resolve it before? Why didn't that work, or why have you avoided it for this long?

Dig around. Ask a lot of questions. Try to contextualize the experience of carrying this weight for so long, and look for details that have been particularly disturbing or triggering to other unpleasant neural pathways. How has it been complicated by relating to OTHER events or unsolved questions?

Give the whole thing as much context as possible, including doing some outside research or reaching for external perspectives at this point, if you need some extra help grounding the memories in reality or determining what's an appropriate appraisal on your part. Make sense of it, so you could concisely explain the situation out loud to a peer.

This is what happened. This is how it felt. This is how it's been affecting my head. This is how it connects to other issues. This is why it's not real or that detail is unfair. This is the way it relates

to old self-hating narratives I've been lugging around. This is the reality of it, though. This is what I saw and now what I think about it.

At the end, you should ideally be coming up with a firm narrative - what do you believe about this event, what did you experience, what do you feel about it, and how do you ultimately view the happenings?

And then, lastly... how do these event details fit into the entire picture of your existence?

Is it congruent? Does this event change how you see past or current conditions? Did you learn anything new about yourself or others that might change your interpretation or any person or related event?

Does this fit in line with how you view your self? If not, what change can you make now to correct it in the future, tying this into a "woopsy blip" on your timeline, not a defining feature or ultimate destination? Or, how can you see yourself more realistically, with this event now sewn into your historical mind? Have you been mis-estimating yourself all along?

And in what ways have these half-baked assumptions and ideas been possibly changing the filter you've placed over... every subsequent event in life? Especially as it bonked around your head, unquestioned and on fire, this whole time?

You might find... your brain's actually been making everything pretty exhausting, excruciating, and difficult by housing all these unfinished processes that tend come with negative bits and pieces of inner critic mutterings.

So, make that smooth story, make it a good one, and make sure you're ending on a high note that leads into a more positive and realistic, self-directed, future.

And if you're STILL having a hard time getting there... well, I've got a great tip for you, coming up in the BONUS release. A way to skip to the end of the line and force your Self perception, which can help you process everything from the TOP DOWN, instead of this painful procedure that often leaves us too triggered to carry on, trying to conduct business from the emotional BOTTOM UP.

I hope you're ready for that one. Because it's been a sanity-instilling game changer for me. One that puts Self at the top of the deck and ends the "spinning in shit details" effect, when you're looking back at your whole life so far.

Stay tuned, it's coming up next.

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In the meantime, get the process priority hierarchy list AND the trauma recovery flow that runs tandem in written form on the Patreon. And try to seal this picture of a brain, with arrows leading from the bottom-back to the top-front into your own head... next time you feel like you're not the one holding the steering wheel, consider what you're engaging from the lower-brain, and imagine climbing a ladder towards the prefrontal cortex. It helps me just to visualize the various compartments of the brain and recognize "oh, yeah, I've got some lizard shit going on. And that's necessary to be a full human down the road."

See you in the bonus episode. And don't shy away from processing the past so you can understand the present and redesign the future.

Cheers y'all.

RECAP (See Pt II of the Brain Hierarchy of Processing Series for audio version)**Processing hierarchy**

Automatic survival and fear responses (such as getting nervous system-deregulated or engaging your fight or flight cascade)

Emotions (as in, having feelings that act as a conduit between your brain, body, and the world to tell you how to act. Also, this is the level of creating and retrieving emotional memories, which we continually talk about being a different category of memories from word recollections, because they are completely different priorities.)

Experiential memories (as in, tying together multiple senses to create a movie-version of events playing in your skull. Also, accessing your early implicit memories, which are generally behavioral programs you learned so young and/or persistently in life that you can't remember when you ever first encountered the information. Plus, this is where past recollections of visual, auditory, olfactory, sensory experiences will pop up.)

Word representations of emotions and experiences (Meaning, your translation of physical emotional and experiential events into thought-based, abstract, human language. Also known as, creating disjointed tidbits of declarative memories from what you felt and saw. Having partial narratives of events and feelings, sometimes interspersed with the words you've collected from others making appearances.)

Acknowledgement of outside facts (This is your higher level integrative process of finally enlisting your working memory. Taking information from your life and adding in new, more objective data from external sources. Holding them together in one place to collect context. This would be the maintenance and initial integration portion of your working memory.)

Realizing more realistic limitations of existing in time-space (Let's call this long term memory retrieval processes, in which you remember your inherent fallibility and ignorance as a living organism. Realizing what you *knew* at that time... is different than what you *know* now, removed from the event... and trying to mesh those two perspectives. I think we can consider this stage to also be functions of your working memory - specifically informational *manipulation*, which is a different process in a different part of your head. It means you can HOLD data from different perspectives... but also have the power to shape the information. As in, you can change the meaning of the short-term memory you're holding onto, not just cling to those first data points.)

Internally and externally congruent, logical and reasonable narratives creation (We can correlate this with increasingly high levels of memory integration and reconsolidation, in which you reassess old information with a new narrative based on more recent information, thus changing

the coding of the memory in your brain synapses. And we can also connect this to the process of decision making. Deciding HOW you feel about events, WHAT really happened, and how you react to the memory in the current day, with all information in tow.)

And, then, *finally*,

You gain access to your full timeline of historically derived information, and have the power to take broad views that include personal identity integration (This would be your long term potentiation of neural networks, or, the “sealing-in” of information into a historical learned filing cabinet. Moving data from short term to long term memory. It’s also the process of creating autobiographical stories. Also, where we get a “sense of self,” or “lifelong identity,” or “cohesive personal story,” as we keep talking about.)

RECAP (See Pt III of the Brain Hierarchy of Processing Series for audio version)**In trauma recovery the stages translate to:**

Step One: Believe you're okay. Turn down the nervous system by convincing it that you're not in danger right now.

Step Two: Handle those emotions and experiential memories. WHAT do you feel on a sensory basis and why? What have you seen? What experiments are your brain still trying to turn into known, accepted, information and events?

Step Three: Learn how to NAME and INTERPRET your emotions. Take these senses and experiential inputs and make language around them, so you aren't just floating in feelings.

Step Four: Combine the language and the experiential memories together to organize the clusterfuck of previously unlabeled information.

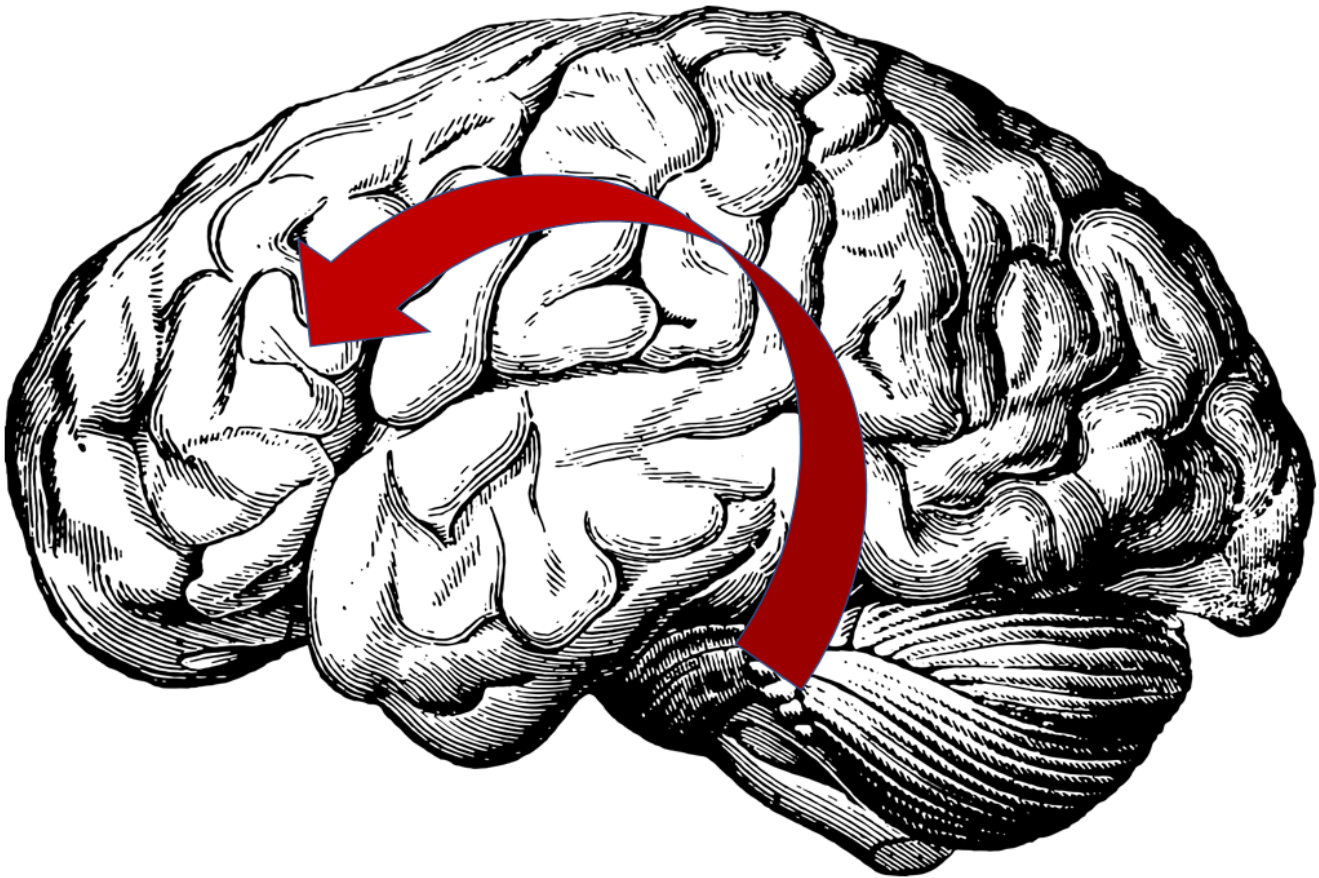
Step Five: Gather outside data to give more context to the events. To see broader trends. To notice the circumstances that surrounded the experience. To pull in objective observations untethered to the perceptions of the person, themselves.

Step Six: Understand the limitations of that poor organism enduring this mess, and I mean at the moment of impact, not at THIS moment down the line with more available data.

Step Seven: Decide how you REALLY feel about the whole story, with all of this insight available. Discard unnecessary information. Reframe initial judgments. Make a single story out of the event, rather than a cloud of snippets that span feelings, senses, and words.

Step Eight: Put that story into the context of the much larger story. See the individual as a single, complete, complicated and complex, living thing with a large collection of personal experiments that have been conducted. And derive long-term lessons from that cultivated collection of experiences. Ultimately, braiding them all together to create that lofty "Sense of Self" or "Persistent Identity" or "Autobiographical Representation" that we all need to reinstate so badly.

Higher “human” processes up here
(Prefrontal Cortex Executive Functioner, most of all)



Lower “animal” / “survival” processes down here
Risk detection, living functions, emotions, etc.