

Substack Archive

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11 behaviours punished in school -- but rewarded in adulthood.

August

You may have left the education system. But did the education system leave you?

One strange realisation as you get older: A lot of the behaviours you were punished for in school are rewarded in adulthood, and a lot of the behaviours you were rewarded for in school are punished in adulthood.

A large part of adulthood isn't learning anything new; it's just unlearning lessons from school, debugging the code the education system has written in your head-line by line, habit by habit, assumption by assumption.

Here's a list of behaviours punished in school - but rewarded in adulthood:

1. Questioning the highest status person in the room - At school, it's easy to see your teachers as gods that can't be questioned. That's the default assumption the school whispers to you: teachers are the highest-status people in the room. One of the biggest red pill moments comes in your early 20s. A person you know who is lost and confused says to you: "I'm unsure what to do with my life, so I'm going to become a teacher. It's got great holidays!" You then do the mental maths: "What % of the teachers I put on pedestals at school were just lost people figuring things out?!". And the same is true now: "What % of people I'm putting on pedestals now are just grown-up children figuring things out?"

2. Copying people - When I was 12, I handed in my dad's university dissertation as my computer science homework. I was put in detention for copying. In adulthood, if you copy a successful playbook, you're labelled a "successful franchisee owner". The global franchise market is worth over \$1 trillion annually. Reality rewards finding the smartest kid in the class and stealing every bit of knowledge they have.

3. Hardcore nerdiness - If you had a hardcore nerdy obsession at school, you're a bully's dream. And if your interests are outside the curriculum, you're a teacher's nightmare. In adulthood, it's impossible to find someone at the top 1% of their field who doesn't have a hardcore nerdy obsession with it. Society no longer laughs at you or throws you out of class; they pay you buckets of cash to be a hardcore nerd.

4. Touching reality - The rewards in school are for your theoretical knowledge. The teacher will have a smile on their face if you write a 2,000-word essay of a SWOT analysis of Coca-Cola's business, but if the same teacher caught you turning \$50 of Coca-Cola cans into \$200 of profit at lunchtime, they will have a frown on their face. "In theory, there's no difference between theory and practice. In practice, there is!" - Yogi Berra

5. Losing popularity contests - School reinforces the mimetic desire to win popularity contests. In adulthood, you gradually realise the whole game was a facade. If you win, people resent you and want to tear you down. And if you lose, nobody is thinking about you -- most people are too busy worrying about what you were thinking of them to have an opinion of you.

And then you die.

And then they all die.

6. Staring out of windows doing nothing - You've finished your work? We don't want you staring out the window, daydreaming. Don't worry, we've got more work for you. It never ends. And there's work for when you get home. If you carry this addiction to busyness into adulthood, you end up in the Tversky trap: "Some people waste years because they can't waste hours". The most prolific people I know and have read about spend a lot of time doing what appears like nothing: taking walks, meditating, laying on the sofa, staring at the ceiling.

7. Rejecting normality - If you have a weird accent, fashion sense or worldviews, you'll be isolated from the group. As you grow old, this flips: nobody remembers any of your normal behaviours. If you study the biographies of the greats or attend the funerals of people you care about, the normal rational behaviour is never mentioned. It's the times they broke out of the median distribution of human behaviour that they tell stories about. In adulthood, you painfully realise that if you want weird outputs, you'll need weird inputs.

8. Creating your own time zone - School doesn't care if you get your best work done from 5am to 9am, or 10pm to 3am. You must comply with the agreed schedule. Some people go their entire lives never aligning with their unique biological clock because of the school bell that still exists in their head. The most productive adults ignore society's clock and create their own time zones.

9. Never ask for permission to visit the bathroom - If you want to go to the toilet, you must ask. You must not release your bladder without permission. Or else.

In adulthood, you can now go to the bathroom as you please, but this concept of waiting for permission from a status figure still exists.

The bathroom is less physical and more metaphorical: Waiting for permission to ask her out, waiting for permission to quit the job, waiting for permission to leave your hometown, [waiting for permission to take Roy off the grid](#).

Meanwhile, 70 years later, when the same children have grey hair and wrinkles, they lament wasting their lives waiting for permission.

If you look closely, all the top 5 regrets of the dying are caused by waiting for permission. They were waiting for someone to give them permission to visit the bathroom:

I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me. I wish I hadn't worked so hard. I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings. I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends. I wish that I had let myself be happier.

10. Exiting your age lane - School and college create age lanes. Most of your friends are the same age as you, and you rarely leave these lanes. Some of these relationships become intense mimetic rivalries and zero-sum games. Through contrasting their life to yours, your victories feel like defeats to them, and your defeats feel like victories to them. This is an unfortunate feature in the human operating system.

In the real world outside of school, if you get friends who are significantly older than you, there's less mimetic competition. Just decades of wisdom they love to share. They've completed their mimetic games and now want to help people who remind them of their younger selves. This was normal for most of your ancestors.

11. Hunting like an eagle - "One should not read like a dog obeying its master, but like an eagle hunting its prey" - Dee Hock. Whenever I would start a book, article or podcast -- the school teacher still lived in my head.

Decades after leaving school, whenever I opened a book or started a podcast, there he was-demanding I consume at the set pace, forbidding me to skip ahead to what matters. I was taught to learn like a dog. Obedient. Patient. Grateful for scraps. I built up a resentment for learning.

If you want to re-find your love for learning, learn like an eagle hunting its prey. Build your own curriculum. Get what is useful. Move on when it's boring. You're not there to serve the teacher. The teacher is there to serve you.

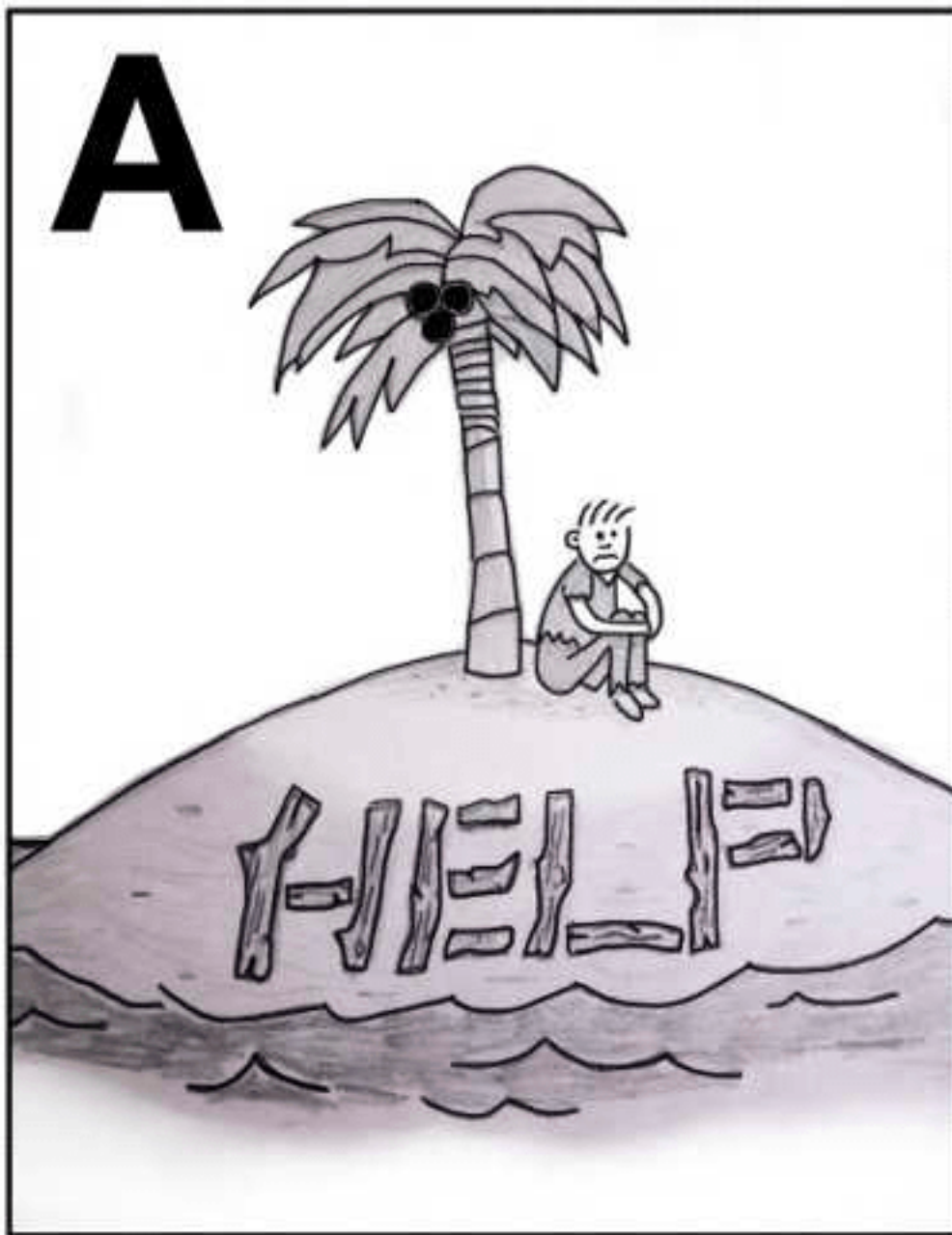
This was my first post on Substack. I'll be using the platform to test ideas for V2 of highagency.com. Please subscribe and share if you enjoyed it.

Let me know which idea you enjoyed the most.

Special thank you to two of my favourite people on the planet: Harry Dry and Billy Oppenheimer for giving feedback.

How to spot high agency people

Sept



Here's my updated list of how to spot high agency people:

- 1. The golden question** - Who do you call when stuck in a 3rd world prison cell? That's the highest agency person you know.
- 2. Weird teenage hobbies** - Teenage years are the hardest time to go against social pressures. If they can go against the crowd as a teenager, they can go against the crowd as an adult.
- 3. Treadmill energy** - If you meet with them when you're tired and defeated, you leave the room ready to run a marathon on a treadmill with max incline.
- 4. You can never guess their opinion** - The boxer who writes poetry. The advertiser obsessed with the history of war. The beauty queen who reads Nietzsche. If their beliefs don't line up with their stereotypes, they've exercised agency.
- 5. Immigrant mentality** - If they've moved from their hometown, that's a good sign. If they've moved from their home country, that's an even greater sign. It takes agency to spot you're in the wrong place, resourcefulness to operationalise a move and a growth mindset to start from zero in a new location.
- 6. Sends you niche content** - A low agency trap is to look at the social engagement of content before deeming its quality. High agency people just look at the content. They spot upcoming trends very early.

7. Mean to your face, nice behind your back - The social incentives are to be nice to people's faces and gossip behind their backs. To do the opposite requires agency because they're swimming against the social tide.

8. Quit something of prestige - The miserable management consultant who breaks free from their golden handcuffs to become a stand-up comedian has to overcome momentum, social shame and sunk cost fallacy. The high agency person lives many lives and isn't afraid to reinvent themselves - regardless of the perceived social cost.

9. They don't trust. They verify - A low agency trap is to be hypnotized by groupthink. High agency people refuse to passively download the current thing without first verifying it for themselves:

?

? "They say" -> *Who is they?*

? "Science says" -> *What is the science? Can I see the primary sources?*

? "Misinformation" -> *What is your theory of knowledge? Can you show me your first principles?*

10. Self-taught learning machines - Whether it's learning to play their favourite song on the Saxophone or deconstructing how 3D printers work - they start from zero and use agency to climb up the knowledge ladder. Tesla, Da Vinci and Darwin didn't ask for permission from institutions to just do things.

11. They question the question - Before rushing to answer your question, they question whether it's the right question to answer. They know the right answer to the wrong question is worse than no answer to the right question.

12. Non-fungible human - When they die, it doesn't feel like a typical funeral; it feels more like an extinction event of a unique species. High agency people live like a fingerprint: One in 8.1 billion. Never to be repeated again. They think their own thoughts and act their own actions, regardless of the overton window.

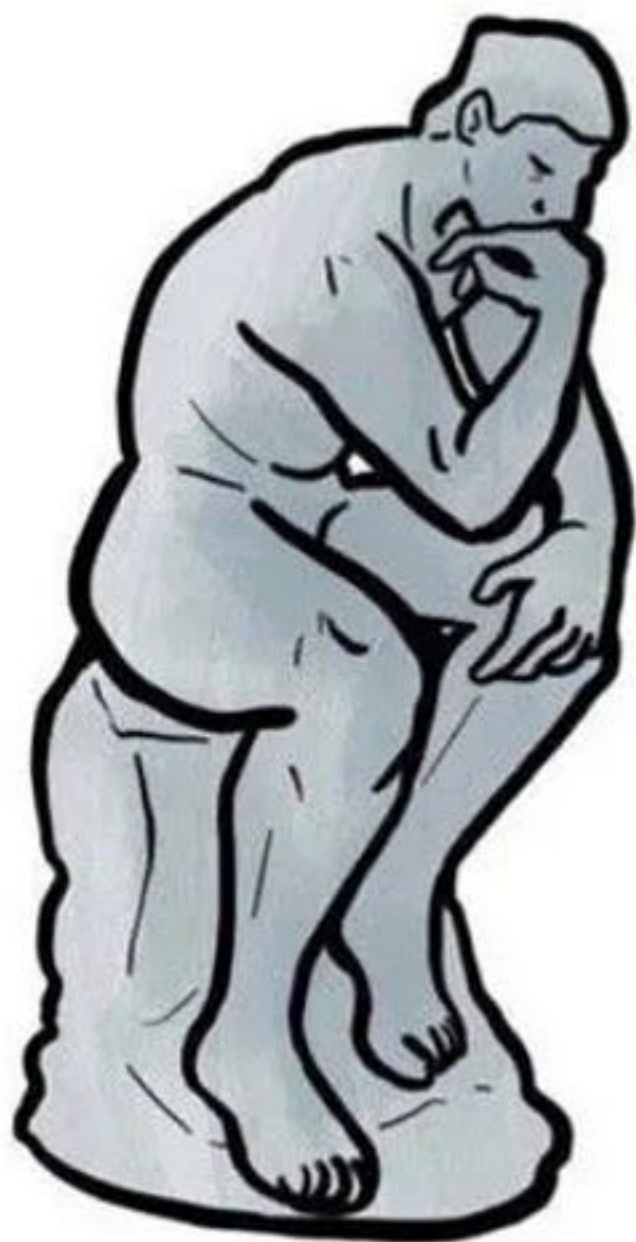
13. Specific questions, rapid action - When they ask for your help, they respect your time by asking specific questions and avoiding vague ones. To show you appreciation for the time given, they follow up in freakish speed with a thank you and evidence of the advice actioned.

14. They pet the elephant in the room - If they sense an elephant in the room, they don't avoid it. They talk to the elephant, feed it, and ask it why it's there. They know the elephant in the room gets smaller every time they interact with it. In five minutes, they help shrink an enormous elephant you've been avoiding for five years into a cute baby elephant calf you can control.

15. Avoid underthinking and overthinking - Socrates once said: The unexamined life is not worth living. But the overexamined life is not worth living either. The Watts trap: "A person who thinks all the time has nothing to think about except thoughts. So they lose touch with reality and live in a world of illusions." The high agency person knows one hour of reflection after ten hours of action is worth more than one hundred hours of rumination without any feedback from reality.

16. An infinite number of reframes - When they can't bend external atoms in the physical world, they bend the neurons in their head instead. Charlie Munger was an obsessive reader. After a failed surgery, he was left blind in one eye with a strong likelihood of going fully blind. When asked how he would cope not being able to read, he replied in the blink of his one eye: "I've always wanted to learn braille."

10 ideas for overthinkers



"THE THINK

1. Overthinking is a tax on life - The average person spends nearly eight hours per day mind wandering. If you're awake for sixteen hours per day, that's half of your conscious existence spent lost in imaginary thought. To appreciate how large this life tax is: it's the equivalent of January 1st to June 30th each year. If you add sleep into the equation, it gets worse: January 1st to August 30th, unconscious or absent-minded. This leaves you just from September 1st to December 31st for mere scraps of life.

Doestovsky described the overthinking trap as an illness: "I swear to you that to think too much is a disease, a real, actual disease."

2. Overthinking is amnesia - On a typical day, humans have between 30,000 to 70,000 thoughts. Here's the tragedy: can you remember a single clear sentence of thought from yesterday? If you're one of the rare people who can, how about last Tuesday? The same thought loops that feel inescapable in the present moment are then deleted from memory - into the abyss. You don't consciously notice how much you forget because, by definition, you forget just how much you forget.

3. You can't run from your mind - An escape route many try for the overthinking trap is travelling. They board the plane, leaving their former life behind, hoping to wake up on the other side of the world free from overthinking. Only to discover the one thing they couldn't leave at home: Their minds.

4. Overthinking is downstream from low agency - The low agency model of time has three modes: Past, present and future. The high agency model of time has five modes: Past-dwelling, past rectifying, present, future-worrying, and future-building. The low agency model of time assumes all time spent thinking about the past and the future is the same. It's not. Rectifying the past is 100x better than dwelling on it. Building the future is 100x better than worrying about it. Thousands of hours lost to looping on a past or future worry could be closed with one phone call, one letter, or one email.

5. Never trust a thought - Nietzsche had a rule of thumb: "Never trust a thought you have indoors". This idea is great, but Friedrich didn't go far enough. To take it one step further: never trust a thought. Only begin inspecting its truth once it's gone outside of your mind: Writing, drawing, walking, talking, spreadsheet. Trusting thoughts that happen inside skulls or buildings is a breeding ground for low agency slop.

6. Stop making decisions. Start making experiments - Retire the word *decision* from your vocabulary. Never use the D-word again. Replace it with *experiment*. Daniel Kahneman won a Nobel Prize for his work on decision-making and concluded that the biggest lesson was that decision-making theory didn't make him a better decision-maker. Reality is smarter than your ruminations: Create a hypothesis. Design experiments. Run them. Blitzkrieg! Even so-called *irreversible decisions* like having a child with someone can be turned into an experiment if you think hard enough: Experiment with a dog first.

7. Overthinking is caused by self-importance - Overthinkers believe they have low self-worth, but spend all their time thinking about themselves. Overthinking isn't low self-worth; it's narcissism. In rare scenarios where overthinkers think about others, it's worrying about what that person is thinking about them. Escape the overthinking trap by embracing your inner Galileo: remove yourself as the centre of your universe. Try to think as another person in the room. Imagine all their ruminations and worries. Your self-centred rumination loops will fade away, and you'll sneak in charisma through the back door.

8. Arrange your mind with Napoleon's cupboard - Napoleon arranged his mind like a series of cupboards: "Different subjects and different affairs are arranged in my head as in a cupboard. When I wish to interrupt one train of thought, I shut that drawer and open another." Have a worry cupboard that you visit for 30 minutes per day. Review your worries and action them. At the end of the session, close the cupboard. If a new worry appears, put it in the cupboard, and tell it you'll see it during your scheduled slot tomorrow. Most worry is caused by your mind being unsure whether you'll take action on addressing it. When worry knows where it lives in the cupboard with a clear time on the calendar, it quietsens.

9. You can't hide from your mind - A monk tells a novice to go to the top of the mountain with one goal: Have no thoughts. The novice follows the monk's instructions. He spends all day trying to make his mind go blank - and his mind can't stop racing.

The novice couldn't find silence, so he walked down the mountain feeling like a failure.

The next day, the monk tells him to go back to the mountain with a different goal: Keep thinking. The novice could think of anything he liked all day long, but couldn't allow any gaps to occur between thoughts. The novice followed the monk's instructions. He spent all morning thinking about everything: dwelling on his childhood to the meaning of life. By lunch time, his thoughts began to dry up, and his mind went silent.

The novice couldn't escape the silence, so he walked down the mountain feeling like a failure.

If you want to increase overthinking, resist it. If you want to decrease overthinking, welcome it.

10. Overthinking is a solvable problem - When someone suggests a limit on human minds, just reply with this photo of Thich Quang Duc meditating in the lotus position after setting himself on fire in protest against the war. He didn't flinch once. A nuke so strong you have to delete all past assumptions and say "I don't know".

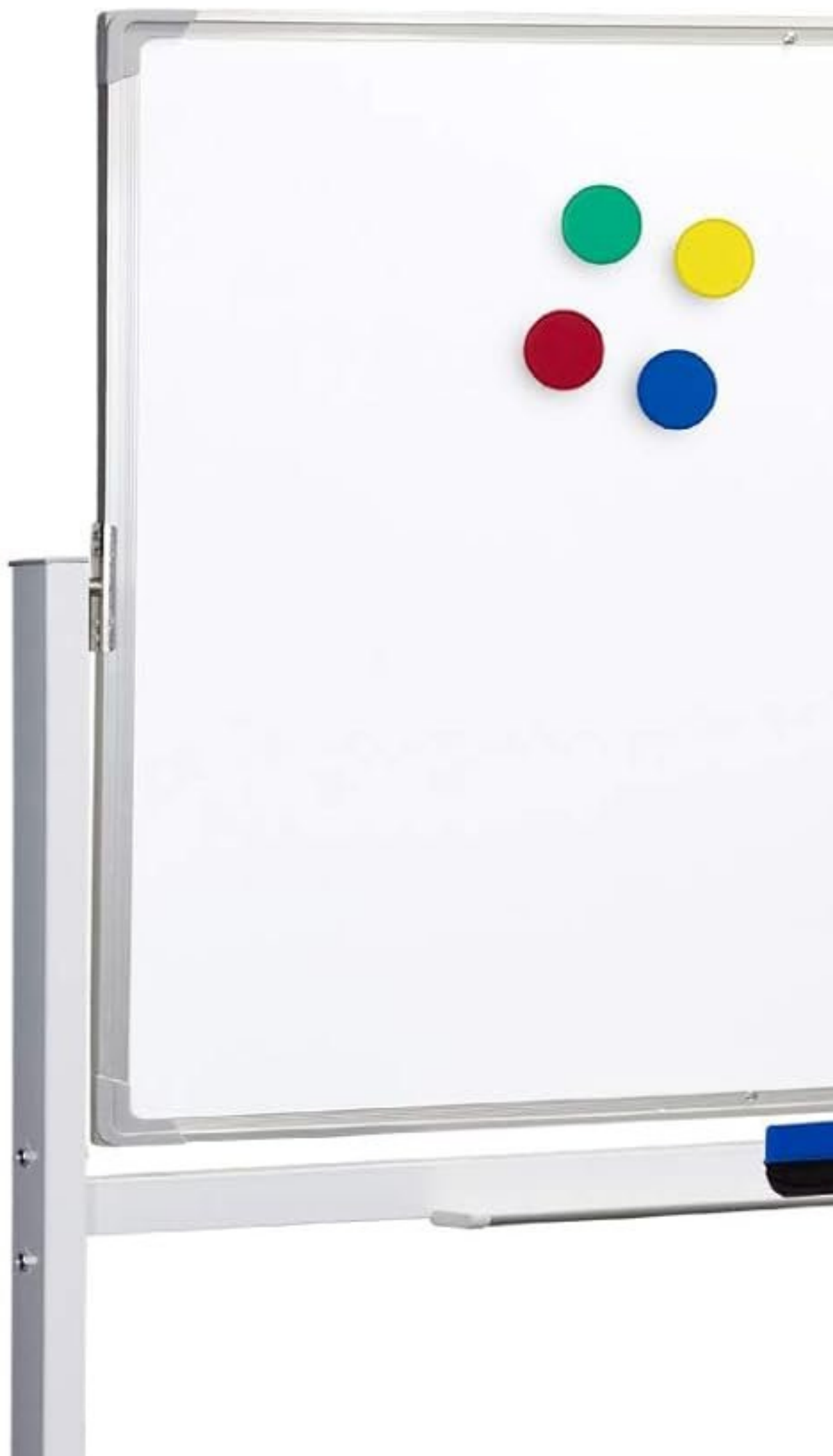


9 fun ways to increase your agency with zero grinding required

Octob

Most people think high agency - happening to life, rather than letting life happen - means grinding 24/7. It doesn't. You can solve problems, take initiative *and* have fun at the same time:

1. Get a giant whiteboard in your home - My most contrarian belief: We could increase the global economy by 2-3% just by installing large whiteboards in every home. The whiteboard forces you to commit Kidlins' law: If you write the problem down clearly, then the matter is 50% solved. With a whiteboard, it's more like 70%; there's an extra 20% because it stays there over the next few days, whispering into your creative subconscious whenever you walk past it.



(You can get giant Post-it sticky notes the next day from Amazon too)



2. **If in doubt, use the luck razor** - If stuck with two equal options, pick the one that feels like it will produce the most luck later down the line. I used this razor to go for drinks with a stranger rather than watch Netflix. In hindsight, it was the highest ROI decision I've ever made.
3. **Puzzle > Problem** - An easy way to increase agency is to remove "problem" from your vocabulary and replace it with "puzzle". It sounds absurd, but "problem" activates my amygdala and "puzzle" activates my prefrontal cortex. Try it. Self-induced placebo that works.
4. **Focus on hardware before software** - Rule of thumb: Fix hardware (sleep, exercise, diet) before software (psychology). 95% of my software problems seem to magically get fixed when I take care of my hardware. And the remaining 5% is easier to debug once I've fixed my hardware. Never try anything more complex without first turning the computer off and on.
5. **Ask specific questions** - Vague questions could mean anything, so they mean nothing. "How can I be happy?" generates unclear fortune cookie slop: *Be grateful. Follow your passion! Live in the moment.* Now try: *What does my dream week look like hour by hour? What does my nightmare week look like hour by hour? What's the gap between my current week and the dream or nightmare week?* Questions are the answers you might need. (My favourite Oasis lyric)
6. **If in doubt, use the story razor** - When stuck with two equal options you can't decide between, ask: What option makes for a more interesting story? Good stories require characters who act. High agency is just another word for being the executive producer of your life. Act as if it's you at a dinner party five years from now, telling the story. Enhance the

plot. Don't forget Dostoevsky's golden rule: "But how could you live and how no story to tell?!".

7. Work less. Focus more - A good rule of thumb I want tattooed on my brain: working hard is overpriced, focusing hard is underpriced. Most of our lives are spent inside the Grove Trap: "*There are so many people working so hard, and achieving so little*" - Andy Grove. One door out of the Grove Trap is deep mode: Focus 90% of your work hours for 2-4 weeks on your number one bottleneck. Most people context-switch between C-tier tasks all day-emails, meetings, small fixes. They never identify the A-tier task, much less focus on it. One month of clear-minded focus beats a year of distracted hustle grindset.

8. Low agency is downstream from taking yourself too seriously - One thing that helps with taking life less seriously is exploring the absurdity of astrophysics. It's hard to take my life too seriously when there's a black hole at the centre of the Milky Way 4 million times the mass of our sun, or staring into the night sky and seeing light from stars that existed over 10,000 years ago in the present moment. My fear of cringe looks tiny when placed in the grand scheme of the universe, let alone the multiverse. If you stare into the stars long enough, the stars begin to stare back into you.

9. Kill your to-do list. Play video games instead - To-do lists trigger anxiety. Video games trigger excitement. Take something that sounds impossible: teaching yourself quantum mechanics. My brain immediately freezes. *Where do I even start?*

Why? I'm starting at level 300 of the video game. What are the first 5 levels of that video game?

? Level 1 - Write down every learning idea that comes to mind, no filter.

? Level 2 - Search "quantum mechanics beginner" on Amazon. Buy the top-rated intro book.

? Level 3 - Read the first 10 pages.

? Level 4 - Put anything confusing into ChatGPT: "Explain this like I'm a smart 12-year-old."

? Level 5 - Based on what you learned, write levels 6-10.

The golden rule: Level 1 should always be so easy it's impossible to feel overwhelmed. Before you know it, you're at level 5. Bathe in that dopamine and watch overwhelm fade away.

**ARE YA
WINNING SON?**



Let me know which one was your favourite. I'll try and do a version 2 soon. I'll also be putting more ideas on Substack, as it's one of the few places that encourage long-form writing.

How to engineer luck

October

Here's an absurd but fun thought experiment: *If you had to double your luck in the next six months, what would you do?*

My default low agency response is to freeze at this question. We're told luck is like weather, something that just happens to us.

For 99.9% of human history, the weather *was* uncontrollable. It simply happened to us. Then we invented air conditioning to escape heat, central heating to survive cold, and refrigeration to preserve food.

The harshest climates often develop the best weather engineers. Dubai has some of the world's most advanced air conditioning. Oslo has some of the best central heating. Meanwhile, locations like London and Amsterdam become unbearable on a hot summer's day.

The same pattern appears with engineering luck.

Many of the best luck engineers I know faced significant, uncontrollable bad luck early in life. They had to learn the skill of luck. Meanwhile, people who've been given luck their entire lives often never develop luck engineering - they've never needed to.

I find it useful to distinguish between *luck-luck* and *skill-luck*. *Luck-luck* is pure randomness, like being born in the right country. *Skill-luck* is when you help engineer luck, like moving cities to the place that has the best opportunity potential for you.

The question of *doubling your luck in the next six months* moves your focus from the obvious *luck-luck* you can't control, to the non-obvious *skill-luck* you can engineer.

Here are 12 rules of thumb I've seen in skilled luck engineers:

1. Make unscheduled phone calls - Over the last five years, we stopped calling people. We started booking Zoom appointments and sending Calendly links instead. When did you last pick up your phone and dial someone without warning? Scheduled calls lock you into an agenda: "Let's discuss Q3 projections" or "Can we sync on the deliverables?" Unscheduled calls wander. You ask how someone's doing, they mention a problem, you riff on a solution-and suddenly you've stumbled into an opportunity neither of you planned. Super-agent Ari Emmanuel makes dozens of unscheduled calls every day. His opening line: "Can I help you with anything right now?"



2. Avoid boring people - This has two meanings. Avoid people who bore you. And avoid being the boring person in the room. Interesting people get more luck, not because they're necessarily smarter, but because they're memorable. When someone has an opportunity to share, interesting people are the first ones that pop up in their mind.

3. Poker mindset > Roulette mindset - Here's a ridiculous but useful statement... Playing a game of roulette, thinking it's poker is better than playing a game of poker, thinking it's roulette. Assume every game has an element of skill - you've just not discovered it yet. When I originally wrote this, I wasn't aware of the story of Claude Shannon and Ed Thorp, who literally did this. To hack roulette, they built the first-ever wearable computer. The device transmitted

information about roulette wheels via a cigarette packet-sized box that they placed in their shoe. Shannon and Thorp would use a toe-operating switch to input data on the ball's speed and wheel rotation to predict a landing zone. They improved their odds by 44% and outsmarted the house.

Hacking roulette is impossible!!!



Low Agency

4. Luck razor - If stuck with 2 equal options, pick the one that feels like it will produce the most luck later down the line. I used this razor to go for drinks with a stranger rather than watch Netflix. In hindsight, it was the highest ROI decision I've ever made.

5. Proactively make introductions - If friend A and friend B can get value from each other, introduce them. It's a 30-second email for you, and it may change their lives forever. Maybe they will start a company together. Maybe one hires the other. Maybe they fall in love, have three kids and become soul mates. Networks are unique because they don't divide when you share them -- they multiply. There's no higher ROI on any other 30-second activity. (Note - do not confuse this with making introductions where only one side gets value from it)

6. Avoid fan relationships - Chasing "successful" people you admire rarely works. You're fan #967 trying to get their attention. They don't need more groupies in their lives. They prefer spending time with people who knew them before their success. A better strategy that is also more fulfilling: Find talented peers at your level. Their DMs aren't crowded. Help them. Collaborate. Celebrate their wins. When they break through in five or ten years, you'll be one of the people who knew them "back in the day"-and those relationships are worth exponentially more than being fan #967.

7. Get more curious with age - Curiosity is like your joints - it weakens with age. Instead, you want to age like Larry Ellison. If you're over the age of 25, a good rule of thumb is to assume your first thoughts about new trends are wrong. It's fine to have no opinion on new trends. But if you want to have an opinion, put 20 hours into it first. Talk to people doing it. Try it yourself. Get your hands dirty. You'll be years ahead of everyone your age.

8. Delete the scoreboard - One piece of advice I find myself still thinking about five years later comes from my friend Shaan Puri: Most people have a relationship scoreboard. My score versus your score. When I do something for you, I get points. When you do something for me, you get points.

This creates two problems. First, most scoreboards stay stuck at 0-0 because both people are waiting for the other to give first. Second, the scoreboard assumes relationships are zero-sum-a fixed pie where if you get a bigger slice, I get less. If the score is 6-5 in their favor, I feel like I'm losing -1, when I'm actually +5.

Luck engineers delete the scoreboard. Give aggressively, give early, give without permission. The pie isn't fixed-it expands when you give freely. Some people will take advantage of you, but they'll be a rounding error compared to the incredible relationships you build. And your funeral will be jam-packed.

9. Reverse prison advice - The cliché advice given to new prisoners is to find the biggest person in the prison on your first day, and punch them in the face. The questionable logic is that everyone in the prison now knows you're not someone to be messed with. (My personal approach would be to wear glasses and become the library guy.) Punching a 6'9, 280 lb psychopath might be terrible advice for prison, but the reverse is useful for increasing your luck in the outside world: Find the most talented people you know and help them as much as you can, permissionlessly. Share their projects, give feedback, and make introductions. Successful people have a special place in their hearts for the people who helped them before anyone else did.

10. Work on your introduction - This could be the least British advice I will ever give. I can hear my ancestors spinning in their graves at the thought of what I'm about to say. In British culture, we're taught to play down everything that we do. "I just do marketing stuff". The problem with this is that people you meet don't understand what you do or how they can help you. When you have a clear introduction that describes what you do: "I create Super Bowl-level commercials for fintech companies on social media", they can now realise ways they can help you: "Oh, my friend Barry is the marketing director at Amex. Let me introduce you!". Being a great luck engineer is turning yourself into a simple API that people can connect into.

11. Track luck inputs - Luck is a lagging measure. It often takes years to connect cause and effect, so most don't bother. You publish an essay in 2022-it brings you an investor in 2025. You make an introduction in 2025 - it brings you an introduction in 2027. The lag makes it hard to motivate yourself to do it because you don't know when the return will be. My friend Ben Levy solves this by tracking luck inputs: introductions made, people helped, or bets placed. He trusts that if he maintains a high luck input rate, the luck outputs take care of themselves. You can't control the timing of luck, but you can control the volume of luck inputs you create.

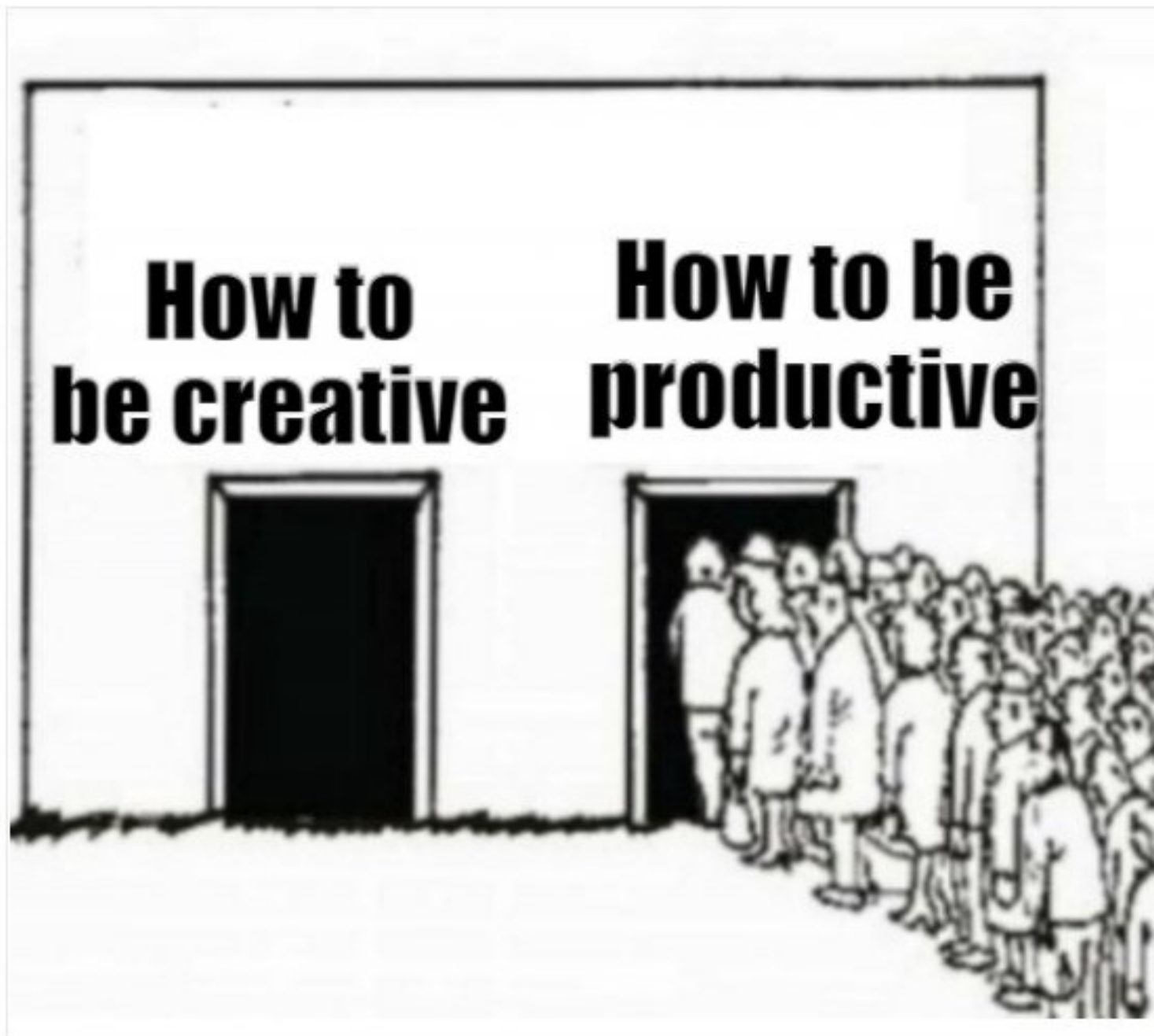
12. Get good at advertising - The ultimate meta-skill. If you can create a persuasive advert or landing page, you can create a persuasive CV or job interview. This is an incredible luck-hack because most people are awful at advertising.

13. Dish out baker's dozens - A baker's dozen is when a baker gives someone 13 when they expected 12. It isn't the 12 that makes bakers' customers happy - it's the unexpected +1. Surprise generosity creates loyalty. People remember who exceeded their expectations. They tell others. They come back. They reciprocate. Apply this everywhere: Buy someone a book when they ask for a book recommendation. Ship Thursday when you said Friday. Show up twenty minutes early to help a friend set up an event.

PS. I said I'd give you twelve ideas on the skill of luck; I gave you thirteen. I hope you enjoyed the baker's dozen. That's my luck input done for this morning. Have a great day.

How to be creative (without taking drugs)

Novel



A wealthy man walks into a bank in New York.

"I'm going away to Europe on business for two weeks and need to borrow \$5000"

The bank officer says the bank will need some security for the loan. The man hands over the keys to a new Rolls-Royce, which costs \$250,000. The bank officer is shocked but agrees to accept the car as collateral for the loan.

After the man leaves, the loan officer, the bank's president and all their colleagues enjoy a good laugh at the man for using a \$250,000 Rolls-Royce as collateral against a \$5,000 loan.

One of the employees drives the Rolls into the bank's underground garage and parks it there.

Two weeks later, the wealthy man returns, repays the \$5000 and the interest, which comes to \$15.41.

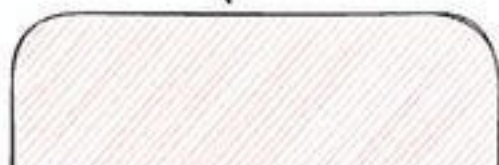
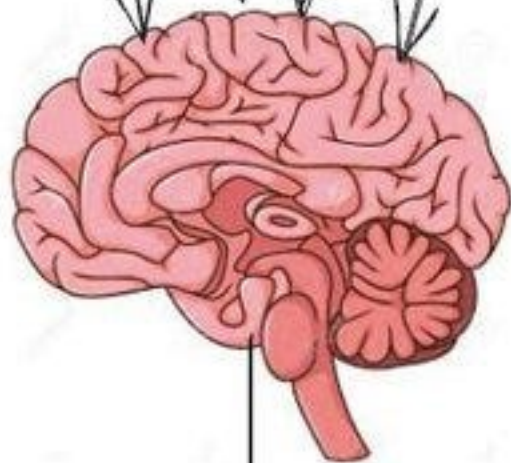
The loan officer says, "Sir, I must tell you, we're all a little puzzled. You're a multi-millionaire - why would you need a \$5,000 loan?"

The man replies, "Where else in New York City can I park my car for two weeks for only \$15.41?"

The mistake people make is treating creativity like productivity. They try to work harder and expect creativity to appear. Instead, sprinkle in new inputs and watch new outputs appear.



Same
Input



Here are 12 inputs that help increase creativity. Let's turn some bank vaults into cheap parking spots together:

1. Translate aggressively - Got a written idea? Draw it. Got a visual idea? Write it down. Calculating an equation? Explain it out loud. As you translate an idea from one language to another, creativity leaks out in the migration process.

One of my favourite examples is that Christopher Nolan drew the plot of Inception.

2. Scroll for anti-social proof - Go to YouTube or Substack, scroll through the explore page, and click only on content that has under 5,000 views. You'll find niche ideas that haven't yet mimetically spread. 90% will be a waste of time. Like a successful venture capitalist's portfolio, the 10% of hits cover the 90% of misses multiple times over.

3. Avoid content made after 2016 - Something happened in 2016. The internet became less weird, less creative. Whatever the cause, pre-2016 content has a distinct flavour of strangeness that has vanished. My favourite hack for this: Find a book or essay you love. Open up ChatGPT deep research. Ask for 50 similar books or essays, all created before 2016.

4. Create your own time zone - Most people peak creatively whilst others are asleep. At 2 p.m., your brain tracks what others think. At 2 a.m., nobody's watching. The ideas that seemed too weird at lunch suddenly seem worth exploring. Your brain fills the silence with ideas you'd normally censor. If creativity is your main goal, wake up absurdly early or go to sleep ridiculously late.

5. Increase time in the bathroom - Aaron Sorkin, the writer behind *A Few Good Men* and *The West Wing*, takes 6-8 hot showers per day when he's writing. Another hack is to be slightly overly hydrated. You may only have shower thoughts once per day, but you can increase your bathroom thoughts by drinking more water.

6. Fight an evil twin - Imagine there's an evil identical twin of you whose sole job is to out-think you. *What are they thinking?* This thought experiment allows the mind to explore dangerous ideas because you can blame it on the twin. If the twin produces any useful ideas, you can steal them. You have no skin in the game.



7. Spin wheels - Collect the best questions you find. Add them to a spinning wheel app. Spin the wheel before bed. Leave the question with the subconscious overnight. Brainstorm on the question first thing in the morning, before any inputs.

8. Take a sakoku - When I ask friends which country they want to visit, the most common answer is Japan. When I ask why, it's because Japanese culture feels so unique compared to anywhere else in the world. One of the major historical reasons is that Japan practised an isolationist policy for 265 years called Sakoku. They cut off the outside world, whilst most countries traded ideas and customs.

Once every 6 months, practice a Sakoku for a week. Consume no inputs. Sakoku is intermittent fasting for the mimetic mind. Our thoughts feel like our own -- but it's often society's voice echoing. When you spend a week alone with zero external inputs -- the echoes disappear and you hear your own creative voice

9. When creativity hits you, sprint to your garden shed in your boxer shorts at 3 am - Christopher Nolan bolted across to his garden at 3 a.m. in his boxer shorts. He'd been stuck on the final scenes of *Oppenheimer* for weeks. Then,

mid-dream, the entire sequence materialised. He grabbed paper and pen in his shed and wrote it down before it vanished. The 3 am idea never changed and was the finale of the film.

10. The creativity faucet - One fun way to spark creativity is to ask: *What's the worst idea possible?* Set the bar so low and then just keep improving it. Self-inflicted pressure is the single biggest killer of creativity. My friend Julain Shapiro visualises creativity as a backed-up pipe of water. The first mile is wastewater that needs to be emptied. After emptying the bad ideas, you begin to spot patterns as to why they are bad.

11. Avoid dramatic people - Good news: Your brain is the most powerful supercomputer in the known universe. Bad news: It can only have one conscious thought at a time. Every minute you spend ruminating on someone's manufactured crisis is a minute you're not solving your actual problems. Dramatic people eat your supercomputer's RAM.

12. The Swedish House Mafia Technique - Get a room with friends away from the outside world. Two to four friends is the sweet spot. Throw ideas back and forth like a tennis rally. Keep iterating away. When you're playing idea tennis with creative people, 1+1 does not equal 2; it equals 11.

Here's Swedish House Mafia creating the iconic *One* from a hum and a table tap to performing it on stage. It's one of my favourite videos on the internet.

If you enjoyed this, share it with your Swedish House Mafia friends.

