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**SPECIAL  
EDITION**

**BUSINESS**

**COACHING**

**LEADERSHIP  
THROUGH LENS  
OF NEUROSCIENCE**





# EDITORIAL

Neuroscience is one of the most applied sciences in people development right now. Knowing how the brain works could help both people and coaches, HR professionals, trainers.

In this special edition, we want to share the most useful articles that come from Frederieke Fabritius, neuroscientist, and keynote speaker from Germany. Publishing this format, we want to collect and share with you all the articles published by the authors only in the online edition as an added value to your knowledge. The thematic edition of the magazine always focuses on a single topic, and this time it is Neuroscience. The special edition is the latest format of the magazine that we've published. This magazine is smaller in format, but we tried to keep it large in content and design.

Enjoy your reading and stay safe!

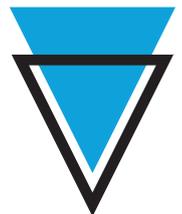
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# ABOUT AUTHOR



She is a neuroscientist, keynote speaker, and award-winning author. She was trained at the Max Planck Institute for Brain Research and she is an alumna of McKinsey & Company. Friederike works with executives of Fortune 500 companies around the globe to transform how they think, innovate, and navigate change.

She is the lead author of the book *The Leading Brain: Neuroscience Hacks to Work Smarter, Better, Happier* (Random House) which has been translated internationally and received numerous awards. Friederike is fluent in six languages and has five kids. Her passion is to help people to not only work better, but also lead better and happier lives, using neuroscience.

# PEOPLE THRIVE IN DIFFERENT KINDS OF WORKPLACES

*Interview*

***Friederike, for the start, please tell us about your leadership role in the house.***

We have five kids aged 6,5,4,2, and 1. How do we keep up with that? Every single thing we do at our house is based on neuroscience – and I have a lot of fun with that.

Let me give you an example. This winter I decided that we should spend at least an hour outdoors every day, regardless of the weather in order to get more natural light, which is important for our brain. How do I achieve that? Do I force my kids to go out when it's raining? We know that willpower is a limited resource, so that would probably be a very painful process.

Instead, I'm using a technique called "Implementation Intentions". Research shows that people are much more successful in adopting new habits when there is a clear "when-then"-connection, linking a certain behavior to a specific situation. For us it's: "When we get home from school, we go outside".

In addition, I'm using a technique called "Nudging". Nudging is a way of setting up the environment in a way so that whatever behavior you want to encourage, is easy to do. What does this mean here? I have put all

of our outdoor clothes conveniently next to the door. You just don't leave the house if it's cold, dark, and raining outside and you first have to search for seven different outdoor gears.

**The same principle applies if you want to encourage any kind of behavior in the workplace: Make it easy. It sounds trivial, but it really works.**

***You have a great theory for success, with a lot of science in the background. It's called 3F (Fun, Fear, Focus). (Please explain a bit), and if you could choose another, 4th F, what F would it be?***

We all need a certain mix of neurochemicals to reach peak performance. And when you have the right mix, you will be multiple times more productive. You can save a lot of time if you know how to get there, whenever you need it, whenever you want it.

## FUN

When we have fun, our brain releases dopamine. And dopamine is a real brain booster. It makes us think faster, it makes us learn better. Everything is easy when you are high on dopamine. It's not just nice to have fun at work, it's essential.

So how can you have more fun at work? Fun is highly individual. **The easiest way to have more fun is to find a job that is in line with your strengths.** If you are good at crunching numbers – find a job where that talent can shine. If you are talented with words, seek an environment where you can use these skills.

## FEAR

Most people think that we reach the best possible performance when our skills are in line with the challenge. That's not true. **We reach our best performance when our challenge is a little bit too big for us.** We need to be what I like to call "slightly over-challenged".

Because that's when the brain releases a substance called noradrenaline.

Noradrenaline is like a wake-up call for our brain, telling us: "Wake up! Something truly

important is going on! You need to rise to the occasion!" Your brain is not going to go into peak performance when you are sitting in a boring meeting.

Do you know that feeling when you take a cold shower or plunge into a cold pool? It's a bit scary at first, but once you do it, you get that kick. That's the noradrenaline.

So how can you get it at work? Take on projects that are a little bit too difficult for you, get that promotion, take some risks. If you are never nervous at your job, you are not reaching peak performance.

## FOCUS

Imagine Serena Williams taking a call in the middle of the Wimbledon finals. Her fans would be appalled. Yet, in the business world, people behave like this all the time. Research shows that when we multi-task, we make 50 percent more mistakes and we take 50 percent longer to complete the task. That's insane! Our brain needs to be focused in order to reach peak performance. Because only when we are fully focused, we are going to release a substance called acetylcholine.

Acetylcholine is like a spotlight. It highlights your most important thoughts while everything else remains in the dark.

How can you become more focused? Many books will tell you to meditate or to try yoga. There is a much easier way. You can hack your brain for focus.

When people are multitasking or distracted at work or anywhere else, it's usually the symptom, not the disease. They use their smartphones as an escape mechanism when they are bored out or stressed. Here is the hack: **Find the right level of fun, find the right level of fear, and focus will follow naturally.**

If I had to pick an additional F, it would be Flow. Because that's what you get when you combine the 3Fs.

***After you explained 3Fs, you are saying that we need to be aware of 3Ss, in order to live a healthy life. (Sport, Sleep, Snacks) and if you could choose another, 4th S, what S would it be?***

Usually, when people get cranky, it could be fixed by doing some sports, getting some sleep, or having a snack.

Most people think that you go to the gym to exercise your body. And then you do crossword puzzles to keep your brain fit. **No, the most effective way to exercise your brain is by exercising your body.** Let me break it to you: your brain is a part of your body. It's with sports, sleep, and snacks that your brain gets most of the neurochemicals it needs to reach peak performance and emotional wellbeing.

## **SPORTS**

When we move physically, our brain releases dopamine and serotonin. These neurotransmitters make us feel great and boost our cognitive performance. We also release a substance called brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) which helps us to learn better. Our brain gets more oxygen too, which is always a plus when it comes to cognitive performance.

## **SLEEP**

Sleep is important to restore dopamine and serotonin levels. It's during sleep that the brain removes toxins and stress hormones. Sleep is also important to transfer information from short term to long term memory.

## SNACKS

**All of the neurotransmitters we need for reaching peak performance and emotional balance are not built from love and air. We have to physically intake the building blocks so that our body can produce them.**

If I had to introduce a fourth S, it had to be social: We know that our brains are very social. When we have great social relationships, we will live up to eight years longer, we will be happier, and more profitable too.

***Have you ever thought that coaching also could release some of the hormones, and helps the client to feel better and be more successful?***

Research shows that the best predictor for success in coaching is the relationship between the coachee and the coach. This is really interesting because when we trust someone and when we truly connect, the brain releases a substance called oxytocin. Oxytocin triggers the release of dopamine, which makes us feel great and motivates us. Oxytocin also triggers the release of serotonin which reduces anxiety and stabilizes our mood. With this potent release of neurochemicals, coaching can be a truly powerful tool! But only when you have a great

relationship with your coach.

***You are preparing the new book. Could you promise that you will pay attention to the question: “How we could change someone’s behavior, without the “boomerang” effect?”***

People always ask me: How can we change? The brain has evolved in a certain way for millions of years. It’s much more effective to change the workplace than to try to change somebody’s brain. When the workplace is right, you will automatically get the behaviors you want to see.

Here is how this is relevant for my new book: Most companies try to increase diversity and they fail. Why do they fail? They ask women to “lean in” and focus on “unconscious bias” while completely ignoring neurochemical diversity. What is neurochemical diversity? People thrive in different kinds of workplaces. Some excel under pressure; others require less stress to reach peak performance.

My message is: **Don’t change the women, change the workplace. If the workplace is brain-friendly, it will naturally attract a more diverse set of people.**



**“I CAN COUNT TO 16  
BUT STATISTICS IS  
REALLY HARD”**



How can we prepare for the next pandemic? My answer: We need to reduce “statistical innumeracy” both in the general public and in experts. Let me explain.

Did you know that rats can count to 16? But they don’t seem to be able to deal with probabilities and percentages. Even small children learn how to count effortlessly, but statistics is a whole different story.

From an evolutionary perspective, the ability to count has been part of our history for a long time. It’s wired into our brain. But statistics have only become a part of our everyday life in the second half of the 20th century.

Newspapers are filled with probabilities and percentages these days. People like to think that they understand what they read or hear in the news, but when asked to properly explain how high a certain risk is or what a probability means, the answers are wildly incorrect for the majority of people.

Now you might put your hope into experts. Maybe they know what’s best for us and will act in our best interest? Unfortunately, there are studies that show that most experts are not properly skilled in statistics either.

This inability is called “statistical innumeracy” and most people aren’t aware that they have it.

The good news: We are not rats. We can learn statistics with a few hours of proper training.

I dream of a world in which every adult is able to read the newspaper and to properly understand risk and probabilities. We need people to be able to think for themselves instead of just relying on expert opinion. The world would be a much better place.

Let’s improve statistical numeracy. It all starts in school.

Better education, better future.

# HOW CAN WE FIND SOLUTIONS WITHOUT ASKING QUESTIONS?



Our society is facing a lot of issues that we need to solve if we want to create a better future for our children. Why are we having such a hard time solving them? I believe it has to do with the fact that we do not dare to ask questions anymore.

We tend to think of others in terms of “us” versus “them”, “friend” or “foe”. Social scientists have known this for a very long time. We love to put people into boxes. So what’s new? Thanks to social media it’s easier than ever before to judge people before they speak a single word. We can now completely bypass content and get to judgement first. The way our brain likes it best.

We live in an age of virtue signalling. Before we even start a discussion, we put people into boxes: The “good” versus “the bad”.

What is virtue signalling? It’s all about showing the world how kind, decent, and virtuous you are. Think a politician who kisses a baby in public, an actor who volunteers in a soup kitchen (after informing the media to show up) or any hotel chain that “saves the environment” by asking you to use your towel twice.

But virtue signalling can even be done from the comfort of your own home. You don’t

have to volunteer to help your elderly neighbour with her groceries. Good deeds can be done by attacking “morally inferior” people on social media. The harsher, the better. James Bartholomew first coined the term in a 2015 article called: “Easy virtue: Want to be virtuous? Saying the right things violently on Twitter is much easier than real kindness”.

To quote the first article of The Human Rights as declared by the UN: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” This is the standard we should keep ourselves accountable at.

But what happens when we can’t even discuss strategies on how to mitigate societal issues since everybody is busy outdoing each other on the moral superiority scale?

This kind of judgmental attitude kills any possibility to develop a solution. How can we find solutions if we are walking on eggshells? Noam Chomsky once famously said "The best way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum".

We are consuming videos and pictures rather than looking at numbers and statistics. Our brain loves pictures and hates statistics. There is no easier way to elicit emotions and to steer people than with pictures. Our natural tendency for altruism is easily exploited by the media. When it bleeds, it leads.

We are looking at individual cases rather than looking at the numbers. The fate of one person moves us more than the fate of millions. There is an expression for this in behavioral sciences: "The identifiable victim effect". Media and politicians have known this for ages.

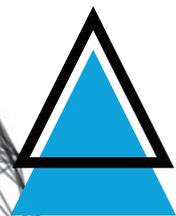
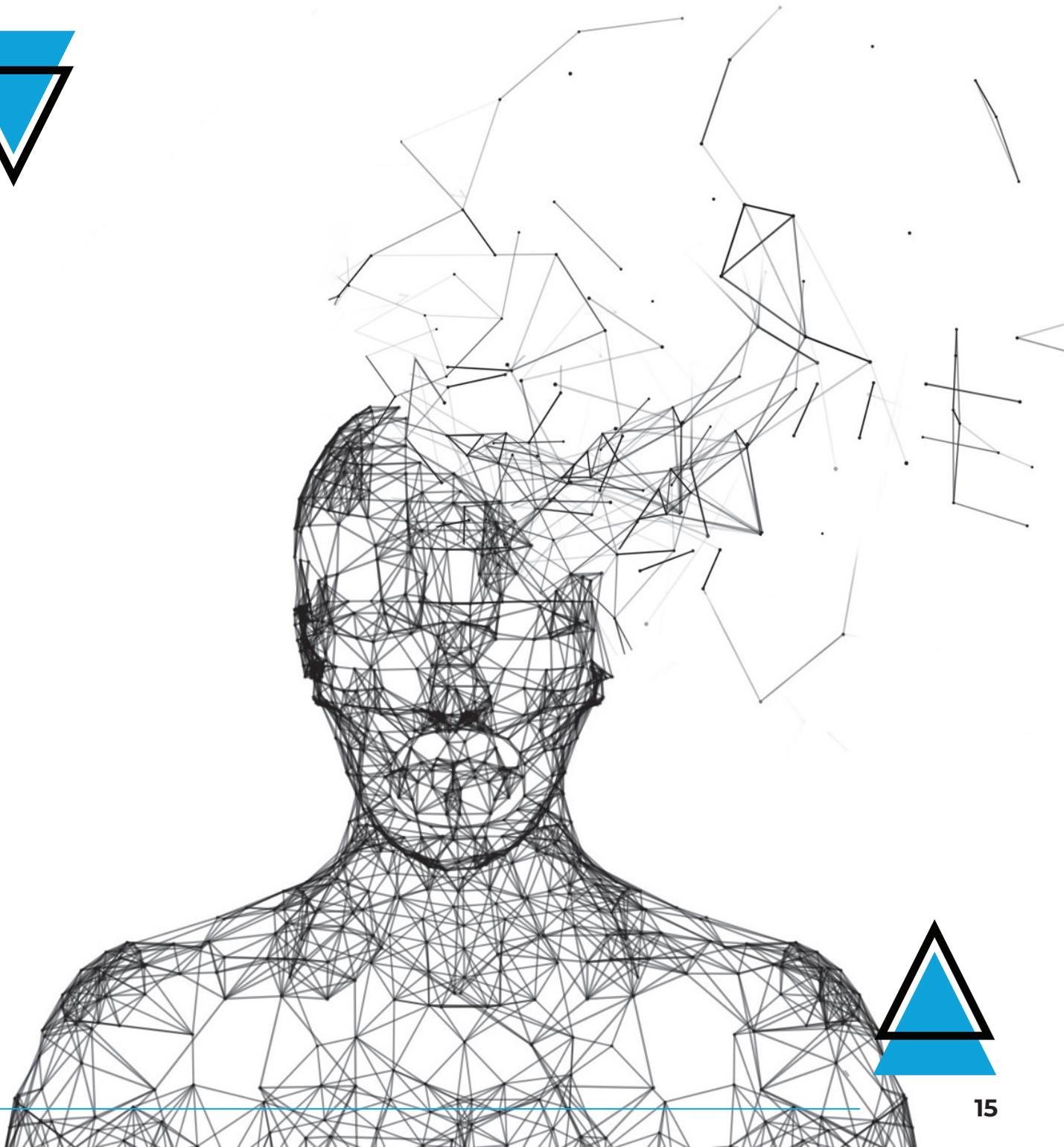
Our world has been reduced to hashtags. Use the wrong hashtag, and you are the enemy.

Why are less and less people asking questions? Nobody wants to be excluded. Our brain processes social exclusion like physical

pain. Back when we lived in small groups of 50-150 people we only survived since we were part of a community. Being excluded from this community was equal with a death sentence. Our world might have changed, but our brains have not. Virtue signalling is a powerful way to make sure that we belong.

So what can we do about it? Allow for discussions about facts and figures without judging people up front. It should always be ok to ask questions. Speak to the "enemy" and find out why they think the way they do. You might find that they are humans just like you and I. Before the crisis, diversity of thought was a big topic. Now we only want to accept one truth.

We can only win if we work together rather than against each other. We shouldn't use societal issues to gain power or win over others. We should address them to solve the underlying problem in the most effective way. This process starts with questions.



# FUN, FEAR, AND FOCUS



Most of us recognize that heady feeling when we're performing at our very best. Time becomes irrelevant, doubt and self-consciousness evaporate, and you find yourself completely immersed in the task at hand. It's almost like falling in love with whatever you're doing. For a short time, it becomes the center of your universe.

According to McKinsey, when you reach this exalted state, commonly known as "flow", you are a whopping five times more productive. Wouldn't it be great to gain a fast track to flow? Thanks to brain science, you can. We now know that three distinct neurochemicals produce this unmistakable feeling: dopamine, noradrenaline, and acetylcholine. But if that chemical soup sounds a little intimidating, there's an even easier way to remember the recipe. When you want to move into that pleasant but powerful zone of productivity wherever and whenever you need it, all it takes are fun, fear and focus.

## **FUN**

When we experience pleasure, our brain releases dopamine. In fact, dopamine is sometimes known as "the Kim Kardashian of neurochemicals" because it is associated with excitement, sensation seeking, and addiction, but above all, with fun. Of course,

when I refer to "fun" at your job, I'm not talking about after-work-party fun or even the enjoyment that comes from chatting by the coffee machine or playing a lively game at the office foosball table during a break. That's enjoyment you get in spite of your job. I'm talking about enjoyment you derive because of your job. It's not surprising that we commonly describe the work we enjoy most as "rewarding." From a brain standpoint, that's literally true. Often the very things we find most rewarding are the things we are good at. That's why from the standpoint of both job enjoyment and performance, it makes sense to play to your strengths and to regularly devise strategies to keep your job both rewarding and fresh. One effective way to do this is by continually challenging yourself.

## **FEAR**

Remember the old expression, "No pain. No gain"? Well, there's some neuroscientific truth to that adage. Most of us recognize cortisol as the chemical involved in corrosive, damaging stress. Well, I like to think of noradrenaline as its nicer little brother. It provides just the right level of uncertainty to prevent a task from becoming humdrum. You may be able to do your job day in and day out on automatic pilot, but I can

tell you right now that you won't be performing at your best unless whatever you're doing takes you just beyond the outskirts of your comfort zone, either because it's a little more difficult than you're accustomed to, because your future success or the success of your company may depend upon it, or because the time allotted for finishing the job is not quite as generous as you'd like. In each of these scenarios, the brain responds with a squirt of noradrenaline. Depending on your temperament, any of these factors may be just what you need to up the ante and with it, your performance. Not enough fear and you'll be mired in the boredom that rarely results in superior work. Too much and you'll be too panicked or frightened to think straight. But just the right amount of fear will make you sit up, take notice, and sharpen your attention so you can perform at your best. You don't want to be either under-stimulated or overwhelmed. As I regularly tell my clients, to achieve an optimal performance state, you need to be "slightly over-challenged."

## FOCUS

Fun and fear are crucial, but they won't put you on the path to peak performance without the third and final component: focus. We derive our focus from the chemical acetyl-

choline. Acetylcholine enables us to zero-in laser-like on whatever we perceive as most important at the time. For perpetually curious babies, acetylcholine release is automatic, but as we get older we have to activate it consciously. Unfortunately, in this era of information overload and always-on electronic devices, all sorts of stimuli are vying for our attention. As a result, focus has become the hardest of the three to achieve. Whenever a new text message pings, the telephone rings, or a colleague walks by your cube or your open office door, your brain activates a primitive response that was originally designed to counter threats and pursue potential rewards. Of course, you can train yourself to ignore or resist these distractions. But resisting distractions takes willpower, and willpower requires energy, energy that could be better devoted to the task at hand. That's why the best way to guarantee focus is to eliminate as many distractions as possible in advance, by shutting off your phone, closing your browser, clearing your desk of any materials that don't pertain to the task at hand, and, above all by discouraging interruptions by colleagues, however well-meaning they may be, either by closing your door or putting in ear buds so it's obvious to all that you're temporarily unavailable. Few people would ever dream of barging into the middle of a meeting. Yet sometimes when you're

working on your own, it almost seems like an open invitation to interruptions. One simple, surprisingly effective way to increase your chances of focus is by scheduling a “meeting of one,” a regular time in your day that is as sacred and respected as any multi-person meeting, when you can be confident that you can work on your own undisturbed and perform at your best

Although peak performance might’ve once seemed mysterious and elusive, the new-

est neuroscience has shown us that it’s not nearly as difficult to achieve as we may have imagined. Now you have three simple words at your disposal — and some brain science to support them — that should significantly improve your odds of getting to flow where and when you need to. Besides, it just so happens that the fun, fear and focus that lead to peak performance are also the key ingredients in something else in life that is even more important than productivity: happiness!.



# THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF GREAT WORK RELATIONSHIPS



Suppose I asked you, »What's the single most important change you could make to improve your health?« What do you think the answer would be? Quit smoking? Stop drinking? Exercise more? It turns out that the biggest predictor for longevity is the quality of our relationships. People who have great relationships live eight years longer. That's a lot.

Whether you smoke two packs of cigarettes a day or whether you have bad relationships: The impact on your health is the same. So how can you build great relationships at work? You will see that a great work relationship is very much like a good marriage. Like a good marriage... without the sex. Whether we're falling in love or creating a great team, it all comes down to a chemical called oxytocin. Oxytocin is a neurochemical that is released when we have great relationships. It's released when a baby is born. It is released when people have sex. And it is released when people bond and create trust in a business setting.

Oxytocin has a huge impact on how people behave in any social setting. To study oxytocin's effects, scientists typically administer it as a nasal spray. When applied prior to a negotiation, for example, a dose of oxytocin can increase a negotiator's generosity by as

much as 80 percent. Does this mean that we can buy love after all? Before you run to your local pharmacy, consider the fact that your brain already produces it. There are proven ways you can enhance oxytocin levels naturally. I like to call them the ten commandments of great relationships.

## **1. MEETINGS MATTER**

Research in the US has shown that when a waitress casually touches a customer on the shoulder for 2 to 4 seconds, she will receive a bigger tip. The impact of touch is never casual.

I'm not telling you to touch the people you work with. But it does make a difference to meet someone live and in person instead of just virtually. So, make a point of meeting up face to face — at least once at the very beginning of your relationship.

## 2. GET THINGS RIGHT IN THE BEGINNING

When I met my husband, he lived in his idea of the perfect bachelor pad. Every single piece of furniture beautifully matched all the rest. When I moved in, I replaced his artwork with my own colorful – and not very tasteful – artwork. Think red and pink hearts on a white canvas meet the egg chair and USM Haller. Why? I wanted to make a point. I didn't want to feel like a guest in my own home. I had to claim my territory. Otherwise, he might have continued with his life as if nothing had changed.

There is a magical window at the beginning of a relationship when you can establish the way you want things to be. Oxytocin levels skyrocket at the very beginning of a new relationship, making our brain more flexible and open to change.

But the brain is a lazy couch potato. Once you have established your routines, it's not going to give up on them so easily. If you want your relationship to work, you need to get things right from the very beginning. Use this magical window. Don't waste it!

## 3. 20:1 IN GOOD TIMES, 5:1 IN BAD TIMES

Have you heard of the »Love Lab«? It's a place you can go to sort things out with your spouse. You get hooked up to all kinds of devices that measure your heartbeat, the electrical conductivity of your skin, and other indicators for stress. You are asked to have a conversation with your partner for ten minutes while being video-taped. And then the researchers can tell you whether you will divorce or stay together with a confidence level of over 90 percent!

So how do they do it? They've boiled down their observations and insights into a simple ratio: 20:1. Couples who have 20 times more positive interactions than negative ones will stay together. (During a fight, the ratio needs to be at least 5:1.)

Why does this work? Because the brain has a built-in negativity bias. It processes negative interactions more strongly than positive ones.

How does this apply in a business setting? Of course, you need to be able to speak the truth and convey negative information or feedback when necessary, but overall, you want to be a source of pleasure, not pain.

## 4. RELAX

When I worked in management consulting, I was once put in charge of a gigantic Excel model. Somewhere in that model was a mistake.

My boss was stressed and anxious about it, and constantly yelled at me: »Find the mistake! If you don't fix it, the client will blow their top, and you'll be fired!« Needless to say, I never found the mistake. Her feedback only made me stressed.

When we are stressed, the brain releases the stress hormone cortisol. Cortisol in turn represses the production of oxytocin. Empathy, altruism, and our drive for connection all go down when we are stressed. We never connected well with our client in that project.

What can we learn from this? Reduce stress levels. You are not going to establish great relationships when you are chronically stressed. How can you achieve it? Work out, get enough sleep, and increase your personal autonomy. People high up in the hierarchy work long hours, but they don't feel as stressed since they are the boss and can do whatever they want.

## 5. TAKE YOUR TEAM HOSTAGE

Perhaps you've heard of the »Stockholm Syndrome.« This term was first used by the media in 1973 when four hostages were taken during a bank robbery in Sweden. When the hostages were released six days later, they actually defended their captors and even refused to testify against them in court. What was going on here? When something unusual and exciting happens, and that includes some stressful events, a neurotransmitter called dopamine is released in the brain. And dopamine triggers the release of oxytocin.

How can you use this at work? Surprise the people around you. Go on an adventure together. Get out of the day-to-day rut together, and it will strengthen your bonds.

## 6. THOU SHALT NOT LIE

When you think of Bill Clinton, what's the first thing that comes to mind? For most people, it's Monica Lewinsky – and how Bill Clinton lied in public: »I did not have sexual relations with that woman.«

You can build trust for years. It only takes a second to destroy it.

My advice to you is simple: Don't lie to the people around you. People can handle the truth. I once prepared a workshop series for a big multinational company that had to let a lot of people go. I'm talking about big townhall-style meetings with 600 people at a time. And you have to tell them that their jobs are not safe. How do you do it? Tell them the truth. And tell them quickly.

When the police come to your door to tell you that a close relative has died, they don't start with small talk about the weather. When you have bad news, skip the »feedback sandwich« – first a layer of pleasant information, then the bad news, and then another nice layer to wrap it up. People can handle the truth.

## 7. PUT A RING ON IT

I asked the regional head of an international professional services firm whether he performed any sort of rituals with his clients. He gave me a weird look and said, »Well..., not really.« I said: »Okay, so what about your family? Do you celebrate birthdays with a cake and gifts?« – »Of course.« – »Did you propose to your wife with a ring?« – Of course.« – »Did you do anything special when you got married?« – »Of course.«

Research shows that rituals and ceremonies make our oxytocin levels soar. We have many rituals in our private lives – marriages, holidays, birthday parties. But in the business world, rituals are still an underleveraged resource.

As our conversation went on, we discovered that he did have lots of rituals in place after all: With one CEO, he always goes running; with another other, he always meets at the Oktoberfest. He had just never thought of these routines as rituals. But when he took a closer look, he realized he had established all kinds of traditions with his clients. It does matter whether you send your colleagues a handwritten note or an email. It does matter whether you go hiking together or not. Create rituals, it will strengthen your bonds.

## 8. ASK FOR HELP

Most people try to make a good first impression. But research shows that when you spill coffee at your first meeting, people will like you more.

When we show vulnerability, oxytocin is released, and we connect. When I did my TED talk a few months ago, I did the classical »TED reveal« of sharing a personal story at the very beginning, since this helps the audience to connect with the speaker.

How can you do this in a business setting? Share a personal story, ask for advice, ask for feedback. You don't have to be perfect. Just be yourself.

## 9. FIND COMMON GROUND

Oxytocin will help you build great relationships. But there is also a dark side to it. Oxytocin is the mechanism behind bias, discrimination, and racism. When you build a great relationship with someone, chances are high that you will exclude other people. People tend to think and act in terms of »us« versus »them.« Every politician knows this.

How can you overcome this? Find common ground, even if it's just a shared interest in cars, fashion, or soccer.

## 10. BE FAIR

Economic theory has been telling us for ages that people maximize profit. This is not true. People maximize fairness, not profit. Economic theory is based on the assumption of the »homo economicus« when in reality, we are »homo reciprocans«.

In the past, social networks were essential to our survival. That drove an urge to cooperate and implanted a fear of rejection. Life may have changed dramatically since those primitive days, but our brains haven't. That's why violations of trust and fairness are still perceived by the brain as life-threatening.

In fact, research shows that people are willing to pay to punish an unfair player, even to the point of losing all of their money. Those of you who are lawyers may have seen this behavior in action.

The relevant lesson for business: When you negotiate, you will benefit from creating a win-win situation, whenever possible. If you deliberately rip off the other person, you may gain a small profit in the short term, but you will win more by establishing a long-term relationship.

# **SURPRISE – THE UNDER LEVERAGED RESOURCE IN THE BUSINESS WORLD**



When was the last time someone surprised you with a gift or a nice gesture?

I received a beautiful bouquet of flowers yesterday from a client and this absolutely made my day!

Most companies use expected rewards to motivate and reward their employees or service providers. The works: Salaries, fees, and bonus payments.

The problem? People get used to it and they always want more. That's why people always complain about their salary and their bonus payments. It's not because they are starving or can't pay their rent. At least not at top executive levels in developed countries. Today's payments becomes the new baseline that you come to expect. If you get less, you get upset. If you receive the same, you get complacent and slightly unhappy, and only when you get more, you are happy.

The only strategy to keep people happy in this setup is by continuously increasing salaries and bonus payments. And it won't even make people very happy or motivate them to an extraordinary extent. The best motivation is intrinsic, after all.

So how can you show your appreciation or reward your team? Use unexpected re-

wards! Our brain reacts strongly to surprises. Surprises activate the brain's reward center without breaking the bank.

"Surprises activate the brain's reward center without breaking the bank."

Here are some simple ideas for surprises:

1. Give your team the afternoon or day off (spontaneously and unexpectedly)
2. Send some flowers (or chocolate. or both)
3. Send your team members a coupon for an activity they love (tickets for a show they like etc)
4. Send a book ( a fun one, not something dull)
5. Send a hand-written letter or card
6. Surprise people with a fun joke or activity when all they expect is another boring meeting
7. Allow people to work on a project they like, or eliminate an undesired todo from their list  
Surprise is an under leveraged resource in the business world. Try it and you will be surprised.

# FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR CHILDREN



I see life through the lens of a neuroscientist. Politicians need to act under high uncertainty at the moment and there is a lot at stake. It's a matter of life and death.

We are in fear and as soon as fear is involved, there is a high risk for group-think. Fear is highly contagious and we learn it from others who are afraid themselves. We can't think straight when we are in panic. Our prefrontal cortex for rational thinking shuts down and we go into fight or flight. That's why we see people fighting over toilet paper these days.

People unite in the fight against a common enemy: the virus. This is a phenomenon well known in psychology. It has the positive effect of all of us acting as one, and it is truly powerful (This mechanism is regulated by the release of the neurochemical [oxytocin](#)). But it comes with a downside. We become extremely single-minded and lose perspective of already existing threats such as cardiovascular diseases (18 million deaths per year), traffic accidents (1,35 million deaths per year), and air pollution (8 million deaths per year). We only fear our enemy: the virus. Nothing else matters.

We also become less innovative when we are in fear as the occurrence of Aha moments is positively correlated with a positive mood.

There is a high risk that cognitive biases systematically distort our thinking in such extreme situations and that we don't do our best thinking.

Hyperbolic discounting: People fear the immediate risk of terrorism or a new virus, but ignore long-term challenges such as climate change or the impact of an unhealthy lifestyle – which might kill more people, just not immediately. We are not good at this long-term thing.

Fear of dread risk: "The psychological principle that makes us fear swine flu, avian flu or COVID-19 but not the common flu is called fear of dread risks. It is easy to elicit fear of episodes in which many people die within a short interval, such as plane crashes or epidemics. But when just as many or more people die over a longer period – as with car accidents or the seasonal flu – it is difficult to scare the public into wearing seat belts or getting vaccinated." says [Prof Gerd Gigerenzer](#) who is the director of the Harding Center for Risk Literacy at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin. (I highly recommend reading anything that he has written as he is an expert on risk literacy and decision making.)

Economists and CEOs see a real risk that we might soon experience a meltdown of our economic system and our society as a whole. This is not a discussion of money versus saving lives. The opposite is true. Our economic stability and our health are inextricably linked.

If we make too many mistakes, we risk killing more people than we are trying to save. A recession will impact life expectancy as well – just not as dramatically, and the media won't report about every single person affected. Healthcare budgets will get cut going forward and we will see an increase in cancer deaths, suicides, and psychological disorders. These are all effects that could be observed during the Great Recession. [GDP and life expectancy are linked, though the relationship is not simple](#). Covid-19 kills people, but so will a recession – just not immediately. A recession might also negatively affect climate change, education, and gender equality.

We need to find the delicate balance between short term measures and long term impact. Again, I'm not talking about lives versus money. I'm comparing life expectancy with life expectancy, short term and long term. We need to see the bigger picture and adopt a more holistic view.

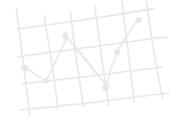
We need an interdisciplinary think tank of scientists from many different fields. Virologists are essential to educate us about facts such as the exponential development of the curve, mortality rate, and contagiousness. But it is not in their role to see the big picture and the many implications our fight against COVID-19 will have on the many different facets of society. We need economists who can calculate the impact on our economy. We need theoretical physicists who understand complex systems. We need health and safety experts who know how to act in an emergency. We need political scientists who understand the impact this will have on the delicate stability of our democracy in an unstable world. We need philosophers who can think about the incredible ethical dilemma of saving lives now, versus saving lives in the future.

Everybody who has ever worked with me knows that I'm usually positive, people-friendly and solution-oriented, and this hasn't changed. I haven't gone mad. I simply see the urgent need for more diversity of thought on this important topic. Why?

For the future of our children.



# Business and People Development



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