

## **Activating the Positive or Negative Emotional Attractors in the Nervous System Change the Persons Cognitive Abilities**

The Positive and Negative Emotional Attractors In his Intentional Change Theory, Boyatzis explained that in pursuit of change or adaptation or in response to change or threat, people and our human systems move toward a Positive Emotional Attractor (PEA) or a Negative Emotional Attractor (NEA). **Arousal of the NEA pulls the person into a stress-aroused state** by arousing the Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS). **This results in decreased cognitive functioning**, decreasing perceptual openness, a severe drop in immune system functioning, and susceptibility to illnesses—not to mention that you feel nervous, anxious, worried, and in general not good.

**In contrast, arousal of the PEA helps a person function at their best.** Research in neuroscience, endocrinology, and psychology has shown that arousing a person's hope for the future stimulates the Parasympathetic Nervous System (PSNS). **This is the state in which the human mind and body is at its cognitive best, can create new neural tissue which allows for learning, engages the immune system, and enables the person to be more open to new ideas, feelings, and other people.**

To summarize, arousal of the PEA helps a person prepare for and engage in sustained, desired change. Arousal of the NEA does the opposite. It facilitates a person closing down and avoiding anything that might induce more stress. It is a defensive posture and invokes diminished capacity for adaptation because it is following an instinctive physiological reaction to chronic or acute prolonged stress to protect the organism.

(Copy from the article *Coaching for Change* in People Matters June 2010, by RICHARD E. BOYATZIS, MELVIN SMITH, ELLEN VAN OOSTEN )