



Tree Climbing and Mental Health – the Need of Attention

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It is not illogical to say that the tree care industry is dangerous. Dealing daily with heights, forces, heavy weights, angles, vectors, strain and unknown variables definitely can put a heavy toll on our bodies. Not only physically speaking but also mentally. Anecdotally, mental health has been an ongoing issue within arboriculture for a long time. A subject that is rather difficult to openly discuss can sometimes been considered taboo amongst colleagues and peers.



Looking into the mind / Source: Google Images

We find ourselves locked in a room, which is our mind, not knowing what to do. Every day that passes by failure, noticing unsafe actions becomes more common, which leads to a higher likelihood of incidents.

People are becoming more aware of the importance of being present in the moment. Arboricultural roles, especially climbing, require a high level of attention and dedication, which can be inhibited by a simple sip of coffee. Unless you are drinking decaf coffee, caffeine is a highly addictive drug which alters the way in which our brain functions. By altering the chemistry within our brains, caffeine speeds up nerve cell endings and constricts blood vessels within the brain.

Caffeine increases neuron firing that in return releases hormones which then trigger adrenaline releases from the adrenal glands. Adrenaline is the naturally occurring hormone, which is significantly linked to our “fight or flight” response.

Dangerous jobs can cause adrenaline rush, allowing these workers to live in a constant state of fight or flight, even without the help of

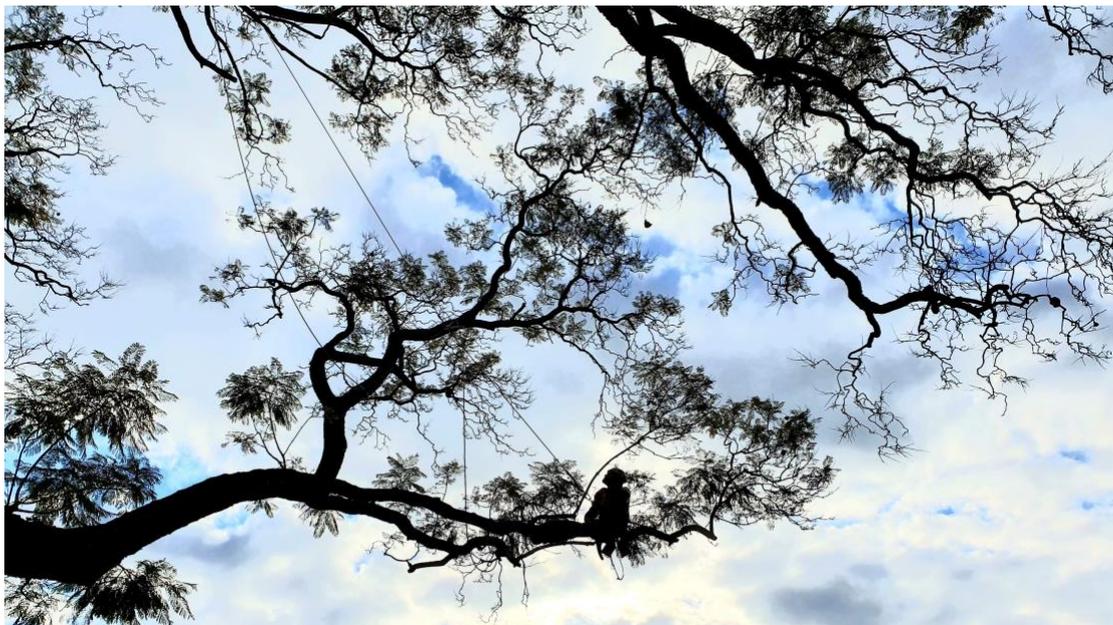


caffeine. Living under these conditions often leads to anxiety, sometimes chronic. Anxiety is our body's response to situations that we find as being worrisome or threatening, irrespective of whether you love heights or not.

Recently researched by the co-founder of emotional intelligence testing and training company TalentSmart, **Travis Bradberry** argues that *"coming off caffeine reduces your cognitive performance and has a negative impact on your mood. The only way to get back to normal is to drink caffeine, and when you do drink it, you feel like it's taking you to new heights"*, but he explains further; *"In reality, the caffeine is just taking your performance back to normal for a short period"*.

In other words, the usual short-term ecstatic state that you get in after drinking coffee is what non-habitual caffeine consumers are undergoing all of the time. The difference is that for caffeine drinkers, the sensation does not last long.

To eliminate the problem of adrenal fatigue which can lead to depression and/or mood swings, the mind needs to be present at each moment. In creating a mental discipline that involves attention training, it highlights the things that are most useful and helpful, which eventually could make our daily jobs easier and comfortable or more fully conscious.



Limb walking / Source: N. Norton 2019



One of the things that constantly helps me, it is to simply cultivate an attitude of frankness, interest and endorsement. Accept failures, incorporate innovations, put yourself in someone else's shoes, admit you were wrong, untangle your throw line as if it were a therapy session, create a discipline of posture, breathing exercises and smile even at the worst moments are things that may be helpful to develop self-awareness. It is indeed hard to walk the talk, but I assure you is nonetheless achievable.

By definition, not paying attention amplifies our level of stress enormously. **Mindfulness** meditation can be the right solution if you were waiting for me to say so. Not new but proved by science as a fact that cures mental distress – if done properly.

Mindfulness enhances executive functions which are associated with the pre-frontal cortex, an area of the brain responsible to promote short-term memory. This area helps on processing information, to make decisions, regulates emotions and assists in how to prioritize things in life.

As you can see, essential for what we do daily. Well, before we go any deeper, I might give you some time to reflect and research about the subject.



Western Australia / Source: T. Miranda 2018

We now understand that the brain is constantly rewiring itself right throughout our lives. Attention development is an arduous task, mostly gradual and progressive and requires regular practice. The benefits do not come without effort – and I say by my experience in being a pretty anxious guy trying to tick along in life.



ARB DEBATE

As **Dr Craig Hassed** says: *“One cannot’ stop the mind from thinking’ and any attempt to do so generally leads to heightened tension and frustration. We can, however, learn not to be so reactive to it. This takes the emotive force out of it. Analogously, many trains of thought come into our minds but we can learn not to be moved by them not by trying to stop them or fight with them, but by learning that we don’t need to get on board any old train of thought that comes into our minds. That takes a lot of awareness”.*



The Grampians, VIC / Source: T. Miranda 2019