AFTER COVID, WHERE TO NOW?

5 SCIENCE-PROVEN HABITS TO THRIVE IN THE POST-COVID WORKPLACE

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To the many people whose love and support I have enjoyed over the years.

To my parents, who raised me.

To Thom Knoles, who taught me.

To the universities that instructed me.

To the students, whose enquiries prompted me.

To Geri, who loved me... and thankfully still does!

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1 Introduction

The Covid pandemic came as a shock, didn't it?

Many employers and employees found themselves out of work. They scurried to apply for government support.

Those people who did have work found that their working conditions changed radically from one day to the next. Initially, they were relieved that their office had the wherewithal to seamlessly transition to a remote working environment. They had a laptop, a home internet connection, a smartphone, and a suite of applications with which to stay connected: *Teams, Zoom, Outlook, Jabber, Skype.* They would get through this, they thought!

But then everyone was home: the partner, the kids, the pets! Patience thinned. Frustration simmered. Tempers flared.

And the working day? Those people who were in work had to wrestle with new challenges.

- Supply chains were compromised, and quick workarounds were required.
- There was *Zoom* call after *Zoom* call.
- You were in front of your screen from the time you woke till late into the evening.

- You no longer had the casual quick coffee with a colleague that allowed you a moment's respite.
- You couldn't head to a colleague's desk and pick their brain about some problem.

The pressures compounded, yet the release valves weren't there:

- you couldn't head to the gym, or
- pop out for a drink after work.

It quickly took its toll.

You weren't alone. The medics confirm this[1]. Many people – whether in work or without – felt tremendous uncertainty through the crisis.

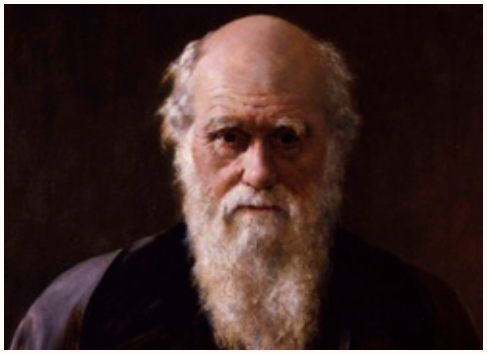
- They slept poorly.
- They drank more.
- They worried about their jobs, their aging parents, their mortgages, school fees, and a host of other uncertainties.

Yet there was a subset of people who had the tools to adapt, prosper, and remain happy, in spite of it all. How did they do it? What lessons can you glean from

[1] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *COVID-19 Stress and Coping*. 2020; https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html

them, and integrate into your work and personal life?

It's crucial that you do so. Indeed, a 2019 OECD report said that, to navigate future challenges in the twenty first century workplace, adaptability is the single most important trait you can have[2]. The report said this, even before Covid-19 hit. That advice is even more poignant now! Charles Darwin – a man who knew a thing or two about survival – put it as follows:



"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change."

This book provides five science-proven habits that you can implement right now to better adapt to the post-Covid work environment. Many of the habits are used by successful business people and executives. Science shows that all five habits really do work. Think of them as secrets to your future success. This book reveals those secrets.

The book is organised into 5 sections. Each section reveals a secret to success.

- It cites the science (in easy-to-understand, everyday language).
- It says who already relies on the particular habit.
- It provides concrete 'take home' measures, summarised in two or three lines. The summary allows you to quickly and easily understand the habit, and integrate it into your daily routine right now. Doing so really can radically change your life... and your enjoyment of it!

[2] OECD (2019), OECD Skills Strategy 2019: Skills to Shape a Better Future, *OECD Publishing*, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264313835-en

2 How to get more time in your day! (As done by execs like Richard Branson)

Do you know what Richard Branson (*Virgin Group* Chairman), Bob Iger (*Disney* Chairman), and Howard Schultz (*Starbucks* CEO) all have in common?

They are all early risers!

These are busy execs with a lot on their plate. Yet they are not up late, fretting over their companies' directions. Each wakes up before sunrise.

2.1 Here's one way to stress less

These execs have made a sound choice. It ensures that they start the day less stressed (and that's the best platform from which to clock up some wins). Science shows this.

The human body produces a hormone known as cortisol, whenever it is under stress. The body also has elevated cortisol levels, when we wake up in the morning. That happens to everyone. It is known as the Cortisol Awakening Response[3]. Everyone's stress hormone levels are higher when they first wake. Yet those elevated levels are less – by an amount of 35% - if a person wakes before

[3] Fries, E., Dettenborn, L., Kirschbaum, C. (2008). The cortisol awakening response (CAR): Facts and future directions. *International Journal of Psychophysiology: official journal of the International Organization of Psychophysiology*. 72. 67-73. 10.1016/j.ijpsycho.2008.03.014.

first light[4]. That means that early risers – people like Branson, Iger, and Shultz – start their days significantly less stressed than if they had woken after the sun had already risen.

2.2 Get 'smarter'

Crucially, when you wake before dawn, your thinking is clearer. You're more lucid. That's a consequence of that 35% decrease in morning cortisol levels.

By contrast, when cortisol levels are high – such as what happens when you are gripped by fear – you lose the ability to think straight. That's what happens, if you're on the receiving end of some road rage, or if the school calls to say that one of your kids has tripped over and injured themselves. You feel a knot in your stomach. Adrenaline levels stay high. Your thinking immediately narrows – you focus entirely on the threat and shut out everything else. And, as a consequence, you stop thinking creatively; you struggle to recall previously learned information; you are less able to organize information[5].

It is little wonder, then, that these high-powered executives choose to rise before sunrise:

- They feel less stressed.
- They think more clearly.
- They recall information more easily.
- They organize their ideas a lot better.

It is even better to actually watch the sun come up. You could look out the

[4] Thorn L, Hucklebridge F, Esgate A, Evans P, Clow A. (2004) The effect of dawn simulation on the cortisol response to awakening in healthy participants. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*. 29(7):925-30. doi: 10.1016/j.psyneuen.2003.08.005. PMID: 15177708

Scheer FA, Buijs RM. Light affects morning salivary cortisol in humans. *J Clin Endocrinol Metab*. 1999 Sep;84(9):3395-8. doi: 10.1210/jcem.84.9.6102. PMID: 10487717

[5] Echouffo-Tcheugui JB, Conner SC, Himali JJ, Maillard P, DeCarli CS, Beiser AS, Vasan RS, Seshadri S. Circulating cortisol and cognitive and structural brain measures: The Framingham Heart Study. *Neurology*. 2018 Nov 20;91(21):e1961-e1970. doi: 10.1212/WNL.0000000000006549. Epub 2018 Oct 24. PMID: 30355700; PMCID: PMC6260201.

window, or better still go outside. Then watch the night sky give way to the first rays of the morning sun. There's a number of advantages that come from doing this.

2.3 Want to get 'more time' in your day?

First, watching the sunrise makes for an awesome sight... and science shows that, when we have a sense of awe, we feel more in the moment[6]. Time feels more abundant. We actually feel like we have more time.

This is the perfect practice, then, for a busy executive. Previously, they may have complained that they had no time. Now, thanks to this daily dose of awe, they feel that they have more time:

- They don't feel like they're being pulled from pillar to post.
- This gives them a greater sense of control over what's happening.
- They feel like they have more time in the day afterwards with which to weigh options and make decisions.

That said, for this 'awesome' practice to work, you cannot be checking your phone the whole time whilst the sun's rising. You should switch it off for a few minutes, and really take in the surroundings: the grass, the trees, the horizon, the changing light. Doing this allows the brain to ease off from higher frequency beta wave activity. Beta waves are what the brain produces when we check emails, crunch through a 'to do' list, and fret over what still needs to get done. There's plenty of time for all of that later. Instead, notice your surrounds. Really notice them. Be present. This allows the brain to move to calmer alpha wave activity. You are more likely to feel 'flow'. That, in turn, provides more fertile conditions for creative thinking and innovative solutions.

[6] Dawson J., Sleek S. The Fluidity of Time: Scientists Uncover How Emotions Alter Time Perception. *Observer Magazine* https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/the-fluidity-of-time

2.4 Boost your mood

Second, exposure to early morning light boosts your mood[7]. Sunlight triggers the brain's release of a hormone called serotonin. It's serotonin that gives you that lighter, carefree, optimistic feeling in summer... and it's a lack of serotonin that leads to you feeling sluggish – even depressed – in the darker, winter months.

Take Home Message

Wake up before dawn and watch the sunrise!

It allows executives to more easily handle the pressures of their role. They are thence less stressed. They think more clearly. They feel like they have more time with which to make decisions. They feel more optimistic.

[7] Lewy AJ, Bauer VK, Cutler NL, Sack RL, Ahmed S, Thomas KH, Blood ML, Jackson JM. Morning vs evening light treatment of patients with winter depression. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 1998 Oct;55(10):890-6. doi: 10.1001/archpsyc.55.10.890. PMID: 9783559.

3 Got to multi-task to thrive, right? Wrong!

If you want to succeed at your job, don't multi-task!

That suggestion flies in the face of what you have previously been led to believe! Managers, executives, and other high-skilled information workers have a lot on their plate... we assume therefore that they need to multi-task. Not so! In fact, multi-tasking's extremely detrimental.

We're all familiar with workplace multi-tasking. Consider a typical scenario.

- You attend a *Zoom* meeting.
- Unbeknownst to the other attendees, you work on your financial report in the background.
- You read and reply to an instant message from a colleague.
- You skim through the artefact that was sent with the meeting invite.
- One of the meeting attendees mentions some ongoing supply chain delays, so you open the latest delivery report to cross-check what they are saying.

3.1 Avoid this! It kills your productivity!

You should not have tried to juggle those various tasks. It would have been far more productive to focus on one task, give it your undivided attention and then, only once that task is done, consciously switch your attention to the next task.

Recent psychology research backs this up. People are *less* productive when

they attempt to multi-task[8]. They take longer to complete each of the individual tasks. Each task is done far less well than if it had received their undivided attention.

What's the take home from this? Don't work on that financial report, when you're in that zoom meeting. You'll make errors. It will take longer.

3.2 You will cripple your ability to concentrate

Did you realise that it's not even possible to multi-task? You don't carry out multiple tasks at the same time. In reality, you quickly switch back and forth between them. Yet that spreads your brain power far too thinly: your ability to focus, your processing powers, your ability to recall information are all severely weakened, when you try to jump between different tasks that each make demands on your finite brain power[9].

One might assume that, as soon as you stop the multi-tasking, you reclaim the brain power that you had previously. Not so. Multi-tasking's effect on your brain can be long term! One study shows that the anterior cingulate cortex – which is the area of the brain that's associated with one's ability to control/focus one's attention – is actually smaller in people who engage in large amounts of multimedia multi-tasking.

You engage in multimedia multitasking in the workplace, when you attend a meeting, whilst composing an email, and simultaneously sending an instant

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[8] Rubinstein, J. S., Meyer, D. E., & Evans, J. E. (2001). Executive control of cognitive processes in task switching. J*ournal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, 27(4), 763-797. https://doi.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2F0096-1523.27.4.763

Bowman, L. L., Levine, L. E., Waite, B. M., & Gendron, M. (2010). Can students really multitask? An experimental study of instant messaging while reading. *Computers and Education 51*, 927-931. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2009.09.024

[9] Liefooghe, B., Barrouillet, P., Vandierendonck, A., & Camos, V. (2008). Working memory costs of task switching. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 34(3), 478-494. https://doi.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2F0278-7393.34.3.478

Oberauer, K. (2003). Selective attention to elements in working memory. *Experimental Pyschology*, 50(4), 257-269. https://econtent.hogrefe.com/doi/10.1026//1618-3169.50.4.257

message or two. You engage in it when you get home, when you watch television, whilst simultaneously checking your social media feeds on your smartphone.

Many of us are multi-tasking, from the time we wake till the time we go to bed! It's alarming, isn't it, to think of all the damage that's doing to your brain? Your brain is, after all, the most precious resource a highly skilled information worker has. You need your brain at its sharpest, if you're to adapt and add value in these challenging, post-Covid times!

3.3 Here's a game-changing trick

It might seem like a tall order to suddenly stop multitasking. But, if you pull it off, an uptick in your productivity will soon follow.

What steps can you take to wean yourself off multitasking, then? How can you work differently?

One practical thing you can do is change how you 'do email':

1) Turn off all email notifications

That way, they won't distract you. Every time you get an email notification – whether you act on it or not – the notification diverts your attention away from what you are working on:

- You were deep in the financials.
- A notification pops up, indicating that there's a new email from one of your suppliers.
- Immediately, you start thinking about the supplier and what you need from them.
- It will take time and effort to get your head back to the space it was in previously, where your thought processes were flowing, and you were intuitively crunching through the financial figures.

2) You should also set aside a couple of 20 min slots in your day for email activity and not look at your inbox outside of those times

This is in line with what Clifford Nass, a psychology professor at Stanford University, recommends[10]. Tom Patterson, the CEO of men's clothing company *Tommy John*, only checks his email before 9am and after 5pm[11].

Most people have their inbox open all the time. Sometimes they 'retreat' to it – they take refuge there – whenever their concentration levels begin to wane. Your concentration can, of course, flag at various points during the day. But turning to your inbox will degrade your concentration levels even more:

- You were working on one task – e.g. a financial report.
- Your brain felt a slump. It needs a short break from that task.
- You should stand up, walk to the water cooler, and allow your brain a few minutes to recoup... before you return to your desk to refocus your attention on the task at hand.
- But, instead of giving your brain a break, you tax it further – you place still more demand on it – with some other task – e.g. skimming an email from one of your suppliers.

What's more, that email, depending on its content, may actually stress you out. Your supplier might be alerting you to a three-month delay on some equipment. You turned to your inbox for a moment's break. It killed your concentration and furthermore stressed you!

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[10] Flatow, I. The Myth of Multitasking. *NPR* https://www.npr.org/2013/05/10/182861382/the-myth-of-multitasking

[11] Liu, B. This CEO's Trick to Managing Hundreds of Emails a Day is Absolutely Brilliant. *Inc* https://www.inc.com/betty-liu/this-ceo-s-genius-trick-to-managing-hundreds-of-emails-a-day.html

Take Home Message

Do one task at a time. Don’t multi-task!

It kills productivity. It hampers your concentration levels.

Switch off your email notifications – otherwise, they pull you away from your current task.

Only look at your inbox at particular times of the day.

4 Three ways to NEVER PROCRASTINATE AGAIN!

We are all familiar with procrastination. It's where there's a task that you need to complete, you could or should carry it out now, but you instead put it off for later.

One in five Americans are chronic procrastinators[12]. All of us procrastinate to some extent from time to time.

Many people believe that procrastination is a failure of willpower. It's not. There's a scientific explanation for why people procrastinate... and scientific ways for anyone to overcome procrastination.

4.1 Why do you procrastinate?

Consider the science behind why people procrastinate. There's two parts of the brain that are relevant here: the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala.

The prefrontal cortex carries out several functions. Amongst other things, it mediates a person's tendency to act impulsively, and it helps the person work towards a goal that they have set for themselves.

The amygdala is implicated in the fight-flight response. You see a threat, such as a knife-wielding assailant. Immediately, the amygdala issues a distress signal, and the body does whatever it can to move away from, or counter, that threat:

- adrenaline and cortisol flood the bloodstream;
- the heart beats faster;
- the lungs inhale and exhale more quickly;
- glucose and fats are secreted into the blood, to give you the energy to

[12] Ferrari, J. Psychology of Procrastination : Why People Put Off Important Tasks Until the Last Minute *APA* https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2010/04/procrastination

either run away or fight off the assailant.

Procrastination can be understood as a tug-o-war between your brain's prefrontal cortex and its amygdala... where the amygdala has won out in the end:

- Suppose you have a task to complete.
- Your prefrontal cortex tries to get you to complete it.
- The task, however, is boring or one that you are not all that good at.
- The amygdala perceives boredom and fear of failure as threats to your wellbeing.
- It immediately issues a distress signal. It tries to get you to move away from the task that's eliciting boredom or fear of failure.

So, even though the prefrontal cortex tries to get you to complete that task, the amygdala tries to get you to not complete it. You procrastinate! How can we avoid this?

4.2 How can you avoid procrastinating?

4.2.1 Avoid these tasks

One simple solution is to only do tasks that hold your interest or that you are good at. Outsource or delegate everything else. James Manyika, Director at *McKinsey & Company*, provides advice along such lines. He says:

> *"Work on what you're good at. I only work on things that I feel I am uniquely positioned to do as opposed to doing lots of things that someone has asked me to do."*[13]

Doing this will transform your productivity. You are good at tasks A and B. You are not good at task C. Task D bores you. Clear your agenda, so that only A and B

[13] Ver Hage, L. 10 Highly-Successful People On How They Stopped Procrastinating. *The Financial Diet.* https://thefinancialdiet.com/10-highly-successful-people-on-how-they-stopped-procrastinating/

remain on it; C and D are given to someone else. You will then motor through your day without procrastinating.

Consider what would have occurred had C and D remained on your 'to do' list. Your amygdala would have triggered at the thought of having to do them. It would move you to perform some other (distracting) activity that provides instant gratification or comfort, such as checking *Facebook* or texting a close friend. You would not have got C and D done. It would have been far more efficient – a better use of your time – to give them to someone else.

There are, of course, certain tasks that we cannot outsource, even if they bore us, or we aren't good at them. They may be core parts of our role, such as managing a budget. Or they might be too important to hand off to someone else, such as hiring a new operations manager. What can we do to carry out and complete those tasks (rather than having the amygdala trigger and move us towards distraction)? I cover that in the next section.

4.2.2 You have got to break things up!

Sometimes a task can seem insurmountable. It might be massive. It might be tricky. It might be unpleasant. It might take a long time. One way to approach such tasks is to break them down into small, manageable, rewarding subtasks.

Your *Fitbit* is designed in precisely this way, to facilitate a task like weight reduction. Perhaps you wish to lose three kilograms over the next couple of months. Diets are hard. That goal is far off. But you start to use a *Fitbit*. It counts the number of steps that you walk each day. It vibrates, and provides a congratulatory animated explosion, whenever you reach a goal of 10,000 steps on any one day. You now have a new (smaller, more manageable) goal: 10,000 steps today. You are rewarded when you reach it: the device congratulates you. Your brain gets a hit of dopamine when you receive that congratulations. The brain loves that feeling. It wants it again tomorrow. This drives you to reach the same (smaller, more manageable) goal tomorrow... and the day after, and the day after that, etc... You

end up reaching your ultimate goal (the loss of three kilograms within the next two months) via these smaller, more manageable goals (10,000 steps each day).

That ultimate goal, on its own, would have freaked you out. Your amygdala would have triggered. You would have sought comfort in a cream bun. Many people do.

The smaller, more manageable goals provide you with a target that's not daunting. The amygdala does not trigger. You *can* walk 10,000 steps each day. And, when you do, your brain is rewarded with a dopamine hit that it hungrily wants to re-experience on each subsequent day too.

Can you use a similar strategy at work, to complete a task that you must do, but you find boring or you're not good at? Yes, you can.

Consider the task of updating your project budget. You know you must do it every month. But you keep putting it off until the last minute. Consistently, you only get it done on the final day. You do so hurriedly. You often forget to include crucial information in your forecast.

Observe how we can apply the *Fitbit* principle to better complete this work task. Our ultimate goal is that we complete the project budget by month's end, and we capture as much salient information in it as possible. Break that down into smaller, more manageable weekly subtasks; for example:

- In week 1, capture all of the costs (resources, equipment) that hit the project last month.
- In week 2, update your resource plan based on what you know the project needs to accomplish in the next three months.
- In week 3, update your forecast of costs and revenue for the next quarter.
- In week 4, check assumptions and numbers, and capture it all in a *Powerpoint* presentation for the board.

Nominate a two-hour slot, at the same time each week, when you will work on each of the subtasks; e.g. Wednesday 11am-1pm. That's important. It is training

your brain to expect it then, and, once the habit forms, the body primes itself to carry it out every week, at the same time, like clockwork.

Reward yourself each time you complete a weekly subtask. Mark an 'X' on your wall calendar to show yourself that 'You did it!'. Your brain will enjoy a dopamine hit each time you chalk up another 'X'. It will want to re-experience that hit each week. The visual reminder of an unbroken sequence of X's will encourage you to stay the course week after week. Your brain won't want to break the X sequence. You complete the weekly subtasks... and, in doing so, you fulfil the ultimate task of accurately completing the project budget by month's end.

4.2.3 Learn to Meditate

A person procrastinates, whenever the amygdala (which freaks out over the task and encourages the person to do something else) wins out over the prefrontal cortex (which wants the person to work on the task).

One strategy – we have seen this so far – is to not provoke the amygdala. Do tasks that you are good at. Do tasks that interest you. Do subtasks that are achievable... and reward yourself when you complete them.

But what if we could train the brain to weaken the amygdala (i.e. your brain's fear centre) and strengthen the prefrontal cortex? A weakened amygdala would freak out less. It's less able – it's less inclined – to distract you from the task at hand. A strengthened prefrontal cortex is more able – it's fitter and better primed – to stay the course and complete that task.

A daily meditation practice can radically help you fight off procrastination by weakening the amygdala and strengthening the prefrontal cortex. That flies in the face of a lot of people's preconceptions about meditation. They think it's about doing less. Incredibly, it can help you do a lot more (by killing off your procrastination)!

The science backs that up. One study shows that just eight weeks of mindfulness meditation training was able to shrink the amygdala![14] Another study shows that

[14] Hölzel BK, Carmody J, Evans KC, Hoge EA, Dusek JA, Morgan L, Pitman RK, Lazar SW. Stress reduction correlates with structural changes in the amygdala. *Soc Cogn Affect Neurosci*. 2010 Mar;5(1):11-7. doi: 10.1093/scan/nsp034. Epub 2009 Sep 23. PMID: 19776221; PMCID: PMC2840837.

such training increases the size of the prefrontal cortex[15].

Want to hear how meditation can help you get things done and procrastinate less? That's a skill worth having. It helps you remain productive, and add value, in these 'sink or swim' post-Covid times.

Book a one-hour consultation with a Stress-Meditation-Productivity expert. They will:

- listen to and assess your productivity weak points,
- provide you with a FREE technique (if suitable) that you can use straight away, and
- (if they assess that you would benefit from meditation) explain how an easy-to-learn technique known as Vedic Meditation could be integrated into your routine to help you work better, relate better, and deliver more value in your role.

Book a FREE 1-hr Consultation

What others say about Neomal Silva's stress management and meditation expertise:

"You are a wealth of knowledge with a warm, inviting manner. So grateful for the tips! Thanks for all the support!"

Julie Clark, *Director of a NSW Health/Medical NDIS Provider organisation*

[15] Hölzel, B. K., Carmody, J., Vangel, M., Congleton, C., Yerramsetti, S. M., Gard, T., & Lazar, S. W. (2011). Mindfulness practice leads to increases in regional brain gray matter density. *Psychiatry Research*, 191(1), 36–43. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pscychresns.2010.08.006

Take Home Message

Want to end procrastination?

Do tasks that you are good at. Do tasks that interest you. Do subtasks that are achievable... and reward yourself when you complete them.

And learn to meditate.

5 What you should never say to yourself after a setback or failure!

5.1 "Regrets — I've had a few!"

At certain points in your life, you may encounter what appear to be setbacks. Perhaps you didn't get the promotion; or your partner leaves you; or your quarterly revenue is below expectations; or you fail to close a deal.

How do you react? Do you berate yourself:

- "You should have worked harder!"
- "It's your fault they left!"
- "You should have pre-empted the hit to revenue, and done X, Y, and Z to prevent it!"
- "How could you stuff that up?!"

Do you look back at those events weeks, months, or years later, and still view them as 'failures'? Do you curse yourself for not having handled them better?

This is not how you should view such curves in the road. You need to go easy on yourself.

5.2 A lesson from Churchill

Consider the words of Winston Churchill:

> *"Success is walking from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm."*

Britain saw some extremely dark days during World War II. Its armed forces retreated from Dunkirk. Its cities were bombed by the Luftwaffe. The Nazis were winning territory throughout Europe. Churchill could, very easily, have wallowed

in those setbacks. Yet his words suggest that he didn't do that. He rallied. And, in the end, he won.

The lesson here lies in how a positive perspective on any previous setbacks can pave the way for future success. Indeed, it's important that you not view or recall any 'unwanted curves in the road' as "failures". There's science behind that. I explain it below.

5.3 Remember how good it was

Academic research reveals something extraordinary about your memories[16]. They are subjective constructions. They are not accurate reconstructions; your memories are not – to use a metaphor – akin to hitting 'rewind' and then 'play' on a video recorder. Instead, they are infused with your own biases and distortions[17]. As Harvard academic, Daniel Schacter, puts it:

> *"[your] memories of past experiences may be colored by present mood and emotional state."*

Let's use an example to explain what that means.

Suppose you went to the corner store. It was sunny. You passed some bushes. Someone was walking the other way on the opposite side of the road. How you interpret and recall the event is informed very much by your disposition right now.

Suppose you are happy and positive. You recall the pleasantness of the spring day and that other people were out enjoying it, too.

Let's suppose though that, for whatever reason, you are instead anxious. You recall that there were bushes along the path. You thought that someone was lurking near them. You felt that they may have posed a threat to you.

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So, to summarise, then: how you are feeling right now colours how you view any past events. But what's that got to do with how you may or may not pave the way for future success?

5.4 Warning: your past can hamper your future! Don't let it!

Additional academic research shows that your memories of past events are the springboard from which you imagine various futures and bounce to one of them[18]. That's why, I would like to suggest, you need to recall any 'unwanted curves in the road' with a degree of self-compassion, and a measure of positivity. You shouldn't berate yourself. You shouldn't self-critique. Self-criticism will only hamper your realisation of your goals. As Stanford professor, Kelly McGonigal, says:

> *"Study after study shows that self-criticism is consistently associated with less motivation and worse self-control"[19].*

So, if you want to succeed, it's crucial, whenever you recall any 'unwanted curves in the road', to dwell on those things you did right... and not handicap yourself (and your pursuit of success) by replaying – over and over again – what you felt you did wrong.

But how do you do that in practice? I explain that below.

5.5 Revisiting the past... to kindle a brighter future

How might you focus on the positives? Let's take one example of an unwanted

[18] As Suddendorf et al. put it: "The primary role of episodic memory, then, may be to provide information from the past for the simulation of the future. Indeed, natural selection can only work on what memory can offer for present and future fitness rather than on the accuracy of the past record per se". See Suddendorf, T., Addis, D. R., & Corballis, M. C. (2009). Mental time travel and the shaping of the human mind. *Philosophical transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological sciences*, 364(1521), 1317–1324. https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2008.0301

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curve in the road:

- You didn't get the job promotion you so dearly wanted.
- The loss was painful when it occurred.
- It still feels raw even though time has passed since then.
- You feel resentment; you have regrets.

You shouldn't. You need to emphasise the positive. Sure, you didn't get the job. But:

- You learned a lot about the role, and the department, in that interview.
- You refined the way you answer questions, as a consequence.
- It made you a little more articulate, and more willing to express yourself.
- Indeed, a different opportunity presented itself shortly afterwards... and you – a more refined version of yourself – snapped it up and really made a good fist of it.

This is one example of how to highlight and recall the positives in a past experience. You should apply a similar strategy with any apparent "failures" in your own life. Your future depends on it! In particular, you are more likely to fulfil any future goals, if you apply a strategy like what I have set out here.

Take Home Message

Don't beat yourself up over past failures! Go easy on yourself.
Pick out the positives from those failures, and emphasise and replay only those elements in your head; you're more likely to succeed at your goals, if you do so.

6 Say goodbye to work stress, sleepless nights, and a short fuse (when you learn this)

Have you ever considered learning meditation? There was a time when meditation was synonymous with dropping out of the rat race. Not anymore! Nowadays, meditation's done by a lot of people and companies that want to win that rat race! *Apple, Google, Target, Goldman Sachs, Linkedin, Bank of America, Spotify, Nike*, and *Airbnb* all have meditation programs.

6.1 The benefits of meditation

What's the attraction? Why are these highflyers so keen to incorporate a meditation practice into their very full work-life schedules?

In an interview with the *Financial Times*, William George, a former chairman and CEO of *Medtronic* and former board member of *Goldman Sachs, Novartis, Target*, and *the World Economic Forum USA*, described meditation's benefits as follows:

> *"The main business case for meditation is that if you're fully present on the job, you will be more effective as a leader, you will make better decisions and you will work better with other people. I tend to live a very busy life. This keeps me focused on what's important."*[20]

Meditation, a number of studies show, brings a slew of benefits:

- It can reduce work stress[21].

[20] Gelles, David. The Mind Business. *Financial Times.* https://www.ft.com/content/d9cb7940-ebea-11e1-985a-00144feab49a

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- It makes you sharper[22,23].
- You sleep better[24].
- You're more patient, and get on better with others[25].
- Your work productivity improves[26]. Indeed, one company, *Aetna*, estimates that productivity improved by $3,000 per employee per year, after they implemented a staff meditation program[27].

These are powerful benefits. Understandably, many people are intrigued by what a meditation practice might do for them.

6.2 Warning! Not all meditation techniques deliver the same benefits

There are a lot of techniques out there that get called "meditation".

At one end of the scale, you could use an app on your smartphone to meditate. But is that effective?

At the other end of the scale, you could attend a ten-day meditation retreat and spend the entire 200+ hours in meditative silence. But who has the time? And can you really integrate such a practice into a busy work-life schedule and benefit from it long-term?

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[22] Cásedas, L., Pirruccio, V., Vadillo, M.A. et al. Does Mindfulness Meditation Training Enhance Executive Control? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials in Adults. *Mindfulness* 11, 411–424 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-019-01279-4

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There are other “meditation” techniques that lie somewhere between those two extremes:

- You could lie on your mat at the end of a yoga class and note the sensations in your body.
- You could learn ‘Mindfulness’, where even eating a raisin becomes a meditative experience.
- You could learn a sound-based technique like Vedic Meditation, where you sit in a chair for a few minutes and silently think a specially-chosen word.

All of these techniques call themselves “meditation”. But not all of them yield the same benefits. Not all meditation practices are equal.

Take Mindfulness, which is one type of meditation technique. One academic study found that the benefits of Mindfulness were often over-hyped and oversold for the sake of financial gain[28].

The scientific benefits of smartphone meditation apps have also been questioned[29]. Consider *Headspace*, which is one of the most popular meditation apps. Researchers from the National University of Ireland sought to test the app’s benefits. They took two groups of people. One group received *Headspace*. The other group received a placebo (an app that was designed to look like *Headspace* but did nothing), and they instructed that group merely to close their eyes and breathe. The researchers checked the two groups for improvements in critical thinking and wellbeing... yet they found no difference between the placebo and *Headspace* itself!

6.3 So what meditation should I learn?

Your productivity and your health may improve with the right kind of meditation practice. But there are a lot of “meditation” practices out there... and they

[28] Stetka, B. Where’s the Proof That Mindfulness Meditation Works *Scientific American* https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/wheres-the-proof-that-mindfulness-meditation-works1/

[29] Mindfulness Meditation Apps Market Forecast, Trend Analysis and Competition Tracking – Global Market Insights 2019 to 2029 *Fact.MR* https://www.factmr.com/report/3075/mindfulness-meditation-apps-market

don’t all yield the same degree of benefit.

So where do you start if you want to learn to meditate? What do you need to know, before spending time and money on a technique that might not deliver the specific benefits you’re after?

We recommend that, no matter which meditation technique you learn, learn it in person. Don’t learn it online. Don’t learn it over *Zoom*.

We spend enough of our lives ‘always on’ and connected to our devices. Meditation should provide you with a few moments of respite, during which you disconnect from those devices.

An online experience – be it a meeting or a learning exercise – is also prone to distraction. In a face-to-face meeting, we are attentive, and we pick up on visual cues from the other participants. In a *Zoom* meeting, we are often distracted, perhaps responding to an email in the background and only half listening to what the speaker is saying. You don’t want added distractions, when you’re learning how to meditate.

In-person instruction is also richer and more nuanced. Suppose a motorcycle roars down the street during your meditation. The instructor is in the same room as you. They are more likely to hear the motorcycle too. They are hence better placed to instruct you on how to react to such noise during your meditations.

6.4 Meditations — a comprehensive guide

We recommend in-person meditation instruction.

There are a lot of in-person “meditation” techniques out there. What you need is a comprehensive guide that clarifies what each meditation type is, and what benefits each may bring you. **We provide that FREE for you below!**

Meditation Type	Focused Awareness/Concentration Techniques	Mindfulness	Open Monitoring Techniques
What do you do?	You concentrate on some object, like the breath, a body sensation, a visualisation, or a candle. Every time the mind wanders from the object, you bring it back to the object.	You concentrate on some object - like your breath, or a raisin you're eating, or what your foot is feeling as you walk along a stretch of grass. When your mind strays from the object, you don't immediately bring it back (as one would do in a Concentration Technique) Instead, you note the stray thought non-judgmentally; you regard it as an «event» ('ah, that happened'), rather than a «distraction» or «annoyance». Then, you return to the object you're concentrating on (your breath, the raisin, etc.)	A thought or sensation may enter your awareness. You don't resist it. You don't wrest yourself away from it. You don't even respond to it. Instead, observe it with detachment. The aim is to create and sustain some distance between one's self and that thought or sensation. In Open Monitoring techniques (unlike what you find it Concentration / Focused Awareness and Mindfulness techniques), there is no focal object, or anchor point, to which you return after a thought or sensation enters your awareness.
Examples	* A visualisation exercise * Samatha meditation	* Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction	* Shoonya Meditation * Transformational Breath® (TB) developed by Dr. Judith Kravitz in 1980
Level of difficulty	Medium difficulty You are trying to maintain focus on a single object, despite the fact that your mind has spent a lifetime jumping from thought to thought to thought, and you have struggled to maintain focus for an extended period of time. This require skill in 3 distinct mind control activities: 1. detecting mind wandering, 2. disengaging from that distraction, 3. then refocusing on the original object of focus.	Difficult You have spent a lifetime judging each thought that you have. It is difficult to break that habit and instead treat each thought or sensation non-judgmentally.	Very difficult It's thought that, to successfully practice an Open Monitoring technique, a practitioner requires some prior proficiency in Concentration / Focused Awareness meditation. The high level of difficulty stems from the fact that Open Monitoring meditation requires that you meditate without the mental use of a focal / anchor point (such as your breath, or a candle).
Some of the benefits	* increases sustained attention [31] * improves ability to refocus after a distraction [32] * does not significantly improve one's ability to find a correct answer to a well-defined problem (i.e. convergent thinking) [33]	* lowers stress [34]. (But some studies question whether Mindfulness really does reduce stress. [35]) * small to medium improvement in working memory [36] * small to medium improvement in ability to control an impulse [36] * improves ability to shut out irrelevant information [37] * improves ability to cultivate emotional distance from an upsetting event [37] * improves psychological health (reduced incidence of depression, reduced incidence of panic attacks, reduced self-mutiliation and suicidal behaviour) [37]	* improves well-being [38] * may broaden one's ability to notice multiple things simultaneously [39] * improves ability to brainstorm, where you try to come up with as many ideas as possible [33]

Meditation Type	Compassion-based Techniques	Transcending Techniques
What do you do?	You think of someone for whom you feel love and/or compassion, such as your partner, a parent, or your child. Certain positive, reassuring phrases - e.g. phrases that affirm happiness for yourself - may also be used to trigger a sense of love or compassion. Thereafter, you let warm compassionate feelings well up inside and envelope you. Finally, you let it extend out from you... towards family, friends, colleagues, and ultimately everyone and everything.	You close your eyes. You receive a word or sound. You are instructed in how to use it properly. You think the word or sound from time to time, as per the instructions given to you. This spontaneously triggers moments of profound rest (known as 'restful altertness')
Examples	* Loving-Kindness Meditation	* Vedic Meditation * Transcendental Meditation *(To understand the relationship between Vedic Meditation and Transcendental Meditation, see footnote [29])*
Level of difficulty	Medium difficulty People aren't used to welling up loving/compassionate feelings. There can be some internal resistance. Hence, it's generally thought to take some time to master compassion-based techniques like Loving-Kindness Meditation.	Extremely simple These are sometimes called 'automatic self-transcending techniques'. They do not require effort. They go almost by themselves. People report feeling its effects even in the first sitting.
Some of the benefits	* lowers stress [35] * improves well-being [40] * slows biological aging [41]	* lowers anxiety levels [43] * lowers stress [44] * sharpens intellect/thinking/intelligence [45] * improves work productivity [46] * improves sleep [47] * slows biological aging [48] * better relationships [49] * improves health (50% fewer hospital visits, 87% less heart disease, 55% fewer incidences of tumour) [50]

Take Home Message

Studies show that meditation has lots of benefits.
You stress less. You sleep better. Your thinking's sharper. You're more patient. You're more productive.
But there are lots of meditations out there. Not all deliver the same benefit.
Find out about meditation types before spending time and money on a technique that might not work for you.

6.5 Next steps

Want to hear whether a meditation technique can help specific areas that you would like to improve in your own work/personal life?

- Perhaps you're not as productive or as motivated at work these days.
- Perhaps you're feeling more stressed, and more irritable with colleagues and family, since the pandemic.
- Perhaps you're not sleeping well at the moment.
- Perhaps you want a practice – one used by several successful execs – that helps you get ahead in challenging times.

Get a FREE consultation
with a meditation/stress management expert!
Normally valued at $324.

Book a FREE 1-hr Consultation

About the expert:

Neomal Silva is an expert in stress management and a teacher of Vedic Meditation.

He has worked as a consultant in Europe and Australia with clients like *Nokia* and *Accenture*.

He holds a Bachelor's degree from the University of New South Wales, a Masters from the University of London (UCL), and he has taught and conducted research at Oxford University. He wrote a university thesis on neuroimaging.

Neomal continues to engage with the latest neuroscientific research on how people can work optimally, and live better.

You will benefit from his knowledge of leading-edge stress management techniques, during your FREE 60-minute consultation.

Book a FREE 1-hr Consultation

Here's what other people say about Neomal's stress-management expertise:

"Neomal came into our lives and changed them! Energy levels soared in the first few weeks and our relationship benefited from our calmer dispositions. If we are flagging in an afternoon, meditation fills us with the energy we need to carry on for the rest of the day."

Shaun Dixon, *Founder of Kingsland Wealth Management*
& Eleanor Dixon, *Writer & Teacher*

Endnotes

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Thom was trained as a teacher of Transcendental Meditation ("TM") by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi ("Maharishi"), and taught it for over 25 years with organizations affiliated with Maharishi.

Since 1997, Thom has continued to teach this meditation as he learned it from Maharishi, and has done so independently and separately from the TM organizations, using the terms "Vedic Meditation".

Thom Knoles trained Neomal to teach meditation as Thom was trained to teach meditation by Maharishi.

Neomal teaches Vedic Meditation independently and separately from TM organizations, and is not affiliated with those organizations.

The form of meditation that Thom Knoles taught for over 25 years with the TM organisations as "Transcendental Meditation," has been the subject of hundreds of scientific studies showing a wide range of benefits from regular practice. These studies, which refer to this form of meditation using the name "Transcendental Meditation" or "TM", support the benefits obtainable from regular practice of Vedic Meditation.

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