



Responding vs Reacting

The art of getting the best out of every scenario

Taught by Andy B Allen

*“Do not get upset with people or situations, both are powerless
without your response”*

- Charles R. Swindoll

Definition

Let's start by defining what it means to respond and to react.

Etymologically speaking, they are basically the same. They are synonyms, which means they can be used interchangeably in most cases, yet there is a slight but fundamental difference between the two. One implies undoing while the other redoing. This is etymologically arguable, yet for the focus of this talk, is not in the etymological side but rather on the sociological/psychological and neurological side.



Definition

“Reacting to” an event is more often than not related to our survival instinct, fight or flight reaction, that’s related to our amygdala and our sympathetic nervous system. While “Responding to” is more often than not related to our decision making process, related to our prefrontal cortex and to our parasympathetic system.



“Life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it”

- Buddha

Responding vs Reacting

This separation between the two words is not to say that one is better than the other or one is good and the other is bad, it is to create awareness on how they affect us and how we can get the best out of each.



Responding vs Reacting

In an ideal world, we want to train ourselves to react and that becomes an unconscious response, unconscious but desired (because it was trained). At the same time, we want to develop the habit of giving ourselves the time to respond when appropriate.



“You can’t control the wind, but you can adjust your sails. It was his way of reminding us that you can’t control most of what happens in life. You can only control your reaction to it.”

- Kristen Proby

Example

First responders are a good example of this. They are trained to react in a mindful way, or in other words, to unconsciously respond. Over time and repetition, they re-shape the natural (fight or flight) responses, and one of the ways they do it is by rehearsing the desired response until it becomes an almost natural or unconscious reaction (a mindful reaction) or second nature



Yoga

One of the reasons why Yoga is instrumental in the re-shaping of this instinctive reactions is because it naturally stimulates the autonomous nervous system to operate in a more balanced manner and to naturally move between the sympathetic and parasympathetic sub-systems. Yogic practices lean more towards the parasympathetic system as that is the one that help us relax and calm down after stressful situations, so overall promotes relaxation, recovery and health in general.



Conclusion

To respond to life instead of to react is a learned process, and therefore it requires us to look deep into ourselves, into our behaviors, our thoughts and mindset. To succeed in the process, it is also required to maintain a steady practice, to be discipline and to be consistent.



Recommended Activities

To stimulate the parasympathetic system

- Cold showers (particularly cold water in the face)
- Humming/Chanting
- Meditative practices/Yoga Nidra
- Massage
- Steam bath or Sauna (hot baths too)
- Breathwork/pranayama, diaphragmatic breathing with long exhalations
- Gentle and slow Yoga practice



Recommended Activities

To stimulate the parasympathetic system

Another recommended practice is called *Saucha* from Patanjali's ashtanga yoga. It is the first practice of the Niyamas or second limb of Raja Yoga. I encourage you to learn and master this teachings of Yoga.



Practice

Choose one or more of the recommended activities and make a daily plan to practice them, journal your thoughts after each practice or at the end of each day, and practice for at least 10 days before you write and send the lesson report.

