

It's not the noise, it's your relationship to it

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I had never heard of the syndrome called Highly Sensitive People (or HSPs) before several of my clients brought up the subject. They both cited their status as HSPs as reasons why they found certain situations to be intolerable (night clubs, parties, busy city streets). Their most common complaints were, "I can't concentrate" or "I can't hear my inner voice."

According to published books, HSPs have a biological predisposition to being overly sensitive to sensual stimulation. So, the theory goes, sound and visual stimulation can overwhelm the individual, making it difficult to think and act. One book on the subject provided suggestions for HSPs, which included avoidance of overly stimulating environments, and establishing a home that is soothing and quiet.

On the one hand, I often find that life consultation involves guiding people toward living less chaotic lives and quieting their minds. On the other hand, there was something about the presentation of this new syndrome that runs completely counter to my life-consultation approach.

My approach is all about empowering my clients and building their skills, especially being able to shift their inner approach so that they are well aligned with their environment. I'll explain further what I mean by that in upcoming paragraphs; for now, let's just say that, by shifting one's inner approach, a person should be able to enjoy both a quiet walk in the woods and a bustling cityscape.

Recently, I was offered a chance to test my theory personally. Being hungry, working on little sleep, and being sore for my gym workout the day before, I wandered into my noisy rambunctious company picnic a few weeks ago.

Bam! I found myself in Highly Sensitive Person mode! I had trouble concentrating on any one thing, I was irritable, and I literally felt slightly disoriented (having a difficult time making decisions about which way to walk, having trouble figuring out which line to get into).

In response, I decided to take responsibility for my inner approach to the picnic, and I experimented with shifting it. I breathed deeply and worked on relaxing the muscles in my body (for example, lowering my shoulders). I applied mindfulness techniques to clear my mind of all thoughts and just let sensory information come in un-edited. I then convinced myself that half my problem was trying to concentrate too much on any one thing; I shifted to an approach where I let all of the sounds and sights wash over me briefly, purposefully not focusing on any one thing for more than a second (most importantly, "making this new approach 'OK' with me").

Now, all of this shifting of my inner approach did not erase my achy body or fatigue. But it did put me in a mental and emotional place where I could "go with it" more easily. I felt considerably more relaxed, and better able to move about and enjoy the picnic.

In summary, human beings are certainly a mixture of genetics, biology, diet, exercise, emotion, thought, belief, spirituality, and more. Also, some people are "party people," some are "city people," and some are "country people." You'll get no argument from me on that point.

However, today's society seems to have shifted to an over reliance on the point of view "that's just the way I'm built!", to the point where personal responsibility and skill development are completely overlooked. Call me crazy, but a party person should be able to enjoy a quiet time on a lake. A country person should be able to enjoy a festival in the city. We all have that basic human ability; it's just up to us to tap into it and bring it into being for ourselves.