

Tame the 'monkey' worries in your brain or harness them?

Emma De Vita [Author alerts](#) 

For those of us lacking self-discipline, our worrying minds are a big barrier to getting stuff done. The “monkey mind” is what Michael Sinclair, clinical director of City Psychology Group, calls it. “A Buddhist term, it conjures up an image of a monkey frantically rushing through the trees and getting up to mischief,” he says.

Dr Sinclair describes a monkey as a persistent, worrying thought that interrupts our focus; a supposed hangover of our cavemen days when we needed to be continually alert to potential threats. To improve our focus, he recommends coaxing the monkey into submission.

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“It’s instinctive to try to push a monkey out of your mind but accepting it is the key to managing it,” he says. Struggle with it and it will ensnare you. Instead, acknowledge it, recognise it for what it is, and then distance yourself from it.

If you are faced with a presentation and a monkey is screaming that you will do a terrible job, add the prefix: “I am having the thought that [I will do a terrible job]”, says Dr Sinclair. “You can’t be aware of a thought and have the thought at the same time.” Alternatively, you can try diverting your attention from the thought by focusing on something else, such as your breathing.

It could be said, however, that a monkey is no more than a motivating worry and that by imagining it as a wild creature it will consume more of your attention than if you had just let it be. Is it not the case that, if you are anxious about a presentation, worrying can help you do your best? The time, attention and energy it would take

to make peace with something that is, in reality, useful and commonsensical could have been spent improving your performance. Forget trying to cage the monkey; just feel the fear and get on with the job.

The generation gap is wider than you think

Want to hold on to the talented new graduates on your team? Beware the gap between what senior managers think the youth of today want, and Generation Y’s actual ambitions. According to a survey by HR firm Penna of 1,000 senior managers, and 1,000 employees aged between 18 and 34, Generation Y’s top three career priorities are earning well, enjoying work and achieving a steady work-life balance. A fifth of managers thought senior leadership would top the list. Nearly a quarter also wrongly assumed that a great Gen Y ambition was to have many different jobs across many sectors. The lesson? Take the time to find out what makes your new recruits tick. They will enjoy the free lunch.

Injecting a dash of sex into schmoozing

Many people loathe networking. Has professional networker Carole Stone just made it even more unsettling for these wallflowers? To do it effectively, she told London’s Evening Standard, you must indulge in conversational foreplay. “To go head-on and say ‘there is something here that could be good for us together’ isn’t on . . . It is a bit like lovemaking: you have to do the small steps before the big one.”

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