

Edition #2 | Tuesday, March 1

FROM MARY NICE

Exploring how to feel more alive at work

Hi Crew,

In December of 2020, I was basically an (undoped) Lance Armstrong pushing it on the Peloton. I immediately knew something was wrong, and I'd try needles, PT, acupuncture, steroids, medical massage, divine intervention, the nectar from the 4th dimension that a guru sold on IG (not really, but close).

It was an f'ing ruptured disc.

After a few fainting events in May of 2021 from the pain, I landed in the ER. Got surgery. And I was much better.

And damn it, a few weeks ago, **the pain started coming back a bit**. This happens when I go too hard. Don't listen to my body, etc.

But that's not the point of the story.

Last week, an unspeakable horror unfolded before us as Putin invaded Ukraine. The reality on the ground in **Ukraine is unfathomable to witness** from afar.

As I watched, I had a number of thoughts throughout the past week:

- This is so heartbreaking. These people are so brave.
- I should be more educated on this. Why am I not reading more about this, I should not be looking away.
- I should be doing more.
- And **why do I give a shit that my back pain is back?** There are literally people leaving their families right now to go off to most likely die. Sit down and shut up Mary.

As I repeatedly berated myself throughout the days, a gentle voice reminded me that **empathy is infinite**.

So as you go about this week and the heartbreak around us continues to unfold in different ways, know that **whatever you feel is valid**. Be cognizant of how that **feeling makes you act**.

Resist the urge to go inward right now, which ties in nicely to our topic for today - **why people'ing may be complicated right now**.

All my best,

Mary

All my best!

Mary

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[Last week](#), we talked about the drunk guy at the bar that may be taking over your brain. This week, I want to talk about why **people'ing may be hard right now**.

My sister called me on Sunday nearly in tears. She just landed for her first business trip since Covid. With two kids under 5 at home, it's been a long two years. She likes her job. And she LOVES her clients. And she couldn't figure out why her **anxiety was sky-high**.

I ☐ FEEL ☐ YOU ☐ SIS

So what may be going on here? Three things to consider depending on how you're feeling:

1. **Isolation can beget isolation** – When you're isolated, it can backfire and your body could start wanting MORE isolation, not less. Chronic social isolation leads to an **increase in epinephrine and cortisol**. This encourages animals to seek out social bonds. When you don't or can't, your body compensates so that you can live more effectively alone. If you get **particularly aggravated around people** now, this could be why.
2. **Introverts may struggle more** – While the research isn't particularly robust, some studies show introverts have fewer dopamine receptors meaning they are more **sensitive to large deposits of dopamine**...like the amounts that are produced during connection. Introverts may have a challenging time getting back out there as they have gotten used to **LESS dopamine – which is their trait preference**.
3. **Your brain isn't static** – It was thought for a long time that past about the age of 25, your brain can't change. Now, we know that that is not true. Through **neuroplasticity**, your brain can continue to change mainly through **the strengthening or weakening of the synapses between neurons**. The nifty graphic explains this. (source: [NICAB](#))



So what happens to the weakened synapses? They go away. And microglia is a major player. I think of **microglia like a Pacman eating the weakened synapses**.

Microglia increase during chronic stress – The **things that used to feel easy may feel challenging now**.

Ok, so why don't we all just become hermits? Well, while this introvert may love that, isolation is terrible for your health. Consequences range from **poor sleep** to depression to **accelerated cognitive decline**.

Tips to get back out there in the world:

1. **Say hello to people throughout your day - Fleeting moments** can help bring you out of social isolation in a low-risk way.
2. **Set your boundaries and ask for what you need** - It's a bit of a **new day at work**. Consider the work environment that will **help you take care of yourself** the most, and talk to your manager about it.
3. **Don't go balls to the wall socializing** - Research indicates that people who socialized more had better health, but only up to a point. Start integrating **more social interactions with the people you enjoy**.
4. **Say NO to days of back-to-back meetings** - Take control of your schedule and take breaks to be alone. Walk for 10 minutes with your thoughts. Do something, rest. Do something, rest.
5. **Be vulnerable and practice reframing** - Stop waiting for someone else to reach out (**looking at you Mary Nice**). **Make the first move** and counter your negative thoughts with positive reframing.

One more thing. If you manage your workplace rules and want to keep your employees, keep in mind that this **shit is hard on your people right now**. Be gentle. Don't come out, **finger guns flinging and team bonding on overdrive**, thinking people want to get back to normal.

Community Question

How do you build relationships with someone at work, virtually? - Jill

Thanks for your question, Jill! While so many of us are entering the world again, many workplaces are either staying virtual or adopting a hybrid model. This question is key!

The foundation for building relationships is **developing trust**, which can be particularly challenging in a digital world. I have worked wholly virtually with my team for the last six years... here is what has worked for us:

1. **Go first** - If you can be authentic and open up, your colleagues have the opportunity to follow.
2. **Don't jump right into work** - While some days, it can be frustrating to do the pre-meeting chit-chat, those moments are crucial to the **rapport of the team**. Use that time to **get curious** about your colleagues.
3. **Know what's going on in each other's lives** - Some of the people you work with will be more naturally private than others, but be curious about what's going on in their lives. Use open-ended questions, instead of asking "how was your weekend" ask "**what were you up to this weekend?**". Then, listen and ask follow-up questions.
4. **Be thoughtful about meeting platforms** - know when **video vs audio** meetings work best (if it's serious, I prefer video. If it's more casual, I prefer audio or **walking meetings**).

[Spot](#) (not sponsored, I just like it!) - I was recently introduced to this company that has an app for **walking meetings**. I LOVE walking while I'm meeting and this app made it super simple to have an agenda, transcribe the meeting, and take notes while you walk. The only downside is that the other person has to have the app too. I'm going to test it with some close clients and colleagues.

Sources:

- Brene Brown - [Comparative Suffering, the 50/50 Myth, and Settling the Ball](#)
- Andrew Huberman - [The Science of Social Bonding in Family, Friendship, and Romance](#)
- National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine - [How Does Neuroplasticity Work?](#)
- Journal of Neuroinflammation - [Social isolation induces neuroinflammation and microglia overactivation, while dihydromyricetin prevents and improves them](#)
- Pub Med - [Investigating the dopaminergic basis of extraversion in humans: A multilevel approach](#)
- SAGE Journals - [Is More Always Better? Examining the Nonlinear Association of Social Contact Frequency With Physical Health and Longevity](#)



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