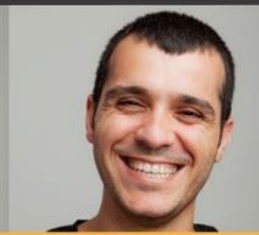
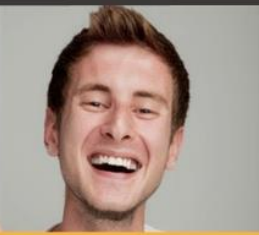
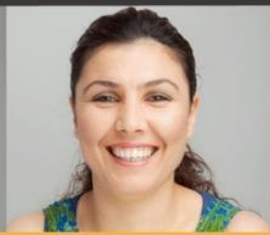
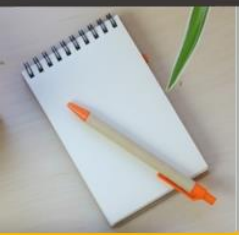


Happy Brain Science

Fostering productivity, creativity & happiness through
the application of cutting-edge brain science.



WHAT IS THE REAL VALUE OF HAPPINESS IN THE WORKPLACE?

TRANSCRIPT

Soothe Stress

Thrive From Nine to Five: The Science of Happiness at Work

Why soothe stress? I want you to soothe stress because stressed out brains tend not to work very well in most circumstances. Fight or Flight is not a switch; it's a continuum. You can be a little bit stressed out, a little bit Fight or Flighty, or full-on panic, but to whatever degree you are toward Fight or Flight, your brain starts figuratively shrinking; you see less options.

Let me tell you a story I so wish I were making up. About eight months ago, I am in Redwood City, California, in a hotel. The following day I am going to present to a big, famous animated movie company, so I am very excited. This has got to be good. So it's very important I get a good night's sleep. I get to bed early, I set my alarm for 7 a.m., and at 1:49 a.m., I hear "Beep! Beep! Beep! Beep!" My first reaction is, "No, no. I'm not moving because I need good sleep tonight, and there's no way that it's seven in the morning. I'm exhausted. In fact, am I awake or asleep? I can't even really ... I'm just going to ignore this."

That did not work very well, as the sound kept getting louder. "Beep! Beep! Beep!" I thought, "Oh, no, I set the alarm wrong. Some jerk set the hotel room alarm clock to go off at two in the morning." I run over to where the alarm clock is and my phone is, and I start hitting every button I can find. "Stop it! Stop it! Stop it! It's loud! Stop it! It's bad. It's going to wake up my neighbors." I'm unplugging things and pulling on cords. Nothing is working, and the sound keeps getting louder and louder, and there's a flashing light on the wall.

Finally, I realize, "This is a fire alarm," so I run towards the door ... I swear I'm not making this up. I'm just about to open the door, and I think, "I don't have pants on." I feel the door; it's not hot, smell for smoke, don't get anything. I have 30 seconds to grab pants and my cellphone, the other essential for modern survival, and out I go into the parking lot with other bleary-eyed visitors.

I tell you that story because it helps illustrate how our brains work under severe stress. When you are really stressed out, you see only three solutions to problems. Although you hear about it less because it doesn't rhyme, your default number one reaction to intense stress is, just Freeze, because if you shut up and stay still, the mountain lion might not see you and you might stay alive. If that doesn't work, then maybe you can fight. Good luck! Maybe you have a giant flaming stick. Or run and

maybe you'll be faster than somebody near you and get away that way. Awesome for dealing with mountain lions and not so awesome for dealing with each other and the problems you encounter at work.

The problems you encounter in challenging work like yours can rarely be solved with Freeze or Fight or Flight. But when you're stressed out, your brain figuratively shrinks. Your uniquely human layers of cortex, your highly logical layers of brain, largely go to the back burner. Your limbic system, roughly speaking, the middle of your brain that looks very much like the brains of other mammals, like house cats, comes to the front burner. And that part of your brain says, "Freeze! Run! Fight! That's it. Those are the solutions I got." If you want to think more like a human than a house cat, you need to get out of Fight or Flight effectively.

As unhelpful as the Fight or Flight response can be, I do not want you to stress about your stress, because that can just push you further into Fight or Flight. In fact, I want you to relax about your stress, because a moderate amount of stress is actually healthy and helpful for us. We've known this for a long time. This is the Yerkes-Dodson curve, been around from the early 1900s. We've known for that long that, while we think these days we want zero stress, "Please, let me lie on a beach for months on end and do nothing." We think we want that. If we actually get a long period of zero stress, what we realize is, we are bored and depressed.

We hear so much about high stress, prolonged stress, and stress we can't control, that we forget that we enjoy moderate stress. Anybody play video games the way I do? Okay, let me try that again. If you ever played Candy Crush, Solitaire, or any other game on a computer or a console, you play video games. Anybody play video games like I do? I thought more of us did, thank you. Some of those games, very few of those games, can be truly relaxing. Most of them are kind of intense, and people are trying to shoot you and invade your home base, and it's really fun! We love moderate amounts of stress we can control. We choose to go see action movies or scary movies. We choose to ride roller coaster rides. We love short-term moderate stress if we choose it and we control it.

That mid-level stress is a way of thriving. If your awesome leader, Scott, paints a great picture of where the organization is going, and you think, "Heck, yeah! I'm going to get there with you," that is Eustress, what psychologists call "Eustress," positive stress that pulls you forward. I invite you to reframe stress as a helpful, energizing force. A big difference between happy, successful people with lower stress and unhappy, less successful, more stressed out people is how we cope. Life brings us hard times; it's unavoidable. How you cope is critical.

In your discussions you just had, I'm assuming that we heard a wide variety of coping techniques, some of which may not be so healthy or helpful. If any of you eat, drink, smoke, gamble heavily when stress comes, I do not want to hear about it. What I do want to hear from you is, "What are your effective strategies for coping with stress, your healthy ways of coping with stress?"

Answer: Exercise.

Exercise. Fantastic! Exercise is at the front of my list and many people's list, because it is such good coping with stress. When you hear Kelly McGonigal talk about, "That stress response is preparing you for action," it is specifically preparing you for physical action. If you give that physical energy somewhere to go, something to do, you are literally processing that stress, moving it through your

body, using it to do something, so it's fantastic for managing stress. You all know how good exercise is for your body. The world of neuroscience has turned up something truly remarkable in recent decades: Your brain is in your body. I know.

So, when you treat your body well, you also treat your brain well. Kids who get exercise get higher grades. People who walk right before a test score higher on the test. Physical activity boosts your brain with better blood flow, more oxygen, glucose, and more that your brain needs to work well. So, exercise, excellent for cognition as well. It's also fantastic for happiness. In multiple studies, exercise is shown to be as effective as moderate anti-depressants in treating moderate depression in the long term. Exercise: fantastic stress management, excellent for your brain, and wonderful for happiness, as well.

What else do you do to cope effectively with stress? Yes, sir?

Answer: Reach out to other people.

I swear we did not plan this ahead of time. Talking with a friend is a fantastic coping strategy. According to science and data, social support is real effective support. I bet if you think long and hard about it, you can imagine somebody you could go and talk to about your work stress who would make you feel worse, right? But most of us, most of the time, can find one or more colleagues who will help us feel better when we go and talk to them about what's hard for us.

Science says it works about as well as anything we have. You are all literally in your stress together with each other, and coping together with it, talking about it, finding solutions, just commiserating to a degree, helps you cope. Social support is real effective support. Like this wise man, talk with your friends when things get hard and stressful.

I want you all to empower your inner CEO with mindfulness. What does that mean? You're going to get a full explanation towards the tail-end of today when we really go deep on mindfulness and meditation, because it is such a useful tool for boosting our brains, boosting happiness, and coping with stress. Your inner CEO is your pre-frontal cortex, this prime brain real estate, loosely speaking, right behind your forehead, that's responsible for executive functions. Much more about mindfulness coming later.

At the moment, I just want to give you a taste of it. So, if you're willing, here's what I invite you to do: We're going to take one breath together. It's going to be an unusual breath. I call a "4-6-8 breath." You're going to breathe in as much as humanly possible for a count of four, hold it for a count of six, breathe out for a count of eight. I'm going to talk you through it. I invite and encourage you to focus just on how your breath feels in your body when you're breathing. You might feel that in your nose, throat, chest, belly. Wherever you feel your breath in your body, I want you to try to focus on that feeling in your body and stick with it.

Most of you who have meditated before know how hard this will be. Curiosity here, please stand up if you have ever meditated at all in your life. According to surveys, it'll be about half of us. Ever meditated in your life? On your feet, please. Excellent. Thank you. You can sit down. I was paying attention, and I'm going to watch every single one of you, if you've never meditated in your life, please on your feet, because I want you to learn this as well as those who regularly meditate. Thank

you. You are producing more BDNF in your brain so you'll learn this better. Thank you. You can sit down.

For those of you who have never tried this before, please don't freak out when you start thinking about other things; that's what's going to happen to all of us. Your job is not to judge yourself, or me or anybody else in the room, because judgement comes from the part of the brain that's different than your inner CEO, your pre-frontal cortex, that we're trying to keep focused on the feeling of your breath. So, if you think, "Wow, this Crabtree guy's kind of weird," or, "Ha, I've never done this before," don't judge those thoughts. Just let them go; return to the feeling of your breath.

You can get your feet on the floor, hands in your lap if it's helpful to you. Close your eyes, just feel your breath on this incoming big breath for four, as much as you can. Go. Hold it, and out for eight. Then you can open your eyes and return to breathing normally. That is just a drop of mindfulness, if you will. We're going to take a big drink from a tall glass of water later today. Mindfulness, paying complete attention at the present moment without judgement, focusing on one thing, such as how your breath feels, is fantastic coping with stress and excellent for your brain and your happiness. Empower your inner CEO with mindfulness, one of many ways science says we can effectively soothe stress.