



Moving for the Mind

When we attended school growing up, we were often told to sit down, sit still, and get to work. Over time, it has been proven that this practice is not the best way to maximize our cognitive abilities. In *The Extended Mind* by Annie Murphy Paul, the author delves into the profound impact that physical movement has on cognitive processes. Paul argues that our bodies are not just vessels for our brains but active participants in our thinking. She highlights how activities such as walking, gesturing, and even fidgeting can enhance focus, creativity, and problem-solving abilities.

One of the key studies discussed in the book involves radiologists who were asked to diagnose medical images while either sitting still or engaging in light physical activity, such as walking on a treadmill. The study found that those who were moving performed significantly better, making more accurate diagnoses, and identifying subtle anomalies more effectively. Specifically, the radiologists who walked on a treadmill identified 20% more anomalies compared to those who were sitting still. This finding underscores the idea that movement can sharpen our cognitive abilities and improve our performance in complex tasks.

Paul also explores the concept of "embodied cognition," which suggests that our thoughts are deeply intertwined with our physical actions. For instance, gesturing while speaking can help us articulate our thoughts more clearly and understand abstract concepts more deeply. This is because gestures can offload some of the cognitive load from our brains, allowing us to process information more efficiently.

Furthermore, the book discusses how different types of physical activities can have varying effects on our mental functions. Low-intensity activities, like standing or gentle walking, can improve focus and engagement, while moderate-intensity exercises can boost memory and cognitive flexibility. High-intensity activities, on the other hand, can induce a state that promotes creative thinking by temporarily reducing activity in the prefrontal cortex.

The next time you are struggling with a complex issue, don't sit down, sit still, and get to work. Instead, get up and move. You will drastically increase your chances of solving the problem at hand or coming up with that divergent idea. If you would like to explore other tips and tricks to think with more clarity or solve those stubborn problems, stay tuned. LLD will release a hybrid eLearning course called *The Introduction to Creative Thinking* in the near future. More to follow.

-Scot Bolz, Talent Management Trainer

Paul, Annie Murphy. *The Extended Mind: The Power of Thinking Outside the Brain*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2021.