

BEFORE HAPPINESS-SHAWN ACHOR

This book abstract is intended to provide just a glimpse of this wonderful book with the hope that you may like to read the original book at leisure and enjoy its real beauty.

I am continually humbled by the realization that I began this journey in the depths of depression while at Harvard. I remember during divinity school my first attempt at journal writing, in which I wrote, "I don't remember being happy." Others will never experience that dark night of soul. But I know this: Change is possible only when we link our lives to others.

Introduction

If you want to change your life, you first have to change your reality.

When we find and create happiness in our work, we show increased intelligence, creativity, and energy, improving nearly every single business and educational outcome.

Happiness led to success true, but what gave someone-especially someone facing obstacles and hardships-the understanding that happiness seem like a possibility to one person but impossible to someone else in the same position or situation?

Of course, there are certain objective facts we must accept about our lives. But how can we choose to look at those objective facts is in our minds. And only when we choose to believe that we live in a world where challenges can be overcome, our behaviour matters, and change is possible can we summon all our drive, energy, and emotional and intellectual resources to make that change happen.

This book shows through my research, a simple five-step process for raising our levels of success and happiness by changing our reality to positive. However, creating a positive reality does not mean simply being optimistic.

I am not talking about one in which good things magically happen by the sheer power of positive thinking. I am talking about one in which you can summon all your cognitive, intellectual, and emotional resources to create positive change, because you believe that true change is possible.

The consistent ability to create this kind of reality is called positive genius, and it turns out to be the greatest precursor of success, performance, and even happiness.

The five steps are:

1. Choose the most valuable reality: How to see multiple realities and select the one that leads to positive growth.
2. Map your meaning markers: How to identify and chart the best route to accomplishing your goals.
3. Find the X-spot: How to use success accelerants to propel you more quickly toward your goals.
4. Cancel the noise: How to boost the signal that points to greater opportunities, possibilities, and resources.

5. Create positive inception: How to amplify the effects of a positive mind-set by transferring your positive reality to others.

Before potential, there is a motivation. Before motivation, there is emotion. And before emotion, there is your reality. This reality is the difference between fleeting happiness and a permanent mind-set that fosters success in every personal and professional endeavour.

The Power of Positive Genius

While the human brain receives eleven million pieces of information every second from our environment, it can process only forty bits per second, which means it has to choose that tiny percentage of this input to process and attend to, and what huge chunk to dismiss or ignore. Thus your reality is a choice; what you choose to focus shapes how you perceive and interpret your world.

This is the key, because the better your brain is at using its energy to focus on positives, the greater your chances at success.

This book is all about how you evoke your potential, by changing your mind-set.

Evoking Potential

From 1920-1980, scientist thought that potential could be measured through IQ. However, studies show that IQ and technical skills could predict only 20-25 % of job success.

Both IQ and SAT scores could not show strong correlation to college freshmen's GPA. Further studies have shown that there is no correlation between grades and professional success.

In 1990, psychologist proved that emotional intelligence (EI) was far more important in predicting human potential. It refers to your ability to regulate your emotions.

Very soon some psychologists introduced Social Intelligence as the ability to understand and relate to other people. Instead of debating which one is better, we need to focus on how to combine all intelligences. What matters most is how your brain knits them together.

The ability to combine, and amplify IQ, EI, and SI, allows us to see a reality in which success is possible.

For amplifying your potential, constructing positive reality comes first. It's not that they don't see negative realities in the world, it's that they also see they have the ability to do something about them.

Success, then is not just about how much intelligence you have; it's about how much of your intelligence you believe you can use.

Beyond Optimism: Seeing the Full Pitcher

Happiness is not about being blind to the negatives in our environment; it's about believing we have the power to do something about them. You can't sugar-coat the present and still make good decisions for the future. True success emerges from positive realities, not positive delusions.

We discovered that if we could change someone's perception about the stress they were under, we could actually change how stress affected them physically. By simply showing employees videos about the more positive (real) effects of stress on the body, we observed 23 % drop in fatigue, backaches, headaches etc.

Positive genius is not about optimism or pessimism, or seeing the glass as half empty or half full. Because in truth, both are not the only options. There is also a third, equally true reality-a pitcher of water on the table to refill the glass. Positive genius can see a greater range of opportunities, possibilities, and paths to success.

How Positive Realities Help Us Scale Mountains

Studies show that when we are in a negative or fatigued state of mind, our brains actually perceive hills as being significantly higher and backpacks as significantly heavier. This principle applies everywhere. When we are in a negative mind-set, all loads feel heavier, all obstacles loom bigger, all mountains seem less surmountable. This is especially true in a workplace. When we look at stress, workload, and competition from a negative mind-set, our performance suffers.

1. Reality Architecture-Choosing the most valuable reality.
Recognise the existence of multiple realities simply by changing the details your brain chooses to focus on.
See a greater range of realities by training your brain to add vantage points and see the world from a broader perspective.
Select the most valuable reality that is both positive and true, using a simple formula called the positivity ratio.
2. Mental Cartography-Mapping Paths to Success
Identify and set better goals by highlighting markers of meaning in your life and learning to distinguish true areas of meaning from the decoys and mental hijackers.
Chart more direct routes to your goals by reorienting your mental maps around those markers of meaning.
Keep yourself squarely on the path to success by mapping success routes before escape routes.
3. The X-spot-using Success Accelerants
Zoom in on the target (proximity). Make your goal seem closer by building in a head start, setting incremental sub goals, and highlighting progress to date instead of what is left to accomplish.
Magnify the target size (likelihood of success). Increase the perceived likelihood of hitting the target by creating "champion moments" that remind you when you have been successful in similar situations, decreasing the perceived number of competitors, and choosing the goals that you have a perceived 70 % chance of reaching.
Recalculate thrust (energy required). Preserve and channel cognitive resources better, think about tasks in terms of objective units rather than in terms of effort involved, and decrease your focus on things you worry about or fear.
4. Noise cancelling-Boosting the Signal by Eliminating the Noise
Learn to cancel out any negative or useless information (noise) that distracts you from the true and reliable information that helps you reach your fullest potential (signal).

Hone your ability to distinguish the noise from the signal by learning four simple criteria of noise.

Improve your ability to hear the signal through simple strategies for reducing the overall volume of noise by just 5 %.

Learn to actively cancel out internal noise of worry, fear, anxiety, and pessimism by emitting three simple waves of positive energy.

5. Positive Inception-Transferring your reality to others

Once you have created a positive reality for yourself, learn how to transfer it to others and reap the exponential benefits of your collective intelligences.

Franchise success by creating simple, easy-to-replicate positive patterns and habits and then helping them spread.

Wield more positive influence and increase the likelihood of your reality being adopted by taking the “power lead” in a conversation and rewriting the social script.

Plant meaning in others’ realities by appealing to emotion and crafting shared, meaningful narratives.

Create a renewable, sustainable source of positive energy that motivates, energises, and summons the collective multiple intelligences of those around you.

SKILL 1: Reality Architecture-Choosing the Most Valuable Reality

If we want to be able to select the reality which will lead to greater productivity, engagement, and revenue growth, we first need to recognise that we have control over how we choose to interpret the objective facts in our external world.

Two individuals in the exact same situation and external world can have two completely different perceptions of the world that are both equally true. Because your brain can process only forty bits of information per second every minute of every day, you are merely picking and choosing from the eleven million pieces of information your sense is receiving. In truth, there is not one reality: there are millions of possibilities that could be constructed into a reality in every given second. It all depends on which information your brain chooses to process! So if your reality is your choice, the important next question is: Have you chosen the one that will help you harness your multiple intelligences to their fullest potential and lead to greater success and growth? And if not, how can you select a more valuable one?

In this chapter you will learn three proven skills that you can use to improve your reality and become more engaged, productive, and innovative at work.

Strategy 1: Recognise Alternative Realities

Studies demonstrated that by simply changing which facts you choose to focus on, you can significantly improve your response to stress at work and decrease your fatigue symptoms by a stunning 23 % in one week. For example, by simply adopting a “stress is enhancing” mindset, you can dramatically reduce the negative effects of stress, such as headaches, backaches, and tiredness. Stress is inevitable, but its effects are not.

Strategy 2: Add Vantage Points

In neuroscience and positive psychology, your vantage point is defined as the point from which you observe facts you will use to create your reality. Studies show that changing your viewpoint as you evaluate options-can significantly increase your ability to see new valuable details,

which in turn, broadens your perspective and helps you find a broader range of ideas and solutions. This ability is crucial to creativity and innovation. Through this you can combine IQ, EI, and SI to solve bigger problems and achieve more ambitious goals.

Strategy 3: Pursue the Most Valuable Reality

Research shows that by changing your perspective in the workplace you can achieve greater long term growth, 37 % higher sales, 31 % more productivity, and perhaps even increase your likelihood of living to age 94.

If managed correctly, stress can be enhancing to both our performance and well-being.

Two groups of managers were shown two different, 3 minute videos about stress. The first one highlighted the well-known ill effects of stress. The second one was about beneficial effects of stress like: helping brain to use more of its capabilities, improve memory and intelligence, and even help the body recover from injury. Those who watched the second video reported 23 % drop in physical symptoms associated with distress. Their productivity increased by 30 %.

Rethinking Stress: this process involves 3 steps. Becoming aware of stress. Looking for meaning behind stress (for example: “I am stressed because I know I will get promotion if I succeed), and the most important, channelling stress response to improve motivation and productivity. This experiment not only decreased stress, but the stress became beneficial.

Stop fighting stress. Stress is a fight-or flight response, and when you fight or flee from it, you only make it worse. Use cues to remind you to embrace stress rather than fight it.

Stress is inevitable, its negative effects are not.

Coffee cup experiment: On a paper, draw a coffee mug as per your own imagination. Use imagination to see many perspectives.

Strategy 2: Add Vantage Points

Many of us suffer from lack of perspective, severely impairing our ability to see the world in right proportions. All too often a minor setback can loom disproportionately large over larger accomplishments and successes.

What is work like for you right now? Write your answer on paper. Did you mention only negatives, leaving out positives? Is any other version possible? The goal is to see 3 realities, all based on facts.

While looking at negatives in a situation, if you see the less privileged persons, you may see more positives in your situation. If you can open your eyes to more positive details, you will not only have a positive genius but also have the greatest possible buffer against down times.

Drive different way to work, or intentionally talk to one new person each day. Go to a different place for lunch. Meet a person not related to your work. Richard Wiseman, in his article “The Luck Factor,” says that if you are an apple picker and you keep coming back to the same trees every day, eventually you are going to run out of fruit. The more you break out of your patterns, the easier it will be to find new vantage points.

Gaining Perspective in your Sleep

Our ability to see positive details can indeed be heavily impaired by fatigue. With lesser sleep you remember much lesser positive words. This is because your brain interprets a lack of sleep as a threat to the central nervous system, then goes on high alert, scanning the world for additional threats-that is negatives.

So if you want to be able to see details that will help your brain summon its full range of intellectual and emotional resources, first make sure you get 7-8 hours of sleep a night. Right before lunch is the worst time to see positive details. This is because when we are low on fuel, our brains are tired and thus more likely to go on high alert to threats and to remember and focus primarily on the negative. At certain low points in the daily cycle, we literally see a more negative reality, and one that we feel we have less ability to change.

You will not only be more positive but also more alert and productive if you regularly replenish your brain's glucose levels with healthy food.

In positive psychology, "the most valuable reality" is defined as the reality that is most valid (true), helpful (conducive to the best outcomes), and positive (growth producing).

Strategy 3: Pursue the Most Valuable Reality

A company had invested heavily by employing Electronic experts to develop a product in great demand. However, suddenly the demand vanished threatening the survival of the company. However, the management decided to look at their strengths rather than limitations and started innovating Electronics applications in automobiles, defence, hospitals. So, a decision which almost led to bankruptcy turned out to be a masterstroke for 50 years of profits.

In real world your brain actively writes words on every single person or image you see. And the words and phrases that our brains write on people, projects, and goals at work change not only your perspective but your motivation, engagement, and creativity.

You need to train your brain to attach more positives to each situation to improve your brain's flexibility and significantly increase your ability in all kinds of personal and professional situations.

If you can't find any positive attributes in your team, company, or workplace, that means either (1) your brain is missing something or (2) you need to make some serious changes in the current situation. These are really the only two options. In the work I have done over the years, even in the most struggling companies, with the most beleaguered leaders and the most pessimistic of individuals, I have never encountered an environment where positive details could not be found.

Try this experiment at home. Focus on an object and see how many attributes, phrases, and labels you can come up with it in 30 seconds. Ignore grammar; go for speed. You get +3 points for every positive descriptor and +1 points for every negative one. Remember, to get 3 points, the attribute must be both positive and true. The reason that there is one point for a negative is that while focussing on too many negatives is detrimental, including some can actually be helpful. The secret, as it turns out, is all in the ratio.

The Positivity Ratio

Acknowledging the negatives can actually be highly adaptive-to a point. It motivates us to take positive action, and makes our brains more flexible and nimble. It improves creativity and problem solving capability.

Powerful research by mathematician Losada has shown that in the working world the most valuable reality is one in which there is at least a 3:1 ratio of positive to negative interactions(Losada Line). This is a ratio above which productivity increases significantly. Highest performing teams have 6:1 P/N ratio. So when things are getting rough, ramp up the ratio by doing something simple as complimenting someone or bringing doughnuts

Interestingly, this ratio is found to be good for people to flourish outside work as well. Such persons are optimistic, are happier, and feel more fulfilled. Try balancing every piece of bad news with three good pieces of good news.

In personal relationships, psychologist and relationship Guru Gottman has found that a ratio of 5:1 is required to maintain a sound relationship. Couples with lesser ratio have higher rate of divorce.

Overcoming Blind Spots

Some of the most common blind spots which hold us back include: inability to rely on other people. Positive geniuses invest more heavily in their social support system during stressful periods. The next one is the lack of “impact awareness”, the ability to see the impact of their decisions on their teams.

The final common blind spot is “bottling it up,” or concealing emotions from one’s teams, employees and co-workers.

Why sometimes we are unable to solve problems is that our brain creates rules for reality that we do not think we can break.

Sometimes simply asking the right questions can help us overcome our blind spots. Instead of asking “Do you feel depressed right now?” or “Are you feeling happy or unhappy right now?” I ask “How are you enjoying the social connections you have made at Harvard?” or “How are you helping others?”

Making it Practical

1. Make stress work for you. Think about what is meaningful behind whatever is stressful.
2. Cross-train your brain. Go to museums, or observe famous paintings on the net, and learn to observe more details.
3. Do something pro-social. Focus on helping others. The greatest buffer against depression is altruism.
4. Fuel your reality. Eat and sleep regularly. Eat right before a big decision. Most of my major mistakes I made in my life, I made when I was too tired to know what I was doing-both personally and professionally.
5. Add vantage points. See more attributes (+/-) in a given situation. Aim for 3:1 P/N ratio.
6. Seek diverse voices. Seek opinion about a big decision from 3 persons with diversity in personality, gender, position, or culture.

7. Remind yourself of power of change. Write down the three greatest moments of change in your life that have brought you to being a person you like being today. Then put it at a place visible to you (desk, bathroom mirror) to remind yourself that you are capable of long-term positive growth.

Please visit beforeHappiness.com to watch a video about how to put this research into practice.

SKILL 2 : MENTAL CARTOGRAPHY-Mapping Your Success Route

If you don't have a good map of reality, there is no chance of a successful mission.

Whether you realize or not, right now your brain is using a map. Powerful, yet usually hidden, mental maps are what guide your actions anytime you make a decision, face a challenge, or set a goal, be it large or small. It makes you spot opportunities, seize the most valuable resources, and chart the best route toward your goals at work. But not all maps are created equal. If the mental map you are using lacks "meaning markers," it is incomplete and inaccurate and can lead you astray. Meaning markers are quite simply those things in your life that matter to you: career advancement, a new business, better health, your faith, and so on. No matter what goal you set for yourself, if you want to be able to channel your full range of intelligences towards achieving it, your personal meaning markers should be points on your mental path. So if you are currently finding your work less meaningful, your obstacles less surmountable, or your goals less attainable, chances are you need to redraw your mental map.

Truth be told, we could all really use help finding more meaning in our lives. Happiness is the joy we feel moving toward our potential.

Of the 2250 Harvard students surveyed, 10 % had contemplated suicide. This is absolutely heart breaking and horrifying. These kids have such high potential, but because they aren't able to see or remember the meaning behind that potential in the midst of competition and stress, they feel hopeless and unable to reach it. A life without meaning markers does not seem worth navigating.

Only 29 % of the American employees report that they are thriving at work. After all, can we expect to succeed at anything or create lasting happiness, whether at school or at work, when we are distracted all the time by negative information, when we take no joy in the positive results we do achieve, when any moments we might take to reflect on meaning are consumed with emails and text messages and other noise, and when we have demands on our time that keep us from the people we care about? Research has shown that those who fail to find high meaning and engagement at work are 3 times less likely to have life satisfaction and happiness outside the office. This is a vicious cycle, but luckily it is one you can break by using the skills in this chapter.

The second skill of positive genius is learning to use positive markers of meaning in your life to draw mental routes to success. With this, your stress levels drop dramatically, and productivity increases by 31 %, accuracy and completion rates on goals rise significantly, energy and engagement at work skyrocket, and you are able to utilize the entire prism of success at work. When we have meaning, our brains release a storehouse of resources to help make us more successful. Otherwise, it leads to apathy, depression, burnout, and ultimately failure. That is because success without meaning is hollow and not worth the effort.

Sometimes we haven't highlighted enough meaning markers and can see only a limited number of routes to success. Sometimes we have highlighted the wrong meaning markers and chosen a path studded with negatives, rather than the one we care about. Other times, we have mapped too few paths to success, or mapped the most congested ones, on which opportunities and resources are scarcer. And all too often, we map escape routes before we even begin to look for paths to success. This is due to stress and fear, and those very outcomes we fear happen. The research on this is very definitive: when we expect the worst, we ignore important opportunities, squander valuable resources, and miss the viable solutions.

Following 3 strategies lead to better mental map making.

Strategy 1: Highlight Your True Meaning Markers

The best mental map is one whose paths steer us toward accomplishment of meaningful goals. But we can't chart paths until we have identified and mapped the things in life that matter most to us. In this section I will show how to create a diversified portfolio of meaning and how to distinguish your true meaning markers from the decoys and hijackers that derail your paths to success.

Strategy 2: Reorient Your Mental Map

Every mental map has a focal point that dictates where the majority of your brain's resources will be allocated.

Strategy 3: Map Success Routes before Escape Routes

Often in our professional lives we get so focussed on mapping mental escape routes that our brains are left with little energy for mapping paths that led to growth. It is amazing how much our brain resources is spent on finding escape routes away from situations or environments where success is still possible. Given that our brain has limited amount of resources, what we decide to map first has the greatest chance of becoming our reality.

After 2008 banking collapse, managing directors at world's top banks told that their team's performance had nosedived because they were spending inordinate amounts of time thinking about whether they should flee the firm, or what job prospects and compensation packages would be like elsewhere, instead of focussing on what they could do to improve their situations where they were.

Pessimists assume that imagining worst-case scenarios will help protect them in case of problems. But with this approach, the less time and resources the brain gets to spend planning for things to go right.

When a brain is negative, it operates in fight-or flight mode. But when it is positive, it can use its full range of resources to "broaden and build" and find new ways of seeing and doing things.

A Cartographer's Job Is Never Done

Keeping on track toward your professional goals requires checking and rechecking your map periodically. This is critical: flawed reality maps, with paths that are no longer viable, are responsible for some of the greatest disasters.

Take time each month to make sure that your short-term plans are still leading you toward your career life goals. Periodically, ask a friend, a colleague, or even a career expert to give you an objective opinion on where he/she thinks your career is headed. Another strategy is simply to ask yourself a question: Does my behaviour today lead toward one of my meaning markers? If not, you have identified a road that need not be travelled. Third, make a regular time, maybe even just an hour on the first Saturday of each month, to reflect upon the map I had you draw earlier in the Chapter. Does it still reflect your goals and your plans? Are there new meaning markers to be drawn, new paths to be added? I suggest even keeping a journal or a Word doc to track your goals for the next year and periodically check against your map.

Making It Practical

1. Diversify your meaning portfolio

Write down a list right now of as many meaning markers in your life as you can. Aim for at least ten, and be specific. Instead of just “money” or “family,” yours might include “Be a positive role model for my son” or “Find time to read more” or “Do more adventuresome travel with my family.” And be sure to look for meaning markers in all areas of life.

2. Do a daily “meaning orientation.”

Ask yourself each morning as you start your day, “What is one action I will take today that will get me closer to my meaningful goals?” Even if you were going to do that task anyway, highlighting the fact that you are doing a meaningful action daily will train your brain to constantly readjust and reorient your map around meaning.

3. Map your life

Draw an actual map of your current workplace, neighbourhood, or city. What areas or people did you draw largest? Which are closest to the centre? Now think about what is missing. Are there important people or places or resources that you overlooked? If so, chances are you are overlooking them in your actual work life as well. Think about ways you might better utilize these people and resources.

4. Spot and stop hijackers

Identify three map hijackers that you know pull you off your path (for example, getting email alerts, hanging out with negative people, envying others’ possessions, gossiping, shopping online). What can you do today to avoid those hijackers? What positive, meaningful habits can you replace them with? If you are worried about the hijackers rearing their ugly heads, give a copy of the list to a close friend, a colleague, or your spouse to help you stay accountable.

5. Use a treasure map

Commit to focussing your brain on what it would take to nail it, rather than what to do if you fail. If others start focussing on problems or worrying, steer the conversation back to positive: “Let’s figure out how success is possible before talking about what might go wrong.”

6. Update your map

Take a monthly, one-hour sabbatical to reflect on your mental map. Pick suitable day and time just thinking about what your current ambitions are and whether you are still on track. This brief respite is crucial to ensure that your map is up-to-date and accurate.

SKILL 3: The X Spot: Finding Success Accelerants

When runners are 26.1 miles into the 26.2 mile race, a special brain event occurs right at the spot, called the X-spot, where runners turn the corner and can finally see the finish line. Their brains release a flood of endorphins and other chemicals that give them energy to accelerate through that final leg of the race. When your brain sees that success is not only possible but now probable, the reaction is physically powerful-so powerful, in fact, that a very small handful of marathoners can't handle it.

The X-spot reveals one of the most important attributes of our brains. At the precise moment your brain realizes that attaining goal is not only possible but probable, it releases a potent stream of chemicals that help you to speed up.

The X-spot illustrates how powerful the finish line can be in terms of increased energy and focus. As soon as the goal comes into view, our efforts ramp up. So if you want to accelerate your success rates, you need to find your X-spots early and often.

Of course, this phenomenon doesn't occur only in sports. No matter what the goal is-whether it's finishing the marathon, completing a big project at work, or losing 20 pounds-your brain behaves in the exact same way. As soon as your brain registers that you are going to achieve your goal, it releases these same chemicals that give you the extra boost you need to accelerate. The closer you perceive success to be, in other words, the faster you move toward it.

What if we could access that increased energy, focus, and drive as we approached not just the finish line but any point in the race? And what if we could apply those same techniques to speed toward any goal we wished to accomplish in our professional lives?

By changing our perception of the distance to the finish line, we can prime our brains to release those chemicals earlier to accelerate our success.

Painting the Target

When a missile is fired neared its target, it was able to detect the scattered energy coming from the target to adjust both its trajectory and momentum on the basis of these data. This was called painting the target.

Painting the target is exactly what your brains must do anytime it desires to accomplish a goal. Once your brain has mapped a path toward a goal you want to attain or a target you want to hit at work or in your personal life, it is constantly reading signals about what it will take to get you there.

How can you construct realities that help you achieve these goals faster? What you need are success accelerants.

Your brain is a goal oriented machine. At work, when you set targets, project deadlines, or set any kind of objective for personal or career growth, your mind subconsciously makes a number of assessments about how far away that goal is (proximity), how likely you are to achieve it (the size of the target), and the effort (thrust) it will take to do so. As you work toward the goal, your brain is constantly calculating and recalculating these three variables. However, research from neuroscience labs prove that these variables are not based only on objective measures; in fact, they are based largely on the perception of the facts. Think about it this way. Unless you can see into the future, you can't possibly know or control how far your goal is, how likely you

are to attain it, and how much effort it will take. But you can control how you perceive the proximity of the goal and the effort required to succeed. That means you have the power to accelerate the speed at which you hit your targets—simply by changing perceptions.

Your success is largely determined by how you perceive your current progress. For example, did you know that your performance on a test like SATs can be determined by the number of people you see in the room taking the test with you? Did you know you are more likely to hole a putt in golf if you surround the hole with a circle of smaller circles to create an optical illusion that makes the hole look bigger? Or that if you highlight reaching the 70 % mark as you progress toward your goal, you can speed up? Creating more positive perceptions of our goals can dramatically increase our engagement, focus, productivity, and motivation and thus increase the speed at which we attain them.

In this chapter, you will learn 3 skills to help you do exactly that.

Strategy 1: Zoom in on the Target (Proximity)

The closer people get to target, the harder and faster they work. Changing your brain's perception of the distance to a target provides drive, focus, and motivation and gets your brain working at maximum capacity.

Strategy 2: Magnify the Target Size (Likelihood of Success)

In archery, the bigger a target is, the more likely you are to hit it. By the same token, the bigger the target looks, the more your brain believes you will hit it.

Strategy 3: Recalculate Thrust (Energy Required)

To achieve any goal, a certain amount of energy is required. But different types of goals have different mental costs. The lower the mental costs, the faster you speed toward success. Research has shown that by changing your perceptions of these costs, you can increase your speed toward your target by as much as 35 %.

Strategy 1: Zoom in on the Target (Proximity)

Hull's gradient theory says that closer you are to the goal, the faster you go. I contribute one important addendum to Hull's hypothesis: we work harder and faster not only when we get objectively closer to our goal but also when we perceive that we are closer to our goal. In other words, the closer we perceive success to be, the more successful we become.

Coffee cup experiment: one group was offered "buy ten coffees and get one free" scheme. The second group was offered "buy twelve coffees and get one free", but with first two cards already stamped. Although, effectively both groups had same number of coffees to buy for a free one, but because of the perceived head start, the second group grabbed the offer more enthusiastically than the 1st one. This is a proof of the subjective perception of the reality.

If you want to incentivize your customers to visit you more frequently, make sure to design your reward programs so that people (1) have a perceived head start and (2) can perceive great progress.

These findings have huge implications for how should set and structure goals for ourselves as individuals and for our teams. For one, give yourself a perceived head start by designing your

goals with some progress already worked in. This could be previous week's or month's progress included. The distance to goal may still be same, but you and your team can work harder to get there because the target seems closer.

The best way to turn a marathon of work into a sprint is to change your perception of the finish line. Create X-spots for your team whenever and wherever you can, and show them how close success could be through repeated positive feedback, shorter goal horizons, and graphic/visual display of progress. This could be as practical and simple as making weekly goals, rather than yearly ones. Or try making daily habit charts where you check off each positive habit or action, rather than discrete tasks, which often take longer and involve multiple steps. It's lot easier to see the finish line when the finish line is "Respond to boss's e-mail," rather than "Get through the e-mail inbox."

Break up big projects into smaller, incremental goals. But also create X-spots by setting mileposts for yourself at 70 % mark.

When you make a list of things to do during the day, write down the things you have already done that day and check them off immediately. And include three things you know you are going to do anyway. This increases the likelihood of an X-spot experience because it highlights how much progress you have made over the course of the day. What matters is feeling that you have made over the course of the day.

Look Backward

A study has found that in situations where you are less committed or motivated, the best way to accelerate growth is to look, not ahead to the finish line, but behind you, at what you have already accomplished.

The more you invest in a task or challenge, the more you begin to care about it. This is called "escalation of commitment."

The more time you put in learning a new skill, the more determined you become to master it. Even if you are not committed to the task at the outset, highlighting your progress to date and the effort you have already invested tells the brain to release more success accelerants, giving you more energy to keep going. It's a strategy that can be incredibly useful where we are often involuntarily involved that we are not necessarily excited about.

Whatever the target, and no matter how frustrated you feel about progress, take few minutes to write down all the work you have done and the strides you have made so far.

Strategy 2: Magnify the Target Size (Likelihood of Success)

Target size refers to the perceived likelihood of attaining a goal, not how big or important or how ambitious the goal is. Ironically, some of the biggest goals have the smallest target sizes. Becoming CEO of a company is a huge goal, but the target size is extremely small-realistically speaking, your chances of attaining is slim to none.

A circle simply looks bigger if it is surrounded by smaller circles. Let's say that you are struggling to finish a complex and challenging project work that was assigned to you at the last second. At first, the chances of completing the project well and on time for success-may seem small. But what if you remind yourself of all the other projects you have accomplished in the past that were even more difficult and rushed than this one? Suddenly, success will feel more

likely, and your brain will channel all of your experiences and strengths and intelligences toward hitting that larger target.

If you perceive your ability to overcome these challenges- as small, the challenges appear to come to you faster, and vice versa. One of the easiest ways of doing this is to make a list of your current resources and a few “champion moments” that remind you when you have been successful in similar situations, even though they may not be dramatic.

The N Effect

N is the number of people in the study which affects the performance. When we perceive there are few competitors, we believe there is greater likelihood of success, which results in more engagement and concentration and improved performance.

Participants in a quiz were told that if they were in the top 20 %, they would receive \$5. Then they were split in two groups. The participants in 1st group were told that they were competing against 10 other individuals, whereas those in other group were told that they were competing against 100 individuals. Since the prize was based on %, this should not have any effect on the performance. Nevertheless, participants in group 1 finished significantly faster than those in other group.

Hence, you need to find ways to make your brain perceive the N (the no. of competitors), as being as low as possible. If you are applying for a job, schedule your interview at the beginning of the morning when there are least no. of candidates waiting. If you are studying for a big test, do not study in a huge room with lot of other students studying for the same test.

Move the Fences

Simply move the fences so that it seems easier. One way is to set reasonable goals. If we believe we have less than 70 % chance of succeeding at creating a new habit or achieving a goal, our likelihood of sticking with it plummets. So structure all your goals so that you can believe you have at least 70 % chance of making them.

Instead of a big monthly target which you consider has 50 % chances of success, set a two weeks target of 50 % which seems less daunting, success suddenly seems more possible. The original goal hasn't changed. Or you can restate the goal in terms of something which is much less intimidating, or even attractive.

Strategy 3: Recalculate Thrust (Energy Required)

Research shows that not all demands upon brain are equivalent. It also shows that the more thrust, or mental effort, we believe is necessary to accomplish a goal, the more likely we are to give up. But the good news is that we have the power to change the perception of the same to overcome our greatest challenges or obstacles.

When I am doing normal work, I usually have tons of energy after work to go work out. But when I am being creative working on a new project, I have a boost of energy, but then I feel too exhausted to work out. I sat at the desk for the same amount of time, but it's like I have put in three or four days of work. Corporate coaches also say that giving employees training sessions for 8-10 hours a day is no problem, but make them give a 45 minute keynote, and they feel wiped out.

The reason is that cognitive functions are like muscles. If you are doing tasks that you know so well and that use the part of the brain you work out often, you can put in 8 hours and not feel exhausted. But any time you have to use skills, intelligences, or parts of your brain that you use less frequently, an hour can seem as depleting as three or four normal days of work.

The reason for this lies in your brain's levels of glucose, it's primary source of fuel. Because difficult tasks require more glucose than simple ones, trying to use parts of your brain that are out of shape, and thus have to work harder, comes at a high cognitive cost. Research shows that mental costs increase as you go from physical, to visual, to cognitive process. The most expensive is "emotional and social processing."

Just as, when you are physically fatigued, walking up a flight of stairs can seem as exhausting as running a marathon, when you are mentally fatigued, even a simple task of writing an e-mail or looking over a report will automatically seem harder. That is why, if you are facing a difficult or daunting challenge at work, avoiding mental fatigue is key to reducing your brain's perception of thrust.

Since every choice you make requires some cognitive effort, and you have only a finite amount, the key to avoiding getting burned out when it matters is to budget your cognitive resources wisely and hoard them for those tasks and challenges that take priority. For example, avoid having a lunch with a difficult co-worker on a day when you have to work on an important project. Don't read a dense academic article right before going on a networking event where you need to be "on."

Research also shows that if you are required to make multiple decisions before having to regulate emotions, your brain wears out faster, you are more likely to procrastinate, you have lower energy, and you are more likely to quit the task early. So the more you can routinize your unimportant tasks at work, thus eliminating the need to make conscious decisions, the more thrust you will have to complete the important goals. Try to routinize what time you get to work, what you have for breakfast, when you take coffee breaks, and so on.

Second, put the most important work early in the day, and never schedule two really important meetings or mentally taxing tasks back to back. Researcher Roy Bannister has found that your brain's self-regulation, or will power, is exactly like a muscle in your arm. You can strengthen your will power, but only if it is rested. You wouldn't try to help someone move furniture immediately after lifting weights at a gym. So why would you try to do your most important work after making lots of emotional and cognitive decisions.

Remember, it is the perception of the amount of effort involved that matters most. If you are getting overwhelmed by a task or goal at work, you might be misperceiving it as harder than it is. One solution to think about tasks in terms of objective units rather than in terms of efforts involved. For example, if your inbox is overflowing, calculate how many emails you need to respond to, instead of fixing your mind on how much effort it will take to reply to a that one difficult e-mail you have been avoiding. If you feel that it is ridiculously hard to get all the information you need to make a decision or solve a problem at work, write down names of the people you need to talk to. In almost all the cases, thinking in terms of a task in terms of discrete units will make it seem much less difficult and daunting.

Watching The Clock

Time Paradox: The more mental energy you have to exert during a given period of time, the longer that period seems.

Just a 3-20 second delay between you and the activity you are trying to make yourself do can often be a solid deterrent. I'd like to e-mail that potential client, but don't know where I put his e-mail address...so I will do it later. I would like to eat a piece of fruit, but it's in the kitchen, and these jelly beans are right on my desk.

Have you noticed how your energy gives out right when you expect it to? Like you plan running 20 minutes, and after that you can't run another minute. Or you plan working on a project until 5:00 p.m., and after that you "just can't look at it anymore." If you want to harness energy to work harder and longer, all you need to do is change your perception of how long you have been working.

Ironically, the key to managing time is to lose time-or, more precisely, to lose track of time intervals. We have all experienced how time flies when we are fully immersed in something. This happens because when you are fully engaged, "it's time keeper," diverts its resources to the parts of the brain working hard. It therefore doesn't have resources left to keep up it's job of keeping track of time.

The state in which an individual is completely absorbed in a task and nearly 100 % of conscious cognitive functioning is aimed at the task, as "flow." It correlates with the greatest levels of happiness.

One very practical way to purposely lose track of time is simply to take off your watch.

Moments of fear, worry, anticipation, and boredom keep your timekeeper on high alert, making it impossible to focus on anything but time. It's why when you have to wait for a day for test results from your doctor, the day seems like a week.

Trajectory Matters

If a player is thinking, "Don't miss this shot," he is almost certainly doomed to miss this shot. Rather, the player should be focusing his brain on what making the shot looks like. No matter what your goal or challenge is, visualizing what success would look like will steer you to the beach instead of rocks.

Another technique to help you stay focussed on your goals is to put visual cues in your environment to remind you of your meaning markers. Researchers have found putting unrealistic, fantastical goals onto a vision board actually makes us feel worse about ourselves because it makes think we are missing out on life. Vision boards are helpful if done correctly using (1) realistic goals are (2) based upon your real meaning markers and (3) possible in the near future.

A study in which one group of healthy volunteers spent fifteen minutes a day practicing "finger abductions," which are basically like the biceps curl but with one finger. A second group of healthy volunteers was asked to practice visualizing doing finger abductions for that same time period, and the rest did nothing. After 12 weeks, the 1st group showed 53 % increase in finger strength. But the fascinating thing was that group 2, who did not move a finger, showed a 35 % increase in strength. Incredibly, mentally practising an action increased physical strength.

Why did it happen? Because when you mentally practice something, whether it is in thought or an action, and whether it's +ve/-ve, your brain increases a cortical output signal for that thought or action-that is, it becomes more proficient at creating that result. Visualization is not the means to your goals. It is accelerant that gets you on the right trajectory toward those goals.

Making It Practical

1. Identify your X-spots
2. Give yourself head start
3. Be objective
4. Use champion moments
5. Keep your eyes on the beach, not the rocks
6. Make 70 % your goal
7. Make your goals visible

SKILL 4: Noise Cancelling

Noise can be a huge distorter of reality. Vegas casinos know this; that's why they overload your brain with sounds and lights to distract you from the reality that you are losing money. But noise is much more than just a distraction; it blocks out signals that can point you toward positive growth.

Because of the information overload, it isn't always easy to hear the signal through noise.

But it's important to understand that it is not just the outside world that makes noise. Your brain is a huge noisemaker. Much of our reality is created by not by outside facts but by our own internal voices. And when the voices are deafening chorus of worry, anxiety, negativity, and fear, our engagement and success rates plummet. So if we want to create the most valuable reality we have to find a way to block both external and internal noise. Following strategies will help in this.

Strategy 1: Recognise the Signal

Recognise noise by four criteria and train your mind to pick out signal from the noise.

Strategy 2: Stop the Addiction to Noise

Here you will learn practical, daily steps to reduce your overall noise level and increase the strength of your signal by up to 25 %.

Strategy 3: Cancel the Internal Noise

Here you will learn how to boost your signal by actively eliminating the internal noise of fear, pessimism, and self-doubt. You will learn how to boost the signal by silencing anxiety and negativity through two simple habits.

Strategy 1: Recognise the Signal

Definitions of signal and noise.

Signal is information that is true and reliable and alerts you to opportunities, possibilities, and resources that will help you reach your fullest potential.

Noise is everything else: any information that is negative, false, or unnecessary or that prevents you from perceiving a world in which success is possible.

Signal could be any form of appreciation you have received. It is also authentic, constructive criticism which may not feel great, but which can spark a change that leads to immense personal growth.

The Four Criteria of Noise

1. Unusable: your behaviour will not be altered by the information. Most of the information falls in this category. Example: Earthquakes, floods elsewhere.
2. Untimely: you are not going to use the information imminently, and it could change by the time you do use it. Example: Share prices, if you don't want to buy/sell now.
3. Hypothetical: it is based on what someone believes "could be" instead of "what is." Example: Market predictions.
4. Distracting: The information you are getting does not relate to your domains of interest.

Strategy 2: Stop the Addiction to Noise

Our brains are wired to respond faster to threats in the environment.

If you are like a lion who is at the top of the food chain, you need not run from predators because you can handle whatever comes.

Your Bose Brain

Scientifically speaking, there are two ways to cancel noise: passively and actively. Putting in earplugs is the former because it simply blocks the noise. My noise-cancelling headphones use active noise cancelling by emitting opposite sound waves that cancel out ambient noise.

As every addict knows, the 1st step in recovery is recognising that we have a problem. The next step is to extricate ourselves from tempting situations.

Some practical tips:

Mute TV and internet commercials. Limit watching prediction news. When working, listen to music without lyrics.

Strategy 3: Cancel the Internal Noise

Use active noise cancellation as follows.

Wave 1: I will keep my worry in proportion to the likelihood of the event.

Wave 2: I will not run 10,000 days to be right on a handful.

Wave 3: I will not equate worrying with being loving and responsible.

A coward dies a thousand deaths, a soldier dies but once.

Making it Practical

1. Noise-check your life. Eliminate unnecessary information.
2. Decrease information intake by 5 %.
3. Create noise cancelling.

4. Fact-check
5. Do a 5 minute writing exercise. Any time you start hearing doubting voices, take just 5 minutes to write about things you feel passionate about. With this you can increase your performance on intelligence tasks by 10-15 %.
6. Exercise. Decreases anxiety by 20 %

SKILL 5: Positive Inception: Transferring your positive reality to others

In Christopher Nolan's film Inception this concept has been used. The subconscious is motivated by emotion, not reason. Positive emotion trumps negative emotion every time.

While we can't force others to see the world in a positive way, we can plant seeds of positive realities into their brains. Having more positive company always helps. Moreover, it is easier to sustain our own positive reality when we help others in doing the same.

The following three strategies help in this.

Strategy 1: Franchise Success

Identify one aspect of a reality that if replicated, would help other people harness their drive, motivation and become more successful. To be contagious, it must be based upon a simple, easy to replicate idea. A hospital was able to improve patient happiness, doctor job satisfaction, and hospital reputation by adopting 10/5 rule. It also increased hospital revenue by \$30 million. In this strategy, if a guest walks by an employee within 10 feet, the employee should make eye contact and smile. If that guest comes within 5 feet, the employee should say "Hello."

Strategy 2: Rewrite Social Script

Speaking first, using "power lead", and utilizing humour help in this.

Strategy 3: Create a Shared Narrative

Construct a narrative around some shared emotional experience around some past adversity or failure.

Best doctors are the ones who know how to connect with the patient.

In any organisation the employees are all unique individuals with different personalities, thought patterns, beliefs, values, and learning styles. Our personalities may be distinct and unique, but our brains are highly interconnected; they are linked by wireless mirror neuron network. University of Sussex research shows that not only yawns and smiles are contagious but also emotions like stress, anxiety, optimism, confidence, boredom, and engagement. We are hardwired for inception.

Flex your smile: all you have to do is smile three extra times a day. Smile at a colleague you wouldn't normally smile. Smile while you order a coffee. Smile at a stranger on your way to office. This one second behavioural change has a high return on investment.

By merely simulating a smile reduced their ability to get angry at another person.

When you smile, your brain releases dopamine, which improves your mood and your reality as well. Remember, positive realities are contagious in both directions.

Commenting on cold makes brain more conscious of the cold, which makes you feel colder.

For the next 24 hours, smile at everyone who comes within ten feet, and abstain from venting.

While all social scripts affect our interactions with others, not all have equal influence. Every social script has 3 components: the strength of the message (S), the immediacy (I), and the number of sources (N). The degree of social influence is the sum of the three.

The stronger and more important the message is, and the number of people delivering it, the more influence it will have.

The best approach is to increase N, the number of people buying into the positive message. Focus on the like-minded, positive people-first. Once you have increased the N, you will have more influence over the middle-of the road group, and finally, the negative ones.

Use the Power lead

If you want your positive message to be heard, the solution is not to speak the loudest,. It's to be the one who speaks first. And start with a positive topic.

Change Your Face

Facial expressions play a big role in transferring our realities. Failing to show positive emotion can hamper not only your ability to experience positive realities but also your ability to spread it to others. Nonverbal communication includes more than your smile: body language and tone also set the stage for inception.

Thanks to our neural network, we unconsciously mirror the people we are with. So if the person you are talking with is not smiling, seems fatigued or dis, or seems anxious, chances are your nonverbals are not as positive as they need to be. If you don't like what you are seeing, change yourself first and see if other person follows the new script.

Change the Script From Tragedy to Comedy

Your brain must be flexible, quick, and sharp to create humour. You need to share a laugh with them.

Strategy 3: Create a Shared Narrative (Make it Meaningful)

If you make your message emotional, your chances of creating inception improve dramatically.