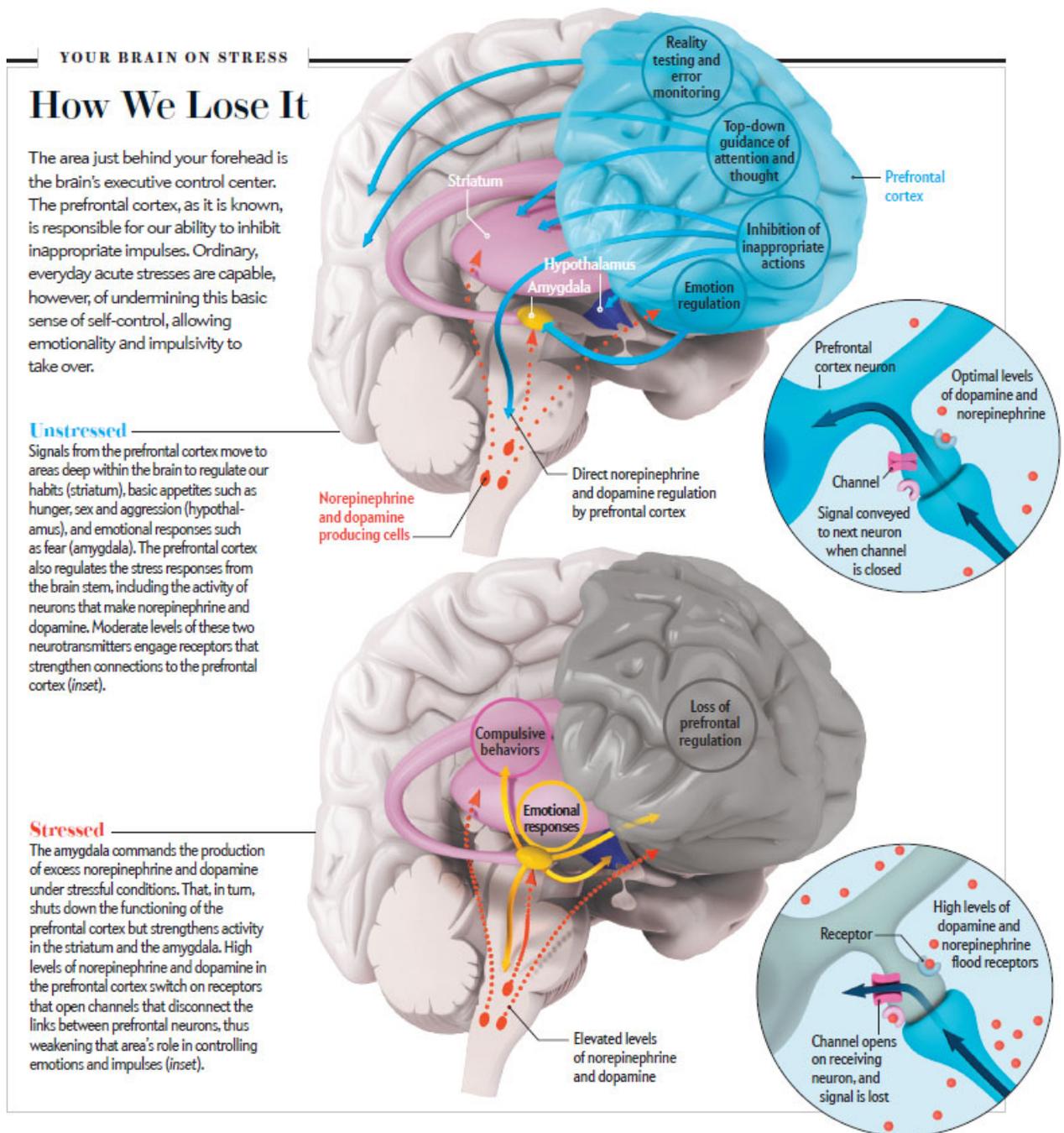# Managing, Mood, Energy, and Focus

The Brain Under Stress: Why we lose our creativity & clear thinking[i]

YOUR BRAIN ON STRESS

How We Lose It

The area just behind your forehead is the brain's executive control center. The prefrontal cortex, as it is known, is responsible for our ability to inhibit inappropriate impulses. Ordinary, everyday acute stresses are capable, however, of undermining this basic sense of self-control, allowing emotionality and impulsivity to take over.

Reality testing and error monitoring

Top-down guidance of attention and thought

Prefrontal cortex

Striatum

Inhibition of inappropriate actions

Hypothalamus

Amygdala

Emotion regulation

Unstressed

Signals from the prefrontal cortex move to areas deep within the brain to regulate our habits (striatum), basic appetites such as hunger, sex and aggression (hypothalamus), and emotional responses such as fear (amygdala). The prefrontal cortex also regulates the stress responses from the brain stem, including the activity of neurons that make norepinephrine and dopamine. Moderate levels of these two neurotransmitters engage receptors that strengthen connections to the prefrontal cortex (inset).

Norepinephrine and dopamine producing cells

Direct norepinephrine and dopamine regulation by prefrontal cortex

Prefrontal cortex neuron

Optimal levels of dopamine and norepinephrine

Channel

Signal conveyed to next neuron when channel is closed

Loss of prefrontal regulation

Compulsive behaviors

Emotional responses

Stressed

The amygdala commands the production of excess norepinephrine and dopamine under stressful conditions. That, in turn, shuts down the functioning of the prefrontal cortex but strengthens activity in the striatum and the amygdala. High levels of norepinephrine and dopamine in the prefrontal cortex switch on receptors that open channels that disconnect the links between prefrontal neurons, thus weakening that area's role in controlling emotions and impulses (inset).

Elevated levels of norepinephrine and dopamine

Receptor

High levels of dopamine and norepinephrine flood receptors

Channel opens on receiving neuron, and signal is lost

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TREC Leadership Program Resource

Managing Mood, Energy, and Focus

A Basic Reframe: What can help us respond effectively in challenging and stressful times

From REACTIVE	To CREATIVE
Problem-focused	Outcome-focused
Anxiety	Passion, enjoyment, excitement
Fear-driven	New thinking
Risk averse	Make mistakes!
Hide mistakes	Learn quickly!
Tactical	Strategic
Hard to take in new info!	Learning agility
Resistant	Resilient, Resourceful
Not sustainable	Sustainable

Managing Mood, Energy, and Focus

Leadership Mood Contagion

- What is Mood
- How Mood Contagion Works
- Impact of Mood
- Leader Strategies for Managing Mood
- Tips for Shifting Your Mood In the Moment
- Creating Intentional Moods In the Workplace

Our emotional state impacts (*infects*) both ourselves and others around us through a complex set of largely unconscious, primal biology-driven signals. This dynamic is even more powerful when leaders are involved.

We distinguish between emotions and moods even though they are deeply linked. Emotions tend to be immediate, visceral responses to events – our brains take about 1/4 second to identify the trigger, and about another 1/4 second to produce the chemicals that alert our body and it only takes a few seconds more before those chemicals are coursing through our body (related to the degree and type of emotion). So whereas emotions are shorter in duration and often more intense, moods usually are longer and often more pervasive (a day/month/year/ lifetime) and can be experienced as less visible and subtler in presence. Moods are not tied to a specific incident, but a collection of inputs. Mood is heavily influenced by our history (Sites of Shaping), our environment (weather, lighting, color, people around us), our physiology (what we've been eating, how we've been exercising, if we have a cold or not, how well we slept), our thinking (where we're focusing attention), and by our current emotions.

Both our emotions and moods impact other people, though in different ways. Because moods are a longer-term phenomenon, their impact can have more power and so we will focus on them here.

What is Mood

- A physical (whole body) presentation of your assessments and opinions

- Learned and embodied habits and interpretations that become automatic

- Mood is always present, and nearly always unconscious (to the individual)

- Compare walking into any Department of Motor Vehicles (you'll feel the impact of the prevailing mood instantly—a dense fog of sourness, irritability, and listlessness) to walking into almost any Apple store and you'll experience the opposite—a sense of aliveness and excitement that raises your energy (and makes you want to buy something).[ii]

- Describing emotions or moods as *positive* and *negative* is a rather crude and simplistic labelling, as the impact of a mood can be very situational, and the definition of *positive* or *negative* is open to wide interpretation. However, for the purposes of this document these terms refer to whether a mood generally/usually increases or decreases an individual or group's productivity, trust, openness, motivation, etc.

How Mood Contagion Works

- Mood contagion is the process by which the observation of another person's positive or negative mood causes our own mood to become more positive or negative.

- "Emotional contagion happens within milliseconds, so quick you can't control it, and so subtly that you're not really aware it's going on."[iii]

- Mood is conveyed through micro/visible facial and body gestures, tone of voice or in responses of the autonomic nervous system (involuntary activities like sweating, heart rate increasing).

- Negative moods spread fast – they activate automatic biological fear reactions

- Leaders leave an *emotional wake* that is positive or negative; *negative* wakes are much more influential. Leaders (like others) are often unaware of their mood while those around them are highly aware of the leader's mood.

- Consistency of mood is critical: an unpredictable leader elicits anxiety and, in some cases, even fear, both of which negatively affect performance and productivity. Predictability engenders trust, comfort, and safety.

- Mood and *rational thinking* are directly connected (contrary to the myth that one can be non-emotional in their thinking).

- The more emotionally expressive people are, the more apt they are to transmit their moods to someone they talk with.

Impact of Mood

- Roughly, 50-70% of how employees perceive their organization's climate (which includes mood) is attributable to the actions and behaviors of their leader. A leader creates the environment that determines people's moods at the office and their mood, in turn, affects their productivity and level of engagement.[iv]

- Negative emotions are highly toxic – more than positive emotions

- Creates space of possibility or no-possibility

- Other people respond to your mood, even if you say otherwise

- Directly affects your capacity to take action and coordinate effectively

- Directly affects the quality of your relationships to and with others

- Mood biases how optimistically or pessimistically people see the future

- Bad moods kill productivity and possibility

Leader Strategies for Managing Mood

- A leader's mood has the greatest impact on performance when it is upbeat. **However,** it must also be in tune with those around them.

> **The most effective executives display moods and behaviors that match the situation at hand, with a healthy dose of optimism mixed in. They respect how other people are feeling – even if it is glum or defeated – but they also model what it looks like to move forward with hope and humor.[v]**
>
> **Daniel Goleman**

- So, practice *Realistic Optimism* which means, "having the faith to tell the most hopeful and empowering story possible in any given situation, but also the willingness to confront difficult facts as they arise and deal with them directly."[vi]

- Be present (e.g. not distracted)

- Be authentic, grounded, and confident

- Be clear – notice your impact: people feel less anxious, more confident, more trusting

- Listen so people feel heard

- Watch your pace

- Demonstrate empathy and compassion

- Learn to manage your reactive tendencies

- Look for the good in others; be known in your organization as someone who is always on the lookout for what is right in people

- Manage the *Emotions of Change* (see William Bridges *Stages of Transition*)[vii]

- Work on being able to really feel and express your emotions. A key influencer of our prevailing moods is our capacity to fully experience, accept, and appropriately express our own emotions, and the emotions of others. If we "stuff" emotions, our moods still leak out but usually with negative impact. Stuffing emotions also increases the likelihood we'll get stuck in unhealthy moods. Children are often role models for expressing emotions. Something happens, an emotion comes up, it's fully expressed, and they're open and ready for the next thing. The emotion isn't cut off, denied, or unexpressed.

- Fake your mood vs. authenticity

Authenticity matters because you can't fake positivity for long. It is possible to put on a "game face" — to say you're feeling one way when you're actually feeling another — but the truth will ultimately reveal itself in your facial, vocal, and postural cues. We must learn to monitor and manage our moods.[viii]

Tony Schwartz

Tips for Shifting your Mood in the Moment

- Recall the "Stages of Learning" and how we create personal change. Bring attention to what's present in the moment (awareness/attention):

  o What mood am I (or others) in?

  o What impact is it having – on me, on others?

  o Is it serving me in this moment?

  o Is there a narrative that's impacting my mood or an associated emotion?

  o What mood might better serve me (choice)?

  o Other practices like Centering, Stop Challenge Choose, and "feel your feet, feel you seat" are also very helpful for surfacing and shifting moods.

Creating More Intentional Moods in the Workplace

- Select leaders who tend to be enthusiastic and optimistic so followers can *catch* their positive mood.

- Train leaders in emotion management, an approach that may help them better manage their moods and understand how the way they feel influences others.

- Select team members who tend to have positive moods. Emotional contagion among peers can be very powerful.

- Help workers understand the possibility of emotional contagion. Awareness can help them ward off bad moods, just as they ward off winter colds.

- Hold team meetings in a comfortable place. Even little things such as temperature, lighting, and aesthetics can influence our moods.

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