

Energy of joy is contagious

By Ruth Ostrow

THE people we surround ourselves with can make a huge difference to our health. Several mornings a week I make my way to the local gym.

I do it on automatic: roll out of bed, make my daughter's sandwiches with my eyes half shut, usher her to the bus-stop, and then drive around the corner. As I pummel the treadmill I am still half asleep, walking, walking, walking towards something I want to be, waiting for my morning caffeine hit to kick in.

Each morning the sound of music seems to crack open my head. It's like disco city without the fun. Just the thud of the base and iron grating against iron as people pull and push things, and make their way slowly around the circuit.

One morning last week I got a pleasant surprise. I crept into the gym in my usual way, started my routine on the treadmill, yet something seemed to be happening. For no logical reason I started to feel really alive, as if energy were pulsing through my body.

I'd noticed two new trainees when I first walked in. They were doing kick-boxing in the centre of the room behind me. They were powerful, electric and very energised.

Though I had my back to them, I could hear them grunting, and swearing and gasping as they did their routine, and I realised after 10 minutes that their energy was actually starting to invigorate me.

I noticed the same phenomenon a few days later. Some new people were in the gym, and they were really pumping iron, putting out some very highly-charged vibes. Again I felt my body tingling and the urge to push myself that little bit harder rather than just maintain the status quo.

"Sounds natural to me, you don't want to be seen to be a big lump amidst all those super-fit people. It's a performance thing," said one friend who works out.

But my gym instructor disagreed.

"I think that when there are people around doing high-octane stuff it does create an energy field around the entire room which seems to pump everyone else up. I've seen it time and time again. People really do influence each other."

There is, of course, the scent of testosterone and the chemicals we give off when we exercise that stimulate those around. But my instructor, who is well-versed in martial arts, says his master taught him that we all have the ability to influence each other using energy fields, which is why kung fu experts can knock several people over with the poke of a finger or chop lumps of concrete in half with a single blow of the hand.

Bounding out of the gymnasium on those two occasions last week, I began to notice that the same formula is true in every facet of our lives. It may be a cliché but worth remembering that we define our mood by the company we keep.

When we wallow in the energy of negative people, our own psyches become burdened and somewhat polluted and depressed.

A book I recently discovered by Joe H. Slate, (professor, psychologist and founder of the Psychology Research Institute in the US) called *Psychic Vampires: Protection from Energy Predators and Parasites*, describes how we feel when we hang around with people who actually take our energy and make us feel like drained wet rags.

Like their mythological counterparts, energy vampires unconsciously live off the vitality of others.

As a result they come away from an encounter feeling better, whilst their victims are left exhausted, depleted and robbed of life-force.

Conversely, when we spend time around funny people, high-energy, highly optimistic people, we seem to be left with a feeling that we can conquer the world, the way I felt in the gym.

A friend who was getting very depressed fed this back to me. He was not coping at work, and seemed to be in an environment where everyone was dour and miserable. When he changed to another company he noted that the people around were happy and lively and full of enthusiasm. He says he is now 10 times more motivated than he ever was.

"It's wonderful. I feel so much lighter. Some places do suck the life-blood out of you. Some people make you anxious. In this job, I feel really filled up."

The point is to approach other people with the same awareness we use when we consider any health-affecting product -- be it a happy pill, a pick-me-up drink, or a fattening lump of cake.

When we need to feel better, it is clever and prudent to seek out the company of positive people. Not in order to drain them as energy vampires do (deliberately wanting to be carried, or dumping our issues on to their shoulders), rather to simply enjoy their invigorating, stimulating positivity.

It's profoundly healing being around the energy of joy, whilst toxic relationships are as unhealthy as eating food with pesticides. The people we surround ourselves with are, in my opinion, even more important to our wellbeing than what we ingest.

www.ruthostrow.com

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