

Mental Calisthenics and Cognitive Aikido

JOE FERGUSON, PhD

PhD Clinical Psychology, Fielding University
MBA, Wharton School of Business



Use it or lose it is the slogan of the current mental calisthenics fad, which is intended to overcome age-related decline in cognitive functions. These declines actually begin about age 25 but most people don't notice for a couple of decades, when short and recent term memory losses become impossible to ignore. *Why did I come to the kitchen?* Like the decline in vision that requires reading glasses around this time, memory deterioration is a minor irritant that either effortful attention or a notepad can remedy. Memory functions decline steadily and continuously over the lifespan, although there is a great deal of variation among individuals. Since memory is vital to every cognitive function it gets the lion's share of popular attention, but processing speed and stamina for effortful thinking and sustained attention also decline. These realities disturb some people, which accounts for the appeal of the many products and programs that claim to arrest or reverse them. Most such programs are based on the false premise that mental exercises for memory and cognition are equivalent to physical calisthenics for muscular strength and agility.

I think this approach is barking up the wrong tree entirely. Just as I have to ski more gracefully these days in lieu of the speed, power, and orthopedic resilience of my youth, I have found it necessary and possible to think more gracefully as well. I am exploring many cognitive adaptations. Most generally, I try to reflect on my chosen objects of interest with less intensity over a longer period of time. Most specifically, I now maintain effortful concentration on new insights that I wish to retain for 20 seconds beyond the point at which I fully grasp them, which gets them into long term memory whence they otherwise do not necessarily penetrate. Hopefully, by now I have also acquired some wisdom so that I don't have to reevaluate everything all the time. I am *at least* as happy with my own cognitive function at 57 as I was at 25, although I think quite differently now. It is my intention to continue this trend indefinitely and I think that is realistic.

Relief, Recovery, Resolution

*Primarily for men and adolescent males in transition and in crisis,
and for women who want to understand them better*

332 Forest Avenue, Suite #17, Laguna Beach, CA 92651
(949) 235-2615 ~ DrJoe@Fergi.com ~ www.Fergi.com