Hack Your Brain: Emotional Intelligence at Work and Beyond

Tuesday, October 16
1-1:50 p.m.

Dr. Lindsay Bira, LLC, Clinical Health Psychologist

Dr. Bira’s keynote presentation will help attendees understand the human factor behind work: How our tricky brains trip us up to make stress heavier and performance harder. She will discuss brain function and work stress, building emotional intelligence, and the power of mindfulness. Attendees will take a journey into perception to learn how the brain works in the background to create our experience of life, and how to reverse that through awareness, insight, and practice to maximize performance and health in the workplace and beyond.
Dr. Lindsay Bira, LLC, Clinical Health Psychologist, San Antonio

Dr. Bira is a clinical health psychologist, TEDx speaker, and served as assistant professor of psychiatry at UT Health San Antonio. She has clinical research specialty in behavioral medicine and PTSD/trauma. She speaks often on the topic of mental health and wellbeing, serves as a consultant on projects that seek to incorporate mental health, and runs a private practice, treating adults and teens for a range of issues. She received her Ph.D. in clinical health psychology from University of Miami. She completed residency with Harvard Medical School and Boston University School of Medicine before completing an additional two-year fellowship in trauma psychology. Dr. Bira has been featured by TEDx, Texas Public Radio, Women’s Health Magazine, Headspace, Science, Nature Biotech, and more for her work in PTSD, mindfulness, brain health and personal growth. She is passionate about breaking stigma around mental health to improve wellbeing and works to bridge the gap between complex research and global understanding.
HACK YOUR BRAIN:

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AT WORK + BEYOND

Dr. LINDSAY BIRA
Clinical Health Psychologist

UT Health Science Center
San Antonio
+ Private Practice @ Pearl

Dr. LINDSAY BIRA
Clinical Health Psychologist

www.DrLindsayBira.com
Leading causes of death in perspective

- Heart & circulatory disorders
- Cancer
- Respiratory disorders
- Diabetes
- Non-transport accidents
- Infections
- Kidney disorders
- Digestive disorders
- Nervous system disorders
- Transport accidents
- Suicide
- Musculoskeletal disorders
- Mental health disorders
- Undetermined events
- Murder
- Pregnancy & birth
- War

Top causes of death:

1. Heart disease
2. Diabetes
3. Obesity
4. Hypertension
5. High cholesterol
6. Smoking

100% of people experience stress.
Risks leading to death in perspective

- high blood pressure
- smoking
- high cholesterol
- obesity
- war
- pregnancy & birth
- medical complications
- murder
- illicit drug use
- transport accidents
- non-transport accidents
- infections
- alcohol
- physical inactivity
- low fruit and vegetables

STRESS @ WORK

- Work load / deadlines
- Distracting work environment
- Dealing with others
- Work - Life balance
What is STRESS?

A nervous system reaction when a situation's demands exceed immediate resources

1. The brain + body!
2. Tied to emotions + behaviors
3. Keeps us alive, but can be harmful

Fight / Flight / Freeze
ANIMAL VS. HUMAN
Amygdala vs. Frontal Lobes
ACUTE VS. CHRONIC

- Short or long term?
- Survival or...?
- FoFoF level?

Chronic is harmful...

CONSEQUENCES

STRESS ➔ PHYSICAL EMOTIONAL BEHAVIORAL

Burnout, bad habits, relationship problems, work difficulties, chronic health issues
Most stress in work/life is unavoidable.

Control vs. NonControl

- Active, problem-focused coping
- Emotion / biology-focused coping

- Perceived control
- Avoidance coping & other problematic coping
“People are disturbed not by a thing, but by their perception of a thing.”

- Epictetus
THAT MOMENT WHEN YOU REALISE

IT SPELLS HORSE.
BRAIN TRICKS

- **Emotions**
  - Gut feelings
- **Thoughts**
  - Core beliefs
- **Jumping to Conclusions / Judgments**
  - Mind reading
  - Future telling
- **Our own filter**
  - How we see the world

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

EI / EQ
SEL - social emotional learning
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

EI / EQ
SEL - social emotional learning

1. Notice, label & monitor what you're feeling
2. Notice, label & monitor what others are feeling
3. Use this info to guide thinking & behavior

BENEFITS

- Can manage / regulate emotions in self & others
- Can manage / regulate behavior
- Healthier relationships
- Better mental health & resiliency
- Career success
- Better parenting
4 Tools for EI

- Mindfulness
- Labeling thoughts / emotions
- Cognitive flexibility
- Empathy & social skills

Frontal lobe activation!

MINDFULNESS

- **Mindfulness** is an active process of building awareness into your present experience (internal & external)
  - Buddhist roots (all religion)
  - Western world: Jon Kabat-Zinn (1979)
  - Grey matter growth in hippocampus (Lazar et al. 2011)
  - Structural changes in amygdala (Jha et al. 2010)
  - Formal & informal practice
MINDFULNESS EXERCISES

- Pay attention
- On purpose
- Without judgment

Simply observe

EMOTIONS
Diaphragmatic Breathing

MINDFULNESS EXERCISES
- Pay attention
- On purpose
- Without judgment

Simply observe
THANK YOU

Dr. LINDSAY BIRA
Clinical Health Psychologist

www.DrLindsayBira.com
Relaxed Breathing

When we are anxious or threatened our breathing speeds up in order to get our body ready for danger. Relaxed breathing (sometimes called abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing) signals the body that it is safe to relax. Relaxed breathing is slower and deeper than normal breathing, and it happens lower in the body (the belly rather than the chest).

How to do relaxed breathing
• To practice make sure you are sitting or lying comfortably – close your eyes
• Try to breathe through your nose rather than your mouth
• As you breath in, allow your belly to expand and then your chest will follow
• Deliberately slow your breathing down. Breathe in for a count of 4, pause, then breathe out for a count of 8 – the outbreath should be twice as long as the in-breath
• Make sure that your breaths are smooth, steady, and continuous - not jerky
• Pay particular attention to your out-breath - make sure it is smooth and steady

Am I doing it right? What should I be paying attention to?
• Relaxed breathing should be low down in the abdomen (belly), and not high in the chest. You can check this by putting one hand on your stomach and one on your chest. Try to keep the top hand still, your breathing should only move the bottom hand
• Focus your attention on your breath - some people find it helpful to count in their head to begin with (“In ... two ... three ... four ... pause ... Out ... two ... three ... four ...”)

How long and how often?
• Try breathing in a relaxed way for at least a few minutes at a time - it might take a few minutes for you to notice an effect. If you are comfortable, aim for 5-10 minutes
• Try to practice regularly - perhaps three times a day

Variations and troubleshooting
• Find a slow breathing rhythm that is comfortable for you. Counting to 4 isn’t an absolute rule. Try 3 or 5. The important thing is that the breathing is slow and steady and the outbreath is longer than the in-breath
• Some people find the sensation of relaxing to be unusual or uncomfortable at first but this normally passes with practice. Do persist and keep practicing
What is Mindfulness?
Mindfulness is a practice + brain exercise that builds emotional intelligence and wellbeing. It is a form of self-awareness training adapted from Buddhist meditation – much research shows benefits of mindfulness alone. Mindfulness is about being aware of what is happening in each moment, without making judgements about what we notice. The practice of it is a key ingredient in a variety of evidence-based psychotherapies, including dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).

Why should I practice mindfulness?
Our minds can be focused on many things, but we often find ourselves ruminating about things that have already happened (leading to guilt, regret), or worrying about things that could happen. This can activate the stress response or lead to mental health struggles.

Mindfulness is a practice which trains the brain to attend to the present moment. There is good evidence that mindfulness practice can help people cope with depression and anxiety, and also physical health conditions including pain and chronic illness. Mindfulness helps us ride the waves of life with more control over emotions.

Can’t I pay attention to the present moment already?
We can all pay attention to the present moment, at least for a short while. You will notice though that your attention wanders and is not easily controlled. Mindfulness is about catching it, which strengthens our ability to control our attention and increases our awareness of how our minds fluctuate (often in unhelpful ways). People who practice mindfulness regularly find that it helps their ability to stay in the present moment without being distracted, and improves control over emotions, thoughts and behaviors.

What does it mean to have a ‘non-judgmental attitude’ or to observe with ‘gentle curiosity’?
Epictetus, a Greek philosopher, said “People are disturbed not by a thing, but by their perception of a thing.” How we think about our experiences can lead to more distress. This is a core idea in therapies like cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and mindful awareness is the first step in building emotional intelligence and gaining control. For example, noticing judgmental thoughts like “this shouldn’t be happening” and “I can’t deal with it” as well as the emotions that are attached to them provides an opportunity to shift into simply observing non-judgmentally. Practicing mindfulness teaches us to accept more of our experience without judging it and emotionally reacting. This gets us out of our animal brain and strengthens neuron connections in our frontal lobe, which has been shown to help people feel more in control and live more fulfilling lives.

WAYS TO PRACTICE

1. **Diaphragmatic breathing**: notice the breath, belly breathe, count breaths

2. **Object-focused**: Pick an object and pretend you’ve never seen it before. What do you notice?

3. **Senses**: Notice 5 colors you see, 4 noises, 3 things you feel outside, 2 inside, 1 smell.

4. **Body Scan**: From head to toe, notice all sensations, inside & outside, and relax all muscles.

“Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally”
The Quick Emotional Intelligence Self-Assessment*

*Adapted for the San Diego City College MESA Program from a model by Paul Mohapel (paul.mohapel@shaw.ca)

Emotional intelligence (referred to as EQ) is your ability to be aware of, understand and manage your emotions. Why is EQ important? While intelligence (referred to as IQ) is important, success in life depends more on EQ. Take the assessment below to learn your EQ strengths!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank each statement as follows:</th>
<th>0 (Never)</th>
<th>1 (Rarely)</th>
<th>2 (Sometimes)</th>
<th>3 (Often)</th>
<th>4 (Always)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Awareness – Total:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 My feelings are clear to me at any given moment</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 Emotions play an important part in my life</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 My moods impact the people around me</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I find it easy to put words to my feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 My moods are easily affected by external events</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I can easily sense when I’m going to be angry</td>
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<td>0 1 2 3 4 I readily tell others my true feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I find it easy to describe my feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 Even when I’m upset, I’m aware of what’s happening to me</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I am able to stand apart from my thoughts and feelings and examine them</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Management – Total:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I accept responsibility for my reactions</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I find it easy to make goals and stick with them</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I am an emotionally balanced person</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I am a very patient person</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I can accept critical comments from others without becoming angry</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I maintain my composure, even during stressful times</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 If an issue does not affect me directly, I don’t let it bother me</td>
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<td>0 1 2 3 4 I can restrain myself when I feel anger towards someone</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I control urges to overindulge in things that could damage my well being</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I direct my energy into creative work or hobbies</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social Emotional Awareness – Total:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I consider the impact of my decisions on other people</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I can tell easily tell if the people around me are becoming annoyed</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I sense it when a person’s mood changes</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I am able to be supportive when giving bad news to others</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I am generally able to understand the way other people feel</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 My friends can tell me intimate things about themselves</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 It genuinely bothers me to see other people suffer</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I usually know when to speak and when to be silent</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I care what happens to other people</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 I understand when people’s plans change</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Relationship Management – Total:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>I am able to show affection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>My relationships are safe places for me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>I find it easy to share my deep feelings with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>I am good at motivating others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>I am a fairly cheerful person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>It is easy for me to make friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>People tell me I am sociable and fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>I like helping people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Others can depend on me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>I am able to talk someone down if they are very upset</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**My EQ strengths!** Mark your EQ total scores to assess your strengths and areas for improvement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Awareness</td>
<td>0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20 22 24 26 28 30 32 34 36 38 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Management</td>
<td>0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20 22 24 26 28 30 32 34 36 38 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Emotional Awareness</td>
<td>0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20 22 24 26 28 30 32 34 36 38 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Management</td>
<td>0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20 22 24 26 28 30 32 34 36 38 40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measure your effectiveness in each domain using the following key:

- **0 – 24** Area for Enrichment: *Requires* attention and development
- **25 – 34** Effective Functioning: Consider *strengthening*
- **35 – 40** Enhanced Skills: Use as *leverage* to develop weaker areas

**Using your EQ strength** – for your strongest EQ domain, give an example of how you demonstrate your strength in your daily life or work:

______________________________________________________________________________

**Effects of your EQ strength** – for your weakest EQ domain, give an example of how this affects you AND others in your daily life or work:

______________________________________________________________________________

**Improving your EQ strength** – for your weakest EQ domain, what steps can you take to strengthen yourself in this area? How will this benefit you in your daily life or work?

______________________________________________________________________________

*For help in developing your EQ strengths, visit the City College Mental Health Counseling Center (Room A-221)*

*San Diego City College*

*A Learning Culture of Success - MESA works!*

*www.sdcity.edu/mesa*