

[Opinion](#) » [Column](#)

Tap your hidden potential

By Larry Burk

December 2, 2005

[Opinion](#) [1] » [Column](#) [2]

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Guest column

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[Print Article](#) [3]

[Email Article](#) [4]

[Download PDF](#) [5]

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Subtitle: Guest column

How many students perform up to their potential in the classroom or on the playing field? What holds you back from achieving the best that your talents would allow? Often it is anxiety related to the thought of past failure that distracts you from the focus required to accomplish your goal. Unfortunately, most people learn to worry from their parents who are often experts at creating self-fulfilling prophecies.

Getting ready to take a test and remembering the last time you choked on an exam is a form of negative visualization. In contrast, sport psychologists know that performing a positive visualization ritual on the foul line helps quiet the negative self-talk long enough to get in the "zone" and sink the crucial free throw. While visualizations and affirmations have known benefits, for some frustrating reason they don't always work.

The best explanation for why they don't is a phenomenon known as a tail-ender, the "yes, but" that occurs spontaneously after your well-intended affirmation and undermines your success. In hypnosis theory, everything that comes before a "but" in a suggestion is negated, thus your positive language is often replaced by a more powerful negative tail-ender.

One of the best ways to deal with tail-enders is to tap them away literally using a new energy psychology approach known as Emotional Freedom Techniques, which involves self-tapping on the acupuncture meridians while holding a negative thought in your mind.

This scientifically-validated method for relief of anxiety and other ailments is easily learned by downloading a free 80-page manual from www.emofree.com.

I learned it three years ago and also signed up to receive free weekly e-mail updates from Gary Craig, the Stanford-trained engineer, investment manager, and personal coach whose mission is to make EFT available to everyone.

I soon had the opportunity to test it out with one of my students who had recently been in a serious car accident.

She had been uninjured after totaling her car but was afflicted with a case of total body hives combined with a fear of driving. She was given medication to suppress the hives at Student Health which made her too drowsy to study, and the itchy blotches came right back when she quit taking the medication. I spent 15 minutes after class teaching her how to do EFT with immediate success.

She started by repeating a typical EFT self-acceptance statement, "Even though I had a scary, thought-I-was-going-to-die car accident, I deeply and completely accept myself," while rubbing what is known as the "sore spot" on her chest a few inches below the mid-clavicle. She rated her anxiety about the statement in Subjective Units of Distress as an 8 on a scale of 1 to 10.

I then guided her to repeat just the distressing part of the phrase known as the EFT "target" while tapping seven times each on a series of EFT acupuncture points with her middle finger. The points most frequently used are the inside of the eyebrow, on the side of the eye, under the eye, under the nose, in the middle of the chin, on the inside of the clavicle, on the side of the chest under the arm and on the top of the head.

She noted that the SUDS dropped from 8 to 4, so I asked her if there was any other aspect of the event that was still bothering her. She said she felt guilty about totaling her dad's car, and that was off the SUDS chart at an 11! She used that as her next target for another round of tapping after which her SUDS decreased to 2. She later tapped on all her other past car accidents, regained her driving confidence and never had another hive.

Cognitive memories of past traumas that have power over you are usually associated with energetic body memories thought to be stored in the acupuncture meridians, i.e., those sick feelings you get when thinking of past failures. EFT works by deleting those disruptions in your energy system, so that you are free to perform at your best. You might want to start with, "Even though I always procrastinate until the last minute -"

Dr. Larry Burk, Trinity '77, is a physician in Durham.

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- [2] <http://dukechronicle.com/section/opinion/column>
- [3] <http://dukechronicle.com/print/138242>
- [4] <http://dukechronicle.com/printmail/138242>
- [5] <http://dukechronicle.com/printpdf/138242>