

climbing process and won't allow your mind to trick you into hiding behind the comfort of a label.

## Mental Fitness Illness Number 3

### All or Nothing

All or nothing thinking is another tendency of the mind. When you push yourself on grades that are outside your comfort zone, your mind will resist by creating thoughts to lure you into escaping, or finishing quickly. Your mind seeks the greater comfort before or after the stress and wants to either rush through to the end when the stress is over (all), or not engage the challenge at all (nothing).

Understand and remember that these avoiding, labelling, and all or nothing tendencies are your mind's natural inclination. Simply identify these thoughts when they happen, and use your awareness to deal with them.

## Developing Mental Fitness Health

**You can't "fix" the mind** from the perspective of the mind. Mental fitness training has to be done from a perspective that is removed from the mind itself. You need a different access point. If you operate from your thinking mind, you'll get sucked into its comfort-seeking motivation. To improve your mental fitness you need to understand this motivation and step away from it. You need separation from your mind so you can see it objectively. Operating from awareness will help you develop an appropriate relationship with your mind.

Many people are so identified with thinking that they believe they think all the time. You don't think all the time. You think much of the time, but there are gaps between thoughts. It's in those gaps that awareness resides. You can witness – that is, observe and notice – when your mind generates thoughts. This witnessing comes from the field of your awareness. Witnessing your mind create thoughts helps you realize they are just that – thoughts.

Perhaps the most critical shift you will make in developing mental fitness is learning to operate from the perspective of the Witness instead of thinking. Your mental fitness will improve to the same degree that you can make this shift. Once you begin to operate from the Witness, you separate your true self from the limiting effects of thinking.

## Mental Fitness Health An Exercise

**Let's return** to my experience on Whitesides to demonstrate how to develop mental fitness health.

**Step 1:** Set Intention: It's valuable to set specific intentions for climbing. My intention for going to Whitesides was to engage the route and push it past the half-pitch mark we achieved the previous year.

**Step 2:** Witness Doubts: I noticed the internal dialogue of my mind. It was motivated by comfort so it was creating doubts and looking for an excuse to avoid the climbing stress. Without a partner I couldn't get on the route. My mind locked onto this new excuse. Bill Sabine's offer to belay me took that excuse away. Instead of getting lost in the inner dialogue, I watched it from awareness. I witnessed attention shifting away from my intention toward ways to avoid the stress of engaging the route.

**Step 3:** Delay Reacting: Don't just react to the doubts. Stay in the stress to allow "space" for solutions to arise. I could have left right away but I didn't. I delayed reacting to my doubts.

**Step 4:** Dissociate to Redirect Attention: By dissociate I mean talk to yourself or coach yourself back to your intention. I reminded myself of my intention before the doubts began. "OK Arno, your intention was to push this route higher." This coaching helped redirect my attention back to my intention.

**Step 5:** Find Little Ways to Engage: The final, critical step involves making the transition from thinking to taking action. I came up with a smaller, less-threatening way to engage the route rather than thinking about the whole goal. "I will just climb to the highpoint," I told myself. "Once I get there I'll decide whether or not to continue." Doing this would allow me to simply cover ground I had already climbed. Essentially I would still be in my comfort zone. Engaging in this little way, however, would carry me to the edge of my comfort zone before my mind could pull an all-or-nothing trick on me. As I engaged my body, the excitement of the challenge would begin to do its work and help me stay with my intention. If I'd forced my mind to accept the full stress of climbing new rock when it was settled within its comfort zone and had the handy excuse of my absent partner, I probably would have driven home. But hiking out to the wall with a less demanding plan moved me along, and once on the wall I could see the situation more clearly. As it turned out, when I arrived at my highpoint it was easy to take the next little step. I began a combination of aiding on hooks and free climbing, placing bolts and natural pro. I climbed another 70 feet and finished the pitch.

Our minds have intelligence, but before we can utilize it, we need to become aware of the mind's illness. The mind is comfort-seeking, and when we encounter stress, it will distract our attention to a place of comfort. To fight this tendency, we must first make a distinction between our thinking and our Witness. Our minds think, yet we can observe those thoughts. Therefore, our thoughts are not us. Instead, we look to the point of origin of this witnessing – awareness. From that space of awareness we can let go of limiting thoughts and act out our intentions.

**With awareness,** we can use the mind's intelligence to do what it does best: collect information, plan effectively, and assess the risk to determine appropriateness. At the same time, we are aware of the mind's harmful comfort-seeking traits and do not give in to them. Awareness is the foundation that allows us to develop an appropriate relationship with our minds, giving us the tools and perspective to cure our mental fitness illness.

*Go to [warriorway.com](http://warriorway.com) for more information on overcoming mental fitness illness, which is fully developed in Arno's new book, Espresso Lessons.*