

# Sustainable Behavior Change

## What the Science Says

If you want new results, you need to try new things. And if you want the kind of change agility required to thrive in an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous business landscape, you need to be working with individuals who are open to embracing behavior change by trying new tactics. Use these tactics to thrive during times of change.



### 1. Start With What You Can Change Today

**Embrace iterative modes of working and behavior change.** Start with what you can improve today, and build from there. Celebrate success, debrief on what doesn't work, and try to do a bit better tomorrow.



The feeling of being excluded provoked the same sort of reaction in the brain that physical pain might cause.”

NAOMI EISENBERGER



### 3. The Threat Response Shuts Down Analytic Thinking

**Don't skip your regular one on one conversations.** If you are maintaining a regular cadence of conversations to discuss how things are going, individuals won't automatically assume the worst when you call them into a meeting.



There is a good chance that tomorrow is going to be just as crazy as today. If you want to change anything about yourself, the best time to start is now. Ask yourself, 'What am I willing to change now?' Just do that. That's more than enough.”

MARSHALL GOLDSMITH, *WHAT GOT YOU HERE WON'T GET YOU THERE*



### 2. Minimize Social Threats

Have a zero tolerance policy for [incivility in the workplace](#). Prioritize the basics, like saying please and thank you, acknowledging work well-done, and encouraging personal interaction.



The threat response is both mentally taxing and deadly to the productivity of a person—or of an organization. Because this response uses up oxygen and glucose from the blood, they are diverted from other parts of the brain, including the working memory function, which processes new information and ideas. This impairs analytic thinking, creative insight, and problem solving”

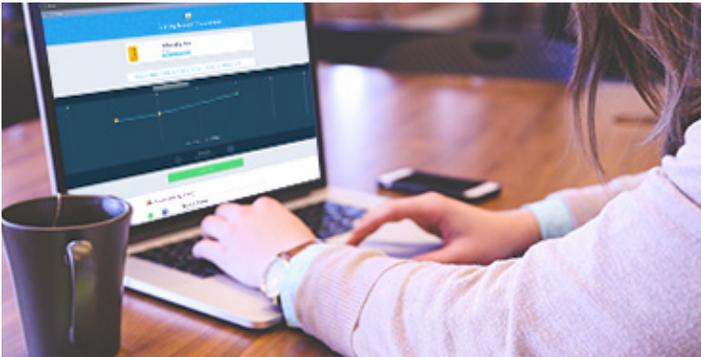
DAVID ROCK



#### 4. Recognize the Power of Routine

When an action or process has become a habit, it invokes the basal ganglia, which [David Rock and Jeffrey Schwartz](#) explain is the “part of the brain ... where neural circuits of long-standing habit are formed and held. It requires much less energy to function than working memory does.”

**Don’t overload people with changes.** If you are in the middle of changing one element of your workflow or processes, avoid introducing additional changes. Work on changing one routine or behavior at a time, to avoid overloading people with multiple types of change.



#### 6. Prioritize Conversations that Develop Trust

**Show trust to foster trusting relationships.** Do you trust that each individual that you work with will do what they say they will, or do you micromanage performance? Giving people the power and support to manage their own schedules and priorities shows that you trust them.



#### 5. Minimize Error Signals to Get Better Results

The way we process routines, as well as new information, is also heavily impacted by what “[neuroscientists call ‘errors’](#)”: perceived differences between expectation and actuality. When a child (or an adult, for that matter) is promised a sweet-tasting treat and then discovers it tastes salty or bitter, the brain emits strong signals that use a lot of energy.”

**Actively manage expectations—especially during times of change.** Simple acts like sending out meeting agendas ahead of time, and setting and meeting realistic timelines will help to manage expectations and minimize their perception of error signals.



When we are in a fear state, our conversations are shaped by the neurochemistry of fear... The best antidotes to the brain’s fear state are trust, empathy, and support. When someone shows concern for us, our brain chemistry makes a shift. We become calmer, we regain our composure, and we can begin once again to think in a constructive way.”

**JUDITH GLASER,  
CONVERSATIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

Individuals are complicated, messy, diverse, and difficult to align to centralized objectives. They are also often the greatest asset that organizations have to help achieve the kind of agility in change that is essential for thriving in a VUCA landscape. By harnessing the wisdom of neuroscience, organizations can begin to create the conditions that individuals need to be comfortable in times of change, and ultimately get the best results.