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*Nice guys finish last: How negative traits help in the corporate world*
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*How Listening Like a Fly Could Lead to Better Sound Detectors*
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TRY A LITTLE TENDERNESS

It's not just words that can help or hurt a marriage. In one study of newlyweds, says Matthew J. Johnson, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Binghamton University, SUNY, couples were scored on both their ability to deal constructively with conflict and on their positive or negative “affect”—the outward display of emotion (for example, using a warm tone of voice versus turning away or raising an eyebrow). Four years later, those who were bad at both were markedly less happy than couples who were bad at either one or the other. That means even if you have trouble keeping your cool during arguments, you can make up for it in other ways.

"When the research team and I watched this couple, we all had the same thought: 'They're going to make it.'"

Johnson recalls seeing two of his research subjects—a pregnant woman and her partner—battling it out. Suddenly the woman stood up, walked over to her partner, and sat on his lap while he rubbed her belly. "All the while, they were still arguing in some pretty awful ways," says Johnson. "But somehow they were able to be affectionate. When we watched this, the research team and I all had the same thought: 'They're going to make it.'"
Happily Ever After: The New Science Behind Wedded Bliss

JULY 25, 2014 – 8:00 AM / FRANCINE RUSSO

(James Wojcik)
In their 11 years of marriage, Megan and Frank Constantíno have had to deal with plenty of stress and disappointments. She once suffered from anorexia, he has battled anxiety attacks, and they struggled for two years to have a baby before Megan recently became pregnant.

They disagree plenty—about politics, or who's the better driver—but Frank says they’ve learned to stay respectful of each other. “It breaks my heart when I see her struggle,” says Frank, a 33-year-old sales rep in West Virginia, but where he once tried to “fix” his wife’s problems, he’s now learned just to empathize. “The listening and sharing of the burden is the most healing thing I could ask for,” says Megan, 31, an online marketer.

Meanwhile, he goes to her for support and advice with his work. When his anxiety strikes, he says, “she brings me down to earth. She helps me put what I’m feeling in perspective.” Science shows that together, Frank and Megan are doing many things right. In the early days of marriage research, scientists were most interested in which behaviors would break up unions—but the latest studies focus on the positive habits of happily married couples. Here are five keys to avoiding the potholes on the road to marital bliss.
REMEMBER THAT YOU’RE A TEAM

More than 40 years ago, one of the pioneers of relationship research, psychologist John Gottman, Ph.D., videotaped mates discussing everyday events and areas of conflict, and identified four negative behaviors that could predict divorce with over 90 percent accuracy.
They are: criticism, defensiveness, contempt (rolling your eyes, for example), and “stonewalling” (a.k.a. the silent treatment). But even if you steer clear of these marital minefields, the stresses of life—unemployment, a family illness—can make even the most loving couples fall into hurtful patterns, like name-calling (“you’re such a slob!”). In fact, Benjamin Karney, Ph.D., a social psychology professor at UCLA, observed couples in his lab and found that stress was the best predictor of how negatively they behaved with each other. The more intense the stress, the worse their interactions. It was much more predictive than having had a miserable childhood or divorced parents, or even how happy they were together generally.

“It’s not you against each other. It’s both of you against the world.”

But couples can learn to deal better with external pressures. One way is by consciously aligning together as a team, says Thomas Bradbury, Ph.D., a clinical psychology professor at UCLA. “Remember that you’re in this together,” he advises couples. “It’s not you against each other. It’s both of you against the world.”

**TRY A LITTLE TENDERNESS**

It’s not just words that can help or hurt a marriage. In one study of newlyweds, says Matthew D. Johnson, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Binghamton University, SUNY, couples were scored on both their ability to deal constructively with conflict and on their positive or negative “affect”—the outward display of emotion (for example, using a warm tone of voice versus turning away or raising an eyebrow). Four years later, those who were bad at both were markedly less happy than couples who were bad at either one or the other. That means even if you have trouble keeping your cool during arguments, you can make up for it in other ways.
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*Plus:* What do happily married couples think about the notion of “soul mates”?

**SOFTEN CONFLICT WITH HUMOR**

Laughter can go a long way toward defusing tension during negative interactions, according to Sarah Holley, Ph.D., director of the Relationships, Emotion, and Health Lab at San Francisco State University. A’Mera Frieman, 37, a caseworker and writer, cops to being an avoider. She remembers repeatedly dodging her husband Zach’s complaints about how her teenaged daughters had “totally trashed” the new room he spent weeks constructing for them. On one of his attempts to bring it up, she dashed out of the room, saying, “Gotta go thaw the meat for dinner.” Zach, 39, an electrical technician, noiselessly followed her into the kitchen and expressed anger in his own way, becoming utterly silent. She finally turned toward him and said teasingly, “You’re doing that creepy quiet thing again.” He started laughing, and she did, too. The light moment kept the argument from “spiraling out of control,” says Frieman. Once the pressure was off, she felt freer to sit down with her spouse and discuss the issue.
SUPPORT—BUT DON’T SMOOTHER
More than almost anything else, “social support”—how spouses help each other with a problem or goal—is vital to wedded bliss, even trumping the ability to resolve conflicts. The tricky thing is to provide not too much and not too little, but what each feels is “just right,” like Goldilocks finally settling into Baby Bear’s bed. (Expressing empathy, for example, only rankles if what your overwhelmed mate really wants is for you to take over the bills.) University of Iowa psychologist Erika Lawrence has identified four kinds of support: emotional (listening, holding hands), tangible (dealing with the kids or helping with a partner’s chores), esteem (“Honey, I know you can do this!”), and informational (giving advice). So how do you figure out what kind of support—and how much—your spouse wants? The couples who manage this best, says Lawrence, don’t rely on their partners to intuit their needs—they think about what they want, and then they ask for it. “Don’t wait for your spouse to ‘figure it out,’ ” she says. On the flip side, “pay attention to the times when ‘supporting’ your mate sparks a fight,” suggests Emily Butler, Ph.D., a University of Arizona family studies professor.

Jason Christensen, 43, an IT manager in Chicago, says he loved how his wife of 19 years, Janice, 44, supported his desire to run the Chicago Marathon when he turned 40. She bought him new running shoes, took over family chores, and cheered him on. But when she tried to help him meet his goals at work, the same “go get ’em” attitude grated, Jason says. “It was always, ‘Be more aggressive. Just go in there and ask for a promotion.’ It would sometimes end with both of us pouting and going our own way for a while.” The arguments finally ended when Janice decided to “try to figure out” why her well-meaned suggestions were bothering Jason. After hearing him explain his side, she backed off and let him do things his way.
Plus: Is marriage (really) good for your health?

CELEBRATE EACH OTHER
The belief that your partner will be there for you when things go wrong lays a strong foundation for marital happiness. What creates this belief? Surprisingly, it’s not only how your spouse behaves during a crisis, but also how he or she responds when something great happens, according to Shelly Gable, Ph.D., a psychology professor at UC Santa Barbara.

“Got a promotion? Your spouse could respond actively or passively, constructively or destructively.”

Got a promotion? Your spouse could respond actively or passively, constructively or destructively. The best would be active/constructive: “I know you’ve worked so hard for this! Let’s celebrate.” The worst would be active/destructive: “Wow, do you really think you can handle this extra responsibility?” Somewhere in between are a “[yawn] That’s nice, dear,” or worse, “Did you pick up my dry cleaning?”

Celebrating each other’s triumphs is a no-brainer for Atherton and Bert Drenth, a 58-year-old health care company owner and a 60-year-old service rep for hospital lab equipment in Guelph, Ontario. The couple agree that they have been “each other’s best cheerleaders,” throughout their marriage. When Bert gave Atherton the news, for example, that he’d landed a great new job, she told him, “All your hard work, integrity, reliability, and attention to detail really paid off. I am so proud of you.”

With that kind of unwavering support, it’s no wonder that 35 years later, they’re still going strong.
Published on Jul 10, 2014

One of the "Wall Street Journal's" most popular articles this week says people with dark personality traits may actually have an advantage in climbing the corporate ladder. Seth Spain, assistant professor of organizational behavior at Binghamton University, joins the "CBS This Morning" co-hosts to discuss his research.
How Listening Like a Fly Could Lead to Better Sound Detectors

The tiny yellow nocturnal fly can pinpoint the origin of sound with uncanny accuracy. Now scientists are stealing its secrets.

July 22, 2014

A new sound detector that mimics how a parasitic fly uses its extraordinary hearing to pinpoint its victims, could one day help soldiers track down snipers and lead to better phones and hearing aids that stifle background noise.
The new invention was inspired by the ear of a small yellow nocturnal fly, Ormia ochracea. The fly can identify the origin of sounds with uncanny accuracy—and uses that ability with deadly force. When a female of the species hears the mating song of a male cricket, she flies onto the back of the singer and deposits her offspring, which invade, consume and kill their host.

The fact that this fly can pinpoint sound so well is a bit of a surprise. We humans know where sounds are coming from because of the distance separating our ears—if a sound comes from one side, the ear on that side will hear it slightly before the ear on the other side. But because the yellow nocturnal fly is so tiny, sound waves hit both sides of its head at essentially the same time. Its ears are separated by about the width of a nickel, which means it takes sound about four millionths of a second to go from one ear to the other.

Nearly 20 years ago, engineer Ronald Miles at Binghamton University discovered the secret: The fly's ear possesses a structure resembling a teeter-totter that’s about 1.5 millimeters long. When a sound reaches the insect from the side, one end of the teeter-totter starts tipping before the other, which tells the fly which side sound is coming from, says Neal Hall, an engineer at the University of Texas at Austin and coauthor on the new study.

The new sound detector Hall and his colleagues developed is essentially a silicon teeter-totter only 2 millimeters wide. Under both ends of the seesaw are springs made of piezoelectric materials, which turn mechanical force into electrical signals. Thanks to these springs, the researchers can measure how the seesaw beam flexes and rotates. "Doing so enabled us to fully emulate the mimic and replicate the fly's special ability," Hall says.

The research, funded by DARPA, could have military applications, Hall says. "One can imagine battlefield scenarios where being able to determine the location of an event based on sound alone is important—situations in which visual cues are denied. Finding a hidden sniper using sound emitted from the gunshot is an example."

Or, imagine a smartphone that can filter our ambient noise. "We envision a smartphone app that uses directional microphones to focus only on a specific speaker of interest while rejecting all other ambient noise," Hall says. "For example, plates dropping in the background, or screaming toddlers."

This tech could lead to a new generation of smarter hearing aids that focus only on conversations or sounds of interest to wearers, instead of amplifying everything as current hearing aids do. The discomfort from this amplified background noise a major reason why only 2 percent of Americans wear hearing aids even though perhaps 10 percent of the population could benefit from wearing one, Hall says.
6 Weird Scientific Facts About Love

Health.com @goodhealth July 17, 2014
Sure, you know the basics about the birds and the bees, but how much do you really know about what goes on in your body—and your mind—while you’re falling head over heels or doing the deed? Here are some fascinating facts about love and sex that may surprise you.

**Spouses may have similar DNA**

Scientists already knew that people tend to choose romantic partners with similar characteristics, such as age, race, religion, income, and upbringings. But a study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* found that people also tend to marry others with similar DNA. When researchers studied the genetic material of 825 white American couples, they found fewer differences in the DNA between married people than between two randomly selected individuals within the same race. In fact, they calculated that the tendency to pair up with a genetically similar spouse is about one-third as strong as the tendency to do so with someone with a similar education.

**Watching rom-coms may help strengthen marriage**

Watching movies may be one key to marital bliss, says Matthew Johnson, PhD, director of the Marriage and Family Studies Laboratory at Binghamton University. In his study, couples attended counseling or watched relationship-themed movies and completed discussion guides together. Both strategies cut the groups’ divorce rate in half after three years—but the movie-watching activity took 50% less time and took place almost entirely at home. “The key is to talk with your partner about your relationship in the context of a movie,” says Johnson.
Women can make their voice “sexier,” but men can’t

In a 2014 study, Albright University researchers found that women were able to deliberately manipulate their voices—while counting from one to 10—to sound more attractive. But, sorry guys: When men tried to be sexier, they were actually rated as sounding worse! When a woman intentionally drops her voice to make it sound low and breathy, she’s often perceived as more attractive—but not exactly for the reasons you might think.

Men tend to prefer women with higher, more feminine voices, says co-author Susan Hughes, PhD, associate professor of psychology. But when a woman lowers her voice to “sound sexy,” she’s signaling her interest in a potential mate—a clue that men are able to pick up on.

You’re less likely to get grossed out when aroused

Sex can be a messy activity with lots of fluids and smells, but in the heat of the moment, none of that (usually) seems to matter. According to a study from the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, that’s because sexual arousal overrides the body’s natural “disgust response.” When researchers asked women to watch either an erotic film, a sports video, or a “neutral” video of a train, and then perform a series of unpleasant acts (like drinking out of a cup with a bug in it), they found that those who’d watched the sexual acts rated the tasks as less disgusting—and were also able to complete more of them. Previous research has suggested that sexual arousal has a similar impact on men, as well.

Love is good for your bones

Marriage appears to strengthen men’s skeletons, according to a University of California Los Angeles study, especially if they wait until after age 25 to tie the knot.
Researchers aren’t sure why, but they point out that it’s not the first time marriage has been linked to health. Other studies, for example, have suggested that married people live longer, are more likely to survive cancer, and have a lower risk of cardiovascular disease.

**Old people do it, too**

Sexual interest and sexual function do both decline with age—especially as adults begin to take more medications—but that doesn’t mean that senior citizens aren’t still getting it on. “Many people do continue to have sex into their old age, often until death,” Garcia says. And they’re not always careful: “Besides teenagers and young adults, the elderly is the biggest population for sexually-transmitted disease spikes,” he adds. “They’re not worried about getting pregnant, so they’re not using condoms.”
Down but Not Out: The Uncertain Future of the Crossword Puzzle

The future of puzzling is as fluid as the English language itself.

TANYA BASU
JUL 11 2014, 8:05 AM ET

While the world warns of an impending print collapse, it might take down an innocent bystander with it—those little black and white squares that have long inhabited the back pages of newspapers and made themselves the primary Sunday-afternoon obsession of crossword nerds, for whom completing a puzzle is a bragworthy accomplishment.
Yes, the meager crossword, its unnerving simplicity belying a capability to wrench you mad with clues that speak of everything and nothing at once, is moving toward becoming a relic of the past.

**Binghamton University English professor Michael Sharp** is tactful about its potential demise. “I’m not predicting the death of the crossword, just saying that there are significant hurdles that the crossword faces in coming decades,” said Sharp, who writes the popular “Rex Parker Does the NYT Crossword Puzzle” under a pseudonym.

Crosswords are having quite the moment, despite hitting their 100th birthday late last year. **Alan Connor**, the British media personality, wrote a book released this week called, *The Crossword Century: 100 Years of Witty Wordplay, Ingenious Puzzles, and Linguistic Mischief*, tracing the history of crosswords and their cultural significance. Despite being a British invention—compared to the Beatles as one of the country’s most valuable exports—Connor argues the crossword is quite American. The puzzles themselves are distinct from one another, depending which country you’re in.

“British puzzles have more black squares, and the effect is not merely aesthetic—it means that the constructors can limit themselves to words found in a dictionary,” Connor explained. “The words in American puzzles interlock far more often, which means that they end up including proper nouns: unlikely places, extraordinary people, and everything from inventions to fragments of phrases.”

This construct has affected American crosswords in two distinct, opposing ways: While significantly increasing the potential answers to a clue, the seemingly endless array of possibilities makes puzzles more complex—a quality that reflects the period of American excess in which crosswords came of age.

In the flapper era, crosswords inspired chic black-and-white clothes, Broadway revues, even church sermons. Their prevalence made crosswords the rock 'n roll of the 1920s—they were ubiquitous, either revered or reviled depending on whom you asked, with a 1924 London *Times* article gravely declaring the state of "An Enslaved America:"
"[The crossword] has grown from the pastime of a few ingenious idlers into a national institution: a menace because it is making devastating inroads on the working hours of every rank of society... [people were seen] cudgeleng their brains for a four-letter word meaning 'molten rock' or a six-letter word meaning 'idler,' or what not: in trains and trams, or omnibuses, in subways, in private offices and counting-rooms, in factories and homes, and even—although as yet rarely—with hymnals for camouflage, in church."

America was obsessed. And this obsession drove the newspaper industry to adopt the crossword as a mainstay in its pages, making it the brainiac's game of choice—one that required mental gymnastics, luck, and determination. The crossword, though British in origin, was a naturalized American citizen.

American crossword builders have been instrumental in keeping the puzzle alive—and relevant—today. Will Shortz, the legendary editor of The New York Times' crossword column, has singlehandedly made crosswords sexy with pop culture references and slang that appeal to a modern audience. Shortz has famously included hip-hop references in his clues, and he's keen on selecting creative interns who help keep his column fresh. But having a wildly popular, imaginative genius behind the world's premier crossword isn't changing the fact, Connor says, that fewer people than ever before are crosswording. And just because crosswords are slowly losing their crotchety clues doesn't mean that solver demographics have changed, according to Sharp.

"Then one day, maybe you're bored and its empty boxes beckon."

"I don’t think you’ve had much of a change in terms of the audience the puzzle is pitched to," Sharp said. "Cluing is more democratic, but reliance on ‘crosswordese’ and the reality of a generally older, generally white audience means that the puzzle just gravitates that way."

Sharp, for his part, is suspicious of making crosswords more accessible, saying that just putting a puzzle on a mobile device "does nothing to the overall 'accessibility' of the puzzle." A print loyalist, he notes that demographics of newspaper readership dictate the content of the crossword puzzle and therefore, what segment of the population is interested in it. In fact, he predicts the average puzzle solver is a college-educated white woman in her sixties.
“It’s still older college-educated white people who dominate the solver base, and I don’t think apps change that,” Sharp remarked. “It’s worth noting that solver demographics might look very different if you move off of the Times and more elite puzzles.”

But apps are the future of crosswords, and puzzle aficionados realize this. According to a Pew report, tablet usage has spiked among those over 65, with 27 percent of senior citizens owning a device; only 18 percent of seniors own a smartphone. But paper is still the preferred method by which seniors get their news: while 59 percent go online every day, they lag behind their younger counterparts. Something, however, gets muddled in using a tablet versus newsprint, and puzzlers worry about the loss of the ink-on-paper experience.

“If you read the paper, then you stumble across [a crossword] all the time, even if you ignored it,” Sharp, an English professor at Binghamton University, said. “You’d know it was there. Then one day, maybe you’re bored and its empty boxes beckon. I remember watching my grandmother solving a crossword, and I could see it was different from other activities because she had the paper folded a certain way, she had a pencil in her hand. Today, all activities look the same—it’s just people bent over keyboards.”

The New York Times is arguably the leading crossword in the puzzling world—and those who seek it out are still, largely, gravitating toward paper. The Times has also ventured into the world of digital solving, but don’t think this means the newspaper has figured it all out: Even its venerable post as a crossword doyen hasn’t translated paper success to the digital world, as it proved last month when users "revolted" over the 2.0 launch of a widely despised crossword app.

"How will the new potential solvers discover the pleasure of puzzling?"
Search for a crossword app and the number one result is Crosswords Classic, a product of Stand Alone, Inc. Crosswords Classic acts as an aggregator of newspaper crosswords, from high-brow publications to lesser known, popularly accessible puzzles such as Australia's The Stickler Weekly and Glutton for Pun. It’s the best-rated app of its kind in the iTunes Store and even boasts admiration from—surprise!—The New York Times, which has acknowledged it as the “...definitive source for puzzles for iOS.”
Here's where the Gray Lady might be doing it wrong: Crosswords Classic costs $9.99 for a one-time download (plus extra should the puzzler want access to additional puzzles); the Times’ crossword app costs about $40 per year. While The New York Times declined to offer statistics about how many people are using its crossword app, it faces clear competition from others in the digital space. Sharp points to a whole slew of crosswords that exist purely online, arguing that the subculture of Internet-only crosswords might pump life back into the puzzle. “Independent [organizations, like the American Values Club and Fireball] can do things mainstream puzzles can’t—they tend to have a more contemporary and less ‘censored’ vibe,” Sharp said. “This seems likely to hook younger solvers.”

While crossword puzzles may be associated with the elderly, the lonely, and/or the mad genius type, Connor argues that solving one is, in fact, a social activity—solvers often reach out to family members and friends to get context for clues. “When you look at the first crossword puzzle, it seems cute that it had to include instructions on how to complete the grid,” Connor says. “What the experience makes you realize is how natural the practice of solving has become.”

Both Connor and Sharp lament the potential death of crosswording, with Connor going so far as to worry whether baby boomers might be the last crosswording generation: "As the older solvers die, how will the new potential solvers discover the pleasure of puzzling?"

Then again, the future of puzzling may be as fluid as the form itself. "Abstract puzzles like sudoku tend to be the same thing every time, but crossword constructors have all of language as their toolkit," Connor notes. "The puzzles, like the English language, are constantly refreshed, with TWERK and BOEHNER enriching the lexicon just as LINDY HOP and GILLETT did before them."
What Corporate Climbers Can Teach Us

'Dark' Personality Traits Can Help People Rise Through Ranks

Updated July 9, 2014 6:34 p.m. ET

Psychologists have identified personality traits that help some people rise through the ranks, but there is a cost to certain behaviors. WSJ's Sue Shellenbarger and Seth Span a professor from SUNY Binghamton University join Lunch Break with Tanya Rivero.

Every office full of ambitious people has them. And we have all worked with at least one—the co-worker with an inexplicable ability to rise in the ranks.

"How do they do it?" we may ask ourselves or whisper to friends at work. They don't have more experience. They don't seem that brilliant.

But such co-workers may possess a dose of one of the personality traits that psychologists call the "dark triad": manipulativeness, a tendency to influence others for selfish gain; narcissism, a profound self-centeredness; or an antisocial personality, lacking in empathy or concern for others. These traits are well-known for the bad behavior that they can cause when dominant in people's personalities. At milder levels, however, they can actually foster skills that can help people rise through the ranks.

For instance, people with narcissism, who want to be the center
of attention, often make a good first impression on clients and bosses, says a 2014 review of more than 140 studies on people with mild, or "subclinical," levels of dark personality traits. They also can be persuasive when pitching their own ideas.

James Albon

The Manipulator

Influences others for own gain

Dark Side: Uses flattery to influence others. Deceives others to get desired results.

Silver Lining: Skilled in negotiating, enjoys combat. Good at forming political alliances.
Manipulators influence others for their own gain, using flattery or deceive if necessary. But these personalities—also called Machiavellians—can also be charismatic leaders and forceful negotiators, says the study, in the Journal of Organizational Behavior. And while antisocial personalities lack empathy or concern for others, they can be creative because they often enjoy testing limits.

Researchers are increasingly studying the dark triad because it is "a well-organized framework for a big chunk of individual differences that are relatively unstudied, especially at work," says Seth M. Spain, lead author of the 2014 research review, and an assistant professor of organizational behavior at Binghamton University, part of the State University of New York. Learning to spot the traits in employees can help employers improve their career paths through training and wise job assignments.

Also, "everybody can learn from" understanding how narcissistic or manipulative people use subtle skills to gain influence, Dr. Spain says. It can also help co-workers and bosses spot extreme cases early and rein them in before they cause grumbling and discontent.

Renee LeBouef cuts short any co-workers' attempts to gossip with her since an experience with a Machiavellian manager on a previous job undermined her relationships at the office.
James Albon

Narcissist

**Dark Side:** Wants to be the center of attention. Uses appearance, charm to seek prestige and status.

**Silver Lining:** Pitches own ideas with enthusiasm, makes a good first impression.

The manager used flattery to make friends with Ms. LeBouef and other subordinates, telling them how attractive or talented they were and pressuring them to reveal personal information about themselves. The manager then used gossip to drive a wedge between co-workers, tighten her control over the team and promote herself with higher-ups, says Ms. LeBouef, a New Orleans sales and marketing manager.
Ms. LeBouef now shares only superficial details about herself—that she has a boyfriend and likes natural foods and holistic remedies—with co-workers. "They don't need to know anything further about my life outside the office," she says. She appreciates her current boss, because he shows enough interest in employees' lives to demonstrate that he cares about them, without meddling.

Related

Work & Family Mailbox: Parenting With Two Dads
At Work: How to Spot a Dark-Side Personality

People with dark traits are often attractive job candidates because they display charm, assertiveness and apparent leadership ability, the research review says. Researchers believe narcissists tend to do well in training programs because they want to be seen at their best.

"It's hard to go anywhere and not find such people," says Toby Bishop of Toronto, past president of the 71,000-member Association of Certified Fraud Examiners and an independent antifraud strategy adviser. They are often skilled at making a good first impression, and "people who can talk a good talk and impress others will at least initially be respected and put in positions of authority and command by others," he says.

The flattery often used by manipulative people is helpful in getting named to corporate boards, but only if it's used skillfully, says a 2010 study. Managers who framed flattery as a request for advice, such as, "How were you able to pull off that strategy so successfully?" improved their chances of winning a director's seat, the study found.

Those who were clumsy about it, however, stating flatly, "I really admire you," or, "You're the greatest," hurt their chances, says the study of 1,822 managers, CEOs and directors in Administrative Science Quarterly.
Antisocial Personality

Unconcerned with others' feelings or welfare

Dark Side: Impulsive and thrill-seeking, tends toward antagonism.

Silver Lining: Tends to think creatively, tests limits.

Manipulators are also skilled at forming political alliances. "One of the reasons these people climb so high in the company is that they're very forceful," says James D. Ratley, president of the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners.

The careers of people with these characteristics tend to derail over time, in part because they tend to focus on short-term benefits for themselves rather than long-term results for their organizations. Colleagues may come to view them as hostile, harsh or arrogant, Dr. Spain says. And when present at extreme or clinical levels, these traits disrupt lives. One thing that trips
people up, Mr. Ratley says: "They think the rules don't apply to them."

Mr. Ratley and other corporate accounting experts cite former HealthSouth Corp. CEO Richard Scrushy as an example of a manipulative personality who could also be forceful and persuasive. Mr. Scrushy used charisma and salesmanship to build the chain of outpatient surgery and rehab clinics he founded in 1984 into a $4 billion publicly traded giant.

"He's a classic good salesman," says Aaron Beam, a former chief financial officer at HealthSouth, and a speaker and author of a book on the experience. "He had this magical ability to get people to agree with him."

Mr. Beam says Mr. Scrushy also made life hard for employees who disagreed with him. "He would literally scream at you," belittling and berating employees at weekly staff meetings, says Mr. Beam, of Loxley, Ala. He also spent lavishly on a flamboyant lifestyle.

HealthSouth hit the rocks when regulators uncovered a $2.7 billion accounting fraud, and Mr. Scrushy was fired as CEO in 2003. Mr. Scrushy was acquitted of criminal charges in connection with the fraud, but a state court later imposed $2.88 billion in civil damages against him for fraud. Mr. Beam served three months in prison for bank fraud. Mr. Scrushy got out of prison in 2012 after serving five years in connection with a different scandal, for bribing a state official.

"I do accept responsibility that it [the accounting fraud] happened on my watch," Mr. Scrushy says in an interview, but he admits no personal wrongdoing.
He says his style was effective with underlings. "You don't manage 120 people by being a pansy," he says of his direct reports at HealthSouth. "Any CEO worth his salt has to be a little bit strong ... I don't think it's a 'dark side.' It's a skill, to be able to build a business from scratch," says Mr. Scrushy, who is speaking and advising businesses.

To spot dark traits among co-workers, watch for bullying behavior, says Gary Zeune, founder of The Pros & The Cons, a speakers' bureau that enlists white-collar criminals to talk about preventing fraud.

Also, dark personalities often ingratiate themselves by appearing caring and competent. Beware of a colleague who "tries to be way too nice for what they're asking you to do," Mr. Zeune says.

Write to Sue Shellenbarger at sue.shellenbarger@wsj.com
20 Weird Facts About Sex and Love

#3: Watching rom-coms may help strengthen marriage

by Amanda MacMillan
Watching movies may be one key to marital bliss, says Matthew Johnson, PhD, director of the Marriage and Family Studies Laboratory at Binghamton University. In his study, couples attended counseling or watched relationship-themed movies and completed discussion guides together. Both strategies cut the groups' divorce rate in half after three years—but the movie-watching activity took 50% less time and took place almost entirely at home. "The key is to talk with your partner about your relationship in the context of a movie," says Johnson.

To view full article, visit:
http://www.health.com/health/gallery/0,,20824699,00.html
Nurturing BUMBLEBEES

EXPERT DETAILS ON WHAT MAKES THESE MAGNIFICENT CREATURES PERFECT POLLINATORS.
BUMBLEBEES, those big furry, burly bees—otherwise known as Bombus (the bumblebee genus, meaning "booming")—have been ignored by farmers until recently because bumblebee colonies produce very little honey surplus.

But the truth is, far from being useless annoyances, bumblebees are vital pollinators of native plants and as many crops. In North America, bumblebees are pollinators of clover, alfalfa, beans, blueberries and cranberries. Heirloom tomatoes and many cherry tomato cultivars—plus their relatives in the Solanaceae family, such as peppers and eggplant—need assistance from such buzz pollinators for pollination to occur. Bumblebees are the pollinator of choice.

WHAT MAKES A BUMBLEBEE such a good pollinator? Bumblebees fly at lower temperatures than smaller bees because their large bodies covered with dense fur retain body heat better. Queens can fly at near-freezing temperatures and the smaller workers at 50°F. A bumblebee averages 450 flower visits per hour—more than 7 flowers per minute—and works several hours more daily than a honey bee.

The bumblebee's larger body size also means a longer tongue to obtain food from tubular flowers, and more hair to hold pollen dust. Bumblebees depend heavily on pollen for food and so will visit nectar-less flowers, such as tomato, that honey bees shun.

Because bumblebees are such reliable pollinators, moving so much pollen around, more pollen is deposited or flowers. Up to point, this means more plant eggs are fertilized; in turn more seeds develop and the plants yield larger and juicer fruits. For a flower like the tomato, with a floral design making it difficult to self-pollinate, the bumblebee is the perfect match.

Bumblebees are also the champs of buzz pollination. Some flowers, such as the tomato, require quite last vibration (equivalent to that of an electric toothbrush) to release their pollen. Honey bees are too small to create that, but bumblebees can. Bumblebees grab hold of the flowers with their jaws, then shiver their flight muscles while their wings are folded against their body. With no drag created by flapping wings, the bumblebees can vibrate twice as fast as honey bees, between 300-400 Hz. This causes the flower to shake enough to shoot pollen out, dusting the bumblebees. Then the bumblebees groom themselves of the pollen, even during flight, and store it on their hind legs in a spoon-like indentation where it is taken back to the nest to feed the bumblebee larvae. However, the bumblebees cannot groom themselves of all of the pollen. The pollen deposited at the base of the bee's legs or between the thorax and abdomen is too difficult to groom, especially during flight. Consequently, some of the pollen dust ends up on the next flowers visited.

BUMBLEBEE LIFESTYLE

The lifestyle of a bumblebee queen differs markedly from that of the honey bee. Unlike honey bees, bumblebee workers don’t hibernate over winter; instead, just the bumblebee queens hibernate. Then in the spring each queen searches for a nest site, investigating old rodent nests in grass tussocks or burrows in the ground.

Good bumblebee habitat is meadow with a variety of flowers available, or fields lined with thick grasses. A good nest site will already be supplied with hair, dry grass, feathers—insulation to make the nest warm and dry. Then the queen shapes the insulation into a tennis-ball size mass with a chamber inside, provisioned with a large lump of pollen and a wax honey pot.

Once the housework is done, the

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LEFT: Like palace guards, the stamens stand in a circle around the pistil (with ovary within) forming a tube-like structure with an opening only at the exposed end. The pollen is firmly attached inside the anthers, capping the stamens. Something has to shake the stamens to release the pollen through pores in the anthers.

ABOVE: A bumblebee investigates tomato flowers. Tomato flowers hang from the plant, with stamens bearing pollen pointing outward or downward; consequently the pollen doesn't naturally fall on the stigma (which is surrounded by the stamens and is the gateway to the floral ovary).
queen lays about 10-12 eggs on the pollen lump. Even in cool spring temperatures, she can incubate the eggs at a constant 86-90°F by shivering her flight muscles.

In a few days, the bumblebee larvae hatch and start eating the pollen. Resembling maggots, the bee babies are just eating machines. Consequently, the queen is busy both restocking the provisions and regulating nest temperature. Typically her work requires about 600 mg of sugar each day, which equals visiting as many as 6,000 flowers. It takes about 3-5 weeks to raise the baby bumblebees to adults.

BUMBLEBEES AT RISK
Unfortunately, just as honey bee populations are in decline, so are bumblebee species. This is due to combined effects of diseases, altered habitat, pesticide use, invasive species, and climate change.

In North America, comparison of historical distributions of eight Bombus species (>73,000 museum specimens) versus current distributions (U.S. survey with >16,000 specimens) showed that the range of four species—the American bumblebee (B. pensylvanicus), the yellow-banded bumblebee (B. terricola), the western bumblebee (B. occidentalis) and the rusty-patched bumblebee (B. affinis)—has shrunk by a whopping 23-87 percent.

CONSERVING BUMBLEBEES
What then can be done now to mitigate bumblebee declines, thus ensure natural pollination? Wild bumblebees need a supply of pollen and nectar over their entire brood season, undisturbed nesting sites and hibernation sites. Nurturing bumblebee populations is similar to promoting other beneficial wildlife. Unmown margins around fields sown with a mixture of wildflowers, agricultural legumes and tussocky grasses attract the greatest abundance and diversity of bumblebee species. If a crop (such as tomato) doesn’t provide nectar, then bumblebee colonies need an additional nectar supply which can readily be provided by wildflowers.

Will nurturing wild bumblebees pay off? In California fields, wild bees have increased cherry tomato production, and wild bumblebees were a primary visitor when the tomato fields were within about 0.2 miles (or 1,000 feet) of natural habitat.

Home gardeners can also help by providing shelters for bumblebees. A bumblebee colony needs a good nest site, plenty of food over the summer, and safety from predators and parasites. Queens will investigate dark, dry, warm holes, and make their home in a nest box if it suits their taste.

A nest box must be weather tight to keep the larvae warm and dry enough to deter mold and fungi growth. The box needs ventilation holes with fine screen to keep out ants, small drainage holes in the bottom, and nesting material such as upholsterer’s cotton.

The queen needs nectar and pollen as soon as she emerges in the spring. That may require giving the spring-flowering weeds in the lawn, like dandelions, a break. “What we see as weeds is dinner for a pollinator,” noted May Berenbaum, entomologist and coordinator of the University of Illinois’ Bee Spotter program, which monitors bee populations by identifying bee species from photos throughout Illinois. Talking with the St. Louis Beacon, she emphasized, “A perfectly green, manicured lawn is a biological desert for pollinators.”

Furthermore, often the flowers in home gardens are introduced species, or horticulturally modified in ways that don’t match the native bees’ needs. For instance, cultivars may be selected for flowers with double the number of petals—usually a super-sized flower. But extra petals may interfere with the pollinator’s access to nectar and pollen. More petals may also have a production cost in the form of less nectar and pollen. In general, such flowers reduce the diversity of insect visitors, and in turn, seed production is likely less. That gives home gardeners, especially the tomato lovers, another reason to think twice about when and what flowers are available to pollinators.

For more information about bumblebees, the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation recently published a free document entitled “Conserving Bumble Bees: Guidelines for Creating and Managing Habitat for America’s Declining Pollinators,” which provides color identification guides of bumblebees, lists of flowers by season and region that attract bumblebees, and nest box instructions. To access this document, visit: www.xerces.org/bumblebees/guidelines/.

NANCY STAMP is a biologist at Binghamton University-State University of New York, researching the tomato and insects that use it.

LEW STAMP is a freelance professional photographer in Akron, Ohio, and is a dedicated gardener.
**Expert Pollinators**

The pollen is captured by the bumblebee's fur. By grooming in flight, she'll store it on her hind legs (visible as a tan lump in this photo) and carry it home to her young. In the inset photo, the flowers have tell-tale brown bruising on the stamens, left by earlier bumblebees grasping with their jaws while buzzing for pollen.
Opinion: Bumblebees in Trouble

Commercialization has sickened wild bumblebees around the world. Can we save them?

By Nancy Stamp | June 30, 2014

To keep them aloft, the wing beat of honeybees is 170 to 270 hertz (Hz). Yet while producing a soft humming sound, it is out of tune with flowers that require vibrations around 400 Hz to release their pollen.

Bumblebees, on the other hand, are buzz pollination pros, delivering the rapid vibrations to flowers that tomatoes, peppers, cranberries, blueberries and red clover—to name a few—need. Bumblebees also work harder and at cooler temperatures than honey bees, and visit nectar-less flowers, which honey bees shun. Thanks to bumblebee pollination, tomato plants, for example, produce more and bigger, juicier fruit.

In the early 1900s, to ensure pollination, growers using hothouses to produce vine-ripened fresh market tomatoes either strummed string tied to the stems or gently shook the flowers with a bit of rabbit's tail on a stick. After World War II, growers began using bee wands, similar to an electric toothbrush, to simulate bumblebee buzz-like action. But all of these methods were labor-intensive, requiring daily checks for new flowers. Then, in the 1980s, the Dutch were the first to commercialize bumblebees. With a trial-and-error process, they figured out how to turn off the natural winter hibernation of bumblebee queens, and turn on the egg production of the queens and the queen's care of the baby bumblebees.
Bombiculture is now big business (worth more than $70 million per year), with commercial colonies of European bumblebees exported around the world, including to Japan, China, Korea, Mexico, and Chile.

**Good for business, bad for bees**

While that was a welcome game-changer for the tomato hothouse industry, bombiculture led to transport and proliferation of bee diseases. Commercial colonies around the world have higher rates of infection, by such parasites as the trypanosomal protozoan (*Crithidia bombi*), the pathogenic fungus (*Nosema bombi*), and a tracheal mite (*Locustacarus buchneri*), than wild colonies. For instance, *C. bombi* is a gut pathogen that takes a serious toll on a bumblebee queen’s ability to establish a colony, and the foraging efficiency of workers and their survival. Normally, wild populations of bumblebees, with colonies highly dispersed across the landscape, have infection rates far less than 10 percent, but commercial colonies, having much higher density of bees, typically have rates of 20 percent. When commercial bumblebees inadvertently leave a hothouse during a foraging trip, they then visit the same flowers as the wild bees, invariably inoculating some with the bee diseases of the commercial colony. Research has shown that pathogen spillover from hothouses explains the rise of infection in wild bees, and its contribution to the decline in bumblebee populations. Such studies prompted the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in February 2013 to state emphatically that the global trade in bumblebee colonies for crop pollination has resulted in the establishment of bumblebee species outside of their native range and, in turn, the parasites from commercial bumblebees have been introduced around the world, with serious impact on native bumblebees.

Habitat destruction, pesticide use, alien competitors, and climate change also contribute to native bumblebee decline. A North American study of eight bumblebee species showed that the range of four of them has shrunk by 23 percent to 87 percent. This year, the IUCN reported that 16 of 68 bumblebee species in Europe, including three important crop pollinators, are now at risk of extinction.

But it is not too late to help native bumblebees. First, we can support bumblebee habitats. The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation and the Bumblebee Conservation Trust have released handy resources, such as making flowers bumblebees like available over spring and summer and conserving good nest sites. Second, hothouse growers should use native buzz pollinators rather than import non-natives. Australia, for example, which has no native bumblebees, does not allow importation of non-native bees. There, native buzz pollinators, such as the blue-banded bee, are being developed for commercialization. Third, the commercial bee industry must certify that colonies are pest-free. Although robotic bees have been suggested as a remedy to the world-wide declining populations of pollinators, robotic bees are not a viable solution for crop pollination. Such pollination would require huge armies of robotic bees, directed by sophisticated computer programming, an expensive proposition for most of the world’s growers. And it would not save thousands of other plants that depend on bumblebees.

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*Nancy Stamp is a professor of biological sciences at Binghamton University–State University of New York, employing as a research system tomato and insects using tomato.*
Is this the death of privacy? Your every conversation (and glance) streamed live, security hopelessly compromised – and open season for stalkers: Google glasses with video cameras have come here... and may change the way we live forever

- Claudia Joseph tests Google Glass on the streets of London
- She was able to film in changing rooms, in banks and magistrates court
- Only the Royal Courts of Justice spotted the Google glasses

By CLAUDIA JOSEPH
PUBLISHED: 16:27 EST, 28 June 2014 | UPDATED: 06:50 EST, 29 June 2014

I'm standing in Top Shop as jostling customers browse for handbags and flick through rails of summer dresses. They are not looking at me, but I am watching them.

In fact, I am photographing them taking video clips and wiring them back to the office. I make a call without lifting a finger. I send a discreet email. But I attract no attention because the camera, the screen and the phone are virtually invisible. They are just a tiny component of my high-tech glasses.

I am looking at the future and the people around me are oblivious. The long-awaited but controversial Google Glass has arrived in Britain, and I am testing what it can do – and not just in terms of making calls or capturing high-quality snaps to show my friends. I am also seeing how it stretches long-cherished ideas of privacy to breaking point. And beyond.

'Okay Glass': Claudia Joseph manages to prowl London's streets, banks and cinemas wearing Google Glass virtually undetected, filming and taking pictures as she goes
Today we are fearful of terrorists, alert for paedophiles and edgy about the all-consuming surveillance of major corporations and the state. We have never been so conscious of snooping and spying.

Yet I have been in the law courts, loitered outside a primary school, queued for changing rooms, snooped around a bank – and with one exception only, my strange new glasses have provoked not so much as a glance of enquiry.

More...
- Google Glass wearers warned they face fines for secret filming under data protection laws
- The phone you can upgrade in a second: Google reveals DIY handset that allows you to clip in cameras, batteries and sensors when you need them - and say it could be on sale by January 2015 for just $50
- Apple's iWatch will monitor your SWEAT - and is already being tested by Kobe Bryant and other sports stars

The attractions of immediate communication and instant imagery are powerful; human knowledge is expanding at an unimaginable rate. But from smartphones to drones the size of insects, the pace of electronic change is now so overwhelming that experts predict a reshaping of society itself – a dystopian world in which our thoughts and movements are forever available to close family and strangers alike. A world with no private space.

Google Glass is at the forefront of this revolution – futuristic technology that has burst out of the laboratory and gone on sale.

The price, £1,000 is stiff but like most new technology will probably fall. A voice-activated cross between a smartphone and a pair of spectacles, it can take photos and videos, make phone and video calls, surf the internet, send emails, listen to music and update your diary, all while you barely twitch a muscle.

Happy snapper: Claudia is able to film while waiting in line at a cash point on London's Oxford Circus
Welcome to Britain: The privacy-invading Goggle glasses have now arrived in the UK at a price of £1,000.

At their new Kings Cross headquarters, Google staff showed me how to use the new device. Key to its operation is the screen, a tiny translucent prism suspended above the right eye. You swipe on the side of the frame to activate it and dictate commands starting with the words: 'Okay Glass.'

Everything is saved on a timeline, which is found by swiping forwards and backwards. To go back to the menu, you scroll downwards. The battery lasts about a day, or 45 minutes for non-stop video recording.

I'm a little nervous wearing them for the first time, but no one takes a second glance as I take the tube to Oxford Circus, in London's West End.

There is nothing obviously private on view in Top Shop. But what about the changing rooms? Would my fellow shoppers be uneasy at the recording device perched on my nose?

Apparently not. I am unchallenged – it's a good job this isn't an open changing room, like at the gym.

What about more sensitive locations? Would bank staff spot me if I tried to film inside a branch where security is supposedly tight? First I film a cashpoint queue outside HSBC, then I go inside. They seem oblivious. 'Can I help you?' they ask, before guiding me to the tills. So much for security.

Surely there would be more vigilance at a primary school – the sort of place where parents have found themselves banned from filming their own children at sports days. I sit outside the entrance and watch through the glasses as the children arrive. I am barely noticed.

My local cinema pays no attention when I catch a screening of the newly released Jersey Boys. Wearing the glasses, I buy a ticket, sit down and decide to film the opening credits.
At least Google Glass is visible, unlike the tiny surveillance cameras now available online, although the time will come when high-tech specs are indistinguishable from any other pair of glasses. In fact, the time will come when almost anything could contain a recording device.

![Image of a woman using an ATM](image1)

Pin-ned down: Google Glass is so discreet no one notices, allowing Claudia to capture images of people using the cash machine unchallenged.

![Image of a stairway](image2)

Taking the credit: No questions were raised when Claudia wore the Google Glass to a screening at her local cinema, so she could record the opening credits undiscovered.
I take matters a step further, and visit a magistrates' court, choosing a seat in the public gallery. The rules here are draconian: there must be no pictures or filming or recording. So I keep Google Glass switched off. But magistrates, lawyers, clerks and ushers pay no attention to my headwear.

Only the Royal Courts of Justice were on the ball. The metal detector in the foyer fails to pick up Google Glass. But as I begin to walk in, a guard turns to me and says: 'Is that a camera? You will have to leave those here, if you want to go in.' I am bang to rights – for once.

Google claims the glasses bring people the technology they need 'without distracting them from the world around them'. Glass has been featured in Vogue's fashion pages, attracted the porn industry (Google banned an app called Tits and Glass), been spoofed by the Simpsons (as the Oogle Goggles) and worn by Prince Charles and Sarah Jessica Parker.

There is no doubting the radical potential. Shafi Ahmed, a surgeon at the Royal London Hospital, broadcast live video of him operating to 13,000 medical students using Google's specs.

But they are also thought to be behind the footage of One Direction's Zayn Malik apparently lighting up a joint.

In America, some shops and cafes have banned the device, while critics have branded wearers 'glassholes'.

Google has released an etiquette guide stating, rather obviously, that 'standing alone in the corner of a room staring at people while recording them through Glass is not going to win you any friends'.

'Take them off: Although the Courts of Justice metal detector failed to recognize the glasses, officials were quick to spot the camera
'We designed Glass with privacy in mind,' says a Google spokeswoman. 'The fact that Glass is worn above the eyes and the screen lights up when it is activated clearly signals it is in use and makes it a fairly lousy surveillance device. '

'There are other ways to record people such as pin cameras. Glass isn't one of them.'

She is right. There are tiny remote-control drones that can manoeuvre like an insect, and contact lenses, under development by Google, that are capable of taking photos.

Driverless cars will record our every journey. Computerised watches, already in development, will monitor our state of health. Fridges will inform a central computer when we're low on milk.

Finally stopped: Only at the Royal Courts of Justice is Claudia asked to remove her glasses
At a more basic level, cloud technology can already let friends, family – and hackers – know where you are and what you’re up to. And while it is heartening to know we can be tracked and rescued by mobile phone signals, it also means we are never truly alone.

Odd behaviour, curious facial expressions, stray looks – these are increasingly captured and broadcast in myriad forums, from Facebook to YouTube. Imagine that five-fold – or 25-fold.

And we already spy on those closest to us. Forty-four per cent of spouses now secretly check each other’s text messages, according to Oxford University research, behaviour that would once have been seen as a serious breach of privacy.

Neuroscientist Professor Susan Greenfield warns that human identity itself is under threat as electronic devices cause changes in the brain’s microcellular structure.

'It’s pretty clear that the screen-based, two-dimensional world that so many teenagers – and a growing number of adults – choose to inhabit is producing changes in behaviour.

Attention spans are shorter, personal communication skills are reduced and there’s a marked reduction in the ability to think abstractly,' she has said.

And that can affect even our closest relationships. ‘Google Glass raises the spectre of society’s loss of privacy, since you never know when someone might be videotaping or recording you,’ says Benita Roth, professor of sociology at Binghamton University, New York.

‘A huge concern is the lack of control people have over their own persona, as your online identity becomes an agglomeration of people you know, products you have bought and websites you have visited, leaving a digital trail followed by data-hungry corporations.’

In Dave Eggers’s recent bestseller The Circle, his characters’ every move is videoed and streamed live. Only the toilet cubicle is spared the camera’s all-seeing eye.

Is his fiction so far from the future we now face?

Additional reporting: Rob Waugh
Leaning In, Burning Out and the Humblebrag

BY MARTHA C. WHITE

Being overscheduled, overtired and generally overwhelmed has become something of an upper-middle-class badge of honor.

Critics argue that "having it all" has become synonymous with spreading ourselves too thin.

"The nature of bubbles is that some asset is absurdly overvalued .... The asset we’re overvaluing now is the notion of doing it all, having it all, achieving it all," author and speaker Greg McKeown wrote on a Harvard Business Review blog.

McKeown’s post joins a growing body of opinion pieces urging people — primarily women — mired in obligations and commitments to work, family, professional networks and volunteerism to "lean out" — in contrast to the titular advice of Sheryl Sandberg's movement to encourage female leadership — and add free time back into our lives.

"Time scarcity is a huge happiness killer," said Rajagopal Raghunathan, a professor of marketing at the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas at Austin.

So why do it? Why overload ourselves and then telegraph the inevitable burnout?
For one thing, we’re evolutionarily wired to seek out activity, according to University of Chicago professor of behavioral science and marketing Christopher Hsee.

In a research paper about "the need for justifiable busyness," Hsee observed that people have to be motivated to be busy, but almost any excuse will fit the bill. "People dread idleness, and their professed reasons for activity may be mere justifications for keeping busy," he wrote.

McKeown blamed "smart phones, social media, and extreme consumerism." He wrote, "We are more aware than at any time in history of what everyone else is doing and, therefore, what we 'should' be doing."

People tend to over-commit because we make the flawed assumption that our plethora of mobile devices and other high-tech tools will make us much more efficient than they actually do, Raghunathan said. "We overestimate the extent to which they're going to give us free time."

Seth Spain, an assistant professor of organizational behavior and leadership at Binghamton University, said when we log onto social media and see the most exciting parts of our friends' lives, we measure ourselves against that and feel compelled to compete. "If we have some sort of an unrealistic expectation of what success is, [we’re] going to strive for a lot more than is probably reasonable," he said.

"We are more aware than at any time in history of what everyone else is doing and, therefore, what we 'should' be doing."

Cue the humblebrag. "I think it’s a signal to other people that 'I’ve arrived and I have so many things going on,'" Raghunathan said.

"All of us realize it’s not in good taste to brag about how successful you are," he said. "Instead, you give them this proxy signal for being successful [that] allows us to act modest."

Spain pointed out that low-income Americans suffer from time poverty as well, often to a greater extent than their wealthier counterparts, but it doesn't become a status symbol.
"When you’re competing for more basic resources, it’s sort of antithetical to making not sleeping enough or how hard you’re working into a virtue," Spain said.

While more affluent Americans deliberately pursue this busyness, it doesn’t deliver the fulfillment we pursue because the more we have, the more we want. “Across the board, our answer to the problem of more is always more,” McKeown wrote.

First published June 27th 2014, 2:12 pm
Leaning in, burning out and the humblebrag

Martha C. White

June 27, 2014 at 2:17 PM ET

M. Spencer Green / AP

Our technology lets us multitask to the extreme, and we often want to let others know how productive we're being. But we're overloading ourselves and risking burnout, experts say.
Being overscheduled, overtired and generally overwhelmed has become something of an upper-middle-class badge of honor.

Critics argue that "having it all" has become synonymous with spreading ourselves too thin.

"The nature of bubbles is that some asset is absurdly overvalued .... The asset we’re overvaluing now is the notion of doing it all, having it all, achieving it all," author and speaker Greg McKeown wrote on a Harvard Business Review blog. McKeown’s post joins a growing body of opinion pieces urging people — primarily women — mired in obligations and commitments to work, family, professional networks and volunteerism to "lean out" — in contrast to the titular advice of Sheryl Sandberg’s movement to encourage female leadership — and add free time back into our lives.

"Time scarcity is a huge happiness killer," said Rajagopal Raghunathan, a professor of marketing at the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas at Austin. So why do it? Why overload ourselves and then telegraph the inevitable burnout?

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While more affluent Americans deliberately pursue this busyness, it doesn’t deliver the fulfillment we pursue because the more we have, the more we want. “Across the board, our answer to the problem of more is always more,” McKeown wrote.
Bacteria in Arteries May Be Link Between Stress And Heart Attacks

The long-held belief that emotional or physical stress can trigger heart attacks may now have a scientific explanation: In stressed people, heart attacks might be triggered by bacteria dispersing within artery walls, causing fatty deposits in those blood vessels to rupture and clog blood flow, a new study says.

"We don't believe you're going to have a heart attack every time you get excited," said study co-author David Davies, a microbiologist at Binghamton University in New York. "It's more likely that every time there's stress, some small amount of damage is done that weakens the fibers that hold such deposits onto artery walls, he said."
Heart attacks occur when blood stops flowing properly to the heart, leading to the death of heart muscle. Due to the scarcity of donor hearts and other factors that make heart transplants difficult, half the people who live through a heart attack die within five years.

The major cause of heart attacks is atherosclerosis — the hardening of the arteries — which occurs when fatty deposits, known as plaques, build up in arterial walls. These plaques can rupture suddenly, leading to the life-threatening clogging of blood flow.

Scientists thought that stress might lead these plaques to rupture, but they aren't sure exactly how it happens.

SEE ALSO: 10 Amazing Facts About Your Heart

The new findings show that bacteria live in plaque-covered arteries. Furthermore, stress may make these bacteria disperse and release enzymes that could destabilize plaques. The scientists detailed their findings online June 10 in the journal *mBio*.

Davies and his colleagues reasoned that atherosclerosis may be linked to biofilms — slimy fortresses that communities of bacteria often construct for shelter from antibiotics and the body's defenders.

The researchers analyzed samples of carotid arteries — the arteries that carry blood to the head and neck — from 15 patients with atherosclerosis. They found DNA evidence that at least a dozen species of bacteria lived in the walls of every arterial sample tested. Furthermore, each of the five arterial samples large enough for detailed microscopic analysis possessed biofilm deposits.

"Most of the bacteria associated with plaques are also associated with the skin or oral cavity," Davies said. "Some are also commonly associated with the gastrointestinal tract."

Six of the 15 plaques analyzed had signs of a bacterium called *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, which is commonly found in soil and water. "When *Pseudomonas* is found in the mouth, skin or gastrointestinal tract, it doesn't seem to cause problems, but in puncture wounds, it can be life-threatening, and in eyes, it can form biofilms and lead to blindness," Davies said.

In experiments, Davies and his colleagues found that biofilms of *Pseudomonas* that were grown in the lab, on the inner walls of silicone tubes, dispersed when they were given norepinephrine — a stress hormone responsible for the fight-or-flight response in humans — at levels that would be found in the body after stress.
"This dispersion is a coordinated response — most to all of the bacteria in the biofilms carry out this behavior at the same time," Davies said.

Since biofilms are closely bound to arterial plaques, the investigators suggested that the dispersal of a biofilm could also disrupt arterial plaques and, in turn, trigger a heart attack. "All of the samples we have looked at appear to be ticking time bombs — all those bacteria must have some medical consequence," Davies said.

The growth of bacteria in the human body is often limited by how little iron flows freely in the blood, but the hormone norepinephrine causes levels of free iron in the blood to spike. When free iron levels rise, the bacteria in biofilms disperse to pursue the nutrient. To disperse, the microbes release enzymes to escape from their sticky biofilms, and the researchers suggest these enzymes could also partially digest and weaken nearby tissues that normally prevent arterial plaques from rupturing into the bloodstream.

Future research is needed to confirm whether stress actually does trigger plaque rupture in humans.

It also remains unknown whether these bacteria simply take advantage of existing plaques as shelter within the body or whether they might actually help plaques develop and grow. "There's a lot of controversy and contradictory results on that subject," Davies said.

The scientists are now examining other bacteria found in plaques that demonstrate the same behavior. Moreover, they are also investigating which enzymes bacteria release when they disperse, and what effects these enzymes have on surrounding tissues.

These new findings suggest that when dealing with heart disease, "management of bacteria within an arterial plaque lesion may be as important as, or potentially more important than, managing cholesterol," Davies said.

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This article originally published at LiveScience here
The Quest for Meaning

The discovery of meaning in life and work.
by Lolly Daskal

June 15, 2014

We define ourselves in what we do and what we say and who we are and how we interact with others. Simply standing around and talking can turn out to be an important expression of the kind of person we would like to be—or not to be.

When we are gossiping, we are talking about a person or group who, if they were present, would not appreciate what we had to say. A 2008 study published in Scientific American suggests that human beings are hardwired to enjoy gossip—it’s part of our biological makeup as social beings.

As social human beings, we naturally enjoy gossip. Epicurus would classify gossip as a natural pleasure, but it’s not a necessary one. We could live our whole lives without gossip and we would not suffer, unlike sleeping or eating, but when we gossip we do add a little bit of pleasure to our own lives.

The benefits of gossip:

According to psychologist Colin Gill, gossiping “boosts levels of positive hormones like serotonin, reducing stress and anxiety.” When we gossip, we’re taking an interest in what other people have to say and vice versa, and bonding with them makes us feel happier, releasing those feel-good chemicals.
David Sloan Wilson, a professor of biology and anthropology at the State University of New York at Binghamton and the author of Darwin’s Cathedral, a book on evolution and group behavior, says, “When two or more people huddle to share inside information about another person who is absent, they are often spreading important news, and enacting a mutually protective ritual.”

The down side of gossip:

While gossip does have its benefits, there are good arguments to be made against it:

Gossip excludes. We love the feeling of belonging, and gossip is a powerful way of establishing an “us”—but at the exclusion of the “them.”

Gossip ruins reputations. A reputation is hard to build, but once broken it’s even harder to repair. Gossip often happens without all the facts and reasons and circumstances, but with the authority of truth.

Gossip pulls rank. Gossiping gives us a false sense of moral superiority. As Nietzsche points out, the feeling of rank is one of the most basic human instincts. To gossip about someone is to elevate yourself above him or her.

Gossip is morally questionable. The German term "schadenfreude" means taking pleasure in the pain of others. And we do take a strange sort of pleasure in discussing the suffering of others. It may be a fact of human psychology, but it’s morally unsound.

Gossip creates herd mentality. Gossip often leads to groupthink, which occurs when a group makes faulty decisions because of group pressures. We are especially vulnerable to groupthink when we are with those from similar backgrounds, when the group is insulated from outside opinions, and when there are no clear rules for decision making. The worst kind of human behavior can result when we start letting herd mentality settle the question what is true or what is false, what is right and what is wrong.
So should we gossip or not?

Gossip can bind us, protects us, make us feel good, create intimacy—but ask yourself:

*Do you trust those who speak about others?*

*Do you admire those who exclude others?*

*Do you respect those who feel superior to others?*

*Do you esteem those who delight in others’ suffering?*

*Do you want to follow those who follow a herd mentality?*

The way we talk about others can have a tremendous moral force—not only on our character and development but within the society around us.

If you think of your conversation as act of morality—a morality that brings us together to help one another and not cause harm, when you ask yourself whether gossip is OK the simple answer is: **probably not.**

As the old aphorism says, **strong minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; weak minds discuss people.**

**The Quest for Meaning:** We should live our lives representing who we are and treating others as we would wish to be treated.
Live suspects in Moncton, Calgary mass killings may shed light on motives, experts say

By Steve Merl | June 11, 2014
The two mass murders that have rocked Canada in the last three months have something fairly rare in common: In both cases the alleged killers were captured alive.

When it comes to mass murders it's often impossible to ask the perpetrator that crucial question: Why did you do it?

Often as not, they are killed by police or kill themselves. It leaves investigators trying to piece together the murderer's motivation from clues they left behind and interviews with family and friends.

While police, criminologists and social scientists find common factors among mass murderers — sometimes dubbed rampage killers — they have trouble zeroing in on precisely what pushed them over the edge. It's easier when you've got a live killer you can talk to.

University of Calgary student Matthew de Grood was arrested April 15, not far from a house near the university where five young men and women were stabbed to death at a late night party.

De Grood was declared fit to stand trial last month on five first-degree murder charges after a 30-day mental assessment but was being held in a forensic psychiatric facility until his next court appearance in July.

Then last week, Justin Bourque was captured in a massive 30-hour manhunt following the shooting of five police officers by a man dressed in camouflage and toting a rifle and shotgun.

Bourque made an initial court appearance Friday on three counts of first-degree murder and two of attempted murder. No psychiatric evaluation has been ordered.

It's useful but not essential to have the surviving killer to help complete to picture of the crime, says Neil Boyd, director of Simon Fraser University's School of Criminology.

"With a lot of these crimes we have a good deal of data to go on; demographic characteristics, we have some sense of the motive from what they left behind," Boyd told Yahoo Canada News.
“Most people who commit homicide are people who have few social skills, often few intellectual skills, probably more often than not backgrounds of abuse and neglect.

"Having a capacity to speak to them after the fact can be useful, but I don’t think it’s critical to understanding what’s gone on in these cases."

That negative background is true of a lot of people in society but most don’t explode in a killing frenzy, said Mary Muscari, a criminologist and forensic nursing specialist who’s researched dozens of revenge-motivated mass killings.

“What is it that does push some of them to the point of actually killing?” said Muscari, an associate professor at Binghamton University’s Decker School of Nursing in upstate New York. “That’s what we’re missing.”

About half the 43 revenge mass murders Muscari looked at ended in the killer’s death.

Being able to question a living killer improves the odds of understanding what might have triggered the rampage, Muscari said in an interview.

“A lot of them don’t fully understand why they did what they did,” she said. "They’ll give you the overlying motivation, what triggered the revenge."

Research into the root causes of anti-social behaviour pinpoint the interaction of a number of complex factors, said Karlen Lyons-Ruth, professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School's department of psychiatry.

They include emotionally distanced parenting in the first two years of life, childhood abuse and "role confusion with the parent in childhood and disorientation and role confusion when interacting with the parent in adolescence," Lyons-Ruth said via email.
"These effects are documented in the scientific literature but not specific to rampage killers," said Lyons-Ruth, whose own research does not focus on rampage murderers.

Mass killers tend to be "lifelong losers," said Muscari.

"They've had a lot of things that have gone wrong, and a good number of these things they've caused themselves but have that [they place] external blame for it," she said. "But again, a lot of people like that don't become shooters. So we are still missing that piece."

Revenge fantasies are an important part of that worldview, involving specific individuals, institutions or just society in general, which has screwed them over. At some point, though, the fantasy becomes a real-world plan they feel compelled to fulfill.

Some mass killers may exhibit psychotic characteristics but are still able to plan and carry out complex attacks.

"We know that none of these shooters just all of a sudden go off," said Muscari.

"They're all pre-mediated and they're all well planned. The level of planning depends on the offender that you're dealing with. It's as good as their own intelligence and imagination."

The revenge scenario seems common to all suicidal mass killers, sociologist Randall Collins of the University of Pennsylvania told Yahoo Canada News.

"They feel humiliated by a particular institution and want to show it that they can present oneself as a violently dominant person," Collins said via email from Berlin, where he's teaching at the city's Free University.

"They never plan for an escape. It is true that a few of the youngest ones simply gave up and were taken alive."

That's generally true of school and workplace shootings, said Collins, but may not be the case in the Calgary and Moncton killings.
"Typically these kinds of rampages emerge suddenly, without planning," he said.

"Often it happens that one thing sets it off, then the perpetrators go on from there, caught up in the momentum of what they are doing. Presumably we would find this out from interviews afterwards." Associations can also play a part, said Boyd. We're learning, for instance, that Bourque shared a love of guns, antipathy to police and authority generally and a dark view of the world with some of his friends.

Boyd also noted the man and woman who gunned down two police officers and a Wal-Mart shopper in Las Vegas on Sunday before killing themselves were connected to anti-government extremists. They also apparently turned up previously at a highly publicized standoff between a Nevada rancher and the U.S. government over unpaid grazing fees.

"You get these like-minded people together and they can act as catalysts for one another," said Boyd.

This kind of association is more common today than before the advent of the Internet, Muscari said, because it creates a community of like-minded people on the web.

"I'm not alone, so that normalizes it," she said, adding it's quite prevalent among sex offenders. "It's almost like group therapy." Yet in Bourque's case, many friends said he showed no signs of trouble, at least until a few months ago. What changed?

"He's alive, so that's something that can be explored," said Boyd.

"Was there some kind of mental illness, some kind of trigger for this change?"
A new research explains how stress, fear or over-exertion can lead to heart attacks in some people.
According to researchers at the Binghamton University, Binghamton, stress or over-exertion release hormones that rupture bacterial biofilms on blood vessel walls. The bacterial colonies are closely attached to the plaque and their dispersal leads to the plaque being released into the bloodstream, causing a heart attack.

Biofilm is a slimy layer made by bacterial colony. This layer keeps the bacterial colony intact and helps the colony cling to a surface. "Our hypothesis fitted with the observation that heart attack and stroke often occur following an event where elevated levels of catecholamine hormones are released into the blood and tissues, such as occurs during sudden emotional shock or stress, sudden exertion or over-exertion" said David Davies of Binghamton University, Binghamton, New York, one of the authors of the study.

For the study, researchers looked at bacteria from diseased carotid arteries. They found that all plaque covered artery sample had bacteria with biofilms.

According to the researchers, these biofilms are resistant to drugs. However, the body releases certain hormones under stress that can lead to these colonies dispersing from the arterial wall. The bacteria release enzyme that can dissolve tissues that prevent the plaque from entering the bloodstream.

Rupture of the vulnerable (unstable) atherosclerotic plaque is a major reason for several acute heart events.

In the next part of the study, researchers used a silicone to test whether the hormones were really breaking the biofilms. The team added norepinephrine, which is a stress hormone, to the bacterial biofilms in the silicone tube.
"At least one species of bacteria - Pseudomonas aeruginosa - commonly associated with carotid arteries in our studies, was able to undergo a biofilm dispersion response when exposed to norepinephrine, a hormone responsible for the fight-or-flight response in humans," said Davies in a news release.
This Proves The Link Between Stress And Heart Attacks

Posted: 10/06/2014

Stressing yourself out is a phrase we're all familiar with, but how many of us take it seriously? If you allow yourself to consistently experience high levels of stress, you may be endangering your heart.

Scientists have found a link between stress hormones and bacteria that may explain how emotional shock or over-exertion can trigger heart attacks.

Scientists found that hormones released during stress caused thin sheets of bacteria called biofilms on arterial walls to disperse.

In the process, the bugs produce enzymes that may free clots from plaque deposits on artery walls into the bloodstream.
US lead researcher Dr David Davies, from Binghamton University in New York, said: "Our hypothesis fitted with the observation that heart attack and stroke often occur following an event where elevated levels of catecholamine hormones are released into the blood and tissues, such as occurs during sudden emotional shock or stress, sudden exertion or over-exertion."

The scientists grew different species of bacteria taken from diseased carotid arteries affected by atherosclerosis, the build-up of thick plaques on the walls of blood vessels.

They found multiple bacterial species living as biofilms in the walls of every carotid artery tested. Certain molecular signals can cause the biofilms to release enzymes that digest the scaffolding anchoring the bacteria in place.

The enzymes have the potential to attack nearby tissues, causing the arterial plaques to rupture and release clumps of material into the blood stream.

To test the theory, the scientists exposed biofilms formed on the inner walls of silicone tubing to the stress hormone norepinephrine. Levels of the hormone were similar to those found in the body following stress or exertion.

"At least one species of bacteria - Pseudomonas aeruginosa - commonly associated with carotid arteries in our studies, was able to undergo a biofilm dispersion response when exposed to norepinephrine, a hormone responsible for the fight-or-flight response in humans," said Dr Davies. Norepinephrine is also known as noradrenaline.

The freeing of clots caused by biofilm dispersal could trigger a heart attack, say the scientists.

The research, published in the online journal mBio, suggests that managing bacteria within an arterial plaque site may be as important as managing cholesterol, they add.
Putinism vs. The Global Obama: Or, Clash of the Titans

When President Obama was elected in 2008, his approval ratings around the world were extremely high in part due to the Bush-fatigue from the Iraq war, and his approval has remained relatively high through 2013, except in the Muslim majority nations in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. President Obama clearly does not lack vision and audacity. The question now is: How has Obama's America fared abroad in the past five years and is he in a position to bend the global arc of history?

In the aftermath of the Syrian genocide and Ukrainian crisis, the foreign policy challenges have put Obama in the hot seat against a traditional Cold-War adversary. Recently, two former presidential candidates, McCain and Romney have claimed that President Obama has looked weak against Putin's apparently strong-arm tactics in trying to reconstruct his motherland and some semblance of an emerging Eurasian union. Even though the president was elected to end the two long wars and congenitally prefers peacemaking, an American president who does not enter into a war may invariably be seen by some as a cultural wimp.

After the NSA scandal, the Drones controversy, and the sputtering "Pivot to Asia," the sheen was beginning to wear off the Obama world till Putin invaded Crimea and blamed the West for orchestrating a coup in Ukraine. While the Obama administration has been trying to pull-off a big foreign policy victory in the remaining years -- whether it is the Iranian nuclear deal, the Mideast peace process, ending the impasse on Climate Change debate, or the Immigration reform act -- with Putin's annexation of Crimea their task just became exponentially harder. With the Russian bear on the prowl, making the former Soviet states nervous, will Obama reclaim the trust in the American ideals and values around the world?

It is appropriate to muse openly as Ali Vazrui, the legendary African post-colonial intellectual of Obama's father's generation, has boldly predicted that Obama will go down as "a great man in history." However, will Obama become one of "the great presidents" with the passage of time? The elevation of Obama has been completed twice over by American voters of diverse backgrounds and, at least in spirit, by people around the world. Yet, many have been waiting with considerable, though cautious optimism for "the second act" of the Obama presidency.

y be it. The Crimean conflict may have created 'the perfect or Obama to show strong global leadership.

adigmatic moment of the American presidency, with the re-
s of the first Black president taking a quantum leap into the as receded into our collective consciousness, to be rude-
eyed by the specter of cyber-spying networks and the over-
security state. Suddenly, Putin seems to have pulled the ack into the 19th century, as Secretary Kerry said, and Huntingdon's "clash of civilizations," reminiscent of an earlier nister Cold War era.

ton argued that the primary axis of conflict in the future will g century old cultural and religious lines: "The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural ... The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future."

As we try to grasp Obama's evolving leadership style, it is instructive to compare him with Vladimir Putin. While Obama is a 'consensus-builder,' with a fiercely competitive and 'hawkish' streak, Putin is a statist, who exercises centralized power, with an authoritarian personality style. Obama was a Harvard-trained legal pragmatist, with great professorial and oratory skills, before he developed into an inspiring politician. Putin was a case-officer in the KGB before he became a political operator and the president of Russia.

Both were virtual outsiders before they joined their ranks. As a Rorschach test, Obama elicits fantastical and unbelievable projections from adoring masses as well as his detractors; yet on a whole host of social and cultural issues he has revealed himself to be an unreconstructed liberal. Putin as his biographers have described is a "man without a face," with a media constructed mythic persona, and nationalistic views about the Russian motherland, otherwise called Putinitism.

Obama believes in American exceptionalism, especially, through the "soft power" of development and diplomacy. Putin too believes in Russian exceptionalism, which he sees as antithetical to the Western hegemony, responsible for the defeat and humiliation of the Soviet empire. Obama has repeatedly claimed America is not declining, even though emerging economies in the Asia-Pacific region may be catching up with the developed economies in U.S. and EJ. Putin clearly believes, with the silent support of China and other BRICS economies, America and the West are declining.

Obama's critics argue that the president is a champion of "leading from behind," as if that is the cornerstone of the Obama doctrine, while his proponents have put their stakes in "nation-building at home." Thus, Putin may have rudely awakened Obama to "the return of history" by showing disregard for the rules of international law, raising the specter of previous World Wars.

The U.S. may have been caught flat-footed due to their mixed response in Syria, tightening budgets, congressional opposition, and an incomplete pivot towards Asia. However, Obama can no longer avoid the clash of the titans. If he is unable to contain and engage Putin, with verbal threats and mounting sanctions, it will redefine his second term and the presidency.
Achieve Road-Trip Bliss

Your car may be the best place to strengthen your relationship. So this spring, use these tips to hit the road with your gal.

BY RACHAEL SCHULTZ, APRIL 02, 2014
Traveling may teach you about yourself, but traveling with her may teach you even more: “You never really know somebody until you’ve spent hours in the car with them,” says Rachel DeAlto, a New York-based relationship and communication coach. Why? For starters, sitting 2 feet from someone for hours on end advances the dynamics of any relationship—whether a friend or a girlfriend.

But even if you’ve been together for years, drive-time can help strengthen your bond. “Sustained attention such as you would find on a long road trip encourages you to talk about your relationship, and that alone can improve it,” says Matthew D. Johnson, Ph.D., director of the Marriage and Family Studies Laboratory at Binghamton University in New York.

Key to the automotive dynamic is that there are fewer interruptions while trying to hold a conversation than in, say, a restaurant, or even your living room. The only distraction is really the background noise of the car—which may not be a bad thing. This low-level sound and the steady pace of driving may help you concentrate on the conversation at hand and have a soothing effect, says Carrie Keating, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Colgate University in New York.

Another major advantage: Talking without looking at one another. A 2013 study in Psychological Science found that holding eye contact during arguments or persuasion can actually make the listener less receptive to both the message and the messenger. Why? Eye contact can come off as aggressive when you’re talking passionately about something. Sitting side-by-side but looking straight ahead helps defuse that tension.

So how can you use your hours on the road to your advantage? Check out these tips on how to have the most honest conversation in the car.

Watch your posture

Sitting in a car naturally makes you moody: Joint research from Harvard and Columbia found that low-power poses—like sitting down with your arms crossed—lowers levels of testosterone, reduces your feeling of power, and increases your levels of the stress hormone cortisol compared to high-power poses like standing. Your play: offset the killjoy of sitting by keeping the conversation flowing and mood upbeat. This can also help avoid sending mixed messages to your travel companion: “When you’re in a car, even if you’re excited, your posture mimics that of being depressed—sitting, hunched, arms folded,” says Blake Eastman, body language expert and founder of New York-based research firm Nonverbal Group. “This can be confusing for the other person in trying to gauge your mood.” Check in with her if you’ve both been quiet for a while to make sure everything is alright. And pull over for a stretch—standing up and moving around can be a good mood-changer, Eastman adds.
Hold hands

Even though you’re confined to your own seat, holding hands or touching her leg—easier and more natural gestures while driving than in most other circumstances—can help strengthen your bond, Eastman says. “When you touch someone, it releases neurochemicals that create a bond with you and that person,” he explains. It also tells her how exactly you feel: A 2011 study from DePauw University’s Touch and Emotion Lab found that while women are better at communicating certain emotions than men, both genders are equally able to convey sadness, embarrassment, love and gratitude with a simple touch to the forearm. “Touch can help break any barrier of tension or confusion, so make an effort to mirror your actions with your emotions and conversation,” Eastman advises. This means whether you’re talking about where she grew up or why things have been off between you lately, holding her hand can help reassure her you’re interested and supportive.

Take detours

Beyond talking, sharing new experiences can bring you closer together, says Johnson. Luckily, road trips are ripe for novelty: Take the scenic route or stop at cheesy roadside attractions, he suggests. Not only will this keep the trip fun and exciting, but it’ll give you new things to talk about. Download the Roadside America app (roadsideamerica.com) to find wacky places—like the world’s largest ball of twine or a bar covered in pennies—wherever you’re driving.

Ask cliché questions

It takes time to learn all the history and personality traits of somebody, but being stuck in a car can speed that up, says DeAlto. “Guys sometimes feel like they need a list of prepared questions as a guide for conversation, but that doesn’t come off as natural,” she adds. Stick to the basics: Women are more comfortable answering the cliché questions right away. But ask questions you actually want to know the answers to: What sports did you play growing up? Why did you go to school at that university? What do you like to do on the weekends? Can’t think of any conversation starters? Turn to apps like Q Road Trip (doyouq.com) that help generate conversation starters for the car, DeAlto suggests.

Disconnect for the ride

We’ve become conditioned to turn to our phone when we’re bored, but one of the biggest blocks in conversation is electronics, says DeAlto. “Alter your environment so the only thing that’s happening is the conversation the two of you are having—which means no phones,” she advises. In fact, a 2012 study from the University of Essex in the UK found that when people are having a conversation, simply having a cellphone visible—without anyone even using it—caused participants to feel less connected and close to their partner. Researchers speculate the gadget reminds us of the wider network we could be connecting with, keeping us from focusing on the people right next to us.
Trade tunes

There can be pressure to pick the right song, but if you’re in the mood for it, she probably is too: Researchers at Stanford studied activity patterns in different people’s brains and found that despite their differences in musical preference and experience, they all had relatively the same response to certain songs. An earlier study by the same team found that melodies can help the brain pay attention, while the pauses between songs help your memory process and record everything that’s going on. Keep the music on low while you’re chatting, or take turns sharing songs to get to know her personality. Need some suggestions? Try one of Spotify’s pre-picked road trip playlists.

Hit the big topics

Car rides can be a great place to talk through complicated problems because you have nothing but time and can’t run away from the issue, says Johnson. Bring up the elephant that’s been in the room for weeks, but be sure it isn’t too heated: The driver has to use part of his cognitive resources for driving, and research shows we’re not as good at multitasking as we think, especially when it comes to emotional topics, Johnson says.

Stick to single-decision topics: Whose family you’re going to spend Christmas with is easier to talk through than trying to iron out every detail of your wedding plans. And stay positive: “Even if you’re not the greatest communicator, we’ve done studies that found your relationship can still benefit from a discussion by staying positive and interested,” Johnson adds. Airing your grievances with minimal anger and a soft tone can help avoid damage to the relationship, he says.

Plus, talking about heated topics in the car could help reduce emotional contagion—or the infectious nature of emotions, adds Keating. We often mimic one another’s anger or disgust, but without being able to see the other’s face, you’re less likely to get as worked up. If you’re discussing something emotionally charged and remaining relatively calm, it’ll rub off on your partner, and matching one another’s body language gives you a sense of togetherness, she says.