

**ATTENTION & AWARENESS
FACTS AND FUN PRACTICES
WEEK 4 – FEBRUARY 12, 2016**

Our unconscious "System 1" neurological system perceives on the order of a million times as much information as our conscious system, "System 2," is able to appreciate. That is to say, our **attention**, the dynamic process by which our brain boosts the signal of some activities over others, is like the beam of a small flashlight in a huge cave. And yet, the majority of the time the aim of that beam is directed by habit and intuition, by the unperceived System 1. Remarkably, we have the ability to refocus the beam of our attention through conscious command. We are able to direct our attention. Princeton neuroscientist Michael Graziano has proposed a theory of consciousness in which our awareness of our attention creates an *attention schema*. He proposes that our conscious awareness is *information* we provide ourselves about our ongoing process of attention. This information creates a positive feedback loop to strengthen or redirect our brain's attention processes. The process of attention describes the awareness that the body and brain have produced. The process of attention itself changes the awareness. This is what causes the loop.

ASSIGNMENT:

Throughout this week, bring to mind the awareness of what you are paying attention to. Then purposefully change it. Easy exercises are things like a) paying attention to the sounds you hear in the background, b) remarking on the colors that people are wearing, c) wondering about the source of the accents of those you meet. You can also experiment by "reframing" an event, for example, to make an unpleasant task enjoyable. As you do this, try to be aware (i.e., pay attention to) things like:

- How hard is it to keep your attention re-directed at will?
- Is it easier when you are switching between neutral kinds of awareness, e.g., between sounds and colors, than when you are trying to use attention to redirect from awareness of hunger, pain, or grief?
- Does it help to bring to mind totally different ideas and images?
- Have you ever noticed that your brain feels "tired" when it is required to focus for a prolonged period, e.g., learning a foreign language?

Keep track of your observations as you go along. Are you able to change how you feel by changing what you pay attention to? Is what you pay attention to aligned with your long-term values and goals?