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**Reshaping the
Narrative of
Motivation and
Performance**

The Last Time You Did Good Work



Work Featured on  Google Cloud Next '24

Brad NELSON

Author

*I Think therefore I Know:
Scientific Thinking for
Unscientific Organizations*



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Professional Certificate

This is to certify that

Bradley Nelson

successfully completed all courses and received
passing grades for a Professional Certificate in

**Happiness in Leadership: Driving Team
Success**

a program offered by HarvardX, in collaboration
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PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATE
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HarvardX

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ronald Heifetz'.

Ronald Heifetz

Founder, Center for Public Leadership; King Hussein Bin
Talal Senior Lecturer in Public Leadership at Harvard
Kennedy School
Harvard University

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luana Marques'.

Luana Marques

Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical
School
Harvard University

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arthur Brooks'.

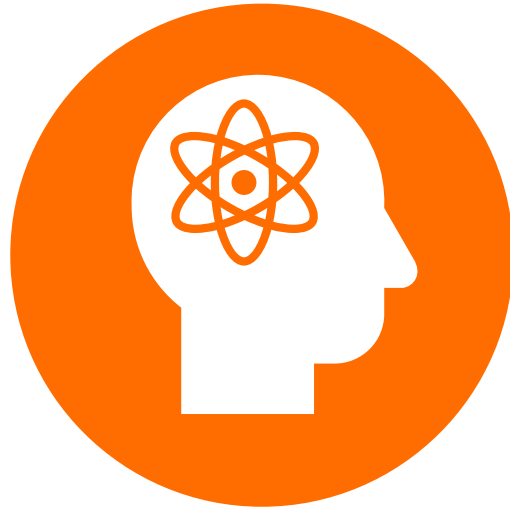
Arthur Brooks

William Henry Bloomberg Professor of the Practice of
Public Leadership at Harvard Kennedy School and
Professor of Management Practice at Harvard Business
School
Harvard University

DISCLAIMER

- ✓ I am not a doctor... nor do I play one on TV.
- ✓ The content provided in this presentation is intended for informational purposes only. These slides are not, and should not, be relied upon as medical advice, and should not be used to make a clinical diagnosis, to provide treatment, or to replace or overrule a licensed health care provider's judgment.
- ✓ This content has been reviewed by multiple professionals, including a medical doctor, for accuracy.
- ✓ The opinions within this presentation are mine and may not coincide with the opinions of any organization I am associated with.
- ✓ These slides will be made available at the end of the presentation with all 50+ references.

Understand how humans operate



Biology

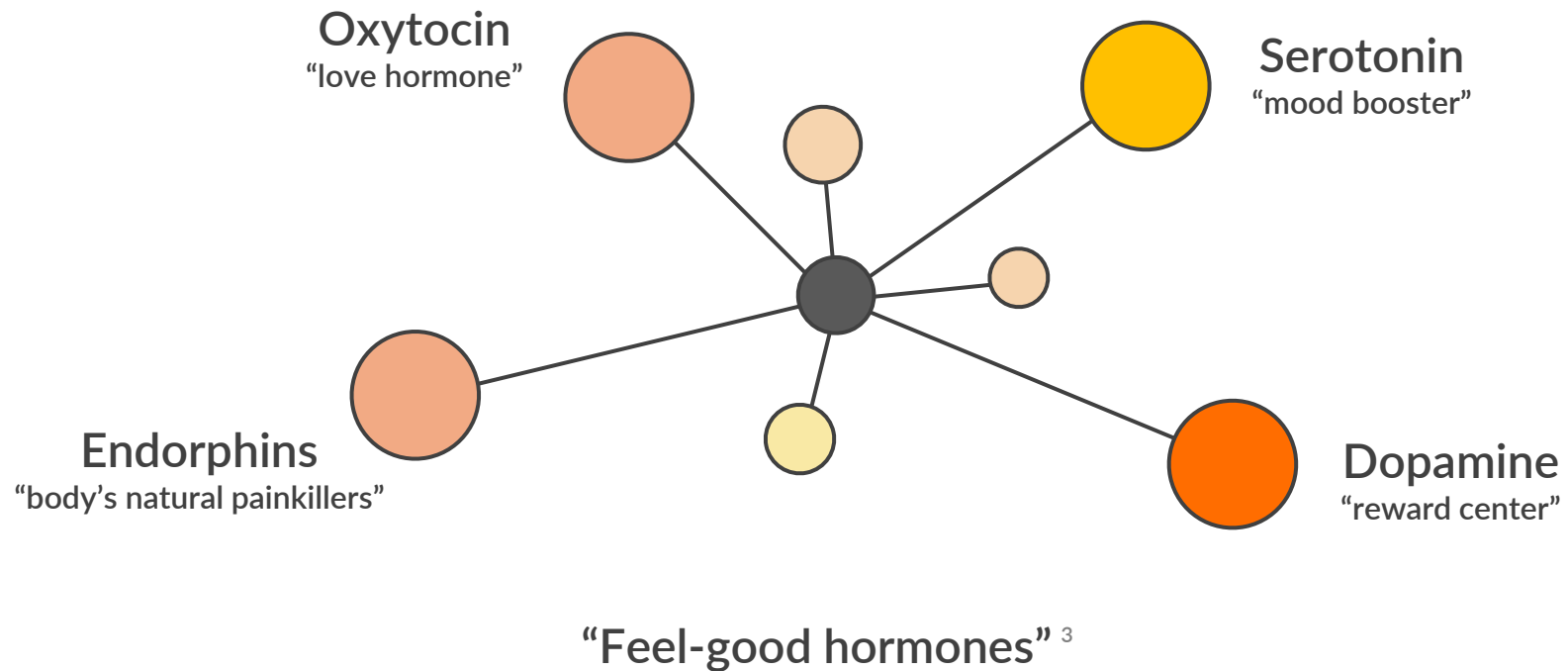
(Neurobiology)



Psychology

Neurotransmitters

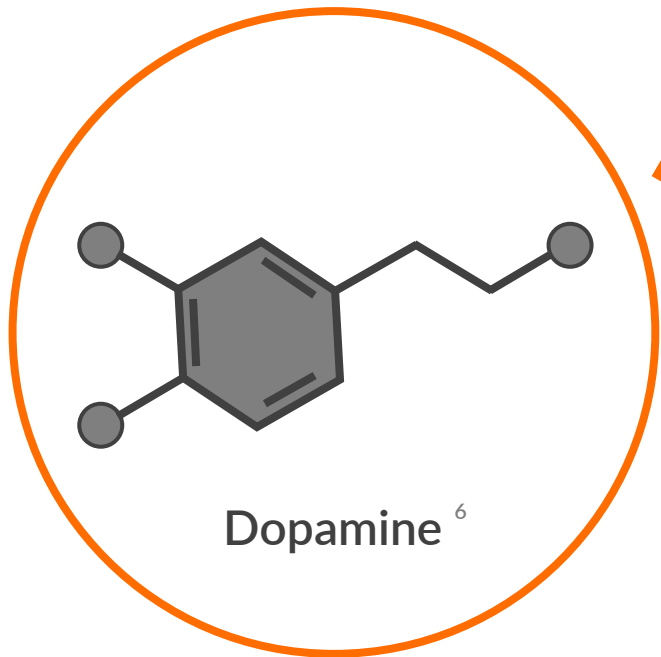
Neurons firing electrical signals produce neurotransmitters ³



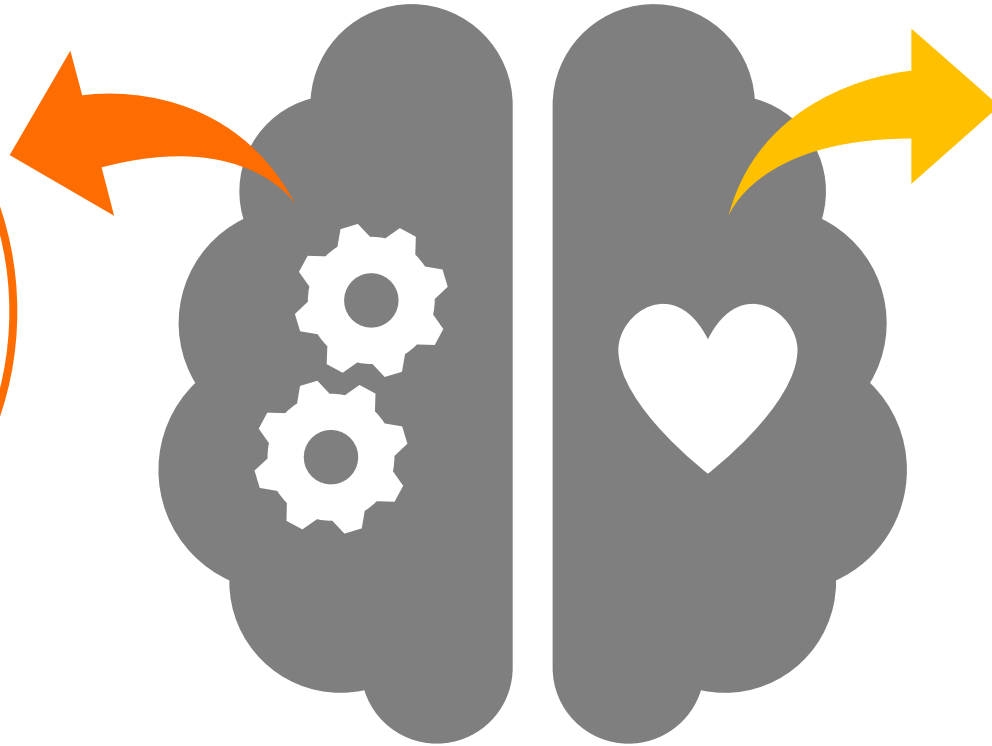
3. Korb 2015

4. Camilleri 2010

Neurotransmitters



- Attention/Focus³
- Learning
- Memory



- Alertness/Wakefulness³
- Motivation/Willpower
- Manage-Anxiety

3. Korb 2015

5. PubChem Serotonin (Compound) 2024

6. PubChem Dopamine (Compound) 2024

The Happiness Advantage

Results of research from 200+ scientific studies on ~275,000 people



found that **happiness leads to success** in nearly every domain of our lives
– from relationships to jobs, health and creativity.

24. Achor 2010

Happiness Improves Every Outcome



**Stronger
Sales** ¹



**Increase
Productivity** ¹



**Decrease
burnout** ¹



**Lower
turnover** ¹



**Become more
resilient** ¹



**Secure more
jobs** ¹



**Better keep
your job** ¹



**Improved
Health** ²

1. Lyubomirsky, King, Diener 2005

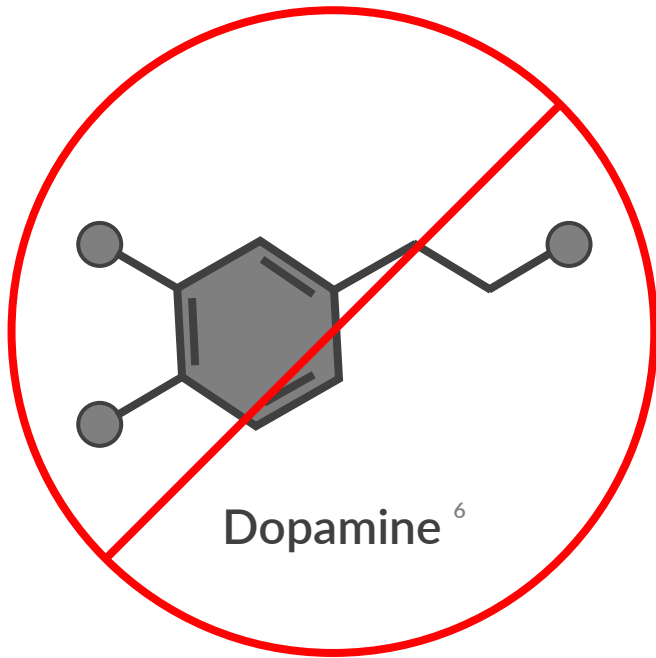
2. Beckman 2006

STRESS

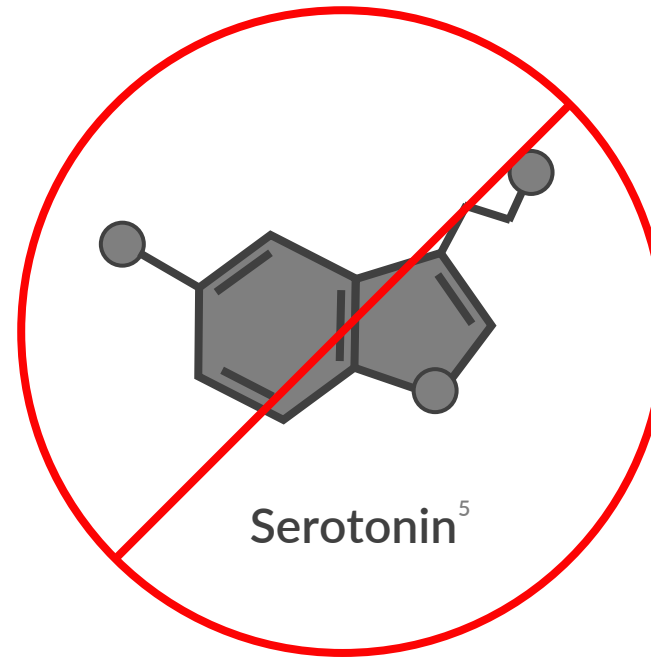
- 1. a response to mental or emotional strain**
- 2. a prompt to address challenges or threats in our life**

The Stress Hormone

Cortisol is a steroid hormone produced in response to stress. ³



Inhibits dopamine production ^{3,7}



Increases the consumption of serotonin ^{3,7}

3. Korb 2015

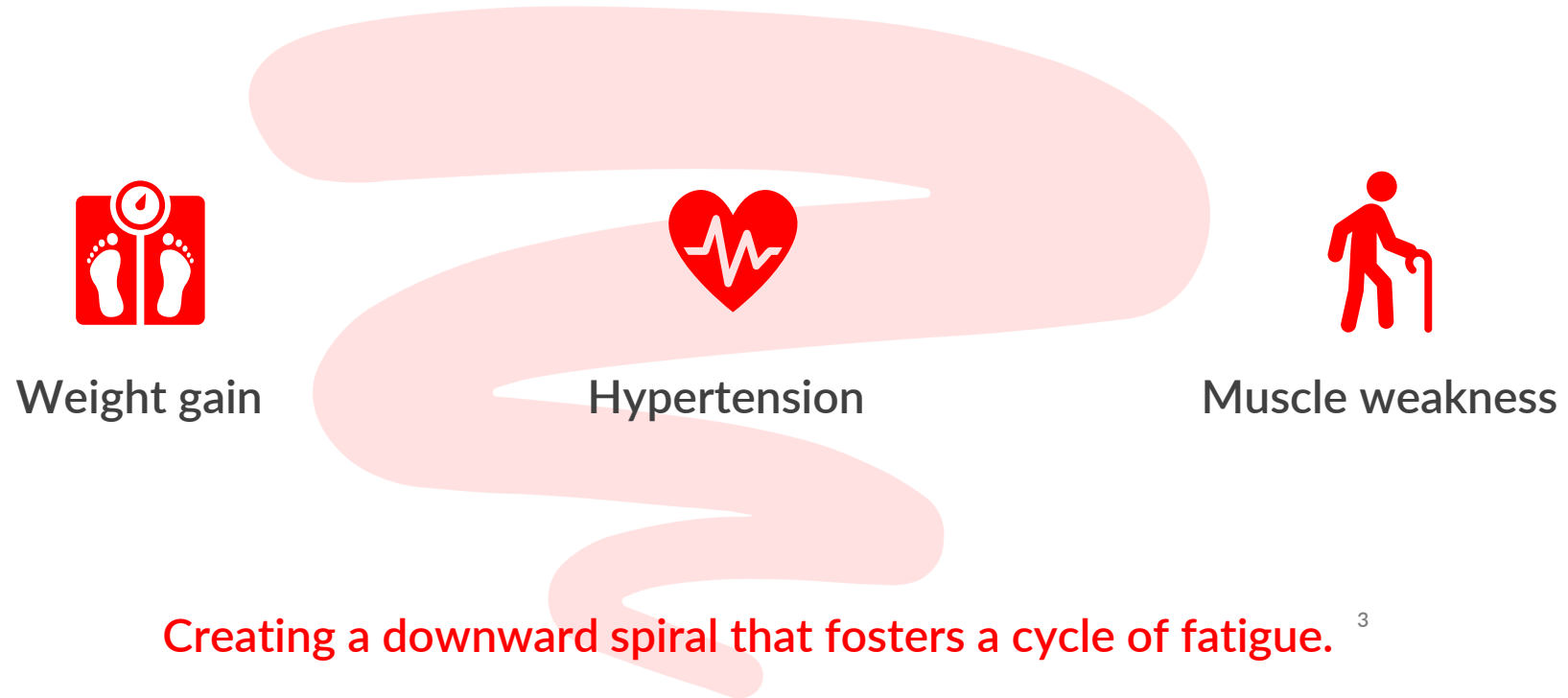
5. PubChem Serotonin (Compound) 2024

6. PubChem Dopamine (Compound) 2024

7. Tafet, Toister-Achituv, & Shinitzky 2001

The Stress Hormone

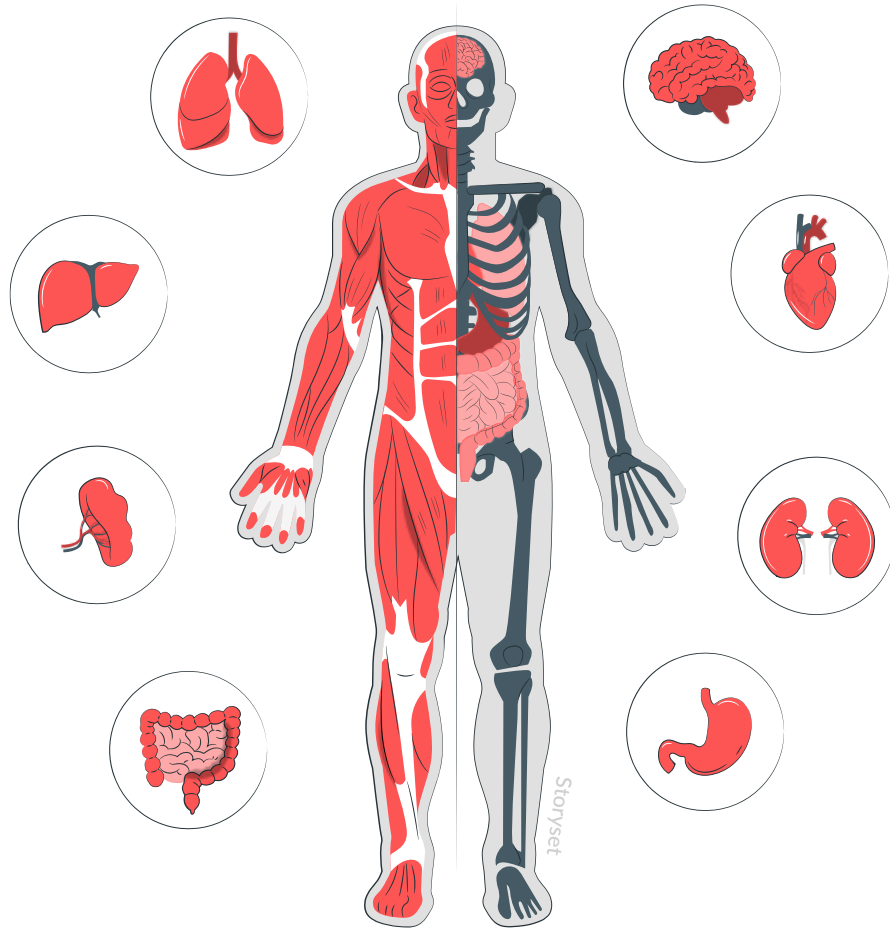
Elevated cortisol levels also contribute to: ⁸



3. Korb 2015

8. Shaw et al. 2023

Stress affects all systems of the body⁸



Up to 90% of all doctor's office visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints.²

Emotional stress is **a major cause** of physical illness, from cancer to autoimmune conditions and many other chronic diseases.⁹

2. Beckman 2016

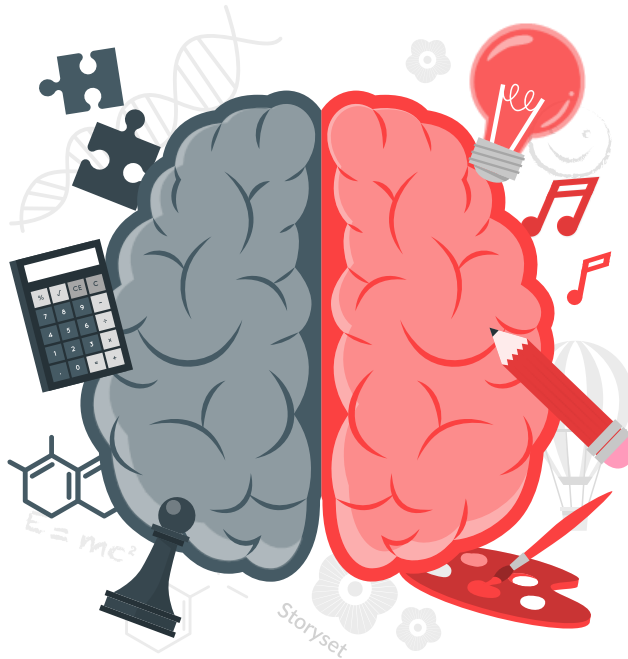
8. Shaw et al. 2023

9. Maté 2021

Neuroplasticity

The brain structurally changes in response to environmental demands.²¹

Increased stress causes the amygdala to grow.²²



Stress decreases neuroplasticity.²²

3. Korb 2015

21. Maguire et al. 2000

23. Hogenboom 2023

1/2 of workers are **unsatisfied** with their jobs



4/10 workers see their job as central to their **identity**

3/10 workers find their job to be **stressful**

1/3 of U.S. adults have been diagnosed with **depression**

Day Reconstruction Activity

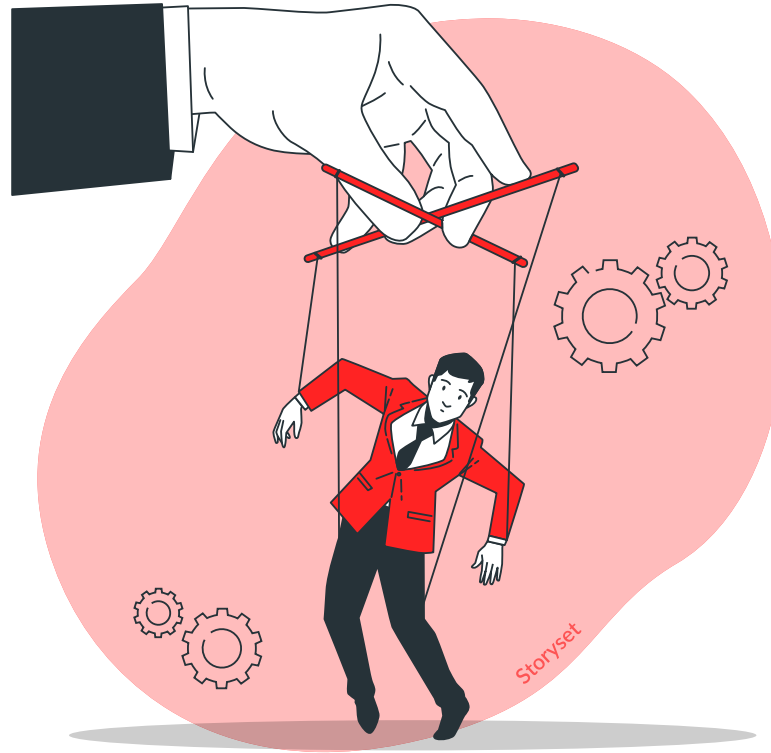
Track your activities over the course of a single day.

Describe the activity	Rate happiness
Get up to alarm at 6 am	0 = not at all
Drink fresh cup of coffee	6 = very much

What things made you the happiest?

What lines did you rate the lowest?

What is the #1 cause of stress at work?



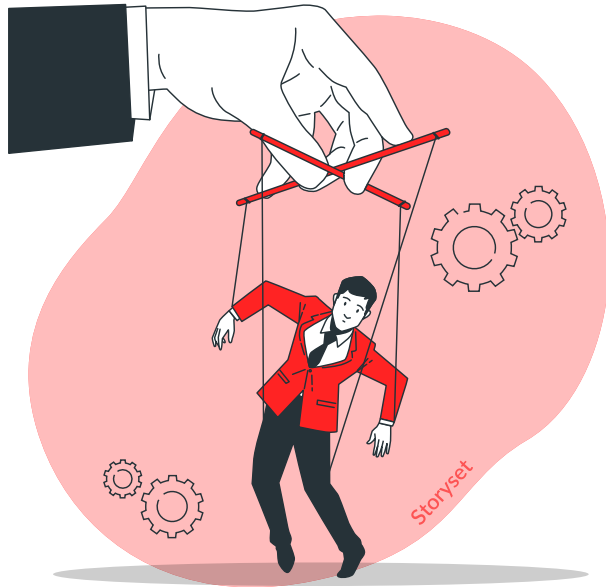
A lack of control ¹¹

11. Johnston et al. 2018

12. Job, Walton, Bernecker & Dweck 2013

Lack of Control

#1 cause of stress at work ¹¹



- Micromanaging
- Limited decision-making power
- Constant oversight from superior or monitoring tool ²²
- Strict processes
- Mandated deadlines and goals
- Lack of Psychological Safety

We are biologically wired to perform worse in command & control environments. ¹¹

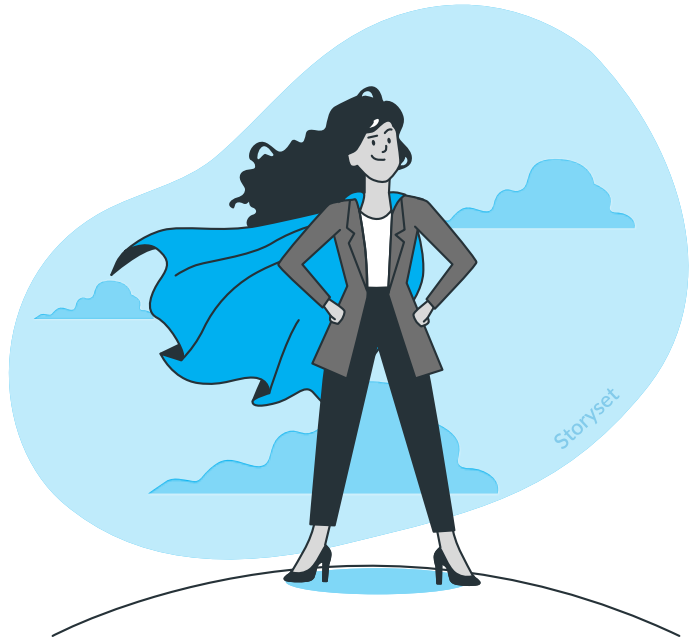
11. Johnston et al. 2018

12. Ackerman 2018

13. Cho & Perry 2011

22. Smith et al. 1992

Feeling in Control



Two Types of Motivation:¹²

1. Controlled Motivation (Extrinsic)

- Expected reward or punishment

2. Autonomous Motivation (Intrinsic)

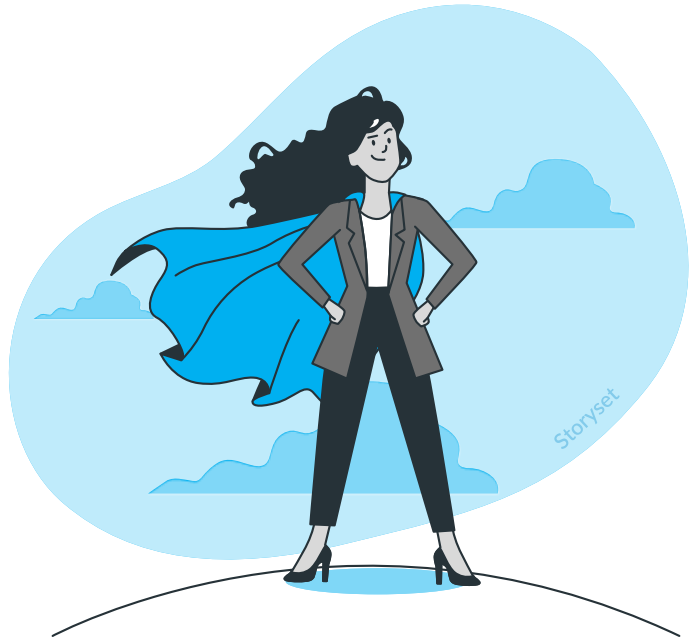
- Control
- Competence
- Connection

11. Johnston et al. 2018

12. Ackerman 2018

13. Cho & Perry 2011

Feeling in Control



Autonomous Motivation > Controlled Motivation

- Intrinsically motivated employees are 3x more engaged ¹³
- Positive extrinsic motivators lose effectiveness and can diminish engagement
- Negative extrinsic motivators create stress leading to cortisol production

11. Johnston et al. 2018

12. Ackerman 2018

13. Cho & Perry 2011

Language of Choice

It's not what you say, but how you say it!

- × Do you “have” to do it?
- × “I need you to do this for me.”
- × “I need this by...”
- × “Bill, can you pick up this next item?”

- ✓ Or do you “want” to do it?
(Even better if you “get” to do it!)
- ✓ “Can you help me with this?”
- ✓ “When could you get to this?”
- ✓ “Who has capacity for this next item?”

11. Johnston et al. 2018

12. Ackerman 2018

13. Cho & Perry 2011

Promoting Happiness

- There are known ways to promote happiness within our own lives ^{3, 24, 41}
- There is no ONE thing, it is a bunch of little things that create an **upward spiral** ³
- Happiness in our personal lives is also intrinsic ^{3, 24, 41}
 - Only 10% of long-term happiness can be predicted by external factors ²⁴



3. Korb 2015

24. Achor 2010

41. Robbins 2021

Biological Notification System

- Mood is a basic summary of our current state
- Our bodies evolved to signal us when it has a need
- We must learn what those signals mean
- Depression is one of those signals
- *Contentment* is the absence of these signals

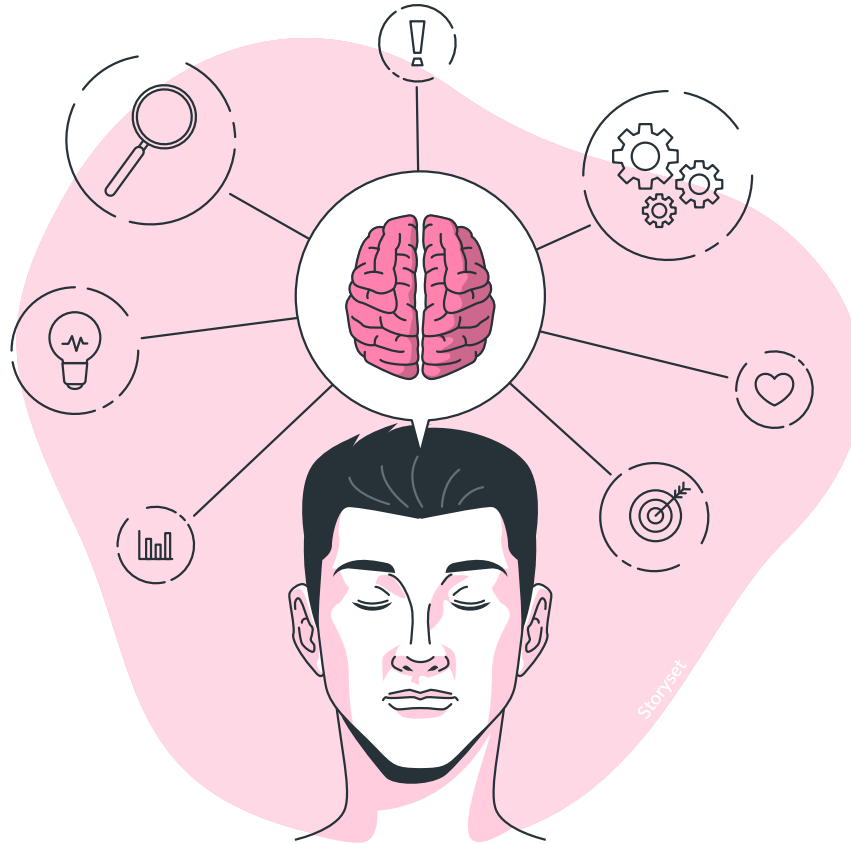


53. Barrett 2017

54. Barrett 2020

Reticular Active System (RAS)

RAS filters 99% of our surroundings to prevent sensory overload.



It identifies what is important enough to catch our attention.

Retrain the RAS

3, 16, 24, 35, 41

Reframing Activity

Describe the activity	Why are you doing it?
Get up to alarm at 6 am	I want to feel ready for work
Finish my TPS report every Friday	I don't want 8 lectures from my 8 bosses

Pick
One

Gratitude Journal

What am I Grateful For?
I am grateful I get to present this talk today.
I am grateful I can facetime my family while traveling.
I am grateful caffeine exists in many forms!

Pick something you don't want to do:
Why do you want to do this activity?
What would happen if you didn't do it?

List 3 things you're grateful for.

3. Korb 2015

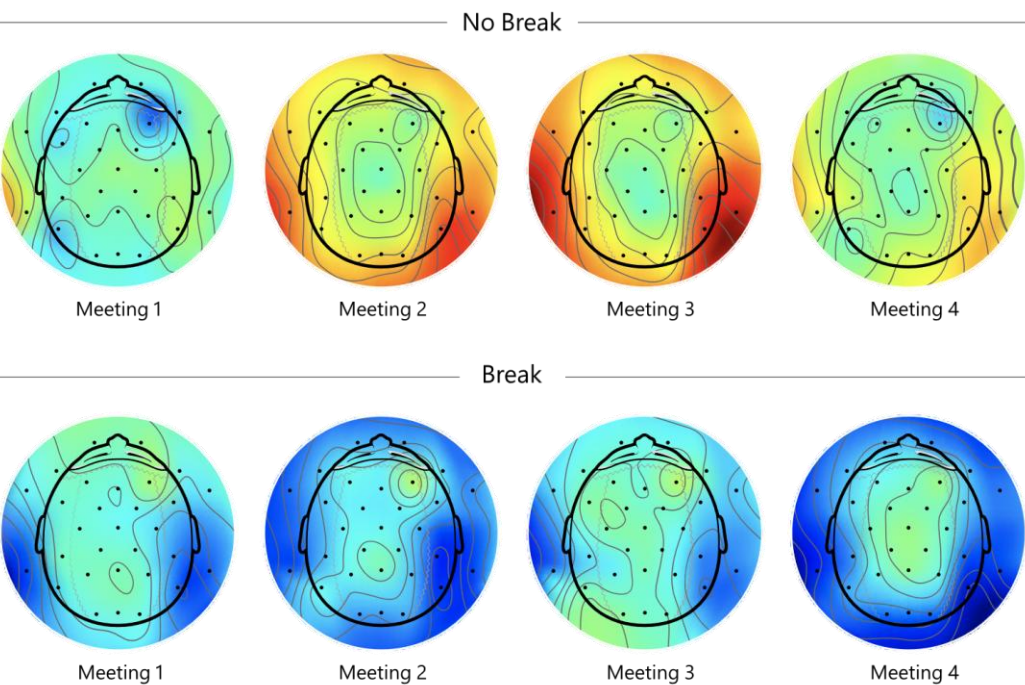
41. Robbins 2021

16. Bradberry 2014

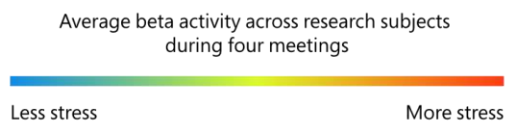
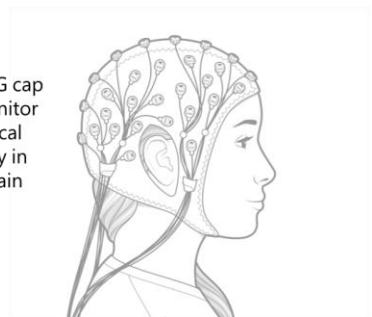
24. Achor 2010

35. Emmons & McCullough 2003

Take A Break!

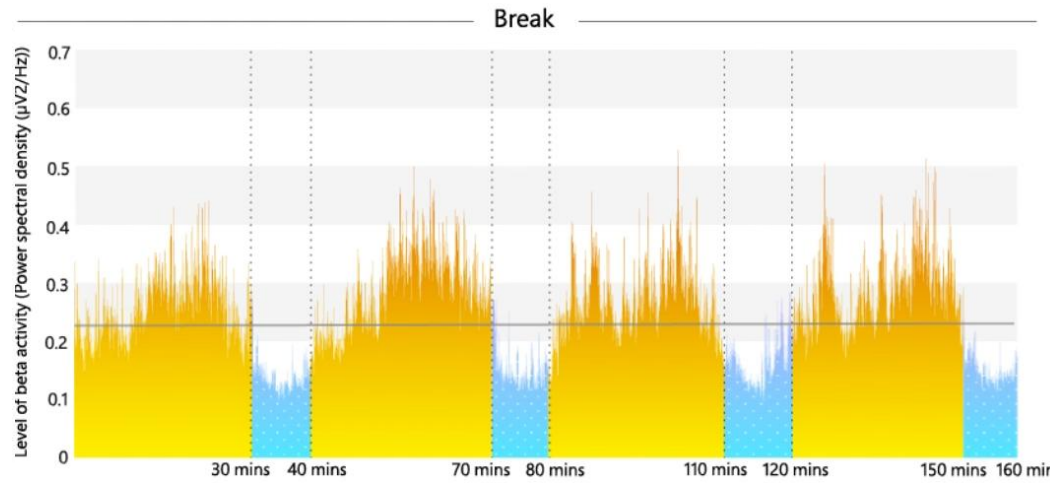
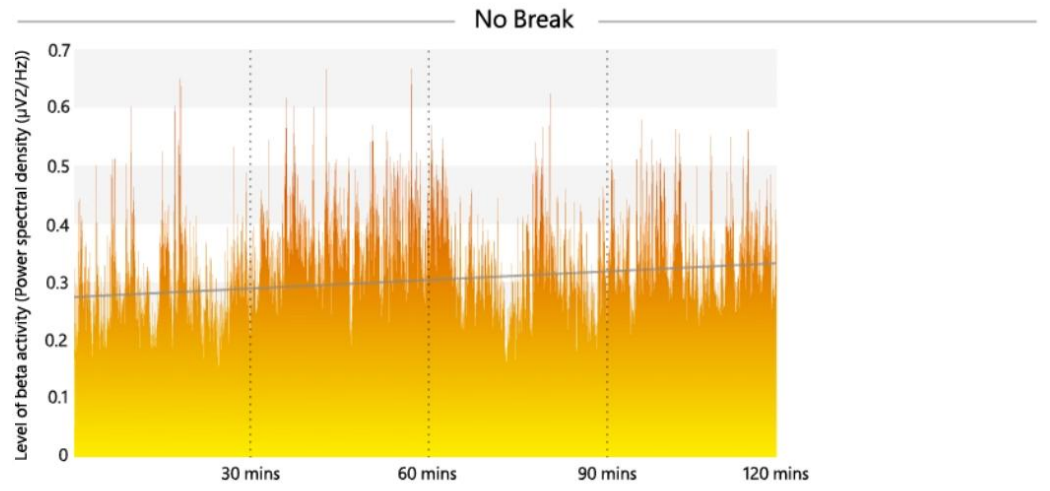


An EEG cap to monitor electrical activity in the brain



Microsoft's Human Factors Lab
Illustration by Brown Bird Design

Stress level during meetings Stress level during breaks



44. Wiseman 2021

Illustration by Valerio Pellegrini

2 Largest Predictors of happiness and overall life expectancy: ^{24, 32}



Social Connection ^{3, 10, 24}



Physical Activity ^{3, 27, 32, 45}

3. Korb 2015

10. Gallup Organization 2023

24. Achor 2010

27. Dutta 2023

32. Buettner 2010

45. Suzuki & Fitzpatrick 2015

50. Lieberman 2020

2 Largest Predictors of happiness and overall life expectancy: ^{24, 32}



Social Connection ^{3, 10, 24}

“The world's longest study on happiness found that having good relationships is the best predictor of living a happy, healthy, long life.”

— Dr. Laurie Santos
Yale Professor of Psychology

3. Korb 2015

10. Gallup Organization 2023

24. Achor 2010

27. Dutta 2023

32. Buettner 2010

45. Suzuki & Fitzpatrick 2015

50. Lieberman 2020

Social Connection



Interacting with others
produces oxytocin ³

- Same receptor as serotonin
- Reduces pain, anxiety, & stress
- Activates centers responsible for social interactions

Having friends at work is
key to employee
engagement ¹⁰

Take advantage of existing opportunities:

1. Add fun or levity to existing meetings
2. Extend existing interactions
3. Eat or run errands with another
4. Make existing hobbies social
5. Message someone for no reason every day

3. Korb 2015

10. Gallup Organization 2023

24. Achor 2010

27. Dutta 2023

32. Buettner 2010

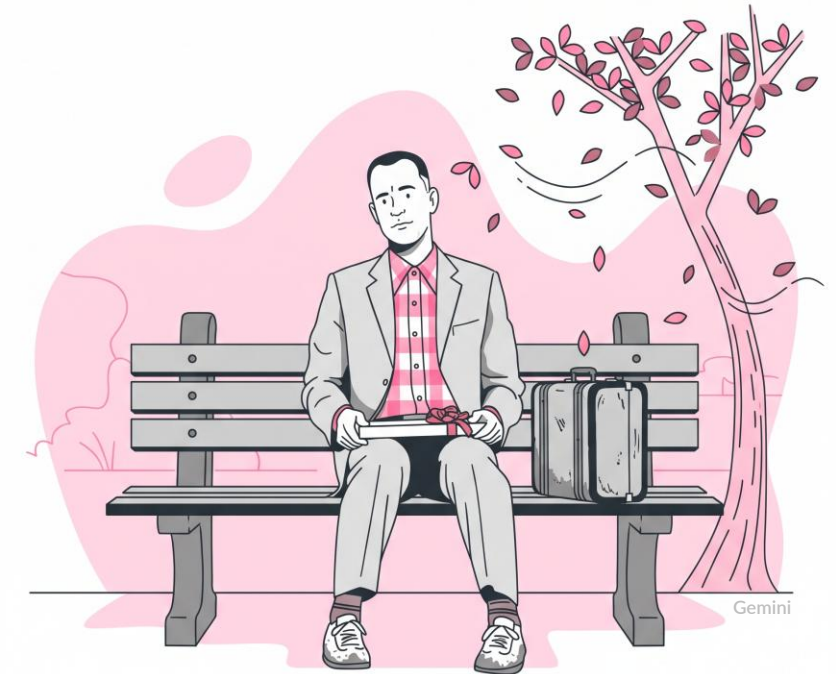
45. Suzuki & Fitzpatrick 2015

50. Lieberman 2020

Rules of Engagement

Two easy tips for small talk:

1. **Go deeper, not wider.**⁵¹
Follow the thread instead of jumping topics.
2. **Expand on your answers.**⁵²
Give the other person something to work with.



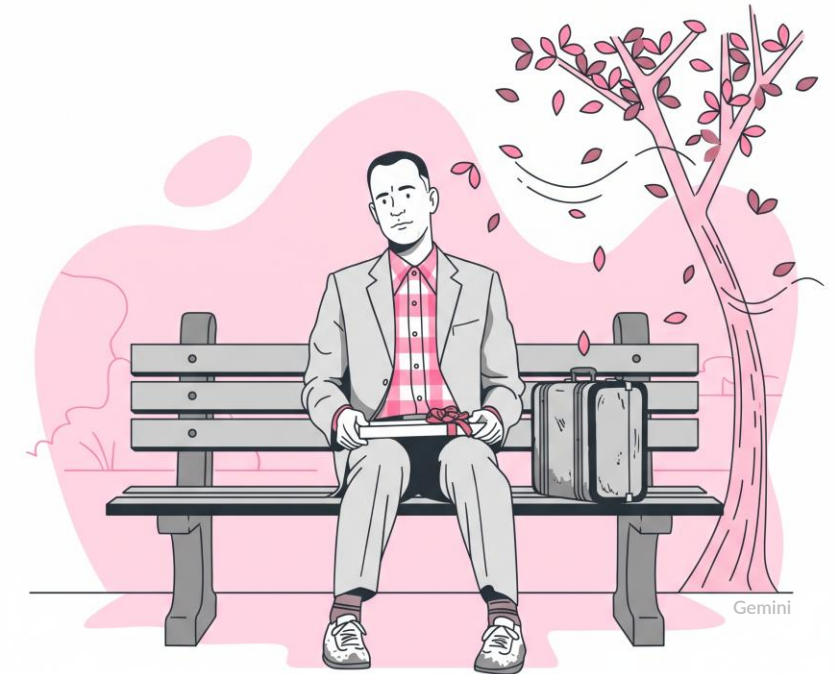
51. Huang et al. 2017

52. Collins & Miller 1994

Rules of Engagement

The Forrest Gump Method – Cold Opener

1. **Observe.**
Notice something about the person or surroundings.
2. **Invite.**
Go deeper — ask a related question to the observation.
3. **Reciprocate.**
Expand on their response by making it personal to you.



51. Huang et al. 2017

52. Collins & Miller 1994

2 Largest Predictors of happiness and overall life expectancy: ^{24, 32}



Physical Activity ^{3, 27, 32, 45}

“Exercise is the single most transformative thing you can do for your brain, mood, and overall well-being.”

— Dr. Wendy Suzuki
NYU Professor of Neural Science and Psychology

3. Korb 2015

10. Gallup Organization 2023

24. Achor 2010

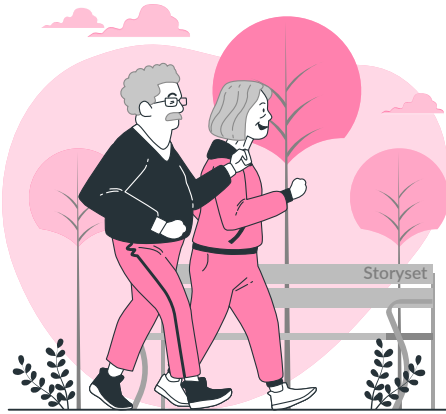
27. Dutta 2023

32. Buettner 2010

45. Suzuki & Fitzpatrick 2015

50. Lieberman 2020

Physical Activity



Sedentary behaviors
increase all-cause mortality
risk 20-30%²⁷

Regular exercise can be as
effective as medication for
treating depression^{3, 32, 45}

Engineer more movement into your day:

1. Walk or take stairs when applicable
2. Drink more water = more breaks
3. Attach activity to something you already do
4. Make activity social or enjoyable
5. Schedule activity instead of relying on willpower

3. Korb 2015

10. Gallup Organization 2023

24. Achor 2010

27. Dutta 2023

32. Buettner 2010

45. Suzuki & Fitzpatrick 2015

50. Lieberman 2020

Changing Habits

Celebrate any “win” for an extra **dopamine** hit

A behavior becomes more automatic when you feel a positive emotion or the relief from a negative one

Don’t get too caught up in “**perfecting**” the new change

Instead, make small changes to:

- ↓ Decrease time between “rewards”
- ↓ Reduce effort / increase ability



3. Korb 2015

37. Fogg 2020

38. Clear 2018

Takeaway

Our brains are biologically wired to perform best when motivated intrinsically



Feel-good hormones are responsible for the brain's performance



The stress hormone shuts down the feel-good hormones

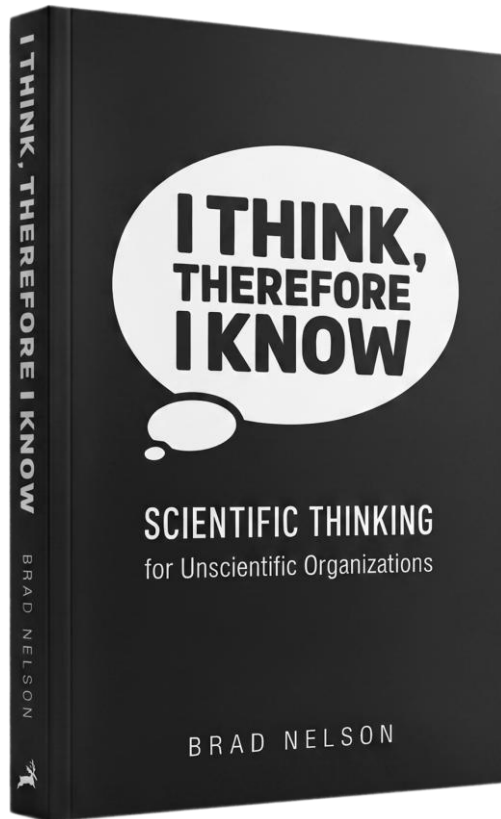


The #1 cause of stress at work is a lack of control

This presentation is just a start, there's a lot more information out there!

THANK YOU

Apply Science To Your Org



Scientific Thinking for Unscientific Organizations

By Brad Nelson

"If you want to go deep into why organizations struggle to change, why frameworks never feel quite right and learn to diagnose the problems, I would highly recommend you this book. "

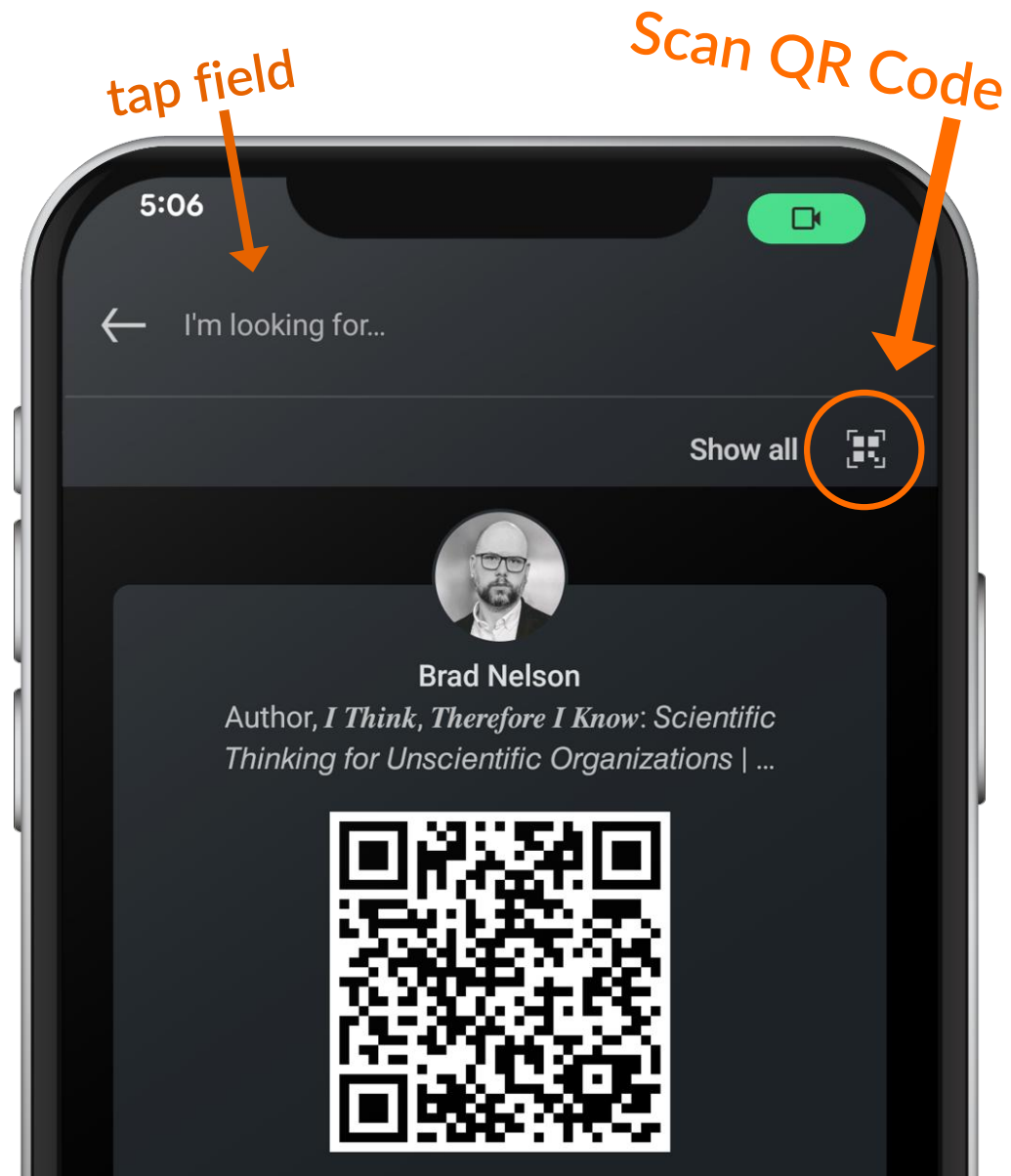
– Jim Hendriks, Game Producer & Engineer Manager

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