

# FDP Rick Alexandar

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## SPEAKERS

Michael Nelson



Michael Nelson 00:01

Hey there, welcome back to the flex diet pod cast. Then today, on new episode, I've got my good buddy, Rick Alexander, I worked with him on the Special Forces experience. And we got to hang out with everyone else from the fsfe in Costa Rica this past year in January for kind of a group meeting mastermind, so it was super awesome to spend more time with him, I would highly recommend you also check out his podcast too, which is just morning coffee with Rick Alexander. His Instagram is awesome. He's got lots of really great quotes there. We talk a little bit about his background in the first part of the episode. But I wanted to give you more background on him since he's doesn't see a whole lot about himself. And he's done some really cool stuff. He's an author, speaker educator, specializing in helping individuals and organizations understand themselves better. So they can increase performance, find meaning in their work, and build a life that is in alignment with their ultimate goals. He is also a former member of the Naval Special Operations community, as well as an ultra endurance athlete. He talks in here about his run, he did have 200 miles, which is just crazy. So yeah, definitely check him out. And his book is awesome. We talked about that to his latest one, there'll be a link in here to it. I liked it so much. I bought it for all of my online one on one clients and sent it to them. Really good. So in the podcast today with Rick, we talk about transitions and looking at your nervous system from a lens of parasympathetic does more rest and relaxation to sympathetic more of the stress side? And how do you transition back and forth between those two, there's a lot of talk of people needing to down regulate, relax, get more on the

parasympathetic side. So we talked about why that's important. Why you want to be able to transition between these points. To me, if you get stuck in either one, that's not going to be very good for performance or just your life in general body comp, pretty much any goal that you want to achieve. And Rick has some really great tools on how to downregulate more how to do faster transitions, and some really great stories to so this podcast is brought to you by the physiologic flexibility cert, a big portion of what we talk about the physiologic flexibility cert, is how does things like oxygen and co2 and other homeostatic regulators? How do they affect your performance? Everything from changes in temperature pH, as I mentioned, breathing related things. So Rick has some really good tips on what type of breathing to do we talk about meditation as a tool also. So the physiologic flexibility, certain you can get more info on that at [physiologic flexibility.com](https://physiologicflexibility.com). Right now, we're releasing in around quarterly. So if you're pretty good with your nutrition and exercise, you're trying to figure out what is the next level to increase your recovery, to be more robust, anti fragile, human, be more resilient to stressors of all forms. That's what I would recommend. And that's why we created the course. So check out this great interview here with Rick Alexander. Cool. So we're here on the flex diet podcast, my buddy, Rick Alexander, thank you so much for being on here today. Really appreciate it, man. Yeah, thanks for having me. I'm excited to have a conversation. Yeah. So we're gonna get into the topic today, which is, how do you kind of transition between more of a parasympathetic rest and relax to a sympathetic state? And then kind of back again, right, so what are those spectrum ends look like? What are those transitions look like? Which I know some you've used a lot in your life. And for people who may not be familiar with us, give us a little background on yourself, because you have a very, super interesting background.



04:42

super interesting. That's a good thing. So it's interesting in the sense that I don't consider myself a master in anything, but I'd certainly like experientially but a lot of places so I spent 12 years in the military, in a special operations capacity, actually became a special operations. combat medic, which was really cool because it got to was a time where I got to really marry my interest in the human body and, and also the service that I was into at the time. And since getting out just two or three years ago, now I really stepped full time into being an author and a speaker, I tend to write and think a lot and, and talk a lot about psychological concepts that have been really helpful, useful in my time in my life. And then it also worked for the Special Forces experienced as the chief of growth. And really, all that means is we take a lot of time to think how can we put people in experiences that are going to stretch them psychologically, physiologically. And also, while while while stressing them? give them the tools that help them adapt to that stress and come out with some sort of internal growth? So that's kind of the bulk of what I spend

my time on now.

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Michael Nelson 05:58

Awesome. And you are also a student again?

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06:02

Yeah, that's right. We'll see I'm kind of in between being a student right now. But yeah, I've been in a master's program for a while, and really interested in studying psychology. And we'll see where that goes.

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Michael Nelson 06:15

Very cool. Very cool. And I think just related to Special Forces, experience, we had a team meeting down in Costa Rica, which was just amazing, super awesome. And I think one of the things that gets kind of glossed over with that is people here, you know, military hero, a lot of stress, and there's a lot of talk about, you know, PTSD, PTs and for good reason. But there also can be, you know, potentially, PT G, like post traumatic growth, which I don't think really gets talked about enough. It always seems to be more of the negative side. Do you want to just speak to that, briefly, in terms of that concept is probably newer to most people.

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06:56

Yeah, I think it's something that's starting to gain a little bit of steam. Yeah. So there's a few different ways we could talk about it, right. And in some sense, post traumatic stress, or PTSD, especially we have a tendency in our culture to diagnose people, and then that becomes their label that they sort of live by. Right. So in some sense, I think what we're really doing is hopefully widening people's aperture on what they think that this stress is done to them and, and how it's affecting them. And, and giving them the tools so that these experiences can be helpful rather than diminishing rather than take from you Right. And so So yeah, I think what's true, is true on multiple levels of analysis, right? So just like in your work, when we stress the body, right, there's, there's stress that becomes not helpful at all. There's also stress that if done incrementally, and if the if the thing that is being stressed can be inoculated to it, you actually can grow from that stress, right. So the same is true psychologically, as it is physiologically and so I think really just opening people's aperture, having the conversation about the way that this stress impacts their body, it affects us. And then further, I think when it comes to post traumatic stress or

growth specifically, it really has to do with the way in which you interact with that stress, like the disposition that you take toward it, right, like, you and I had a conversation for the Special Forces experience, I think it was for a podcast. And we talked a bit in the myths of the pandemic, we talked a lot about the the ways in which we can adapt to stress, and I really don't see much of a difference psychologically and physiologically. It's you, it depends on you, right? It depends on the the way that you view what you're going through, and also to really learning how trauma can be trapped in the body learning, you know, I would say really just gaining the tools and understanding how stress affects you can do a lot in helping you grow through it, as opposed to being victimized by it, right? Because oftentimes, what happens is we have these symptoms. And when we do we feel as though we're the victim of these symptoms, and actually, I found that it can be helpful to be like, Well, actually, what you're experiencing, experiencing is a symptom of this. And here's why. And then it kind of puts the ball back in your core kind of empowers you to realize, what do I want to do with this? Right?

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Michael Nelson 09:37

Yeah. So I think we're both in agreement that education, just like all things is probably a good thing. And do you think that education beforehand may potentially mitigate some of the downsides from a traumatic event? Totally.

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09:55

This is a conversation that's taking place right now whether or not you know, you can retro proactively grow from experiences? I think that you can write. I mean, I would say that that's probably the chief goal of therapy, hopefully. But gaining the tools prior to the stress is always going to be more beneficial, I think. Yeah.

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Michael Nelson 10:15

Yeah. A great book is I always think of Bessel Vander kolk. The body keeps the score. It's totally, pretty tough read, like I've started it and stopped it. I don't know how many times because until you get through the halfway point, it's, it's just really heavy. Yeah, the audio book I would recommend, I think it's a little easier, easier. Okay. Yeah. But he talks a lot about, you know, just different traumatic events. And, you know, I've done some hands on stuff with you people, not necessarily, I'm not looking to treat their trauma or anything like that. But, you know, once you start interacting with the body in different ways, like things just, you know, come up. And a lot of times, it's a weird thing for having experienced that myself and watching someone else go through it, because they can feel what's going on,

especially kind of the resolution. But a lot of times, cognitively, it's just hard to explain. So I think there's kind of this two way street between the trauma is kind of stored in the body in that position, and then also how we interact with it, like you said, we can think about it in different times, we can think about it in the future, what we may do, because of it. Now we can think about what happened in the past, you can think of it kind of in the present at the same time, too. Totally. And really,



11:31

I think one thing I really got from his work is just the idea that, you know, life is inherently traumatizing, like New York, overwhelmed often. And, and what I think a lot of people would be surprised about is that, and I don't want to give a shout here, because I'm not 100% sure about it. But a large percentage of people that come out of the military with some sort of post traumatic stress, they went into the military with a decent amount of stress. And actually what happened in the military is they gave them an environment where the way that they had learned to cope with stress actually, like, it actually just like kind of lifted them up, right? Like they were able to be rewarded for their coping mechanism, so to speak, in the military. And then the I certainly experienced this, and then you get out. And you realize that the way that you've been living is like absolutely untenable. So and then you have to start like asking the hard questions. It's like, man, where did this start showing up? For me? How do I deal with overload? Well, and then the most important part, which is how do I start creating some sort of sense of physiological safety in my body, because that's what it comes down to, right? When you're overwhelmed. People do all kinds of things disassociate or become overly aggressive, like, however you deal with it, you have patterns.

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Michael Nelson 12:50

Yeah, I've talked to some other people in the military. And it's fascinating to me how, and I think this has changed. And you could probably speak to this that most of the training is very task specific, right? It's almost sort of the opposite of the the world not in the military, right. So you have like high level people who are trained via scenarios to react in a positive sort of way in stressful situations. And then over time, because of the stress, inoculation and threat inoculation, their body gets better at performing under those circumstances, which is exactly 100% what you want, because you're going to be putting them into that situation. So they have to be prepared for that. But I remember a former Navy SEAL came out was telling me He's like, yeah, the first time I went to the grocery store after I got done by myself as it freaked me the fuck out. And I was like, we just said he was so used to being in a stressful environment and having everything very regimented. That the thought for him just to go into a store with other people in a non

threatening environment, he realized he understood that it was not threatening, but he could feel that he was he had a lot of anxiety around it, which for me was like interesting, because you're almost sort of, like in his case, he was sort of flip flopped, right? He was good in high stress situations, but he just got out. And he wasn't adapted yet to situations with without having that stress. Where I think most people are the inverse, right? If you drop them in a high stress situation, probably not going to go so well, just because they're not used to it.



14:30

Totally. Yeah. And so kind of to tie into the topic here. Like really what's happening oftentimes is your body is you're constantly sympathetic, right? You're constantly alert. You're constantly fight or flight. I remember after I got out of the military, I have insomnia, like you read about. And I remember laying in bed and you know, you're frustrated, can't go to sleep. And I put, oh, I was checking my heart rate. And it was like 135 and it's like You know, it's like midnight, there's nothing going on no reason to be stressed. And so really what happens is, yeah, you inoculate yourself, you become really good in stressful environments, and your body has a lot of trouble shifting gears becoming parasympathetic again. And like, you can probably speak to this better than I can. But essentially, like when you're in that sympathetic state, your body's using physiological resources at a very rapid rate. And so you feel exhausted all the time. I heard it explained to me one time like it, you know, it's a lot like just getting in your car and slamming on the gas and the brakes at the exact same time, right? Like you're, you're revved up, but you're not going anywhere. And so, switching into a parasympathetic state is something that, again, like I was telling you pre show in the military, it became really important for me in now, since getting out of the military, like I'm always sort of paying attention to and regulating my, my physiological state, it's become really important. Yeah.

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Michael Nelson 16:03

Do you think that's a skill set in terms of the military and the transition to non military? Do you think that's a skill set that's being taught a little bit more now, and maybe allowing some people who are in high stress situations to, for lack of a better word cope a little bit better once they are out and that situation is removed from their life?



16:25

Yeah, I mean, I think it probably depends on where you're at. Sure. I was really fortunate that I was at a special operations unit. And so we had a ton of money and, and a team of

dogs human performance lab. So I started gaining these tools toward the end of my career, but it's pretty difficult because, you know, psyches are unraveling in the military left and right. And, you know, when you think about, like, sort of Maslow's hierarchy, it's like, the physiology just has to be taken care of, like, I think a lot of times we're solving mental problems when it's a physiological problem. Because, right, I've been thinking about this a lot, the way in which your physio, your physiology changes the way you're experiencing reality. And so we could say that as a very easy way of thinking about that is like when you become sympathetic, right, you become, you have a heightened awareness. And so you're going to notice things that you wouldn't necessarily notice in a calm, relaxed place. Like, for most of my life, I haven't been able to go to a restaurant without trying to identify where all the exits are something you wouldn't pay attention to if you're in a calm, relaxed place. And so because it changes the way that you actually experience your reality, I think it's important to understand that it's kind of the baseline, you know, the baseline thing that you have to take care of, because you might be solving for the wrong problem, first of all, and so yeah, in the military, I was lucky toward the end of my career. And you know, there's another trouble here too, in the military, just since we're talking about it, which is you really can't have problems, right, you really can't have psychological problems. So you get really good at shoving things. Like, I wrote a lot about this in my second book, but you don't get to repress things without them being expressed in some other way that you're actually just not in control of right. And so yeah, I remember when I started going over to the human performance lab, and since I was getting out, that's when you can be like, okay, so turns out, I haven't slept in 10 years. That's going on. Yeah. And so when I was going through that process, I remember, that's when I started like going and doing meditation and breath work. And it started to become I started to really understand it. Yeah. Before that, breathwork was all about performance, right? Like, for me, for example, I have a I have a fear of heights, but like I have 150, something jumps right out of the helicopter a ton of times, and I never stopped being scared of it. Right, that physiological response never happened. And so using a parasympathetic breath pattern, or or box breathing, that just didn't really work for me. But using something like that to regulate in increased performance was fine. But I just started in the end of my career learning that you could use it to actually proactively treat things.

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Michael Nelson 19:14

Yeah, that's interesting, because I in college, they convinced me that I have a massive fear of heights also. And so idiot knee goes, Oh, if I jump out of a plane that'll fix my fear of heights, right thinking that I'll overcome. You know, the thing that's stressing me out and I was in my master's program at the time, and and up in Michigan, there was a place where you could do static line, your first time these are all just civilians that show up this place. And we got enough people from our lab to go and do it and my roommate was you know,



certified at the time. And for people are listening like static line when they teach you you have to hold on to a pull up bar off the end of a plane because you're in a stable position and you're only at 3000 feet, and you let go and hopefully it pulls your shoot or if not, you've got a floor. Another one right away. And I remember just being absolutely stressed out of my mind getting on the plane, the guy's like, yeah, you know, we're leaking a little fuel out of the left side, but we won't be in the air that long, it's fine. The plane just looked like a lying piece of shit. Like, there's no way I would have gotten this plane without, you know, something on to jump out of it with a shoot. And he's like, Ah, you know, no biggest guy out first. So I'm sitting by the door, and I'm like, God, it's a beautiful day, we'll leave the door open. And I'm like, Oh, my God. And I remember sitting there, just cross my arms like this, like so afraid I was gonna do something wrong. He's like, okay, we're over the site, you know, get out in the bar, right? So you stick your head out the window, and you have to crawl out to get onto this pull up bar. And all I kept remembering was okay, keep one hand moving in front of the next one hand moving in front of the next. And it turns out the jump masters, like in my left ear, like screaming at me, get your ass the bar, get your ass in the fucking bar, because they're, you know, only over the site for so long. It's trees and everything else right over the drop zone. Yep. So I finally get out in the bar. And there's a picture of me looking in my eyes are like the size of coke bottles. I'm like, holding on by like two fingers. And I asked my roommate, I said, hey, what happens if I get out on this bar, and I just freeze up like, I can't let go. And he's like, the jumpmaster goes, I crawl out there and pull your fingers off one by one until you drop. And I'm like, what was like, once you're on the bar, you can't get your ass back in the plane. So you're just going down, like, Oh, okay. But, you know, to your point about, you know, elevated heart rate and like things that you remember, like, when your heart rate gets so high, you just end up in this super state of like, just hyper vigilance. And I didn't remember him yelling in my ear. I didn't remember anything. I remember looking in the plane and like letting go. And then Luckily, everything worked out fine. You get down to the bottom. And again, you know, I'm just like, super freaked out. And he's like, okay, so prepare to flare, right, so you got your hands up. And so you know, as you know, but for listeners, like if you flare too soon, your shoot stalls out, and then you just pummeled into the ground. And if you flare too late, you just pummel into the ground. So I know on my head, I'm like, I got to do it the right time, got to do it the right time. And he's like, I prepare to flare and I'm ready. And the guy in the walkie talkie goes flare, and so I do it. And the guy in the walkie talkie then goes, Oh, shit. I'm like, oh, and so it need looks down at the ground. I don't have depth perception anyway. And I just put them under the ground, jam my knee up and stuff. I asked him at the end, I said, Hey, dude, what happened? Like, why are you yelling like, Oh, shit over the radio, he's like, that's the fastest I've seen anyone flare in my entire life. Because as you get into high heart rates, like some gross motor skills get, you know, elevated. And so for me, it was super fascinating to thinking back on what stress does and how it changes your perception. And then I also realized that, that didn't do anything to cure my fear of



heights. And I never want to do that again, actually. So



23:12

yeah, it's such a good point. I think that a lot of people today, like fear management might be the thing that people are struggling with the most right now in our current time. It's super important to me that people understand that fear doesn't go away, like no, so many people wait for fear to go away. And it actually doesn't, you actually have to increase courage in relation to fear. That's how it works. Psychologically, and so? Yeah, I think a lot of people, and that's true for like existential type fears. That's true for fear of failure. That's true for fear of heights, right? Physical fears. It's just true about fear. And so you have the two important things I think are one fear, for example, changes the way you experience reality. You might not you wouldn't make decisions that you would make otherwise, if you weren't scared. Yes. And then at the same time, realizing that incrementally courage has to be increased in relation to fear. But some of those fears, like fear of heights, for example, is one that I'm thinking of. It's like, my courage went up, I guess.

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Michael Nelson 24:21

times you figured it out.



24:23

I also took flying lessons. I had a pretty rough sort of crash landing in Indonesia on a plane. And so after that, every single time I flew, I would break out and I would just be stressed out of my mind that couldn't sleep. And so I was like, oh, I'll take flying lessons. Like I will face this head on. And, you know, after about 25 hours of like white knuckling a steering wheel sweating. I was just like, I hate this. I'll do box breathing when I climb something high. That's fine.

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Michael Nelson 24:52

Yeah, yeah. And I think there's also a human nature to when you're just gonna opt out and be like, He, maybe this thing isn't really worth it, you know, and I think that's an okay decision to write because I think a lot of society almost pushes people the other direction of like, you know, whatever your fear is, you got to overcome all of it. And you got to make it your bitch and all this stuff. And I think they're like you said, there's a time and a place to elevate courage to overcome it. And I think there's also a time and a place to be just like, No, I don't really want to do that. And I'm okay. Like, I'm okay with that decision to.



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Totally, if you think about that, it's really rooted in some sort of false bravado because fear just like any other emotion as an informational input, sorry to tell you something like, hey, people like you and die doing things like this. Right? Right. And so for you to be like, no, ignore all informational input to do what you want. Like, that's pretty bad advice, too.

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Michael Nelson 25:49

Yeah. Yeah, I know, for a lot of people do that when say extreme sports. I don't really like that term. But, you know, like big mountain skiing, I know, you do a lot of skiing and snowboarding and stuff. And people are kiteboard and crazy wingsuit people and looking at some of the stuff they they do, you would think that like, Oh, they don't really have any fear at all. But most of it, like you said, is managing fear. And then also sudden, what you don't see is like the hundreds, sometimes 1000s of hours of training, where they're doing just a little bit more than before just a little bit more before they're getting a lot of experience doing those things and getting, I think more accustomed to it not that it is going to mitigate or make all the fear go away. But I think they're much more prepared for it than what someone watching the outcome of a 10 second clip on YouTube realizes too.



26:40

Totally. And that is part of the reason that like in the military, for example, all your immediate action drills, all your drills, it's all gross motor skills, and you pattern the hell out of it. Right, so that you can perform that pattern with or without the lights on, essentially.

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Michael Nelson 26:56

Yeah, what is I can't remember the same you probably know that you don't really rise to the occasion, you kind of fall to the level of your training. Yeah, right.



27:04

That's exactly right. fall back on your training. Yeah, cuz I remember the first time I was in a land warfare school learning about that, you know, like your gun jams. It's, it's three steps to get your gun on jam, pretty much no matter what jam it is. And in that's because we understand that what they call it and military is like this chemical cocktail, right? Once adrenaline and I can't remember all of the exact neuro chemicals that are present. But essentially, like, you'll lose fine motor skills are essentially the first thing you're gonna go

on you right, and then processing power and things like that.

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Michael Nelson 27:37

I was explaining to people that if all of a sudden, we're doing this podcast, and a guy runs in my house with a gun, like my heart rates gonna elevate and everything in my brain because your survival orientated is going to, you know, like tunnel vision, right, your goal is that is the immediate threat, like, you're not gonna sit there. And if you were to try to, you know, thread a needle, it's just not going to happen. But some gross motor skills are involved here. And, you know, police reports of like, did not hear gunshot fired behind them, because there was a threat coming, you know, towards an officer or even in the military. Right. So I think, like you said, knowing that certain things are going to drop off, but gross motor skills are going to be enhanced. And if you've trained enough, you're just gonna default to what your training is. And hopefully that's, you know, adequate at that time. So,

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28:23

yeah, totally. And so here's something interesting to like, someone comes into your house with a gun, as you were just saying, right, and, and so when that happens, you feel that fear response, right, and you're gonna, you're essentially going to be on autopilot, but you're gonna make decisions based on that fear response. I think one way that we're not necessarily seeing how this is playing out in our lives is we're kind of constantly getting injects of fear now on social media, on on radio, the regular media, you know, from friends, and because the world has been destabilized in some way, our sense of safety is gone. So more fear and jacks are coming. But we don't necessarily feel that fear. It's kind of like if I were to put take five milligrams of morphine, Ben just give you a bolus, right? Like, you're gonna feel that you're gonna be like, Oh, here we go. And you're going to be high. But if I drip that same amount of morphine, five grams, I think over an hour, you're not going to feel it. But by the end of that hour, you're the end result is going to be the same very gradual won't feel the onset. And so part of the work I've been doing in the last six months or so, it's helping people feel what that fear feels like in their body. Because then what happens is you'll start to notice it in all of these little IV drips that you're getting throughout the day. And I think, yeah, I think it's important if you want to have autonomy over your life that you recognize how this fear is directing your actions because it is it is changing the way you experience reality. You just might not be aware of it.

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Michael Nelson 29:57

Yeah. Yeah. Like that. And then. So my side note, which I got from buddy of mine, Frankie ferries is that I think then you would want to be sensitive enough to act or to change the course. Right. So I think what you're saying is correct me if I'm wrong is that you want enough sensitivity to know that that's occurring. So you can take a different action than correct.



30:21

Yes, right. Because fear is a type of possession in that if you're scared of me, I can make you do whatever I want, right? You're, you're possessed by me in some way. And so what happens is, we don't feel the IV drip of fear. And so we end up making our decisions based on that fear without knowing that we're doing. We're telling ourselves, we're free, essentially. Because the cage is so complete that we don't see it. Yeah. Yeah, that's right. And I think that's why it's so important to understand that these things, you know, when you're put into a sympathetic state, like it's changing the way you're see it's changing the way you're seeing the world. It's shaking your snowglobe up, right. And so having things like parasympathetic breath patterns, doing fear, work for your meditation, things like that, they're massively beneficial in just giving people more autonomy over their lives and the decisions that they're making.

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Michael Nelson 31:18

Yeah. So what are some of the the tools you would use? Because I would agree with that, and I think society tends to be much more on the knee, fear, stress size, and what I find is a client's trying to get them to down regulate is usually much harder than getting them to up regulate. So what are some tools that you found to help with down regulation or becoming more parasympathetic.



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So I mean, basic parasympathetic breath pattern as the exhale is going to be double the length of the inhale. And so you can make that look like anything you want. And I tend to teach that because I think when it comes to tools, tricks, habits, like hacks, like all those get lost, but you can sit down for 10 breath patterns, and do three seconds in with a quick pause, and then a six second outbreath, right. And you'll find that if you ever try to do that, it's actually kind of got to be trained. Because if you're real sympathetic, and you just try to do that, you'll find that you can't, you know, you find it hard, pretty tough to do. But that's something that you can train yourself to do as well. And I believe it was a study out of Georgetown that looked at that parasympathetic breath pattern and paired it directly

after workout in increased the rate of recovery from the people that were working out. Can you speak to that? So the idea was that after a workout, they were able to switch into a parasympathetic state and start that recovery process sooner? Does that sound right to you?

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Michael Nelson 32:47

Yeah, I mean, that's something I've had people do for a while. JOHN Ruskin has some stuff on that, too. And this kind of gets into transitions, right. So if you look at elite level athletes, they're able to do very fast transitions, right? If you look at the fastest human in 100, meter run and sprint, is to go from zero to top end speed to not decelerating to crossing the line first, right. So whether it's NFL you're doing changing direction, drills, like everything is a very fast transition appears to be beneficial. So I would extend that and say, Okay, once you're done, there's no need to be, you know, super sympathetic after you're done lifting, if you can down, regulate and do that faster. I've already debars also talked about this to where I've finally ended up doing the same thing before talking with them. So lay down and put your feet up your arms out at your side, just try to get in a very relaxed state, not much sensory input coming in, if at all possible. And I usually do what you said longer exhale. And then you can get fancy with like an aura ring and look at HRV measurements or heart rate or whatever. And usually you find that I just noticed anecdotally with clients that they're just a lot better the next day. HRV stress usually isn't as high. And then the last part too, is that you can get fancy and exercise and measure heart rate recovery, right? Just get to an elevated heart rate and then stop. How long does it take you one or two minutes of different time periods to get back to baseline? Right? So the faster you can get back to baseline, you have better heart rate recovery, you have better parasympathetic re activation after a stressful event. Hmm,

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34:36

yeah, I did some stuff like that with Brian Mackenzie one time and I remember that the exact nature of it, but we were like packing breath and then doing sprints on the aerodyne. And so we did Sprint's on the aerodyne say like, I think one or two minutes. So probably like 90% effort, or max Cal's in a minute, something like that. And then we looked at like how long it took our recovery or heart rate to return to baseline and then we packed up oxygen and did the same thing and found that just being more oxygenated on our own allowed us to drop back down into a into a recovery rate faster. So that was interesting, too.



Michael Nelson 35:11

So what was the technique to be more oxygenated? were you doing like a hyperventilation type technique or hyperventilation? Yeah, exactly.



35:19

Yep. And holding it. And then. So essentially like, yeah, you're hyperventilating, you're holding the inhale, and you're almost doubling the inhale to the exhale. Does that make sense? So instead of inverted, in inverted, yeah, exactly.



Michael Nelson 35:36

Very cool. Yeah, that's, that's awesome. I'm just gonna pop my video off here for a sec, just because I think it's getting kind of funky. So we'll see if that helps it. Yeah, any other techniques, any other breath techniques you found that have been useful.



35:53

So in tandem with that study, I'm not sure what your thoughts on meditation are. I've started meditating. But I also know that when I first tried to start meditating, it was damn near impossible. Yes, and it feels like really long time. But something like the headspace app, or you can do like a guided where they actually talk you through it. So in tandem without study, like they looked at breathwork, parasympathetic breath patterns, and they also looked at meditation and meditation seem to have the exact same effect. And so what I started doing at first, and this is what I what I had clients do for a while when I was coaching is, they would, I would have them queue up like a five or 10 minute guided meditation. And then same thing, like you were saying, like cut down the sensory inputs out, just have them finished the workout, and then just shut the lights off, lay down, close your eyes, but then just follow the guided meditation. And that is pretty easy to do. And just subjectively, it seemed to be that people felt a lot better.



Michael Nelson 36:53

Yeah, I'll have them do that, or belly breathing. For myself, I usually change the music. Because music for me is like a big indicator. All those things help. even gone so far as if in a perfect world, like on a Sunday night or Sunday, if that's my off day, I can do like a 60 or 90 minute float tank, which I haven't been able to do for about the last year and a half. But not just do some breath work in there and just literally remove as many sensations as possible. HRV is usually better. I've looked at some stuff on omega wave of like DC

potential or CNS type stuff, and that normally normalizes quite a bit too, but it's kind of the same idea. You're just removing as much sensory input as you possibly can. Yep,



37:40

I started doing after all the ultramarathons that I would run, I started scheduling a flow like the following day. Oh, no. And, and I felt like I mean, this is of course, subjective, but it felt to me like it pushed my recovery along by about three days. Oh, interesting. Yeah, it was massively beneficial to the point where it like, became something that I made sure that I did. Yeah.



Michael Nelson 38:05

Yeah, when I was doing a lot more live presentations, I had my assistant look for a float tank area. And so if I would get done presenting Sunday night, I would usually book one there that evening, if I could, and then I would normally allow Monday as an off day and then fly back on Tuesday. And that's again, anecdotal, but that made like a huge difference. Because for quite a while I would, you know, get there a day before because I was got nervous about something happening with the flight or whatever, you know, do the thing that two, three days, you know, whatever it was, and then, you know, fly out immediately come back and expect to work, you know, a full day on Monday. And yeah, that didn't go so well. After a while.



38:46

Yeah. And in I don't know. So do you notice that after you present that you're pretty exhausted?



Michael Nelson 38:52

Yeah, it's gotten better. But like, I've done three and four days, just me only. And it's one of those weird things, even today ones are? It's like, I love doing it. It's super fun. But man, by the time it's done like I am, I'm toast. You know, I noticed?



39:12

Yeah, right. Right. Right. So your body is like, I mean, you're essentially sympathetic for that for that period. And that's, and that's because it like, I mean, you can talk to this, perhaps, but I think it increases your, you know, your ability to compute and increases your



cognitive function by being in that sympathetic state. You can grab ideas quicker, you can find things faster. It's probably just a response to nerves as well. But I think it's important to recognize, like, so much of our life today is inherently sympathetic. Yes. Right. Like we're almost always on and like, you know, we don't we, everything in the world is rhythmic, right? It's seasonal. And that's including us and at the same time, though, there really isn't. We don't really Oh, Winter, right? Like these normal times where we would be more parasympathetic and sleep more. That's really not the case anymore with screens and with the modern world, like everything is just inherently sympathetic. And so I think that this, this issue is actually across the board, whether people are in the military or not, our jobs are inherently sympathetic. I was talking to one of my clients yesterday, who gets 500 emails a day, it's like, oh, you know that you're just ramped on all this? You know. And like, to what we what I said earlier, you're just using physiological resources at a really rapid rate, right? for five or 10 years, it's exhaustion, but then it's going to start to manifest physically for sure.

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Michael Nelson 40:43

Yeah, yeah. And similar to what you just said, I actually like presenting a little bit more in that sympathetic state. But I also realized, like during break periods, if I had a little bit of downtime that I would try to down regulate during that time was good. And then also, what was going on in the evening, I would be more cognizant of scheduling that kind of stuff. Where I think when I first started, I'm like, oh, but I want to be that person that they don't like, just disappears after the seminar is over. And because I enjoy the process, but then I also started looking to see Oh, if I got one this weekend, and one the following weekend, and you know, sometimes it's a plane ride or different country, whatever. It's like, okay, I can do one night out. And then the rest of the nights, I'm just gonna disappear into my hotel room. What do you do to downregulate. Um, what I found was like, the float tanks at the end were super beneficial. Some light exercise was beneficial. If I didn't have to work as much, what I got better at doing was I would go to bed super early. And then I would get up early, I would do email client stuff in the morning, and then I would go teach, because I found trying to do that in the evening prevented me from getting to bed early. And then I also if it was short, like a three to four day one, I wouldn't turn my time clock different. So especially was on the west coast to be like about a two hour difference. I would stay on Central Time for four days. Yeah, because I'm like, well, it actually I would just because I could adjust my schedule around. As long as I was doing the presentation on time, everything was cool. You know, so depending on what coast I was on, or where I was at, a lot of times, it would look like, you know, getting done with it, and then literally being in bed by eight, but then I would get up at you know, five or four in the morning, you know, and just not having to switch those couple hours I found made like a big difference. And then the other part I noticed too, and maybe you noticed this too, is that long plane

flights, no matter how much I got up and moved around. Even if they're in the same timezone band, those would just kind of wreck me for about a day. And if I had to flip time zones, it was even even worse. Yeah, right. Totally. Yeah, yeah. It's just traveling in general, I think is, yeah, yeah. Yeah.



43:06

So you can also sort of, I'm not 100% sure how to how I would describe this, but you can also sort of cause an acute tension, and then that will allow you to release into a more parasympathetic place as well. So it's kind of like, a cold shower at night, for example, right? a cold shower is sympathy, it's, it's going to make you sympathetic, like, you're going to tighten up, you're gonna, you know, at the same time, though, it's almost like you, you get to release that energy, and then you'll sleep better. Yes. Have you noticed that?

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Michael Nelson 43:43

Yeah, I've played around with that, because I have a freezer in my garage that we've converted into cold water immersion, which is kind of fun. And I've done it a few times in the evening. And it's pretty much like what do you say, cuz the first time I read some of the studies on that, yeah, they're kind of split. But people are like, Oh, no, is the temperature difference? And you're like, what? I don't know, I don't want to get like super sympathetic before bed. Or what I would find is, I would be awake for a half hour, 45 minutes, and then I would get a lot more tired. Like you said, it was like changing the shape of the curve, which I thought was interesting. And the handful of times I've been able to do it with a sauna or heat I find that heat for me personally was even better. Is it? That's interesting, you it's weird because like even I got to measure my heart rate would be 121 3135 you get done and I would just feel like super relaxed. We did that we were in Finland a lot. We would place a we're staying at we're there for group competition and place we're staying that had like three saunas, so it's like, oh, what sauna we're gonna go to tonight, you know? And that was great. So we take a sauna late at night and get done. Take a cool shower. And, man, I was out like right after that right away. So



44:55

yeah, I bet Yeah, that's perfect. Yeah, it sounds like it would be counterintuitive, right? But it certainly works. Yeah.

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Michael Nelson 45:02

Now, on the other end of the spectrum, if people want to up regulate their sympathetic, maybe before a stressful event or training or something like that, what are some things you would recommend?



45:18

Yeah, so that's interesting. I don't know that I've ever met someone that has trouble becoming more sympathetic. Like, I can just tell you like that you're gonna like you have a meet in an hour. And that will make, right. Until I mean, like, of course, there's caffeine and the normal things that you would do. But I don't know that I've ever from my whole life, it's been me learning how to become parents. So that's interesting. Yeah. Well, what would you use to push people into that state? I mean, you can use breath pattern for that as well. Yeah. Right. You can use. I mean, you could do this right now, you could mimic, you could mimic a panic attack and just make your breath too short and rapid. That will cause a sympathetic state. I don't know that I would have people do that. But

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Michael Nelson 46:06

yeah, I played around with. I know Patrick McEwen has some stuff on that. Like, as a more warm up before exercising, Brian McKenzie has some stuff there too. And, you know, I've played around with it a little bit, but I haven't used it a whole lot. There's another study looking at hyperventilation before exercise and looking at performance. And there's some interesting studies even doing it during weightlifting. But the amount of people I trust to do that under load is like, like almost nobody, I don't even trust myself to really do that. Because the consequence, if you go too far under load just sounds like a really horrible idea. I know some people were saying, like I would just do with deadlifts. So if it happens, you just dropped the weight, but I don't want to be dropping weight and potentially passing out. And I don't know. So I think there's a fine line there. And even in the studies that wasn't that much of a performance benefit? You know, because I, it's similar to you, I think most people, you when I was doing studies in the lab, like most people, if they were competitive at all, they were pretty good to go. We had a couple of people that they probably could have cared less. But yeah, I usually found that it's the downregulation side that people are missing, too.



47:22

Yeah. And I find that, like three rounds of Wim Hof will put you put you at a pretty even place as well. So yes, that's sort of sympathetic, you know, in a sense, because you're, you're holding your breath, and you're kind of like forcing oxygen. But interestingly

enough, if you're anxious, you know, if you have something sort of psychosomatic, that's making you sympathetic, it's actually will actually put you in like a pretty even even keel place. And I find that what's good about that is because it's more forceful, it gives you something to do that, it's a little bit easier than trying to slow your breathing pattern down. And so again, it sounds a little counterintuitive, but because it you are taking these deep breaths, and you're kind of forcing oxygen in and out. But it'll put you in a pretty good place as well. And it's a little bit easier to get to from a really sympathetic place.

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Michael Nelson 48:15

Yeah, that's what I find. I mean, I had tried off and on to do breathwork meditation stuff since I read when Andrew Wiles book in like, 1996 you know, and to my brain. I'm like, Okay, I'm not doing the habit enough. You know, tiny habits like BJ Fogg stuff, I just make the habit smaller and smaller. And, you know, is that the point and run trying to do like, you have 30 seconds of meditation, and I just was like, God, this is worthless, like, nothing ever happens. I don't feel any different, like, what the hell. And then I did a barbell mastermind kind of probably five years ago now. And my blood soul read us through some stuff using a Wim Hof Method was on the beach in Mexico. And I'm like, Okay, if I can't figure out how to do meditation here, like paying a lot of money to hang out on a beach in Mexico to have somebody guide me through it, I'm probably never gonna figure it out. And it was basically a Wim Hof style technique. And what I realized was, oh, like when you're doing a breath, hold, and you're not even breathing. And you're like, oh, oh, this is what calm feels like, oh, oh, weird. Oh, wow. You know, like, I could actually felt something from putting the work in even after just a couple rounds. So similar, but to use that I, I do that with clients now, even if they're very sympathetic, just to be like, okay, so when you're doing this breath hold, like, this is what calm actually feels like because if you do like two or three rounds, even during the breath, hold, like everything gets really quiet. You're like, oh, oh, this is kind of what I'm looking for. Oh, okay. Got it. Right. And then yeah, back people back from that or wherever they want to go next.

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49:55

Yeah, I think for the western mind, something like that's great because it it gives you some thing to do, right though the hardest part of meditation is that you don't know what to do. You know, you don't have something in front of you but but a breath pattern like that is great because you can you can follow it, you know, it's not too difficult. And so that's kind of my go to you before I, before I speak before I present. I'll do like three rounds of Wim Hof. And then I'll just end with five seconds of a sympathetic breath pattern, or I'm sorry, five cycles of sympathetic breath pattern. And I feel great. I'm like, go on center. We're here. Okay, perfect.



Michael Nelson 50:30

So the sympathetic pattern, are you just doing more of a rapid inhale, let go then.



50:34

I'm sorry, I only see that parasympathetic. Okay, now, at the end, I'll just do five, five breaths of like three seconds in six seconds out God and I'll end with that. And then I feel like, whatever I was, whatever nerves I was thinking about, like, it all just seemed to, like put me in a really even keeled place.



Michael Nelson 50:52

Yeah, yeah. No, I, I agree with that. I find that the what I call the Zen style, go stare at a tree. Like to be really hard. I think it's incredibly beneficial. And a friend of ours, Mr. Kim, we've taken some meditation retreats from him, he says, a Zen priest, and it's super interesting to me how that is so simple to explain. Okay. Just find a soft point out in front. Yep. Just look at it. Just watch your thoughts as they come and go. Okay, Mr. Kim, what else do we do? That's it. That but that's it. Yeah. Go do. Okay.



51:36

Yeah, like you'd be more comfortable if he gave you like, a list? A list of eight things to do at once. Yeah, that's the western mind for sure. Yeah. And, you know, I don't know what your I think we've talked about this that I can't can't recall your thoughts on nasal breathing during cardio, but I also find that it's easy for us to know, outwork our own fitness, like when it comes to cardio running, things like that. And so we're just sort of in this really ramped up sympathetic place mouth breathing like crazy trying to, like get oxygen in. And so I found to that like switching to nasal breathing for all of your, you know, long slow distance, LSD cardio type stuff. It's frustrating to watch your mile times go down, in the long run, like your recovery, and everything is just so much better if you can, like get pushed through the mental part of it.



Michael Nelson 52:30

Yeah, I found that that's been huge. I mean, probably maybe three and a half years ago, now I started doing. I had a bunch of CrossFit people who were just beating themselves into a bloody pulp. And then they hired me and I'm like, Okay, now just don't beat yourself

into a bloody pulp, and then then they'd still do it. So I'm like, Okay, so how do I get them to do something that's really hard, that just doesn't beat the crap out of them and actually helps their performance because their aerobic base was kind of low, the ones I was working with. So I'm like, okay, go do a five key on the concept to rower and only breathe through your nose and tape your mouth if you have to. Do Like what? Like now just go do it. They'll come back and they go, one guy's like, Oh, my God, I'm drowning in air. What is Max heart rate was only 111. You know, so it got them to not hit max all the time. But it felt hard. Right. So they loved doing things that felt hard. So they were kind of bought into it. And when I started doing it, same thing, like I found, like with rowing, or even running, like trying to get in that that rhythmic thing where your breath is kind of matching your your pace or your stroke or whatever. Like kind of hard to do and kind of maddening. But if you can do it, like when I got done, I'm like, Oh, I can think again. Oh, the world's a nice place again. It's okay.



53:51

Yeah, it is a little bit maddening. I'm not sure if I ever told you that I so I use nasal breathing for for those reasons. I also really liked the mental push of it like I do an hour on the air bike nasal breathing only for max cows like that. That'll put you in a dark place. Oh, yeah. And for my first, the first 200 miler that I ever ran was in Lake Tahoe. So you know, it's between six and 10,000 feet elevation, but I lived in Virginia Beach, and I was in the military, so I couldn't even travel to train. And so I had to train at sea level. Well, then I go to the race, and I get to mile 89. And I'm like starting to spit up blood. And then by mile 93. I can't as I talk, it sounds like I'm like gargling water. And I know that if I go talk, so I'm like in this place where I'm like, Okay, if I talk to them, and I'm a medic, so I'm pretty well aware of what's going on here. So I'm like, Okay, if I talk to, you know, anybody at the aid station, they're not gonna they're not gonna let me finish this race. They're gonna pull me I think they pull four or five people per year for high altitude pulmonary edema. And then I also couldn't lay down to sleep like at the aid stations or anything because it felt like I was drowning when I lay down. So I was like, man, I really don't know what to do here. And so I was kind of walking, like trying to figure it out trying to like get my mind around, like, how do I get through this race? I said, 110 miles or so. And, and, you know, I started thinking about it, I was like, Well, you know, I trained so much nasal breathing, that I was like, man, I wonder if I if I could manage this. So I took some vezo dilators, which seemed to help a little bit. And then I just switched to nasal breathing for like the next 70 miles. And it was, perhaps maybe it was just that my pace was slow enough that I was able to process oxygen. But for whatever reason, like it saved my race, it got me through there. I basically just had to not ever stay at any aid station that was above like 7000 feet. And as soon as that would come down below 7000 feet, my lungs would clear up and I would feel fine. Oh, wow. And so yeah, it was a very interesting and painful, painful experience. But yeah,

nasal breathing. Got me through it.

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Michael Nelson 56:09

Hmm. Interesting. Do you think part of that is also maybe the association you had with nasal breathing? Also, just from the neuro Association?



56:18

Yeah, it has to be right. Yeah, I've thought a lot about this because it really worked. Because I, because I couldn't run more than 10 feet without like, doubling over and coughing up blood. Oh, wow. Um, for whatever reason I ice when I switched to nasal breathing. I mean, it was slow. But it but it worked.

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Michael Nelson 56:37

That's super interesting. Like I I just think there's so much of the mental side of training that we haven't even scratched the surface of. Right. And that gets into the whole, you know, Tim Noakes central governor theory, which you could probably never prove or disprove of, you know, his whole premise was okay. So if it's all just simply as distal peripheral fatigue, why it is every big race people get faster at the end? Right. When you have the most fatigue on board? Why do people speed up like, Oh, shit? That's a good question.



57:13

Totally. Yeah, I believe. Yeah, you're right, you can prove or disprove it, but to say that your mind is limiting your ability to perform. I don't think we have to have a long conversation about Yeah, right. Cuz I mean, even you know, CrossFit athletes experienced this, I think like you, you train that Governor and your ability to go hard. That's why CrossFit never gets easier, right? Because not only do you get fitter, but you get better at you get better at like exerting yourself and so you go further into the pain.

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Michael Nelson 57:44

Yeah, I have clients who yell at me, they're like, my next 2k times in the row or have gotten better, but they never feel any easier. I'm like, they never will. Right. Same reason, right? You're just able to push harder, and you're doing more, so it's always gonna feel just miserable. Totally, yeah. Awesome. Well, thank you so much for conversation and sharing



everything. I really appreciate it. It gives us some good tools to definitely use for people want to find more about you. Where should they go? I highly recommend your latest book. I, I bought it and send it to all my clients. And I love it. I think it's really well done. Man. Thank



58:25

you. Yeah, I really appreciate that. Appreciate you buying it for your client. Yeah, totally for having me on.



58:30

Yeah, I think the place I'm the most active is on Instagram at Rick Alexander underscore. And the book that you're talking about is ambitious heroes and heartache. And that's available on Amazon.

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Michael Nelson 58:42

Yeah, I would highly recommend it. It's really good. A lot of really good lessons in there. And it's, it's nice to read, I've been forcing myself to go through it kind of slow, but three fourths of the way through. So I'll read a chapter and then just kind of think on it and kind of process that. And when I feel like I've got a fair amount out of it, then I'll move on to the next chapter. So it's been super useful.



59:05

Thanks. Yeah, I've heard that. I've heard that. It's, it's so packed that it takes a bit to process.

M

Michael Nelson 59:10

Yeah. Which is a good thing. I can't say that about a lot of books like the books do you just read through it? And you're like, Man, I'm done with that me. I'm probably not so impactful. Right, right. Yeah. Thank you so much for having me. Yeah. Thank you so much for listening to the flex diet podcast. Really appreciate it. Big shout out. Thanks to Rick for taking the time out to chat. always enjoy chatting with him always learn new stuff too. I would highly encourage you to pick up his book. Check him out on Instagram and his podcast also. We'll have all the links here. As I mentioned in the intro, this is brought to you buy the physiologic flexibility cert, you can go to [physiologicflexibility.com](https://physiologicflexibility.com) and you'll

have more information there you'll be able to get on the waitlist also For the next time that we open it, if you're looking for a complete system that includes both the context, the big picture, technical rundown of the components and over 40 specific action items of what you would do with all that material, check out the [physiologic flexibility.com](https://physiologicflexibility.com). So that'll put you on the waitlist there for the next time that the certification opens up. Also, make sure to check out all of Rick's great stuff and give us a rank and a review on whatever your favorite podcast platform is. Really appreciate. It helps us get into the year holes, have more people. spread the good word. Thank you so much, again, for listening. Really appreciate it. Talk to you all soon.