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LEARNING
EXPERTS

 **Member
Events**

Let's talk about..negativity bias



Welcome!

Friendly reminder,
while waiting for others to join us...

- ✓ Please have microphones on mute
- ✓ Q & A at end of webinar
- ✓ Recording available afterwards

About Me



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DCM Learning Trainer

Do you also love a great Netflix drama?



Examining people's psychophysiological reactions to video news content in 17 countries, researcher's results revealed that, globally, on average humans are more aroused by and attentive to negative news.

Our brains respond more intensely to negative stimuli.

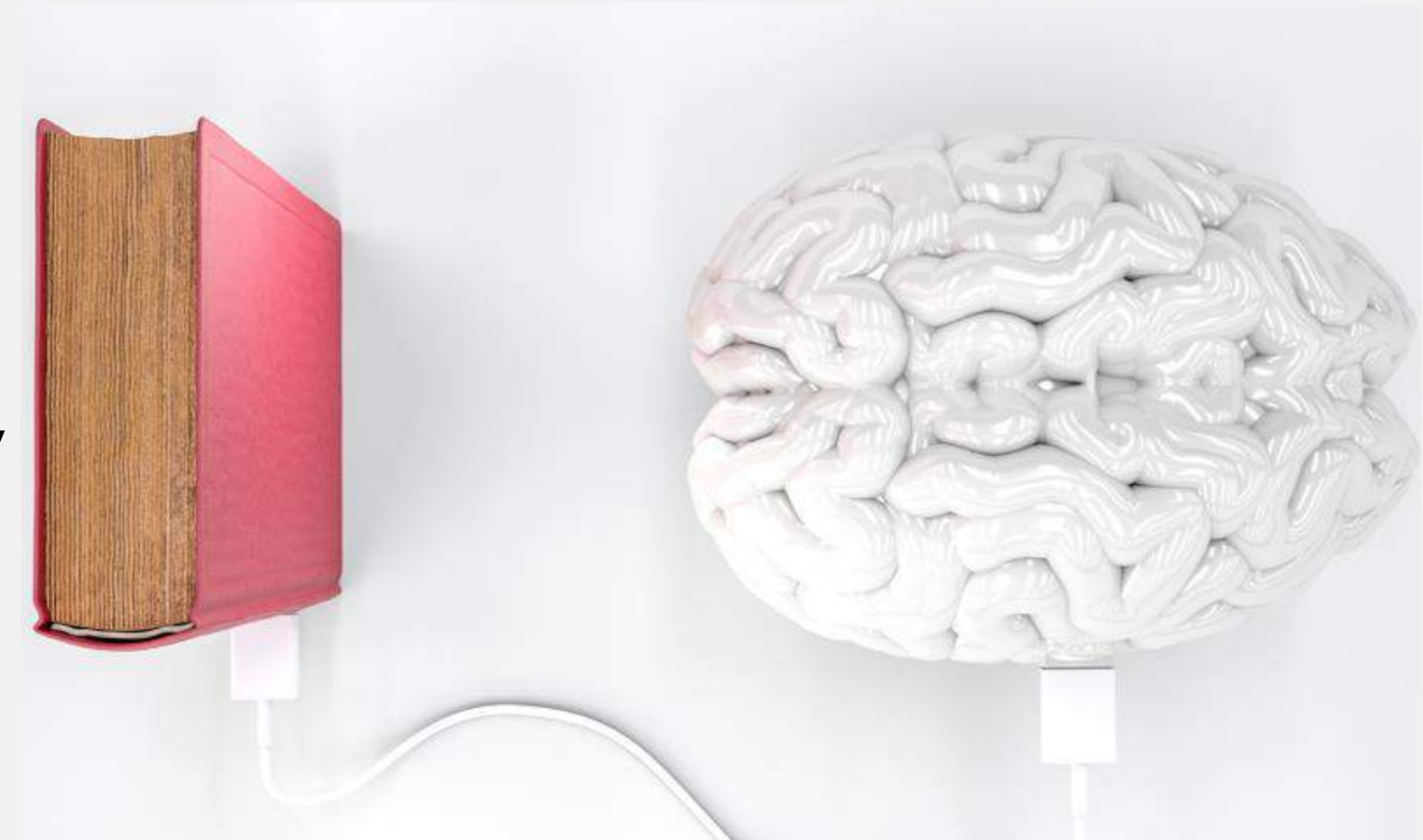
Researchers presented photos to 33 participants and measured their brain's electrical activity to study its responses.

Some were affectively neutral (an electrical outlet, a plate), some were considered positive pictures (people enjoying a rollercoaster), Some were deemed negative images (a gun pointed at the camera).

Findings showed more event-related brain potentials (ERPs), or activity, when participants viewed negative, as opposed to positive images,

leading the researchers to conclude that our evaluations are more strongly influenced by the former.

Ito, Larsen, Smith, and Cacioppo (1998)



How full is your glass daily?

Our brains behave like teflon for the good
and velcro for the bad.

Dr. Rick Hanson



Positive Mindset

You usually expect the best outcome out of any situation.

You always look on the positive side of life.

You think you have a bright future ahead of you.

When you commit to something, you usually expect to succeed.

You believe that where there is a will, there is always a way.

Things usually turn out all right for you in the end.



Negative Mindset

You feel that really good things rarely happen to you.

In your opinion, it is wiser to expect failure rather than success.

You feel, if something can go wrong, it probably will.

Things rarely work out the way you want them to.

You always seem to lose when faced with 50/50 odds.

You consciously avoid getting your hopes up

in case your efforts lead to disappointment.



Our most positive experiences are like water through a sieve.

While our most negative experiences are caught every time

Causing a negative spiral of thoughts – emotions – behaviours.



The Negative Experience Index

Annual composite index tracking experiences of stress, anger, worry, sadness and physical pain worldwide in more than 100 countries.

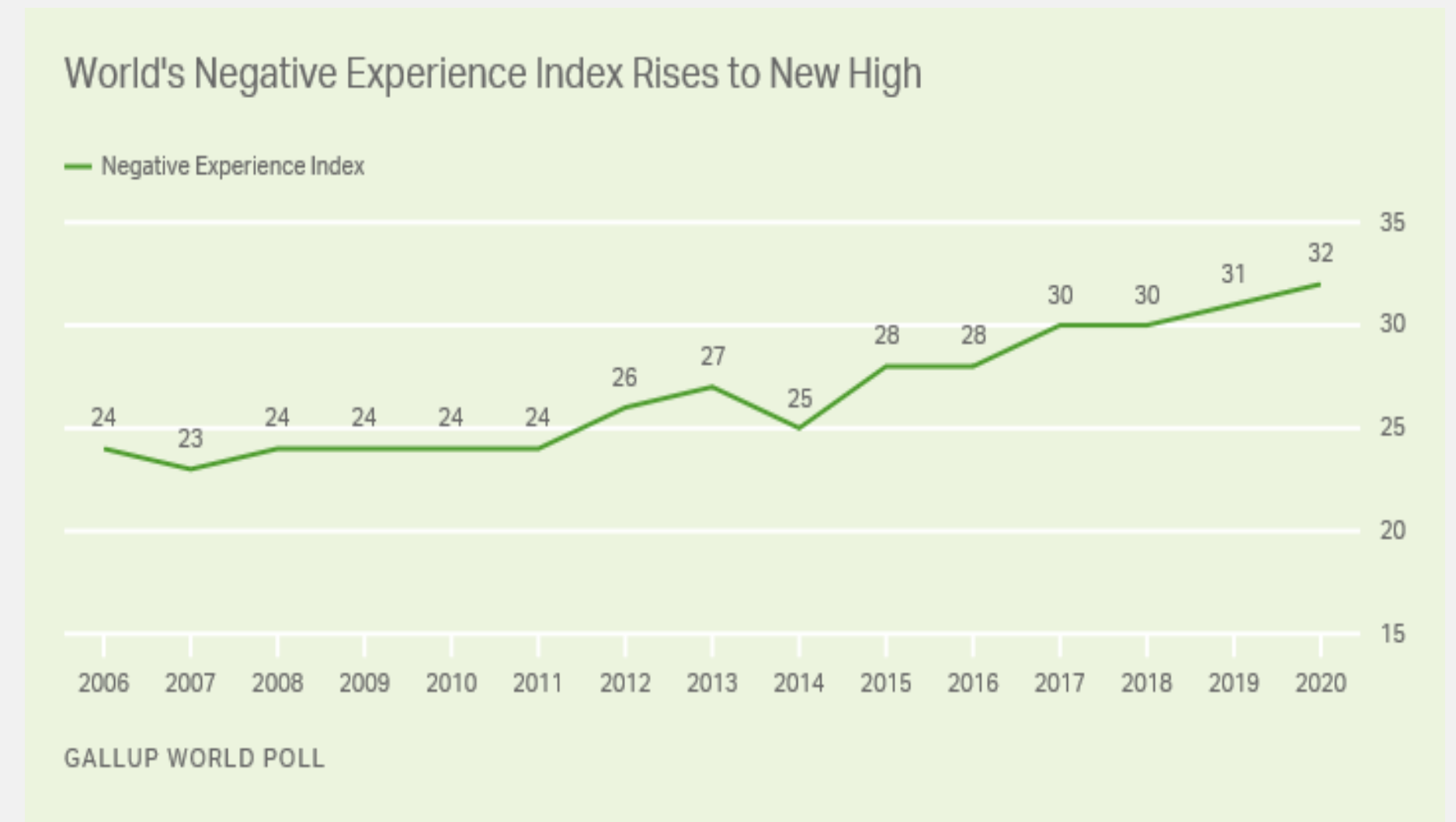
Worry and sadness each rose 1%

Anger rose 2%

Stress rocketed up 5%

But 2020

officially became the most stressful year in recent history.





What is the negativity bias

A cognitive bias.

Refers to our proclivity to “attend to, learn from,
and use negative information far more than positive information”

(Vaish, Grossmann, & Woodward, 2008, p. 383).

Negativity bias refers to the tendency of individuals
to give more weight and attention to negative information
compared to positive information.



We think about negative events more & they have greater impact on the brain.

Have you ever been hung up on something terrible that happened

earlier in the week, despite everything else going great?

Our tendency to think more about negative events

is another example of this bias in action.

Larsen (2009) reviewed ample evidence to suggest

that negative emotions last longer than positive ones,

that we tend to spend more time thinking about negative events.

This is likely related to learning and memory processes.

The more attention we give to a stimulus or experience,


the higher the likelihood that we'll commit it to memory. (Ohira, Winton, & Oyama, 1998).



Good News!

We have more control over
this negativity bias than we may believe!





Where does the negativity
bias come from?

Negativity bias is thought to be an adaptive evolutionary function

(Cacioppo & Berntson, 1999; Vaish et al., 2008; Norman et al., 2011).

Thousands of years ago,

our ancestors were exposed to immediate environmental threats

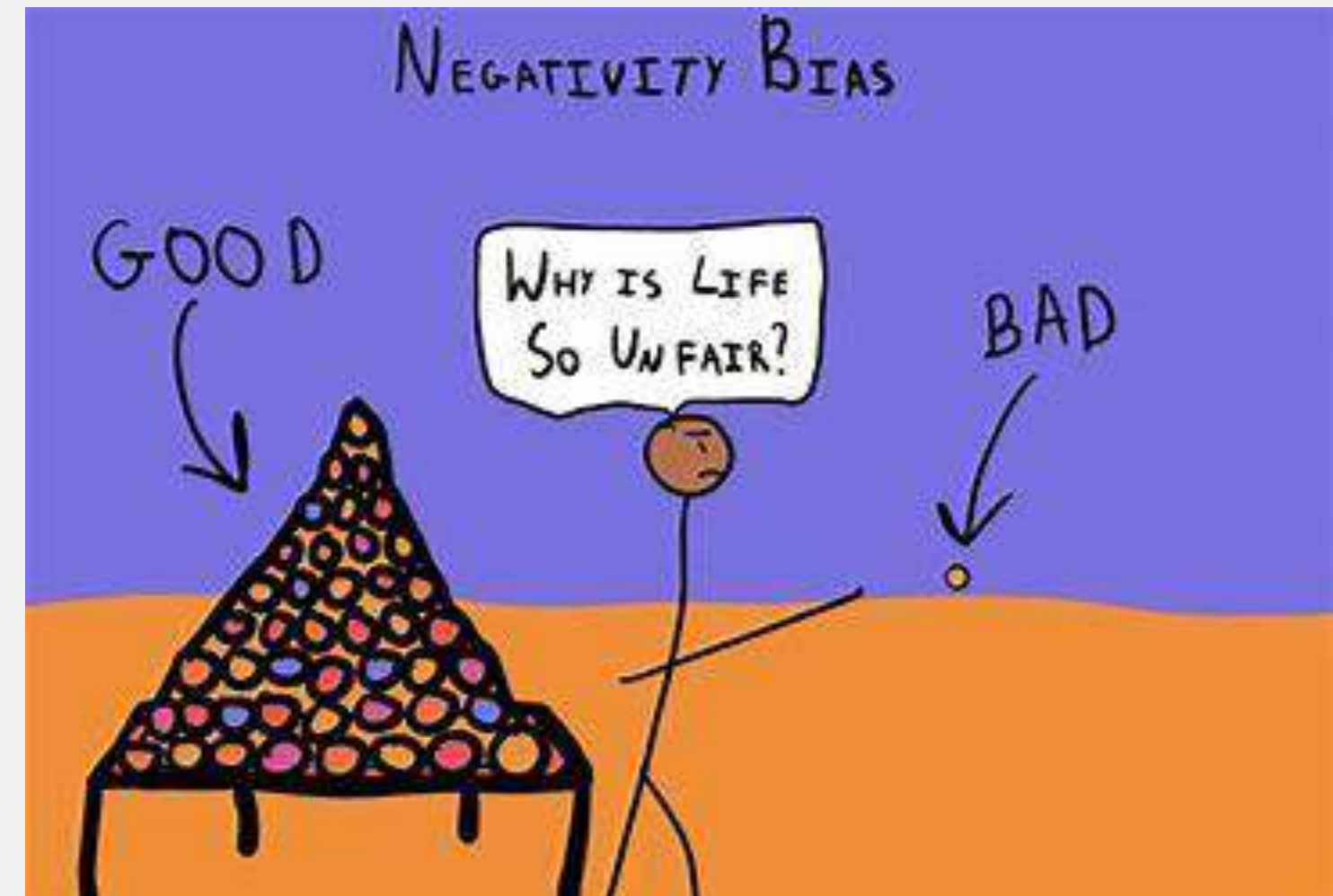
that we no longer need to worry about.

2/3 neurons on lookout for bad news

making it difficult to maintain optimism

A design flaw in the brain.

Dr. Rick Hanson



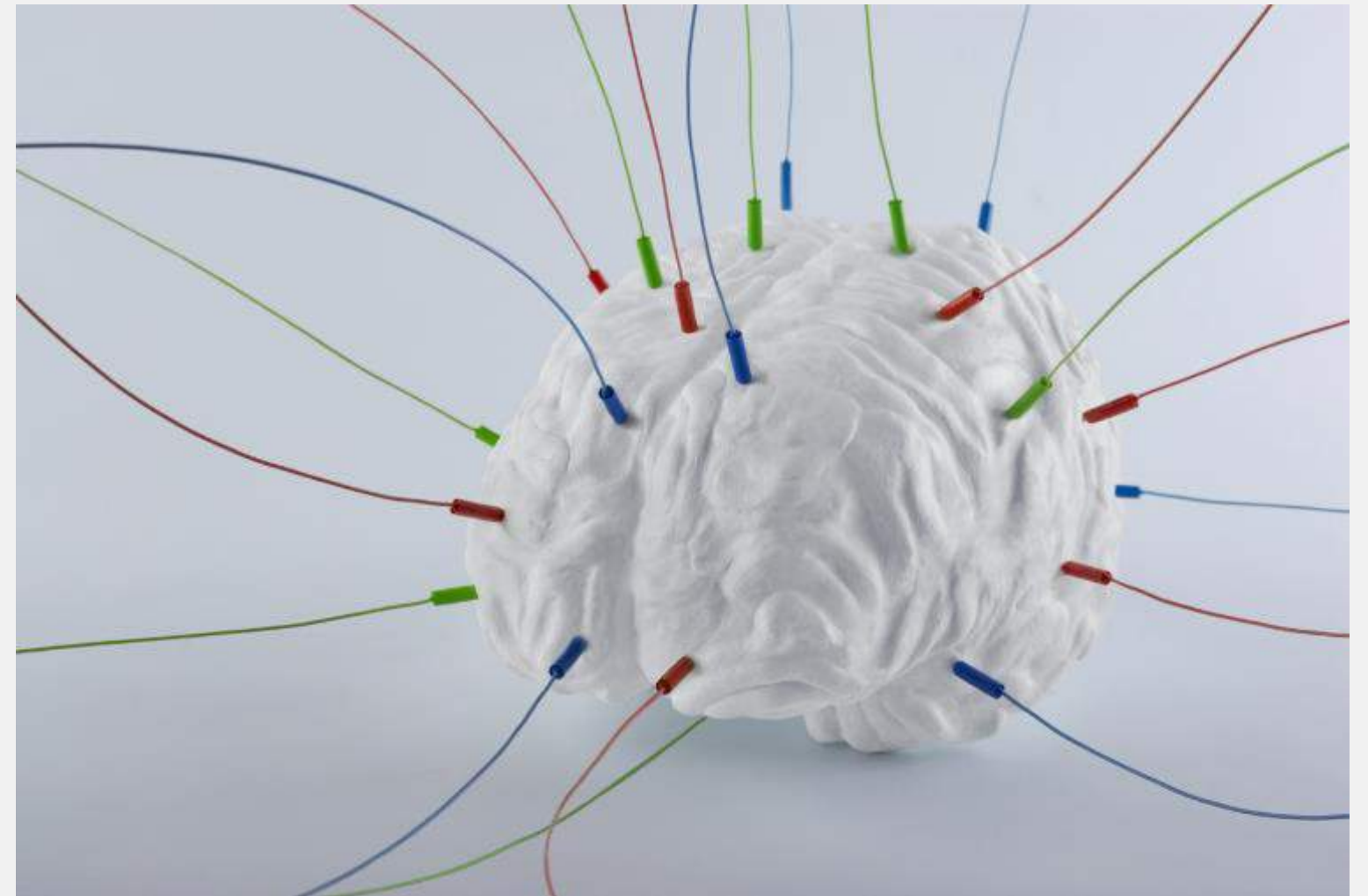
We are hardwired to make quick decisions.

Mere Exposure Effect –

We are often unaware how strongly we are swayed

by repeated external influences –

news, marketing, social media, other people





How does this show up daily?

Recall and think about insults more than compliments.

Respond more – emotionally and physically – to aversive stimuli.

Dwell on unpleasant or traumatic events more than pleasant ones.

Focus our attention more quickly on negative rather than positive information.

Even when we experience numerous good events in one day, negativity bias can cause us to focus on the sole bad thing that occurred.

It can lead us to ruminate on small things, worry over having made a bad impression, being misunderstood and linger on negative comments.

(Lupfer, Weeks, & Dupuis, 2000; Chen & Lurie, 2013; Wisco, Gilbert, & Marroquín, 2014).



In Professional Setting

Innovation and Creativity:

Negativity bias may hinder creativity and innovation by causing individuals to focus more on potential failures or obstacles.

Employees might be less willing to take risks or propose unconventional ideas if they believe there is a higher likelihood of negative outcomes.

Decision-Making:

When a team is considering a new project or initiative, the tendency to focus on potential risks and challenges may lead to a more conservative approach. This cautious decision-making may result from an overemphasis on negative outcomes rather than a balanced consideration of potential benefits.



Team Meetings:

During team meetings, if the majority of the discussion revolves around addressing problems, challenges, or mistakes, it can create a negative atmosphere. This focus on the negative can overshadow positive achievements and contributions, impacting team morale.

Employee Engagement:

Negativity bias can impact employee engagement as individuals may become more attuned to negative aspects of their work environment, such as criticism or perceived unfair treatment. This can lead to a decrease in morale and enthusiasm.



Performance Evaluations:

A manager may primarily focus on an employee's few mistakes during a performance review, overshadowing numerous positive contributions and accomplishments.

The negative aspects tend to stick more, influencing the overall perception of the employee's performance.

Recognition and Rewards:

If an organisation places more emphasis on recognising and rewarding exceptional performance, it may inadvertently contribute to a negativity bias.

Employees who consistently perform well but may not receive explicit recognition may feel undervalued.



Feedback Delivery:

In one-on-one feedback sessions, supervisors may unintentionally emphasise areas for improvement rather than recognising and reinforcing positive behaviors. This can lead employees to feel demoralised and less motivated.

Conflict Resolution:

In resolving conflicts between team members, there might be a disproportionate focus on the negative aspects of the disagreement, making it challenging to find common ground and move forward positively.



Communication:

Negative information tends to be remembered more vividly, and this bias can affect communication within the workplace. Positive messages may be overshadowed by negative ones, leading to misunderstandings or a general sense of pessimism.

Organisational Change:

During times of change, employees may fixate on potential downsides and uncertainties rather than embracing new opportunities. This can lead to resistance and a slower adaptation to changes.



Negativity bias impact

Individuals

Decision making

Problem solving

Perception

Memory

Behaviour

Anxiety

stress

Company

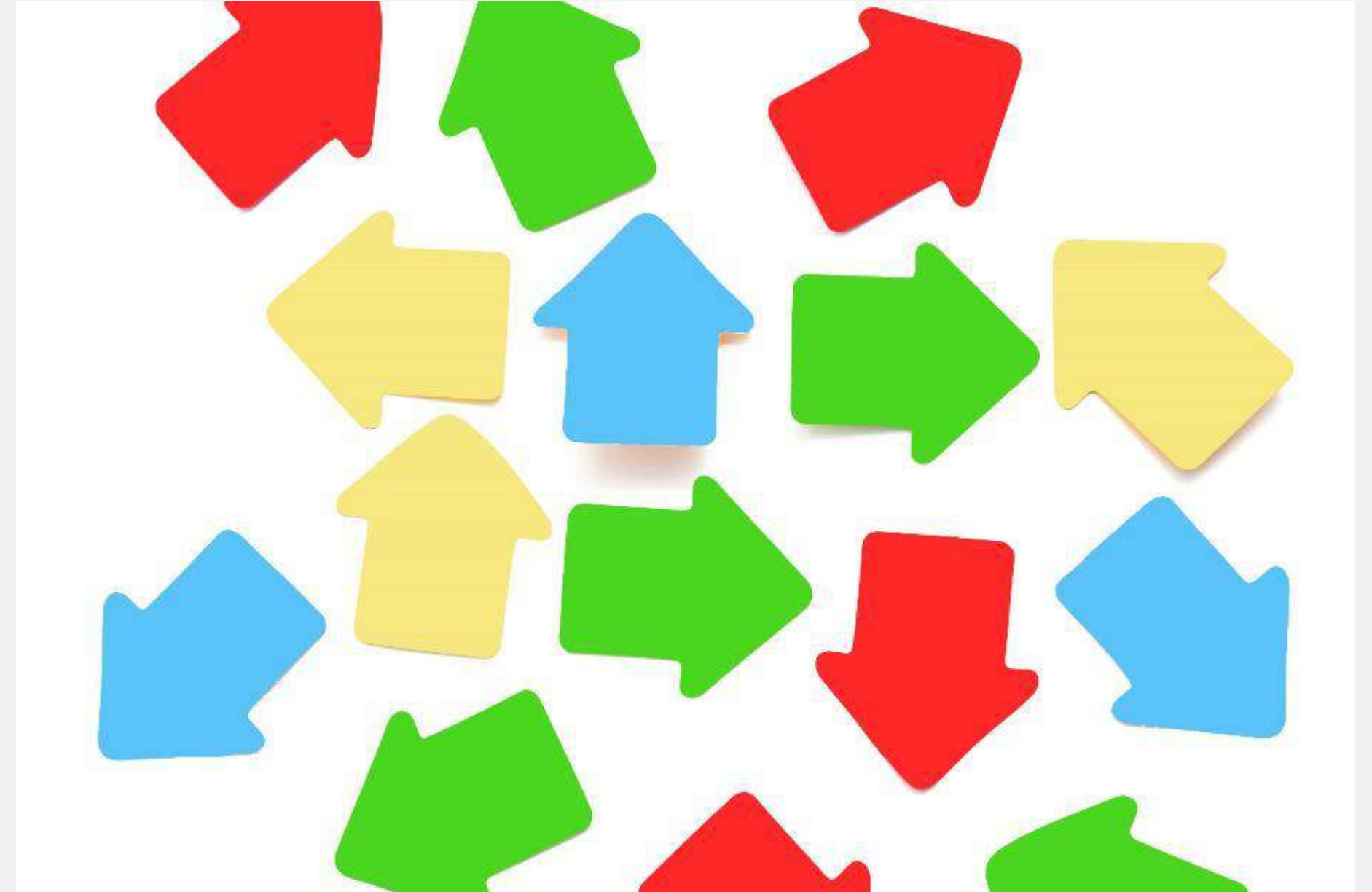
Failure to advance/adapt to change

Reluctance to take calculated risks

Hiring/promotion

Feedback

Relationships





How to overcome the negativity bias

Neuroplasticity

Ability of our brain to change!

Brain takes shape from what our attention rests upon.

By repeated experience we hard wire our brain.

We can deliberately stimulate parts of the brain for positivity.

Neurons that fire together wire together.

By directing more of our conscious attention toward the positive events and feelings we experience, we can begin to address the asymmetry of negativity bias.

And that requires practice.



Manage the negativity bias

- Challenge your thinking
- What if exercise
- Take in the good
- Mindful awareness
- Collaborate to gain perspective
- Organisational input

Sometimes we are so habituated to our thinking processes that we cannot identify unhelpful thinking patterns or thoughts when they arise.

To help make this distinction when a thought arises ask –

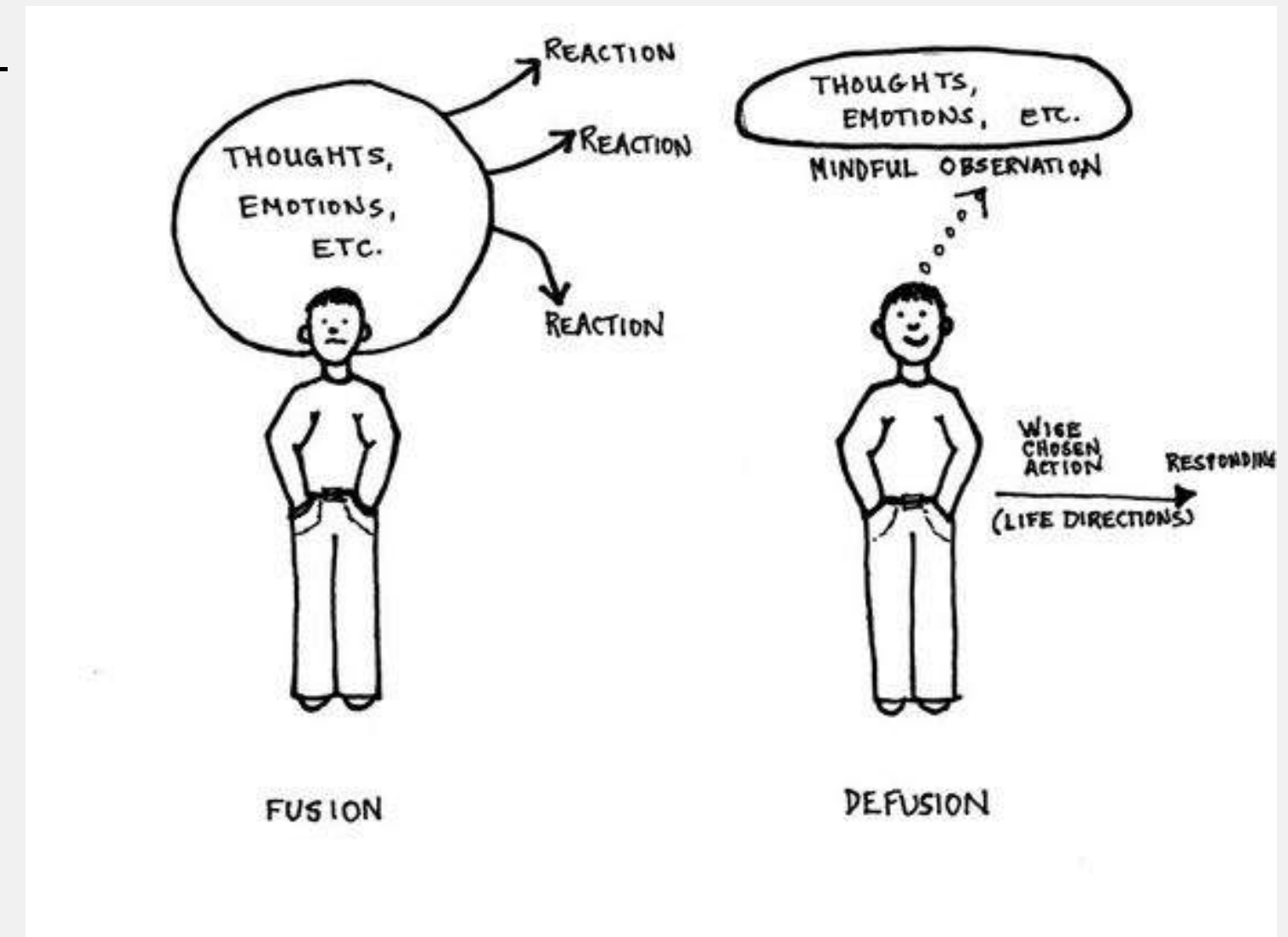
Is this thought in any way helpful or useful or even true?

Is this thought an old story? Have I heard it before?

What do I get for buying into this story (thought)?

Does this thought help me take effective action?

Am I going to trust my thinking?



When you apply cognitive defusion techniques to unhelpful thoughts,

you see thoughts as merely 'words inside your head'.

By refusing to take them literally you choose how to respond to them.

Metaphors to manage & diffuse negative thinking

Thoughts are like... Clouds floating, or birds flying, across the sky. They come and go.

A passing parade. You can watch the floats pass by. You don't have to climb on board.

Leaves and sticks floating down a stream. You don't have to dive in.

You can watch from a bridge.

Trains coming and going while you stand watching from the platform.

People passing you in the street. You can nod and say hello,

but you don't have to stop and have a conversation with them.

'Pop-ups' on the internet. Junk email. You can't stop it from coming in,

but you don't have to read all of them.



Restructure your thoughts

The “What If?” Bias

We often get caught up thinking about all the potential bad outcomes of a situation or decision, rather than adopting a rational perspective.

This exercise can help you combat the “What If?” Bias to regain a balanced perspective and avoid catastrophising.

Thinking of a situation or challenge that you’d like to tackle, use a worksheet to list both positive and negative, benefit/risk “What Ifs?” in each of the columns.



Savor the positive moments

When you stop and take some time to take in a positive experience, you're savouring it and creating memories for the future (Bryant & Veroff, 2017).

Building up your store of positive mental images and feelings can help you address the imbalance that negativity bias predisposes us to.

The next time you experience or create a positive moment, take a little longer than you usually would to enjoy it. (20-30 seconds)

Engage fully in the good sensations, happy thoughts, and pleasant emotions that you feel and make a note of what you enjoyed about it.

When you go home, why not reflect on what just happened and turn the savoring skill into a habit?

Taking in the good



Mindful awareness practices

Practicing mindfulness is one good way to become more attuned to your own thoughts and emotions (Charoensukmongkol, 2014).

Through guided meditations, mindful breathing, reflection, and other mindfulness interventions, you can start to observe your feelings and thoughts more objectively.

We experience an increase in positive judgments and higher levels of optimism when we practice mindful breathing.



Collaborate

Ask for and be open to the perspectives of other people

Stay objective – seek out facts/evidence



Organisational action

Promote Positive Feedback:

Encourage a culture of constructive and positive feedback to balance the effects of negativity bias on performance evaluations.

Focus on Strengths:

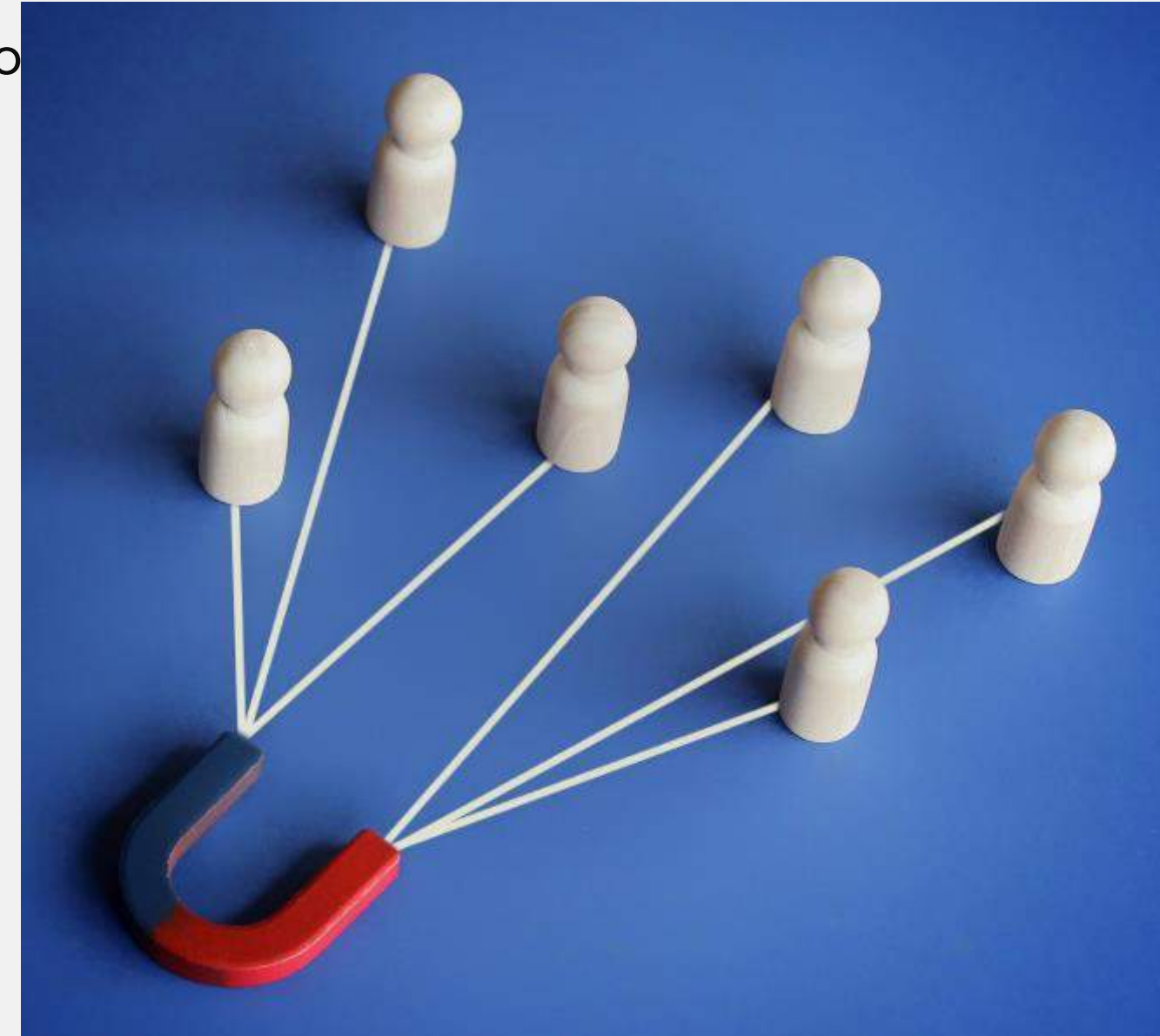
Recognise and celebrate employees' strengths and achievements, emphasising positive contributions to counteract the tendency to dwell on negatives.

Provide Training:

Implement training programs that raise awareness about cognitive biases, including negativity bias, and provide strategies for mitigating their impact on decision-making and interpersonal relationships.

Encourage a Positive Work Environment:

Foster a positive and supportive work environment to counteract the potential negative effects of bias on employee well-being and engagement.



Resources

TEDx

Hardwiring happiness: Dr. Rick Hanson at

A Simple Trick to Improve Positive Thinking

Should You Trust Your First Impression?

Mindset – Carol Dweck

You control your mind, don't allow it to control you!

Growing a more positive mindset leads to a more motivated, resilient, optimistic and happier YOU!



Thank you for joining us today!

I hope you have benefitted from and enjoyed
our webinar.