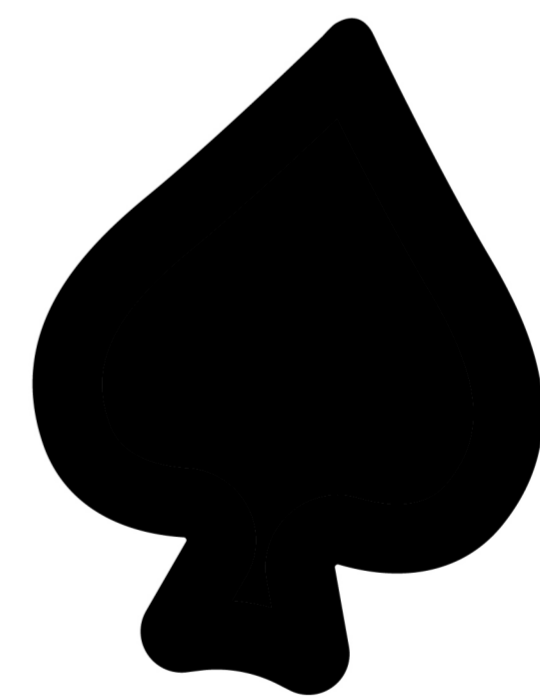
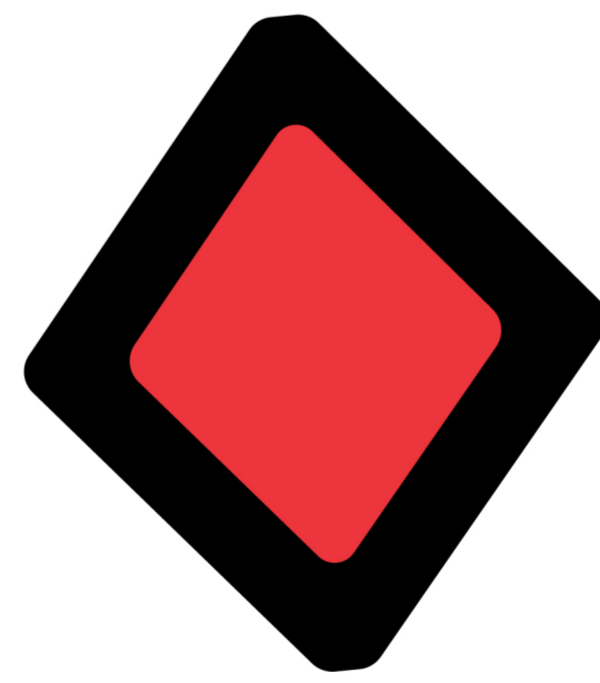
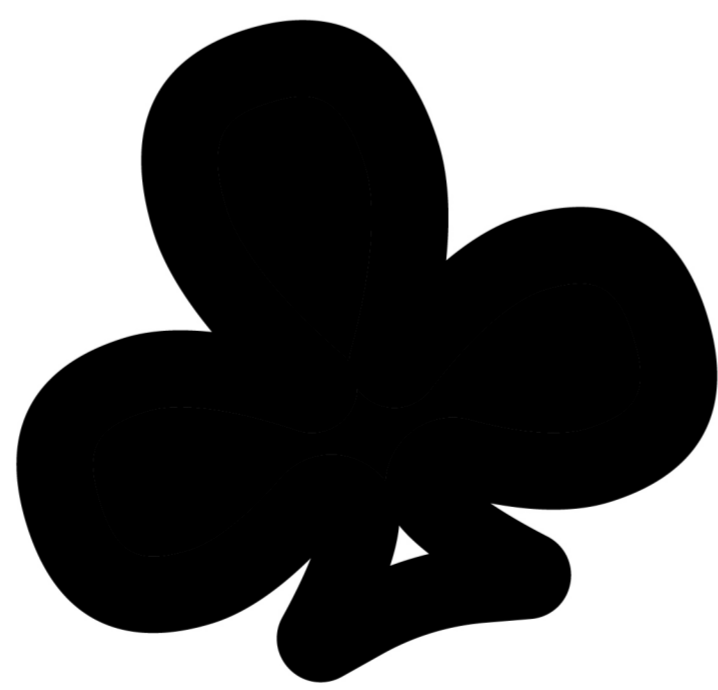


Playful Humans

Mike Montague



52

Reasons to Rediscover the
Power of Play in Your Life
and Career

Playful Humans

**52 Reasons to Rediscover the
Power of Play in Your Life and Career**

Mike Montague

Avenue9

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Prelude

Why don't adults have more fun? How did we forget to live, laugh, and love when we are reminded every day on Instagram? When did we start prioritizing our productivity over our mental and physical health?

I wholeheartedly advocate for play because it has the power to restore the damage we have done to our society, our mental health, and our humanity. We are capable of beating burnout, boredom, and quiet-quitting (*Or loud-quitting!*). We can re-engage with our work and live more passionately in our downtime. Instead of checking our email, feeds, and streaming platforms, we can check in on our friends and family. We can get outside, get moving, challenge our brains, and reinvigorate our spirits.

If we did, we would see higher levels of happiness, lower levels of mental and physical illness, and countless other rewards, such as increased longevity, greater energy, weight loss, creative solutions to the world's challenges, and much more.

With a playful mindset, we can have more fun, flow, and fulfillment in our lives and careers. We can establish better interpersonal connections, reignite our creativity, condition our mind, body, and spirit for peak performance, and build our confidence to tackle the uncertainty of modern life. We can learn the benefits of all types of play and when and where to apply them to make the most of our lives.

This book takes a playful approach to the latest research in psychology and neuroscience to help you reach your peak potential. It will inspire, engage, and entrap you into becoming a more Playful Human.

There are four significant benefits of play outlined in this book structured around a playing card deck with 13 concepts in each of the four suits:

HEARTS - Represent the human connection and fulfillment when playing well with others.

DIAMONDS - Represent our creativity, how our inner child, muse, and artistic expression for problem-solving, innovation, self-actualization, and good, old-fashioned fun.

CLUBS - Represent our physical and mental conditioning: our flow of energy, passion, and strength to fuel our best life.

SPADES - Represent our confidence and fearlessness to live boldly, take chances, and overcome challenges.

This book does not have to be read from front to back, so feel free to jump around. If you want to play a game with this book, grab a deck of cards and shuffle it. Draw one card at a time and jump to the corresponding chapter. You can do one card per week for an entire year of fun personal growth!

Within each concept, you will find an inspiring quote from someone who changed the world, an example of a Playful Human that hits a little closer to home, and a challenge to try yourself. Don't forget to look for a few jokes, hidden Easter Eggs, and puzzles mixed in to demonstrate and practice these ideas. You are going to have fun exploring this book.

Let's go!

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to one of my all-time favorite Playful Humans, Alida Lyn Erickson, or as I call her, Grandma Lyn.

She was born on April Fool's Day, and I always thought that made her sense of humor just a little bit better than everyone else's. I am quite sure she is the one who most shaped my sense of humor, too. She introduced me to Monty Python, Dave Barry, and The Far Side. I watched my first Benny Hill and Mr. Bean sketches at her house, and she bought me a Dwight Schrute bobblehead for my first office. If you don't recognize any of those names, please Google them, and let Grandma Lyn be the reason they are in your life, too!

When I think of Grandma Lyn, I think of the word playful. Her mother was a piano teacher, and her house always had a keyboard and good music. She was an artist as a hobby and painted slices of fruit into the round tops of wooden stools at her home. She loved puzzles and games, especially crossword puzzles. She had a cat for over 20 years named Kato because it would jump out and randomly attack her like she was the Pink Panther.

It always seemed to me that Grandma Lyn was in a good mood. Her house was always open to us, filled with love, toys, and tasty food. When your grandma loves Cheetos and chocolate, something is right with the world. Her creativity shined. She used to have a Cheeto collection filled with funny-shaped chips (*Are Cheetos chips?*) like animals, Abraham Lincoln, or whatever. She saw shapes in them like people do with clouds and placed her favorites in old jewelry boxes to display her collection for guests.

That is until my dad ate the months-old, stale Cheetos right off the padded display boxes during a holiday party!

For April Fool's Day, she stole her neighbor's newspaper one year and kept it in the closet until the following year when she replaced it on their doorstep so they could enjoy last year's April 1st news! She kept that up for years, maybe decades. Grandma Lyn has the perfect sense of humor because she was never mean-spirited. I don't remember her making fun of someone or being sarcastic, bitter, or crabby. Instead, she loved puns, being silly, and laughing at herself and the situations we all get into in life. She never took anything too seriously.

She gave us children permission to play, which I now find one of life's most valuable and important things. My uncle, Scott Lewis, coined the term "Creative Nerdery" at Grandma Lyn's house. Our family used this term when the kids were in a state of pure, innate play and being silly. My cousins, brother, sister, and I would go into her toy room to make up a skit or dress up with something goofy on our heads and then come out to perform for our parents and Grandma Lyn in the living room. We recorded fake radio shows on her tape recorders, typed out creative stories on her electronic typewriter, and played terrible music on toy instruments.

She also encouraged us to learn through intellectual curiosity. I remember taking apart her broken radio, learning about prisms and crystals in her window, and she taught me about microchips that she brought home from her job as a quality control manager at AT&T. Before the Internet, we had Grandma instead of Google when we didn't know something or how to spell a word. Her phone number is one of a handful that I still know by heart.

She taught me to appreciate technology, the mystery of magic, and the beauty of nature. It was not just the creative part but also the nerdery that I appreciated. I learned from Grandma Lyn that people can be extremely intelligent and silly at the same time. Playful Humans like Steve Martin, Barenaked Ladies, MythBusters, Simone Giertz, and Mark Rober epitomize the creative nerdery

spirit that I am talking about. That's who Grandma Lyn was for me: an intelligent and silly mentor who could complete a Sunday crossword puzzle and wear a ribbon on her head from a Christmas present with a straight face.

I also want to mention that her life wasn't easy, just in case you think she was born privileged, lucky, or blessed. She may have been all those things at some point, but her life was not easy. Her father died when she was young, and she struggled in poverty for most of her young life. Physically, she has scoliosis, which causes severe back pain and sciatica. She had hip replacements for so long that one was replaced a second time. She had a pacemaker longer than she had a cell phone. Honestly, that just scratches the surface of her challenges, and yet, Grandma Lyn was still full of love. She was also psychologically stronger than I can understand.

Losing her and Uncle Scott in 2023 was tough, but it felt like a calling to live wholeheartedly for our family. Her legacy is a family of silly, smart, successful, creative nerds. My playfulness and creative spirit are largely thanks to Grandma Lynn and the wonderful childhood that my parents created for me.

As you read this book and every April Fools Day, I challenge you to remember to be more creative, have more fun, laugh easily, create a safe place for others to be themselves, and be more like Grandma Lyn.

Who is your playful mentor? If you don't have one, I encourage you to find one. Explore the people featured in this book, check out the Playful Humans podcast, or simply reflect on the following insights and who most embodies them in your family.

Thank you!

Thank you for reading.

Thanks to my parents, Steve and Carol, and my extended family of Montagues and Ericksons for creating a playful childhood where I could learn these lessons in a safe, loving, and playful home.

Thanks to my brother and sister, Ryan and Laura, for being my first friends and playmates to this day. Special thanks to my nieces and nephews, Sydney, David, Makenna, Brynn, Bella, Brooke, and Bruce, for playing with me and reminding me how great it is to love wholeheartedly. I have loved all of you since you were born and will be here for you as long as I live.

A special thank you goes to Kerri Krovitz for encouraging me to be authentic and honest in my writing. Your wisdom, kindness, and unwavering support inspire me to be my best. It is powerful when someone truly sees your potential. Thank you for your thoughtful feedback and making me laugh along the way.

Thanks to everyone who helped shape this book, especially the reviewers: Alex Kirby, Lisa Forbes, Liam Curley, Nanditha Krishna, Scott Edwards, Kara Latta, Laura Paciorek, Peggy Oberstaller, and Maha Bali. Sarah Iverson also provided a beautiful and inspiring illustration.

Thank you to my friends and confidants who helped me crystalize my thoughts, find my motivation, and keep my head on straight over the years it took to complete this book, especially Keith Kong, Alex Kirby, Linc Miller, and Greg Knapp.

Thanks to my DJ, radio, and public speaking friends for inspiring me to find my voice and put myself out there, especially Maddy, Jesse, Will, John, Craig, Tiffany, Chris, Amy, Sofia, Cami, and the others. Thank you to my game show crew, who helped me rediscover my playful inner child during the pandemic and dark times, especially John, Miranda, Phillip, and the rest of the Grin

Event and Game Show Battle Rooms crews. Thanks to Culture First, Jessie Jacob, and the other HR and culture leaders I have met along the way, helping to shape a better world of work.

Thank you to all of my guests on the Playful Humans podcast for playing along and inspiring me to write this book. Thank you to all of the play experts, advocates, and authors who researched, spread the word, and articulated their version of these principles so that I could learn from them and develop my awareness. Check out the appendix at the end of this book for more recommended reading. I would like to give a special hat tip to Seth Godin for inspiring me for years with his daily blog and books.

Finally, thank you to anyone I might have missed who has shared a laugh, hug, or moment with me. I needed every one of those to become the person I am today.

Introduction

Injecting 4CGs of Fun into Your Life

Welcome to Playful Humans, your urgent care clinic for rejuvenating the weary spirit of adult life. Adulting is hard and sometimes painful. Consider this book your prescription for a life lived with playfulness, an antidote to the common ailments of modern existence.

While I can't write you any actual prescription (*since I am only a doctor as much as Dr. Seuss and Dr. Dre*), I have thoroughly enjoyed researching and practicing the healing art of play my whole life. I have been an athlete, radio personality, and public speaker. I have hosted thousands of parties, team-building events, karaoke nights, game shows, podcasts, and other live events. I interviewed over 175 play advocates, researchers, professionals, and practitioners. I read the top 35+ books on play and happiness (*see appendix*), and I even contributed playful techniques to the Professors at Play Playbook and participated in play research at the University of Colorado - Denver. The following book is composed of my favorite findings combined with my personal insights and experience to inspire you to become a more playful human.

Dr. Peter Gray's research published in the American Journal of Play points to a significant correlation between the decline of play and the increase in mental health issues among children and adolescents. The study suggests that the lack of play contributes to increased levels of anxiety, depression, and other psychological disorders. Dr. Stewart Brown's research on play and stress highlights that play is essential for mental well-being. It reduces

stress levels by promoting relaxation and positive feelings. (*More about Dr. Brown's research later.*)

In a biological study, Dr. Bateson's results indicate that playfulness fosters an open mindset and encourages divergent thinking, which is essential for creative problem-solving and innovation. Smith and Pellegrini's childhood development research underscores the importance of physical play in cognitive development. Playing enhances children's attention, memory, and problem-solving skills, leading to better academic performance and overall cognitive abilities.

A study published in *Organization Science* explores how playfulness in the workplace contributes to thriving employees. It shows that a playful work environment enhances job satisfaction, creativity, and overall work engagement, leading to better performance and lower burnout rates.

In this book, I will administer a potent formula known as the 4CCs of Fun: Connections, Creativity, Conditioning, and Confidence to help heal your mind, body, and spirit so you can have the most fun, flow, and fulfillment in your life and career.

If you see adulthood as a chronic, painful condition with symptoms of burnout, boredom, and disillusionment, ask your doctor if play is right for you. If you find genuine interactions scarce these days, if your most precious moments are monetized by commercial interests, or if you are more worried about what other people think than how you feel about your life, the 4CCs of Fun are the core treatment for revitalizing your mind, body, and spirit. Playfulness is a magical elixir that can transform your life without negative side effects.

Being Playful Humans Has These Four Main Benefits:

Connections form during play when we let our hearts beat in unison with others in a wordless bond of joy and understanding. These shared moments foster deep, lifelong relationships between friends, family, and romantic partners. Play is a potent stimulant that engages our workplaces and communities, infusing them with a sense of fulfillment and delight.

Creativity is ignited through play. That spark of imagination and problem-solving can be life-changing. It is like a hallucinogen that expands our minds, leading to discoveries that heal and transform our world. The power to dream allows us to see a way out of difficult situations. It drives innovation and empowers personal growth.

Conditioning, both mental and physical, is the key to a healthy life. Play therapy builds resilience and vitality, teaching our minds and bodies to thrive through laughter and active engagement. This fitness is far beyond what any conventional medicine could offer and in a much more satisfying way than crash diets, hard workouts, or dulling our minds and bodies with drugs and distractions. We find our flow when we use our brains and bodies to their full potential.

Confidence is the placebo effect in our treatment plan. Whether you believe in yourself or not, confidence is the single biggest factor in the ultimate success of your life. Confidence is nurtured through the acts of trying, failing, and succeeding. Like a muscle strengthened through exercise, confidence grows with each playful endeavor, empowering us to face life's challenges with courage and grace. When you learn to deal with failure, move through difficult times, and overcome life's challenges with playfulness, you unlock the secrets of fearless power to control your destiny.

When you embrace play, you release your inner child, that natural part of you that is happy to be here, excited to be seen, and marveling at the wonder of our human experience. Unfortunately, in our culture, we use our capitalistic instincts to train more compliant bodies to feed the machine rather than develop our natural child instincts that feed our souls.

“We don't stop playing because we grow old;
we grow old because we stop playing”

- George Bernard Shaw.

As adults, we often drift away from what made us so happy as children, lured away by maturity and responsibility. It is time to reawaken that neglected part of ourselves and embrace the playful, creative, and unapologetically silly aspects of our human nature.

In the pandemic, I hit rock bottom. The remaining connections I needed to maintain my mental health were severed. I missed the smiles hidden under masks, the hugs from family, a silly joke from Grandma Lyn, and the positive feedback from audiences upon which I had built my career. I gained a lot of weight. My marriage fell apart and eventually ended. However, through these struggles, I found the world of play research, read dozens of books, and connected virtually with play advocates. I started the Playful Humans podcast and this book, and most importantly, I found my joy again.

Consider this your invitation to a therapeutic journey, a quest to reclaim the joy and wonder of your younger self, melded with the wisdom of your years.

Throughout this book, we'll explore how play gives you these four benefits and give you some actionable tips you can try. You will see a unique combination of what I call “creative nerdery,” which is

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a mix of the anecdotal experience of successful, playful people and the science and psychology research from trained professionals. I believe both are critical to helping you understand that playfulness is not just a good idea. Play, as described in this book, has been proven scientifically to generate the best results in life and business.

Learn from all the Playful Humans that have come before you. In each chapter, you will find a link to an interview from the Playful Humans podcast, helpful guidance in being more true to yourself, science and data-backed insights, and a challenge for you to test the concept yourself. I hope you find these lessons as educational and inspirational as I did on my own journey.

Don't give up! Lean into that prompting telling you there is a better life available. If you have any questions or need help, Playful Humans is a community of people who are fearlessly committed to rekindling the vibrant, playful essence within us to find more fun, flow, and fulfillment in our lives and careers. You are cordially invited to come play with us.

Join the mission to rediscover the power of play at PlayfulHumans.com or subscribe to our podcast on your favorite listening app.

Thank you for playing with me! Let's get started.

Your friend,


Mike Montague

PLAYFUL HUMANS

Section 1

Hearts Connection Fulfillment

Hearts represent the essential human connections that bring fulfillment and meaning to our lives. We will discuss how to cultivate relationships that empower us to grow together, playfully navigate challenges, and build a supportive community. By embracing playfulness, we enable ourselves and others to thrive in a connected and fulfilled life.

A  The movement between chaos and order is what makes life interesting.

Joke of the Week:

Why was Cinderella bad at soccer?
She kept running away from the ball.

*"When you bring a ball with you somewhere, people want to know, 'What are you going to do with that?'
It's a magnet."*

- Kevin Carroll

We all speak ball.

Playful Humans know how to have a ball! Playing with balls is a universal human activity that transcends cultures and ages. It turns out that every mammal on the planet will play with a ball. Google “animals play with balls” (*turn on your safe search first*), and you will see dolphins, pigs, horses, tigers, hedgehogs, elephants, goats, seals, and so many more having fun. As for us humans, some of the oldest games known to ancient Egyptians and Greeks involve throwing or kicking a ball. It turns out that no matter your race, language, or even species, we all speak ball.

There have been books written about the power of the ball, playing catch, and why we play sports. Psychological and anthropological studies suggest that balls are interesting for various reasons, including passing time, exercise, competition, social interaction, releasing energy, and improving coordination, balance, and teamwork.

(I learned how to juggle at a basketball camp in middle school, and that experience taught me how to learn a new skill. It might not be the most valuable skill, but the lesson that I can spend a summer practicing something and be able to do it for the rest of my life was extremely powerful.)

Playing with a ball can be relaxing and entertaining. It can keep your hands occupied while you do some deep thinking. The sheer number of types of balls should give you a hint that they are an interesting and enjoyable part of the human experience. There are:

- Soccer balls
- Basketballs
- Footballs
- Pickleballs
- Volleyballs
- Tennis balls

- Golf balls
- Baseballs
- Bowling Balls
- Bocce Balls
- Beach balls
- Ping pong balls
- Lacrosse balls
- Bouncy balls
- Kickballs
- Handballs
- Juggling balls
- Croquet balls
- Billiards balls
- Koosh balls
- Spikeballs

Of course, there are many other types of balls that people play with, and this list is by no means exhaustive.

What is your favorite type of ball?

It is a tough question. If you could only pick one, would it be a marble or bouncy ball because you loved it as a kid? Would it be a dodgeball so you can use it for a lot of different games? Which ball is best used by yourself, and which one is better with friends?

There are two main reasons why playing with a ball is so powerful. First, it is really cheap, easy, and fun. You can entertain yourself or a huge group of people with just one ball for hours. Think about that. You can play Hot Potato, Keep It Up, Catch, or Tag. You can juggle, try trick shots, or just bounce it off a wall. You can connect with a friend, use your brain to manipulate 3D space, engage your physical body, and lighten your spirits all at the same time.

Second, balls are a great demonstration of True Play. You can get lost in it. This type of play is an activity that is freely chosen, challenging, requires your focus, generates positive feelings, and is usually done solely to engage the player. It creates a bond between people playing together and stirs within us a desire to continue. We feel joy, wonder, and self-actualization, which makes us want to keep playing.

What makes life and a ball so interesting is the movement between order and chaos.

Most people focus too much on creating order. Can you relate? Have you ever tried to control the chaos in life? It will bring a lot of stress and burn you out really fast. It is called the Illusion of Control because we can control some things, but we delusionally think we can control everything. Computers, AI, and digital trackers are measuring almost everything: our sleep, our steps, our social lives, and, of course, our spending. The problem is that a life worth living is messy. Fun, love, happiness, and success are elusive and disruptive. They encompass too many variables to measure and manage. Too much order is stressful, boring, and impossible to maintain.

Too much chaos is dangerous as well. If we have no plan, no mission, and no stability, then it also creates overwhelming stress. We can't relax and feel safe. We feel like we have no control, and taking an action feels pointless. There are benefits to order, and our brains love to make meaning, find patterns, and develop habits because they are the cheat code for life. (*Up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B, A, B, A - Wait, that's the cheat code for 30 lives.*) When we develop habits, we don't have to use conscious brain power on every decision and movement. Imagine if you had to think about it every time you took a breath, moved a muscle, or blinked an eye. You wouldn't have time for anything else.

So where does that leave us? The most interesting play and the most fulfilling and sustainable life come from dancing back and forth between order and chaos. We don't want to stay in either place too long. That's what a ball shows us; we catch it, create order, and control it. Then, we throw the ball, and it bounces unpredictably. We surrender it to the chaos of the universe and wait with anticipation to see if it comes back to us. It is beautiful and serves as a great metaphor for life itself.

Think about the NFL. American football is the most-watched television broadcast game after game and year after year. It is one of the only shows we actually watch live these days. Why do so many people continue to find it interesting?

Well, it is the perfect example of movement between order and chaos. The clock stops. All of the players get on the same page. They line up and freeze—a perfect plan in perfect order. And then the ball snaps. All hell breaks loose. It is total chaos. Bodies crash into each other and fall to the ground. Other players sprint in different directions. The ball flies through the air, and everyone holds their breath. No one knows if it will be a great success or a total failure. Then, just a few seconds after it started. All is safe again. Everyone takes a deep breath, and we go back to order.

I challenge you to think about your life like a football game. If you never snap the ball, you won't get hurt, but you won't have any fun either. You will eventually run out of time on the clock. If you allow yourself to play with the movement and uncertainty of a ball, you will find that you have a lot more great moments in your highlight reel!

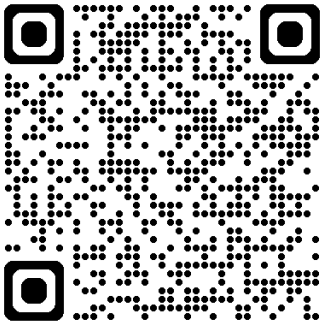
(And yes, I know how many times the word "balls" comes up in this lesson. Your inner teenager has my permission to giggle. Now go play with your balls!)

Are you ready to rediscover the power of play?

Grab a ball instead of your phone next time you feel bored or stressed. Engage in a fun activity in the real world with other Playful Humans. Let yourself enjoy the unpredictability of the universe.



Wanna get really crazy? Rip out this page (*or print it off*) and crumple it up to make your own ball. The person who can throw it in the trash from the furthest distance wins! Share your attempt on social media and tag @PlayfulHumans.



Playful Human: Charles Peacock

Charles has performed on the biggest stages, from America's Got Talent to the Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon. He has gone viral on Instagram and YouTube and has even been featured in People Magazine! You have probably seen him play a song on the keyboard using tennis balls, but he is also a successful entrepreneur. He shows off his talent and tells the story behind it.

Brought to you by The Magic 8 Ball!
I asked my Magic 8 Ball if I should buy
Microsoft 365, and it said,
"Outlook is not so good."

2  Social media is not
social, and reality TV
is not real.

Joke of the Week:

If you ever see a dog at a Zoo,
you know it is a Shih Tzu.

*"As it is with a play, so it is with life. What matters is
not how long the acting lasts, but how good it is."*

- Seneca

There is an epidemic of play deprivation in our society. Depression, suicide, and other signs of poor mental and physical health are skyrocketing, especially since the pandemic! According to the World Health Organization, more than three-quarters of a million people die of overwork-related incidents each year! People who work over 54 hours a week are at a major risk of dying from physical and mental stress. More people are dying from overwork than malaria, making overworking a health crisis. According to Cigna Healthcare, loneliness is now more physically dangerous than smoking and obesity. More than 80% of U.S. workers are reporting mental health challenges in a Gallup poll.

We are all carrying a much heavier LOAD—loneliness, anxiety, obesity, and depression—than ever before. The problem here is one that you have probably seen over and over in our healthcare system, workplace, and political landscape.

We are trying to treat the symptoms instead of treating the root cause of the disease.

People were feeling disconnected, so we created social media, which makes them feel more connected but actually isolates them more and adds to their unhappiness through comparison and fake interactions. Instead of companionship, we get FOMO, the fear of missing out, while we see pictures of other people having fun. We see others' highlight clips while we see our bloopers and behind-the-scenes footage. This disconnect is increasingly contributing to mental health issues, especially among young people, including heightened anxiety and depression.

We watch heavily edited “reality” TV shows that feature performers participating in scripted drama in carefully curated environments controlled by producers. These shows further distort our view of reality and encourage us to compare our lives and relationships to these imaginary benchmarks. It all makes us more stressed and

more confused about our emptiness. Reality shows, game shows, and other competitions provide a distraction from reality, but they are far from anything real.

We have also unwittingly commoditized our attention and recreation. Corporate marketing, political interest lobbying, and cultural messages from groups with power persuade us to believe that we can outsource our happiness. If we just do what we are told, work harder, and follow the leaders, then we can buy happiness, or they will provide it for us. Except that never actually happens. We are not actually **DOING** anything about our own happiness, and we are not enjoying the life that we have sacrificed and worked so hard to achieve.

Things we buy give us momentary satisfaction, but then we need to buy more stuff to keep that feeling. The “entertainment” we watch provides a temporary pause in the stress of our day, but then the stress comes back with a vengeance when the show is over. The relationships with the people we love get measured in likes and comments, filled with advertisements, and compared to others. It leaves us feeling shallow and empty.

My favorite example again is the NFL. If you like football, I would like to challenge you. (*Not in football, I never played.*) When was the last time you actually played football? If you like the NFL, you like television. If you like football, you should play in a flag football league or start a pick-up game in the backyard. The NFL is an entertainment product that provides a distraction. It is a trillion-dollar industry with billionaire owners and millionaire employees. It has been strategically designed to manipulate you and get you to spend more time, money, and attention on the NFL. It is not play for you or even playful anymore for most of the players. It is a serious business built on a commoditized version of a game.

It's time to nerd out about the definition of play and what activities most effectively engage the human mind, body, and spirit. Play can make your whole life better, but it can be hard to define

outside of “you know it when you feel it” because it takes many forms and variations and can be quite difficult to measure.

Here is my personal definition of play:

Play - /plā/ verb:

Engaging in an autotelic activity that is freely chosen, challenging, requires your full focus on the present moment, and generates feelings of joy, wonder, and self-actualization.

Autotelic may not be a word you hear often, but it means play is only valuable in and of itself as an activity. It describes the idea that the whole point of playing is to get a chance to play. We play because we like to play, not for serious or practical purposes. However, that doesn't mean that play is pointless or frivolous. It can be profoundly important and have tremendous purpose and results, and the feelings generated can be so powerful that they may even be one of the true meanings of life itself.

The state of play is much like being in love. The point of being in love is to be in love, and the goal of play as an activity is to get to play.

Both play and love are desired states of being alive and fully living in our humanity.

In our modern culture, true play isn't valued the same as love. Our society has added a stigma to play because it is misunderstood. Adults in our society still value the pursuit of love to make their lives better and more fulfilling. Other adults don't judge you if you are seeking more love in your life. Most adults think that play is the opposite of hard work, but it is not true. The opposites of work are sloth, boredom, and disengagement. We'll talk more about hard work later because it has been overhyped, but for now, it is important to understand its relationship to play.

Play is work done for your own pleasure.

Here are some of the key characteristics that make play different from work and other experiences in our lives:

- You can't force anyone to play. It must be freely chosen. Otherwise, it becomes work.
- Play must be challenging enough to engage your full focus on the present moment. Too easy, and it becomes boring and pointless. Too hard, and it becomes frustrating and disheartening. Challenging games create a powerful experience called Eustress. It is a positive form of stress that engages the body to perform at its best.
- Play must generate positive feelings of joy, wonder, and self-actualization. You should feel like the best version of yourself. It should feel like your inner child is dancing!
- Play is the movement between order and chaos. There is magic in exercising control over the uncertain outcome.
- Play creates bonding between the players and a desire for continuation. It evolves the players by opening the mind and energizing the body. It lowers stress and releases good chemicals and hormones which trigger feelings of pleasure and happiness.

There are many different types of play and many different preferences and personalities when it comes to being a Playful Human. There are also varying degrees of being in a playful state.

One way to think about your play is to categorize your recreational activities into three buckets: True Play, Partial Play, and Faux Play.

TWO OF HEARTS

True play has all of the characteristics listed above. It is healthy for the mind, body, and spirit and positive for others around you and for the culture of your community. It energizes you and leads to more fun, flow, and fulfillment in your life.

Partial play has some characteristics of play, but it is missing one or more aspects that might leave you feeling unsatisfied with your health and relationships.

Faux play feels like play, but core characteristics are missing. Over time, these activities will cause serious damage to you or others around you. Your play deprivation will lead to burnout.

Here is an example:

True Play - going down water slides at a pool with your friends

Partial Play - playing virtual video games with your friends

Faux Play - drinking alcohol in a bar with your friends.

One is fully immersive, two is partially engaging your senses, and three is causing damage.

True play is rooted in reality and involves physical or mental engagement with an activity or person. Examples of true play include playing sports, solving puzzles, building with blocks, or engaging in arts and crafts. True play often involves problem-solving, physical activity, or creativity. It also provides a sense of accomplishment or satisfaction when completed. You will rarely feel guilty about investing a day of your life in true play!

TRUE PLAY	PARTIAL PLAY	FAUX PLAY
Playing a sport	Watching a sport	Gambling on a sport
Creating Art	Viewing Art	Scrolling Instagram
Playing Music	Listening to Music	Watching TikTok Dances
Creative Writing	Reading a book	Engaging with Clickbait News

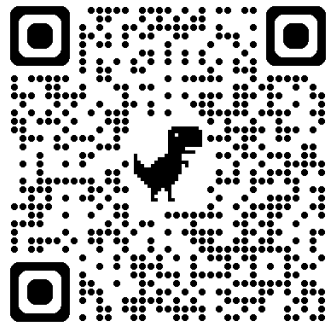
How can you find your true play and reconnect with your inner child who is starved for attention?

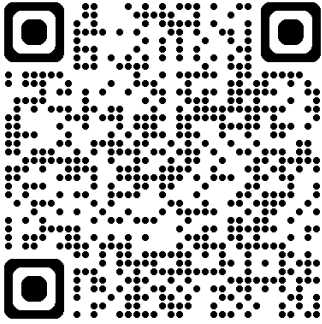
There are many ways to be more playful in your life. You might be an athlete and love to move your body. You might be a practical joker or comedian. As a director, creator, or storyteller, you can facilitate fun for other people. You might be an explorer, deep thinker, or collector. Regardless of how you find your playful state, doing more of what you love will lead to more confidence, creativity, connection, and physical and mental conditioning that will lead to greater levels of success in the other areas of your life!



Discover your playful personality type.

A great way to get started is to take our playful personality quiz and uncover your inner child's favorite way to play. Take the quiz at <https://playfulhumans.com/quiz/>.






Playful Human & Dog: Kentucky & Derby California

How do you get paid to play with your dog? Kentucky and Derby California talk about their careers as entrepreneurs with their dog clothing brand and how they play together with surfing, reality competitions, and Instagram! You might have seen them on The Pack on Amazon, Pet Stars on Netflix, or Derby California on Instagram.

Brought to you by Snoop Dogg's Umbrella:
It is specifically designed for drizzle.

3  Remember the
difference between people
and objects.

Joke of the Week:

Why did the traffic light turn red?
You would too if you had to change in the
middle of the street.

*"Humanity has advanced not because it has been
sober, responsible, and cautious, but because it has
been playful, rebellious, and immature."*

- Tom Robbins

There is a funny irony in life when we think about our humanity and what it means to be alive. Living things often behave differently than almost every other inanimate object around us.

When we use a tool, machine, or computer, the object begins to wear down. A sharp knife gets duller. A spring or a rubber band gets weaker. The wear and tear on your car increases the chances of it breaking over time.

Humans, on the other hand, get sharper, stronger, and more resilient when challenged and tested. The evolution of living creatures on Earth is one of constant struggle to survive, grow, reproduce, and be more productive.

Physical objects are not capable of repairing themselves. If you use all the energy in a battery, it is dead. If a tool no longer serves a purpose, it is useless. Living creatures can replenish their energy, heal, and learn from past experiences. Playful Humans can adapt to new environments, find new ways to contribute, and discover a new purpose.

Computers and robots have their own unique set of skills, but they can only do what they are programmed to do. Compared to humans, they are very good at routines, repetition, speed, and accuracy. They can crunch massive amounts of data and find correct answers to finite problems. But, up to this point, robots are TAMMYS - Totally Autonomous Morons. (*Apologies to all of the Tammys out there.*) They can't think outside the box, be creative, connect emotionally, understand the context of an unusual circumstance, or adapt to randomness and chaos.

Don't be a TAMMY! Humans have a unique ability to improvise.

We are more flexible, creative, intuitive, emotional, and self-aware. Our strengths lie in our judgment, our ability to make new

connections with ideas and people, and our ethics and morality. We can bring out the best of our humanity by leaning into our emotional intelligence and empathy for others instead of settling for computer-generated, economically, or statistically optimal decisions.

When you try to make humans perform as robots, you create soul-sucking jobs that lead to burnout. When you try to measure and compare things like happiness, motivation, and love, you destroy the magic of its emotion. When you over-optimize everything, you often end up with stiff and inflexible systems that break down in disruption and uncertainty. AI chatbots and scripted customer service people become indistinguishable because both are robotic and unapproachable.

As technological capabilities expand, it is important to remember the difference between people and objects. We cannot perfectly optimize our systems if they include us flawed humans. We need to be okay with randomness and less utility to leave room for the magic of being alive with free will.

The best approach is to combine the strengths of humans and machines. We can leverage computers' speed, consistency, and efficiency. We can send robots to do hazardous jobs, scale up planet-wide solutions quickly, and handle repetitive tasks that require accuracy and precision. We can feed the data and analysis to humans, who can look at the big picture, make creative connections, and see into the future to make dreams come true.

It is important to value human empathy in our culture's ethical decisions. Our cultures, morality, and respect for life are just as important as the data we get from our tools and machines. As we continue to develop new technology, it is important to remember that we can choose to leverage these objects to connect people, or we can use the data and algorithms to remove our humanity and divide people. Just like we learned to harness the power of fire to

cook and create, we will need to learn how to use AI, drones, and robots to build a better future.

It's time to lean into the unique traits of being a Playful Human. When you rediscover your strengths, purpose, and natural gifts, you will be more prepared to use the objects around you as tools to connect.



Human versus Machine Match Game

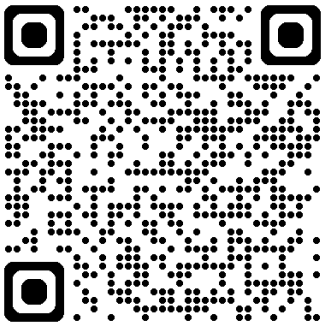
Instructions: Match each description with its match. Circle the answer under each statement.

1. Able to adapt to new and unpredictable situations:
 - Human or Machine
2. Performs repetitive tasks with precision:
 - Human or Machine
3. Makes decisions based on empathy and intuition:
 - Human or Machine
4. Stores and processes vast amounts of data:
 - Human or Machine
5. Creates new ideas and innovative solutions:
 - Human or Machine

Where in your life do you need to be more playful and creative than measured and robotic?

Would it make you feel better to stop measuring your steps, your sleep, and your number of social media followers and likes? While consistency and measured approaches are important in many areas of life, it is also important to recognize the value of

playfulness and spontaneity. Challenge yourself to step outside of your comfort zone, play a game, do a puzzle, or try make-believe and test your imagination with a child. Exhaust yourself with physical, emotional, and spiritual activity so you sleep well. Connect with other Playful Humans in real life, and tell them how much you like them instead of only clicking a thumbs up!



Playful Human: Jeremy Sherman

Jeremy is a scientific researcher and author, who encourages listeners to embrace a playful and curious approach to life. Jeremy's unconventional journey to playing for a living includes everything from skipping traditional schooling to

earning a PhD and discovering how challenging norms and pursuing your passions can lead to a more fulfilling and meaningful life.

Brought to you by the Electoral College:
Undeclared in football since 1776.

4  Get your daily DOSE
of play.

Joke of the Week:

Why do nurses carry around red crayons?
In case they have to draw blood.

*"Human beings need pleasure the way they
need vitamins."*

- Lionel Tiger

Are you feeling stressed out and in need of a pick-me-up? You need a natural DOSE of your body's happy chemicals. These four DOSE neurotransmitters—**Dopamine, Oxytocin, Serotonin, and Endorphins**—can boost your mood, reduce stress, and increase happiness. Just like your daily vitamins, your body needs these chemicals to keep operating at its best.

Let's dive into each one and explore fun ways to get your daily DOSE of play.

Dopamine: The Motivation Molecule

Dopamine is released when we accomplish goals, whether it's finishing a work project or hitting a personal milestone. Dopamine is also associated with pleasure, so it's no surprise that activities that release dopamine activate positive reinforcement.

One way to boost dopamine is to set achievable goals and celebrate when you reach them. Treat yourself to something you enjoy, like a favorite meal or a movie night with friends. Another fun activity is to play games that challenge your skills, like learning a new language or taking up a new hobby. As you progress, the small accomplishments will release dopamine and give you a sense of satisfaction.

It is important to note that dopamine is the chemical that scrolling apps and websites use to keep your attention. They use this seek-and-find motivation to give you tiny hits of dopamine whenever you find an interesting post in your social feed or get a like on one of yours. The problem is that when dopamine is not combined with the other three below, it can lead to feeling strung out and empty. If you feel addicted to social media, your phone, and other multitasking, you may need to consider a dopamine detox and focus more on the following chemicals first. Many people feel overstimulated and desensitized to the instant gratification of dopamine.

Oxytocin: The Love Hormone

Oxytocin is released during social bonding and intimacy. It's associated with feelings of trust, empathy, and generosity. This is the connection we feel with others when we are relaxed, open, and playful with others. It is commonly associated with the bonding of mothers and their babies.

To boost oxytocin, spend time with loved ones. Plan a fun outing with friends or family, or simply call a friend for a chat. Another way to release oxytocin is to volunteer or help others. Find a cause that you're passionate about and give back in a way that feels meaningful to you. Acts of kindness, complimenting someone or holding the door open for a stranger, can also release oxytocin and create positive social connections.

Note that most of the examples above are in-person, face-to-face connections because they are much more effective than texting, virtual conversations, or even phone calls at releasing those groovy love hormones we need to feel happy. It is one of the reasons why social distancing and remote work during the pandemic were so dangerous to mental health. While working remotely can be a huge benefit for flexibility, productivity, and inclusion for people with disabilities, we need to be aware of the negative side effects on our sense of connection.

Serotonin: The Mood Stabilizer

Serotonin helps regulate our emotions and keeps us feeling balanced. It's also associated with feelings of well-being and contentment. Think of this as the satisfaction you feel when you are at peace and focused, like when you are coloring or writing in your journals.

To boost serotonin, engage in activities that promote relaxation and mindfulness. Try meditation, yoga, or a calming walk in nature. Engage in hobbies that bring you joy, like painting or

playing music. Another fun activity is to make a gratitude list or write down positive affirmations. Focusing on the good things in your life can boost serotonin and create a sense of peace and happiness.

Serotonin is the antidote to stress. When we are frantically multitasking or running from one thing to another, we are missing the peace and stability of mindfulness. Even something as simple as cooking and eating dinner together, without television, phones, or other distractions, can be a great way to get your daily dose of Zen.

Endorphins: The Pain Reliever

Endorphins are released during exercise and can help reduce physical pain. They're also associated with feelings of euphoria and pleasure. This chemical is responsible for the "runner's high" that you hear about from distance runners. When you use your body to its full potential daily, it switches on your endorphins to help you feel your best.

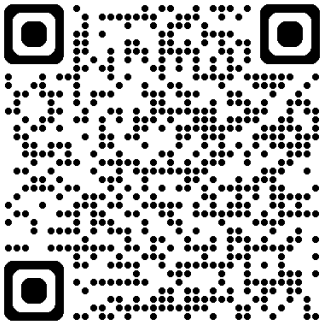
To boost endorphins, engage in activities that get your heart rate up and make you break a sweat. Try running, dancing, or cycling. Laughing is also a great way to release endorphins, so watch a funny movie or joke around with friends. Another fun activity is to do something adventurous, like skydiving or bungee jumping. The rush of adrenaline can release endorphins and create a sense of excitement and exhilaration.

There are different ways to play for each personality, but everyone needs a daily, weekly, and monthly balance of each of these chemicals to play their way to happiness. Your body's natural DOSE chemicals are a powerful tool for increasing motivation and connection and decreasing stress and pain levels.

Which DOSE chemicals are you missing the most?

Do you need to set goals and accomplish a meaningful mission? Do you need to connect with others and have a heart-to-heart? Do you need more mindfulness and intention in your day? Or do you need to get your blood pumping with more physical movement?

True play can trigger all four at the same time. What if you did a dance marathon for charity with your friends? What other activities could you imagine that would release all of these happy hormones?



Playful Human: Brandy Heather

Brandi Heather is a playing professional at Amped2Play, where she speaks and facilitates playshops for social, cognitive, and physical improvement. She created the Play for a Change Podcast series, which

helps adults reexamine the power of play. She wrote her book, *Return to Play: Rebuilding Resilience, Risk, and Reconnection*, to answer the question, "Can play be the answer to some of our most significant and complex social challenges of the 21st Century?"

Brought to you by Antidepressants:
To the guy who stole my antidepressants, I
hope you're happy now.

5  Dull days pass slowly.
Boring lives go fast.

Joke of the Week:

Did you hear the joke about the guy
who is really bad at Limbo?
He walked into a bar.

"The opposite of play is not work; it is depression."

- Dr. Stuart Brown

Have you ever noticed how time seems to drag on so slowly during mundane, monotonous days? However, when you look back on these times, dull and uneventful weeks, months, and years seem to have passed more quickly. Cognitive psychology and neuroscience can explain the phenomenon of how we perceive time.

The old saying is true. Time flies when you are having fun. When we are fully engaged in a new and challenging task, we lose track of time. This perception is supported by a psychological theory, Time's Attentional Gate Model, proposed by psychologist Richard A. Block. According to this theory, our focused attention acts as a gate that blocks time cues from reaching our consciousness, making time seem to pass faster. In short, we are focused on the task and not the clock. When we experience boring routines, our brain has the extra capacity to notice every second passing.

Our brains are also wired to crave novel experiences and encode them as new memories. When we're doing something new and exciting, our brain is busy processing all the new information. This denser encoding of new information and memories makes the duration seem longer in retrospect, giving the impression that time is stretching. Also, a life filled with new memories and accomplishments makes it feel more significant. When boring days pile up in a row, they seem to blur together in an uneventful stream of nothingness, and it allows us to forget that we even lived them.

Novelty is why vacations packed with new experiences and memories feel like they last longer when we look back on them compared to a work week that dragged on. Creating more memorable moments is the key to slowing down time and making life feel more meaningful. Memories are the currency of our lives, and they help us to feel more connected to ourselves and others. By actively seeking out new experiences and making a conscious effort to create memories, we can slow down time and make the most of our short time here on Earth.

Here are a few ideas for how you can make more meaningful memories:

Try anything new: Whether it's taking a cooking class, learning a new language, or picking up a new hobby, trying something new is a great way to break your routine and challenge yourself. Even if you don't end up sticking with the new activity long-term, the act of trying something new can help create new neural pathways in your brain, which is great for mental conditioning and mental health.

Travel to new places: Traveling to new places is a great way to inject more novelty into your life. Whether it's a weekend getaway or a longer trip, traveling can help to create lasting memories and make time feel more significant. Research has shown that people remember the happiness of experiences way longer than they appreciate physical purchases and gifts.

Spend time with loved ones: Investing in quality time is a great way to create meaningful memories. Whether it's a family dinner, a game night with friends, or a romantic weekend getaway, spending time with those we care about can help slow life down and create lasting memories. Adventures with others can also create powerful bonds for stronger relationships.

Get out of your comfort zone: Doing something that scares you or makes you uncomfortable can be a great way to create a memorable experience. Riding a rollercoaster, public speaking, or trying unusual food will make you wake up and pay attention to your life! You don't actually have to put your life at risk, but adrenaline-producing activities like horror movies or haunted houses can shake you out of the doldrums.

By injecting more novelty into our lives and actively seeking out new experiences, we can speed up our days and slow down our lives. And don't forget that famous Ferris Bueller quote. "Life's

short. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you might miss it."

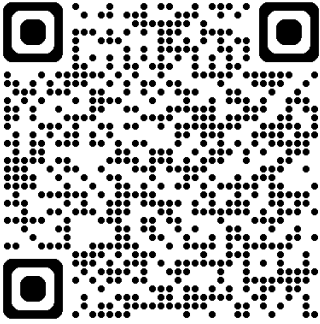
Make a Map of Your Life's Journey.

Take a stroll down memory lane and plan some adventures for the rest of your journey. Draw a treasure map of your life—bonus points for creativity and artistic expression. Start when and where you were born, and end it with a big red X on where and when you will die in a perfect world. *(HINT: Be generous with the when question!)*



Write down and map the top 10 most significant memories of your life so far with the dates they happened. Put a big arrow with today's date and a "You are here!" marker. Then, make another list of the top 10 memories you would like to create for the rest of your life you have remaining.

Feel free to describe them in as much detail as possible, put them on your treasure map, and assign dates to increase your motivation to take action.



Playful Human: Genevieve Pepin

Genevieve Pepin, a musician and sketch comedy performer, discusses the power of play to reduce stress, boost creativity, and connect with others. Learn how to incorporate more play into your daily life,

unleash your silly side, and create a more joyful and fulfilling experience.

Sponsored by Bath Towels:
They are the leading cause of dry skin.

6  Invite everyone to the
playground.

Joke of the Week:

What do you call the wife of a hippie from the
South? Mississippi

*"The very essence of playfulness is an openness to
anything that may happen, the feeling that whatever
happens, it's okay. You're either free to play, or
you're not."*

- John Cleese

Think about the magic of being on a playground for a moment.

Don't focus on the swings, slides, or see-saws on the playground. Instead, feel the openness, energy, and sounds. Can you remember a playground during recess that was loud with laughter and full of excitement? Everyone was fully engaged in play, cooperating and encouraging each other.

Imagine if your workplace was as vibrant and cheerful an atmosphere, where you all play together, and everyone is invited and encouraged to be their full self. Does your workplace feel like a healthy playground? Is it a space of inclusivity where everyone, regardless of experience, background, or ability, is invited to join in the fun and games?

What is it about playing well with others that is so magical? What makes it better than playing alone?

Psychologically, communal play benefits the individuals as well as the culture of the overall community. It fosters social bonding, improves our cooperation skills, and encourages us to navigate complex dynamics and adapt to constantly changing rules. Biologically, social connections lower stress hormones and inflammation. These friendships reduce bad outcomes such as heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. Beyond that, playing with others can significantly impact our mental health. It helps reduce stress, encourages a positive outlook, and nurtures a sense of belonging. Isn't it ironic that a well-played game of hide-and-seek can make us feel connected, seen, and appreciated?

Positive cultures are formed in playful situations. Innovative ideas are born not merely from individual brilliance but from the confluence of diverse minds coming together. When we break down barriers, we open communication, which creates opportunities to collaborate. Through the creativity and social connection of the group, we can accomplish more than we can

individually. So, how can we turn our workplaces, communities, and societies into more inclusive playgrounds where the joy of shared play is a win for everyone?

Inclusion in play doesn't mean everyone has to play the same game in the same way. Instead, it's about ensuring everyone feels invited, accepted, and valued. It is about creating a cultural playground where everyone can connect.

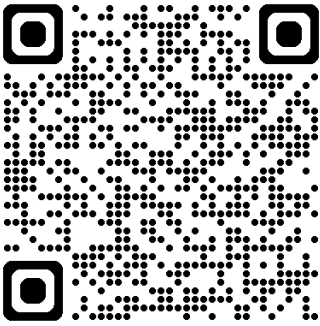
Diversity, whether in our professional network or our playground pals, has immeasurable benefits. When we play with a wide-ranging collection of individuals, each brings their unique experiences and perspectives to the table, enabling us to challenge our assumptions, broaden our collective areas of expertise, and discover new ways of thinking.

LinkedIn research shows that deep connections with diverse people are the most powerful networks. When eclectic groups of people are connected together, they offer more opportunities, information, and people from whom to build your career. Within teams, diverse groups often demonstrate greater innovation, better problem-solving, and improved decision-making. They tackle challenges with a range of creative solutions, keeping the workplace invigorated, dynamic, and lively.

An inclusive playground isn't just a nice idea; it is what is needed to solve our toughest challenges. Our society desperately needs more people, places, and events where people can come together. The game of life is not a single-player event; it's a multiplayer, live-action extravaganza! It's like a great game of dodgeball. The more players, the more fun.

How can you turn your life into a more inclusive playground?

The next time you feel lonely or left out at a gathering when it seems like everyone is separated into cliques, I encourage you to invite someone to play your favorite childhood game. Can you find a deck of cards or a ball? Can you start a game of walking freeze tag or Truth or Dare? Marianne Williamson famously said, “The only thing missing in any situation is that in which you are not giving.” Everyone is invited to play, and that includes you!



Playful Human: Laura Haver

Looking for fun ways to connect with your family? Laura Haver, author of *Play Together: 60 Games and Activities to Boost Creativity, Connection, and Mindfulness*, shares her favorite family games and activities to promote bonding, creativity, and

mindfulness. Learn how to create a more playful and connected family dynamic through shared experiences.

Brought to you by The Road Not Taken:
Don't blame others for the road you are on.
That's your own asphalt.

7 ❤️ Sharing is a form of self-care. What you do for others grows exponentially.

Joke of the Week:

What leadership position did Old McDonald list in his LinkedIn profile?
He is the EIEIO of the farm.

"No one can play a game alone. One cannot be human by oneself."

- James Carse

When you share, give, or volunteer, you're benefiting others and yourself. It's a win-win situation. There are positive benefits to giving for your happiness, physical health, and even monetary wealth. Sometimes, it can actually be a backward law. Life is not a zero-sum game. When you share a loving or playful moment with a friend, you can both feel it at the same time. If you share an idea with someone, you still have the idea, and they have it, too. In many circumstances and for many reasons, those who give more get more.

Sharing is a way of connecting with others. It creates a sense of community and belonging. When we share something with someone, we're letting them know that we care about them and that they matter. This can be as simple as sharing a smile, a compliment, or a kind word. It can also be as meaningful as sharing our time, resources, or expertise. By sharing, we're building relationships and strengthening bonds with others, which is essential for our mental health and well-being.

Giving is another form of sharing that can benefit both the giver and the receiver. When we give to others, we're not only making a positive impact on their lives, but we're also experiencing the joy of giving. Giving can come in many forms, such as donating to a charity, helping a friend in need, or simply giving someone a thoughtful gift. The act of giving has been shown to boost our mood, increase our happiness, and reduce stress levels. It's also been linked to improved physical health, such as lower blood pressure and a stronger immune system.

Volunteering is yet another way to give back to your community and improve your own happiness. When we volunteer, we're not only helping others, but we're also gaining valuable skills, experiences, and connections. Volunteering can provide a sense of purpose and fulfillment, which is crucial for our mental health. It can also help us build our social networks and meet new people who share our interests and passions.

(Volunteering has been one of my favorite ways to give back for most of my life. After high school, I joined the Americorps National Service Committee and performed over 2,000 hours of service teaching science and technology skills to out-of-work, elderly, and underprivileged children. Teaching a 92-year-old man how to email his great-grandchildren who had left for college was one of the most fulfilling moments of my life. But the whole year was fun, and I learned as much as the people I taught.)

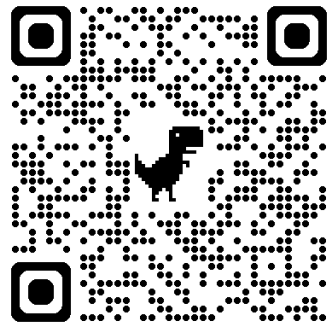
When you volunteer, you make valuable connections and build your experience, network, and portfolio in a way that selfish pursuits never can.

But don't forget, one of the most significant benefits of focusing on others is the impact it can have on the world around us. What we do for others can have a ripple effect, spreading kindness and positivity throughout our communities and beyond. When we give to others, we're not only improving their lives, but we're also making the world a better place. I think we can all agree that the world could always use a little more happiness, kindness, and generosity!

Being a Playful Human is contagious. *(More about this in the next lesson.)* So, go ahead and share a smile, give an unexpected gift, or volunteer your time by lending a helping hand. What you do for others grows beyond you and will come back to you.

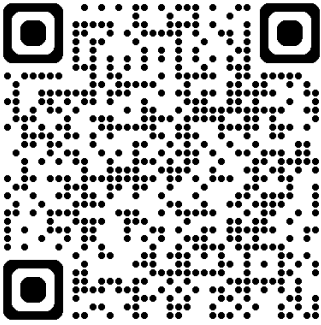
The Great Playful Humans Giveaway

We have created a special contest for you, but unlike most giveaways, you can't enter yourself. You can only nominate someone else to win a free copy of this book. We will keep giving away books as long as



you keep nominating people who need to rediscover the power of play in their lives or careers.


Go to PlayfulHumans.com/giveaway to give away a free copy of this book to someone else!



Playful Human: Peter Williamson

Peter is the founder of Game Genius, which uses games to help people discover their strengths and connect with others. Peter's insights into the different ways people play will help you identify your own play personality and leverage it for greater success and happiness.

Brought to you by Patience:
It is what you have when there are too
many witnesses.

8  Stop chasing money and
start choosing happiness.

Joke of the Week:

Why can't you explain puns
to kleptomaniacs?
They always take things literally.

*"Mama always said, 'There's only so much fortune a
man really needs. The rest is just for showing off.'"*

- Forrest Gump

Are you trading your happiness for money?

Money can be a very tricky thing for most people. We understand that money can't buy long-term happiness. We don't have to look very hard to find a celebrity drug addict or a billionaire on their fourth or fifth marriage. Money can't buy self-esteem, love, or any other emotion. True happiness cannot be purchased; it must be cultivated from within.

The lack of money can bring unwanted stress and challenges. Having extra resources is a great problem-solver. It can buy tools to get jobs done, a little freedom, and some simple pleasures. I don't want to underestimate the power of having enough money to cover your basic needs and the time away from work to spend as you wish. Having SOME money seems to impact overall happiness in many positive ways. However, the problems start shortly after that when we seek MORE money.

Research studies vary on the exact number, but somewhere between \$75,000-\$250,000 per year, there is a steep decline in the diminishing returns of money's effect on happiness. Each additional dollar begins to make less and less of an impact. Think about a professional athlete making \$100 million per year. Would they even notice if they made an extra \$100,000 the next year?! Probably not; that is a big sum for the rest of us, but it would do little to make them happier.

We don't need more stuff; we need more play!

The marketing of the "American Dream" has created a desire for more money, financial freedom, and power. The normalization of hard work has us trading our happiness for work efficiency, life hacks, consumerism, and status symbols. We replaced our pursuit

of happiness with a hustle-and-grind mentality and promise of future happiness, but it was a trap.

The dirty little secret is that there is no money to be made from free play. Look at the marketing in our society. You can see play advertised in sports, board games, video games, and other entertainment and events that can be monetized, but no one is advertising unstructured time with your kids, using your imagination, or going to the park. Playfulness is free and effective.

(Have you considered how crazy it is to burn yourself out working to afford a vacation? You could just stop working and appreciate the extra time you have. Freedom to play.)

Some common myths and misconceptions about money lead to a lot of stress and frustration for many people.

1. **The Happiness-Meter Malfunction:** Much like social media, drugs, and other forms of Dopamine highs, the happiness boost from money or the purchase of a physical object equates to a quick boost of excitement, and then it wears off just as quickly. Our physical body will crave more and more of these temporary pleasures, and at the same time, we get desensitized to them. This means we need more and bigger purchases just to get that same fleeting moment of excitement. To make things worse, it adds very little to our long-term happiness, and we can end up feeling guilty and empty from chasing that high. Not to mention, you might feel overwhelmed with the maintenance of all of these purchases, like a hoarder.
2. **The Gerbil Wheel Exhaustion:** When we try to keep up with the Joneses/Kardashians, compare ourselves to others on social media, or climb the corporate ladder, we find ourselves in an endless pursuit of more. There is nothing at the top of the corporate ladder except more ladder, and if

you climb high enough, you will find out that it is not leaning against anything of substance, either. Anyone who attempts to find happiness by chasing more money will only end up with the stress of an ever-growing list of expensive worries. Psychologists call this the “hedonic treadmill.” Arthur C. Brooks, Harvard professor and happiness researcher, found that satisfaction on this treadmill requires not just that you continuously run in place but also that you run slightly faster than other people running on theirs. It is exhausting!

3. **Investing in the Priceless:** The biggest impacts on overall happiness come from very simple and often free activities. Choosing to spend time with loved ones and children, exploring nature, showing gratitude and serving others, and maintaining your physical and mental health have huge positive impacts. Becoming a Big Brother and taking a kid in need of a mentor to the park for the first time will make you feel better than anything you can buy yourself on Amazon.
4. **The Money-Happiness Paradox:** What’s even crazier is the fact that the opposite of what people expect is also true. It turns out that happiness and playfulness lead to greater levels of success. Many different studies have shown that people who give to charity end up making more than those who hoard their cash. Happy people grow faster than grumpy ones. Positive attitudes attract opportunities and open doors. Don’t forget the impacts on your physical health, too. Less stress and more happiness mean greater physical and mental health you can leverage to make cool things happen. Anyone who has been sick or injured knows

that health and happiness are very correlated!

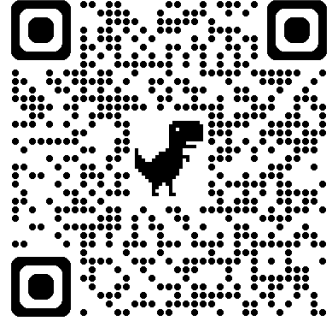
5. **The Happy Network Effect:** Happy people attract other happy people. Greedy people can attract insincere, disingenuous, and dangerous people. Money can't buy true friends, but it turns out that true friends and family can bring you opportunities and much more overall happiness. By prioritizing your relationships instead of money, you'll discover a sense of belonging and support that will uplift you throughout the rest of your life. Investing in your human connections is the ultimate act of self-enrichment.

Invest your time, money, and effort in experiences and relationships that make your heart soar. Use your money to buy time with your family, take that trip to the rainforest, help your favorite cause, or finally learn to salsa dance. Unleash your inner happiness by chasing fulfillment instead of just a bigger number in your bank account. Be grateful for what you have. Engage in mindfulness to cultivate your awareness and savor the moments of happiness. Take care of your mind, body, and spirit so you can enjoy a long and happy life.

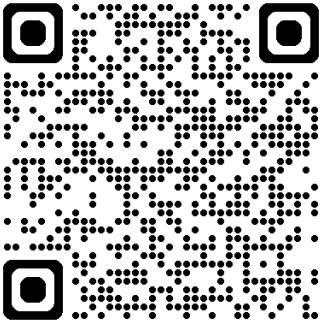
Most importantly, spread kindness, choose happiness, and bring a playful spirit everywhere you go because when you look back on your life, it won't be the size of your bank account that brings a smile to your face. It'll be the memories, laughter, and relationships you've cultivated along the way.

Turn Your Money into Happiness

Fold a dollar bill into a heart using this cool money origami technique and give it to someone you believe in! Tell them why you appreciate them, and choose the biggest bill you feel comfortable with for the biggest boost in both of your days.



Scan the QR code to learn how on YouTube!



Playful Human: Matt Phelan

Matt is the founder of the Happiness Index. He is an author and speaker who focuses on creating happy work cultures, emphasizing the importance of reaching out for support and building meaningful connections. Learn common misconceptions about happiness and how to create an engaging work environment.

Sponsored by an upcoming airplane disaster series on Netflix:

They are currently shooting the pilot.

9  Playfulness
is contagious.

Joke of the Week:

Did you know it is rude to laugh loudly in Hawaii? You want to keep it to a low ha.

"It's the things we play with and the people who help us play that make a great difference in our lives."

- Fred Rogers

Some things are just more fun with other people. Whether it is a game of catch, a dance-off, a comedy show, a beach volleyball match, or cooking a meal, shared experiences amplify our emotions and give us that extra DOSE of playfulness. Connecting with others not only makes the fun moments more enjoyable but also makes the tough ones easier to bear. That's why I recommend that you always bring a +1.

There is something magical about sharing a victory or defeat, creating an outrageous memory, or laughing until you cry with another human. Psychologically, engaging in group activities can lead to improved mental health, better communication skills, and a heightened sense of empathy. It's a shared roller-coaster ride of emotions that reinforces our bonds, fosters a sense of belonging, and cultivates a thriving, inclusive community.

Learning to play well with others is a key skill for a healthy and happy life. It nurtures a collective spirit. Playing together teaches us cooperation, teamwork, communication, problem-solving, coaching skills, giving encouragement, and much more. It reminds us that we are not solitary players in the game of life but part of a vibrant, diverse, and interconnected team.

The science behind playfulness and happiness tells an even deeper story. Playfulness is an "emotional contagion," which means it can spread to yourself and others without you necessarily being aware of it. Researchers Christakis and Fowler found that happy friends make you happier. Not only that, but it also spreads beyond direct contact. If a friend of your friend is happy with their life, you have a 6 percent greater chance of being happy yourself even if you have never met the person!

There are several scientific reasons why you should surround yourself with happy people and bring a playful spirit to every interaction:

Mirror Neurons: Our brains copy what we see in other people. These neurons play an important role in understanding others, learning, and emotional connection. When we see someone else having fun, our brains activate the pleasure centers we associate with fun, making us feel a similar joy.

Social Factors: The ability to read and respond to others is crucial for our survival and social acceptance. When we see someone upset or happy, we have learned to respond with matching energy to be cooperative and empathetic.

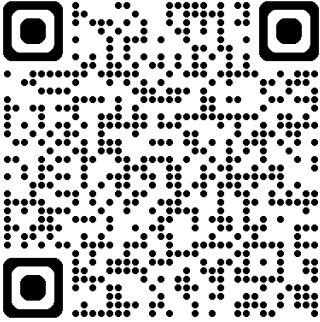
Physical Feedback: This psychological theory suggests that our facial expressions and physical posture can influence our emotional experiences. In other words, if you fake a smile, you might actually start to feel happier. If you fake a confident pose, you will begin to feel more confident. When we begin acting playful to fit in with others, we become more playful.

Remember, though, that emotional contagion isn't limited to positive emotions. Negative emotions can spread in much the same way. That's why it's important to surround ourselves with positive influences and environments that promote happiness and playfulness for our well-being and that of those around us. New research has shown that stress hormones like cortisol will leak into sweat and can actually be transferred to people within six feet like a stress virus.

You have the choice every day to bring a +1 attitude, show up as neutral, or be a -1 and drag down your friends, co-workers, and family. Always bring a "+1" to your playground of life. Invite others to share in your joy and partake in their happiness. Playfulness is contagious. The world becomes a little brighter, a little more happy, and a lot more fun when we play together. Invite a Facebook friend to a real-world experience.

Your next challenge is to invite a friend to come out and play with you. You get to pick the type of play you enjoy most, but you have

to share it with another human being. You can play a board or card game, go to a show, play a sport, solve a puzzle, go to a trivia night, or cook a meal together. Discover why it is always better together!




Playful Human: Gene Magee

Gene is an emcee at Universal Orlando Resort. Gene performs with dolphins at the resort, and he's learned that play is an essential part of building a bond between humans and animals. When we play with animals, we let them know that we're friendly and that we want to

interact with them. This builds trust and understanding, and it can even help to relieve stress and anxiety

Brought to you by Dolphins:
My dolphin jokes are terrible on porpoise.

10  We are more alike
than we are different.

Joke of the Week:

What is the difference between
commas and cats?
Cats have claws at the end of their paws. And
commas are a pause at the end of a clause.

*"Playing a game together actually builds up bonds,
trust, and cooperation. We actually build stronger
social relationships as a result."*

- Jane McGonigal

Have you ever found yourself sizing up a stranger, co-worker, or in-law and wondering how on earth you could ever find common ground? Well, my playful friend, despite a myriad of cultures, languages, and experiences, we are more alike than we are different. In fact, DNA research suggests that 99.9% of our genetic makeup is identical from person to person. It's that 0.1% that makes us uniquely us. We are all fundamentally human, wired for connection, empathy, and, you guessed it—play!

It seems obvious, but it can be difficult to remember when we live in a culture designed to amplify our differences and divide us. However, according to various psychological studies, humans naturally thrive on connections and shared experiences. Psychologist Matthew Lieberman suggests in his book 'Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect' that our need to connect with other people is as fundamental as our need for food and water.

Playing together transforms us into LEGO™ bricks that snap together perfectly regardless of their color, shape, or age. The simple act of engaging in a fun, shared activity can bridge gaps and foster a sense of unity and togetherness. Play allows us to let our guard down, tap into our shared experience, and connect on a fundamental human level.

Here are a few playful ideas to help you find common connections with anyone:

The Similarities Challenge - In a group, you each take turns to share something about yourselves - it could be a favorite food, a pet peeve, or a secret talent. The goal is to find something that you all have in common. Just raise your hand if you are similar to what was shared. You'll be amazed at how quickly you'll start seeing similarities once you start looking for them. Bonus points are awarded for team streaks or most things in common.

Human Bingo - In this game, instead of numbers, the bingo cards are filled with characteristics or experiences like 'Loves chocolate,' 'Has had a speeding ticket,' 'Has traveled to Europe,' 'Has been to a World Series game,' or 'Can juggle.' Just find someone who can write their initial in one of the boxes. The first one to connect with enough people to fill a row or column wins. Keep going and see if you can get a blackout!

Common Ground - The goal for each group is to find the most unusual thing that all of them have in common. This is a great icebreaker for large groups when you have separate tables, or you can pair up. Don't pick anything easy like "we all work together" or "we all eat food." Go for something wild and unusual that is still common ground for everyone on your team.

Continuous Connections - One person shares something about themselves that they have in common with the next player. It could be a hobby, a favorite food, a travel experience, or anything they can imagine. That person must find a commonality with the next person by adding something new about themselves. The game continues in a chain, each person finding common ground with the next until you get back to the first player.

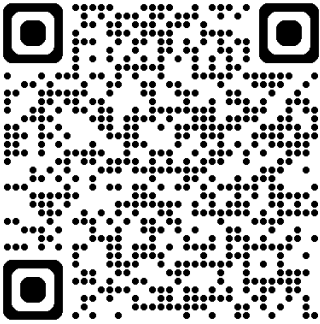
Remember, at the end of the day, we're all grown-up kids in big people's clothes looking to have fun. The key to all of these games is to approach them with an open, playful spirit. They're not competitions; they're opportunities to laugh, share, and connect with others. When we focus on being a Playful Human, we highlight our similarities and create a bridge to understanding and connection.

Find commonalities wherever you can.

Pick two random people or objects and then list as many things as you can that they have in common.

What do a salesperson and a weather forecaster have in common?

1. They spend a lot of time in front of a green screen explaining charts.
2. They are great at sensationalizing trivial events.
3. Everyone blames them for the bad news you deliver.
4. They get sent out in hazardous conditions.
5. Any forecast more than seven days out is always wrong.




Playful Human: Gary Ware

Gary is an improv comedian and author of *Playful Rebellion*. He shows how play can break down barriers and connect people from diverse backgrounds. Discover how improv's collaborative and playful nature can foster empathy,

understanding, and stronger relationships.

Sponsored by Corduroy Pillows:
They're making head lines across the country
right now.

J  **Never underestimate
the power of
positive strokes.**

Joke of the Week:

How often should you tell your partner that
you love them?
Before someone else does!

*“Does your face light up when you see kids? That’s all
they care about.”*

- Toni Morrison

Make sure people feel special and loved.

Do you remember the last time someone was truly happy to see you? Their face lit up, and they smiled and ran to you with a bounce in their step. Maybe it was a long-lost friend, a child after a long day, or even your dog? Do you remember a recent compliment out of the blue? Or when someone you admire acknowledges your efforts at work? It felt pretty darn good, didn't it?

That's what we call the power of positive strokes - tiny affirmations that can light up our day and sometimes change our lives. Psychologist Dr. Eric Berne, the father of Transactional Analysis, talks about the concept of 'strokes' in his work. According to him, a 'stroke' is a unit of recognition that we give or receive - a compliment, a pat on the back, or even a heartfelt smile. He says we all have an inherent need for a certain number of strokes he calls our "Psychological Stroke Counter." Some people need more, and others need less, but we all need attention. We feel happy, confident, and fulfilled when our counters and hearts are full. When they are empty, we act out in need of attention, sometimes even seeking negative strokes.

Modern research shows that receiving positive strokes can significantly boost our mood, enhance our self-esteem, and even increase our lifespan. A study from Penn State University suggests that people who regularly receive compliments and positive affirmations have lower rates of depression, increased job satisfaction, and healthier relationships. And again, they don't just benefit the receiver - they create a positive feedback loop that also uplifts the giver. A 2019 study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology found that complimenting others can make us happier and more satisfied with our lives.

Why is this so important?

In a conversation with Oprah Winfrey, which Oprah calls one of her biggest takeaways from her hundreds of shows, Toni Morrison said, "Does your face light up when you see kids? That's all they care about." Children don't care how much money you have, how hard you work, or how much status you have in the community. They look into your eyes when you meet them, and they instinctively seek validation, acceptance, and excitement in your facial expressions.

Adults are the same; we seek connection, recognition, and the feeling of being valued by others. We want to be seen and appreciated. One powerful way to be seen and become more connected is to be the one who is giving positive strokes to others.

Think about the billions of people now on social media who are dying for someone to pay attention to them. What if you were the one who commented on their post? Take a moment to think about the people in your life - your family, friends, colleagues, or even the barista who makes your coffee just the way you like it. How do you greet them? How often do you acknowledge their efforts? How frequently do you tell them how special they are?

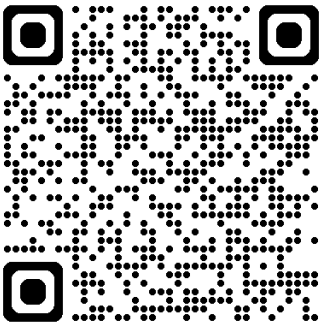
Marriage research suggests that healthy relationships have six positive strokes to each negative one. The chances of divorce increase significantly below that ratio.

Positive strokes have an incredible ability to build bridges, foster connection, and sprinkle a little bit of joy into our lives. And the best part? It doesn't cost a thing! You can be a +1 in the Psychological Stroke Counter for the people you connect with, and all you have to do is show it on your face and let them know they are special!

Give away five positive strokes per day for the next week!

Here's another challenge for you: Try to give out at least five intentional positive strokes each day. Compliment a colleague on their work, tell a friend how much you appreciate their support, or even thank the delivery person for their service. Pay attention to your first impressions, and make sure your face lights up when you see someone you care about. Feel the warmth of connection spread within you.

Bonus Points: Create a secret handshake or greeting for the people most important to you, especially any kids. A fun twist on a classic greeting or an inside joke will create a deep connection and a powerful first impression in every encounter. This bond will make them feel special and loved.




Playful Human: Lisa Navarra

When it comes to connecting with kids, play is often the best medicine. Lisa is an award-winning educator, behavior specialist, and author of books, music, and teacher resources provides group and individual services teaching the “how to learn”

skills for children who struggle with learning and self-regulation. She has spoken nationally and hosts the podcast, Student Success Beyond Expectation. Lisa was a Special Education Teacher for over 20 years.

Sponsored by Whiteboards:
Out of all of the inventions in history,
whiteboards are the most remarkable.

Q  Find the people who
get the joke!

Joke of the Week:

What did the bra say to the hat?
You go on a head.
I'm going to give these two a lift.

"I am not offended by dumb blonde jokes because I know that I am not dumb... and I also know that I am not blonde."

- Dolly Parton

Have you ever been in a group where you cracked a joke, and the room fell silent, but you told another set of friends the same joke, and it had people in stitches?

(I have performed in front of thousands of audiences, from one person to over 10,000 people, and I can attest that each one is different. As a professional entertainer, you learn to read the room so you can tell which joke, song, or story will resonate with the audience. However, when you are designing your life and career, it is often better to do your thing and find the people who like what you do. This brings us to one of my favorite quotes of all time.)

"Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

- Howard Thurman

Jerry Seinfeld doesn't worry about making Kevin Hart's audience laugh. He is too busy collecting fans that enjoy his sense of humor. In a connected world and global economy with billions of people, it is healthier and more sustainable to do what makes you come alive and worry about finding people who need that than it is to worry about making yourself into something a specific group of people wants you to be.

Be playful in your pursuits.

Follow your energy, passion, and curiosity, and don't worry about people who don't get you or your jokes. It is important to maintain your sense of humor throughout your life!

Humor is a fascinating social glue, a pleasurable twist on communication that can create instant connections and build a vibrant culture. Let's explore the power of laughter, the science of humor, and why it's okay to shrug off the humorless.

Research is packed with evidence backing the critical role of humor in human connections. Studies show that laughter synchronizes the brain's neural activity, leading to feelings of connection and understanding. This is why, when someone laughs at your joke, you feel an immediate bond with them. It's as if they're saying, "I understand you, and I'm on the same wavelength."

Humor also has profound implications for workplace culture. Research from Wharton, MIT, and London Business School suggests that humor, when practiced appropriately, can boost creativity, foster teamwork, and enhance status. Shared laughter creates a positive emotion that enhances how we interpret and remember social encounters, promoting a cooperative and collaborative culture.

Humor and laughter can also act as a buffer against stress. According to a study published in the *International Journal of Humor Research*, humor can help in cognitive restructuring, or changing the way we think, to view stressful situations from a more relaxed perspective.

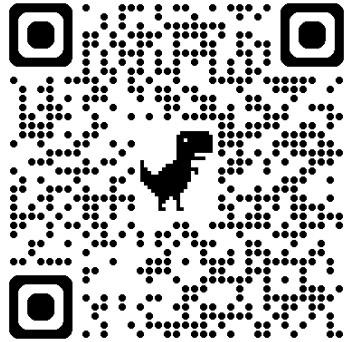
However, not all jokes land, and not all people appreciate your humor. We all have different comedy compasses. Some people might not get your joke, and others might not value your playful side. That's ok. It could be due to cultural differences, personal preferences, or perhaps they have simply lost their inner child in favor of a more serious demeanor. So, what do you do when your humor isn't received well?

Remember, it's not a reflection of your worth or your sense of humor. Comedy is subjective. It's natural to feel a sense of rejection when people don't get your humor but try to take it in stride. Negative people who don't see your value or appreciate your playful nature aren't worth your time or energy.

It's important to find your tribe, the people who get your jokes and appreciate your brand of humor. Surround yourself with those who lift you up, make you laugh, and encourage your playful side. If you have to explain your joke, it is not going to be funny. Humor is an interesting backward law in that it has to be received in the way that it was intended. You can force anyone to laugh. Instead of getting frustrated with people who don't get it, celebrate the people who do!

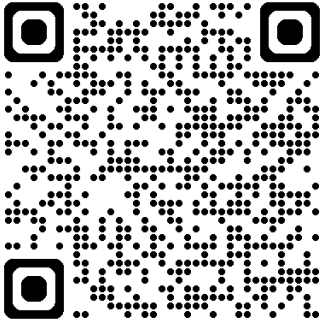
Start a "Joke of the Week" trend.

It could be at your office, in your family, or even on social media. Your mission is to share laughter and positivity. Use it as an experiment to observe people's responses and find those who "get the joke." Playful Humans has a Joke of the Week on every podcast episode and in our YouTube Shorts here:



<https://www.youtube.com/@PlayfulHumans/shorts>.


Subscribe to the channel and share the jokes in each chapter of this book with someone who will appreciate them.



Playful Human: Adam Hunt

Adam is a TV Producer of Big Brother turned copywriter, who loves it when brands make us laugh and hates how rarely that happens. There's an art to writing jokes that work for brands and a science that makes sure the end result is on-brand, on-message, and won't get you canceled. He brought together TV's best comedy writers as White Label Comedy to write jokes for organizations that want to be more playful.

Brought to you by the 1980s:
When I think of the 80s, I think of a boombox,
but that's just a stereo type.

κ  People who play
together stay together!

Joke of the Week:

Why didn't Han Solo enjoy his
steak dinner on Nabu?
It was Chewie.

*"Good music comes out of people playing together,
knowing what they want to do and going for it. You
can't do it by pushing buttons and watching a TV
screen."*

- Keith Richards

In today's hyper-connected world, why does it seem harder to keep in touch with friends and family? Why, with all the social media channels available, are you having a hard time making new friends? Why are people feeling so lonely even in long-term relationships?

Because a social media connection is not a strong bond, the pandemic and technological dependency have separated us in real life. Grazing side-by-side is not the same as truly living together. Relationships without shared fun and playful experiences tend to drift apart over time.

Playfulness is the missing link in our relationships. It is a vital ingredient in nurturing deep connections. The laughter during a family board game, the shared accomplishment in a team-building activity, or the intimacy of a playful wink between partners isn't just fun; it strengthens relationships. *(Again, it is not just me saying this. Science agrees!)*

A study published in the American Journal of Play found that families who regularly engage in playful activities report stronger bonds, better communication, and higher satisfaction in their relationships. The shared joy and positive emotions promote a sense of belonging, mutual understanding, and an environment of trust and support. But this isn't limited to family dynamics.

According to a study in the Journal of Business and Psychology, work teams that engage in playful activities display enhanced cooperation, better communication, and reduced conflict. The shared play experience fosters an atmosphere of camaraderie, encouraging team members to better understand, support, and value each other.

Playfulness is often the magic glue that holds romantic partners together. A study published in the American Journal of Family Therapy found that couples who regularly shared playful activities

reported higher relationship satisfaction, increased intimacy, and better communication. How does that sound?



These statistics offer a clear and hopeful message: play is not just for kids.

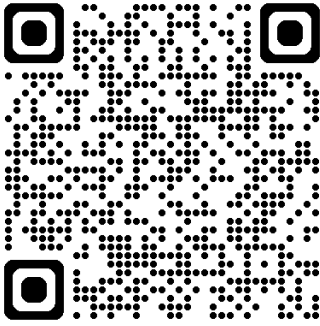
It's a secret weapon that we can all use to boost our relationships and keep them healthy and vibrant over time. So, regardless of the type of relationship you are thinking about, embrace playfulness, nurture it, and watch it weave its magic into your relationships. Be a Playful Human, couple, family, team, business, and community. Who knows? We can even build playful countries or a playful world someday. Plan that family game night, organize the office trivia contest, or initiate a spontaneous dance-off with your partner. A future of strong connections starts now.

Create a Chain of Connections.

Write down the name of a person who has positively impacted your life or someone with whom you've shared a meaningful moment. Keep adding to this chain throughout the week. You can add someone they introduced you to or someone else who had a similar impact on your life. Make your chain grow longer each day. Who will you add next?

Today, we play!

Join the online community of other adults rediscovering the power of play at www.PlayfulHumans.com. The Playful Humans Club is a community uniquely designed to help adults wholeheartedly express their natural inner child's playfulness and need for social connection.



Playful Human: Benjamin Lloyd

Benjamin is an improv actor and teacher, who uses the power of play and improv to help people find real human connections. He is the founder of Bright Invention, a non-profit that performs improv, creates custom scenarios for corporate

training, and works with people of all abilities to make extraordinary things happen on stage.

Sponsored by the sponsors at the
Hokey Pokey Rehab:

I was addicted to the hokey pokey,
but then I turned myself around.

Section 2

Diamonds ♦ Creativity ♦ Fun

Diamonds represent how creativity leads to a more vibrant and fun life. Creativity is the key to unlocking innovation in your work and self-expression in your art. We'll explore how enabling our inner child to emerge can spark problem-solving, making us more adaptable and innovative. Learn how to leverage your creative spirit to turn challenges into opportunities for artistic expression and personal growth.

A  Create more than
you consume.

Joke of the Week:

What do you call a fishing with no eyes?
Fshng!

*"The playing adult steps sideways into another
reality; the playing child advances forward to new
stages of mastery."*

- Erik H. Erikson

I challenge you to write this chapter. You have been reading my thoughts, and now it's time for you to express some of your own. To help you, grab a journal and answer these questions.

- What do you enjoy creating?
- When do you feel in flow?
- What do you enjoy consuming?
- What are the downsides of consuming too much?
- What are the negative side effects of creating too much?
- How do you add value to society in exchange for the energy you consume?
- Are you investing your valuable time and energy into building a legacy?
- What inputs are necessary for you to live your best life?
- What items are not necessary?
- What creative output would make your life more fun and fulfilling?

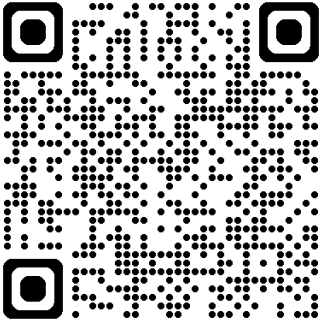
This lesson might be about the meaning of life itself. Much of physics suggests that energy should spread out, heat should cool off, and complex matter should decay. Yet, here we are, a bunch of hot, complex creatures full of energy. Why do we exist, then?

We can create more than we consume. Humans powered by air, water, and a little food can create incredible value. We can dream, build, grow, learn, heal, and contribute to the universe in ways that can't be matched by mere physical matter.

Consider your inputs and output.

What is the Universe's return on investment in you? How are you creating a positive impact in the world?

Do more of that. We need you.



Playful Human: Steve Sims

You need to know about Steve. Entrepreneur Magazine labeled him as “The Real Life Wizard of Oz” because he has developed a reputation for making the impossible possible. He founded the first high-end luxury concierge,

through which he's arranged things like private dinners at the feet of Michelangelo's “David” while being serenaded by Andrea Bocelli, Elton John's Grammy party, and even facilitated experiences for Elon Musk and Richard Branson!

Brought to you by Tide:

It's what the Little Mermaid uses to wash her
fin, the tide.

2 Be an original.

Joke of the Week:

Why did the bicycle fall over?
Because it was two tired.

“Play builds the kind of free-and-easy, try-it-out, do-it-yourself character that our future needs.”

- James L. Hymes Jr.

Cover bands are uninspired.

Cover bands and karaoke singers can be fun at the local bar or wedding receptions, but let's face it, they fall a little flat like some of their high notes. They're like that guy at a party who does an impression of Arnold Schwarzenegger. Funny, when well-timed, but not very original. Every comedian does an impression of Arnold, and when the party-goer says, "I'll be back," you can't help but hope he won't. Copies of the original become a commodity, not nearly as valuable or interesting as a truly creative and authentic original.

So, why do some of us become "Tone Deaf Leppard"—a slightly off-key version of something truly legendary? There are two main reasons. Conforming to the norm feels safe and predictable. There's less risk involved in sticking to what's already been done than in exploring the unknown. The pressure to perform, get a real job, and keep up with the Jones (*or Kardashians*) has overwhelmed our playful and creative spirit, and we are stuck in a comfort zone.

We are also trained from a very young age to learn from others, to look for road maps and the right answers, and to follow what works. It's not a bad way to learn, but you are meant to keep learning and growing. Mimicking others is the training wheels that help us get started, but it is pretty uninspired if you are a grown adult still peddling around with extra wheels.

Imagine a world full of cover bands. What if the Top 40 was full of songs by The Faux Fighters, Amy Housewine, and The Rolling Clones? Instead of new hits every year and the thrill of finding that great new song, you just get slightly worse copies of songs you already know. Your desire for novelty and surprise would go unsatisfied. Psychologists have studied this, too. Humans have a basic need for novelty and challenge, known as the "self-determination theory." It's a huge reason why we tend to get tired

of the same-old, same-old. At work and in life, we get burnt out and bored without something new.

Be a one-of-a-kind original.

It's clear that cover bands (*like Nearvanna*) don't have the soul of the original. It's because of authenticity. You are uniquely designed to be yourself, so when you try to be someone else, it ends up feeling like a fashion knock-off. It just doesn't fit. But when you live as the best version of yourself, the authenticity is magnetic, and we can all sense it.

The choice is yours. You can be a cover band and be forgotten, or you can be the headliner of your own show and bring a new, unique voice to the world. Researchers have found that people who show their "true self" on a first date are more likely to score a second one. Whether we're on a date, at a job interview, or just showing up day in and day out, we need to bring out our playful, natural inner child and share it with the world.

How do you find your voice?

Embrace what makes you unique. Lean into your strengths and practice your craft to develop your talent and perspective. It is OK to question what you like about others' work but don't follow their path. Maintain a library of ideas, notes, and inspirations. You never know when two unrelated ideas might combine to create a new genre. Then, take breaks and go for a walk or distract yourself with physical activity. Creative ideas from your authentic subconscious tend to bubble up when your stress levels are low, and your conscious brain is distracted. But remember, you are on your own journey. If you follow their map, you will find they beat you to the treasure!

Creative ideas often come from:

Inspiration: The proverbial muse often shows up when you least expect it, like during a shower or a walk outside. That's because you're not trying to force it. It's another backward law. Listen to those inspirational whispers, and go for it!

Combination: The art of mixing different elements to create something new is an underrated creative skill. Experiencing new things yourself will create new connections and perspectives. Getting out of your industry and your comfort zone can generate tremendous creative energy.

Perspiration: Sometimes, you've got to put in the sweat equity to perfect your skills. You can't become the next great guitarist without practice. Your next breakthrough is not likely to happen when you are watching TV or scrolling on social media. You need activity to generate opportunities and to develop your talents.

Elimination: Your time is precious, and your creative energy is extremely valuable. Don't waste either one on clients, jobs, or other tasks that are not worthy of your full self. Look at your calendar and think about what things you could remove to make time and energy for your passion. (*Hints: TV, social media, Zoom meetings, and toxic relationships.*)

Education: Before you can start a revolution, it helps to know what you're revolting against. You need to know the rules to break them. Going on a learning binge can also inspire new ideas. If you read the top books on a subject, listen to podcasts, or explore tutorial videos, you may find where others have left a you-sized hole in the market.

Incubation: Creativity needs downtime. It's ironic, but during this rest time, your brain strings together those magical notes into a symphony. It often happens during sleep. Your subconscious brain is in control right before, during, and after sleep. If all else fails, take a nap or meditate and see if your creativity returns.

Experimentation: Rock and roll wasn't born from playing it safe. Sometimes, you need to turn the amp up to 11 and see what happens. Don't hold back. Develop the guts to go all in and see what you are truly capable of accomplishing. Sometimes, failing spectacularly is even more valuable than success. One thing is for sure: you can't win if you don't play.

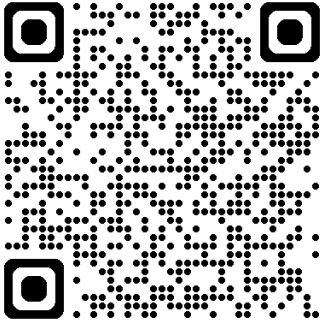
In the music festival of life, dare to rock harder than you ever thought possible. Go for weird, aim for stupid, break the rules, and be the most playful you can be. Strike a chord that resonates with your true self, and who knows? You could compose a hit nobody saw coming.

The secret loophole is that even if you fail, you can always come back and join the all-female rock band AC/DShe, later. In the immortal words of Arnold, "Come with me if you want to live." (*You did the voice, didn't you?*)

Creativity Challenge: What would be the name of your cover band?

Share it on social media and ask if anyone wants to join. Tag us @PlayfulHumans.

(PS - My cover band is called The Duvets.)



Playful Human: DC “The Brain Supreme” Glenn

DC Glenn, from the music group Tag Team, talks about the profound impact of creating his own opportunities has had on his life and career. Discover how surrounding yourself with the right people, taking

action, and hustling creatively will help you to achieve your full potential. Whoomp! There it is!

Sponsored by Philippe Fallop:
New sandals specifically designed for
French men.

3 Creativity comes from combinations and connections.

Joke of the Week:

Why should you never take sides during a political argument at the Thanksgiving table?
Trick question. It's the perfect time to take sides because no one's paying attention.
Bring Tupperware.

"Maturity consists in having rediscovered the seriousness one had as a child at play."

- Friedrich Nietzsche

THREE OF DIAMONDS

Creativity and innovation are more important than ever. However, our modern work is starving us of the ingredients needed to make an idea come to life. Creativity is the single most important job skill in the world, according to LinkedIn Learning. Over 60% of CEOs cite creativity as the most important leadership skill. Creativity can help you solve problems, communicate better, reduce stress, adapt to change, and be more productive. Yet, over 75% of people think they are not living up to their creative potential.

Imagine an untrained chef standing in front of an empty pantry with a few stale ingredients like flour, condiments, and dead yeast. They have a few dull knives but no measuring cups or even mixing bowls. There is no salt or other spices. And to make it all worse, the only heat source is an old toaster oven. If they had 10 minutes to make us something for dinner, how good are you expecting this resulting dish to be?

Unfortunately, that's what our creative situation has become at work. We don't have the skills, resources, energy, or time to make anything interesting happen. It's not that we lack creativity or inspiration. There is no such thing as writer's block. The problem is that we are not in a creative environment, and we haven't practiced enough to overcome these limitations.

Creativity isn't a mysterious muse that occasionally graces us with its presence. It isn't a magical talent reserved for creative geniuses. It's a skill like cooking, and like any skill, it can be learned and cultivated until it becomes a strength.

When you develop your creative skills, everything you produce and every interaction you have begins to exude more flavor. Just like a good chef uses their culinary knowledge to combine ingredients and textures in an interesting way, you can leverage a combination of your existing experiences, opinions, and knowledge to add your own unique take on any situation.

Here are some practical tips to boost your brain's creative connections:

Mind Mapping: Use mind maps to represent your ideas and their connections visually. This technique can help you see relationships between them, which you might have missed. Start with a brain dump of all your ideas on a subject, then move them around and tie them together with other ideas.

Collaboration: Share your ideas with others and encourage them to build upon or challenge them. Sometimes, the best creative sparks come from connecting with others. Ask others to help identify your blind spots or resolve conflicts in your thinking. Other people can see challenges with a fresh perspective that may trigger new ideas.

Brainstorming: Set aside dedicated time for brainstorming. Write down every idea, no matter how absurd it seems. Bad ideas help us test the limits and identify our true constraints. You can then work on combining the good parts of bad ideas into something new that will solve the problem. You never know which crazy notion will lead to a brilliant solution.

Constraints as Catalysts: Embrace constraints as creative fuel. They give you boundaries to push against and leverage for anchoring your innovation. Constraints can guide you to the key connections that need to be made between systems or people. They can also force you to think outside the box and find unique solutions. What if that bug was a feature? What if that limitation is actually a unique advantage that will make your idea scarcer and more valuable?

Iterate Multiple Combinations: Rarely does creativity strike in a single moment, and all of the pieces fall together. It often requires multiple iterations and revisions. Don't be afraid to refine and reshape your ideas. The editing process can be extremely

valuable. Sometimes, ideas that don't quite fit the first time can be reordered or reorganized into the perfect combination. Embrace the idea of an ugly first draft and give yourself permission to play with the idea.

Let's try an example. If you were trying to write a creative and funny scene for a new Star Wars movie, you might struggle with a blank sheet of paper. It is a lot of pressure. There have been hundreds of great scenes already; millions of people are going to see this, and millions of dollars are going to be spent on the production.

However, if you give yourself permission to play with connections and combinations, you can build from existing ideas and find something innovative. You could brainstorm all of the existing films' themes, characters, and locations, and you might get an idea for a scene using the Storm Troopers. You have seen them used a lot for comic relief in different movies. Later in the day, you talk with a friend and find out that they are going to the circus that night with their daughter. All of a sudden, you make the connection and come up with an idea for a Storm Trooper Circus! It would be hilarious and give animators a chance to develop some new alien animals. You could show troopers riding giant beasts or swinging from the trapeze. Who knows? But it could be fun!

Remember, a playful spirit is the key to unlocking your creativity.

You need the energy, time, and lack of pressure to play with ideas. You need a safe space to fail and try things that might not work. Just as a good chef needs a few tries to perfect a new recipe, you need to give yourself permission to throw out the bad ideas and start fresh if that's what it takes.

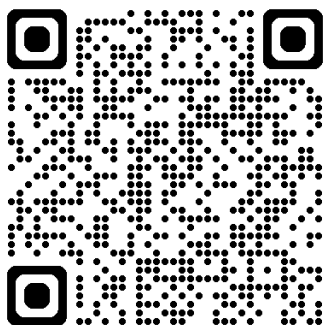
Creativity Challenge: What unusual food combination do you love?



Do you love pineapple on your pizza or peanut butter and pickle sandwiches? Have you ever invented or stumbled upon a delicious combo?

(I love salted peanuts and candy corn in October, and who doesn't love breakfast for dinner!?)

What new ideas can you bring into the world? How can you combine the ordinary to create something extraordinary? Share your quirky concoction with a friend and see what they think. Better yet, share those crazy connections with us @PlayfulHumans.




Playful Human: Karen Morgan

Karen Morgan is seriously funny. She shares comedy through the perceptive eye of a wife and mother, prepared with the tenacity of an attorney and tempered with a dash of Southern charm. Karen shares how she makes time for play despite a demanding schedule. Karen's story proves that you can make fun

happen in any lifestyle. Her work is professional but never boring, outrageously funny yet appropriate for a wide audience.

Brought to you by the
Playful Humans Silent Auction:
Bid on dog whistles and
experiences with mimes!

4  The start and the finish
are the two toughest parts
of any project.

Joke of the Week:

Did you hear about the restaurant on the
moon? Great food, no atmosphere.

"It is a happy talent to know how to play."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

At the start of any project, it feels like you are standing at the edge of a cold swimming pool, hesitant to take that initial plunge. You have dipped your toes in, and you know that it will be refreshing once you get in, but right now, you are paralyzed by the fear of that initial shock to the system. When you are facing that blank page or canvas, getting ready to go live or hit record on a performance, walking into a social event, or exploring a new environment, you experience the same moment of hesitation from a few common psychological barriers.

The Pull of Perfection

It is like driving your new car for the first time. You know you are going to be upset at that first scratch, door-ding, or stain. The pristine newness, the untouched canvas, the new car smell, and the unboxed supplies are never going to survive. Sometimes, we just have to break the seal and make a mess before we can make our magic.

It helps to embrace imperfection. Tell yourself that you are making a draft. You are starting with something beautiful, but it can't stay that way. We have to break a few eggs to make an omelet, and we need permission to make mistakes to live our lives to the fullest. Remember, the movement between order and chaos makes life worth living. If we keep things in order and play it too safe, we just end up bored. Or worse, outside forces ruin our perfect situation anyway.

Procrastination from Self-Doubt

It is the nagging thought that your creation might not measure up to the vision you had in your mind. You might be comparing yourself or your ideas to others. You might be afraid it is too hard or won't come together. You might have impostor syndrome and be questioning if you have what it takes or if you even deserve to succeed.

When we pause from self-doubt, it helps to get outside encouragement. The voices in our heads can be very tricky. Our brains can start making up stories to justify why it is safer not to put ourselves out there. Find a creative buddy or coach who can provide the encouragement and accountability you need to get started. Hold hands with your friend and jump in the pool or get them to push you in if you need it!

In fact, getting started is the key. If you break the project down into smaller tasks, you can actually reverse the story in your head. You can convince yourself that the fears come later, but right now, you are just doing small, insignificant actions (*insignificant to your brain and body's reaction, but huge in regards to getting started and making progress*).

Nothing to see here. Move along fears. Pay no attention to these first bits. You can worry later when we actually share this thing with the world, which brings us to the second hardest part of any project: the finish.

Crossing the finish line on any creative project also contains several psychological barriers, including any perfectionism and fear of failure you kicked down the road at the start. Hitting publish, sharing your work, and facing feedback from an audience can be scary.

If you find yourself revising and editing over and over without a clear end, if you are afraid about how others will react, if you are so attached to your project that it feels like you are a parent worried about sending their kid off to camp, then you might need to try some or all of these tips to cross the finish line.

Set Deadlines: Create a realistic timeline for completion and stick to it. Ship your work whether you like it or not. Often, in creative work, it is hard to tell when a book, painting, song, or speech is completed. Instead, it is likely that it is only as good as you can

make it for now. Deadlines (even artificial ones) create urgency and the constraints we need to finish. The water park is closing for the winter, so we better get to getting.

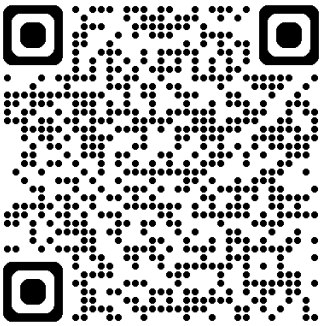
Feedback is Fuel for Better Work: Instead of fearing judgment, great artists use feedback to make their work better. See negative feedback as an opportunity to improve and make your project better. It is not an attack on you personally; it is only more data and insight into the work. It helps to pay attention to whom you are asking. Don't worry about people who don't get what you are trying to do. It is not for them. Don't listen to feedback that is not helpful to doing your best work. Sometimes, people who love us want to keep us safe, and there are others who are afraid of our success. Instead, only worry about the people you seek to serve and listen to the people who want you to be successful.

Embrace Vulnerability: Brene Brown has a very popular TED Talk about the power of sharing yourself with others. Putting our true selves out there can help us work through emotions instead of getting stuck. Sharing our projects is a sign of courage and healthy self-esteem. Trusting others can build confidence and resilience, motivate and inspire others, and lead to stronger relationships.

We build our self-awareness by playing through our creative pursuits, sharing them with others, and starting and finishing projects. We flex our creative muscles, and we learn how to become more confident with practice. We become better versions of ourselves through feedback. So show us your best cannonball and make a splash in the pool of playful possibilities.

Creativity Challenge: Make a mess.

Far too often in our adult lives, we are too worried about making a mess, as if the things around us are more important than the joy in our hearts. I challenge you to make a beautiful mess today. Bust out the glitter, flour, or paint, and get messy! If you have time to read this chapter, you have time to clean up whatever mess you make. Give yourself the joy of playing without perfection.




Playful Human: Allen Clark

Allen is a commercial and advertising photographer based in Nashville, Tennessee. His work can be seen on music packaging, magazines, and countless celebrity and Fortune 500 company websites. Allen has traveled the world doing

what he has described as his dream job with a side of glorified stalking. Get Allen's tips on marketing, networking, and branding to help you turn your creative pursuits into a sustainable career.

Sponsored by Plateaus:

A plateau is the highest form of flattery.

S  **Create a playful environment for creativity to emerge.**

Joke of the Week:

What does oblivious mean?
I have no idea.

"The true object of all human life is play."

- Ursula K. Le Guin

Creativity can be a mischievous muse that often eludes us when we try to force it into our lives and work. It often hides in the shadows until we create the perfect environment for it to emerge. Think of it like inviting a shy kid to an imaginary tea party. They will never join you if you are stressed, tense, or overly enthusiastic. (*It's like parents in Walmart yelling at their kids to calm down. It's just not how calming down works.*) However, if you create a safe space, a gentle invitation, and get into a playful spirit, you can coax them into playing along.

The same goes for creativity in your work. Your inner child can be just as shy if it feels threatened. If you can transform your workspace into a playground for creativity, you might end up with an abundance of innovative ideas and epiphanies rushing in like kids let out for recess.

1. Stress: The Creativity Killer

Imagine your creativity as a delicate flower. A little water can bring out its best growth, but too much is like a heavy rainstorm that can crush it. Research by psychologist Robert Epstein suggests that high stress levels can significantly hinder our creative thinking. So, step one in creating a playful environment is to minimize stress. Take deep breaths, practice mindfulness, and leave your worries at the door. A little motivation is not bad; crushing pressure is.

2. Environment Matters

Your workspace should be a canvas waiting for your creative strokes. Surround yourself with stimulating colors, inspirational quotes, and quirky decorations. Make your workspace a trigger for your creative senses. To get the right outputs, you need the right inputs. Create a space for yourself that empowers your best playful spirit.

3. The Power of Play

Introducing fun activities into your day can bring energy and creativity to your work when you get back to your desk. Try

doodling, solving puzzles, or even having a Nerf gun battle with your co-workers. Such activities can activate different parts of your brain and promote creative thinking. Creativity is a practice that thrives on being used. The more you play in life, the more you find ways to bring play into your work.

4. Shake Up Your Routine

Einstein once said, "Creativity is intelligence having fun." Break the monotony of your daily routine. Take a different route to work, rearrange your office furniture, or try working from a coffee shop for a day. A change of scenery can stimulate fresh ideas. When we break out patterns, we force our brains into a creative problem-solving mode, and we see our work from a different perspective.

5. The Creativity Blend

Metaphor Alert: Think of creativity as a flavored tea blend. Mix your experiences, interests, and knowledge together in your mental shaker. The result? A refreshing sip of innovation. Dive into books, documentaries, or hobbies unrelated to your work. This blend of ideas can lead to unexpected breakthroughs. Watch stand-up comedy, creative videos, or other inspirational people. Listen to creative and high-energy music, and let it improve your mood.

6. Collaboration and Laughter

Speaking of stand-up comedy, laughter is the secret sauce of creativity. Surround yourself with people who make you laugh and encourage your ideas. Collaborative brainstorming sessions can turn into laughter-filled playgrounds of innovation. It is very hard for our bodies and brains to be stressed and laughing at the same time. When you change your energy, you change the chemicals in your brain that allow you to unlock new ideas.

7. The Magic of Sleep

Ever had a eureka moment in the shower? Creativity often visits us when we're relaxed. Ensure you get enough sleep and allow your mind to wander in the dreamy playground of your subconscious. If

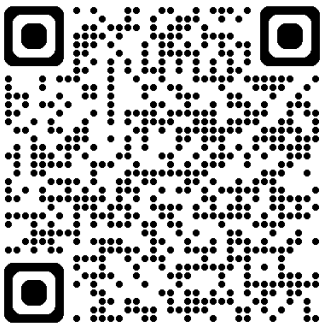
you review your goals or playfully meditate about your challenge before bed, your mind can work on it while you sleep. Many great ideas come as we are falling asleep or just waking up. Keep a notebook by your bedside to capture those midnight musings.

8. The Spark of Serendipity

Creativity isn't always predictable. Be open to serendipity. Engage in chance encounters, explore new technologies, and consider contrarian ideas. You never know when that unexpected spark of brilliance might ignite. But remember, it takes a lot of work to get new ideas from old routines.

Creating an environment for creativity is like setting the stage for a grand performance. Your inner child is the star, and your imagination is the director. So, let your creative muse dance freely on this imaginative stage. You must design the set, the soundtrack, and the story to give your imagination the tools it needs to succeed.

How will you build a creative sanctuary? Where can you craft a stress-free, colorful, and playful environment? Based on what you learned in this lesson, what three changes could you make to your workspace to increase your creative output?



Playful Human: Sarah Iverson

Sarah is a multi-hyphenate Playful Human. She believes that curiosity is something that we all inherently have, but as we get older, we start to lose it. Mindfulness is an important part of the Curious

Sunshine method, as it allows one to ground oneself and check in with one's energy and body. Through art and play, one can

discover their authentic traits and gold nuggets of who they are. She even designed the artwork for us on the next page!

Sponsored by Colorblindness:

I found out I was color-blind the other day.
I didn't see that coming. It came right out of
the orange.



Colorful Creativity

Find some colored pencils, markers, or crayons and fill in this creative space as you wish. A study published in Art Therapy found that structured coloring of a geometric pattern (*like a mandala*) significantly reduced anxiety and increased mindfulness in participants. Additionally, coloring activates different areas of the brain related to creativity and motor skills, helping individuals enter a meditative state that can foster both relaxation and innovative thinking.



Coloring page illustration by Sarah Iverson

6 Choice and control make tasks more interesting.

Joke of the Week:

What do you call a droid that always takes the long way?
An R2-Detour.

"Imagination is the thing that differentiates us from other sentient species on this planet. We have the ability to place our attention in the past, present, or future. That is a uniquely human superpower."

- Girija Kaimal

Life can often feel like a video game; we keep trying to level up, collect coins, develop special skills, and face those big, scary bosses. But nobody wants to be stuck on Level 1, running head-first into the same seemingly simple challenges repeatedly. If you've ever thought, "There has to be a cheat code to skip past this part and make life more interesting," you're onto something! The secrets to interesting video games, work, and life involve mastering two fundamental game mechanics: choice and control.

Hitting the "Flow State": The Power-Up for High-Performers

Have you ever been so deeply immersed in a task that you lost track of time? Welcome to the "Flow State"—a concept brought into play by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. (*No, that's not a secret cheat code; he is a Hungarian-American Psychologist. It's pronounced Me-Hi Chick-Zen-Me-Hi.*)

Much like in video games, real-world flow is activated when there's a perfect balance between the challenge ahead and your skillset. Studies confirm that tasks need to be neither too easy (*button-mashing*) nor too hard (*trying to defeat a boss with a plastic spoon*). Too easy, and you're bored, too hard, and you're overwhelmed. The right level of control lets you dial in the difficulty and keep the game interesting. When we feel like the task at hand is doable but challenging, it requires our full focus and effort. When we are fully engaged, we feel our work is more meaningful.

The Controller of Your Destiny

In video games, your moves are guided by a controller. In the game of life, the Axis of Control serves the same purpose. You decide whether to be proactive (*going full-quest mode*) or reactive (*waiting in defense*). Studies confirm that people who feel they have control over their own actions are the ones who level up faster and enjoy the game more. They're the ones finding secret

passages and hidden power-ups while the rest are still trying to figure out the controls. When we are forced to do a task because of our boss, spouse, or circumstance, we begin to get frustrated and unable to control how we spend our time and energy. Giving ourselves and others the Axis of Control improves our mental well-being and our work.

Choose Your Own Adventure

The game of life is an open-world game where we have the autonomy and the freedom to choose our quests, allies, and equipment, making the experience profoundly engaging. Scientific research shows that having a range of choices makes you more intrinsically motivated, less stressed, and less likely to experience burnout. Think of it as choosing your character class, weapons, and storyline; the more you align these with your interests, the more invested you are in the game. However, too many choices can leave us feeling overwhelmed, so we should stay focused on a few things at a time.

Remember, we also like to feel like we are in control of our fate and that we will have a chance of succeeding, so here are some actionable tips to help you find the right balance of choice and control to unlock your next achievement!

Skill Assessment: Know your character's stats. Realize where your strengths lie and choose challenges that help you level up but won't get you KO'd. Focus on finding the next skill level, about 10-20% above your current ability.

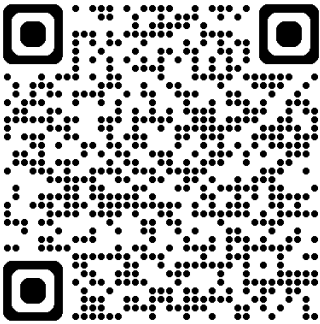
Control Calibration: Regularly check if you're in the driver's seat of your life. If you find yourself in autopilot mode, it's time to seize control back. Protect your schedule and make sure you invest time each day in the activities that are most important to you personally, not outside influences or other people.

Choice Chamber: Take time to explore different routes and options. Don't just settle for the default sword; maybe there's a magical staff that suits you better. Choose tasks, tools, and teammates that can help you explore new ways to level up.

Ready to unlock those achievements?

If you don't feel like you are experiencing as much fun, flow, and fulfillment as you should, look at how much choice and control you feel in your work and play. Those two things are your cheat codes and power-ups, which will help you effortlessly level up in the game of life.

Where in your life are you on autopilot? Where are you feeling overwhelmed? How can you take control and give yourself more options?




Playful Human: Haylee Kalani

Haylee is a high-performance creative coach, host of the Letting It All Hang Out podcast, and entrepreneur co-founder of several projects. Her mission is to guide you through the transformation into becoming the most creative,

effective, and driven version of yourself and feel damn good while doing it.

Sponsored by Unfinished Research:
According to unfinished research,
6 out of 10 people.

7  Understand the three different types of work: Body, Mind, and Spirit

Joke of the Week:

Why did the golfer wear two pairs of pants?
In case he got a hole-in-one.

"We shouldn't stick too close to everyday reality but give room to the reality of the heart, of the mind, and of the imagination. Those things can help us in life."

- Levar Burton

Hard work does not equal success.

Did you know that not all work is created equal? There are at least three types of work, and understanding the difference can make a dramatic impact on your results! Physical, intellectual, and emotional work behave differently. The type of work depends on whether you are using your body, mind, or spirit to accomplish the goal.

Physical Work:

The Sweaty Business of Bodily Effort

Think of physical work like building a brick wall. Each brick you add to the wall makes it higher, wider, or longer. In the world of manual labor, hard work equals success. This grind has a straightforward, predictable pattern: energy in and results out. We can't do physical labor nonstop for very long before we have to rest, but we can build stamina and strength over time.

This type of work typically has a clearly defined start and finish. We have learned to manage this type of work fairly well, and recognizing progress is easy.

In most cases, we know that we need sleep, regular breaks, and meals to keep going. We have learned that humans can sustainably do about 8 hours of physical labor per day and about 40 hours per week.

Here are a few tips for this type of work:

- **Pace Yourself:** Rome wasn't built in a day, and your wall won't be either. Focus on finding a sustainable yet challenging level of work to maintain your flow.
- **Know Your Limits:** Work within your physical capabilities. No one needs a martyr; we need a functioning human. Be

safe and protect your body.

- **Rest and Recover:** Again, your body is your ultimate tool. Keep it sharp by allowing time for proper rest during breaks, get plenty of sleep, and maintain yourself with proper nutrition.

Intellectual Work:

The Diminishing Returns of Brain Drain

Intellectual work is like playing a game of chess with yourself all day. You start your day like a Grandmaster, but the longer you play, the more pieces you lose on your board. You start to slow down your pace, and eventually, you only have pawns and your king left, moving one step at a time.

Why does this happen? Because your brain gets tired just like your body. However, it is harder to realize when we are slowing down, and we can't really build stamina in this type of work. Mental work often has diminishing returns, which means the harder you work, the exponentially harder it is to get to the next level. Using your mind is not a straightforward task like building a wall. It is more like a shifting maze where each decision could lead you closer to or further from your goal, and the maze gets more complex the longer you're in it. With mental work, it can be very hard to tell when we are done with the task, and it is easy to get stuck. Measuring progress can be difficult because it may come in waves.

Research studies have shown that programmers who work more than 60 hours per week for more than six weeks will slow down so much that they end up producing fewer lines of code than their peers who only work 40 hours per week. Modern research indicates that we can only perform at our intellectual peak for about 4-5 hours per day when well rested, but to make matters

worse, chronic stress and repeated burnout can significantly lower your productive time.

Here are a few tips for finding success in mental work:

- **Break It Down:** Projects should be like tapas: small, manageable bites. The Pomodoro Technique is working for 25 minutes, followed by a 5-minute break. A study by the University of Illinois shows that brief diversions vastly improve focus.
- **Time Blocks:** Keep your work sessions confined to specific times to retain your brain's firepower. Recharge yourself with physical exercise, meditation, and naps in between work sessions.
- **Stay in Peak Performance:** Numerous studies show that learning, sleep, proper diet, and exercise are key to mental health and intellectual performance. A diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants, and vitamins, alongside adequate hydration, supports brain health and cognitive abilities. Regular physical activity is shown to boost brain function, enhance neurogenesis, the creation of new brain cells, and improve mood and energy levels.

Emotional Work:

The Whimsical Serendipity of Creative Productivity

Emotional work is the magical muse that strikes with sudden and impactful creativity. It can feel elusive, captivating, and a little unpredictable because it is often spiritual. These eureka moments of insight and heart-to-heart emotional connections are tricky because forcing things can actually scare the moment away.

It is an important backward law of life that the harder we try to be creative, the less we are. The more we try to sell someone, the less likely they are to buy. The harder we try to solve a problem, the more likely we are to make it worse. The more you try to make someone love you, the less likely they are to connect. With emotional, spiritual, or creative work, we have to let go of traditional work boundaries and open ourselves up to other possibilities. However, we can build this skill and create momentum for ourselves through practice.

With this emotional work, it is almost never done. We can always deepen relationships, keep improving our art projects, or find a way to level up our creative problem-solving. Often, we have to decide when we have done enough spiritually. There is no clearly defined finish line and measuring progress is almost impossible.

Emotional labor can be incredibly invigorating and lead to better well-being and job satisfaction when things are going well, but trying to force it or fight it can quickly lead to burnout, stress, and high levels of anguish. To perform at our spiritual best, we need flexibility in work hours, supportive leadership, and safe environments that encourage experimentation without fear of failure, and again, working beyond 4-5 hours per day can lead to poor quality and less creative output.

Here are a few tips for emotional workers:

- **Let Go:** Trying to force creativity is like trying to catch smoke with your bare hands. Instead of trying to force your emotional output, focus on increasing your inputs. Engaging with diverse cultures, ideas, and fields can enhance creativity. Continuous learning and curiosity feed creative output.
- **Be Mindful:** Emotional and creative work thrive in the moment. Mindfulness practices can improve emotional

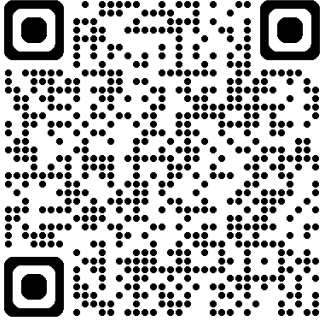
regulation, enhance empathy, and boost creativity. Reflective practices help us understand emotional experiences and foster deeper connections.

- **Space Out:** Sometimes, the best ideas come when you're doing absolutely nothing related to work. Take a walk, work with your hands, or phone a friend. In an ironic twist, distracting yourself can help you get closer to your breakthrough, as long as you have done your preparation, and you are not avoiding the work.
- **Create an Engaging Environment:** Creative spaces that are aesthetically pleasing and changeable can stimulate creativity. Natural light, comfortable furnishings, and the availability of creative tools (*like whiteboards and artistic supplies*) can also help you find your muse. Collaborative environments where ideas can be shared and refined with others help enhance creativity and emotional resonance with work.

Understanding these three types of work (*body, mind, and spirit*) allows you to choose the environment, schedule, teammates, and effort needed to produce your best results. Use this awareness to tailor your approach to your project and treat your energy like its precious resource. Burnout is not a trophy; it's a warning sign that you're doing the wrong type of work, or you missed your ideal stopping point.

Take a break and evaluate your approach.

Balancing work demands with adequate support and recovery can help maintain productivity, enhance job satisfaction, and promote healthy work-life integration—your mind, body, and spirit will thank you.




What type of work do you do most in your career? Have you optimized your life for that style?

Playful Human: Christine Samuel

Is it possible to move purposefully toward an as-yet-unknown destination? That's what Coddiwomple means! Christine is a well-being coach and founder of the Coddiwomple Experiment. She is leading herself and others on a journey of creating what matters from the heart and from a place of joy, curiosity, and flow.

Sponsored by Self-Driving Cars:
Now that there are self-driving cars,
there will eventually be a country song where
the guy's truck leaves him.

8  Humor is tension,
pattern, and positive release
of the tension.

Joke of the Week:

Did you hear about the guys who
dipped their balls in glitter?
They were pretty nuts.

*"To truly laugh, you must be able to take your pain
and play with it!"*

- Charlie Chaplin

The Seriously Laughable Science of Humor

Humor can be the spice of life, the WD-40 to social awkwardness, and therapy for the burned out and bored. Have you ever wondered why something is funny?

There's actual science and psychology behind humor. Yes, scientists in lab coats have been diligently dissecting jokes like frogs in a high school biology class, and they have some interesting insights into how we can have more fun.

Warning: As we explain these principles, try not to overthink humor. It's like explaining a joke or revealing a magic trick—it loses its charm. Instead, use these lessons to see how you can inject some spontaneity into your life, relieve some tension, and break those boring patterns that are holding you back.

Humor comes from establishing tension and patterns, then a positive release of that tension that breaks the pattern.

In comedy, tension is the expectation, the dangling carrot, the elephant in the room, the light calling the moth to the comedic flame. According to the Incongruity Theory, humor arises when there's a discrepancy between what we expect and what actually happens. This is like going to the grocery store for milk and coming back with a puppy—totally unexpected, yet completely entertaining. We will find it funny as long as the surprise is released in a positive direction. If your partner really needed the milk for your baby, it is not as humorous.

Humans are creatures of habit. We are built to recognize patterns. Our brains constantly try to predict the future to keep us safe, so when something unexpected happens, it either scares or delights us. Imagine beginning a classic joke format like, "Why didn't the toilet paper cross the road?" and ending with, "Because it got stuck in a crack." Okay, maybe not the best example, but it breaks the

pattern you have heard from all of the chicken jokes over the years.

Peter McGraw and Joel Warner, who wrote "The Humor Code," found that the most amusing things operate on a benign violation of our preconceived notions—a situation that's a violation of some social or moral code yet is perceived to be harmless. It's like someone slipping on a banana peel but landing safely in a perfect gymnastic split. Violation? Yes. Harmless? Sure. Funny? You bet!

Famous comedian George Carlin once said,
"That is what comics do: stand the
conventional wisdom on its head."

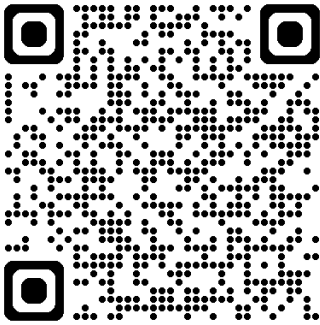
Humor messes with your ideas of what is socially acceptable, expected, and normal. Jokes create a tension between what is considered normal and our creative genius. It's like pulling a rubber band around your hand to make a finger gun and then—BAM!—letting loose and shooting it across the office.

The positive release of tension, or the "punchline," is when the humor snaps free like the rubberband shooting off our finger. But, you know what is even funnier? When your friend tries to shoot it back, but it goes the wrong way and snaps their own hand. Here, psychologists have identified the Superiority Theory: we laugh at the misfortune or stupidity of others because it makes us feel, well, superior. Like when your buddy Steve thinks quinoa is pronounced "kwin-o-a." (*Ha, classic Steve.*) Sometimes, we can even laugh at the stupidity of ourselves as long as we feel like the comedian is keeping us safe while they poke fun at us.

Sigmund Freud's Relief Theory discusses the release of tension. He believed that laughter releases psychological tension like a mental sneeze. Do you sometimes laugh at inappropriate times or switch from laughing to crying and back? This is a physiological reaction to the release of mental tension.

Humor is an engaging mix of tension, patterns, and a positive release, creatively challenging your cognitive biases and expectations. But, if you want to impress at parties, it is probably best to tell a joke instead of tossing around terms like "Incongruity Theory" and "Superiority Theory." Sharing a sense of humor can create better connections, build a culture of humility, and encourage creative thinking, so steal one of the jokes from this book and try it on an unsuspecting victim.

Where in your life do you need to relieve tension? Where are you taking yourself or your work a bit too seriously? How can you relieve that tension in a positive way while keeping yourself physically and mentally safe?



Playful Human: Glen Tickle


Glen talks about his journey from his days as a substitute teacher to commanding the stage with his comedy. You won't want to miss how he honed his craft by testing his comedic chops on unsuspecting preschoolers - a humorous yet

enlightening revelation about on-stage material development.

Sponsored by Fairytales:

Life is not a fairy tale.

If you lose a shoe at midnight,
you're probably just drunk.

9  **Don't be comfortable.
Be awesome.**

Joke of the Week:

What's the best thing about Switzerland?
I don't know, but the flag is a big plus.

"Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity."

- Kay Redfield Jamison

Do you believe that the key to an extraordinary life doesn't lie in removing discomfort but in adding more joy?

The Soggy Cereal of Comfort Zones

A study in the 'Journal of Consumer Research' found that people default to familiar choices to minimize risk. Doing the same things over and over, like your breakfast routine, makes you feel safe, and it saves energy. It's basically the brain's way of reducing decision fatigue. But over time, it becomes the soggy cereal of existence—still edible but lacking crunch or zest. What feels safe in the short term is a trade-off for your long-term happiness.

The risks of playing it safe are often minimized. Remember Blockbuster? Remember the pandemic? Change and discomfort are coming for you, no matter how safe you play it. You might as well be the one to choose your change and pick the challenges that bring you the most fulfillment.

Life is an ever-changing, dynamic landscape. It gives you multiple opportunities to be awesome every day and allows you to tap into your full potential. The crazy thing about human nature is that we can learn to normalize change! We can become comfortable with being uncomfortable.

We can find joy in the fleeting nature of satisfaction and jump from one safe zone to another like we are jumping from the couch to a chair in the Floor Is Lava game. We can spice up our routines and have breakfast for dinner instead!

Channel Your Inner Willy Wonka

Instead of following the herd, consider people like Willy Wonka or Salvador Dalí, who didn't just change the game—they invented new ones. Willy Wonka didn't make another chocolate bar; he made an edible wonderland. Dalí didn't create another portrait

like the 'Mona Lisa'; he gave us melting clocks. That's the magic of playful creativity—it elevates you and brings joy to others.

Tips for Being More Awesome:

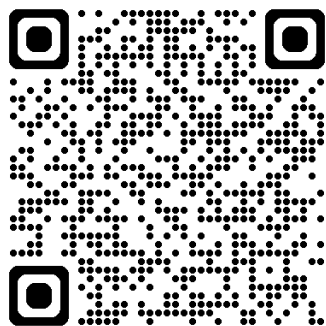
- **Innovate Your Routine:** Turn your daily routine into a playful game. Make coffee brewing an art form! Challenge yourself to be uncomfortable a few times each day.
- **Limitless Learning:** Instead of formal courses, try picking up skills through fun projects and experiments. Watch a video tutorial or look up a new recipe and try it out!
- **Surround Yourself With Awesome People:** People who make you think “What if?” are much better than those who make you think “What for?” Don’t take advice from people who are worried about what will happen if you fail. Take advice from those who will help you learn from your mistakes and coach you on how to succeed next time.
- **Revel in Randomness:** Sometimes, the most creative ideas come from the most unexpected places. Don’t fight against the unknown. Embrace it. Look for ways to leverage the unexpected to your advantage and get cozy with a little chaos.
- **Write Your Own Story:** Don’t try to fit in, follow the crowd, or keep up with the Kardashians, the Joneses, or anyone else, for that matter. You get one chance to write the story of your life. Start with this chapter you are working on today. Laugh at your mistakes and turn it into a comedy.

Make it an epic comeback story. Do something worthy of being written about. Be awesome!

Are you going to watch the days go by until you run out of time? Are you going to keep wearing those old, baggy jeans, or are you ready to slip on something a little more spectacular?

Go on, dazzle us! Being awesome isn't about being safe, comfortable, or mistake-free. Being awesome means being courageous, unique, and overcoming challenges. It's about doing uncomfortable things that other people are not willing to do.

Remember, being awesome isn't a destination; it's a way of life.



Playful Human: Randy Miller

Randy is a legendary radio broadcaster and veteran advocate. He talks about his favorite way he got fired as a morning show shock jock and how he won his wife in a radio station contest. Learn how he supports the troops with his shows,

National Defense Network and the Celebrity Salute Podcast!

Brought to you by National Anthems:
The world's most popular country songs.



Scrambling to Break Out of Your Comfort Zone

Unscramble the following words related to stepping out of your comfort zone and embracing a dynamic life. Each scrambled word represents a key concept from the chapter.

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Use the circled letters from the words in the top part to complete the final word or phrase at the bottom. Each circled letter is used just once in the anagram.

10  Improvisers
are valuable.

Joke of the Week:

Why does the mermaid wear seashells?
She outgrew her b-shells.

*"The debt we owe to the play of the imagination is
incalculable."*

- Carl Jung

Instruction followers are cheap.

Playfulness Is the Secret Sauce of Success

What is more valuable to your organization, society, and humanity: should we be meticulous, card-carrying members of the instruction-followers club or join the ranks of rule-bending improvisers called Playful Humans? It's like choosing between a scripted reality show and a spontaneous night of improv comedy. The scripted show might have higher production values, better marketing, and even get more viewers, but there's a certain "je ne sais quoi" about the unpredictability of improv. People love to do and watch improv precisely because it doesn't have the production value, storyline, and security of a script.

The Price Tag of Predictability

Instruction followers often try to live in a predictable landscape where A leads to B, and B reliably turns into C. They want a clear-cut path to the promised ideals of the "American Dream." Not that there's anything wrong with that; they keep the cogs turning, and the straight and narrow has its benefits. However, the price of this predictability is, well, predictability. These folks often earn less and feel less fulfilled in their jobs. A study from the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) found that jobs with less need for cognitive ability and more routine tasks offer lower wages.

Now, you have made it this far into the book because you are a Playful Human, one of the improvisers. These people are your jazz musicians in a world of sheet music. They can look at a situation, throw the rulebook out the window, and still emerge victorious. According to Harvard Business Review, improvisational skills are in high demand for leadership roles, often yielding higher salaries and promotions. HBR also found that improvisational companies often outperform their competition. Why? Because when Plan A

falls through, and Plan B looks like Swiss cheese, they whip up a Plan C on the fly.

When you live creatively, mistakes and missteps aren't the enemy; they're your quirky sidekicks in the epic story of your success. They add a twist to your tale, showing you paths you might not have found otherwise.

The Science Behind Having More Fun

If elevating your income isn't enough to sway you, let's talk about fun—the real, unfiltered, "I'm living my best life" kind of fun. Neuroscientific studies have shown that engaging in improvisational activities boosts dopamine levels, making you happier. Daniel Pink, author of "Drive," says that autonomy is one of the key motivators for job satisfaction. Improvisers tend to naturally seek and create more control over their situation, which leads to a more engaged and satisfying work experience. And, let's not forget the "flow state," where you lose track of time because you're wholly engrossed in a fun and fulfilling activity. Improvising can get you there faster than you can say, "Whose Line Is It Anyway?"

Unscript Your Life:

Tips to Be a Better Improviser

- **Embrace the "Yes, And" Technique:** The cornerstone of any improv routine. Don't negate your teammates; cooperate! It keeps conversations flowing and builds on your collective intelligence and creativity.
- **Keep Learning:** Improvisers aren't just winging it; they're really making well-informed judgments based on experience and intuition. The more you know and the more

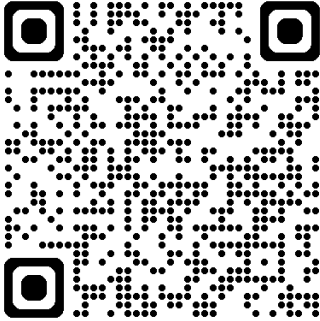
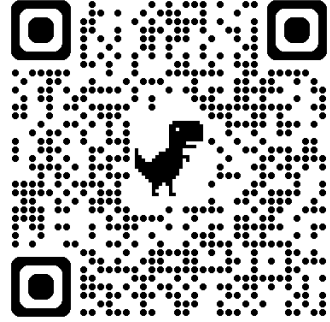
you practice, the better you can riff. Keep up with the latest trends, research, and technologies, and spend time learning to deal with uncertainty.

- **Step Out of Your Comfort Zone:** Routine is the enemy of improvisation. The more varied your experiences, the more material you have to draw upon. You need more input, better stories, and unusual friends.
(Think Kramer in Seinfeld.)
- **Listen and Adapt:** Good improvisers are also excellent listeners. They react to what's happening around them rather than sticking rigidly to a preconceived plan. One of the biggest benefits of improv is that you can change your strategy with each bit of new information.
- **Don't Fear Failure:** You're going to make mistakes, and that's okay. The worst nights make for the best stories! You learn the most about yourself and your craft when you are testing your limits.
- **Harness Tech Tools:** To improve your skills, leverage new technologies like virtual reality for practice scenarios or AI-driven insights to add to your natural human intuition.
(Personally, I love to brainstorm with AI and use a bunch of unusual prompts that lead to new ideas.)

So, what's it going to be? The safety of a pre-paved road that may or may not lead to a destination you enjoy or the excitement of blazing your own trail? Remember, your life is the journey, not the destination. Throw in some extra twists and turns to make it memorable.

Predict your playfulness.


Improvising doesn't mean that you are erratic and unpredictable. *(At HubSpot's Inbound conference, I proved that you can have fun, leave things to chance, and still be 100% accurate in your performance. I brought a random person on stage and made him read my mind. I had no idea what would happen when I walked onto one of the most important stages of my career, but I knew without a shadow of a doubt that it would be fun for me and the audience!)*



Playful Human: Lisa Forbes and David Thomas

The "Professors at Play," explain how games can be a powerful tool for learning, engagement, and connection. Hear their arguments for incorporating more play into academia and beyond to enhance creativity, problem-solving, and social interaction.

Brought to you by the hit song Hello:
If you thought of Lionel Richie instead of
Adell, you are probably sore today.

J  **Leverage the limits and embrace the edges.**

Joke of the Week:

Why don't scientists trust atoms?
Because they make up everything!

"Sometimes people forget that play is learning and learning is play."

- Peter Dixon

Embrace the Box: How More Options Lead to More Searching, Not More Answers!

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. People often think you need a vast expanse of mental real estate, tons of resources, and oodles of time to come up with breakthrough ideas. But here's the thing: sometimes, the tighter the box, the more creative the Jack of an idea that pops out of it. When it comes to creativity, more is a bore, and less is best!

Have you ever walked into a supermarket and felt overwhelmed with 50 types of cereal to choose from? This is the "paradox of choice," a term coined by psychologist Barry Schwartz. His research suggests that more choices often lead to decision paralysis, not better decisions. When we have a few choices, say less than 4, we can make a quick decision and be happy with it. However, when we have 50 choices, we must spend more time and effort sorting through them. (*I didn't know about you, but my joy leaves the experience at about the same time as a spreadsheet enters!*) Often, we are also less satisfied with our final choice because we had to say no to 49 other viable options instead of only 3. The opportunity costs you give up are much greater.

Too many options can drain cognitive resources and make you skip choosing altogether. Instead of committing and creating, we end up perplexed and procrastinating.

Constraints Are Your New BFF

Think of constraints as guardrails on a winding mountain road. They keep you from flying off the cliff, and they can help you get to your creative summit more safely. Constraints encourage problem-solving, resourcefulness, and innovation.

In a study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, researchers found that limited resources actually

fostered enhanced problem-solving and creativity. Having limitations forces you to focus on what's essential, like an expert sculptor finding their shape. Only what's necessary stays; the rest is chipped away.

How to Be a Constraint Connoisseur:

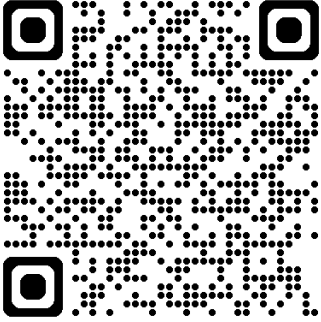
- **Identify Core Elements:** What is the real problem you are trying to solve? Who is the solution for? What does success look, feel, and sound like? Be like Marie Kondo and ask, "What really sparks joy in my project?" Focus on that.
- **Time-box:** Use time management strategies to your advantage. Knowing you have limited time will juice up your focus. Parkinson's Law states that work expands to fit the time available for its completion. If you give yourself less time, you will work faster and simplify the challenge. Just get started, and the magic will happen!
- **Embrace Limitations:** Use setbacks and mistakes as fuel. They aren't signs that you're veering off track but nudges toward a potentially groundbreaking path. Have you ever heard of Post-it notes? This game-changing product was born from a "failed" adhesive. Dr. Spencer Silver intended to create super-strong glue but ended up with a weaker, repositionable one. The apparent setback was, in reality, a lesson in serendipitous innovation.
- **Kill Your Darlings:** British writer Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, in a 1914 lecture series, advised writers to "murder their darlings." This advice means that writers should be willing to remove their favorite elements—whether sentences, paragraphs, or ideas—if they do not serve the overall work.

The idea is that being too attached to particular aspects of one's work can hinder the process of editing and refining, potentially compromising the quality of the final product. Sometimes, you have to sacrifice a good idea for a great one. Don't get too attached to any one solution. Keep solving for the overall challenge.

- **Iterate:** Think of your creative process as software development. Version 1.0 won't be perfect. So, keep updating and upgrading your ideas. Remember, most creative works are never done; they are just as good as you can make them at the time. Keep experimenting. Keep improving. Keep going!

In the pursuit of creative nirvana, sometimes the narrow, bumpy lanes are more rewarding than the sprawling, multi-lane highways. Constraints are not the killjoys of creativity; they're the catalysts. They force us to look beyond the obvious, to think not just out of the box but about the box itself. So, the next time you feel restricted by your boss, budget, or busyness, remember: it's not a prison; it's a cocoon. What emerges might just surprise you!

Now, go create your next masterpiece. 🧠



Playful Human: Dan Henk

Dan's early career included drawing political cartoons for Madcap Magazine and illustrating underground projects. In the 2000s, his tattoo work started appearing in both a growing number of tattoo magazines and more fine art-

influenced outlets, and many tattoo-related books. He is now a published author, writing novels, short stories, and compiling an illustrated calendar featuring a variety of artists.

Sponsored by Pro-Tips for
Peeing in the Shower:
You have to be the one taking a shower.
My ex was pissed.

Q  Your inner child's voice is
a whisper.

Joke of the Week:

Did you hear that Elton John bought a
treadmill for his pet rabbit?
It's a little fit bunny.

*"Imagination is the only key to the future. Without it,
none exists—with it, all things are possible."*

- D.W. Winnicott

Distractions are a rock concert.

Have you ever heard the voice of your "inner child" whisper a little idea, joke, or prank in your head? How often do you listen to your playful intuition? How often does it get silenced by the rational adult or critical parent in your head? Isn't the stress and pressure of adulting overwhelming, like the music at a rock concert?

Being creative, funny, or innovative can feel like trying to hear the words of your friend amidst blaring electric guitars and pounding drums. Let's decode this volume imbalance.

Your brain operates like an overzealous DJ with an identity crisis. It switches genres from hip hop to NPR, to heavy metal to commercial break, and back to pop music. There's a neuroscience explanation for this. The amygdala, that center chunk of your brain that looks out for danger, is like an anxious dog barking at every passerby—making fears and threats louder in your mind. On the other hand, the prefrontal cortex, the outside of your brain in charge of rational thought, often has the volume turned down like background jazz in an elevator. These creative thoughts are less important to our evolutionary survival, but they are critical to our happiness.

Facts Over Feels

Research has shown that negative experiences or fears trigger stronger and more lasting neural connections than positive ones. It's a survival mechanism dating back to caveman days. Your brain makes almost permanent recordings of negativity. However, it is not biologically as important to encode positive experiences in your mind. You must consciously remind yourself of positive thoughts and feelings and practice gratitude to cut through the noise.

The Authority Amplifiers

Let's talk about authority figures. From parents to bosses, they sometimes act like they have a bullhorn, amplifying their voice while diminishing yours. They're an important part of the social framework that's needed for a functioning organization, but sometimes, an order from your boss or parent will override your creative instinct. The voices of your parents and other authorities are present from your very birth. According to transactional analysis, our scripts from authority figures are recorded from ages 0-6 years old, and they are not very easily deleted or replaced, so we need to learn to mute them.

Tips for Tuning Out Your Inner Tyrants

Open a Dialogue: Challenge your authority records respectfully, at least in your head. Remind yourself or share your perspective based on your lived experience, and don't take others' words for it. Be your own guitar solo in the symphony of your thoughts.

Mindful Action: Your responsibilities and distractions are like those incessant push notifications that just keep buzzing. They're the interruptive commercials that you never asked for in the middle of your non-stop rock block.

Take a 5-minute break to breathe and reset. Turn down the volume knob on life's distractions. Tune into your thoughts for a few minutes and listen for those whispers of your inner child. Then act with your true intentions instead of letting your brain autoplays negative thoughts.

Do a Digital Detox: Allocate specific times for distractions. You wouldn't invite the drummer from the rock concert into your tranquil flute practice, would you? Turn off tech, delete distractions, and make mental space for the music you want to play.

Prioritize Play: Studies show that unstructured play can increase creativity and problem-solving skills. Blocking out an hour a day for unscheduled activities can work wonders. Stay in touch with your inner child.

Psychological Safety: Remember to create an environment that nurtures your child. Think of it as building a soundproof room for your inner child to play freely.

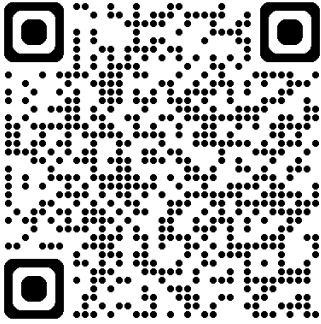
Listening to your inner child isn't about ignoring the world's rock concert. It's about being the composer of your life—choosing when to let your creativity take center stage. You can learn to find your voice, turn down the noise, and dance like no one is watching.

In what situations are you likely to be overwhelmed, distracted, or catering to authority instead of doing your best work? What are three things you could do to turn down the noise and crank up your creativity? What will you create today that the world has never seen before?

Unleash your inner child.

Which of the following activities would you most enjoy on a rainy day?

- A. Painting or drawing
- B. Writing a story
- C. Building a pillow fort
- D. Hosting a tea party
- E. Build a LEGO kit



Playful Human: Jordana Confino

Jordana, a former Type-A legal eagle turned positive psychology guru, shares her personal awakening to a life beyond the relentless pursuit of flawlessness. Her insights shed light on the often misunderstood relationship between play, productivity, and well-being.

Sponsored by Mozart:

I hate it when people try to pretend they know about Mozart, and they haven't even seen one of his paintings.

❖ Create your present and
design your future.

Joke of the Week:

If you ask Rick Astley to borrow his copy of the animated movie Up, you create a paradox because he can never give you Up and never let you down at the same time.

"It is paradoxical that many educators and parents still differentiate between a time for learning and a time for play without seeing the vital connection between them."

- Leo F. Buscaglia

The Art of Life Design

You are the artist, and life is your canvas. Don't settle for being a doodle in the corner of someone else's masterpiece. You're reading this because you are ready to grab that clay, pick up that chisel, and create a masterpiece of a life like Michelangelo carving David. *(You should also be as excited about it as Michelangelo is about parties, pizza, and nunchucks, but I might be mixing up my Mikes.)*

Trusting other people, data, or systems with your life's decisions is like letting a stranger pick your tattoos. It might be a Picasso or a stick figure. Are you willing to live with their decision for the rest of your life? *(If so, reach out to me. I have some tattoo ideas.)* If not, let's rethink a few things.

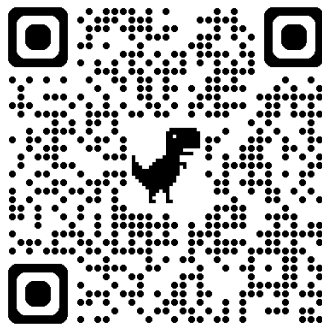
You can control your life, or it will control you. Being in control significantly enhances well-being and lowers depression. You get to choose how you will respond to your situation in the present. Regardless of what has happened in your past, in this moment and all future ones, you get to craft the life of your dreams.

Tips for Creating Your Life

1. Set Vivid Goals. Artists start with a vision. Whether it's a business empire or mastering the tango, make your goals vivid, specific, and exciting. Research from Dr. Gail Matthews at Dominican University found that specific goal setting increases achievement.

2. Design Your Ideal Day. Have you ever thought of what a perfect day looks like for you? From the coffee blend you sip to wake up to the type of work you do to the amount of sunshine and physical activity you need to be happy, write it all out. Remember to pencil in time for play, and feel free to leave out deadlines and spreadsheets you don't enjoy.

*(Yes, some people enjoy spreadsheets!
[Google Matt Parker](#) or scan this QR
Code to find another creative nerd.)*



3. Add Your Artistic Signature.

What is your personal brand? How do you want the world to see you? Adventurous, sophisticated, a blend of Elon Musk and Tony Stark? Why you? Your personal brand is your essence, your personal flavor that people will come to know and love (*or hate; you can't win them all*).

4. Take Control of Time. Time is your most limited resource. How do you want to spend it? What are your short-term goals? What are your long-term dreams? Time management isn't just for the type A's; it's for anyone who wants to seize the day. Plan to take action every day that moves you confidently in the direction of your dreams.

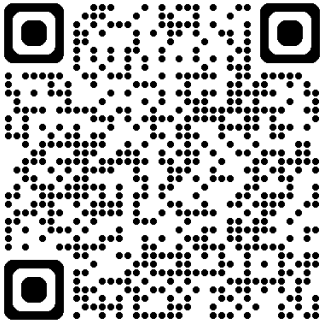
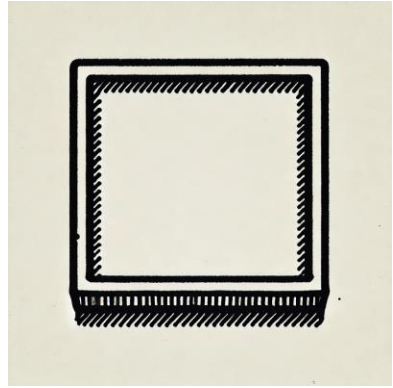
Your life is created one brush stroke at a time in the present. Don't let your past define your future. Imagine a life where you are free to be more playful and free.

What action can you take today that will make your life better tomorrow? What would your future self be thankful you did now?

But remember, creating your life isn't a chore; it's an art form, so let's not take ourselves too seriously. Life design is about playfulness, imagination, and, yes, a little bit of rebellion. It's your life. You can color outside the lines if you want. Your future self will thank you for taking a nap, a vacation, or a few hours to play outside. But most importantly, your future self needs you to design a more fun and fulfilling life.

Paint your world in colorful hues.

Your life is your ongoing project, your magnum opus. So go ahead and channel your inner artist. Pause and doodle the first thing that comes to mind when you think of creativity. Use the rest of this page to make a little sketch to remind you of the most important takeaway from this section.



Playful Human: Aisha Makara


Aisha is an extraordinary artist and world traveler. Her transformative journey from being an orphan in Russia to becoming a global artist is nothing short of remarkable. Her experiences navigating her unsupportive environment, moving to America, and daring to send her art to space icons like Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Richard Branson will leave you inspired to head out on your next adventure!

Sponsored by 6:30:
It is the best time on a clock, hands down.

Section 3

Clubs ♣ Conditioning ♣ Flow

Clubs represent physical and mental conditioning vital for sustaining energy and resilience in our daily lives. We'll learn how to condition our bodies and minds to handle life's demands with grace and strength. Through play, we build the resilience needed to thrive, and we tap into our Flow State, where we perform at our absolute peak.

A  Happiness leads
to success, not the other
way around.

Joke of the Week:

Why did the man get fired from the orange juice factory? He couldn't concentrate.

"I believe that those boys who take part in rough, hard play outside of school will not find any need for horse-play in school."

- Theodore Roosevelt

Reversing the Equation for a Fulfilling Life

You might have thought to yourself, "If I'm successful at ____, then I'll be happy." This conventional achievement thinking suggests that success proceeds happiness as if achieving particular milestones—whether it's landing your dream job, amassing wealth, or finding your soulmate—will somehow make your life complete. But what if I told you we've got it backward? Research, experience, and a sprinkle of common sense suggest that happiness can actually lead to success, not the other way around.

The Three F's of Success

Fun - Imagine life as a game of basketball. Would you rather play with teammates who are down in the dumps or those who are energized and optimistic? When you're happy, you're more likely to dive into experiences wholeheartedly and explore new avenues that might lead to success. This spontaneity and open-mindedness can lead to "aha" moments and innovation. Happiness helps you dribble through life's challenges with flair.

Flow - It's a lot easier to achieve when you're happy. In this mental state, your productivity soars, and you're performing at your peak. You become the point guard of your own success with every behind-the-back pass, hitting your teammates in stride with precision timing.

Fulfillment - Happiness fuels a sense of confidence and purpose. When you're happy, it's like having fresh legs after halftime. You can run further and play harder, leading to more success. They say offense wins games, and defense wins championships. You're more likely to face challenges head-on, from building a family to building a business, if you are feeling happy, healthy, and wise.

The Business of Being Happy

A meta-analysis of success found that happy individuals are more likely to achieve high incomes and superior work outcomes.

According to a study by the University of Warwick, happy workers are 12% more productive than their less happy counterparts. This productivity isn't just good for business; it's good for the individual, as it often leads to professional growth and, consequently, financial success. Playful salespeople sell 37% more than their burnout peers.

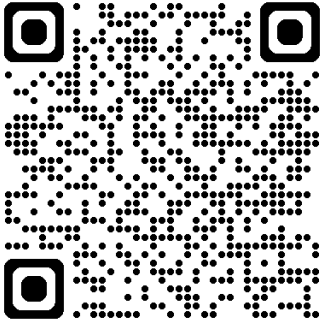
Let's be real. Nobody enjoys being around Debbie Downer. A study in the 'Journal of Applied Psychology' showed that positive individuals had better peer evaluations and higher incomes than their less positive peers. Essentially, happiness can make you a people magnet, opening doors you didn't even know existed.

Happiness is the cornerstone of success. It enhances our creativity, improves our productivity, and enriches our relationships, which, in turn, paves the way for broader success.

By shifting your focus to being happier in the present, you're not just improving your current life experience. You're also setting the stage for future achievements. Think of it as your happiness practice that builds the skills, mindset, and teamwork you need to win the big game.

Journal your journey.

Can you think of a time when you were wishing for success instead of becoming who you need to be in order to achieve it? What could you do to make yourself happier now? Reflect on something meaningful, journal your thoughts by writing down things you're grateful for or times you helped someone else. How can you enjoy the journey instead of waiting until you get to the destination?



Playful Human: Jeff Harry

Jeff Harry is an international speaker, play consultant, and positive psychology coach. He helps teams address toxicity in the workplace through play. His play has been featured in the NY Times, AJ+, SoulPancake, the SF Chronicle, and

CNN. Jeff believes that we already have many of the answers we seek, and by simply unleashing our inner child, we can find our purpose and, in turn, help to create a better world.

Brought to you by a new Anti-Gloating
Cream: Go ahead and rub it in!

2♣ People do more of what
is satisfying, fun, and easy.

Joke of the Week:

Why is playing poker pirates so addictive?
Once ye lose yer first hand, you get hooked.

*“When you wake up every day, you have two choices.
You can either be positive or negative, an optimist or
a pessimist. I choose to be an optimist. It’s all a
matter of perspective.”*

- Harvey Mackay

The Two Sides of the Stress Coin

If you have ever found yourself in distress, worn down from the daily grind, and ready to give up, that's the bad kind of stress. (*When you have run out of shits to give.*) But, you have probably never heard of the term eustress, which is a good kind of stress. Eustress is a sprinkle of spice that makes life interesting without being overwhelming.

Before you try to take a chill pill and remove all of the stress from your life, you should know about some magical benefits of eustress, which provide a unique kind of satisfaction. Solvable challenges are key to building a playground of productivity and long-term happiness.

Stress and tension rightfully get a bad rap because we usually associate it with the evil twin, distress. However, its overlooked good twin, eustress, is the playful feeling of immersion in a task that is enjoyable. Think about how you feel when you are 100% engrossed in playing a game right before you make the final move to win the game, when you are lost in solving a difficult puzzle, or leveling up in a video game. This 'good stress' provides a shot of adrenaline and dopamine, creating a cocktail of satisfaction and accomplishment.

The Science of Eustress: Pleasure and Mastery

Our brain loves a good challenge. According to the Self-Determination Theory, human motivation is fueled by the need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Eustress offers us the chance to flex our skills, gain mastery, and enjoy the endorphins that accompany a job well done.

You don't get that from binge-watching a TV series, do you? When we tune out to reset, we end up feeling disconnected, disengaged,

and disappointed. Think about how eustress is different from work distress. When our biological fear and survival instincts are triggered, we feel like we are not enough and not in control. As we have already discussed, checking out of your life or focusing on bad stress triggers our brains to shut down. So, how can you make the most of your life through playful effort in eustress?

How to Turn Work into Play

Gamification: It's not just for kids. Introducing elements of a game—like leaderboards or rewards—can make work more challenging and enjoyable. A study by TalentLMS found that 89% of those surveyed felt that a point system would boost their engagement. Who doesn't like to make progress!?!

Flow State: This is the eustress goldmine. The flow state occurs when a task is challenging, yet doable. To enter this state, aim for tasks that are in your 'Goldilocks Zone': not too easy, not too hard, but just the right kind of challenge that you can excel at with your best effort. Break bigger challenges into manageable parts and delegate easy parts to more inexperienced coworkers or outsourced providers.

Skill Building: Look for work tasks and leisure activities where you can learn to get better over time. By gradually taking on more challenging tasks, you can climb the ladder of mastery, earning you the pleasure of accomplishment along the way. Momentum is key. Start with easy warm-ups, and then make your tasks increasingly challenging until you reach your limits. This is called Challenge Stacking.

Prioritize the Important: Use the Eisenhower Matrix to segregate tasks into Urgent-Important, Important-Not-Urgent, etc. Focus on the important but not urgent tasks, as these are often the ones that create eustress. Urgent tasks can cause too much stress, especially those that are unimportant. Don't let the unimportant

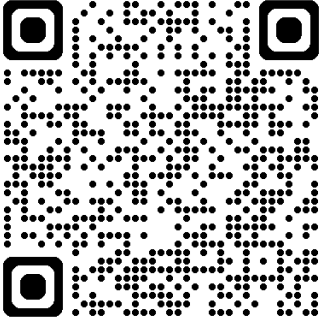
rob you of your energy. Focus on getting started and making progress on long-term wins.

Celebrate Wins: Every task has milestones. Celebrating these can bring spurts of eustress, making the overall job less daunting. Running on an endless treadmill of daily work routines can lead to burnout because you never feel like you have accomplished anything. Set goals and celebrate progress to allow your mind, body, and spirit to enjoy the feeling of a job well done!

Set an Intention: Sometimes, you can't escape a distressing task, but you can change your approach to it. Mindfulness techniques can help you focus on the task, not the stress, making it more bearable. If you feel triggered by stress, take a step back and allow your body to relax. Then, set reasonable goals and timelines that you feel capable of attaining. When doing boring, repetitive tasks, do them with purpose and intention to make an impact on a small scale.

Consciously layering small challenges in your routine will transform each day into a self-designed escape room of playful eustress. When done right, you'll use your daily challenges to emerge more skilled, resilient, and satisfied with your work.

Remember, the basis of positive psychology is that people do more of what is satisfying, fun, and easy for them. They do less when they feel like it is pointless, boring, or too hard. Design your life to maximize your impact through playful challenge stacking.



Playful Human: Nick Gray

Nick is the founder of Museum Hack and author of the 2-Hour Cocktail Party. He shares how to build a community around a unique and playful approach to business and your personal life. Discover how to create a sense of belonging, shared

purpose, and fun by connecting with like-minded individuals who share your passions.

Sponsored by Happy Meals:

I ate a kid's Happy Meal at McDonald's the other day, and you know what? His mom was pretty upset that I even kept the toy.



The Scavenger Hunt for Success

How can you turn your shopping list into a scavenger hunt? How can you make your to-do list into objectives for your next undercover mission? When can you celebrate your progress?

Complete this playful challenge to unlock eustress.

Remember, the goal is to enjoy the challenges while also achieving something meaningful.

- **Find a Task in Your Goldilocks Zone:** Identify a task that is challenging but not overwhelming. It could be a puzzle, a DIY project, or a work task that you've been putting off because it's a bit tricky but doable. Complete it and feel the satisfaction of checking it off your list.
- **Create a Mini Game Out of Your Chore List:** Turn your regular to-do list into a game. Assign points to each task based on its difficulty and give yourself a reward when you reach a certain number of points. Score your chores this way for at least three days.
- **Set an Intention Before a Challenging Task:** Identify a task that you usually find distressing. Before starting, take a moment to relax and set a positive intention. Focus on the task itself rather than the stress associated with it. Reflect afterward on how this approach changed your experience.
- **Experience Flow:** Choose an activity where you can get lost in the moment—whether it's coloring, coding, cooking, or capturing a perfect nature photo. The task should be something that requires focus and keeps you engaged.
- **Prioritize with Purpose:** Use the Eisenhower Matrix to focus on one "Important-Not Urgent" task for 25 minutes. Write down how it makes you feel to have made progress.

- **Build a Small Skill:** Find an activity where you can improve a skill. It could be learning a new cooking technique, practicing a musical instrument, or improving your public speaking. Spend 15 minutes on this practice and check this off when you feel you have gotten measurably better.
- **Add Fun to a Routine Task:** Choose a mundane task and find a way to make it fun. For example, turn cleaning into a race against the clock or listen to your favorite music while organizing your workspace.
- **Celebrate a Win:** Identify a milestone or small victory you can celebrate today. Whether it's completing a workout, finishing a project, or simply getting through your daily tasks, find a way to acknowledge and celebrate it. Share a photo of how you celebrated with the group @PlayfulHumans.

3 The Five P's of a Prosperous Life

Joke of the Week:

What did the ocean say to the beach?
Nothing, it just waved.

"We cannot change our past. We cannot change the fact that people act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude."

- Charles R. Swindoll

The Human Sustainability Challenge

We can't ignore the power of balance in achieving a life filled with flow. You could be the hardest worker in the room but burning out. You could be living stress-free but missing meaning. When most people think about life balance, they get it a bit wrong. They either aim to work hard and play hard, or they attempt a harmonious balance. (*Nobody move! My life is in balance!*) Others try to get all of their ducks in a row, while even more gave up on that long ago and are so frantic that they haven't seen the ducks in years! (*They don't give a duck anymore.*)

Let's look at a better framework for a more sustainable life with the 5 Ps: Perform, Pause, Ponder, Practice, and Play.

Together, they form a symbiotic relationship that makes you more productive and nourishes your mind, body, and spirit. Embrace the concept of human sustainability and build a life that continuously flourishes.

Perform

Let's begin with what most people associate with success: performance. Performing at your peak involves a combination of skill, focus, and discipline. You have probably been inundated with hustle culture advice since birth, so you don't need any tips here. Let's just add one big caveat. Continuous high performance requires support from the other four Ps. Research shows that long-term performance is closely tied to well-being, and a lack of balance can lead to burnout. High performance isn't a sprint; it's more like interval training, where each "interval" is boosted by the accompanying Ps surrounding it.

Pause

The least glamorous yet surprisingly essential P is Pause. It's like the pit stop in a Formula 1 race. Sure, stopping takes time, but it allows you to refuel and make necessary adjustments. Pausing can reduce stress and improve mental clarity. According to the American Psychological Association, brief diversions significantly improve focus for prolonged tasks. Even your best performance will be unsustainable without pausing to rest and rejuvenate. A good restful pause allows your mind, body, and spirit to reset and prepare for another round of engaging activity.

Ponder

Think of pondering as your GPS system. You wouldn't embark on a journey without a destination in mind, would you? The process of pondering helps align your actions with your goals. Remember, individuals who regularly ponder and write down their goals are more likely to achieve them. Pondering ensures that your performance is purpose-driven and that your pauses are productive. You need time to think, be creative, overcome challenges, and improve your processes to ensure you are working on the right problem and applying the right solution.

Practice

What separates a skilled professional from an amateur? Practice. Practice doesn't just make perfect; it makes it permanent. The psychologist K. Anders Ericsson found that elite performers engage in 'deliberate practice'—a focused and purposeful form of practice that includes feedback loops. Practice is the bridge between pondering your ambitions and performing at your best. It's like a dress rehearsal for life's big events. When you make time for practice, you give yourself the gift of a safe space to fail and learn.

Play

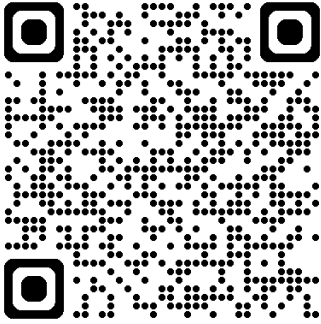
Lastly, we played. It's not just about fun; play is a serious component of well-being. According to research published in the *Journal of Leisure Research*, play contributes to greater life satisfaction. It also recharges your mental batteries, enhancing creativity and problem-solving skills. Play adds zest to your performance and practice, making pauses and pondering periods more enjoyable. Making time for play is critical to maintaining and improving your health.

Putting It All Together

By combining all five Ps, you're not just summing them up; you're magnifying their individual and collective impact. They're like an all-star team whose members are talented on their own, but they are unstoppable together. The beauty is in the synergy and movement between them. Performing is made sustainable by Pausing, more effective by Practicing, purposeful through Pondering, and enjoyable with Play.

The 5 Ps serve as your holistic roadmap to prosperity, enriching not just your work but your entire being. Too much of any one P will cause your life to be out of balance, and you'll begin to wobble. Employ them in harmony, and you'll be the most peacefully productive version of yourself and the most fulfilled. Lifelong success is not just about the hustle and grind; it's about the sustainability of your efforts.

Which P aspect of life are you most lacking? Which one do you need to dial down? How can you work all five into your day, week, and month?



Playful Human: John Davis

John survived his biggest fear and went from being paralyzed to being a professional stuntman. At 22 years old, John's spine broke dashing his dreams of being a stuntman.

Doctors told him he may never walk again. John overcame the limiting

beliefs of others and his physical challenges. He went on to perform over four thousand live comedy sword-fighting stunt shows all over the world including the most remote bases in both Iraq and Afghanistan on six USO tours. He is known as the corporate action hero!

Sponsored by Flamingos: My nephew wanted me to stop doing my impression of a flamingo, so I had to put my foot down.

4 ♣ When feeling stuck, move your body.

Joke of the Week:

What do you call getting in trouble for something you didn't do? Plagiarism.

"Forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair."

- Khalil Gibran

We have all been there. You're sitting at your desk, staring at a blank document or perhaps a dizzying spreadsheet, and it's as though your brain has decided to hang the "Closed for Business" sign. What if I told you that the solution might not be in cracking open another Red Bull or doom scrolling Twitter for "inspiration," but in doing something as simple and primal as, well, moving your body?

The Science of Movement

Physical movement floods your brain with endorphins, those happy little chemicals that act like nature's antidepressants. They alleviate stress and pump up your mood. Physical activity increases the production of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a protein that supports the growth and survival of neurons. Translation: You're not just flexing your muscles when you exercise; you're also boosting your brain.

For starters, take short breaks during work to move around. There's no need to go full gym mode—a simple walk around the block can do wonders. Stand up and change your scenery as often as you can fit it into your schedule.

Get Your Creative Juices Flowing

Have you noticed that the best ideas often pop into your head while you're taking a shower or walking the dog? There's a reason for that. Physical movement increases blood flow to the brain and activates various neurotransmitters, which can aid in cognitive flexibility. It's like having a brainstorming session with your closest collaborator, your body.

Next time you hit a roadblock, instead of beating your head against the wall, go for a brisk walk or even dance to your favorite tune. Trust me, your brain will thank you for the space to breathe.

The Symbiotic Relationship Between Physical and Mental Health

Exercise has been shown to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. A study published in **The Lancet Psychiatry Journal** found that individuals who engaged in physical exercise reported fewer mental health issues compared to those who didn't. Some studies have shown that exercise can be more effective than antidepressants, but please talk to your doctor before stopping any medications!

If you're feeling down or anxious, try incorporating at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise into your day. It's like hitting the "refresh" button on your mental browser.

(Warning: Start easy and low weights if you are over 40. Rule #1 is don't get hurt. I ended up tearing my belly button and having to go to the hospital for a hernia surgery. I didn't even know that was possible! It set me back over two months on my fitness goals. Who tears their belly button?)

Peak Performance Is Linked to Pushing Your Limits

Ever heard of the "runner's high"? It's not a myth. Achieving peak performance isn't just about building physical strength but also about mental resilience. Physical activity helps in increasing your focus and concentration. You're not just breaking a sweat; you're breaking mental barriers, too.

Why not integrate high-intensity interval training (*HIIT*) into your routine to improve your overall performance? You can do this at any level of fitness. Just do as many repetitions as you can, rest for about 90 seconds, and then try again. Go for about three sets of about eight different exercises to target your whole body. You can find excellent workouts for any age or fitness level online for free

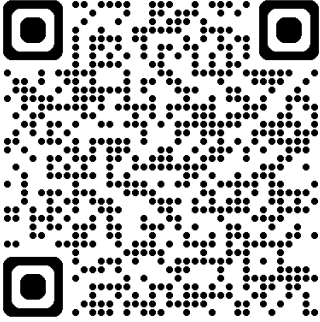
or talk to a trainer. You'll get fit and experience a surge in mental clarity.

The 30-Day Movement Challenge

For the next 30 days, dedicate at least 30 minutes daily to any form of physical exercise—be it walking, cycling, yoga, or even dancing in your PJs. (*I won't judge.*) Start with your current level of fitness and simply increase the amount slightly every week.

Document your moods, creativity levels, and general well-being before and after the challenge. Be your own science experiment. It turns out that when life gives you lemons, the physical activity of making lemonade could be the cure—but why stop there? Make a lemon soufflé, juggle them, or roll those lemons down a hill and race them to the bottom—just get moving. Your body isn't just a vehicle to carry your brain; it's the co-pilot in your journey towards fulfillment. When you move your body, you move your life in a positive direction.

PS - The same rule applies if you are feeling stuck in your life or career. Get moving! Taking any action will spur change, learning, and progress that will get you going again.



Playful Human: Janet Omstead

Janet believes that getting in shape doesn't have to suck. Health, fitness, and well-being are possible without punishing diets and workout programs. In fact, they can be joyful. Healthy habits should make your life better, not worse. As a play expert

and health coach, she helps you look after yourself in an enjoyable, playful way so that you can live life to the fullest.

Sponsored by Camouflage Pants:
I went to buy some camo pants the other day
but couldn't find any.

5♣ Test your limits and find
your edges.

Joke of the Week:

What do you call a boy who finally stood up
to the bullies? An ambulance.

"People tend to forget that play is serious."

- David Hockney

The Art and Science of Living an Extraordinary Life

Ah, the comfort zone. It's like your favorite pair of sweatpants—cozy and familiar but not exactly the attire that'll get you noticed or promoted. The fun, flow, and fulfillment of an extraordinary life aren't found in the safety of your comfort zone. They are on the edges, in the moments where you wobble, sweat, and occasionally learn the valuable lessons of failure.

The Upside of Living Life on the Ledge

Think of your comfort zone as a merry-go-round wheel. In the center, you're safe. There was no chance of falling off, no judgments, no unexpected movements. But, and here's the kicker, also no growth. Life moves slowly in the middle of the wheel.

All the good stuff—the juice that's with the squeeze, the glory, the gold—they're on the outside edge. At the edge of the wheel, things move pretty fast. The wheel is still spinning at the same speed, but your position and perspective change.

Your life works in much the same way. Inside your comfort zone, life is slow. Each rotation of the earth or trip around the sun seems to go slowly. The only problem is that it feels empty when you look back on your life. When you live outside your comfort zone, each day and year seems filled with new experiences whizzing by. When you look back, it feels full.

Remember being back in school? Your brain was like a sponge, soaking up facts, figures, and formulas. It was stressful sometimes, sure, but as you grew older, you realized you were smarter for it. Psychologists call this "desirable difficulty," a concept rooted in the idea that mental strain makes for a stronger brain. The more we challenge our cognitive faculties, the better they become at problem-solving and critical thinking.

The Difference Between the Long-term and Short-Term

When it comes to your happiness and health, what feels good in the present is bad over your lifetime, and what is temporarily tough at the moment can be great for your overall success.

For example, stress isn't all bad. Long-term stress without breaks is very bad for your mental and physical health. Over time, it leads to ailments like heart disease, obesity, and a compromised immune system.

Acute, short-term stress—think of it as the sprint, not the marathon—kicks your body into high gear. Your brain releases a cocktail of neurotransmitters like dopamine and adrenaline, making you more alert and focused. It's the same reason why athletes and performers often do their best when the stakes are high.

The same goes for your physique. Have you ever heard of hypertrophy? It's the process of muscle fibers breaking down after strenuous activity, only to regrow bigger and stronger. We all know you don't get stronger by napping on the couch. You get better fitness and become more resilient by testing your limits.

Flex and Reset to Find Your Limits

Just like stretching a rubber band too far can cause it to snap, pushing too hard against your limitations without adequate rest and recovery can lead to mental and physical breakdowns. Balance is key. Stress, rest, repeat—that's the mantra. In other words, reach for the sky, but don't forget to touch base with the ground. Remember the lesson about the movement between order and chaos? It is the switch between comfort and challenge that makes life the most fulfilling.

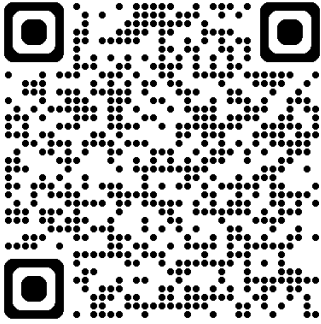
Challenge Accepted!

Who says stress management needs to be all "Om" and no "Oh wow!"? Have you ever heard of biohacking—where science and technology meet human psychology and physiology? From using cryotherapy to improve muscle recovery to experimenting with your schedule for performance enhancement, biohacking encourages you to use science as a playground for optimizing human performance.

How can you test your limits to find your best self?

- **Get Uncomfortable:** Take up a hobby or task that makes you break a sweat, literally or figuratively.
- **Test Your Stress Tolerance:** Use techniques like deep breathing, meditation, or even cold therapy to manage stress more effectively.
- **Lean into Learning:** Continue reading challenging books or learning a new language. Exercise that gray matter!
- **Push Yourself Physically:** Include high-intensity workouts in your routine. Your future self will thank you next swimsuit season.
- **Challenge Yourself Creatively:** Allocate time to try new ideas. Shoot for something really stupid and silly. Test the limits of your inner child by playing wholeheartedly.

You don't want to look back on your life and find that you lived most of it in the safety of your comfort zone. Do your future self a favor and find out what you are truly capable of. Are you up for the challenge?



Playful Human: Asher Laub

Asher is a classical musician who incorporates modern elements like break dancing into his performances. He encourages you to create meaningful experiences through your art. Learn how to engage audiences, inspire others, and make a lasting impact through creative expression at the limits of your comfort zone.

Sponsored by Fanny Packs:
I bought a fanny pack made out of \$100 bills.
It was a complete waist of money.

♣ Desbundar!

Joke of the Week:

Why do fish live in salt water?
Because pepper water makes them sneeze.

"My father used to play with my brother and me in the yard. Mother would come out and say, 'You're tearing up the grass'; 'We're not raising grass,' Dad would reply. 'We're raising boys.'"

- Harmon Killebrew

Unleashing the Power of Play in Your Life

Did you know that Portuguese has words for things that we haven't named in English yet? *Desbundar*, your new favorite word, translates to "shedding one's inhibitions while having full-out fun." Think of it as the linguistic equivalent of ripping off your business suit to reveal a superhero outfit underneath.

Let's explore this concept and how it can help improve our mind, body, and spirit. But before we throw our inhibitions to the wind, let's talk about the science. A study published in the "Frontiers in Psychology" journal shows that playfulness in adults can enhance creativity and social skills, not to mention its positive effects on mental well-being. Simply put, play isn't just frivolous fun; it's adult maintenance. Imagine if your brain were a garden; play would be the fertilizer, sprinkler, and the occasional garden gnome all at once.

You have probably heard the phrase, "Laughter is the best medicine"? The Mayo Clinic confirms that laughter triggers the release of endorphins. These endorphins act as natural stress-busters and painkillers. So, participating in activities that bring you joy maximizes pleasure while making you less susceptible to stress and pain.

Now, the spiritual side of 'Desbundar' isn't something you can put under a microscope. It's that transcendental moment when you realize you're not just in the game; you ARE the game. You're fully present, neither dwelling in the past nor anxious about the future. It's like tapping into a feeling of being ageless. The pressures of adulthood and the feeling of being self-conscious melt away, and our true selves, our best selves, emerge.

How to Achieve Peak Desbundar

Break free from the stifling grips of your inhibitions like a champagne cork at a New Year's Eve party—purposeful, energetic, and bubbly.

The “Anti-Bucket” List: Instead of a list of things to achieve before you die, make a list of things that are just plain fun. (*I call it a Fun Bucket List or Fucket List! More on this in the next section.*) No skydiving or seeing the Seven Wonders, just simple joys like trying a dance class or baking cookies in weird shapes. Each week, cross off one item. The act of planning and looking forward to it will create a snowball effect of good vibes.

The 15-Minute Play Rule: Set aside at least 15 minutes for playtime. It takes a while for desbundar to kick in. Do something childishly entertaining and keep going until you are fully engaged. Whether it's doodling, playing a video game, or making a beautiful mess with your favorite artistic medium, the key here is to make it non-negotiable so you push through your initial hesitations.

The Playdate: No, not for your kids, but for you and your adult friends. Remember those sleepovers filled with laughter and zero responsibilities? Recreate that atmosphere. Have a movie night, a cooking duel, or even a make-your-own-meme competition. Social fun is a great way to let loose.

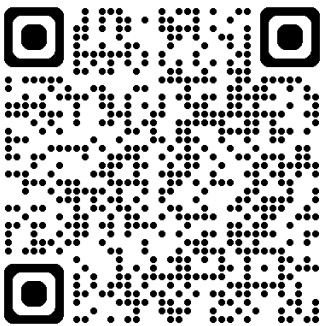
Desbundar Quests: Turn your weekends or vacations into mini-adventures. Think of it as a real-life video game where you're the hero. Assign yourself and your companions missions like “Find the five funny things to say to your partner when they are in a bad mood” or “Have a meaningful conversation with a stranger.” These little quests combine excitement with a hint of challenge, embodying the very spirit of desbundar. It is a speed-dating version of the playdate.

The Creative Dabble: Have you always wanted to write, paint, or play an instrument? This is your cue. The goal is not to become the next Shakespeare or Picasso; it's to let your creativity flow without judgment. You might surprise yourself by how much this frees your mind and lifts your spirits. Research indicates that creative activities can increase happiness and reduce stress.

Playful Impulse Buys: Instead of splurging on comfort foods and Instagram ads, splurge on experiences. For example, rather than buying that kitchen gadget you will only use once, how about spending that money on a go-kart race, a cooking class, or an impromptu weekend getaway? Treat yourself to *desbundar*.

Challenge Yourself to Embrace *Desbundar*

Incorporate at least one of these tips into your life over the next month and observe how it changes your mindset and emotional well-being. Trust me, once you start, you won't want to stop. Unleashing your inner child isn't just a one-off event; it's a lifestyle. You will unlock levels of joy and satisfaction that many adults have conditioned themselves to think are beyond reach. Embrace *desbundar*, and your life may be filled with the kind of joy that can't be contained in any language.



Playful Human: Jesse Tack

Jesse is the afternoon DJ on B105 in Cincinnati and has won a Country Music Award for Radio Personality of the Year! In his free time, you'll find Jesse at the movies, DJ'ing weddings, and exploring with his beagle mix, Jackson. Jesse loves being on the radio. He's been at it since the age of 16 and still looks forward to working every day!

Sponsored by Handyman:

I hired a handyman to do a long list of repairs. When I got back home, he had only done #1, #3 and #5. It turns out that he only does odd jobs.

7♣ Play is the fun uncle
of work.

Joke of the Week:

Why should golfers always bring an extra pair of pants? In case they get a hole-in-one.

"The world is a stage, but the play is badly cast."

- Oscar Wilde

Work and play—the yin and yang of adult life. But did you ever stop to think that maybe work and play aren't so diametrically opposed? In fact, they're more like a superhero and sidekick dynamic duo. While work may be the stern parent figure telling you to clean your room, play is the fun uncle (*or "funckle," if you will*) who slides you a candy bar when no one's looking.

Laziness is the Real Villain.

Let's get one thing straight: the opposite of hard work is sloth. Think about it.

If work is energy directed towards a purpose, laziness holds its kryptonite—zero energy, zero purpose. A couch potato doesn't live a fun, fulfilling life with passion and creativity, but a Playful Human does. Laziness is the antagonist. Play is the protagonist superhero that can swoop in and save the day! It is not what is holding you back from the success, relationships, health, and happiness you seek.

Work Is Obligatory Play without the Fun.

Work is like a sidekick without the same superpowers as our hero. The grind, the hustle, whatever you want to call it, is often needed, but it is doing the dirty work for play. It's what pays the bills, builds civilizations, and powers progress. It's often other-centric, which can be rewarding but difficult. You work to provide for your family, serve your community, or meet deadlines for your boss. Work is an external force requiring your effort. It's a grind because, even if you love it, you are not totally in control.

Play Makes You a Superhero!

Play invites you to use your energy and effort with self-directed, self-rewarding, and self-fulfilling efforts. The key word is "fun." You engage in play not because you have to but because you want to.

Play can be challenging, from snowboarding down steep slopes to strategizing in a board game. It can demand physical, mental, and even spiritual effort. You may want to organize special birthday parties for your friends or divide up teams for a tournament to play your favorite game. There can be a lot of work along with play, but remember, play is the hero, and work is the sidekick!

Play makes the work you choose to do more colorful, memorable, and worthwhile. It invites eustress into your life and unlocks your full potential.

An Epic Quest: Playing for a Living

Remember, work typically feels obligatory because it's focused on others' needs and demands. You clock in because, well, bills and responsibilities. But what if your work was your play, something you'd willingly choose even if nobody paid you for it? You'd be ticking both the necessity and passion boxes.

Research actually supports the idea that you'll perform better in roles that align with your intrinsic interests. One study found that those with a 'calling orientation' are better at their jobs and less likely to burn out. So basically, when your work is your play, you're good at what you do and enjoy it more.

Every hero needs an epic quest worthy of their pursuit, and journeys like this come with distractions, challenges, and villains. Mixing work and play can create conflicts. There's compelling evidence that getting paid for doing what you love can sometimes rob it of its sparkle. Psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan showed this in their seminal work on self-determination theory. When you start getting paid for your passion, you risk shifting from intrinsic to extrinsic motivation. You may focus more on external rewards than the joy of the activity itself.

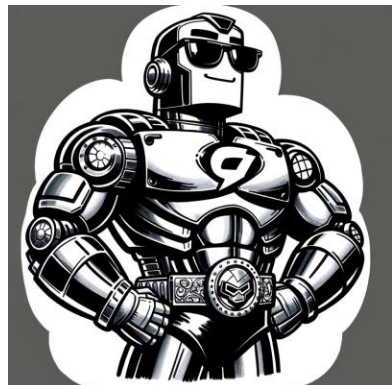
In their study, the researchers paid kids to play with markers. Initially, the kids played for the pure love of it. But once they started getting paid, the intrinsic motivation waned. When the payment stopped, the kids were less interested in playing with the markers than they were pre-study. So, if you're not careful, monetizing your play could turn your passion into just another job.

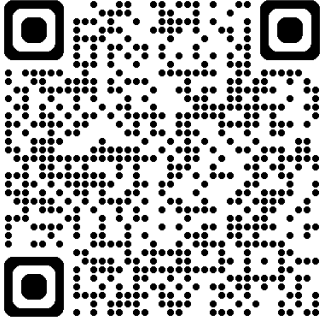
You have probably heard the mantra, "Do what you love, and you'll never work another day in your life." While monetizing all aspects of your passion is enticing, keep a portion solely for your soul's nourishment. If your play involves painting and you start selling your art, perhaps designate certain pieces that are just for you, never for sale. This keeps the heart of play alive—the part that is self-directed, self-rewarding, and self-fulfilling. Besides, that old mantra is just not true. There will still be days when you have to pay your taxes, do work for a client who doesn't appreciate it, or just don't feel like it and want to be doing something else. All of that is okay and part of life. Let the work sidekick take over on those days, and you can head back to the hidden lair to rest and recover.

Most importantly, you should always remember to be yourself.

(Unless you can be Ironman, then always be Ironman. He is rich, funny, and has the coolest toys.)

(I am currently playing with a new project called Avenue9, where I am building a Human-First AI Marketing Agency. We are trying to build the Ironman version of artificial intelligence for B2B marketing instead of the Terminator version. Check it out at Avenue9.com.)





Playful Human: David Kaye

David is a legendary voice actor who has worked in TV shows, movies, video games, and commercials. His voice-over career began with General Hawk in the animation series GI Joe in 1989. Over the next two decades, David and his voice

became iconic as Megatron and Optimus Prime in the Transformers, the narrator in Pixar's Up, and he created more cartoon, video game, and movie characters!

Brought to you by a brand-new incantation
validator software for witches:
try Spell Check today!

8♣ Your mind and body get sharper with use.

Joke of the Week:

Why can't Monday lift Saturday?
It's a weak day.

"Happy are the playful, for they will be serious achievers."

- Darryl Tippens

How People Play

We have already looked at the unique characteristics that separate us from machines. Hopefully, you remember: never be a TAMMY (*Totally Autonomous Moron*)! You are a Playful Human with thoughts, dreams, aspirations, and the ability to adapt and grow. Unlike your trusty smartphone, which slows down after a couple of years, you get better with use. Like a fine wine, you can get better with age. So why not uncork the bottle of your potential?

Sharpen Your Saw: How Using Your Mind and Body Amplifies Your Potential

In a famous story, Abraham Lincoln said, "Give me six hours to chop down a tree, and I will spend the first four sharpening the ax." (*Great quote, but no one gets six hours to do anything these days, Abe.*) Let's examine how being playful can sharpen your skills and condition your mind, body, and spirit for peak performance in less than four hours.

Consider the difference between your car and your brain. While your car's engine suffers from wear and tear, losing horsepower over the years, your mind builds more neural pathways. You are a never-ending work in progress. Your brain is capable of what psychologists call "neuroplasticity," the ability to rewire itself. Objects are like coffee in a cup. Over time, you sip away, and it cools off, and the cup empties out. The human body is more like a coffee plant. The more beans you pick, the more the plant is stimulated to produce.

The same is true spiritually. When our confidence, optimism, and other beliefs are challenged, they become stronger. When we give more of ourselves to others, we build relationships and develop ourselves in a way that can provide more in the future. Sharing is caring. It's not just a platitude to get kids to share their toys; it's scientifically accurate! Studies indicate that acts of generosity boost our mental well-being and have been linked to the release of oxytocin. When you share your skills and

knowledge, not only do you solidify your own understanding, but you also get a nice dose of feel-good hormones. It is another crazy backward law that the more you give, the more you get. It's a win-win!

Let's Get Physical, Mental, and Emotional!

You've heard of "work hard, play hard," right? What if I told you to flip it on its head—play hard to work smarter! Take athletes, for instance. They don't just huff and puff in gyms; they also engage in mental visualization, emotional regulation, and strategic gameplay. Even in the corporate world, adopting play-based training techniques has been shown to improve productivity and job satisfaction. Mental and physical skills that can take hundreds of repetitions to learn at work can be learned in a tenth of the time during play.

Generosity Grows: Identify a skill or talent you possess that could help someone else and offer it. Maybe you're a guitar hero—why not give a free lesson to a budding Hendrix?

Plus 1 Play: Pick an activity that stimulates you mentally, physically, and emotionally. This could be anything from a rousing game of chess to an improv comedy class. +1 your play by inviting a friend.

Build Sweat Equity: Engage in high-intensity play at least twice a week. Whether it's soccer, tag with your kids, or virtual reality games that get your heart rate up, go all in.

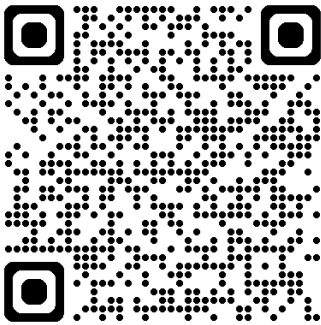
Mindful Minutes: Dedicate a few minutes every day to pure mental play. Solve a quick puzzle, do a sudoku, or just daydream about conquering the world.

Share and Sharpen: Take some time to write down or discuss what you've learned from these activities. Sharing deepens your own understanding, and you never know who you might inspire.

Remember, life's not a spectator sport. Get in the game and give it all you've got. By doing so, you'll not only sharpen your mind and body, but you'll also prepare yourself to face life's curveballs with the agility of a pro athlete and the wisdom of a sage. So, what are you waiting for?

Design a Resilience Relay.

Set up an obstacle course or escape room at your house with some mental, physical, and spiritual challenges. Each obstacle can represent a common life challenge, like leaning into your fears or jumping over your roadblocks. After, reflect on how it feels to turn problems into play and how you will tackle your next challenge.



Playful Human: Kevin Cassidy

Kevin is the author of "Falling Down To Find Myself" and the owner of Ninja Nation, a gym in Huntsville, Alabama. He spent over 17 years working as a Slamball athlete and stuntman on some of the biggest movies in the world, including

Marvel films (Spider-Man Homecoming and Far From Home, Black Panther, Ant-man, Captain America Civil War, and others), as well as The Dark Knight Rises, The Other Guys, Zombieland 2, and many more.

Sponsored by INTUIT Quickbooks:
I could do my own taxes, but I wasn't into it.

9♣ Focus on energy
management, not
time management.

Joke of the Week:

When is the best time to go to the dentist?
Tooth-hurty.

"The more fun I had, the better I did."

- Bill Murray

Welcome to another paradigm shift! Forget about time management; it's not helping. The clock may be ticking, but you can't stop it. Instead, it's much more beneficial to focus on what you can control, managing your energy—mental, physical, and spiritual—to get the most out of life.

Most people obsess over time—squeezing in more tasks in the bloated 8-hour workday. They overestimated their energy level and the time it takes to build momentum. How often do you think about your energy levels and the quality of your work compared to how often you check the clock?

Just like a cell phone, you can be "plugged in" or "on battery power." When you're in flow and in a playful state, you're plugged in, baby! Your energy is endless. But when you're grinding, forcing yourself to push through, you're operating on battery power. And guess what? Batteries run out.

The Flaws of the 8-Hour Workday

Research has shown that the 8-hour workday, a relic from the industrial era, is ill-suited for modern creative tasks. Tasks requiring intellectual and creative power can't be consistently maintained for that long. Studies indicate that humans can focus intensely for about 90 to 120 minutes before needing a break. In the 1950s, sleep researcher Nathaniel Kleitman discovered something called the "ultradian rhythm." This biological rhythm means that our attention, creativity, and energy operate in cycles. Work against it, and you're wading through mud. Work with it, and you're surfing the big wave effortlessly.

Follow Your Energy, Not Your To-Do List

Mind: Think of your brain like a muscle. A good workout is great, but endless reps will lead to fatigue and failure. Intersperse

challenging tasks with simpler ones to give your brain some downtime. Employ techniques like the Pomodoro Technique to work in bursts and then take a break. During this break, do something entirely different—listen to music, take a walk, or juggle if you're into that sort of thing. Mindless physical activity like mowing the yard or taking a shower allows our brain to turn off and reset while we use muscle memory.

If you work from home, losing our commute has robbed us of the decompression on the drive home. You need to build yourself a new routine to bookend the workday.

Body: Just like you wouldn't run a marathon without preparation, don't expect to work long hours without the right fuel. Exercise, nutrition, and sleep are the holy trinity of high productivity. Ignore them, and you'll find yourself burned out faster than a candle with no wick.

Don't use coffee and other drugs as a replacement for good health. Never underestimate the power nap to get yourself back on track! When in doubt, drink water and eat a salad. It is much more sustainable and doesn't have the other negative side effects of bad habits.

Spirit: Spirituality doesn't have to mean religion; it can be any medium through which you channel emotional or creative energy. Whether it's writing, painting, or other expressions of your emotions, make sure you allocate time to activities that feed your soul. In today's hustle culture, we lack connection to higher meaning, misunderstand purpose, and become self-absorbed.

Make time to journal. Getting your thoughts and emotions out on paper allows your brain to let go of them. Go ahead and feel the feelings and move through your spiritual suffering instead of getting stuck. Finally, if all else fails, do something nice for someone else!

The Downside of Over-Optimization

Here's the kicker with all the data, measurement, algorithms, and AI of our culture in America: Over-optimizing your time can make you rigid and inflexible, squashing your creativity and the ability to seize new opportunities. It's like over-packing for a vacation and then realizing you've left no room for souvenirs or unexpected adventures. *(Plus, you are paying extra for all that extra baggage you are carrying around.)*

In our efforts to be more productive, profitable, and perfect, we have removed the playful activities that brought us energy and outsourced our intuition to capitalism. We have even removed art, music, and gym classes from schools, and there is an assault on recess! And we wonder why we are all stressed, overweight, and burnt out.

Quick Tips for Energy Management

Recognize Your Energy Peaks: Are you not a morning person? Don't schedule your most demanding tasks for 8 a.m.

Find Your Recharging Stations: Make a list of activities that recharge you, such as a quick jog, meditation, or jamming on a guitar.

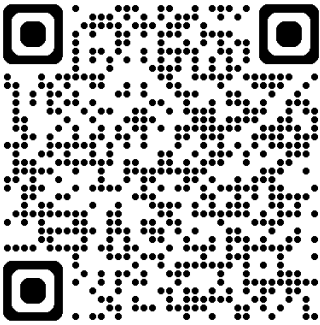
Unplug Often: Take a 5 to 10-minute break every 90 minutes. Stand up, stretch, and reset.

Change Your Energy Sources: Rotate between different kinds of activities to use different parts of your brain and body.

Conduct Energy Audits: Once a week, review what drained you and what energized you. Eliminate or reduce the former and focus on the latter.

This week, forget the clock. Pay attention to your energy rhythms. When do you feel most in the flow? Rearrange your day to leverage these natural peaks, and start focusing on managing your energy, not your time.

You're not a machine programmed to churn out work by the hour; you're a complex being with cycles, rhythms, and, yes, a battery that needs to be recharged. So plug into that flow state, and watch your life light up.



Playful Human: Lenny Ravich

Lenny Ravich is the author of *Everlasting Optimism* and developed the first-ever Gestalt Awareness and Healing Therapy via Humor, Creativity, and Laughter in the world. He is based in Tel Aviv, Israel.

Learn how to shift your focus from worries and regrets to gratitude and joy, allowing you to fully experience the richness of life.

Sponsored by ArsonistDating.com:
Everyone on the site gets a lot of matches.
This site is so hot right now!

 **Energy Audit Quiz****1. How do you typically start your day?**

- A. I jump out of bed and get moving immediately.
- B. I take some time to ease into the day with a slow routine.
- C. I hit the snooze button multiple times before getting up.
- D. I check my phone and social media first thing.

2. How often do you engage in physical activity?

- A. Daily, I prioritize exercise or physical movement.
- B. A few times a week, I make sure to fit in some physical activity.
- C. Occasionally, when it comes up, but it's not a regular habit.
- D. Rarely, I'm mostly sedentary.

3. How do you handle breaks during your daily routine?

- A. I take regular, mindful breaks to recharge.
- B. I take breaks for lunch but usually continue thinking about work.
- C. I often skip breaks or miss meals altogether.
- D. I push through without any breaks until I'm exhausted.

4. How do you manage your mental focus throughout the day?

- A. I prioritize tasks and focus on one thing at a time.
- B. I juggle multiple tasks but try to stay focused on being productive.
- C. I get easily distracted by emails, social media, or other interruptions.
- D. I struggle to concentrate and often feel mentally drained.

5. What do you typically do during lunch or mealtime?

- A. I step away from work and enjoy a relaxed, healthy meal.
- B. I snack while working or doing other personal tasks.
- C. I often skip meals or eat something in a premade package.
- D. I eat fast food and catch up on social media.

6. How do you wind down at the end of the day?

- A. I have a calming evening routine that helps me relax.
- B. I watch TV or scroll through my phone until I fall asleep.
- C. I often go to bed without any particular routine.
- D. I stay up late working or thinking about tasks for the next day.

7. How do you feel about your energy levels at the end of a typical day?

- A. I feel like I did my best, and I am ready to rest.
- B. I feel tired but usually content with what I have accomplished.
- C. I feel drained and just want to crash.
- D. I feel restless and have trouble winding down.

8. How often do you engage in activities purely for fun or relaxation?

- A. Daily, I make time for things that bring me joy.
- B. A few times a week, I fit in some fun or relaxation.
- C. Occasionally, but it's not a regular habit.
- D. Rarely, I'm too busy or stressed to focus on fun.

9. How do you typically deal with stress during the day?

- A. I have healthy coping mechanisms like deep breathing or taking a walk.
- B. I try to push through the stress and keep working.
- C. I tend to avoid the stress but feel it is building up over time.
- D. I often feel overwhelmed and a lot of anxiety.

10. How do you balance your work, social, and personal time?

- A. I have a good balance so I can be present with the people around me.
- B. I manage but often feel stretched thin.
- C. My work usually takes over, and I struggle to find time for myself or others.
- D. I feel constantly pulled in different directions and rarely feel present.

Where can you shift your energy to play more, stress less, and build resilience in your daily life?

Use your answers to reflect on areas where you might need to adjust your habits. Are there opportunities to incorporate more physical activity, mindfulness, or play into your day? What small changes could help you better manage your energy and reduce stress? Remember, building resilience and maintaining your energy is about making intentional choices that align with your well-being. You can also take our official burnout quiz on the website for some humorous suggestions:

<https://playfulhumans.com/quiz/>.

10  Look for glimmers,
not triggers.

Joke of the Week:

When is the best time to do an impression of
a motorcycle? Nnnnoooowwww.

*"I had no idea that being your authentic self could
make me as rich as I've become."*

- Oprah Winfrey

Less Worry Equals More Joy

"If you have no worries, you have no more problems than are necessary." This is one of those ancient nuggets of wisdom that we still have to learn over and over again. In the Pixar movie *Inside Out 2*, they show how Anxiety hijacks our creative energy and playful spirit and uses it to invent problems and create worst-case scenarios.

That creates all kinds of dangers. Chronic stress can lead to heart disease, obesity, diabetes, and even accelerate the aging process. Worry is like a hamster on a wheel. It goes nowhere but keeps running in your head all day long. The more you worry, the more cortisol you produce, which adversely affects your immune system.

And then we have full-on fear. It's your body's alarm system; sometimes, it's too sensitive and goes off even when there's no actual danger. Living in fear leads to a life in a self-imposed prison. It can negatively affect your mental health and has been linked to depression and anxiety attacks.

To make matters worse, all of that time and energy spent with stress, worry, and fear was not spent on more positive pursuits. So, the opportunity cost of missing happy thoughts is very high!

Trigger Warnings versus Glimmering Signs of Hope

Triggers are things that connect past trauma and fears to the present. If we are not careful, they can set off a chain reaction, leading to negative emotional reactions. Glimmers are signs from the universe that connect us to positive thoughts and lead to optimistic and hopeful emotional reactions.

The interesting thing about the human mind is that we get more of what we seek. We can choose to spend our lives looking for triggers or glimmers. Both are free and available anywhere, at any time, and at any place. Your brain works like a search or social media algorithm. It shows you more of what is likely to get your attention.

Living a Playing Present: Let Go of Past Trauma and Future Fear

Imagine your mind as a hot air balloon. For it to rise, you need to toss overboard all those sandbags of past trauma and fear of future pain.

IMPORTANT: There are therapeutic techniques like EMDR and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy designed to help you deal with traumatic memories that are holding you back. If you need help dealing with depression, anxiety, and other traumas, please seek help from a licensed therapist or psychologist.

(I have seen up close how holding onto past trauma can cause mental and physical illness and spiritual suffering. But, it is temporary and treatable. It is possible to find your way back to a healthy state if you are willing to ask for help and make the changes necessary to heal. Don't give up!)

The present moment is where the magic happens. It is where you have the most control. You can't change the past or control every variable of the future, but you can choose to focus your current thoughts and actions on positive things, glimmers.

So, how do you make the present moment your playground? It's easy: Play! Use your creative energy to look for glimmers.

Mindfulness: Learn to stay in the present moment and observe your thoughts without judgment. You are not your thoughts. Don't

believe everything you think. Choose happy thoughts. When you find yourself spiraling on the negative, ask yourself, "What if the opposite was true? How could things work out for the best?"

Take Action: When going through hell, keep going. That's not the place to get stuck. Again, a good sweat session releases endorphins, which naturally elevate your mood. Do something to move or change your energy. It also works ahead of time if you have a stressful event coming up.

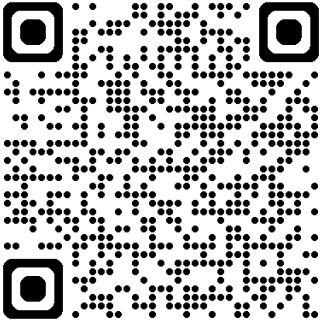
Social Support: A problem shared is a problem halved. Talk to friends or join a support group. Let others lift your spirits. Often, we need external motivation and connection when we get stuck in our own heads. Unfortunately, we can be harder on ourselves than other people.

Play: Whatever your play style is, engage in activities that stimulate your mind, body, and spirit. Go to the beach, bust out a board game, play music, solve a puzzle, or watch stand-up comedy. You control how you invest in this present moment.

Changing your conditioning can take time. For the next 30 days, engage in a playful activity that you love for at least 10 minutes a day. Note the changes in your stress levels, creativity, and overall mood.

Living in fear is like refusing to drive your car because you are worried about a door-ding. You can't prevent accidents, but you can repair the dents. A happy life isn't about dodging bullets or stopping all of them Matrix-style; it's about knowing that even if you get hit, you'll heal quickly. Playful Humans heal, grow, and change. Instead of trying to dodge bullets, learn a cool new dance move instead.

The next time you find yourself looking for triggers that will set you off, look for glimmers that will light you up!



Playful Human: Meg Lewis

Meg Lewis is a designer, comedian, performer, and educator working to make the world a happier place. She designs cool, fun products, teaches a self-discovery personal brand course, created a Sit There and Do Nothing comedy mindfulness

podcast, and so much more! Not only is she my cousin, she was one of the original creative nerdery gang and has lived that philosophy to the fullest.

Sponsored by Mood Rings:
Someone stole my mood ring.
I don't know how I feel about that.

J♣ Do a digital detox.

Joke of the Week:

Why didn't dinosaurs drive cars?
Because Tyrannosaurus wrecks.

*"You do not quit playing because you grow old; you
grow old because you quit playing."*

- Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

Sometimes, It's Easier to Scroll Than to Soar

The blue glow of the screen—a modern-day campfire we gather around to distract ourselves from life's big questions like, "Who am I?" (or "*Is a hot dog a sandwich?*" *If tomatoes are fruit, does that make ketchup a jelly?*) The digital world has its advantages, but let's face it: often, we use it like an adult pacifier. It's no wonder the concept of a digital detox has become as mainstream as almond milk in coffee shops. But why is it that many of us find it psychologically easier to burn out slowly scrolling through our feed than to become our most daringly beautiful, fully-realized selves? Let's dig into this modern crisis of human existence.

The Comfort of Exhaustion

Being tired feels safe. Running endlessly on life's hedonic treadmill isn't fulfilling, but at least it's straightforward. You know what to expect. You give yourself the excuse that you couldn't possibly do more; you are too tired. You can convince yourself that you should treat yourself to the snack, buy that impulse purchase, or have that drink because you are exhausted.

In psychological terms, this behavior aligns with the principle of "loss aversion." A term coined by psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, loss aversion suggests we're more likely to avoid losses than to seek gains—even when the gain could be monumental.

In the digital realm, the cost seems low to check out of your life while you check in on your feeds: a few minutes scrolling here, an episode there. But the actual cost? Your time, your creativity, your human essence. When you're occupied—however mindlessly—you're insulated from the responsibility of true engagement in your life.

The Risk of a Fulfilling Life

Engaging with your life, on the other hand, is like traveling through a dark forest. It's full of unknowns and risky situations, but if you choose this adventure, you will make new friends with fulfillment. You might meet the wise wizard of self-actualization! What if you discover the magical elixir of creativity? The risk in turning off the digital world and turning on your life is that you might just realize how incredible you can be.

Why does that scare us so much? Many of us are afraid to fail, sure. Others are afraid of success. What if you are asked to do more at work? What if you become the leader of a company that employs hundreds of people? That's a lot of pressure, especially if we feel exhausted already.

But what if the opposite is true? What if you are more capable than you ever imagined? What if by leaning into your playful, inner child, you unlock the energy of a toddler?

Ask yourself:

Are you glowing, or is it just your phone?

If you are not shining your full light on the world, consider a digital detox.

Schedule Screen Time: Use your phone's built-in screen time features to set limits. It's like a digital chaperone. Set specific times to check your email or social media, and do not open apps outside those times.

Get the Light Phone: A minimalist second phone that only does basics like calls and texts. It's the phone equivalent of a cabin in the woods. Use it on vacation or times of focus to stay connected without access to any scrollable feeds. You can also download

minimalist launchers like Olauncher on Android, which will make it operate like a dumb phone.

Get Out in Nature: You have to walk before you can run, and you have to go outside before you can walk. Spend time in nature to disconnect.

Art & Craft: Rediscover painting, writing, or playing the kazoo. Let creativity be your new "feed." Create more than you consume by making an endless stream of your art.

Get Analog: Read the paper, try using a map, and write with a pen. Remember, the original "tablet" had a chisel and stone. Especially with your communication, take a friend to lunch and ask about their vacation rather than just liking their picture.

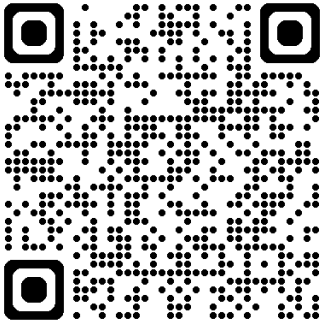
Tech-Free Zones: Designate certain areas in your home where technology is a no-go, like the dinner table. Think of it as a "spa zone," but for your mind. Keep the phone and TV out of your bedroom! Bonus points if you can avoid taking the phone in the bathroom.

Doing a digital detox challenges the status quo. When it comes to tech, you can either be a passive consumer or an active participant in your life. Challenge yourself to put the phone down and pick up your dreams.

Digital Detox Challenge

For the next week, every time you feel the urge to scroll mindlessly, redirect that energy. Instead of numbing your feelings or anxiety, act on them and see if they go away. Jot down those thoughts, or make a to-do list and start checking them off. Pick up a book, go for a walk, or engage in conversation.

When and where can you bring more of your true self? You might discover that turning off the notifications and turning on your full potential is the best update you will ever make.



Playful Human: Milena Regos

Milena lives at the crossroads where humanity, high-flow living, and high performance intersect. She has presented at the World Economic Forum at Davos, Wisdom2.0, and Women in Data, sharing the stage with business luminaries and world

leaders to activate change on a global scale. Unhustle® is a counterintuitive approach to how we live and work that leads to an increase in well-being, focus, and performance. Rooted in science and proven by real life.

Sponsored by Amazon's new Precognition
Delivery: Get it yesterday!

♣ Good choices start
hard and get easy.

Joke of the Week:

Why do you never see elephants hiding in trees? Because they're so good at it.

"What, then, is the right way of living? Life must be lived as play."

- Plato

Bad choices start easy and get harder.

The Comfortable Start of Bad Choices

Why is it that bad habits like eating junk food, skipping exercise, or procrastination seem so easy to start but get increasingly difficult to maintain? Picture bad habits as that sketchy friend from high school: he offers you a drink, and you're having a good time, but after a while, you realize he's not good for you. He's all fun and games, but then the party ends, and you're left to clean up the mess.

Behavioral scientists have identified several factors behind this. For one, bad habits often offer immediate rewards, triggering dopamine hits in our brains. Over time, however, the initial joy fades, replaced by a slew of negative consequences—weight gain, poor health, and stress. This is the principle of "delay discounting," where we opt for smaller, immediate rewards rather than larger, delayed ones.

Ask yourself this question: "Which choice would make my life easier tomorrow?" Whether it is eating a salad instead of pizza, getting to bed on time, or knocking out those last few work items before the weekend, when you make choices for the long term, each day of your life gets easier. Do something today that your future self will be grateful for. Don't make it tomorrow's problem!

Getting Started Making Better Choices

On the flip side, starting good habits, like exercising or eating right, can feel like climbing Mount Everest in flip-flops while walking backward. Why? These rewards are often delayed. You don't see the health benefits instantly; you have to wait for the "glow-up." We need to build our physical and mental conditioning to handle

these challenges. Psychological barriers, like the Dunning-Kruger effect, can also hinder us. This cognitive bias makes us overestimate our abilities, leading to disappointment when results don't materialize immediately. The only way to get good at a new skill is to be bad at it first, and that can cause our confidence and commitment to take a dip.

Willpower plays a critical role. It is like a muscle that gives out if you overuse it. For bad habits, you need increasing willpower to deal with the escalating negatives, like when you're pulling all-nighters to meet deadlines. On the other hand, good habits become self-reinforcing. The better you get at something, the easier it becomes to maintain. It's like using momentum to keep a ball rolling—you need a good push initially, but then the physics of inertia (*or, in our case, the power of habit*) does most of the work. Just make sure you don't overly rely on your willpower when getting started with a new habit.

How can we tip the scales in favor of good habits?

Enter the power of play. Studies have shown that incorporating play into mundane or challenging tasks can improve engagement and outcomes. Making your good habits fun can bring instant gratification, making the start less grueling.

Did you know that it can take up to 200-400 repetitions to build a new habit with willpower alone, but you can build the same skill in 4-12 reps during play!?!

The Power of Points: Use a point system for every good habit you accomplish. Accumulate enough, and reward yourself. Streak charts are a great way to keep your momentum going. Check out this one from one of my favorite Playful Humans, Simone Giertz: [EVERY DAY GOAL CALENDAR | Yetch](#), and check out her [YouTube Channel](#).

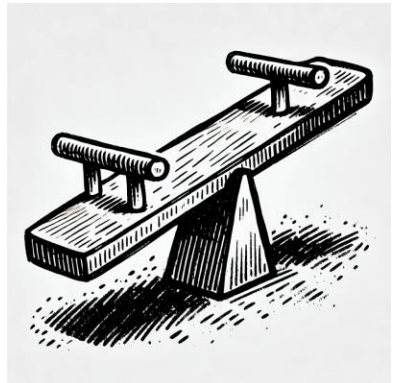
Peer Pressure: Turn it into a social game. Engage in challenges with friends or family. External motivation and accountability are great ways to keep yourself on track. Also, who doesn't have more fun with a friend?

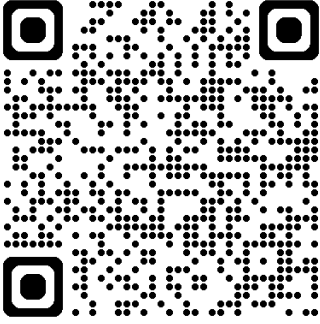
Visualization: Use your creative subconscious to imagine the benefits of your good habits. Picture yourself walking through a version of your future, healthier life. Design the best version of your future self in as much detail as possible. Use your favorite creative outlet to make a self-portrait.

Habit Stacking: Link a fun activity with a good habit, like listening to a comedy podcast while on a jog. Create synergistic opportunities by trapping yourself with reminders, appointments with friends, and setting up other design solutions. The easiest way to start a new habit is to remove old triggers and add new glimmers to your daily routine.

Your next challenge is to pick a habit you've been avoiding and add a sprinkle of play to it. Make it a game for 30 days, involve your social circle, and keep track of your progress.

In a world that's basically a seesaw of choices every day, isn't it smart to put your effort behind good habits? You can either pay now or pay later, but you are going to have to invest in your future. Think of life as a game—while games can be challenging, the real fun lies in overcoming obstacles and making progress. So, make your next move a good one!





Playful Human: Alec Sorenson

Feeling stuck? Alec Sorenson will help you find and keep habits that boost your energy, confidence, and productivity so you can transform your business. People spend a lot of time, energy, and money searching for a breakthrough. It's not one big

breakthrough that you need. You need a handful of positive habits that compound each day to transform your life and business.

Sponsored by Elephants:
They are important mostly because
everything else is irrelephant.

K♣ Play an infinite game!

Joke of the Week:

What's the difference between a
Hippo and a Zippo?
One is very heavy,
and the other is a little lighter.

"There are at least two kinds of games. A finite game is played for the purpose of winning, an infinite game for the purpose of continuing the play."

- James Carse

Playing for Eternity, Not Just for Today

You've heard the saying, "It's not whether you win or lose; it's how you play the game." But what if I told you that even this old adage misses the mark? Get ready to have your mind blown because we're about to unpack James Carse's philosophy of Infinite Games, a way of thinking that will unlock the next level of fun, flow, and fulfillment in your life and career. We are about to take the future-me concept to the extreme. (*Warning: this can be harder to follow than Back To The Future Part II.*)

Finite vs. Infinite Games

Imagine life as a game of soccer. A finite game has a beginning, an end, and rules that everyone agrees upon. Your goal (*pun intended*) is simple: score more than your opponent. Once the whistle blows to end the game, someone's declared the winner, and you all shake hands and go home.

An infinite game, on the other hand, is like joining your friends to kick the soccer ball around with no time limit, no scorekeeping, and no concrete way to "win." The goal is to have as much fun as possible with your friends, to keep playing, and to evolve the game in a way that maintains engagement.

Picture Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo passing the ball back and forth indefinitely, showing off new tricks before they pass it back, inviting more players to help them, and expanding the game across fields, nations, and maybe even planets. (*Yes, Elon Musk would be a proud sponsor of soccer on Mars.*) In an infinite game, the only goal is to keep the game going. If you play to win, you ruin the game by being selfish and ending the fun for everyone else.

Why Playing to Win is a Losing Game

It seems sacrilegious to say so in our competitive culture. We're wired to seek immediate rewards; it's in our evolutionary code. But aiming for short-term wins can make you the hare in Aesop's fable, sprinting ahead only to lose to the tortoise who's playing the long game. Focusing on winning finite games leads to stress, burnout, and an unfulfilling lack of accomplishment. Winning an argument at the cost of a relationship or closing a business deal at the expense of ethics might offer immediate 'wins,' but they erode the social fabric.

Once you start measuring your success, happiness, and victories over others, you start seeing the world with a scarcity mindset. You compare yourself to others. You feel like you have to take from someone else in order to have enough for yourself.

Studies confirm that the pursuit of extrinsic goals like wealth, fame, and status can lead to anxiety and depression. One study by Tim Kasser, a psychology professor at Knox College, finds that the pursuit of intrinsic goals, like personal growth and community contribution, is much better for your well-being.

Infinite Play with Fun, Flow, and Fulfillment

Mind—Playing infinite games trains your mind to focus on growth, abundance, and adaptability. Unlike finite games that have a set path to victory, infinite games require creative problem-solving and continual learning. You must juggle and adapt to keep things in balance rather than over-optimize for one measurement.

Body—Long-term thinking, as opposed to short-term adrenaline spikes, has tangible health benefits. Stress hormones like cortisol drop, which helps your immune system, reduces inflammation, and improves your overall quality of life. Longevity is crucial when

thinking about your physical and mental health. Many athletes have regretted taking shortcuts and destroying their bodies for short-term gain, whether it was steroids, concussions, or just destroying their knees for later in life.

Spirit—The sense of connectedness and community you feel when playing infinite games enriches your soul. The camaraderie of the journey, not the isolation of the win, feeds your spirit. When we play for the long term, we consider the impact of our decisions on others in our organization, our species' sustainability, and the planet's success.

Training for the Infinite Game Lifestyle

Change How You Think about Time: Most people overestimate what they can do in a day, week, or month and underestimate what they can accomplish in a year, decade, or lifetime. Instead of stressing about short-term deadlines, think of your goals as markers along an infinite journey.

Redefine Winning: Measure success by how well you've kept the game going, expanded it, and invited others to play. Grow the pie so everyone has a bigger slice. Rather than "I want to lose 10 pounds this month," say, "I want to live a healthier lifestyle," and make choices along the way that reflect who you want to become. (*I probably shouldn't have mentioned the pie. My bad.*) How can you become the kind of person who is healthy, wealthy, and wise and let success come along with it?

Seek Collaboration Over Competition: Make allies, not enemies. Life isn't a zero-sum game. You are enough. There is enough for all of us. You can win with your friends, family, and co-workers while still allowing space for others. (*One thing I love about this play movement is that the problem is so big that I need the help of everyone who wants to join the cause. Other play advocates are on my team, and I love to feature them on my podcast.*) Even the most successful companies on the planet, like Facebook, are barely

scratching the surface with billions of users. As of this writing, most of the people in the world are NOT on Facebook. Google is trying to get more customers by getting the Internet to more people in developing nations.

Be Generous: Share your resources, knowledge, and opportunities. It's not about accumulating the most toys; it's about expanding the playground for everyone. Research has shown that givers receive more than they give spiritually and physically. Read the *Go-Giver* by Bob Burg.

Stay Curious, Not Judgmental: Continual learning is the hallmark of an infinite player. Read widely, ask questions, and never stop growing. Life has no finish line, final exam, or permanent record. If you zoom out far enough, we are all figuring it out as we go along. Keep going and keep learning.

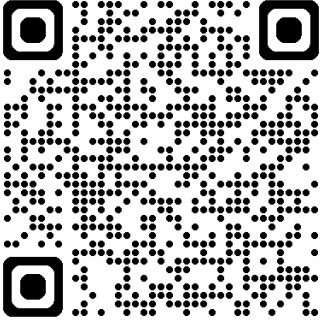
Challenge yourself to step out of short-term thinking and into the infinite. Be the creator of your own game of life: make new rules, pull tricks you didn't even know you had, make friends, and even make opponents say, "Wow, what a player!"

Play it forward!

Take time now to invite a friend on an adventure or share what you have learned in this book with someone that you think needs to hear it. Pick one area of your life where you've been playing a finite game to win or beat someone else. How can you make it infinite? How could you invite that person to collaborate instead of compete?

Start making that shift today, and let the endless games begin!





Playful Human: Louise Wo

Louise Pan Wo is living The Recess Life as an event planner and podcaster. She has a Masters in Applied Positive Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania. She started talking to others about play and learning about its importance

and learned that play plays a role in creativity, innovation, and healing. It makes our work, relationships, and health better. So, why are we not talking about it more?

Sponsored by Dead Batteries:
They are always free of charge.

Section 4

Spades ♠ Confidence ♠ Fearlessness

Spades represent the confidence we need to build a bold and fearless life. We explore how to take risks, overcome fears, and live playfully. By embracing failure as a powerful learning tool, we build the foundation of courage needed to pursue our dreams. Being a Playful Human means developing the fearlessness that comes from knowing we are capable, resilient, and ready to tackle anything life throws our way. Living authentically to yourself requires having confidence in spades.

A♠ Are you spending
more time as Clark Kent
or Superman?

Joke of the Week:

What do you call a sheep who can
sing and dance? Lady Baba.

"Play is training for the unexpected."

- Marc Bekoff

In the never-ending battle for truth, justice, and the pursuit of happiness, are you donning the cape and embracing your superpowers, or are you too busy adjusting those thick-rimmed glasses as Clark Kent? Before we get too tangled in this web, (*Oh wait, wrong superhero.*) Let's clarify who the true persona is.

Clark Kent is a great guy from Kansas. He represents the average Joe. Superman is a hero alien who is the most powerful character ever invented. He is strong and fast, sees and hears everything, and can fly! If you had those superpowers for one day, would you spend it walking around pretending to be human, watching TV, scrolling social media, and eating junk food!?! HELL NO! You would be awesome!

Are You Living as Clark Kent?

Imagine Clark Kent as that version of you who's a little timid, a little unsure, and a little too eager to blend into the wallpaper. This is you in that awkward networking event, pretending to text so you don't have to talk to strangers. It's also you choosing not to share your innovative ideas during a meeting for fear of judgment. Or, maybe you stopped creating art, pursuing your dream, or leaning into that hobby that makes you look silly?

Your inner Clark isn't a bad guy. In fact, he's essential; he's the part of you that's considerate, cautious, and practical. However, the Clark Kent mode can easily become a self-made prison if it stops you from being your best, most courageous self.

Studies have shown that people often underestimate their capabilities, failing to reach their full potential due to fear or self-doubt. Remaining in Clark Kent mode may result in a host of psychological issues, including lower self-esteem, reduced life satisfaction, and even depressive symptoms. Plus, living too conservatively won't help you discover your unique gifts or abilities, essentially robbing the world of your own brand of superpowers.

Why We Fear Our Superman Side

Embracing your inner Superman can be scary. Your Superman is powerful, creative, and revolutionary! And let's face it, Superman's costume doesn't leave much to the imagination, and neither does putting your authentic self out there. But what if someone finds your Kryptonite? What if you offend someone?

Superman also feels like an alien. He fears hurting others with his immense power, and he's constantly aware of his "Kryptonite." (*Your emotional vulnerabilities and fears of rejection.*) Yet, he flies high because he understands the stakes if he doesn't lean into his gifts.

Don the Cape:

How to Embrace Your Inner Superman

Turn Play into Power. Life doesn't always have to be a grim struggle for survival. A study from the National Institute for Play found that adults can foster creativity, improve social skills, and even build confidence through play. So, whether it's enjoying a brainstorming collaboration at work or playing a game that sharpens your skills, find ways to use play as a chance to develop your superpower.

(I enjoy watching cartoons and superhero movies because they remind us of our call to greatness. In playful environments, we can fake it until we make it. We can pretend and practice being awesome before we are called into action.)

Create a Super-Identity. Just like Superman has his Fortress of Solitude, you need a space—literal or metaphorical—where you can shed the Clark Kent persona. Spend some time crafting your super-identity. Write down your powers (*skills*), allies (*supportive people*), and arch-nemeses (*fears or obstacles*). Keep this as a reference for when you need a boost of courage. Name your inner

superhero and create your costume. Many athletes and performers love getting dressed up and being their best selves. You can, too!

(I loved having my alter-ego, Romeo, when I was a DJ. Mike was a computer nerd who felt left out. DJ Romeo was a funny, charismatic performer who brought thousands of people to the dance floor.)

Own Your Origin Story. Everyone loves a hero's journey. Acknowledge the hurdles you've overcome, the lessons you've learned, and how they've shaped you. Your experiences are your unique origin story; they make your persona truly one-of-a-kind. Some experts say your biggest fear as a child becomes your superpower as an adult.

(As a child, I was bullied at school and felt left out. Now, as an adult, I make it my mission to make sure others feel safe and included through community building.)

Find Your Justice League. Even Superman needs a team. Surround yourself with people who bring out the Superman in you—those who challenge you, support you, and celebrate your victories. Research has shown that social support can significantly improve self-esteem and life satisfaction.

(I truly enjoy working with play advocates and other performers who are fearless in sharing their voices and talents with the world. They continually inspire me and push me to become a better version of myself.)

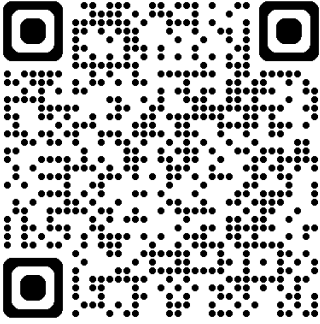
Life's too short to be spent in Clark Kent's sensible shoes. Let your inner Superman soar, embracing the possibilities and getting rid of that metaphorical Kryptonite. After all, most of it is in your head.

Keep a Hero Journal

For one week, consciously choose one activity a day where you'll act as Superman, not Clark Kent. Keep a journal during this period,

and jot down how these actions made you feel and what you learned.

Remember, the world doesn't need more Clark Kents. It needs you in your full, caped glory. (*Just please put your underwear inside your outfit!*)



Playful Human: Emma Stroud

Emma is an amazing creator, podcaster, author, speaker, MC, coach, and Orange, the clown! Her mission is to get people to laugh, think, and play more. She wants to help you to be brilliant. She has been a performer for over twenty

years – acting, clowning, devising, improvising, and directing. She has a passion for creating stories that provoke laughter and thought in every audience. Check out her book, *Lessons From A Clown*.

Brought to you by the Almond Diet:
I was going to try an all-almond diet,
but that's just nuts.

2♠ No one can beat you at
being you.

Joke of the Week:

How many Storm Troopers does it take to change a lightbulb? None because they are all on the dark side.

"Play matters because people matter. It reminds us of our interdependence and gives us a chance to really see other people. And in turn, to be really and truly seen."

- Jill Violet

Picture a slice of pizza in a world of cheeseburgers. Imagine trying to fold your slice in half to make your crust look like a bun, squishing it into a ball, and trying to become more like a burger. Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? You'd lose the cheesy goodness and toppings that make pizza so great. Well, that's what happens when you suppress your true self to fit into someone else's mold.

The Square-Peg-in-a-Round-Hole Dilemma

Conforming to others' expectations isn't just exhausting; it's a game you can never win. Psychologists have termed this the "Social Comparison Theory," which states that individuals determine their own social and personal worth based on how they stack up against others. The problem? It's a never-ending cycle. If you're constantly playing catch-up, how can you ever get ahead? When you add in the filters of social media, you end up comparing your blooper reel to everyone else's top 10 highlights.

Fitting in can have huge detriments to your confidence and mental health. Research reveals that suppressing your real emotions and actions for the sake of fitting in can lead to elevated stress levels, anxiety, and even depression. It can also limit your career advancement. Conforming to norms may make you tolerable at work, but it will never make you unforgettable. A study by Harvard Business Review found that employees who conform are less likely to get promoted than those who exhibit authentic leadership.

The Power of Being Unapologetically You

Have you ever heard the saying, "In a world where you can be anything, be yourself."? It's not just an Instagram caption; it's a lifestyle worth pursuing.

Boosts Confidence: Self-acceptance can make you feel more secure and confident. According to psychology, those who

embrace their true selves exhibit higher levels of mental well-being.

Unlocks Unique Opportunities: In the job market, where differentiation is key, standing out is your greatest asset. A study showed that recruiters value uniqueness and cultural fit over conformity.

Builds Genuine Relationships: Authenticity attracts like-minded individuals. When you're true to yourself, you draw in people who appreciate the "real" you. Less masquerading equals more meaningful connections.

Who doesn't want to be appreciated for who they really are at work and home and valued for what only they can bring to the market?

Here's how you can lean into what makes you so special:

Identify Your Strengths: Not sure what makes you tick? Try the StrengthsFinder test or the VIA Character Strengths Questionnaire online.

Seek Encouraging Feedback: 360 feedback from your peers, mentors, and subordinates can help you find your strengths. Constructive criticism is also useful, but remember, you're in control of your own life. Not everyone has to like your style, but you should love it. Look for insights into how you can be more of yourself, not how you can fit into a neater box.

Create a Personal Brand: Write down what you stand for and what you won't compromise on. This can be your compass in decision-making situations. What do you like about yourself? When are you at your best? What activities make you feel confident, powerful, and special?

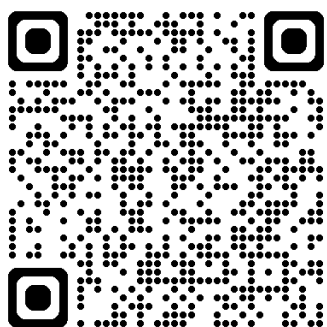
(My personal brand is “creative nerdery.” I am smart and silly at the same time, and I feel most like myself when I am playfully creating, connecting with others, learning, and sharing my lessons learned.)

Showcase Your Skills: Leverage social platforms like LinkedIn to showcase your unique talents. Instead of fitting in, think about how you can stand out with your personal brand and attract opportunities for which you are uniquely qualified.

Never Stop Evolving: The “you” you are today shouldn’t be the same “you” five years from now. Keep adapting, but stay true to your core. Go confidently in the direction of your dreams and continue the process of becoming who you always dreamed you could be.

Focus on the tasks that you want to do: the fun ones, the ones that make you feel fulfilled, the ones that make you excited to start. Observe how it impacts your confidence and happiness.

Look, average is predictable, boring, and replaceable. If you are like everyone else, we don’t need you, but in a competitive job market, no one can beat you at being you. Remember, you’re an unparalleled masterpiece in a world of photocopies. Don’t hide what makes you special. We need you to be awesome!



Playful Human: Jill Vialet

Jill is the founder of Playworks, the leading national nonprofit leveraging the power of safe, fun, and healthy play at school every day. Playworks create a place for every kid on the playground to feel included, be active, and build

TWO OF SPADES

valuable social and emotional skills. Playworks partners with schools, districts, and after-school programs to provide a service or mix of services, including on-site coaches, professional training for school staff who support recess, and consultative partnerships.

Sponsored by the word Short:
It's the only word you can make shorter by
adding two letters.

3 ♠ Create a safe space for fearlessness.

Joke of the Week:

What do you call security staff at Samsung?
Guardians of the Galaxy.

“My childhood play took me to extremes, and all of them, I now understand, were a fun way to test the social realities into which one is born. Surely this is a most important evolutionary function of play—finding out what is fun and fair or not fair on the field of life.”

- Jaak Panksepp

Safety, the word brings to mind seatbelts, helmets, and perhaps an overly cautious parent. But we're not talking about physical safety here. Most people are aware of the physical dangers in life, but psychological safety is a bit trickier. If we are not careful, we can play things too safe and lose our ability to risk, grow, and fail forward.

The Paradox of Play:

Safe Failures

Imagine being a kid and playing with building blocks. You stack them up, they fall down, and you laugh because that's part of the game, and, well, you're a kid! Kids understand the paradox of play. It is how they learn—a risk-free arena where failure isn't just tolerated; it's expected. Failure in a safe space is like a free gym membership for your brain. You get to exercise your decision-making, creativity, skill-building, and problem-solving without the fear of being judged.

Play, in all its glorious forms, from video games and puzzles to travel adventures and team-building exercises, promotes a sense of safety, which builds confidence. According to a study published in the *American Journal of Play*, environments that encourage playful behavior have been linked to increased creativity, better problem-solving, and improved emotional well-being. The gains from play can be as visible in the office as they are when watching a toddler learn to walk. We can learn to crawl, walk, and run with new projects, initiatives, and product lines.

The Phoenix Effect:

How Failure Feeds Resilience

If playfulness is where the magic happens, then psychological safety is the ticket-taker letting you into the theater. You must create an environment where you feel safe expressing your ideas, making mistakes, and revealing your "flaws" without fearing

ridicule or backlash. The only way to get good at something is to be bad at it first, and we must fail to build our confidence. In her 2012 TEDx talk, renowned psychologist Brené Brown elaborated on the significance of vulnerability for innovation and personal growth. Being vulnerable permits us to explore the unknown within and around us. And what's personal growth if not a quest into the unknown?

Failure often feels like hitting a brick wall. But, plot twist: that wall is made of LEGO, and you can rebuild it however you want. In an unpredictable world, changes can cause temporary setbacks at any time. Don't you hate it when your phone or computer updates and sets you back a minute while you figure out the new buttons? But, eventually, we appreciate the new features and productivity. How you navigate these temporary setbacks determines your resilience. We have to reconfigure our mind, body, and spirit to move forward. There is no such thing as staying the same in life.

A report by Harvard Business Review suggests that individuals and teams that have experienced failure and learned from it are often more resilient and effective when tackling future challenges. It's counterintuitive but straightforward: failing and surviving it helps you build an immune system against future setbacks. You develop emotional strength.

Create Your Personal "Safe Space"

Start Small, Fail Small: When venturing into the unknown, begin with low-stakes situations where the impact of failure is minimal. It's easier to recover from a stumble than a full-blown faceplant.

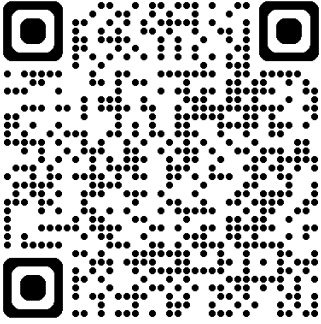
Cultivate a Growth Mindset: Psychologist Carol Dweck taught us about the dangers of a fixed mindset and the benefits of being open to growth and change. Look at challenges as opportunities to grow. Reframe failure as not a mark against your worth but as a temporary setback in a much larger journey.

Encourage Open Dialogue: Whether it's at home or in the office, promote an environment where people can share without fear of humiliation or reprisal. The moment someone feels safe enough to tell you the truth, you've laid the first brick in the foundation of a safe space.

Invest Time in Play: Be it a hobby, a game night, or even an impromptu dance-off, make time to play. It's not just for kids; it's your mental sandbox as an adult. A game of Twister doesn't just help you be more physically flexible. It builds your mental toughness and relationships, too!

Creating your safe space to play with failure and fearlessness is a crucial part of building your confidence. It's about teaching yourself how to be courageously vulnerable, wildly experimental, and gloriously fallible. Schedule time to build a safe space for yourself and then fail spectacularly in it.

No one notices the person who places it safe and blends in, and no one looks back at their life and fondly remembers the safety of the couch. You remember the colossal failures and epic wins of big swings and major moments. Don't be afraid to add more peaks and valleys to your life.



Playful Human: Keith Kong

Keith is a mentalist. He reads people's minds for a living on stage. He has performed around the world and fooled Penn and Teller on season 7 of their show Fool Us! Keith plays with psychology, memory, and profiling to make magic happen for his audiences.

Sponsored by Sidewalks: I'd like to give a special shout out to sidewalk for keeping me off of the streets.

4♠ **Blame it on your
alter ego.**

Joke of the Week:

What do you call a criminal
landing an airplane?
Condescending.

*"Belief in your alter ego gives you the confidence and
courage to take risks and achieve greatness."*

- Todd Herman

Hopefully, you agree that you are done hiding as Clark Kent and are ready to unleash your inner Superman into the world! There's a fun new concept that's been flying around the psychological safety skyline—the Alter Ego Effect. What if you could create your own superhero persona to flip the script and help you experiment with role-playing as your super self?

What is the Alter Ego Effect?

Think of your alter ego as your own version of a mask you can wear to protect your psychological identity. The Batman persona you can use to help protect your inner Bruce Wayne, except this one doesn't need a multi-billion-dollar inheritance to afford the gadgets, Batcave, and Batmobile. The Alter Ego Effect, popularized by Todd Herman, refers to the practice of adopting an alternative persona to help you perform better in various aspects of life.

Separate and Protect Your Identity

If Spiderman went around all night fighting crime as Peter Parker, the constant pressure would follow him during the day and disrupt his life. Plus, there would be other risks threatening him and his friends, which could distract him or cause him to give up. The same goes for us; the benefits of separating our superhero alter ego from our daily selves include reducing performance anxiety and maintaining balance. We protect our self-esteem and avoid hiding in shame by role-playing as a new character.

Experiment Without Fear

When you put on your alter ego's costume, you're free to experiment, take calculated risks, and even fail without damaging your core identity. Think of it as training wheels for your new life ambitions. Research has shown that separating yourself from your actions in this manner can reduce stress and anxiety. Besides, it's true! How you perform in any given task has no bearing on how you should feel about your self-esteem. You are more valuable than the sum of your accomplishments.

Harness the Power of Visualization

Visualizing yourself as a superhero can make achieving those herculean tasks more manageable. In psychology, this is called "future self-continuity," and studies indicate that having a vivid image of your future self can significantly increase your current self's self-control and decision-making abilities. Many times, you can pretend to act like someone with courage, and it has the same outcome as actually being courageous!

Be the Hero of Your Own Story

Narrative identity is the idea that we all have an internalized story that shapes our actions. Crafting a powerful narrative that involves seeing yourself as the hero can help you achieve things that your regular self might find daunting. We are all writing the story of our lives each day, and we can flip the script and start a new chapter at any time. You could make yourself the hero that saves the day!

Tips for Creating Your Superhero Alter Ego

#1 Set Up Your Bat Signals.

List your areas for improvement where you want to be a little more super. Knowing your "Kryptonite" helps you craft a persona that can handle them better than you currently can. Then, set up glimmers that activate your alter ego. Whenever you see the signals that a superhero persona is needed, you can suit up and kick butt!

#2 Design Your Costume.

A particular piece of clothing can provide cognitive cues that expedite your transformation. Clearly identify the situations where you will need your super suit and make sure you bring it with you. Donning the cape, (*or maybe not a cape exactly,*) putting on a favorite watch, hat, or pair of shoes can be a psychological reminder that you are in superhero mode!

#3 Make a Hero's Soundtrack.

Don't you just love it when the action music kicks in and ramps up the energy of the movie? Music can influence your emotional state. Create a playlist that your alter ego would listen to to pump themselves up. Design your mixtape as the soundtrack of your life to change your energy and launch into a new dimension.

#4 Find Your Superman Pose.

Amy Cuddy's research on power posing reveals that standing tall can chemically boost your confidence. Imagine the physical presence of a superhero and see what you can do. Preparing yourself to be at your best by doing a superhero pose will boost your confidence.

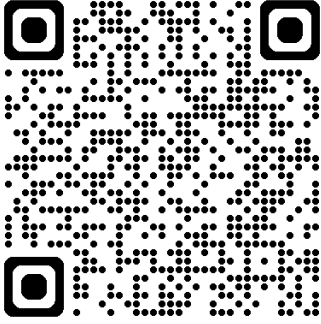
#5 Write Your Story.

Keep a progress journal. Track the decisions made, risks taken, and the tasks accomplished while in your alter ego state. Reflect on them to improve and fine-tune your superhero persona. You get to choose whether the next scene is one of triumph or tribulation.

Sure, blaming your alter ego for that bold new business move or daring social interaction may sound like a cop-out. But if that's what it takes to break free from your self-imposed limitations, then go ahead—use your alter ego!

Create your alter ego now.

Name your bold, fearless version of yourself, describe their traits, and write a short story about how your alter ego overcomes a difficult situation with confidence. What would your alter ego do today if they knew they were the hero of the story and could not fail? Use your journal or the rest of this page to write your story.



Playful Human: Kate Katz

Kate is the owner and founder of All Hands In, a soft skills development company. She is also a trained puppeteer and special effects artist. She observed a link between the art form of puppetry and soft skills like awareness, adaptability, communication, problem-solving, and collaboration. She created training platforms focused on developing these skills using puppetry.

Sponsored by Discount DVDs:
I sold my Batman DVD collection on eBay.
No Returns.

♠ Create a fun bucket list for your future!

Joke of the Week:

How does the man in the moon cut his hair?
Eclipse it.

"This is the real secret of life: to be completely engaged with what you are doing in the here and now, and instead of calling it 'work,' realize that this is play."

- Alan Watts

A Playbook for a Thrilling Future

The "Bucket List" is an aspirational catalog of dreams. It's like the Christmas wish list of adulthood. But what if you switched things up, ditched the gravitas, and instead of waiting for someday to come, turned it into a fun bucket list, a Fucket List? (*You heard that right.*) Instead of wishing and hoping, what if you just said, "Screw it, let's do it!" What if, instead of a list of accomplishments to write on your resume for other people, you made a list of fun activities just for your own enjoyment?

This idea isn't just about gathering a list of whimsical experiences for Instagram glory. It's about breaking the monotony and improving your mental health. Goals don't have to be homework assignments for yourself. You don't have to toil away at them for years. They don't have to be logical and practical. Playful goal setting injects levity into our lives, making the journey enjoyable, not just the destination.

When we approach goals playfully, we're more open to novelty, ambiguity, and complexity. It's like a jazz musician jamming—exploring new melodies without getting bogged down by rigid scales. Novel experiences spark dopamine, which enhances learning and rewards exploration. Tackling ambiguity and uncertainty also boosts cognitive flexibility and resilience. Think of it as a mental agility course; you're not just running in a straight line anymore; you're dodging, leaping, ducking, and dodging.

Top Tips for Crafting Your Fucket List

Dream Big & Get Specific

Don't just think you want to "Travel more." How about "Swim with dolphins in the Bahamas" or "Salsa dance in the streets of Cuba"? The more vivid your goal, the more motivated you'll be to chase it. Specifics are the spice of life!

Prioritize Experiences Over Material Things

Remember that joy you felt as a kid when you were counting down the days to a family trip? Anticipation is a potent happiness booster. The more you can anticipate an experience, the more enjoyment you'll wring out of it. Unlike the fading luster of material possessions, experiences become a part of our identity, adding to our story and enriching our lives.

Openness to Novelty

Keep a slot open for "Wildcard Adventures"—things you've never considered before. Life often throws interesting curveballs, and your Fucket List should be flexible enough to hit a home run when they come along. Sometimes, the best stories come from the most unexpected adventures. Overly planned events like weddings and New Year's Eve often leave us disappointed because of the structure. The expectations are simply too high.

Keep It Diverse

Include activities catering to various well-being aspects: emotional, physical, intellectual, and even spiritual (*whatever that means to you*). Perhaps you could aim for "Laugh till I cry at a stand-up comedy show" and "Climb a mountain and meditate at the summit." Many people make the mistake of seeking balance in their goals. We want to be varied and unexpected. Balance is boring.

Share It With Others

Make your Fucket List public, or at least share it with a few close playmates. It creates accountability and invites collaboration—someone might just share your passion for late-night poetry slams or fire-juggling workshops. Invite others to join you, look for opportunities, or at least support your missions of mischief.

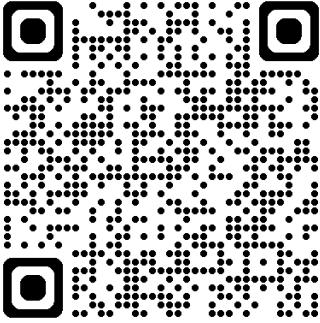
Having a Fucket List does more than tickle your funny bone. The power of positive anticipation and unexpected joy should not be underestimated; it can turn ordinary moments into magical ones. The anticipatory joy of future events, like vacations and other fun activities, releases endorphins and serotonin, alleviating stress and promoting well-being. When you recall the memories, you get to enjoy the positive feelings before, during, and after the event.

You're far more likely to reminisce about that unforgettable snorkeling adventure than the fancy watch you bought. These memories become a kind of emotional anchor, tethering us to our most authentic selves. They also create lasting bonds with the people who share these magical moments with us.

Design your own Fucket List today.

Don't wait! Your challenge is to write down at least five fun, playful experiences that you wouldn't usually consider. Then, pick one and take the first step to making it happen. Buy that ticket, block the calendar, or invite that friend. It's time to live out your personal Ferris Bueller's Day Off. Play hooky and check something off your list. Your future self will thank you for it!

Let's stop tiptoeing around life's playground. Your Fucket List isn't just a to-do list; it's a "to-live" list. Go out and paint your masterpiece, one playful stroke at a time!



Playful Human: Art Bell

Art Bell worked at CBS and HBO, where he founded The Comedy Channel, which became Comedy Central, and then was President of Court TV. Constant Comedy is the story of how he helped make the fledgling channel a success. In his book, he shares how he lost his sense of humor while starting the

channel that went on to become a powerhouse in comedy entertainment.

Sponsored by Chemistry:

I have a joke about chemistry, but I don't think it will get a reaction.

6♠ **openness is confidence.**

Joke of the Week:

How many tickles does it take to
make an octopus laugh?
Ten tickles.

"I believe that life exists to be enjoyed."

- Tim Ferris

The key to a fulfilling life is embracing openness and the courage it takes to live fully and unapologetically. It takes confidence to live and love wholeheartedly. It takes commitment, high self-esteem, and resilience to maintain your beliefs and your identity in the face of life's challenges. From distractions from marketing to peer pressure from friends, sometimes, it feels like the whole world wants to shape the vision you have for your life. However, we must resist the temptation to hide ourselves if we want to make a real impact on ourselves and others.

Openness Is Attractive.

Openness is often associated with vulnerability, but being authentic is not about allowing yourself to be open to attack. It is more about having the confidence to be the best version of yourself, which, ironically, leaves you less vulnerable, especially in personal relationships and your career. The more open you are, the more likely you are to succeed.

Studies indicate that openness to experience, one of the Big Five personality traits, is positively correlated with self-esteem. It takes a confident person to say, "Here I am, world—take it or leave it!" However, the backward law here is that more people will choose to take it. Confidence and authenticity are more attractive than weakness and acting like something you are not.

Emotional Intelligence Is the Key to Self-Awareness.

Daniel Goleman, a pioneer in emotional intelligence, argues that recognizing and managing our own emotions and understanding those of others is a cornerstone of self-awareness. The more aware you are of your identity, the more you can recognize and develop the traits that make you special. Emotional intelligence gives us the skills to be more authentic. The math is simple: Emotional Intelligence + Openness = A More Confident You.

Authenticity Is the Root of Genuine Connections.

Psychological studies link authenticity to a variety of aspects of psychological well-being, including vitality, self-esteem, and coping skills. So, living authentically enhances your own well-being, but it also allows for more real connections with others. Living authentically means listening to that inner voice that whispers promptings from your true self. When you do what is right and true to yourself, you build your confidence and feel better after taking action. When you deny your promptings for generosity, greatness, or playfulness, you feel like an imposter, a hypocrite, and the fear of being called out weakens your identity.

Why You Should Feel the Highs and Lows of Being Open

Facing our ups and downs head-on has psychological benefits. Research shows that the ability to engage with both positive and negative emotions can significantly impact mental resilience. Essentially, living openly allows us to fully experience the rich tapestry of human emotions—otherwise, you're just getting a dull, lifeless photocopy of your own life.

Wholehearted living is about integrating all aspects of our experience, even the messy parts. A study from the *Journal of Happiness Studies* shows that acceptance, a component of wholehearted living, is a key factor in long-term well-being. When we hide ourselves, run from the truth, and bottle up our negative emotions, we accumulate stress, pain, and trauma. When we open ourselves up to feel the negative feelings, we begin processing the situation and healing ourselves. It creates tremendous personal growth.

Here are some quick tips for a more open life:

Express Yourself: Write a poem, paint a picture, or compose a song to channel your emotions. You don't have to share it with anyone. Just start by getting your honest thoughts out of your head.

Mirror, Mirror: Take a good, hard look at yourself in the mirror. Speak three affirmations that make you feel confident and open. Start filling your mind with the positive beliefs you want to embody.

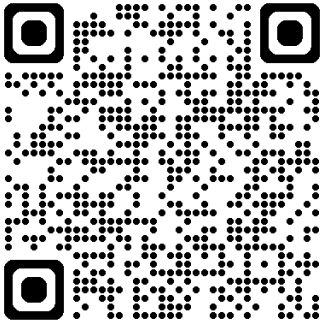
Get Real: Try the "deep thoughts" approach with a friend or co-worker. Skip the small talk and dive into meaningful conversations with someone. Start by sharing your truth and asking them about how they are really doing, so you don't just get that canned response, fine.

Embrace All Emotions: Practice feeling your entire range of emotions, your highs and lows, and notice what triggers them and what allows you to reset them. When you practice moving back and forth between emotions, you realize they are temporary, and you won't fear getting stuck in down cycles. When you flatline, you die. Living means experiencing peaks and valleys.

Play Time: Incorporate short bursts of play into your day, whether it's a quick joke with your friends or tossing a ball with your pet. Use play to reset your mind, body, and spirit to its playful default settings. Remember, your playful natural child is your truest and more open identity.

Open Up

Express yourself in a new way today that feels the most like you—sing out loud, wear that bold outfit, or just share a personal story with a friend. It's your life. Make it a brilliant one. Do one thing that is uniquely shining your light on the world.



Playful Human: Justin Guarini

Justin was runner-up on the first American Idol season to Kelly Clarkson. He released several successful musical albums. He is Lil' Sweet in the Diet Dr. Pepper commercial, has starred in 6 Broadway shows, appeared on

Oprah, and so much more. Justin is the author of *Unshakable Confidence: The Powerful Formula for Being, Doing, Having, and Giving More Than You Ever Imagined!*

Sponsored by Calendars:
Help save the calendars.
Their days are numbered.

7♠ Gain confidence through
temporary failure.

Joke of the Week:

Did you hear about the guy who
invented the knock-knock joke?
He won the 'no-bell' prize.

*"Never let the fear of striking out stop you from
playing the game."*

- Babe Ruth

The Underrated Power of Failing Forward

Let's talk about one of life's spiciest ingredients, one that we all avoid like the plague: failure. Yes, the F-word. Most people are terrified of failure because of their parent's expectations and the letter grade in school. But what if failure is actually the best way to build bulletproof confidence? Often, your setbacks are just set-ups for fabulous comebacks.

(I want to tell you a story about one of my failures. In my mid-twenties, I got the opportunity to open for Billy Idol as a DJ when his tour came through Kansas City. If you are under 30, go to Spotify and look up Rebel Yell, White Wedding, or Mony Mony. I'll wait.

I was super pumped to get a chance to play in a huge theater of about 1,500 people and be a part of this legendary rock show. I met with Billy and his manager before the show, and they said to play rock music and whatever retro stuff we played on the radio station. At the time, I was the prize guy for e105, playing music from retro to right now. They also told me not to play any Billy Idol songs so they could save those for the end of the night.

It sounded perfect. I was going to get \$200 and an autographed picture. I was going to play for a theater full of soccer moms, and I was very confident that I could nail this. I had been a DJ in clubs, bars, and on the radio for about four years, and I knew what this audience wanted to hear. I was thinking of songs all day, like Jenny (867-5309), Jessie's Girl, and Faith. Maybe I would throw in a little Aerosmith and Poison for the rock show.

What I didn't realize is that Billy Idol started in the 1970s and considers himself a classic rock artist, not 80s pop-rock. I was fired, live on stage, in front of over a thousand people with no notice. The manager told the sound guys to cut my music and turn off the lights, and I was just standing there helpless with no control as he made the cut-throat sign and yelled, "You're done."

I slinked off the stage in the dark, stunned. I did not collect \$200. I did not pass Go. I just ducked out the back and walked around to my radio friends in the front, still in shock. But you know what? That was the day I learned a valuable lesson.

Confidence is not gained through success. It is built by overcoming temporary failures. That was the day I became bulletproof as a performer. I had survived about the worst thing I could think of, and I was now free to be myself and go on to crush every other opportunity after that. I went on to open for Frankie Valli. I'll wait again, ugh. These were old retro acts at the time; I am not that old. That concert was ten times bigger and a huge success!

Since then, I have had a ton of wins, challenges, and losses. However, they haven't affected my identity because I was able to be confident in who I was as a performer, even if I got heckled, assaulted, the power went out, or whatever craziness came my way. I have done shows on 9/11/2001 and March 15th, 2020, when the world was falling apart, and I was able to find the strength to deliver for my audience. Over 3,000 podcasts, broadcasts, speeches, and shows later, I have earned the confidence that I need to put my whole self out there.)

The Springboard Effect:

How Resilience Cultivates Strength

Resilience is like emotional Teflon. When you're resilient, setbacks don't stick. A study from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln found that resilient individuals recover from adversity faster and exhibit lower stress levels and greater life satisfaction. So, a better metaphor might be failure as life's trampoline. The lower you go, the higher you bounce back.

Resilience is key to emotional stability, cognitive alertness, and psychological well-being. Every time you encounter a failure or a setback, write it down. Note down what you learned from it and what proactive steps you can take to bounce back. Call this your "Resilience Journal."

The Imposter Within:

When Winning Leads to Wobbling

Imagine you're constantly winning. You never lose. Awesome, right? But winning too much can be a sign of weakness. Success, especially when it comes easy, can leave you feeling like a fraud, expecting to be "found out" at any moment. This can undermine your self-confidence and create a cycle of anxiety. Also, if you are winning too much, you might not be challenging yourself enough.

It is hard to learn and grow without failure. It sounds ridiculous, but a healthy balance is winning more than you lose, about 50-80% of the time when trying your best. We want to win more than we lose to create momentum but lose enough to stretch our comfort zones, challenge our skills, and develop new capabilities.

The next time you find yourself feeling a win or a loss, stop to acknowledge your achievements. Remind yourself that you are worthy of success and you are learning from failure. Don't just be a scorekeeper; be a storyteller of your own achievements. You either win, or you learn.

The Safety Illusion

Do you know what's more dangerous than failure? Playing it safe. When you're committed to not losing, you're not really committed at all. If failure is not an option, then neither is success. Playing it safe breeds doubt, keeping you stuck in the comfort zone's cushy but stifling embrace. A study by Northwestern University indicates that those who avoid taking calculated risks are more prone to regret later in life. Life is all about movement, growth, and change. If you are not taking any swings, you are never going to hit a home run.

Take a baby step outside your comfort zone each day. Whether it's speaking up in a meeting or trying a new hobby, broaden your horizons and remove that pesky doubt. The only way to eliminate doubt is to have the guts to try something and find out the truth.

The Playground of Life:

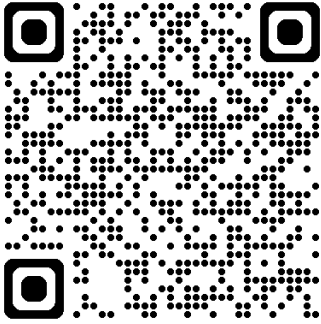
Failing and Rebuilding

Life is a playground. Being in a playful state is moving between order and chaos. You can play from behind or in front. You can trip, fall, and get back up without the world ending. You can lose the battle today and still win the war tomorrow. When most people fear failure, it is because they think a temporary setback is permanent. But your parents and teachers lied to you. There is no permanent record where your bad marks are stored for the rest of your life. Almost everything is temporary except for death, so be careful with physical and fatal risks. Other than that, you can always move, start again, or rebuild!

Change your daily mantra to, "Each day is another chance to choose how I want to live." Whenever you feel stuck or overwhelmed, remember that you're not bound by yesterday's decisions. When you find yourself taking things too seriously, reframe this aspect of your life as a game. For example, if you're nervous about a big project at work, think of it as a puzzle or quest. Approaching stressful situations in a playful state will allow you to be flexible and relaxed enough to perform at your best.

Remember: There's No Permanent Scoreboard in the Sky.

The finish line is a mirage. There's no final exam, and the only person you should compare yourself to is who you were yesterday. Remember James Carse's concept of life as an "infinite game," where the goal isn't to win or lose but to keep playing. Failure isn't a stumbling block; it's a stepping stone. It's the secret ingredient in a fulfilling life, making it more savory, more resilient, and, yes, more successful. Turn your setbacks into comebacks, your trials into triumphs, and your failures into your future confidence.



Playful Human: TJ Walsh

TJ is the host of The Bold Creatives Collective Podcast. He has worked at the colorful intersection of creativity, art, therapy, and education. He is an innovative, out-of-the-box artist, creative clinician and coach, CliniCoach®, and Licensed Professional Counselor. His passion is to help you nurture your creative life so that you can be the powerhouse of an artist and human you are created to be.

Brought to you by Pianos:
I used to play piano by ear.
Now, I just use my hands.



Bold Moves Bingo

B	I	N	G	O
Speak up in a meeting	Try a new hobby	Compliment a stranger	Say no to something	Ask for feedback
Start a conversation	Share a personal story	Take a calculated risk	Ask for help	Take on a leadership role
Initiate a new project	Give an unexpected gift	FREE SPACE (Create your alter ego if you haven't already)	Voice a new idea	Challenge yourself physically
Set a bold goal	Introduce yourself to someone new	Offer help to someone	Admit a mistake	Suggest a change to a project
Speak up for someone	Attend a new event	Try something outside your comfort zone	Give a presentation	Ask a bold question

Instructions:

1. **Make a Bold Move:** What challenge will you check off today? And how will that confidence carry over into the rest of your week?
2. **Complete a Row or Entire Card:** As you go about your day or week, aim to complete a row, column, or even the entire card by checking off these bold actions.
3. **Reflect:** Once you've completed a bold move, take a moment to reflect on how it made you feel and what impact it had on your confidence.

Feel free to print out the card or recreate it in a format that works for you. Keep it visible as a reminder to take confident actions daily!

8 ♠ Buts are for
party-pooing.

Joke of the Week:

Why did the scarecrow win an award?
Because he was outstanding in his field.

*“A lack of play should be treated like malnutrition:
it’s a health risk to your body and mind.”*

- Dr. Stuart Brown

The Art of Ditching Excuses and Embracing the "Yes, And" Philosophy

You've heard it before, the classic "but" that sneaks into conversations like a notorious party pooper. It's the hallmark of naysayers and excuse-makers worldwide. Yet, in the improv theater of life, there's a much more appealing script that can be followed, one that leads to confidence, collaboration, and a whole lot of creativity. Enter stage left: the "Yes, And" mindset.

When we cling to our "buts," we're often shielding ourselves from the risk of being wrong or looking foolish. It's our psychological immune system in action, prioritizing safety over growth. However, the quest for success while maintaining constant correctness is like trying to swim while wearing a heavy suit of armor; it just doesn't work.

Letting go of the need to be right unchains you from the weight of your expectations; it's like opening the door to a party with many new possibilities. When you use a "Yes, And" mindset, each idea can build upon the last in a harmonious conga line of innovation. The fun lies in the unexpected twists and turns as more dancers join the movement.

Building Confidence with the Improv Mindset

By adopting a "Yes, And" philosophy, you join an ongoing, infinite game of intellectual keepy-uppy, where the aim is to keep the ball in the air. When you're not preoccupied with self-defense, your mind can focus on problem-solving and team-building to keep supporting the group effort. You learn how to respond to changes quickly and deal with uncertainty as part of the process.

Imagine a workplace or a home where "Yes, And" is the norm. The atmosphere is free and open, with trust and positivity. Confidence

grows not from the absence of errors but from the presence of acceptance and the eagerness to build on each contribution. It's an incubator for bold ideas, abundance, and resilient relationships.

On the other hand, when you try to control everything and everyone, something always feels dangerous and out of place. You are playing a balancing game that is eventually going to fall apart.

Life is rarely black and white and never balanced. Our minds are the canvas for many shades of gray (*not exactly fifty*). Holding two or more conflicting beliefs is the mental equivalent of patting your head and rubbing your belly—it takes practice. Cognitive dissonance, the mental discomfort experienced when holding onto two conflicting ideas, is a sign of an engaged mind. It is a hallmark of intelligence and wisdom. Life is messy, ever-changing, and uncertain.

To ease into this state of playfulness, start with small exercises and practice. For instance, accept that you can be a meticulous planner yet still value spontaneity.

(I used to be a wedding DJ and would tell the bridezillas to do all of their planning, agonizing, and worry up front, but on their wedding day, they have to let go and have fun. It is going to be whatever it becomes. Mistakes become hilarious stories over time. Rain is good luck and not at all ironic, Alanis.)

Once you become comfortable with smaller levels of uncertainty, you can tackle the heavier mental gymnastics — like acknowledging that you can have a successful career and not know all the answers at the same time. We are all making this up as we go along, anyway.

Tips for a 'But-Free' Life:

How to Use Yet or “Yes, And”

Listen Fully: Before you add your "but," listen to the entire idea. Often, it's not about agreeing with everything. It is about understanding and respecting the viewpoint. Listen to absorb the whole concept and think about all possible likely outcomes, not just one negative aspect or rare outcome.

Open Minds, Open Doors: Assume that every idea has a kernel of brilliance. Your job is to pop that kernel into a delicious possibility snack. When collaborating with others, it helps to take a divergent mindset and come up with all the ways that your ideas might work. Shooting down all the options rarely helps. You end up stuck with no perfect alternative.

The "Yes, And" Exercise: Practicing "Yes, And" can start in low-stakes conversations. Agree and add to what's said rather than contradicting. It's like mental stretching. Use this famous improv warm-up to get your creative juices flowing and build your confidence in uncertainty.

Use the Yet Idea: When excuses, objections, or negative situations arise, try to solve them with the word “yet” instead of “but.” This idea allows us to think about overcoming obstacles instead of running into roadblocks. Instead of saying, “But we don’t have enough money,” reframe your thinking with, “We don’t have enough money, yet...” The “yet” allows us to think about how we can earn money or deliver the solution with less money. Think with abundance and possibility instead of scarcity and limitation.

Both Things Can Be True: Don't choose sides immediately when presented with two conflicting ideas. Look for a third option that might marry the best of both worlds. Often, both things can be true at the same time. Jobs may provide more stable income in the short term, and freelancing might be more stable in the long term.

Tough decisions mean dealing with tradeoffs and risk, but that's ok. Life doesn't have an instruction manual or many perfect outcomes. How can you get creative and think of solutions to move forward anyway?

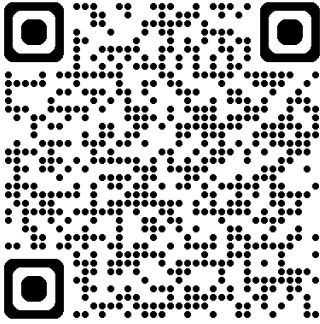
Reflect on Worst-Case Scenario: Remember the times when a "but" held you back, and you missed an opportunity. What could have happened if you'd said "Yes, And" instead? What is the worst thing that can happen if you take action quickly? If failure is not fatal to yourself, your career, or your business, then it might make sense to move forward.

Encourage Others: Reward "Yes, And" behavior in others. When people feel supported, they're more likely to return the favor. Tell your peers to keep going and try to +1 their ideas instead of being a wet blanket.

Affirm the Positive: End your day by affirming the positive collaborations and contributions you made by saying "Yes, And." Reward yourself and others for taking risks and choosing to see the abundant possibilities in the world.

By embracing "Yes, And," you're not just fertilizing the soil for confidence to bloom; you are inviting others to plant their ideas in your garden. It's a way of fertilizing relationships and cross-pollinating with diverse perspectives to grow a lush landscape of innovation and mutual respect.

(Yes, I know poop is a form of fertilizer, too, and I still liked this metaphor anyway. See what I did there!)



Playful Human: Antarctic Mike Pierce

Antarctic Mike is a public speaker, coach, and teacher of leadership lessons he collected while competing in marathons in the Antarctic! His flagship program, *Leading at 90 Below Zero*, brings the secrets of South Pole explorers to

the real world and today's business environments. He also specializes in helping others tell their stories with impact.

Sponsored by the new *Anti-Gravity Book*: It's impossible to put down!

9♠ Your systems should
serve you.

Joke of the Week:

Why can't you hear a psychiatrist using the bathroom? Because the 'P' is silent.

*"Lack of sufficient play leads to social
incompetence."*

- Sergio & Vivien Pellis

You don't serve the data.

Navigating Your Life's Road Trip

Imagine embarking on a cross-country road trip. You've got your snacks, your playlist, and your destination. Life, much like this adventure, is about steering your own course and enjoying the journey along the way. In this era of high-tech GPS and endless data, it's crucial that these tools don't distract you or steer you away from what you really set out to do.

You're cruising along the highway with your GPS. It suggests the fastest routes and highlights the next gas station. But what if you find a roadside attraction that piques your interest, you need a bathroom break, or you see a scenic byway along the beach that isn't on the planned route? That's where you have to take the wheel. The GPS may recalibrate, sometimes insistently, trying to get you back on the 'optimal path.' Remember, it's a suggestion, not a command.

In today's tech-enabled, data-backed world, it is easy to become addicted to your phone, watch, or GPS and miss the point of these devices. Stay flexible and adventurous. The path less traveled often leads to the greatest discoveries. What started as a nice tool to assist you in accomplishing your goals may have become a dangerous dictator, leading you away from living your best life.

The Confidence to Choose Your Own Adventure

AI tools like ChatGPT are your travel buddies on life's journey. They're great for suggestions on how to craft that perfect out-of-office email or witty postcard home. They add to the fun of brainstorming and can take some of the grunt work off your hands, like finding synonyms for "amazing" (*stunning, breathtaking,*

awe-inspiring!). But they can't tell your stories, share your experiences, or express your emotions with the same authenticity. That's your voice alone, and it's irreplaceable. As AI and new tech evolve and promise to automate our work, we have to think hard about those tradeoffs and choices.

Did you know that people are 10% dumber if their smartphones are in the room?

They don't even have to be turned on. If your phone is nearby, your brain short-circuits your thinking and delegates about 10-15 IQ points over to the phone. Think about it. Twenty years ago, if you didn't know the answer to a question, your brain would have to think, you would be forced to remember 5th-grade science, or you would have to talk it out with a friend. If you did look up the answer in an encyclopedia, dictionary, or other source, the amount of effort it took locked in the answer's importance, and you were more likely to remember it the next time. Now, you just pull out the phone or ask Siri, Alexa, or Google the answer. (*That sentence is definitely going to date this book.*)

Shortcuts with tech and big data have consequences and tradeoffs, so we need to make sure we constantly keep our sites set on our true goals of fun, flow, and fulfillment. Social media robs us of catching up with our friends. AI steals the challenging work that crystalizes thought and creates flow. Reliance on Big Data means we don't get the chance to develop our own instincts and natural intuition. Automating our toughest work deletes the chance for us to feel fulfilled by our accomplishments. Our decision-making processes, focus, relationships, and brainpower are being eroded.

Using Data as Your Almanac, Not Your Agenda

Data is your almanac, brimming with information on every page. It can tell you Oregon's average rainfall or Yellowstone's busiest

months. But you don't want your life to be average or super busy. No amount of data can account for spontaneous moments of joy or even unforeseen misfortunes that are out of the norm. The AI atlas can help you prepare for your trip, but your choices in the present moment define your journey. Learn to read between the lines drawn by technology to find your own way forward.

There's something compelling about cruise control and self-driving cars. You set it and forget it, allowing the automation to take over. Some experts have predicted a massive jump in productivity. If humans didn't have to commute or even pay attention in the car, we could be working instead of driving. But in life, you don't want to become a passive passenger, especially when algorithms developed by commercial interests are deciding your route.

We need to be very cautious about letting global corporations, AI, or governments take the wheel. (*I feel like this is starting to sound like a conspiracy rant but stay with me. I am not anti-tech; I am pro-Playful Humans.*) Every now and then, it's important to turn off the cruise control, roll down the windows, and just drive. Feel the road, take control, and remember why you set out on this trip in the first place.

Have you ever heard of a shortcut that everyone takes? Probably not. Then, it would just be the main route. The most memorable paths are often the ones we forge ourselves. Societal norms and structures are the highways of life—they're fast, efficient, and well-traveled.

But sometimes, the right turn for us is off the beaten path. When the road feels boring, there's a traffic jam, or it's not leading us to the right destination, it might be time to cut a new path through uncharted territory.

Tips for a Healthy Relationship with Data and Tech on Your Life's Journey

Plan, then Play: Use data to plan your route, but stay open to spontaneous side trips and choose your own adventures along the way.

Customize Your Dashboard: Tailor your tech to serve you. Adjust settings, notifications, and feeds to fit your journey, not someone else's. Turn off distractions. You shouldn't check your phone while driving, and you shouldn't check it while living life's most precious moments, either.

Manual Mode: Sometimes, go old school. Read a physical map or ask locals for directions. It keeps your navigation skills sharp and might lead to delightful surprises. *(I am always surprised at how much kids love using archaic tools like rotary phones and typewriters.)*

Critical Compass: Not all data is created equal. Scrutinize sources, question motives, and make sure they align with your route and your rules. Your values should shape your decisions.

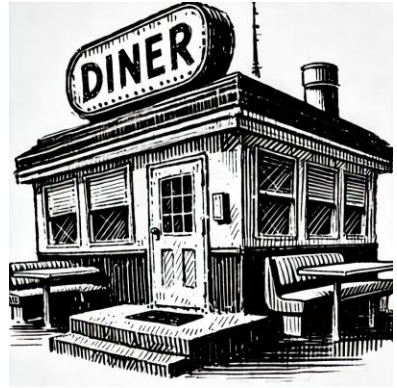
Detox Drive: Take some tech-free time. Disconnecting helps you reconnect with yourself and the world around you. Leave your phone at home and go for a walk.

Narrative GPS: When using AI for writing, check that it's guiding you to your destination without taking over the journey. Your voice should always be in the driver's seat. AI can tell a story, but only you can tell your story.

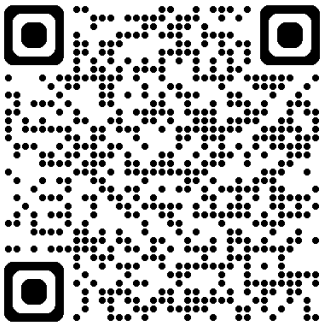
Detour as Needed: Understand societal norms, but don't be afraid to venture off the expected path when your destination calls for it. It takes courage to say "no, thanks" to the latest trend, but maybe you don't need that new smartwatch or brain implant with AI.

Real World Road Rules

Remember, you're not on this road trip to rack up miles or tick off boxes on a list—you're here to experience life. Your hands are on the wheel, and the road ahead is yours to claim. So, as you head out on today's leg of the journey, ask yourself: Am I following my route, or am I just going along for the ride?




Take a turn you've never taken before. Stop at that quirky landmark or take a chance on that roadside diner.



Playful Human: David Chislett

David is a published author, poet, musician, and artist. The link that joins everything in his life together is creativity. He believes we are all creative and that making creativity a skill in your armory of tools will empower you to observe, analyze and make decisions that will lead you to growth personally and professionally. David is a weapon of mass creation!

Sponsored by Fantasies:
I once had a dream that I was floating
in an ocean of orange soda.
It was more of a Fanta sea.

10  Do the things that
scare you.

Joke of the Week:

I was going to include a time-traveling joke
here, but you didn't like it.

"When you have fun, you can do amazing things."

- Joe Namath

Doing It Scared

There's another backward law, an irony that sits at the core of human experience: we're wired to seek safety, yet embracing the unknown amplifies our vitality. Doing things that scare us, that matter, that might not work, is what living is all about. Playing it safe allows you to survive, but living dangerously is what makes life worth living. When you venture beyond the boundaries of your comfort zone, you expand them.

Taking risks isn't just about adrenaline. It's a fundamental part of growth. According to research from the field of positive psychology, stepping out of your comfort zone is closely linked to building your belief in your ability to succeed. So when you take on tough challenges, you don't just succeed or fail in that task. You build a broader belief in your own capabilities that allows you to increase your chances of success in future tasks. This belief is the wind beneath the wings of every would-be adventurer, entrepreneur, artist, or Playful Human who wants to craft a life less ordinary.

The Alchemy of Action

In this whirlwind of uncertainty, you find the magic of your abilities. Think of it as alchemy—action turns fear into accomplishment. When you act in spite of fear, you're proving to yourself that you're stronger than the ephemeral smoke and mirrors of your anxieties. You don't always need confidence or courage. Sometimes, you just need to do the thing while being scared.

Acting on your fears and taking risks forces you to learn and adapt—traits that are highly valued in our rapidly changing world. Consider this: LinkedIn's 2019 Global Talent Trends report highlighted adaptability as a critical professional skill. (*That was pre-pandemic, but do you think it has gone up or down in the rankings*

since then?) And what better way to become adaptable than to routinely step into new, uncertain endeavors? Humans aren't meant to be stationary. Like sharks, our movement keeps us alive. We need to be engaged and excited about each new day. Engaging with our fears, especially in pursuit of meaningful endeavors, injects a vibrancy into our daily existence. It reminds us that we're alive, capable of change, and connected to a larger narrative of human endeavor.

This isn't a call to recklessness. It's an invitation to calculated risks—as Seth Godin says, the kind that “might not work” but promise growth and learning either way. These are win-win scenarios in which if we act, we win or we learn.

Confidence Is the Byproduct of Brave Acts

You gain confidence with each step into the intimidating fog of the unknown, not the brash, unearned kind, but a quiet, steady accumulation of self-respect. It comes from knowing you've stared down the dragons of doubt and emerged, perhaps not unscathed, but certainly wiser.

We need to embrace the projects that are filled with importance but offer no guarantees—these are the endeavors that truly make a difference. They are the ones that others don't dare take on, the important but not urgent things that no one else will make time to complete, the gutsy decisions and emotional engagement that others shy away from—the cold call, the speech, the tough layoff, or the hard conversation with a loved one.

It's not just about monumental leaps of faith. It's also about the small, daily decisions to choose the path of gutsy action in the face of uncertainty over the mundane, such as choosing a challenging project at work over mindless busywork or striking up a conversation with a stranger instead of scrolling through your phone. Making the morally right choice instead of avoiding it is critical to a life worth living.

Here's your mission, should you choose to accept it:

Identify something that you've been avoiding because it scares you. It might be a conversation, a new skill, a journey, or a project. Commit to one small step towards it, just one. The size of the step isn't the victory—it's the motion. And as you take that step, remember that there's no failure here. There are only outcomes—each one a guidepost on your journey to a more vibrant life. You either did the thing or you didn't, with no judgment or half-hearted intentions. (*Just do it. Shout out to Nike marketing.*)

- 1. Draft Your Fear List:** Write down the things that scare you but also intrigue you. Acknowledge them, then decide if they are things you want to do or just hopes and dreams. It's OK to take them off the list and decide you don't want them, but it is not OK to agonize for years and make yourself feel guilty about not taking the risk.
- 2. Pick Your Passion:** Choose one fear to confront. Start small. The size of the fear isn't as important as the act of proving to yourself that you are capable of doing it scared.
- 3. Plan Your First Step:** Break down your chosen challenge into the smallest possible action and set a deadline to do it. Often, when starting a new fitness routine, getting to the gym and starting the workout is the hardest part. Once you face the fears and commit to any action, you build the momentum you need to keep going.
- 4. Build a Habit of Risk-Taking:** It is OK to decide you no longer want something, but it is not OK to give up on your dream because it is too hard. Make it a regular part of your life to do something that challenges you, even in a small way, and you will build your skills and confidence to tackle bigger challenges.

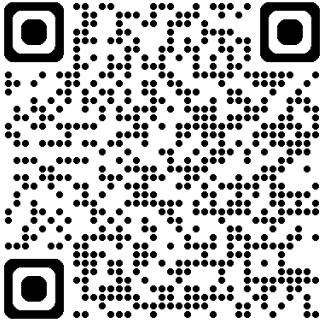
5. Reflect and Celebrate: After you've taken your step, no matter the outcome, take stock. Celebrate the courage it took to make the move. Look back on your life and reflect on all the challenging things you have already been through. You are a survivor. You can do this!

For example, public speaking is a fear for a lot of people. If sharing your voice with more people is important to you, then you need to learn how to overcome your fear. Start with a small group, friends or strangers, whichever is easier for you. Share a story about yourself or your work that is about 5 minutes long. Toastmasters groups are great for this. Try it, and then toast yourself for personal growth!

(My first time speaking in front of the class in middle school was a disaster. My hands shook, I forgot everything, and I had a panic attack in front of the whole class. It was so bad that I think the teacher just passed me and never made me try it again. However, I felt called to be a performer. Two years later, with a ton of practice, I was winning state storytelling competitions, and I never looked back. You can learn to do it while scared, too!)

By regularly stepping into our fears, we ensure a life that's not just survived but savored and celebrated. A life that echoes with the joy of fulfilled potential and the sweet satisfaction of risks bravely taken. Your trampoline awaits. It's in our human nature to bounce back stronger.

Are you ready to jump?



Playful Human: David McBee

David is the author of the children's book series DJ's Off-Road Adventures, encouraging you to embrace gratitude and find joy in everyday moments. Hear how David transitioned from a career in internet marketing to writing a children's book about courage and discover how gratitude can transform your perspective and lead to greater happiness.

Sponsored by Beards:
I used to hate facial hair, but it grew on me.

J♠ Life is an open-book test
with no final exam.

Joke of the Week:

Why are elevator jokes so good? They work
on many levels.

"What I do is play soccer, which is what I like."

- Lionel Messi

When the caps fly into the air on graduation day, we're often led to believe that the test-taking, studying, and relentless grading come to a conclusive end. The reality, however, is quite the opposite. It is the beginning of our adulthood. Life, in all its unpredictable glory, shifts from a series of structured semester-long sprints into what is perhaps best described as an open-book test—an infinite game with no more exams, grades, or term papers.

Moving from Final Exams to Daily Pop Quizzes

The educational system has us well-trained: memorize, regurgitate, and, if we're particularly savvy, understand deeply enough to apply the knowledge in a few hypothetical situations crafted by the curriculum gods. Then, there are finals—those big, bad summations of everything we're supposed to have learned—and graduation to the next level with a feeling of success or failure. But once we step into the real world, the landscape changes dramatically.

There's no syllabus outlining life's next lesson, no final exam to cram for, and no one holding you accountable. Instead, we're faced with a continuous flow of decisions and problems that resemble more of a pop quiz—unexpected, unannounced, and often unforgiving. Every day presents a series of questions. Either, you are prepared, or you are not. However, unlike the classroom, the answers to life may be right in front of us. We can search for answers scribbled in the vast pages of the world around us, we can cheat off a friend's paper, or we can choose to figure it out on our own.

The good news is that life is an open-book test. This book is a live one like Wikipedia—it grows, it evolves, and sometimes it rewrites itself overnight. We're no longer tested on our ability to recall facts; we're tested on our capacity to source information, adapt to new data, and apply knowledge to novel situations. This is why

learning as we go becomes a vital skill. The Internet is at our fingertips, offering us cheat sheets of the past, present, and speculative future, but the pages of the Internet are added, modified, and deleted every day as our collecting knowledge expands.

Are You Stuck in the School Days Mindset?

Not everyone adjusts well to this newfound freedom and ambiguity. The structured hallways of education and the corporate ladder give a comforting sense of direction, but the problem is that they are someone else's directions. Having a teacher, a boss, or a parent to guide us is like having a treasure map to someone else's treasure. It feels safe and valuable, but it might not be leading us where we really want to go.

Sometimes, these rules, the predictability, and the clearly marked paths are very psychologically soothing. We crave the approval that comes with an 'A' grade or a pat on the back from authority figures. We love the comfort of not being on the hook for our life. These predefined paths have a certain allure; it feels like following a well-worn trail through the wilderness. Deviating from this can feel like stepping into an untamed forest, where the risk of getting lost is real.

And here's the paradoxical bit in this lesson: following someone else's path is WAY more risky than paving your own. They didn't start where you did. They are not going where you are. They care more about their interests than yours. They have different beliefs, values, skills, experiences, personalities, and thousands of other differences. Their treasure is not meant for us.

In the pursuit of external validation, we often stretch ourselves thin—burning out from trying to mold into someone else's idea of success. In this identity contortion, we risk losing the essence of what makes us unique. There's a psychological term for it: 'ego depletion.' It's the idea that self-control and conformity to others'

expectations drain us of our willpower, leaving us less energy to make decisions that align with our values and goals.

Only you can define your ideal life,
and only you can figure out how to attain it.

Embracing the Risk of Being Ourselves

So, how do we muster the courage to step off the prescribed path and venture into the wilderness of authenticity? It starts with embracing the risk of being our full selves and understanding that every mistake is a chance to learn, not a point deducted from our life's GPA.

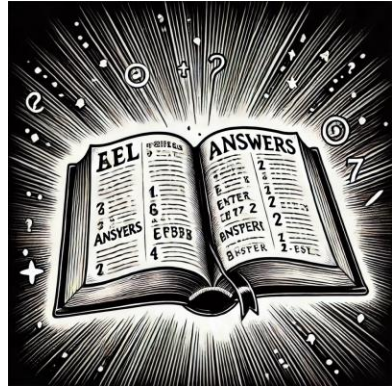
This is where life's open-book nature becomes our ally. Being our full selves means we get to write in the margins of the book, add chapters, and sometimes find answers in places we least expect them. And when we do look for guidance, it's not about seeking someone to give us the answers but to help us ask better questions.

Here's a challenge for you if you are feeling stuck in the old-school way of thinking: for one week, make every choice as if it's for a story you're writing about your life. Before you decide, ask yourself, "Will this make my story interesting and enriching, or is it just what I think I'm supposed to do?" You'll likely find that the most fulfilling plot twists come from listening to your inner voice, not someone else's direction.

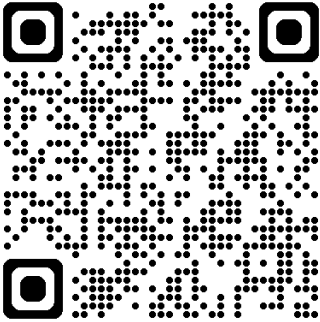
As you navigate life, remember that you are the author of your own story and the cartographer of your own treasure map. You are the only expert in our life's journey. You decide where the

value is. The real learning takes place in uncharted waters. The real test is how you choose to fill the pages of your journal.

Life is an open-book essay test, and the question is, "How can I enjoy the most fun, flow, and fulfillment?"



The true metric of your life's success will be the richness of the answer to that question and the love, joy, and wisdom you impart to others along their journey. A life well lived is one shared with others.



Playful Human: Megan Miller

Megan Miller is an intentional living expert, professional speaker, best-selling author, and the host of her own podcast, 'Putting Attention to Intention'. Our digitally hyper-connected world accelerates anxiety and has us feeling exhausted &

hustling harder to achieve the next thing. Megan talks about her own experience in intentional living and how to care for yourself with micro-steps.

Sponsored by Spring:
I got so excited about Spring
that I wet my plants.

Q♠ Flow, meaning, and
pleasure are the basis of
positive psychology and the
foundations of playfulness.

Joke of the Week:

My dad told me his password is
MickeyMinnieGoofyDonaldPlutoHueyLouieDeweyDublin
because he was told his password had to
contain eight characters
and at least one capital.

*"All meaningful, organic, and foundational learning
is at heart playful."*

- Marcelo Suárez-Orozco

In our quest for a fulfilling life, positive psychology helps us extend the scope of our wisdom from mere happiness into what truly enriches our lives. Flow, meaning, and pleasure together form the underpinnings of playfulness, a state that's critical to long-term joy, satisfaction, and contentment.

Flow without pleasure turns into robotic efficiency, and pleasure without meaning feels empty. Meaning without pleasure and flow is a brutal grind of feeling helpless to change the world. Many people work without purpose, and others try to share their purpose without doing the work. All of it without joy will eventually fade into burnout. However, when these three are synchronized, they are a source of long-term well-being.

Flow keeps us engaged, meaning gives us direction, and pleasure makes the journey enjoyable. In the intersection of these three elements, we find playfulness—a state of being that welcomes connection, inspires creativity, develops physical and mental conditioning, and encourages confidence through experimentation. Research has shown that when we engage in playful activities, we're not just fooling around; we're architecting a fulfilling life.

The Power of Flow

Socially: Playfulness is a relationship glue. Whether it's a high-five with a colleague or a board game night with friends and family, playful interactions help forge strong social ties, a key ingredient in the recipe for long-term happiness.

Creatively: When playfulness steers the ship, creativity is the wind in its sails. A playful mindset is fertile ground for innovation, nurturing out-of-the-box thinking and problem-solving.

Physically: Play good for the mind, body, and spirit. Activities like sports, dancing, or just mucking around release the DOSE

hormones, the body's natural feel-good chemicals, which promote an overall sense of well-being and enhance longevity and vitality.

Psychologically: Playfulness breeds flexibility and adaptability. A study in the American Journal of Play suggests that playful adults can better cope with stress, adapt to new situations, and turn the mundane into the extraordinary.

Becoming a Playful Human

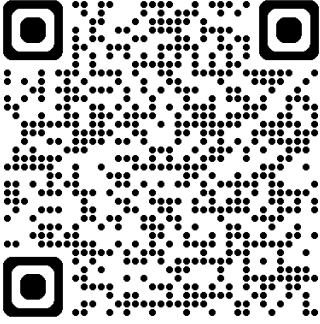
Hopefully, by now, you understand being a Playful Human is not about chucking responsibility out the window. Instead, it's about letting in the fresh air of your best self into your everyday life.

Cultivate Meaning: Reflect on your values and passions. Engage in activities that resonate with your personal sense of purpose, whether it's volunteering, mentoring, or creating art.

Find Your Flow: Seek activities that challenge you just enough to maintain engagement without tipping into frustration. It could be a hobby, a work project, or learning a new skill.

Seek Pleasure in the Small Things and Joy in the Big Things: Savor the taste of your morning coffee, enjoy the laughter with friends, or relish the quiet moments of a book before bed. Build relationships and your confidence to do big things, and leverage them to tackle fulfilling challenges in industries, markets, and vocations that bring you satisfaction.

You're bringing the most value possible to yourself, your family, and the world by fostering flow, meaning, and pleasure. Keep this trio of positive psychology front and center as you make decisions about your life and career.



Playful Human: Raquel Borrás

Raquel is a social media brand consultant and self-proclaimed Queen of Goofiness. She has a ton of fun on social media, especially LinkedIn. She launched a YouTube channel called 'Raquel the Boat' to uplift young voices through candid

conversation. Youth share their knowledge, creativity, empathy, and vision for the future. She has spoken candidly on dozens of podcasts about battling depression, overcoming and finding meaning.

Sponsored by Live Streaming:
Simply the best way to watch a
fly-fishing tournament.

QUEEN OF SPADES



Playful Humans Crossword Puzzle

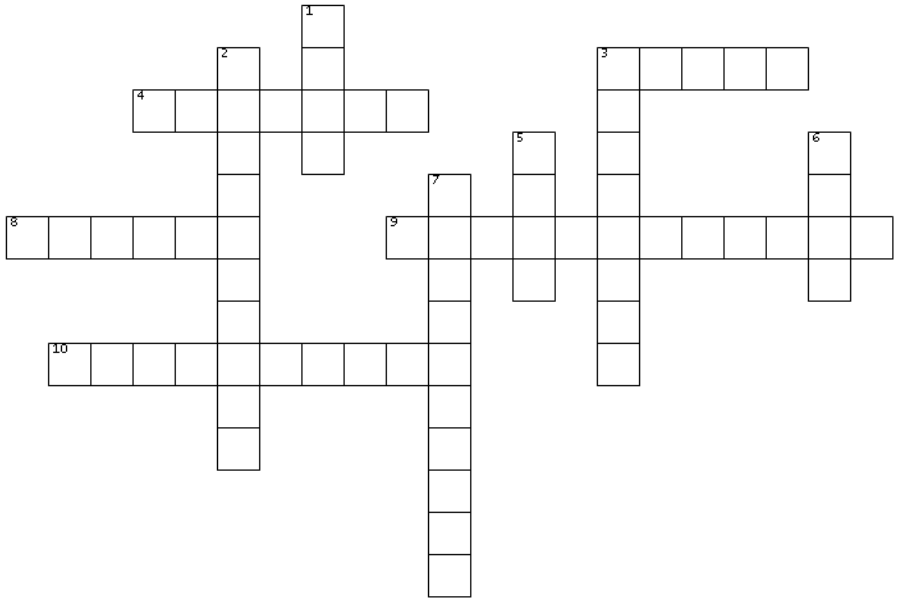
ACROSS

3. A temporary stop or rest, especially in speech or action.
4. To carry out, accomplish, or fulfill an action, task, or function.
8. The non-physical part of a person that is the seat of emotions and character.
9. Preparing the body mentally and physically to perform in a flow state.
10. The feeling or belief that one can rely on someone or something: firm trust.

DOWN

1. The mental state of being fully immersed in an activity.
2. The use of imagination or original ideas to create something.
3. Repeated exercise in or performance of an activity or skill to acquire proficiency.
5. The physical structure of a person or an animal, including the bones, flesh, and organs.
6. The element of a person that enables them to think, feel, and be aware.
7. The act of linking or associating with others.

QUEEN OF SPADES



♠ You get to play!

Joke of the Week:

Where do you take someone who
gets hurt playing peek-a-boo?
To the ICU.

*"There is a lot of pressure put on me, but I don't put
a lot of pressure on myself. I feel if I play my game, it
will take care of itself."*

- LeBron James

Get outside, get going, get a ball, get messy, get lost, get into it, get over yourself, get silly, get others involved, and get moving.

Embracing play in its myriad of forms is a vital element of being human. It's an open invitation to twist the kaleidoscope of our existence, making it extraordinary.

Imagine your mind as a playground—limitless, boundless, and full of potential. Every new idea is a game waiting to be played. Each book you read is a secret passage to unexplored worlds. By fostering a playful mind, we become cartographers of creativity, mapping out new thoughts and solutions. Just as a child believes in the impossible, let your mind wander into the realm of boundless curiosity and see where it leads you. Mental gymnastics will not only make you more creative but also sharper and more agile in your thinking.

Now, consider your body—a tool given to you to interact with the world. Why walk when you can skip? Why watch others play games when you can join in? Physical play isn't a childhood relic; it's a powerful force for good. It's a rebellion against the sedentary lifestyle of modern work, a battle cry against burnout, and a march to the health benefits that accompany an active lifestyle. Your body needs movement, just as fish need water. Each day, you can choose to claim the vitality that comes from physical play.

And then there's the spirit—your inner essence flourishes when you play. To play is to connect deeply with the joy of being alive. It's to laugh loudly, to embrace the moment, to cherish the feeling of sunshine on your face or the grass under your feet. When we engage in play, we tap into a universal language that transcends barriers and binds us in joy. Playing with our spirit is a sacred practice, a reminder that we are here not just to exist but to live.

Get outside—your playground awaits. Let the sky be your limit and the earth your stage. Find a ball and play with it, not just to score a point, but to score a moment of pure bliss.

Get messy—let the mud, paint, or food stains be your badges of honor. Lose yourself in the game, in the moment, in the sheer ecstasy of play—and in doing so, find yourself.

Get over any inhibitions that whisper you're too old or too serious. Replace them with the lightness of heart that comes from embracing your inner child. Encourage silliness; it's the secret handshake of play. When we're silly, we're free, and when we're free, we soar.

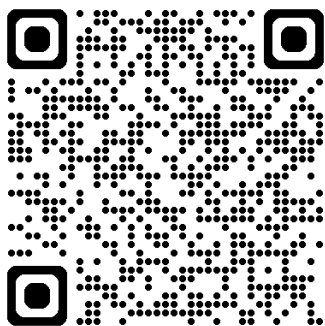
Get on the same wavelength. Invite others to join you. Shared play is a communal experience, a collective giggle that echoes through our culture. It builds connections, forges friendships, and creates communities. It's a unifier, a peacekeeper, a bridge-builder. Getting on the same level as children can be extremely powerful. Meet others where they are.

Finally, get moving. Let each small step be toward a more playful you—brimming with connections, creativity, conditioning, and confidence. When we dance to the music of life, each twist and turn is a choreography of personal expression. We learn to live in sync with the beat of our hearts.

The world is our playground, and life is the infinite game we only get to play once. The rules are simple: there are none. The objective is joy. The goal is to keep the game going. The strategy is play.

Let's not waste another moment. Be a Playful Human, not just today, but every day. Find joy in the little things, and let playfulness guide your way with the big things. Let this be the day you rediscover the power of play.

Embrace it. Seek it. Live it.
And, most importantly, share it.



Playful Human: Mr. Dearybury

Jed Dearybury found that playing in the classroom led to him being named GQ Magazine's Male Leader of the Year and meeting President Obama as the winner of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching. Mr. Dearybury is a playful education

thought leader and author of *The Playful Classroom*, *The Courageous Classroom*, and *The Playful Life!*

Sponsored by Things That Hold Water:
If you can't name two things that hold water:
well, dam.

Conclusion

An Invitation to Play

As you approach the last page of this book, my hope is that you are filled with the anticipation of a new chapter unfolding in your life. You've discovered a profound truth: you are both the architect and the inhabitant of your own existence. Each of us holds the power to ignite a spark of change, not just within our own lives but within our communities and organizations.

Consider the notion that our lives are an exchange of energy. We take in air, food, and water, and we create laughter, innovation, and a positive influence on those around us.

You've seen the evidence that directs us towards a life rich with play—a life where our daily tasks are interwoven with joy, where the routine is disrupted by spontaneity, and where the pursuit of happiness is a lived reality. It's a life that champions fun as the fuel to power our most profound accomplishments and deepest connections.

Research has revealed that stress and burnout are not our inevitable fate but challenges to be overcome with a spirit of playfulness and creative engagement. You've learned that when our work is infused with passion, and our breaks are filled with genuine leisure, we flourish.

(This book is a testament to the power of transformation within each of us. Writing it transformed me, and I hope it has changed you, too.) How will you weave pleasure and play into your days? How will you make the world your playground? And when will you take that next leap into the joy of your existence? Can you come out and play with us?

CONCLUSION

The choice is yours. Go forth with the knowledge that, in the grand scheme of things, your capacity to enrich the universe is limitless. Play fiercely. Love fully. Live wholeheartedly. Let your legacy be infinite.

You are invited to join a community of adults rediscovering the power of play and inspiring others to do the same at www.playfulhumans.com.

Subscribe to the podcast using your favorite app. Let's play together and make the world a more joyful place.

Also, I have started a new project called Avenue9, creating human-first AI marketing to help businesses implement a playful and human-first approach to this transformation happening in the era of artificial intelligence. I use AI to help me write, edit podcasts, brainstorm jokes, and even find the best Playful Humans to feature in each chapter from the 175+ interviews!

If you would like to learn more about how to implement AI for your business humanely. Check out Avenue9.com.

GO PLAY!



Playful Humans Word Find

Grandma Lyn loved word finds, crossword puzzles, and scrambles. She loved to play with language, use her mind, and find answers. See if you can find the answers you seek in this puzzle. Words can go in any direction. Words can share letters as they cross over each other.

Once you find all the words, you will reveal the hidden message in the unused letters.

C H R C A N Y O U C O T M E O U T A N D
 I O A E P L A Y M Q M N U R M M Z B C I
 M N N P T T Z P P T N E M R E W O P M E
 E I N D P H X Q X H X M U Y M G S Y H V
 I E N O I I G B S F V L P T G L G N Z D
 N K S D V T N U E P E L K I A R E O Q K
 E O N S F A I E A B D I J E E G I I A B
 E M V W E U T O S L K F N N Z V C S D Q
 T Q X E Y N L I N S L L E A C Q F S P C
 Z Y E S L A L N O I D U W T R M U A Z O
 X K J E B T Z U E N N F P N E R X P Y N
 K W C J X T Y E F S D G U O A N T M E F
 S I Q N P R F S S Y S A M P T S B O C I
 H B Z E J M C P P W A K K S I T H C N D
 B J Z E O T S O J H W L O J V B S P A E
 E H C I Y D A T D M W Z P C I N I E L N
 R E S I L I E N C E E O U Q T I N N A C
 C O L L A B O R A T I O N X Y I O R B E
 Y T I V I S U L C N I E U H M N K U V I
 V E P U Y C O N N E C T I O N Q X C H C

CONCLUSION

Balance	Collaboration	Compassion
Conditioning	Confidence	Connection
Creativity	Empowerment	Energy
Fulfillment	Happiness	Inclusivity
Innovation	Joy	Laughter
Mindfulness	Novelty	Playfulness
Resilience	Spontaneity	

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Recommended Reading

This book is the result of extensive research, including reading the following books, reading countless online blogs and journal articles, conducting over 175 interviews, and watching way too many YouTube videos. Playful Humans is written from my own perspective and experiences. I have made every effort to provide proper credit and references to all sources and inspirations used in the creation of this work.

However, if any material has been inadvertently overlooked or improperly attributed, it was not intentional. Please contact me at mike@avenue9.com so that any necessary corrections can be made in future editions of this book. This work is intended for educational and informational purposes only and should not be considered a substitute for professional advice or services.

If you are interested in continuing your own play research, I recommend these books in no particular order.

1. Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture by Johan Huizinga, Martino Fine Books, 2014
2. Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul by Dr. Stuart Brown with Christopher Vaughan, Avery, 2010
3. The Happiness Advantage: How a Positive Brain Fuels Success in Work and Life by Shawn Achor, Random House
4. The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, Is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal by Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, Free Press, 2003
5. Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World by Jane McGonigal, Penguin, 2011
6. The Happiness Equation: Want Nothing + Do Anything = Have Everything by Neil Pasricha, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2016
7. The Infinite Game by Simon Sinek, Portfolio Penguin, 2020

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9. The Power of Having Fun: How Meaningful Breaks Help You Get More Done and Feel Fantastic by Dave Crenshaw, Beret-Koehler, 2017
10. Create in a Flash: A Leader's Recipe for Breakthrough Innovation by Dr. Roger Firestien, Green Tractor, 2019
11. The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World by Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and Douglas Carlton Adams, Avery, 2016
12. Put Happiness to Work: 7 Strategies to Elevate Engagement for Optimal Performance by Eric Karpinski and Shawn Achor, McGraw Hill, 2021
13. The Power of Fun: How to Feel Alive Again by Catherine Price, The Dial Press, 2021
14. The Game: Win Your Life in 90 Days by Sarano Kelley, Jodere Group, 2001
15. Ignore Everybody: and 39 Other Keys to Creativity by Hugh MacLeod, Portfolio, 2009
16. Return To Play: Rebuilding Resilience, Risk, and Reconnection by Brandi Heather, 2021
17. Playful Intelligence: The Power of Living Lightly in a Serious World by Anthony T. DeBenedet, MD, Santa Monica Press, 2018
18. Playful Mindfulness: a joyful journey to everyday confidence, calm, and connection by Ted DesMaisons, ANIMA Learning, 2019
19. LEGO Build Yourself Happy: The Joy of LEGO play by Abbie Headon, DK, 2019
20. The Surrender Experiment: My Journey into Life's Perfection by Michael A. Singer, Harmony Books, 2015
21. Have More Fun: How to Be Remarkable, Stop Feeling Stuck, and Start Enjoying Life by Mandy Arioto, Zondervan, 2019
22. Permission to Play: How Teens Can Build a Life That is Fun, Fulfilling, and Promising by Joe Fingerhut, Stonebrook Publishing, 2015
23. Prioritize Fun: A manifesto for those who want to enjoy life, not endure it by Nanci Bergman, 2019
24. Play It Away: A Workaholic's Cure for Anxiety by Charlie Hoehn, 2014

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25. *The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life* by Rosamond Stone Zander, Penguin Books, 2002
26. *You Are Awesome: How to Navigate Change, Wrestle with Failure, and Live an Intentional Life* by Neil Pasricha, Gallery Books, 2019
27. *The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership: A New Paradigm for Sustainable Success* by Jim Dethmer, Diana Chapman, and Kaley Klemp, 2015
28. *Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration* by Ed Catmull and Amy Wallace, Random House, 2014
29. *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* by Steven Pinker, Viking, 2018
30. *What Happy People Know: How the New Science of Happiness Can Change Your Life for the Better* by Dan Baker and Cameron Stauth, St. Martins Essentials, 2004
31. *Three New People: Make the Most of Your Daily Interactions and Stop Missing Amazing Opportunities* by Brian Miller, All the Things Publishing, 2018
32. *The GAME of Innovation: Conquer Challenges. Level Up Your Team. Play to Win* by David Cutler, McGraw Hill, 2022
33. *The 2-Hour Cocktail Party: How to Build Big Relationships with Small Gatherings* by Nick Gray, Lioncrest Publishing, 2022
34. *Stop Decorating The Fish* by Yishai Ashlag and Kristen Cox, North River Press Publishing Corporation, 2020
35. *Be Your Future Self Now: The Science of Intentional Transformation* by Dr. Benjamin Hardy, Hay House Business, 2022
36. *Playful Rebellion: Maximize Workplace Success Through the Power of Play* by Gary Ware, 2022
37. *Professors at Play PlayBook: Real-world techniques from a more playful higher education classroom* edited by Lisa Forbes and David Thomas, Carnegie Mellon University ETC Press, 2022 (*Look for my contribution!*)

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- LinkedIn. *Global Talent Trends 2019: The 4 Trends Transforming Your Workplace*. Available online: [LinkedIn Talent Solutions](#)
- Mayo Clinic Staff. "Stress Management: Laughter Is the Best Medicine." *Mayo Clinic*, 2020.
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