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Increasing Personal Effectiveness

with Body Friendly Furniture

By Patrick Clark

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Body Friendly Furniture is fun and enhances wellness and the creative process.

1) Body Friendly Furniture puts us in positions we are not accustomed to. The unfamiliarity shakes up our self concept. Just the act of moving and using a variety of positions is enough to shake up the status quo of our subconscious. This is ideal for stimulating new ideas and outgrowing old ways of seeing things. If you work outside the box, you can't help but think outside the box. This helps to break through writer's block like nothing else.

The standard desk and chair work station is not exactly active (like standing) and not exactly passive (like lying down). At first it feels very strange to actually be productive and working while in a comfortable relaxing position or an outright active position. We don't typically go to the office or studio to work out or to get in a meditative state. However, if you look at typical behavior in more relaxed environments like the home, you see people tend to get into any position they can other than the desk and chair arrangement. That's why you never see an ad for something representing freedom and prosperity unless the person on the computer is lying on his/her stomach either on a bed or the floor. The next step would be to bring this attitude to the office.

2) Body Friendly Furniture lengthens and widens the body, makes breathing deeper and fuller, oxygenates the blood, and tailor's the most conducive brain waves to fit the activity at hand. There are many factors determining which brainwaves at any particular time are the best for any particular activity. It doesn't have to be some mental decision. If you just FEEL like lying down to write, then that will probably yield the best results. If you later have an urge to change to sitting or standing, then the moving and changing positions will facilitate the project.

I find that different times of days I generally prefer different positions. I start out at my stand up Eco Desk and work my way to sitting and later lounging. When I stand it's like having three cups of coffee when I've only had one. I have found that when I stand up most of the day, I sleep much better at night. Also, there could be no better way of toning and balancing the 'core' and the legs and feet (other than perhaps being a hunter-



Shown here is part of my Dynamic Office with a place for active sitting as well as lounging. This converts to a bed at night. Shown are: Peace Bench, Tilt Seat Eco Chair, Eco Backrest, and Zafu.



This shows the Eco Backrest in action, my favorite reading position.

gatherer).

3) The movement inherent in Body Friendly Furniture creates more brain wave coherence. Brain wave coherence is where the right and left hemispheres are working smoothly together so inspiration can flow and there is less 'static'. When either standing or active sitting the body is actively engaged which stimulates neuromuscular feedback. To get even more movement one can pace back and forth or do some stretching on the floor. I keep some dumbbells in my office. Other options are: yoga props, treadmill, mini trampoline, Om Gym™, Fotsie Roller™, Ma Roller™, or whatever suites your needs.

4) On the other hand, the lounge position puts the body in a state of complete rest. This position is generally more conducive to activities that are more receptive—like reading or watching a video. I find that I cannot think 50% as well when I'm trying to write in the lounge position—but that position helps me to read and absorb more effectively than the active positions.

5) Body Friendly Furniture can induce the Relaxation Response. This is specifically: slower heart rate, deeper slower breathing, deeper slower more coherent brain waves. Relaxation has been shown in numerous studies to be the optimal state for learning and problem solving. We don't exactly know all the reasons for this phenomenon. My hypothesis is: the increased breathing capacity brings optimal oxygen to the lungs which in turn puts more oxygen in the blood which in turn triggers relaxation hormones and reduces stress hormones. Or part of this picture could be: the deeper breathing effects the brainwaves, making them more coherent. This is a great area for a research project!

Furniture which cuts off breathing and circulation is basically counter productive. Furniture which widens and lengthens the body, opens the chest and abdomen, and puts bones and joints in a natural neutral position is life enhancing and regenerative. This is the opposite of what society offers. Body Friendly Furniture doesn't look comfortable—it IS comfortable. Conventional furniture LOOKS comfortable but falls far short of it's promise. The reason it LOOKS comfortable is because all of us have grown up with conventional furniture and our brains have been 'entrained' with it. We are USED to it. We associate it with our 'comfort zone' and have no other point of reference. Civilization is constantly making new discoveries and improvements. With research done in the past 30 years in the area of ergonomics and learning, the time has come to implement that into the furniture we use every day. Modern and conventional furniture—that which most of the world is built around--is holding us back.

Here is my criteria for what makes furniture body friendly, people friendly and back friendly:

- 1) Uses four primary positions which put the body in alignment (or neutral): standing, active sitting, lounging, and lying down.
- 2) Numerous built-in opportunities for stretching and movement.
- 3) Inexpensive and widely available. There are some really great chairs for 'active sitting' on the market which are appropriate from some circumstances. However, most people can't afford them, so they do little to promote the movement.
- 4) Adaptable to the modern home, office and conventional lifestyle. Even the office cubicle? Why not? Radical yes, but you have to start somewhere.
- 5) Minimalist (firm surfaces, planar, small, modular, multipurpose)



This is my favorite writing position set up--
The Zen Office.



This shows my Stand Up Eco Desk in the corner.

6) Simple elegance. Built for function and beauty not for status.

7) Makes use of existing circumstances and structures as much as possible. (e.g. Doesn't add a whole piece where only a part is needed.)

8) Friendly to the planet and the people who made the furniture. (Get away from the 'Made in China, sold at a big box store' model).

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!