

SMART: The Four-Module Stress Management and Resiliency Training (SMART) Program

Dear Friend,

In the next two weeks, we will spend some time together, refining our knowledge and understanding of the science and art of stress, resilience, and mindfulness. Here is how I suggest we proceed.

Read each chapter of the book, *SMART with Dr. Sood* (provided to you) with a sense of curiosity and purpose. Note a few insights that resonate with you. Below you will find a few interesting ideas and takeaways I have written for each chapter. Here are your two assignments:

1. Build on this list of interesting takeaways by adding your thoughts in the right column.
2. For each chapter write one idea that really made sense to you.

Once you have completed all the chapters, submit your “This really made sense” learnings to transform.course@gmail.com.

We will discuss our key takeaways as a group in our teleconference #2.

Happy reading!

Amit

1. The Problem

A good world is where kindness doesn't surprise anyone

A lot of human struggles are because we are cognitively bright but emotionally a work in progress

Most of us experience a sense of injustice against ourselves

We are the safest and most fearful we have ever been

Stress shrinks the positivity-inducing centers of the brain and expands the stress-inducing centers

Driver error is the most common cause of an accident

Active self-care is even more important today than in the past because of high levels of stress

A holistic stress management strategy integrates individual and problem-centric solutions

This really made sense:

2. Stress Management, Mindfulness, and Resilience

Managing stress is coming to terms with the past, being resilient is getting ready for the future, and intentionally experiencing the moment is being mindful

A good stress relates to change to which we haven't yet adapted

<p>Positive stress morphs into negative stress if there is an imbalance between resource and requirements, a lack of control, or an inability to find meaning</p> <p>Stress increases inflammation and sympathetic activity, impairs immune response and impulse control, and causes unhealthy genetic expression</p> <p>Stress induced changes in the body and the brain produce more stress</p> <p>Mindfulness is less about being in the moment; it is more about engaging the moment with intentionality</p> <p>Resilience is better captured in stories and not definitions</p>	
<p>This really made sense:</p>	
<p>3. The SMART Approach</p>	
<p>Theory of the brain – Recognizing that our thoughts, words and actions are related to specific brain states</p> <p>Awareness is the first pillar of the SMART program, Attention is the second pillar, and Attitude is the third</p> <p>Our neural networks are highly susceptible to losing focus, getting fatigued, and feeling afraid</p> <p>The brain seesaws between the focused mode and the default mode</p> <p>The focused mode can be instinctive or intentional</p> <p>The goal of the SMART program is to help people spend more time in the</p>	

<p>focused mode, and improve the quality of time they spend in the default mode</p> <p>The brain fatigues within 60-90 minutes of doing routine work, much faster with boring or taxing work</p> <p>We see or hear about many more painful experiences than our ancestors</p> <p>In the default state, we let chance determine our experience</p> <p>No single principle is complete by itself</p> <p>Each SMART practice, taken individually, is very brief</p>	
<p>This really made sense:</p>	
<p>4. The Brain and the Heart</p>	
<p>The brain and heart, together, constitute only two to three percent of the total body weight</p> <p>The number of neurons in our brain is approximately 86 billion</p> <p>In a day we push 2000 gallons of blood through our body</p> <p>As per Aristotle, the heart's radiator was the brain</p>	
<p>This really made sense:</p>	
<p>5. Brain 101: Focus</p>	
<p>When doing repetitive work, many professionals are unfocused for 80 percent of the time</p>	

On an average, people have more than 150 unfinished tasks everyday

We enjoy noticing more often than thinking

The brain is even more active when you are trying to rest, compared to when focusing on a task

The key to activating the brain's focused mode is to do novel and meaningful tasks

Boring is painful

Generally, children have a natural ability when it comes to finding novelty in things

An average adult's brain spends over half the day in the default mode

Unlike car tires that wear out with use, most brain networks become stronger with repeated use (Neuroplasticity)

Most loops in our body are negative feedback loops. Neuroplasticity is one of the few positive feedback loops.

High absenteeism and presentism correlate with excessive default activity

On an average, only about one third of the employees in any organization are engaged

Mental well being and physical well being are correlated; poor mental health leads to poor physical health, and vice versa

Most technologies meant to increase convenience end up causing brain overload

Our brains have good long-term memory, but limited attention capacity

This really made sense:

6. Brain 101: Fatigue

Three parts of our body that get tired with repeated use are our brain, eyes, and muscles

The higher our motivation, lesser our fatigue. If the work we are doing is monotonous and uninteresting, our brain tires faster

The brain has no receptors to detect its own pain

The brain lets you know about its fatigue by reducing focus, increasing irritability, and decreasing creativity

With a tired brain, we become accident and error prone, and unhappy

There is often a correlation between the brain and eye fatigue

When our eyes are tired, our tear films become weaker, we lose focus, and our eye blinks become less efficient

Rest, uplifting emotions, and motivation (RUM) “feed” the brain

Filling the brain with the positive is easier than emptying the brain of the negative

This really made sense:

7. Brain 101: Fear

Fear and irrationality are correlated; the presence of one increases the other

In general, we fear things that can harm children, situations in which we have little or no control, man-made risks (as compared to natural disasters), and newer risks

Physical body withdraws from pain; mind goes deeper into pain

Imaginary and real experiences activate similar brain areas

Physical and emotional pain activate similar brain areas

Seeing someone else suffering, activates our own pain network

The people who want to consume positive news are more likely to spend time watching negative news

Instinctively, the bad dilutes the good, instead of the good diluting the bad

We protect physical and the emotional body, more often the latter

We tend to remember insults, and where they came from

Fears hurt us more than the stuff we fear

Rational fears are healthy and helpful

This really made sense:

8. Attention Sumps

The more we think about regrets, fears, losses, and insults, the stronger they become

Thought suppression often leads to recoil of the thought

Sometimes venting can be a part of the healing process

Mental health issues are caused by a combination of three “strikes” – genetic predisposition, childhood trauma, and adult stress

Neuroplasticity can worsen our negativity bias and our hurts

Kindness that comes from recognition of the others’ suffering, is calming

Attention sumps in the past cause depression, in the future cause anxiety

A high proportion of people with mental health issues have no help

This really made sense:

9. The Main Insight

Many of the brain’s instinctive systems were adaptive in the past, but are not so now

The brain, the heart and the muscles are all trainable

If you practice enough, over time your brain’s focused mode will become its default

Just as we have transformed the physical world, we have the power to transform our emotional world

Both negative and positive feelings physically change the body

SMART emphasizes multiple short-duration practices easily integrated into your daily life

This really made sense:

10. Morning Gratitude (Core Practice #1)

Biologically, morning gratitude practice is waking up with oxytocin and endorphins

Heart attacks, strokes, and sudden death are most likely to occur first thing in the morning

You can practice morning gratitude at any time of the day by involving colleagues, people who have passed away, or pets, and don't need to be restrict the number of people to five

You can combine morning gratitude with deep breathing, and think of the same or different people

Thinking about the good people reminds us of what is most important in life, helps us feel connected, and experience positive emotions

It's a good idea to start with a disciplined practice, even if for a few seconds on a busy day

The morning gratitude practice can be combined with prayer

The most potent resilience drain at work is difficult relationships

One of the best ways to prepare for a meeting is to remind yourself why you are grateful to the person you are going to meet

This really made sense:	
11. Gratitude Jar	
Humor is very closely interrelated with social connections	
Our natural tendency is to consider unpleasant news as more actionable than the pleasant news	
This really made sense:	
12. Summary	
The brain's attention literally needs to be tamed to become better focused	
Adding emotion to attention practices make them stronger and stickier	
A key to feeling grateful is to be thankful for the simple and the ordinary	
Your source of resilience is from the inside Positive emotions, courage, hope) and the outside	
This really made sense:	
13. My Story	
About a third of the population are doing good, a third are struggling, and a third facing a crisis	
Every experience has two parts – your attention and interpretations	
Mindful noticing and mindful thinking are two pillars of mindful presence	

<p>Intentionality is what separates mindful presence from distracted presence</p>	
<p>This really made sense:</p>	
<p>14. The Mindless Brain (In Colors)</p>	
<p>Our heart beats approximately one hundred thousand times everyday</p> <p>Threat, pleasure, and novelty draw our attention</p> <p>We spend more time seeking what we don't have and less time appreciating what is already ours</p> <p>Screens are the realm of attention uniquely created by humans</p> <p>When crossing the road, about a third of all people are distracted</p> <p>Increased blood sugar, poor sleep quality, weight gain, and weaker interpersonal relationships are some of the side effects of excessive screen time</p> <p>About seven out of every one hundred people in the world are addicted to the internet</p> <p>Just as we would hunt and gather food in ancient times, today, we hunt and gather information</p> <p>The SMART program's attention training principles pull attention outward</p>	
<p>This really made sense:</p>	

15. The Two-Minute Rule

Over time, we lose the ability to experience novelty in people that are close to us

The average duration for which a family connects at the end of each day is 90 seconds

As per the Zeigarnik effect, our natural tendency is to anchor our thinking around undone tasks, and not around those that are complete

The goal of the two-minute rule is to help you find novelty where there is love

Every day, when we get home, more than three fourths of our initial connection with loved ones happens in half a minute

Noticing the eye color of those we love is an easy way to raise our oxytocin levels

Letting people know that you were thinking of them, anchoring your focus around their positive traits, and giving them your undivided attention is a powerful way of letting people know that you care about them

Your happiness positively correlates with your partner's happiness and even health

When people laugh together, they build trust in one another and enhance their relationship

Your happiness travels far and wide – to three degrees of separation from you

A known “side effect” of the two-minute rule is that others might feel you have an agenda

Contentment is a great first step for continued growth

Genuinely liking someone is an excellent way to get others to like you

The struggle to find self-worth is nearly universal

We anchor self-worth in the domains where we are performing the worst

It is difficult to dislike someone who you know likes you

Spending time with affiliative connections can significantly improve the quality of your day

This really made sense:

16. Curious Moments

Curiosity naturally attracts most children; meaning naturally attracts most adults

The attention to interpretation ratio influences how you experience most events

In the senior years of life, those who are curious usually have better memory and a longer life

When we attribute an adjective to an experience, we decrease our noticing

Novelty draws attention; deeper attention enhances perception of novelty

FOND is an acronym for Find One New Detail

<p>We have lost connection between the amount we eat and the calories consumed</p> <p>The food we eat provides us two types of energy – nutritional and psychological</p> <p>Consider eating as a celebratory spiritual practice</p> <p>Walking is an excellent practice to improve circulation</p> <p>Eyes are the senses that we use and rely on the most; our seeing, however, can be biased</p>	
<p>This really made sense:</p>	
<p>17. Summary</p>	
<p>Mindful presence is intentional presence</p> <p>Being in the present moment or emptying the mind, are both difficult</p> <p>People closest to us can become boring after some time</p>	
<p>This really made sense:</p>	
<p>18. The Mortar</p>	
<p>If we think of our relationships as bricks, then kindness is the mortar that keeps them bound together</p> <p>Kindness needs to be cultivated fresh every day</p>	

Kindness is increasingly necessary because of our increasing interdependence

People often misinterpret someone's kindness as their weakness

Stronger immunity and reduced inflammation are two benefits of kindness

The skills that brought you so far may not be the skills that will take you to the next place

Emotional intelligence is an important contributor to becoming a successful leader

One of the biggest impediment toward compassion is fear; cruelty based on fear seems justified

This really made sense:

19. The Three Lieutenants

Most mental health issues are biologically predisposed

The first brain center to receive stress-inducing information is the amygdala

The hippocampus and pre-frontal cortex act as moderators of the amygdala

A healthy synergy in the brain keeps the amygdala active but mentored by the hippocampus and the pre-frontal cortex

Our genetic makeup, trauma faced as a child, and stressors experienced as an adult in combination lead to mental health issues

<p>Our stress pathways struggle the most with handling chronic stressors</p> <p>When stressed, we go from being thoughtful creatures to instinctive creatures</p> <p>Unlike the skin that heals its wounds, the mind often keeps its wounds raw</p>	
<p>This really made sense:</p>	
20. Kind Attention	
<p>We avoid crowds as well as loneliness</p> <p>A fear of infections, injuries, and competition is what makes us avoid crowds</p> <p>Loneliness increases our risk of chronic illness</p> <p>We conclude others' trustworthiness within 30 milliseconds of seeing them</p> <p>Every person is special, and every person is struggling – these are two key assumptions of the kind attention practice</p> <p>To wish others well is to wish oneself well</p> <p>Kind attention is best practiced in silence</p>	
<p>This really made sense:</p>	
21. Creative with Kindness	
<p>Our presence can be seeking, averting, or healing</p> <p>About half our day is spent with unfulfilled desires</p>	

Invisible suffering is more prevalent than visible suffering in the world

Kindness enhances work quality, creativity, safety, professionalism

Thinking of yourself as being equal to others is a good way to feel

Perceived workload is lower with higher control and meaning

The key to creative kindness is to develop authentic connection with someone, without judging them

This really made sense:

22. Self-kindness

Negative people get a larger proportion of our brain's real estate

Disapprovals are best isolated not globalized

One way to enhance self-kindness is to re-position negative feedback as a sign that you are capable of doing better

Outcomes are in the future; we have little control over the outcomes but much better control over effort and intentions

The most desirable rewards combine material gain with a gain of values

Anchor self-worth is principles and values, and not the financial success

When you think about it from the perspective of the universe, your net worth will always be miniscule, no matter how much money or fame you have

This really made sense:

23. Drop One

By working on the mind, one starts to take the first steps toward making behavioral changes

The risk of cancer and heart disease goes up with prolonged sitting

For every hour of extra sitting, our lifespan reduces by about 22 minutes

Our metabolism starts to change after just 60 to 90 seconds of standing

Multitask only when necessary; avoid multitasking in a high-risk situation, in relationships and as a habit

As you practice and develop expertise in a certain activity, you require lesser brain power to perform it

By intentionally mono-tasking during a boring job, one can get better at paying attention

People with a preference for the positive usually focus more on the negative

Consuming negative news in large amounts adversely affects our health

This really made sense:

24. Restful Moments

Clearing the brain of toxic neurochemicals might be a key biological purpose of sleep

<p>At the end of a hectic day spend some quite time in the evening; at the end of a slow day, do something stimulating in the evening</p> <p>Deep breathing is an effective practice to rest your heart</p> <p>One of the common mistakes when you start meditating is to expect phenomenal results very quickly</p> <p>When you first start meditating, an optimal duration to aim for is 10 minutes</p>	
<p>This really made sense:</p>	
<p>25. Summary</p>	
<p>We need a daily dose of uplifting emotions</p> <p>Kindness is essential for our survival on the planet</p> <p>Kindness can be expressed in countless ways</p> <p>Some lack of kindness could be genetically predisposed</p> <p>Meditation is intentional, grateful, compassionate attention</p>	
<p>This really made sense:</p>	
<p>26. The Committee</p>	
<p>The three consultants in the head are Mr./Ms. Greedy, Fearful, and Rational</p> <p>Our brain by design is a conflicted organ</p>	

<p>Awareness of human irrationality helps us feel validated</p>	
<p>This really made sense:</p>	
<p>27. Resilience Thinking</p>	
<p>Monday is the day of Gratitude, Tuesdays are for Compassion, Wednesday is the day of Acceptance, Thursdays are for Meaning, Fridays for Forgiveness, Saturday is the day of Celebration, and Sundays are for Reflection/Prayer</p> <p>The common theme among all five principles of resilient thinking is that they positively engage the prefrontal cortex</p> <p>Reading, Thinking, Sharing, Writing, and Practicing will help you integrate the principles of resilient thinking into your life</p> <p>Being proactive and lowering the threshold are the two best ways to apply the principles of resilient thinking into your life</p>	
<p>This really made sense:</p>	
<p>28. Gratitude (on Mondays)</p>	
<p>If life were a pizza, gratitude would be the topping</p> <p>Gratitude keeps the company of humility and contentment</p> <p>Practicing gratitude does not entail stopping the quest to be successful. Instead, it entails being grateful for the ordinary and simple</p> <p>Everyday learn and think about something uplifting</p>	

Life's closest friendships are ones where people share common higher principles

Being grateful is to stop comparing yourself with others. Instead, focus on being thankful for your blessings, big or small

Be careful in talking gratitude to someone in the middle of a tough situation

Compassion enhances the gratitude practice

It is difficult to start feeling grateful when you are struggling to fulfill your basic needs

This really made sense:

29. Compassion (on Tuesdays)

If life were a pizza, compassion would be the base

Compassion has four pillars – first off, you recognize that there is pain; secondly, you validate the pain; thirdly, you have a desire to heal; and finally, you taken an action to heal

Empathy stops short at feeling and doesn't translate the feeling into action

Compassion and empathy are different in that compassion increases positive emotions whereas empathy decreases them

Very similar brain areas are activated when one experiences emotional or physical pain

Very similar brain areas are activated when one experiences imaginary hurt or has a real experience

Pain felt by others and pain felt by oneself activate very similar pain areas in our brains

Helping others is helping yourself

Wealth accumulation can lead to heightened fear and not being able to enjoy little things in life; however, it is correlated with happiness if the wealth is used for a positive purpose

Fear, envy, and biases constitute the major barriers toward compassion

An expression other than love is a call for help

API - assume positive intent, is a good strategy to improve relationships

Finding commonalities with someone is an easy way to cultivate compassion

Excessive empathy leads to fatigue

Reducing the amount of daily news and calibrating expectations closer to reality can decrease energy depletion

Gratitude, meaning, connection, and faith all can increase energy

About half the people in the world experience a catastrophic event in their life at some point

When not sure where to direct compassion, start with self-compassion

This really made sense:

30. Acceptance (on Wednesdays)

Acceptance often needs to be practiced when the situation is undesirable or unpleasant, and it sounds somewhat passive, which makes practicing acceptance difficult

Acceptance can be thought of as empowered engagement

Acceptance empowers people to see truth in the scope of the full context

Accept sees the bad as temporary and limited

Acceptance recognizes that I am not the only one struggling

Being able to find meaning makes it easier to accept

The key to accepting people is anchoring your focus on what is right, trying to find rationality and meaning in what seems wrong, and realizing that each one of us is a work in progress

When dealing with small problems, it might be helpful to remember that if it isn't going to matter in five years, then maybe I don't need to be overly concerned about it today

When dealing with intermediate problems, it might be helpful to remember that an adversity today might prevent a catastrophe tomorrow

When dealing with catastrophe, it's fine to allow yourself to be sad for some time, take the help, and believe in the power of prayer

<p>If you try to <i>force</i> sadness away from your life, it only begets more sadness</p> <p>Acceptance help people save both, time and energy</p>	
<p>This really made sense:</p>	
<p>31. Meaning (on Thursdays)</p>	
<p>Suffering is pain for which you can't find meaning</p> <p>Some ways to find meaning in adversity is to realize that it can help us grow, likely prevent a bigger catastrophe, and improve our connection with other people</p> <p>A good answerable question about meaning is - How can I make my life more meaningful?</p> <p>A good way to integrate meaning in life is to align short-term actions with long-term meaning</p> <p>In general, most people want to be validated, much more than educated</p> <p>The deeper the hurt, the longer and more effortful to heal</p> <p>Life has two core meanings – service and love</p> <p>When you think about it in the context of meaning, the entire world is a giant school of learning</p>	
<p>This really made sense:</p>	
<p>32. Forgiveness (on Fridays)</p>	

Forgiveness is letting go of hurts despite knowing that someone wronged you

To forgive does not mean to justify, condone, excuse, or deny what is wrong

If you forgive others, you will be the one who is most benefited from it; forgiving is an act of self-kindness

Let no one who shouldn't be in the story of your life write the title of your story

The thought of revenge activates the brain's pleasure center

Revenge and anger are closely related in that taking revenge may actually increase anger (and not decrease it)

We can enhance our ability to forgive others by removing the intent behind their actions, finding a benefit or learning in the hurt (if practical), and elevating ourselves in our eyes

One way to make it easier to forgive others is to think of someone who was hurt more than you, but still chose to forgive

Forgiveness takes time, is best shared in silence, usually given to someone who isn't accepting their mistake and very often, does not deserve the forgiveness

Self-forgiveness helps with forgiving others

This really made sense:

33. Pick One

An inability to make good decisions is the number one reason of premature deaths

When we eat, it takes 10-20 minutes for the brain to realize that the stomach is full

Our eating is largely automatic

When you start to notice and remember what you ate, you start to reduce your caloric intake

Micro workouts are beneficial for health

A good model of an aged brain is a young brain that hasn't slept well

One out of two people don't get restorative sleep

Sleep problems are mostly related to unhealthy lifestyle

This really made sense:

34. Inspiration

An inspired state is: filled with positive energy, entails no competition with others, is experienced with positive emotions

People perceive inspired writing as being highly creative

In contrast to adults, children typically do not find inspiration in meaning

Inspiration when combined with positive meaning leads to excellence

You can find micro-inspirations several times every day, which can in turn prepare you for a bigger inspiration

This really made sense:

35. Summary	
<p>Our brain is by design a conflicted organ</p> <p>We have to balance the good of many different body parts; what is good for one may not be as good for another</p> <p>Our brain can't be relied on to consistently think rational thoughts</p> <p>A combination of science, timeless principles, and faith can be powerful</p> <p>The strongest of inspirations are spontaneous</p> <p>The mind has a very strong tendency to forget</p>	
This really made sense:	
36. SMART Research	
37. SMART Customized	
<p>While preserving the overall theme, SMART needs to be customized to the individual needs</p> <p>Not everyone, particularly in healthcare will resonate with resilience</p> <p>Advanced burnout changes are difficult to reverse</p>	

<p>Programs that remove stigma of stress, anxiety, and depression are particularly appealing at workplace</p> <p>SMART has to fit in non-traditional lifestyles for it to be broadly beneficial</p> <p>In mental health, greater focus on self-compassion is important</p> <p>Anchor the program’s benefits toward the felt needs of the individual (e.g. prevention of cancer recurrence)</p> <p>Stress worsens chronic pain and predisposes to addiction relapse</p> <p>Children resonate with gratitude and compassion</p> <p>Caregivers often experience more stress than the patients themselves</p> <p>Most professionals these days need good insight in mental health</p>	
<p>This really made sense:</p>	
<p>38. SMART Attributes</p>	
<p>Present-day programs have to be novel, brief, scientific, relationship-centric, and provide access to uplifting emotions</p> <p>Important to have secular approach that can be easily integrated into a person’s life</p> <p>Meditation can be a difficult practice</p>	
<p>This really made sense:</p>	
<p>39. SMART Sequence</p>	

SMART is best learned in two phases – Train and Sustain	
Incrementally add SMART practices into your daily life	
This really made sense:	

Any final thoughts: