

# Visualization is Like Daydreaming on Purpose

**EXPERT CORNER** AUGUST 12, 2020

When you daydream, your mind “visualizes” things almost without any effort on your part. That means you already have the ability to visualize. Here I will outline from a neuroscience perspective why visualization is actually like daydreaming on purpose, and more importantly, how you can apply this knowledge to help you succeed in any endeavor.

## Daydreaming is an Innate Ability

Everyone has the capacity to daydream. But here’s the catch – it’s random by its very nature. It happens unexpectedly, and there’s usually no specific purpose behind it. Images come and go as they please, often without any logical connection.

Visualization, however, is not random. It’s not unexpected. It’s usually undertaken with a definite purpose or goal in mind before you begin. Images will still come and go, but now you’re focusing on those images, on their relationship to each other, and on their significance to your underlying goal or purpose.

## The Power of Visualization for Learning

In our previous Mpowered article on The Power of Beliefs, it was explained how the brain is the most complex structure in the known universe, and the most powerful super computer in the world. Through the remarkable nature of neuroplasticity, it is also highly adaptive with the right kind of stimulation.

Whether you think about doing something, or you actually do it, the same neural pathways are activated, triggering changes in brain state and learning. In fact, visualization can also create motor learning effects. Dreaming about playing tennis, for instance, can actually help you become a more skillful player.

To some extent this happens just simply watching other people perform tasks. This is because ‘mirror neurons’ actually simulate the experience internally. For example, one study showed that in comparison to hours actually player, golf caddies punch well above their weight making shots on the course, because their minds and bodies have simulated practice through watching others so much.

## Your Brain is Primed to Help you Succeed

The reason this phenomenon exists is that the brain cannot distinguish between a real experience or one you imagined. The same thought patterns develop. With real vision it's possible to realize your dreams – no matter how big or far away they might seem. Whatever you want to achieve, you already have the power.

If you can imagine yourself doing something, there's no reason why you can't actually do it. And that brings us to another astonishing fact, which is that your brain is already geared for success!

## Creating Mental Space for Breakthrough Moments

You may have experienced this yourself at one time or another. It happens when you're busy doing something, trying hard to find a solution to a problem, and getting nowhere. You're stuck and can't find a way forward. You know there's a simple solution, but for some reason you can't quite put your finger on it. Eventually you stop working, take a break, relax and start doing something completely different. Then, when you're not thinking about the problem, the solution just pops into your head.

The same thing happens when you're learning a new skill. Perhaps you're struggling with a difficult sports technique, or a second language, or trying to prepare a proposal for an important project. You work and work away at it, seeming to get nowhere. So, you stop, focus on something else, and forget about it for a while. And then, when you're busy with something else and no longer thinking about it, the information you need to move forward seems to appear out of nowhere.

Those of us who did a lot of motorway driving before COVID 19, often got good ideas on the road. Flashes of inspiration seemingly pop out of nowhere. This can also occur in the shower or even while shaving or brushing your hair. In his book The New Psycho-Cybernetics (updated by Dan Kennedy), author Maxwell Maltz explains the phenomenon like this:

*"...when the stress of trying to force the answer... is turned off, the servo-mechanism is liberated to function as an Automatic Success Mechanism..."*

# Tapping Into the Unconscious Mind

Once again, we're back to the power of the human brain, and more specifically the unconscious mind. It's at the core of the process and the real engine behind this mechanism. While you're busy working away, looking for a solution, neurons are making connections. They're actively acquiring new data, linking together to assimilate all the information. And even when you consciously stop focusing on the problem at hand, your brain keeps right on going, working in the background to fill in the gaps and come up with an answer.

What's great about this mechanism is that we all have it, and it simply involves distracting yourself from the problem at hand.

It isn't reserved for scientists, artists, inventors or authors. Some people might make more frequent use of it than others, but everyone has the capacity to benefit from it. There are lots of different names for what's going on here, such as breakthrough moments, inspiration, ingenuity, revelation, spark, illumination, vision, insight, and flash of genius. Whatever you call them, they all have one thing in common: they give you the power to turn the things you imagine into reality.

## Visualization Takeaways

Firstly, we've discussed how daydreaming is innately wired into your brain. Secondly, that visualization taps into this but in a focused way, and it can be harnessed to achieve your goals. Thirdly, your brain is a powerful simulator of reality, and allowing visualizations to literally adapt your mind and body. Lastly, once you start to visualize purposely, you can also tap into a natural success mechanism to help you achieve any goals, which is boosted when you allow your mind some mental space to unconsciously process solutions to overcome challenges to your goals.

With this simple recipe you can set yourself up for flashes of genius and beyond – so get ready to succeed at levels way past your dreams!

# The Brain's Default Mode: What Is It And Why Meditation Is The Antidote

Life happens when you aren't on autopilot

Maybe, you've never heard of the Brain default network mode before. But you should be familiar with it. You experience it daily. It's what you sense as the voice in your mind

It's what American Psychologist *Julian Jaynes* refers to as the ***bicameral mind***

In his book, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, Julian says that until recently as 3000 years ago, human beings were robots, acting out the will of the gods. Following a voice in their heads.

This is like how we live today. But in our case, the voice doesn't come from the gods; it's our inner voice.

It's a voice that goes like

“This dress makes me look fat”,

“ That was a foolish thing to say”,

“ Why did I do that! Stupid, stupid, stupid” These inner dialogs are always with us. They all come from that nagging, always-on, defeatist voice that never shuts up. In Eastern Traditions, we call this the “*Monkey Mind.*” Science describes that voice as **the default network mode or DMN.**

Researchers have studied the default network mode for decades now. It’s a group of brain regions( medial [prefrontal cortex](#), posterior [cingulate cortex](#), and the [inferior parietal lobule](#)) that are important for our survival.

It’s most active when we are awake. When we do what human beings well — thinking about ourselves, remembering the past, imagining the future,...Anything but being focused on what’s happening right now.

The DMN is useful because it’s involved in our memory, particularly autobiographic episodic memories — These are daily memories that play a role in helping us make a model of the world, predict the future, based on past events.

But although the default network mode is essential, it has its drawbacks. Recent research has associated diseases like [depression](#), [anxiety](#), and [schizophrenia](#) with the DMN.

Since those discoveries, researchers started looking for answers. In particular, how to reverse the effects of the DMN or even control it.

What they found is that therapies like Meditation could influence the default network.

But what the research showed us is that the DMN isn't designed to make us happy. It's evolutionary us is to protect us. And one study proved just that.

## A Wandering Mind Is A Unhappy Mind

*A 2010 paper of Matthew Killingsworth and Daniel*

*Gilbert* described how they developed a smartphone app that asked people throughout the day what they were doing and how happy they were.

Based on a quarter of a million queries posed of about 5000 people from 83 different countries, they found that people think most of their past or future.

What the researchers concluded was that people end up more unhappy if they let their minds wander.

Luckily, that mind-wandering isn't always on.

There are times we are free of that voice. In particular, when we are doing something active. Something we love to do.

In those moments, we feel at our best. That's when you are in "FLOW."

## Tap Into Flow

Flow has been known for a while now. You may know it under a different name like — runner's high, being in the zone. If you're a basketball player, you know it as being unconscious. Flow is a more technical term.

Science defines Flow as an optimal state of consciousness. In flow, you perform and feel your best. The task you're doing absorbs you so much that everything else disappears.

You may have experienced it. Things like your sense of self-consciousness vanish entirely, time dilates — which is a fancy way of saying it passes strangely.

Even your decision-making happens effortlessly. Every decision and action flows seamlessly into the next. Flow is as close to picture-perfect decision-making as you can get. That's why it's called flow.

Steven Kother about Flow

Now, to understand flow and how it works, I need to talk about the neuroscience. That's where things become interesting.

There're two crucial points to understand.

From a neuroanatomical level, we only use 10% of our brains.

So top human performance, aka flow would mean the brain on overdrive. Turns out; that is false.

Inflow, parts of the brain, don't become hyperactive but they deactivate. We know the name for that state as ***transient — meaning temporary — hypo (it means slowing doing, shut down), frontality.***

*Frontality* refers to your prefrontal cortex or the executive function of the brain.

It's where all our higher cognitive functions resist. Our sense of will, morality, a sense of self, complex decision-making etcetera all comes from our PFC. It's what makes 'you' human.



Now, in flow, that area goes quiet.

That also the reason time passes so strangely. We calculate time all over the prefrontal cortex/PFC.

Also, your *dorsal lateral prefrontal cortex* — known as your inner critic — goes off.

When that happens, magic takes place. You feel instantly free of yourself. As a result, things like creativity and risk-taking go through the roof. You probably feel you're invincible. That's why flow is considered the most addictive state.

The brain also produces 5 of the most potent neurochemicals

These are all performance-enhanced neurochemicals, but also feel-good pleasure drugs.

The brain releases neurochemicals like norepinephrine, dopamine, anandamide, serotonin, and endorphins all together. If you were to buy a drug version of all those neurochemicals and combine them, You'd end up dead or in a coma. The brain combines these neurochemicals beautifully.

One of those neurochemicals you've probably heard of called dopamine.

We associate dopamine with learning, creativity, and motivation — It makes you capable of taking in more information and process it more deeply.

And that's just one neurotransmitter. Imagine the effect of the rest.

Unfortunately for us, the brain's default mode is the opposite of this enjoyable state of high focus and high performance.

The good news is that *meditation is as close to flowing* as you can get.

## Meditation Is The Antidote

Meditation is more than spiritual hokum.

Meditation has gained much scientific interest in the last few decades. And for a good reason. Meditation can change the brain.

A [study from Harvard](#) found that when people went through 8 weeks of meditation, critical areas of the brain that associate with awareness, stress, and empathy change.

They grew new grey matter in their cerebral cortex, which connects to attention and emotional integration.

Also, the grey matter in the amygdala, the brain's emotional center, decreased.

They gained more control over their emotions

Even impulse control becomes better.

Besides those changes, Meditators can also shut down their inner voice. But they do this when they aren't meditating — they can shut down their default mode network. And set a new one.

Since research showed that meditation has enormous benefits, high performers have included meditation in their work routine. It might surprise you at how many high achievers do meditation.

## Meditation, a Tool for Success

Tim Ferriss — Author of 4HourWorkWeek & Tribe Of Mentors

80% of all the successful people I've interviewed have a meditation“”

Tim Ferriss is a fantastic, smart-ass guy. Look up the 4-hour workweek, and you know what I mean.

For learning, productivity, launching a successful product, Marketing, etcetera. There's no better guru.

He doesn't just make wild predictions; he backs them up with experiments.

And besides experimenting, he's also on a mission to help the common man. He has a podcast called The Tim Ferriss Show, where he interviews the top-world experts in any arena of life.

Because He's been doing this for years now, Tim has gained enough expertise to know what makes successful people tick.

By interviewing 500 of the top world-class performers, he saw that the most practiced routine they have is meditation. At least 80% of them have some mindfulness practice/meditation.

The top-elite of high achievers know that is meditation is a game-changer. Not just professionally but also personally. The benefits are too huge.

That's the reason they adopted mindfulness.

They know that it can help them gets more control over their lives

And that meditation can stop them from being yanked around by the voice in their head.

So if you're ready to try it go ahead. But if there's still worry in the back of your mind because you worry about what people will think of you, don't be!

Meditation will become the next health easy decision as exercise.

## The Next No-Brainer

In the 1940s — when you told people you went running — they asked:” Who's chasing you?”.

Today, running is as acceptable as watching tv. People combine the 2 activities together sometimes.

If you tell people you meditate. They will look at you like you're weird.

Soon, that will change.

I will make a prediction: Meditation will join the pantheon of no-brainers.

Similar to brushing your teeth before bed or showering after a long workout, That's how normal it will be.

# Summary

A common assumption that we make, somewhat subconscious, is that happiness depends on external factors such as success or things.

We're chasing it hoping one day if we get it, all our problems will melt away.

It doesn't. All we're doing is fulfilling our pleasures/desires and avoiding boredom/pain. We're confusing pleasure-seeking with happiness.

From an evolutionary standpoint, nature doesn't care if you're happy it cares about is passing on your genes and notice what's essential for the survival of the species.

Evolution has nothing to gain from you gazing up the night sky and feeling awe.

Remembering when you saw a rattlesnake, however, matters. That's why the brain evolved to focus on things that can harm/stress us out.

The tendency towards negativity is what the brain's default mode network is all about.

However, the brain is plastic — meaning changeable.

We can form new neural pathways to become happier. We can choose our destiny.

We don't have to live our lives like we're half dead. A happier life is one doorstep away, and meditation is knocking.

The bottom line, happiness is a skill, just like you can train your body in the gym. So you can prepare yourself to be happy. And being mindful might do the trick

However, it doesn't mean you won't be vulnerable. It just means your going to navigate life with a little more ease.

## References:

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By being effective you can work less and achieve more  
[medium.com](https://medium.com)

### **Evolution Doesn't Care if You're Happy**

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Unless you are already a fan: I believe that what I am sharing about the default mode network of your brain will...

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### **Bicameralism — Ballotpedia**

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# How To Gain A Mental Edge: 7 Thinking Tools Used By The World's Leading Performers

If you put them into action, they'll work for you too

Nobel-prize winning physicist and Caltech professor, Richard Feynman, relished solving problems on his own, wanting to truly understand them, before attempting to solve them.

Feynman followed a clear set of thinking tools to drive his thought processes, breaking problems down to their fundamental truths, and then finding solutions from there.

Many of the world's great thinkers use similar tools. Ray Dalio and Elon Musk call them the principles, while Warren Buffet and Bill Gates refer to them as mental models.

These thinking tools, regardless of what you call them, serve as the foundations for what you get out of life. But they are not just for the Richard Feynman's and the Bill Gates's of the world.

Anyone can use these tools. The only thing separating the world's leading performers from the rest of us is that they put them into action. That's what gives them their mental edge.

Here are 7 thinking tools used by the world's leading performers. If you put them into action, they'll give you a mental edge too.

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# 1. Thought Experiments

[Thought experiments](#) are used by many of the world's great thinkers. Defined as a device of the imagination used to investigate the nature of things, thought experiments help us to envisage real-world problems, enabling us to explore impossible situations and predict their outcomes.

Albert Einstein, the most famous proponent of this thinking tool, used thought experiments for some of his most important discoveries. Whilst exploring the relationship between space and time, he asked himself this question: "What would happen if you could catch up to a beam of light as it moved?" He imagined himself chasing the beam of light, and it was this scenario which played a key role in his development of special relativity.

Thought experiments are powerful because we can learn from our mistakes without real-world consequences. In doing so, they help us to identify answers to our problems, and the best way to get there.

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## 2. Inversion

Inversion is one of the most powerful thinking tools. Its origins can be found in the word “invert,” which simply means “turn upside down.” As a thinking tool, it helps us to successfully identify and eliminate obstacles by tackling them from the opposite end of the natural starting point.

For example, say you were struggling with a work project. Instead of asking yourself, “*What three things will help move the project forward?*” ask yourself, “*What five things will hold the project back?*”

The idea is, rather than thinking about what you want, consider what you’d like to avoid. Or as Warren Buffet’s business partner Charlie Munger once said, “*All I want to know is where I’m going to die, so I’ll never go there.*”

Inversion won’t give you the answer to every problem, but by looking at challenges from their opposing perspective, it will help you identify things you may have missed.

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# 3. First-Principles Thinking

[First-principles thinking](#) is one of the best ways to reverse-engineer complex problems. Often called reasoning from first principles, it's the act of boiling things down to their most fundamental truths.

This is done by separating the underlying ideas from any assumptions they might be based on. A first principle, therefore, is a basic assumption that can't be deduced any further.

An excellent example of first-principles thinking comes via entrepreneur Elon Musk. In an [interview with Kevin Rose](#), Musk expertly explained how Space X used first principles to innovate at low prices.

In the early days of Space X, Musk was told that *“battery packs are really expensive and that's just the way they will always be.”* Instead of settling for this answer, though, he broke the problem down into its fundamental parts.

First, he identified the material constituents of the batteries. Then, he priced the materials on the London metal exchange and calculated the construction costs. As it turned out, the cost of building a battery from the bottom-up was only 13.3% of the original price.

By reasoning from first principles, Musk was able to cut through the fog of pre-existing beliefs to see opportunities others had missed, and ultimately, send rockets to space.

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## 4. The Two Razors

**Occam's Razor** and **Hanlon's Razor** are two separate thinking tools, but they complement each other nicely.

**Occam's Razor**, which helps us to seek the simplest solutions to our problems, suggests that “among competing hypotheses, the one with the fewest assumptions should be selected.” Here's a fun example: “when you hear hoofbeats, think of horses, not unicorns.”

In many cases, simpler explanations are more likely to be true than complicated ones. So instead of trying to disprove complex problems, you make a decision based on the explanation with the fewest moving parts.

Related to Occam's razor, **Hanlon's Razor** states that we should not attribute to malice that which is more easily explained by carelessness or stupidity. In a sense, it teaches us to look for the good in others.

Consider this example. A colleague forgets to send you a message about an event. Does this mean that they have something against you? Chances are they don't, although you're not alone if that's your first thought.

Implementing Hanlon's razor teaches you to first assume this happened because someone made a mistake, rather than intentionally trying to hurt you. Maybe they forgot. Or they simply thought it wasn't for you.

Utilizing this thinking tool reminds us that people do make mistakes. It also prevents us from making negative assumptions and helps us see the world in a more positive light.

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## 5. Pareto Principle

Named after Vilfredo Pareto, the [Pareto Principle](#) (also known as the 80/20 rule) states that, for many events, roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes.

For example:

- 20% of your effort produces 80% of your gains.
- 20% of your customers produce 80% of your profits.

- 20% of your sources produce 80% of your happiness.

The point of this thinking tool is to recognize that most things in life aren't evenly distributed. As such, to get better results, you should focus on the 20% that provides the greatest gains. In other words, focus on what works and do it better.

For me personally, the Pareto Principle helped me to identify the people in my life that give me the most energy. I then flipped that analysis, and I was easily able to recognise those who were draining my energy. I've since implemented my findings, and my energy levels have never been better.

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## 6. Circle of Competence

This idea is simple: Through experience, we've all acquired useful information and skills in certain areas of the world. But in some areas — those that require specialist knowledge — we are often lacking.

For example, most people have a basic understanding of car maintenance. You know how to change a tyre and add some screenwash, but if you need to change the oil, you'll most likely need a mechanic.

This is a basic example, but whether it's economics, your ability to manage people, or your communication skills, the idea is always the same: you need to know your strengths and weaknesses. If you remain ignorant to these, your ego drives your actions, and then you're sure to run into trouble.

Understanding your [circle of competence](#), on the other hand, helps you to avoid potential problems, identify opportunities for growth, learn from others, and help you identify where you have an edge over others.

Tom Watson Sr., Founder of IBM, put it best: *"I'm no genius. I'm smart in spots — but I stay around those spots."*

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## 7. Second-order thinking

Every action has a consequence, and each of these consequences has further consequences. These are called second-order effects.

[Second-order thinking](#) means thinking about these second-order effects. In other words, it means thinking about the effects of the effects.



This is a powerful thinking tool because things are not always as they appear. When we solve one problem, it's often the case that we inadvertently create another one that's even worse.

This process is best explained in terms of long-term challenges. Take the current crisis with the coronavirus. A recession at this stage is a given, but other second-order effects include airline bailouts, an increase in racism towards China, and regime changes in countries such as Iran, Venezuela, Uzbekistan, or North Korea.

On a more positive note, people might start reading more, and we'll likely see a drop in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, for a short time anyway.

With any situation, including the coronavirus, second-order thinking allows us to examine long-term consequences before they occur, thus helping us to make of our decisions before we potentially make a bad call.

## The Takeaway

If you want to gain a mental edge, look no further than the 7 thinking tools above. They work for everyone, but what separates the majority from the world's leading performers, is that they put them into action.

Maybe you've read about these tools before, but knowledge is not where the game is played. We also have to put it into practice.

# How to Rewire Your Brain

Neuroplasticity. Eat, drink, and be merry.

Although there are still a lot of unsolved mysteries about our complex biological computer inside our skull, we now know that our brain is flexible and we are able to change the physical structure in various ways.

When we are born, the surface of our brain, the grey matter or cerebral cortex, is like a blank board. The adult brain has areas called lobes, with different functionalities. The frontal lobe is, for example, one of the most important for our more human feelings, consciousness, and rational thoughts.

The brain is the most flexible when we are children. Since we are not born with a fully developed brain, it is still growing, creating new neurons, and new paths between them.

But even when the adult brain is fully matured and developed at the age of 25 years, it is still possible to change and reorganize it — and hence change and develop yourself, alter your thought patterns, change your habits.

Our brain can structurally be rearranged by:

- Generating new neurons
- Creating new synapses to connect neurons
- Strengthen and weaken existing connections

Let's consider each of these, what they are for and how you can use this knowledge for self-improvement.

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## 1. Generate new neurons

Creating new neurons (brain cells) in your brain is also called neurogenesis. This mostly happens in the early development of your brain and at a very low scale after your brain has reached maturity.

Until about a decade ago, it was believed that the adult brain didn't produce any new neurons. But the latest research shows that certain regions of your brain will continuously generate new neurons from neural stem cells:

- Lateral ventricles, responsible for producing a protective cerebrospinal fluid into your brain.
- Part of the hippocampus ([dentate gyrus](#)), which is mainly known for its long-term memory processing functionality.

That little thing called the hippocampus (left) that looks like a seahorse (right — and hence the name which means seahorse) in our brain is very important for our episodic memory functions. Credits: Wikipedia Commons.

## What does it mean for you?

It is still uncertain what the role of adult neurogenesis, but there is some evidence that the new neurons in the hippocampus might be important for our ability to learn and remember.

Other studies show that a decrease in new neurons can trigger Alzheimer's. Neurogenesis will help you to keep your memory sharp.

## How can you stimulate neurogenesis?

- **Exercise** seems to be the number one thing you can do for your mind and your body and this also shows to be true in this case. [Physical exercise increases the generation of new neurons in adult neurogenesis.](#)
- **Eat oily fish:** [Omega-3 fatty acids upregulate adult neurogenesis.](#)
- **Eat walnuts and blueberries:** Walnuts also contain an essential omega-3 acid. Blueberries are blue due to

anthocyanin dye, which has been linked to neurogenesis.

- **Green tea** will also help you generate more neurons in your brain.
  - **Get enough sleep**, as long term [sleep deprivation might reduce neurogenesis.](#)
  - **Meditate**: Long term [meditation and yoga practice might also stimulate neurogenesis.](#)
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## 2. Create new, strengthen or weaken existing neural connections

Neural connections — the connections between your brain cells — are one of the most important factors in your ability to cognitive thinking.

As opposed to neurogenesis, new neural connections are created all the time. New synapses are being created when we learn or experience something new and hence there are new possible neural connections and paths between the neurons.

When practicing by repetition, you strengthen the connections between specific neurons. It is said: “Neurons that fire together, wire together” (Donald Hebb)

“Neurons that fire together, wire together.”

## **What does it mean for you?**

If you don't use or practice your new skill, the connection will be lost. This is why it's important to practice, rehearse and use your new skills and knowledge if it's important for you to know it.

On the other hand, if you need to unlearn something or lose some bad habits, you will need to break these connections. It is harder to unlearn than to learn because breaking existing bonds will require that you try to make new connections instead and connections that have been reinforced for a long time (habits and well-established knowledge) are not easily broken.

## **How can you create and strengthen neural connections?**

When you learn and practice a skill, rehearse knowledge or repeat affirmations, the connections and paths between the neurons used in that skill, knowledge or idea, will be strengthened.

Therefore, to create new and stronger neural connections you should learn new things and reinforce them by repetition. To rewire existing connections differently you should get out of your comfort zone:

- **Learn a new skill:** When we learn something we didn't know before, existing neurons will make new connections with each other.
- **Read:** Reading non-fiction will give you new knowledge by creating new connections between your brain cells. But also fiction creates new connections because you read about new situations.
- **Experience new things:** Travel, meet new people, experience different environments, try new foods.
- **Experiment** or combines things differently. Try a new recipe or combine foods you wouldn't usually try together.
- **Get lost** intentionally and find your way back without a GPS. Or choose a different route than you usually do when going places.
- **Visualize**, for example: Think yourself stronger. A study shows that you can [gain some muscle-power by preforming exercise only mentally!](#)

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There is of course much more to neuroplasticity. The signals between neurons — the neurotransmitters — are chemicals that highly affect your mood, motivations, thoughts, and your ability to concentrate, to mention a few examples.

The neurotransmitters move in synapses (gaps) between neurons and bind to specific receptors, which induces electrical changes. While the structural paths in our brains are important, it is just as important what actually flows through the neural network.

Just like the structural patterns in your brain, the chemicals can also be affected by your diet and your behavior. So eat, drink, and be merry!