

Changing Our Bodies, Changing Our Lives

from [The Magic of Forgiveness](#)

By Tian Dayton PhD, TEP

Studies in neurobiology over the past two decades have clearly revealed that our bodies as well as our minds and hearts suffer when we are hurt emotionally. Feeling “beaten up” inside, whether someone else is doing it to us or we are doing it to ourselves, imprints itself on our neural networks. Our limbic system sets the mind’s emotional tone and stores our highly charged emotional memories. It also controls appetite and sleep cycles, promotes bonding, directly processes the sense of smell and modulates libido and motivation. Our limbic system is physical and has connection and resonance throughout our bodies/minds. Early emotional experiences knit long-lasting patterns into the very fabric of the brain’s neural networks and changing those imprints calls for another kind of medicine than what can be easily bought or sold, the kind of medicine that recovery, treatment and twelve step work are all about. Our emotional life is physical, it imprints itself on our bodies. When we have problems in our deep limbic system they can manifest in moodiness, irritability, increased negative thinking, negative perceptions of events, decreased motivation, floods of negative emotion, clinical depression, appetite and sleep problems, decreased or increased sexual responsiveness or social isolation. Our neural system carries with it our emotional sense memories from childhood. Familiar smells, sounds or places can send a cascade of memories flooding through us that either wrap us up in their warmth, or challenge us to maintain our composure. And along with the memories, comes the cognitive sense we made of what happened at the time that we may still be living by whether it’s functional or dysfunctional.

Much of what the twelve step world and treatment programs have developed naturally over the decades, is a great receipt for neural repatterning, in my opinion. Because just *describing* healthy attitudes and behavior changes to people does not *inscribe* them into our neural systems. We need to a new set of impressions both in our minds and on our neural systems to hardwire us toward new emotional responses which lead toward new behaviors. We need a new neural map with which to navigate through life. “Just get your ‘soles’ into the rooms” we say in twelve step meetings and treatment, meaning the soles of your feet and your ‘soul’ will follow eventually. Neural repatterning comes as we enter into and sustain new types of relationships that allow us to reregulate our sense impressions slowly and over time. We learn to “be in” relationships differently, to have new types of experiences that allow us to modulate our intense reactions and reeducate our body/minds into better ways of being. Living with addiction is traumatizing and can lead to PTSD symptoms such as hyper vigilance, loss of trust and faith, depression, emotional constriction and reenactment dynamics that mirror earlier emotional pain. Changing these dysfunctional dynamics that are literally imprinted on our brains and bodies takes time and commitment. That’s what recovery is all about, a new “design for living” that becomes a part of our bodies, minds and spirits. A new neural map that guides us down a different path. As Marcel Proust says, “we view the same landscape through different eyes,” we ‘live in’ the same life with a different internal response.

This material is excerpted from [The Magic of Forgiveness](#) by Tian Dayton PhD TEP, Health Communications