The WorkPlace

Fireman Meets the Feldenkrais Method®

As a New York City Fireman and Feldenkrais® Practitioner I have had the experience of using the Feldenkrais Method in my work environment to help my co-workers eliminate injuries and improve their work habits. Firefighting is a very stressful occupation and many injuries occur.

After 9/11, I made a bigger attempt to teach group sessions and individual sessions in the firehouses in New York. Firemen can be a very tough bunch, the idea of moving slowly is not part of their vocabulary, especially when the bell rings and time is an important factor.

I came up with some interesting ideas. You can still move fast but without internal tension, without trying too hard. In one experiment we worked with an Awareness Through Movement® lesson from lying to sitting. A lot of firemen just jump out of bed at night and add more stress to themselves.

We explored using the pelvis to initiate the roll out of bed while keeping the spine soft, the head being the last thing to leave the bed. Many said they watched children roll out of bed like this. Yet the experience was a real eye opener for them.

They have appreciated my efforts to bring a table to work and give mini Functional Integration® lessons. They have to be mini because the bell can ring at any time. The percentage of fireman that do come for lessons is usually about 50 percent. They do recognize the fact that they have cut down their work injuries by 90 percent and have reduced their stress levels tremendously.

I became interested in the Feldenkrais Method after sustaining a serious injury in 1997 in a major fire. After trying physical therapy, chiropractic, and massage, I went to see a Feldenkrais practitioner. After three lessons my pain was gone and I could return to work 100 percent. My interpersonal relationships also improved and made me realize all stress patterns can be changed through choice and having options in life.

In the Feldenkrais Method we are learning new ways of movement and acting in the world. One fireman asked me after a session, “How come something so simple is not well known?” I told him if you share it with other people, it will be and you will love yourself at the same time.

—by Charles Velez, GCFT, NYFD

FEFNA was presented with a contribution by Southwest Awareness Educators.

The gift will be used to promote the Method and create more public awareness. We would like to thank them for their generous contribution.

If you are interested in supporting FEFNA, a nonprofit, tax-exempt foundation, and would like to make a contribution, please contact Barbara Greenfield via email at <executivedirector@feldenkraigschool.com> or phone 1.866/FEFNA4U (1.866/333-6248). We appreciate your support.
I am a 71 year old man. By vocation a career massage therapist—NY State licensed and still working at that. I also drive a cab at night—40 hours a week—for the past four and one half years. Until a short time ago, I wore prescription eyeglasses for distance.

Recently, I took a mandatory eye test for renewal of my driver’s license. The examination was given by a board certified ophthalmologist. To my astonishment, the testing conclusively revealed 20-20 vision in each eye and binocularly (with both eyes). Also, my eyes were very healthy—excepting for some age-related changes. How could this be? That my vision could be this good—returned to where I was at 21. What set of circumstances over a period of time might have brought this particular change?

At 21 years of age, glasses were prescribed—full time. I was not happy. I sought remedial measures. A vision improvement method helped. But it did not bring the lasting results I wanted.

Through time, a visit to an optometrist proved inconclusive. The testing was thorough but he didn’t offer any hope. I persevered, and became interested in vision in all of its manifestations. I scoured libraries for information and sought other sources.

At this point in time, my brother gave me a book, “Awareness Through Movement,” by Moshe Feldenkrais. He said to me: “Here is the new frontier in exercise physiology.” We did the exercises to together and apart. They had a profound and lasting effect on each of us. Sometimes we wrote letters with only one word: “Feldenkrais.”

I entered a Feldenkrais training program four and one half years ago. I graduated in 2002. The process involved in this work brought significant changes in my person. But none more dramatic than the return of my vision.

This story is about perseverance and hope. And at my age, with all my failings, I still have hope for the future.

—by Arthur Demetriou, GCFT, LMT
Brooklyn, NY

The book, “Awareness Through Movement,” by Moshe Feldenkrais, founder of the Feldenkrais Method, is available in the FEFNA Bookstore. In it, Dr. Feldenkrais shows us how to: “…use our skill, not our will.”

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Skeletal Awareness Can Help You Be More Comfortable Throughout Your Day

The following experiment will help you experience how the position of your feet can affect the comfort of your back, even while sitting.

1) Sit toward the front of the seat of your chair so that you aren’t leaning against the back of your chair.

2) Position your feet flat on the floor a comfortable distance apart from each other and have your knees over your feet.

3) Sit in a way so that you’re not slouching.

4) Now cross your ankles. Does crossing your ankles cause a change in the position of your back?

5) Test it out by, again, alternating between having your feet flat on the floor and doing something other than having your feet solid on the ground. Do you start to feel tension in your back when your feet aren’t flat on the ground?

When you sit with each foot flat on the floor AND you sit on both "sit bones" (ischial tuberosity), you have four points of support.

1) Again, sit in a way that you’re not slouching with your feet flat on the ground. Place your hands directly below your waist at the top of your hipbones (iliac crests).

2) Go into a slouch and notice that the tops of your hipbones (iliac crests) tilt backward.

3) Roll the top of your hipbones forward just until they point upward to the ceiling. Now you are sitting on your ischial tuberosity so your pelvis can support your spine.

4) As you alternate between #2 and #3 of this section, look around yourself. Notice if there is a difference in how far you can look to the right and to the left.

5) As you alternate between #2 and #3 of this section, reach with your arms. Notice if there’s a difference in the freedom of your shoulders and arms.

Skeletal awareness is just one of many ways the Feldenkrais Method® of Somatic Education helps people move more comfortably and efficiently throughout their working day.

—by Pamela Kihm, GCFT
Author of the book, “Stop Sciatica Now”
Help Yourself: Educational Materials for Self-Study

Products based on the Feldenkrais Method available from the FEFNA Bookstore. Call toll free 1.866.333.6248 and ask for a fee catalog or visit our website at: <www.feldenkrais.com>

- Secrets of Sounder Sleep, by Michael Krugman. Two audio CDs, Product No. 2104, $45, plus shipping and handling.
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