

# What State Are You Living In?

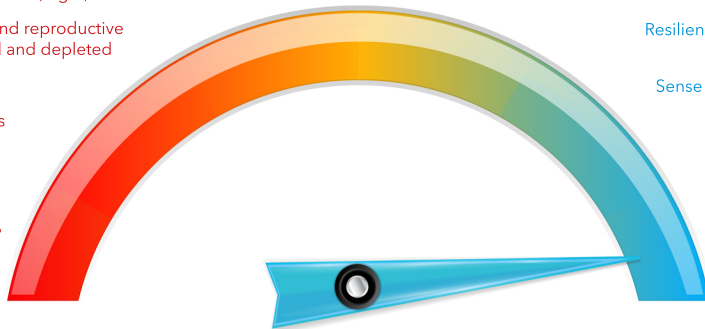
## RED ZONE

*Fight-Flight-Freeze*  
*Frantic-Fearful-Frustrated*



- ↑ Cortisol and adrenalin (stress hormones) spike
- ↓ Blood flow siphoned from brain and sent to arms/legs
- ↓ Mental resources (creativity, strategy) drained
- ↓ Thinking becomes narrow, rigid, black-and-white
- ↓ Immune, digestive, and reproductive systems cannabilized and depleted
- ↓ Resiliency derailed
- ↓ Optimism disappears

**THREAT  
PROTECT  
STATE**



## BLUE ZONE

*Flow-Flourish, Peace-Possibility,*  
*Calm-Connect, Create-Confident*

"Happy" neurochemicals (dopamine, serotonin) flow

Blood flow to "smart" brain increases

Problem-solving, ideation, and learning increase

Social engagement and trust increase

Cardiovascular health and immune system improve

Resiliency and ability to take  
action increase

Sense of identity and goal-  
orientation increase

**SAFETY  
CREATE  
STATE**



# BRAIN-FRIENDLY COACHING TIPS FOR MBA/GRAD STUDENTS

We've all seen the fight-flight-freeze response in students. The seemingly prepared student "freezes" in an important interview. The introverted student "flights" when told she needs to do more networking. The entitled student "fights" upon hearing he needs to improve his emotional intelligence, or the "I'll-take-any-kind-of-job" close-minded student resists when hearing she needs to narrow the focus of her search.

As neuroscientists unveil a flood of research on how the brain works, one thing is crystal clear: **the people we coach will be more successful when they're not in fight-flight-freeze mode.**



## 1. THREAT OR SAFETY?

Students see the world through a "neuro-perception" lens of either "threat" or "safety." (We all do, in fact.) Students perceive threats coming at them from several angles—their academic performance, financial concerns, time crunches, reputation with recruiters, and so on. For example, a GPA that isn't as high as the student would like, or an internship salary that is lower than anticipated, can cause students to slip into the "Red Zone" of threat.



## 2. POSITIVITY PAYS OFF!

Research reveals that our brains are as much as 31% more productive (creative, resilient, engaged, proactive) when in a positive state than when negative, neutral, or stressed. Job search, with its uncertainty and high stakes, can easily push students into negative, neutral, or stressed. When this happens, students immediately disadvantage themselves, effectively diminishing access to the full measure of their reasoning powers and creativity.



## 3. BRAIN BIAS!

Confirmation bias—the tendency to look for evidence that backs up our beliefs—greatly impacts student success. With a belief that "Networking works," students focus on finding like-minded people to connect with, opportunities to build trust, and methods to bring value to relationships. With a belief that "Networking doesn't work," students focus on the contact that didn't email back, the info interview that went poorly, or the alumnus that didn't have a job opening to share. It's the proverbial self-fulfilling prophecy.

Shift students from "threat" to "safety" with words to this effect: "No question! This is a challenging time. There are two types of challenges: one, where we're overwhelmed; another, where we overcome. You were accepted here because you were among the crème de la crème. So, Mr. Overcomer, how will you rise to this challenge?"

## COACHING TIPS

Invite students to "up" their positivity-to-negativity ratio to at least 5:1, with a reminder that employers view resilience (a form of positivity) as a key attribute among top MBAs.

Explain to students that our brains look for evidence of our beliefs, then open a curious dialogue about how their expectations are influencing their actions and willingness to try out new ideas. Share that validating presumptions is a well-researched, quantitative approach, worthy of a top-notch, analytically minded MBA.