

# Overcoming Disruption in the Age of Distraction

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**Becoming Superhuman teaches busy professionals how to get their most important work done in less time.**

## **Recent Superhuman Alumni**



OUR LAB'S FUNDAMENTAL THESIS

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**The way we work today is  
fundamentally misaligned  
with how our brains and  
bodies work best.**

# Today's Overview

## 4 of the biggest mistakes of productivity and performance

The scientific reasons WHY people commonly make those mistakes and what research-backed strategies to use instead.

## How to increase your productivity by 25%+

At both the individual and the team level, without needing to work longer hours.

MISTAKE #1

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# Poor Hygiene



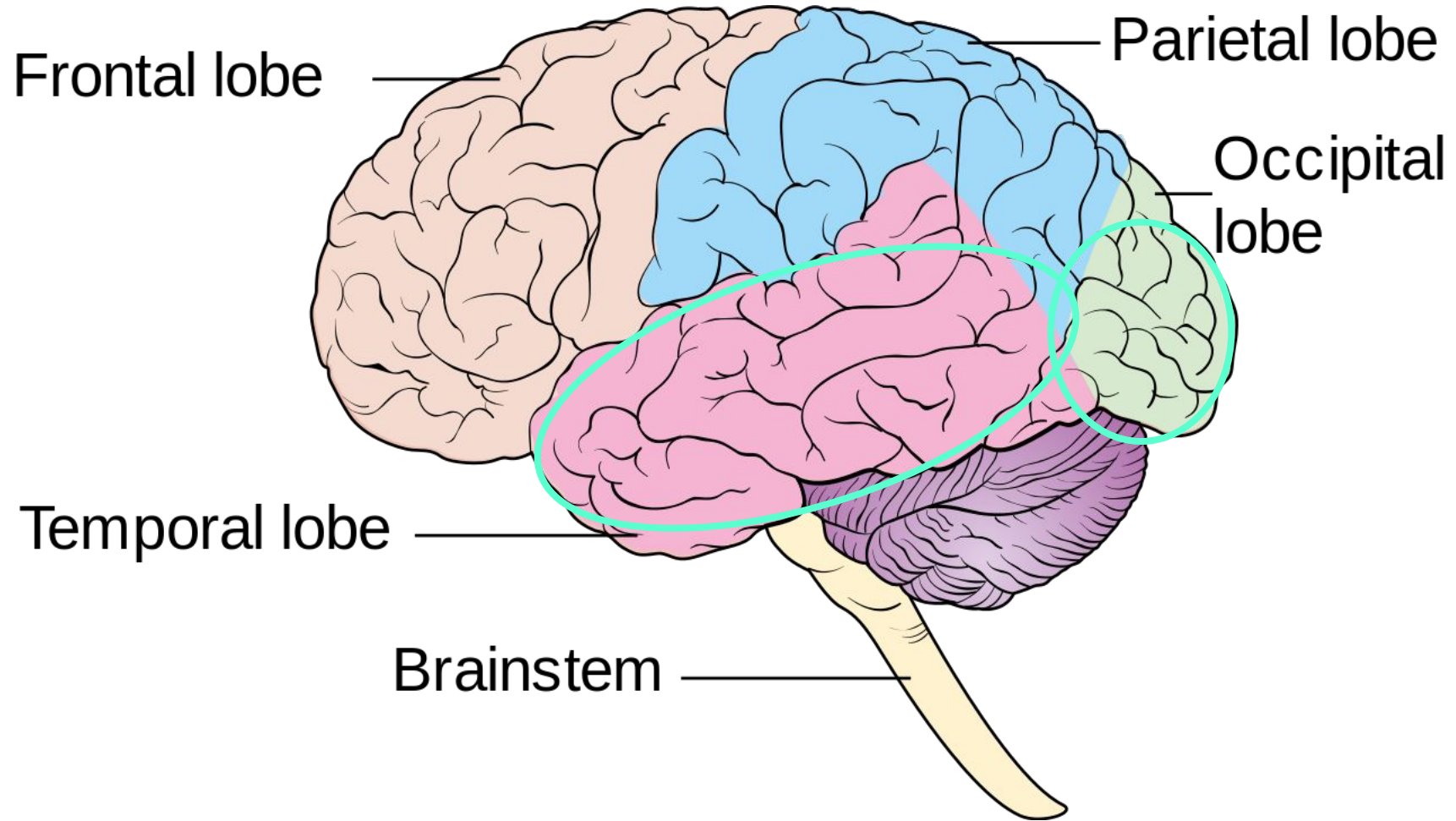
1

**You are hard-wired to  
constantly scan your  
environment**





# 35-40% of Real Estate Dedicated to Seeing / Hearing



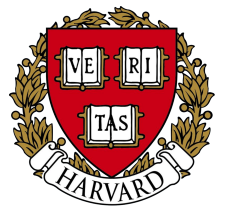


*STUDY*

# First Empirical Study on Open Offices

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(Bernstein, 2018)

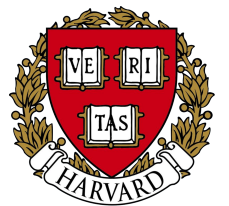


# First Empirical Study on Open Offices

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- Productivity dropped significantly
- Stress levels (measured by salivary cortisol) increased
- Face-to-face communication dropped ~70%, with an increase in digital communication to compensate

(Bernstein, 2018)



# Auditory Distractions Make You Slower

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Background noise  
(especially intelligible  
speech) → 10%+  
performance decrement

(Jahncke, 2012)



# I. Protect Your Sensory Systems

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## Visual

- Create a visual barrier or turn toward a wall / away from foot traffic









# I. Protect Your Sensory Systems

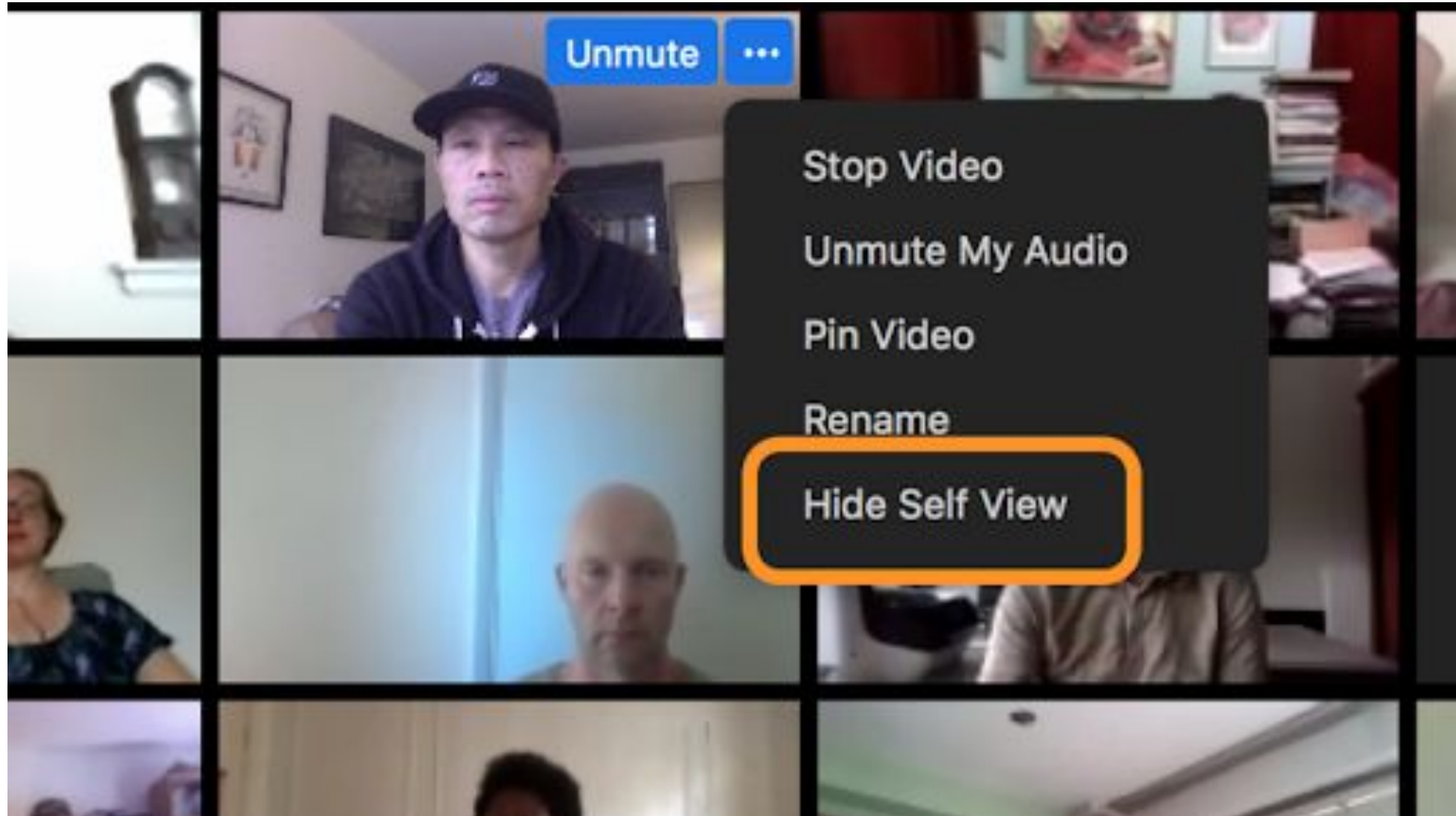
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## Visual

- Create a visual barrier or turn toward a wall / away from foot traffic
- Hide “self view” during Zoom / video calls



# Turn Off “Self View” in Zoom



# I. Protect Your Sensory Systems

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## Visual

- Create a visual barrier or turn toward a wall / away from foot traffic
- Hide “self view” during Zoom / video calls

## Auditory

- Wear noise-cancelling headphones



# I. Protect Your Sensory Systems

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## Visual

- Create a visual barrier or turn toward a wall / away from foot traffic
- Hide “self view” during Zoom / video calls

## Auditory

- Wear noise-cancelling headphones
- Listen to music with either no lyrics or lyrics you don't understand



MISTAKE #2

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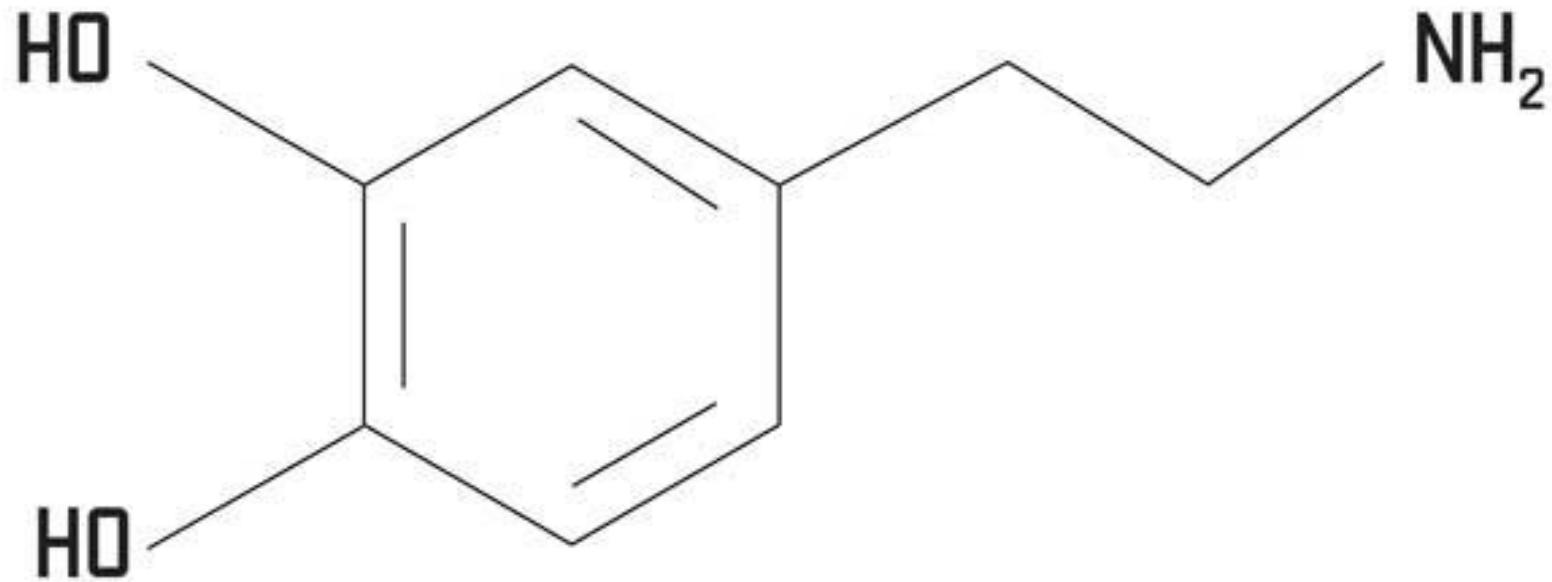
# Being a Passenger in Your Day



2

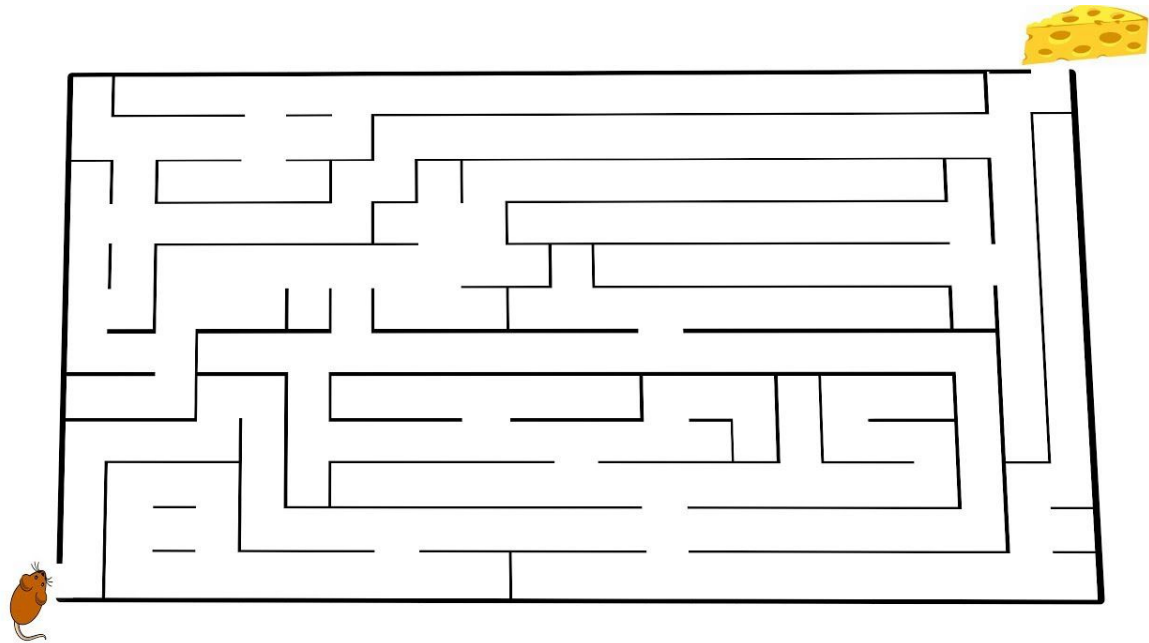
**You are wired to seek  
reward and avoid pain**

# We Are All Dopamine Addicts

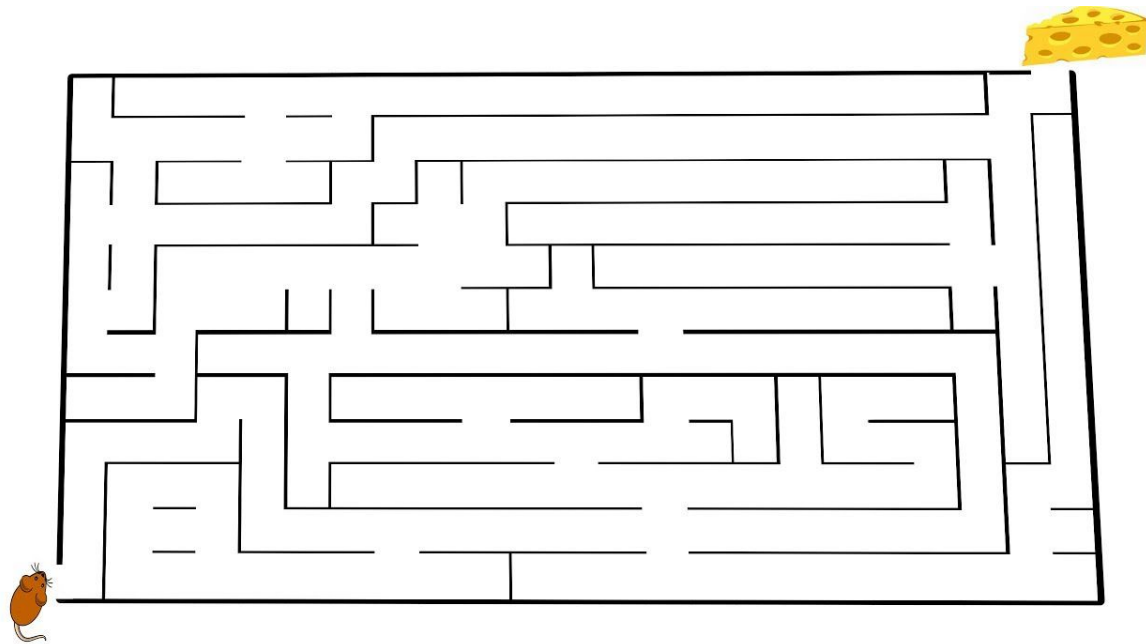


**DOPAMINE**

# Slow Dopamine



# Slow Dopamine



# Fast Dopamine



**Most Important Tasks (MITs) → Slow Dopamine**



**Most Important Tasks (MITs) → Slow Dopamine**

**Least Important Tasks (LITs) → Fast Dopamine**

# 2. Drive Your Day

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## Most Impactful

- Write down your **most important tasks (MITs)**, a small list of 1-3 max each day



MITs

1

2

3

Personal MITs

LITs

Focus Sprints

Brain Breaks

Parking Lot



“

With all the fires and unpredictability in our industry, **I need daily MITs** - which I actually write down on a clipboard since my to-do list is too long - **to anchor around what drives results.**

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Alesia Haas  
CFO, Coinbase

coinbase

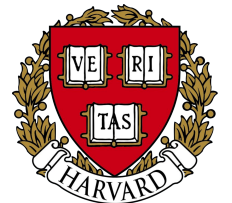


# The Progress Principle

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Through exhaustive analysis of daily logs of thousands of knowledge workers, **the #1 factor that can enhance emotions, motivation, and productivity during the workday is making progress on meaningful work.**

(Amabile, 2011)



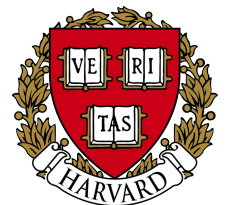
# The Progress Principle

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Through exhaustive analysis of daily logs of thousands of knowledge workers, **the #1 factor that can enhance emotions, motivation, and productivity during the workday is making progress on meaningful work.**

“The more frequently people experience this sense of daily progress, the more likely they are to be creatively productive in the long run.”

(Amabile, 2011)





# Training + 3-Week Daily MIT Challenge Results

↑ **28%**

Average Increase in  
Individual Productivity

↓ **42%**

Reduction in  
Burnout Sentiment

“Thank you for giving us **our most productive quarter in history by far**. This was easily the highest ROI training investment I’ve ever made. **Every ambitious company should do this**, especially if they plan to stay remote.”

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Ware Sykes  
CEO, Seasoned  
(TPG Portfolio)



# 2. Drive Your Day

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## Most Impactful

- Write down your **most important tasks (MITs)**, a small list of 1-3 max each day

## Quick Win

- Be aware of when you are in “LIT land” and use the 15-20 minute gaps in between meetings for LITs



MITs

1

2

3

Personal MITs

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Focus Sprints

Brain Breaks

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MISTAKE #3

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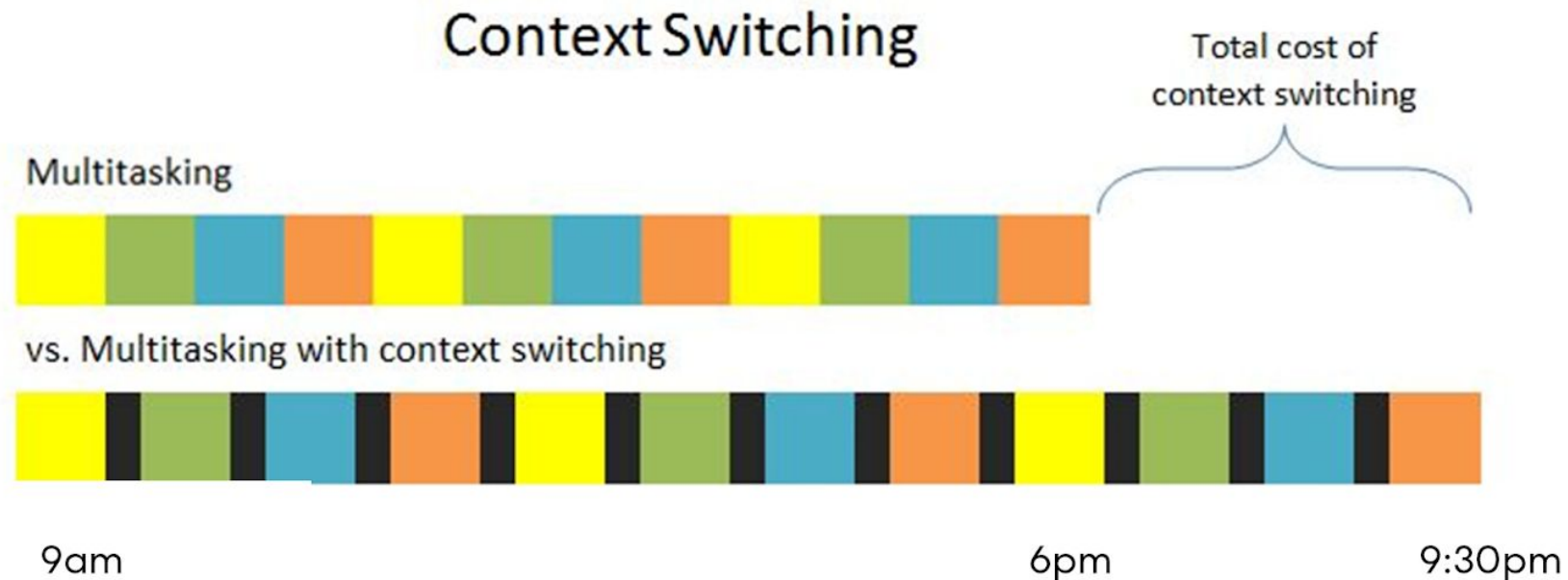
# **Excessive Multitasking**



3

**You pay a fine every time  
you switch tasks**

# “Multitasking” / Context Switching Wastes 2+ Hours Daily





“

People go to work, and they're basically trading in their day for a series of "work moments." **You don't have a work day anymore.**

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**Jason Fried**

*CEO, Basecamp*

*Founder, Ruby on Rails*



**The biggest drain on our  
cognitive resources...**

T-Mobile



6:45

Monday, June 25

## Notification Center



NYTIMES

8m ago

Syria's leader denies using chemical weapons against civilians. Our video investigation uses a trove of evidence to prove him wrong.

2 more notifications



TWITTER

17m ago

Daniel Bader, Malarie Gokey, and 36 others liked Alex Dobie's Tweet

2 more notifications



INSTAGRAM

2h ago

stepan\_matrosovs24 started following you.

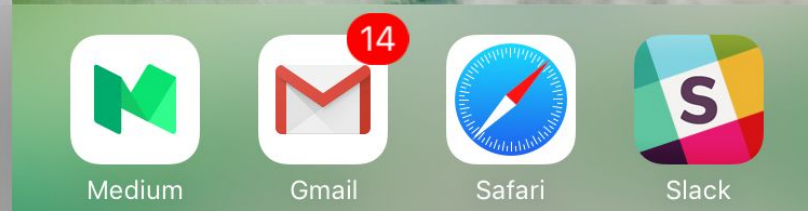
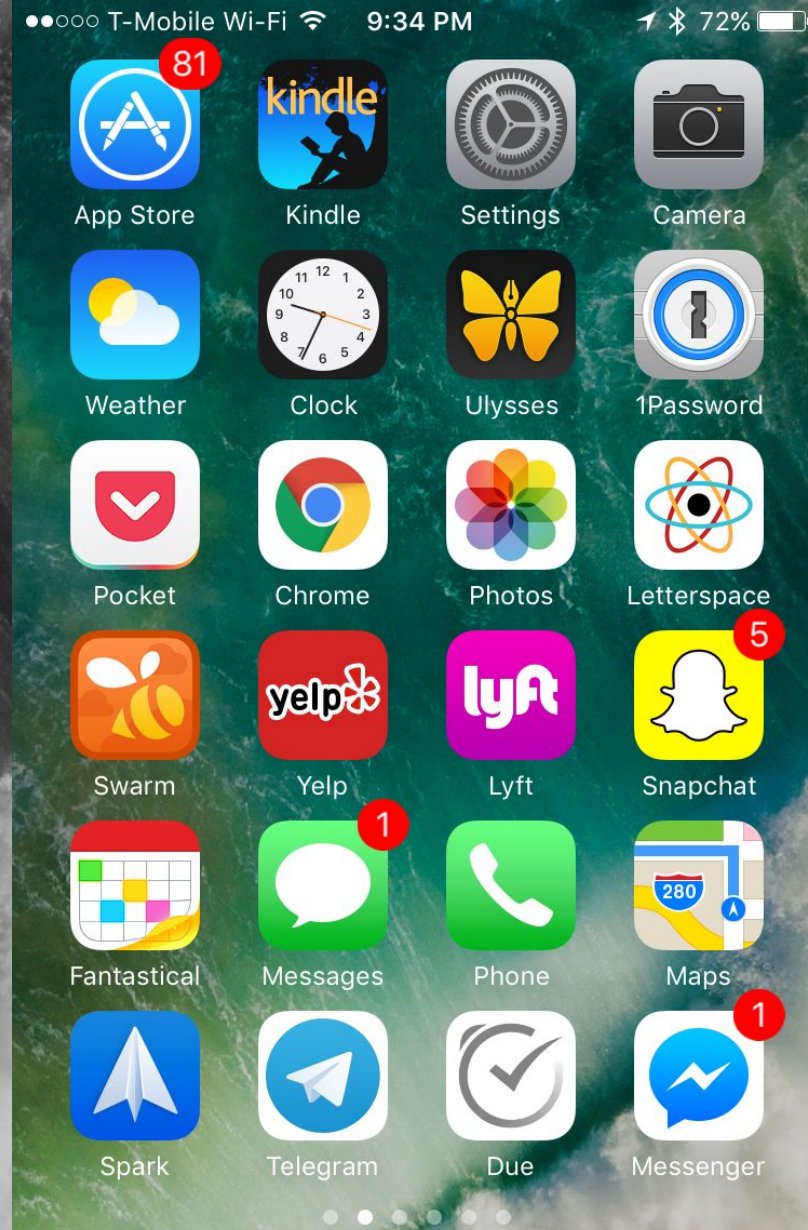
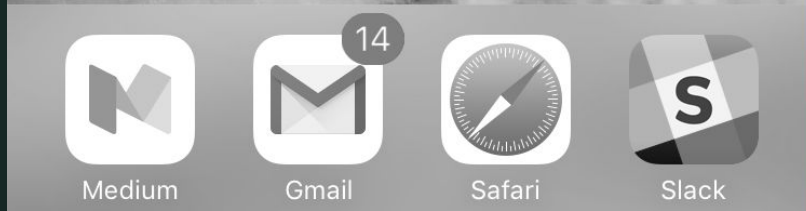
2 more notifications



BBC NEWS

Yesterday 10 PM



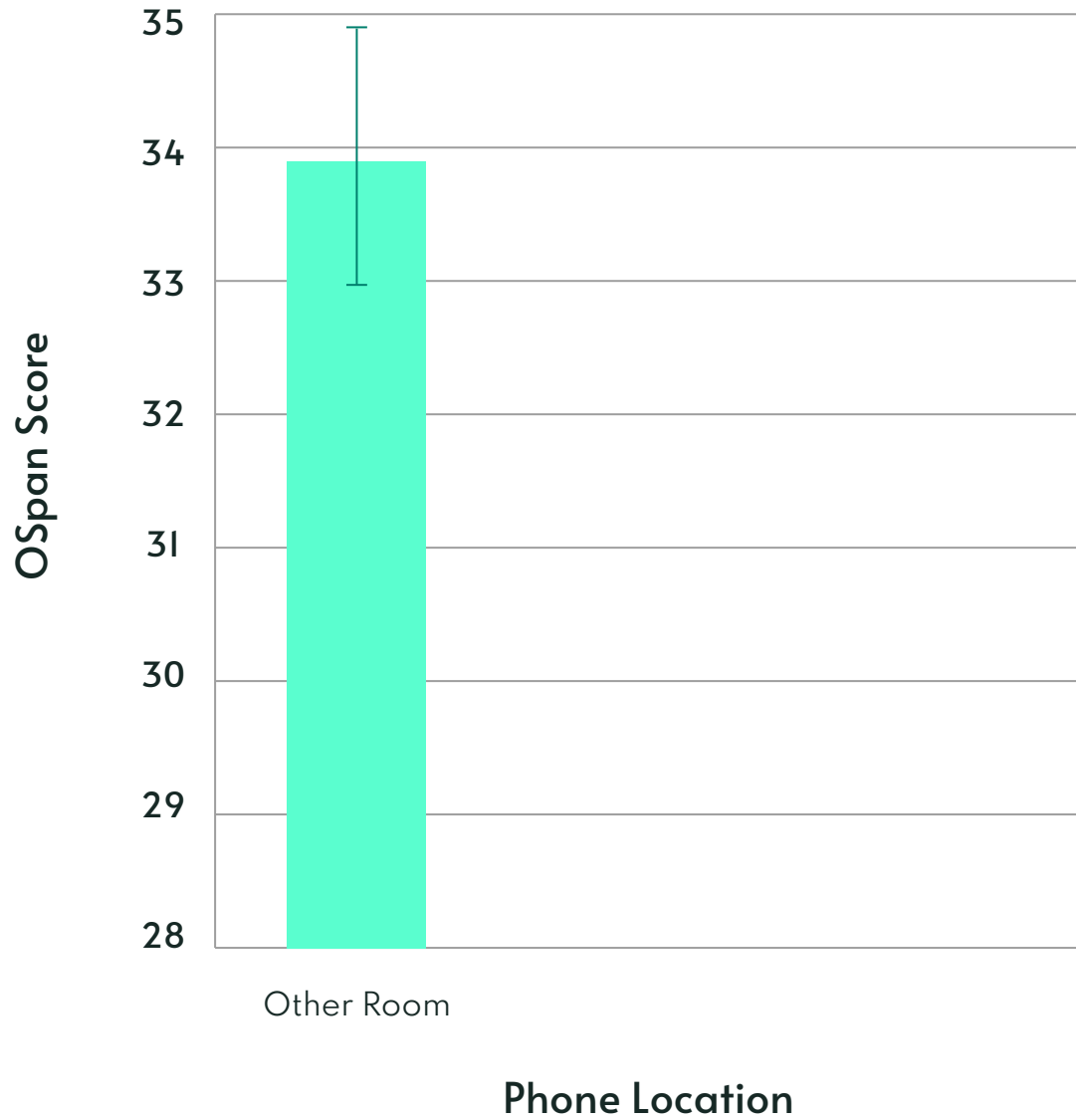


*STUDY*

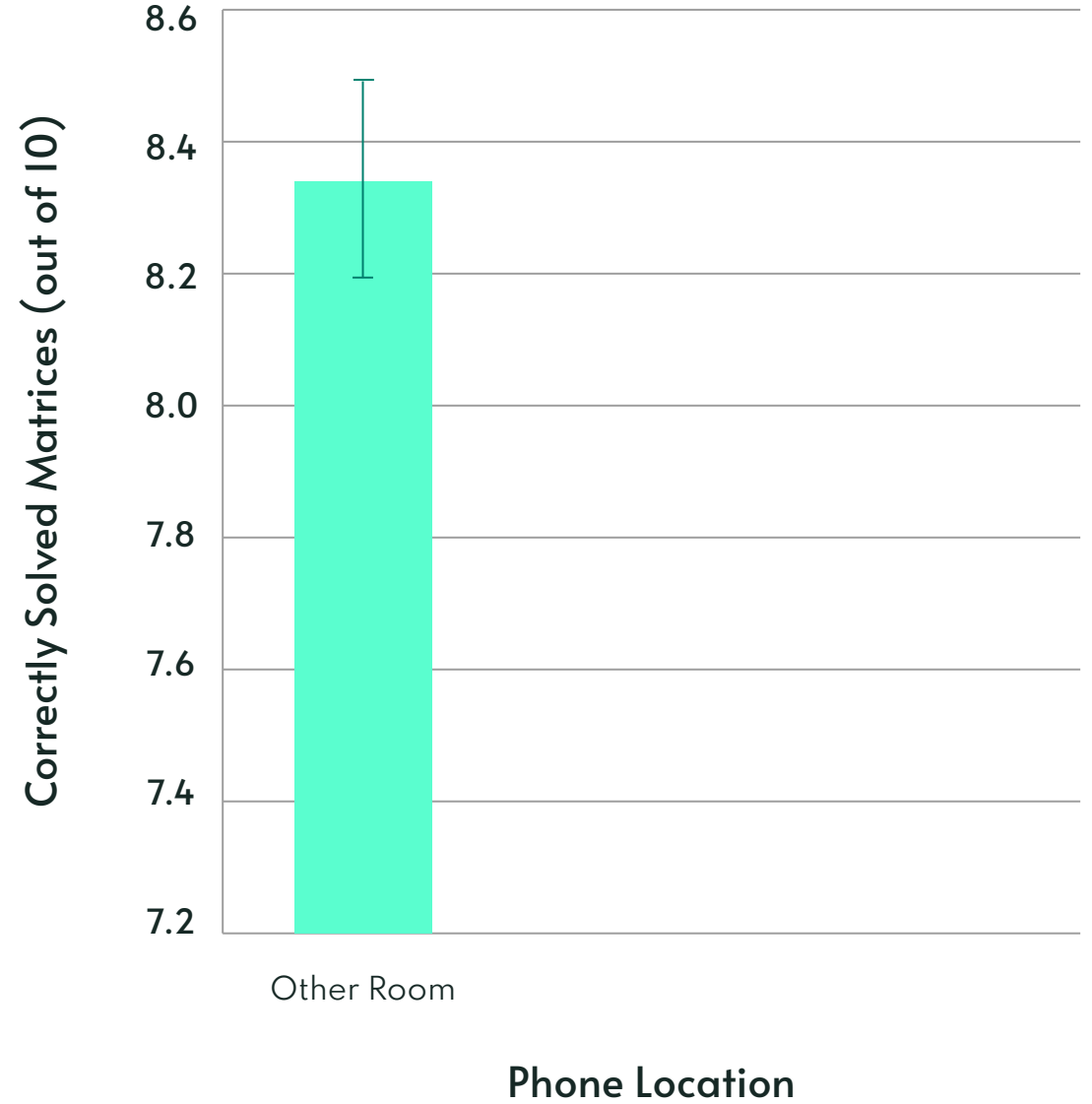
# The Impact of Phone Location on Cognitive Capacity

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A. Working Memory Capacity

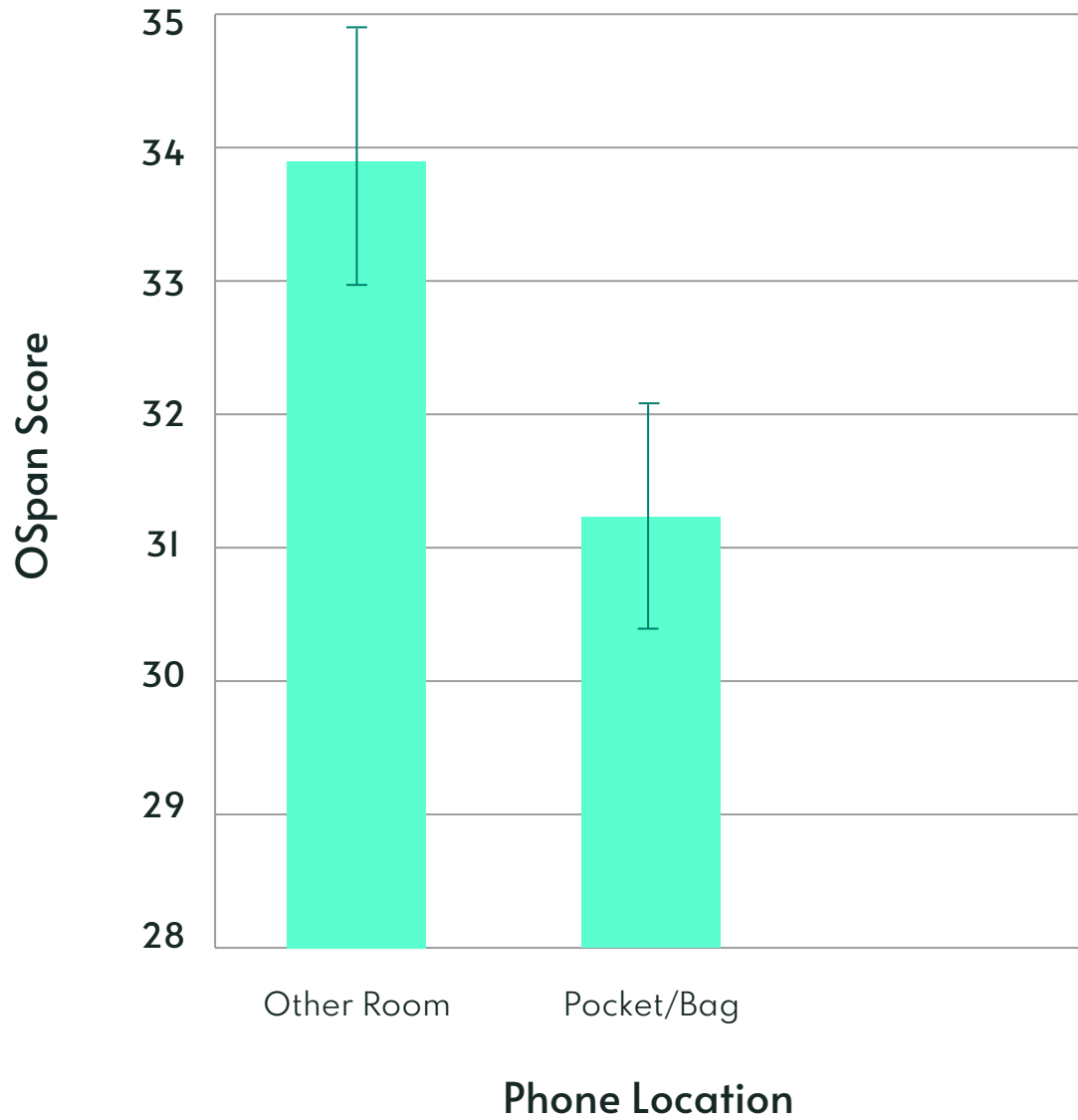


B. Fluid Intelligence

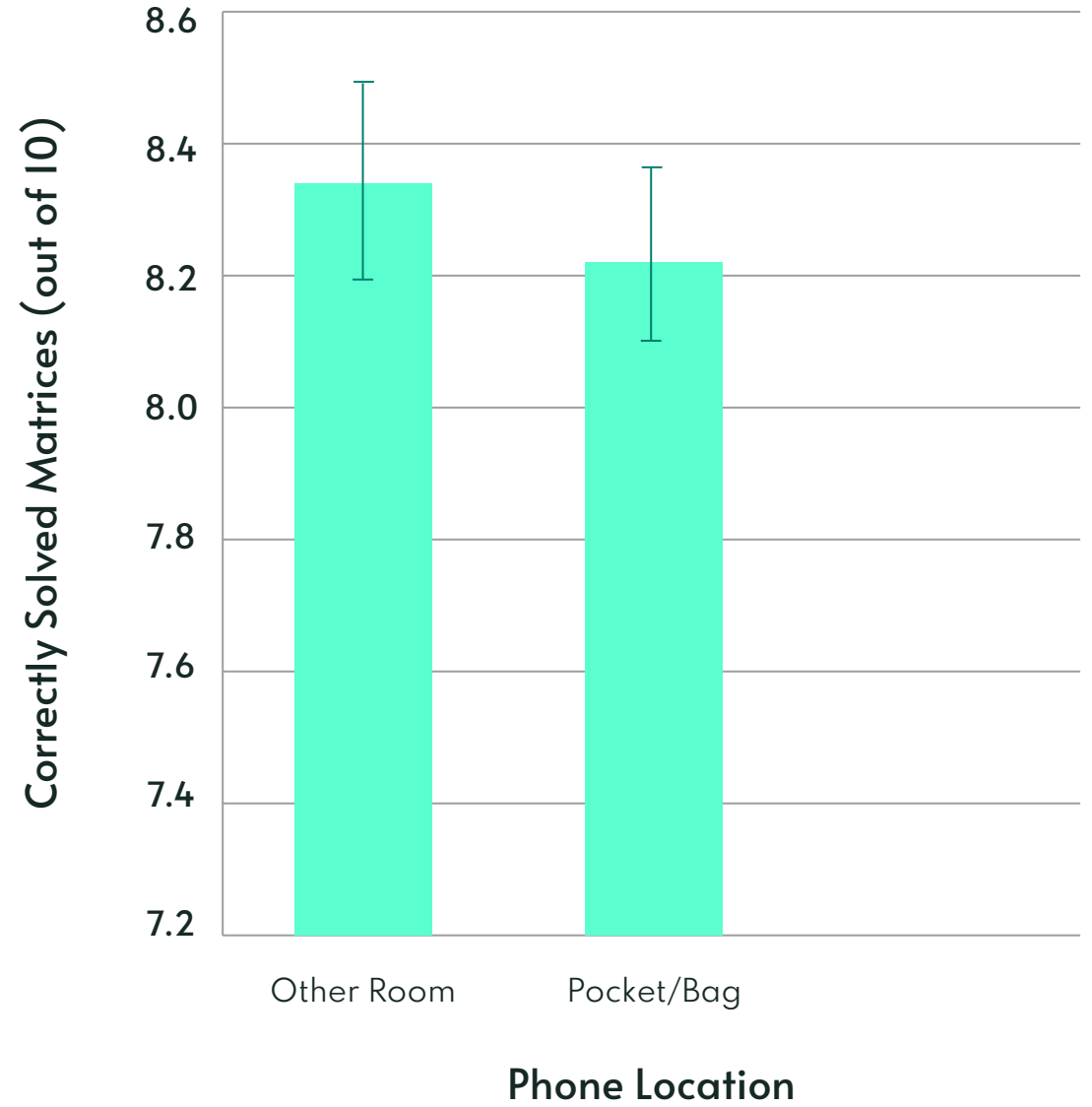




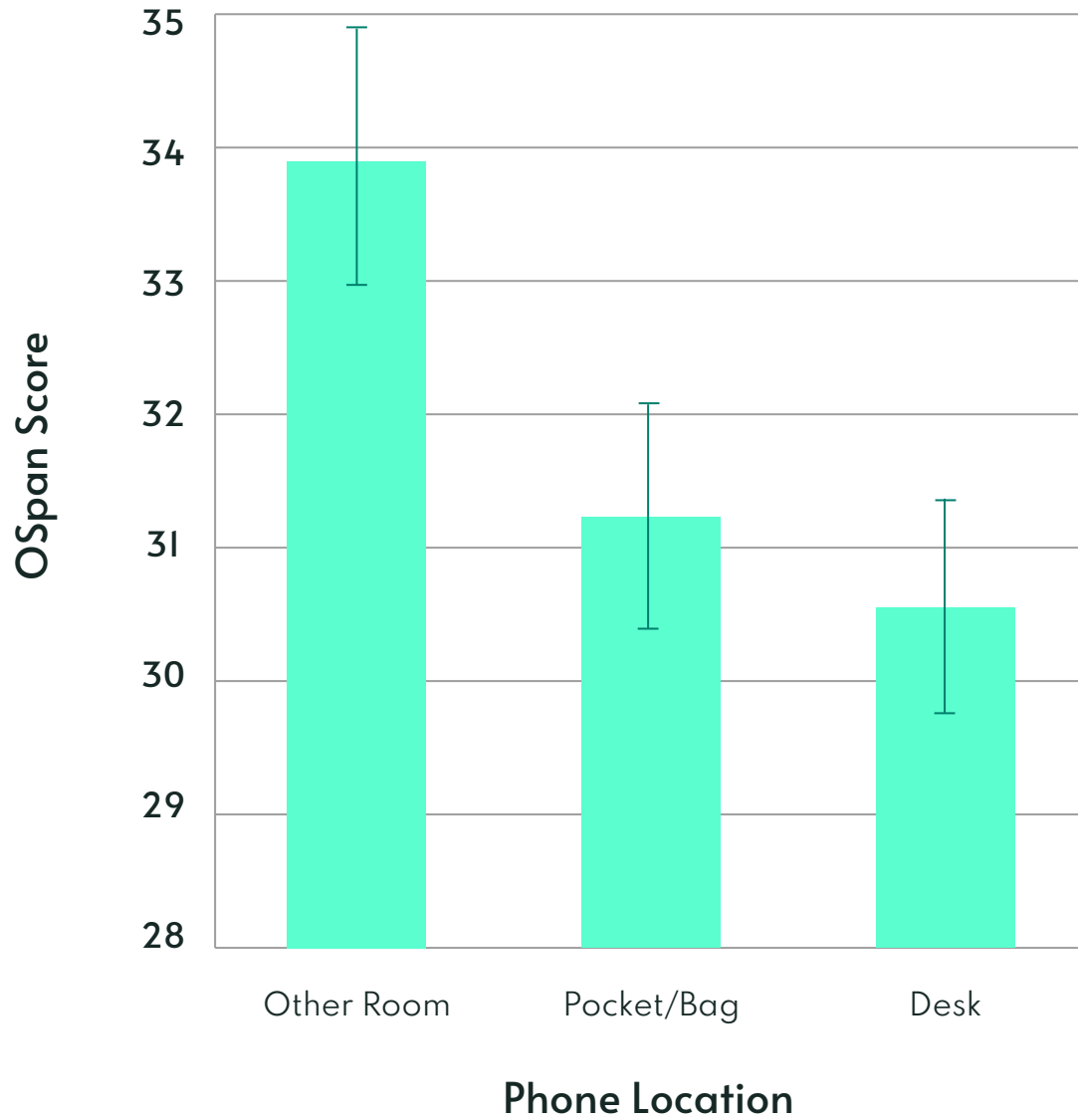
### A. Working Memory Capacity



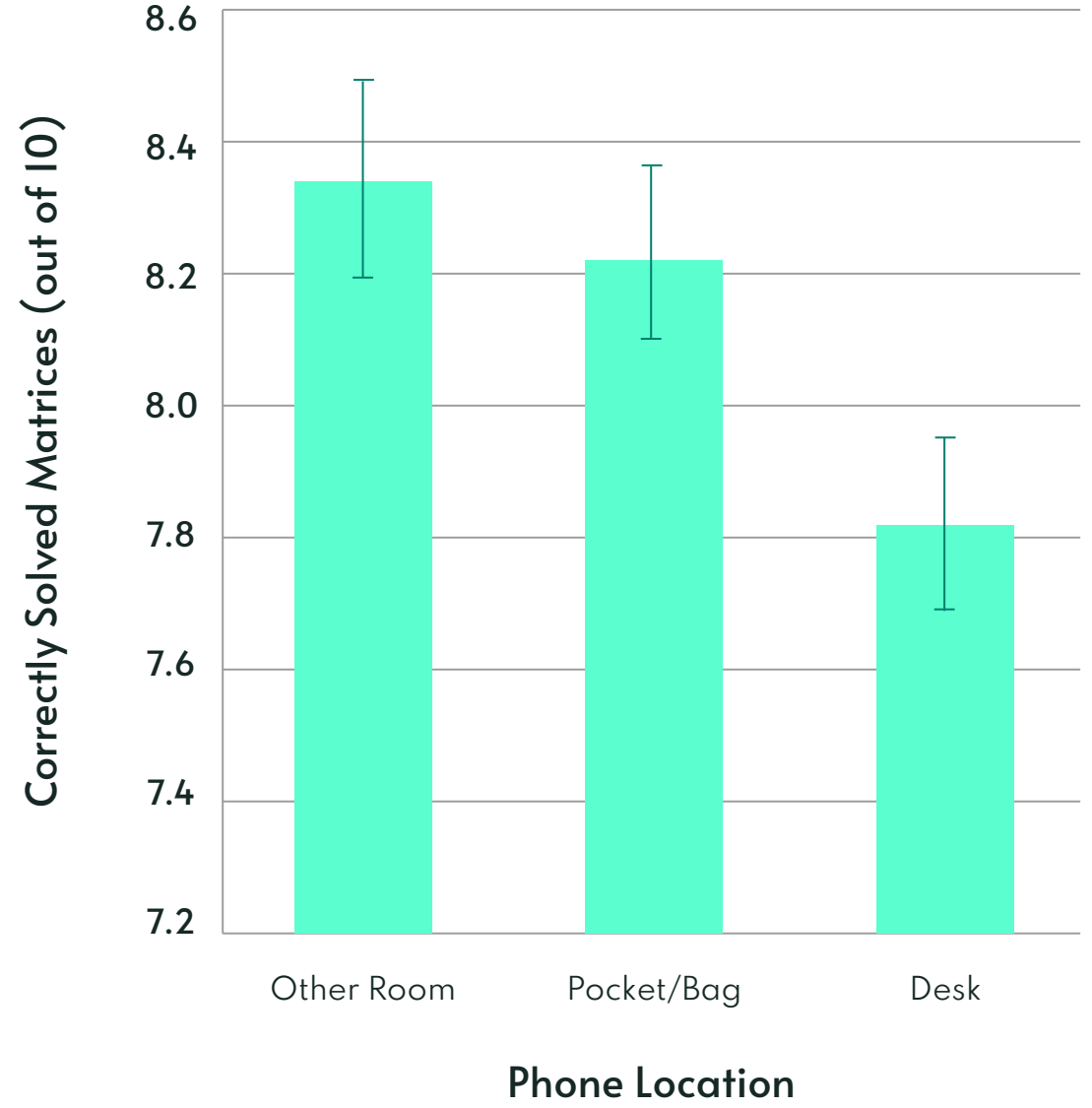
### B. Fluid Intelligence



**A. Working Memory Capacity**



**B. Fluid Intelligence**



# The Impact of Phone Location on Cognitive Capacity

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“The mere presence of a smartphone reduces brain power, even if it’s turned over and even if it’s off.”

(Ward, 2017)

THE SINGLE HIGHEST ROI PRODUCTIVITY METHOD

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# Focus Sprint

ON AVERAGE, INDIVIDUALS REPORT **GETTING WORK DONE  
2X FASTER** WHILE REDUCING THE RISK OF MISTAKES



# Focus Sprint

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**F** Find and set aside an hour in the calendar

# Focus Sprint

---

- F** Find and set aside an hour in the calendar
- O** Outline what you aim to accomplish



# Focus Sprint

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- F** Find and set aside an hour in the calendar
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- C** Cut out all distractions

# Focus Sprint

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- F** Find and set aside an hour in the calendar
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- C** Cut out all distractions
- U** Use a timer and focus for 50 minutes

# Focus Sprint

---

- F** Find and set aside an hour in the calendar
- O** Outline what you aim to accomplish
- C** Cut out all distractions
- U** Use a timer and focus for 50 minutes
- S** Stop and take a brain break



WHAT'S IN YOUR  
PRODUCTIVITY &  
WORK-LIFE CARE  
PACKAGE?



Focus Sprint Desk/Office flag

Sign holders for cubes and open  
floor workspaces



Pyramid stress reliever

Productivity Bundle Guide



MISTAKE #3

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# Unstrategic Scheduling





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**The hours of your day are  
not equal**

2017 NOBEL PRIZE IN MEDICINE

# Each Human Has a Biologically Pre-Set Circadian Rhythm

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Known as a **“chronotype”**, this internal rhythm dictates our optimal time to fall asleep and wake up, as well as the peaks and troughs we experience in our daily energy levels.



# Each Human Has a Biologically Pre-Set Circadian Rhythm

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Known as a **“chronotype”**, this internal rhythm dictates our optimal time to fall asleep and wake up, as well as the peaks and troughs we experience in our daily energy levels.

High-performing executives and managers report being up to **5X more productive during their Peak Performance Hours** (McKinsey, 2013).

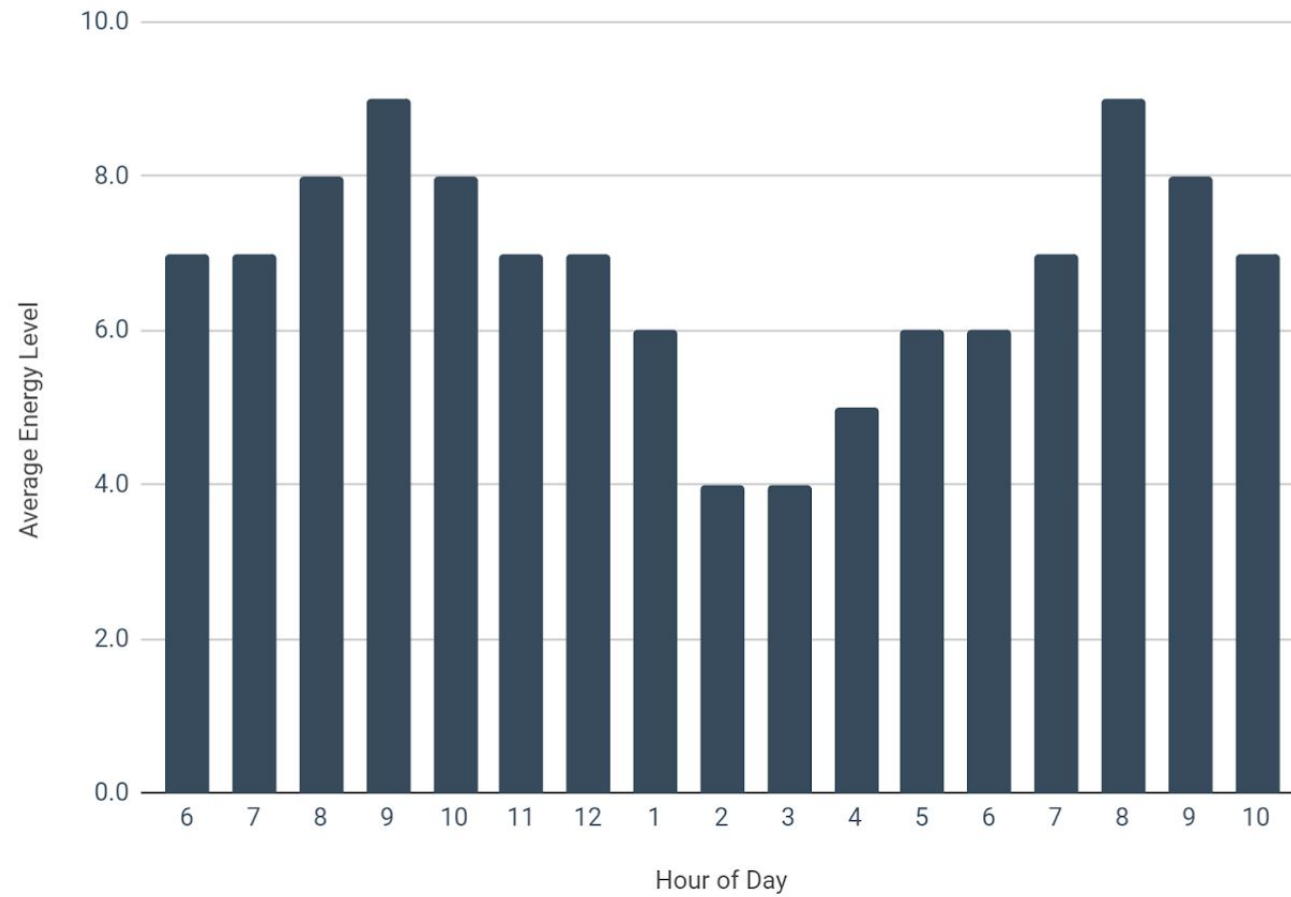
# Three Biological Chronotypes

	Population Distribution	Basic Description
Type I: AM-Shifted	20-25%	Go to bed early and wake up early

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	Population Distribution	Basic Description
Type 1: AM-Shifted	20-25%	Go to bed early and wake up early
Type 2: Bi-Phasic	50+%	Go to bed and wake up on the earlier end, but are susceptible to shifting sleep rhythms

## Average Energy Level vs. Hour of Day



# Three Biological Chronotypes

	Population Distribution	Basic Description
Type 1: AM-Shifted	20-25%	Go to bed early and wake up early
Type 2: Bi-Phasic	50+%	Go to bed and wake up on the earlier end, but are susceptible to shifting sleep rhythms
Type 3: PM-Shifted	~20%	Go to bed late and wake up late

A dark silhouette of a woman in a dynamic, expressive pose, possibly a dancer or performer, set against a dark background. She is leaning forward with her arms extended, creating a sense of movement and energy.

**Early Rising is Terrible Advice**

[mychronotype.com](https://mychronotype.com)

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**Code: “NEEBC”**



# 4. Strategically Design Your Day

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## Most Impactful

- Protect your Peak Focus Hours for strategic, cognitively intensive, high-value work



# 4. Strategically Design Your Day

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## Most Impactful

- Protect your Peak Focus Hours for strategic, cognitively intensive, high-value work

## Quick Win

- Schedule less important emails or administrative work during a lower-energy period of the day



# If You Want to Be 25+% More Productive

(WITHOUT WORKING MORE HOURS)

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## 1. Clean up hygiene



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1. Clean up hygiene
2. Set MITs at start of each day



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# If You Want to Be 25+% More Productive

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1. Clean up hygiene
2. Set MITs at start of each day
3. Use Focus Sprints to accomplish more
4. Schedule around your chronotype



**Get a copy of today's deck + access to  
future research and additional resources:**



**CODE: "NEEBC"**



**BerkeleyHaas**