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|  | CASWELL CORPORATE O COACHING COMPANY   *Making good companies even better – worldwide*  **September 2020 Newsletter #193**  2 | |  |
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|  | **WILLIAM E. CASWELL** | Three Little Friends ***We humans are what we are because evolution has brought us to this place; but not without the aid of three significant inherent chemicals, dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin, sometimes respectively called reward hit, happy drug, and hug hormone. How do they play roles in the way that people (especially your employees) behave? How do people react to events in their daily business and private lives because of these three friends?***  Described below is the outline of the three chemicals, laid out in tabular form. Some of these devices are hormones that send messages to different parts of the body through the bloodstream and some are neurotransmitters that send signals from one nerve cell to another. Some are both. Their roles are far more complex than the description below, which is made simple to help put forward our point.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **Name** | **Description** | **Very Simple Description** | | Dopamine | Sends signals to our ‘feel good’ reward centre as well as weighing the risk-and-reward factors. It also ties into our learning and memory centres | Reward that makes you feel really, really, good – when you have sex or eat chocolate | | Serotonin | Sends signals to our well-being and happiness centres. It includes learning and memory access | Makes you feel happy | | Oxytocin | Sends signals to our social behavior ports (as well as learning, memory circuits, sex and childbirth centres) | Makes you more sociable |     What is not explained is the mystery of human aggression, which, among other things, is wrapped up in the double face of oxytocin. To discover that role, and other influencing factors, let’s look a bit more closely at all three.  **Dopamine**  In my public lectures, I speak endlessly about dopamine, the reward chemical that says: “Job well done; do it again.” We humans cooperate because it feels good to help a fellow human – because that hit of dopamine gives us a great sensation when we cooperate. And we get a hit of (positive) dopamine just by completing our work successfully.  By contrast, if we make a mistake, we get a painful hit which for simplicity I will call anti-dopamine. It is 3 or 4 times as strong as the positive hit that tells us strongly to avoid that path next time. Essentially, it is focused on keeping us out of trouble. That is, we feel 3 times as bad if we lose $50 than we feel good when we find $50.  Dopamine helps us decide if a task’s risk-and-reward factors merit our continuing with that job or not.  **Serotonin**  Authors Brian Hare and Vanessa Woods[[1]](#footnote-1) tell us that serotonin played a role, over eons, in shaping our skulls into a globular form. The changes began when we coexisted with Neanderthals. This ‘happy’ drug makes us less willing to harm others. In fact, the authors postulated that homo sapiens won the  *Survival of the Friendliest*, Scientific American magazine, August 2020  humanoid race (over Neanderthals and many others) because of the friendliness factor due to the strong influence of oxytocin (see below).  **Oxytocin (friendly)**  Known as the social bonding drug, oxytocin floods through mothers at childbirth, facilitates milk production and is passed on through breast milk. Eye contact between mother and child actually creates an oxytocin interactive loop making both parent and baby feel loving and loved. The drug brings people to become more cooperative, empathetic and trusting.  Hare and Woods also postulate that our dominance over Neanderthals was not due to our greater intelligence but rather to our greater social tolerance. That is, because of oxytocin, we can assess strangers as belonging to our group whereas Neanderthals, chimpanzees, and bonobos (our closest ape relative) could not. For them, all strangers would be violently excluded. Accepting strangers into our human group provides more information and a broader outlook. It allows us to learn more. Today, we see that willingness to help strangers via society’s blood, organ, and charitable donations. Human diversity has expanded our horizon and helped us to grow to become the leading world species.  **Oxytocin (unfriendly)**  While oxytocin has been labelled the ‘hug’ hormone, it also creates in the new mother un-tempered rage if anyone threatens her baby. How can she enjoy the love of her infant if it is under threat? Oxytocin has been implicated in related forms of male aggression, too. While the male becomes infused with oxytocin to make him more loving with his mate, any threat to that partner, or his relationship with that mate, triggers his aggressive side (which we sometimes call jealousy) throwing him, often, into an uncontrollable rage. As our species evolved, its increased friendliness brought in, simultaneously, a new form of aggression. It made us particularly responsive to threats[[2]](#footnote-2). Our increase in friendly oxytocin during brain evolution increased the impact of unfriendly oxytocin on our behaviour, namely the willingness to violently defend against unrelated group members. That is, as we evolved to become more loving, we also evolved to defend those loved ones more strongly.  **Conclusion**  These three ‘friends’ can explain much about the often inexplicable behaviour of your staff members:  Praise for achievement triggers **dopamine** to make employees feel swell as well as to feel terrible when things go wrong.  **Serotonin** keeps employees happy and positive.  **Oxytocin** makes employees ‘loving’ to corporate family members and it makes them willing to be friends with strangers. But oxytocin includes a trigger for a rapid defense mechanism whenever a threat is perceived.  To summarize: **dopamine** = thrill, **serotonin** = happy, **oxytocin** = friendliness (and rage).  Appreciating the triggers for certain behaviours in our staff personnel may make them easier for us to understand, accept, and handle.  Good luck with your awesome employees.  Bill  2 CCCC Newsletter #192, *Don’t Piss Off your Employees*, August 2020 outlines why tiny threats work against expected cooperation of staff. |  |
| *Bill Caswell* is an experienced coach of CEOs and executives around the globe.He is the author of 28 books, 22 of which are for CEOs. |

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)