

Former COO of Morgan Stanley Europe, May Busch, and Sevenshift CEO & Senior Adviser to McKinsey, Caroline Webb, discuss Caroline's new book, [How to Have a Good Day](#), and how to accelerate your time to career success.

M: Hi, it's May Busch here, and welcome. I want to introduce my friend and wonderful guest, the fabulous Caroline Webb.

Caroline is the author of 'How To Have a Good Day', which is a fabulous book. Caroline shows people how to use behavioral science to improve their everyday lives at work. She's been doing this for over 15 years, first as a partner at McKinsey where she's now a Senior Advisor, and now through her own company; she's the CEO of Sevenshift. So please join us in welcoming Caroline.

C: Thank you very much, lovely to be here.

M: Caroline, I'd love for you to tell us some of your great wisdom and insight, particularly around how we "create more time", or get more out of the time we have.

And then some insights about our relationships; I have so many clients that say, "I could do so much, except for those other people getting in the way, what do we do about them?"

Then, I find that so many of my clients are also dealing, underneath all of it, with confidence. We are all confident about some things, and not confident about others. So I'd love for you to talk a little bit about confidence.

Then, everyone please stay until the end, because Caroline is going to share with us the two sure-fire ways to have a good day, or at least a better day than you were going to have, right? You promised you were going to share.

C: I did. I will. I promise. Yes.

M: Yes, she always does what she says. You heard it here.

Okay, so let's start with this time element. As I said, you and I both coach a lot of clients, some of these are extremely senior people, as in, CEOs, or other C-Suite executives, and oftentimes, for my clients, they're taking on new, bigger assignments, and they go from doing a huge job to doing an even huger job.

And the one thing that they say is, "Oh my god, how do I have more time?"

C: Well, there are lots of different components to a good day. If you think about those days when you look back at the day and you feel great about it, it's usually some combination of three things.

One is that you feel like you have done things that matter to you, and second that you feel good about what you've done; whether it's because you've had amazing

conversations, or you've done your best possible thinking, or you've made a real impact.

Then there is definitely something about whether you have enough enjoyment and energy left in the tank at the end of the day. You know, whether you feel like going through it all again the next day.

So the book is gathered around seven building blocks that feed that definition of what a good day is, and sort of the general theme that sits behind all of my work, which is that we have a little bit more control than we tend to think. That's why it's a good place to start, to ask about how you create more time in a day, because it feels like it's the most fixed thing ever.

M: Well, we all have the same amount of time - I mean, I have 24 hours, you have 24 hours. It's finite.

C: Right, exactly. But you can feel as if you're creating more time in a day by thinking about how the brain processes information.

So, the way that this works is that if we think about the way that we juggle our messages and our tasks and our conversations as we go through the day. How much of the day are we spending kind of doing more than one thing at once?

M: Oh yes, constantly, I mean, multi-tasking, right?

C: Yes, so we think that a way to get through busy workloads, busy days, is to multi-task, because it makes you feel like you're getting more done, but the research is really, really, startlingly, shockingly clear on this. Which is that we actually slow ourselves down when we try and do more than one thing at once, and we make between two and four times as many errors. Other studies have shown that we make poorer decisions and that we get more stressed, and that it's much harder for us to be creative. So whatever your definition of performance is, you are doing less well. Which means, obviously that's not great, but going back to the first one, you slow yourself down, and if you're making mistakes then you're actually having to slow yourself down even further, because you're having to do re-work.

The little bit of science that sits behind this is it turns out that our conscious brain can only do one thing at once. So when we think we're doing things in parallel, what we're actually doing is switching from one thing to another, and we're doing it so fast that we don't even notice it, so we're not aware that our brain is actually having to switch attention from the email to the task, to thing we're reading, to the thing we're right. But it's doing it, and it's costing us a tiny bit of time and mental effort each time, so that's what adds up to the research suggesting that multi-tasking, far from making us amazingly productive actually really harms our productivity. Therefore, the quickest way to steal back time in the day and to get your work done more quickly, is to 'single task', as I call it, as much as you can.

M: Yes, I know you talk about that in your book, and it's just so hard for- You know, one thing is I'm always distracted by shiny objects, and I think many of our "achiever" clients are the same. Okay, so the first piece of advice is: single task.

C: Yes, single task. Of course, what that means in practice is when you're thinking about your most important piece of work that you try and take yourself offline, and that's not always easy. Sometimes it helps to start really, really small. Certainly, if you're not used to single tasking, when you first try and do it, and you maybe put your phone on airplane mode or you close down your browser-

M: I'm getting nervous just hearing you say that.

C: Right, exactly, you sort of twitch a little bit. I think, what you really want to set up here is the neuro-chemistry of achievement and reward, not the neuro-chemistry of, "I tried something that was way beyond me and I failed." So it's far better to start with 10 minutes, and see whether you can stay focused and concentrated for 10 minutes than to say, "I'm going to go offline for 90 minutes and it's going to be amazing," and then you find yourself freaking out after 15. It's better to start small and then build up; it's almost like you're building up the habit of single-tasking, which many of us have kind of lost.

M: Yes, it reminds me also of building up muscles; we can't just go in, lift 50 pound weights when you have lifted none.

C: No, exactly, and another good way to think about getting more single tasking in your day is to look at whether you can batch together similar types of task.

M: Okay, tell me more about that.

C: So, what I do in the morning is I think, "Okay, so what are my tasks today?" I think, "Okay, well these are calls, and here are the emails that I really need to write," not just the ones that are sitting in my inbox, but the three or four that are really important, and, "Here is the chunk of time that I want to spend on maybe the deeper thinking," maybe I need to get some writing done, maybe I need to... Whatever. Need to read something. I try and group these things together as much as I can, because I've found that if you batch your email processing, so blitzing it maybe two or three times a day, rather than two or three times a second, you will get it done more quickly.

The same with calls. I try and say, "Okay, well here is half an hour, and I'm just going to make as many of the calls as I need to," many of them are actually often personal chores, when you've got to call-

M: Right, phone the doctor and make an appointment, or-

C: Right, exactly. But you're asking your brain to switch less dramatically from a certain task to another task, and I've found that really speeds things up. Also, defining certain zones of the day when I know that I'm going to be best of doing email, or best off doing my deeper, harder work. That's also- You can't do that everyday, but if you have a sense of when the most ideal time would be, I find that I now tend to cluster together my meetings and calls mid to late morning and into lunch, so that my best thinking time is in the afternoon, being a late night person.

M: Oh, interesting, because my best thinking time is in the morning. Ah, right.

C: You've got to know yourself.

M: Okay.

C: So you're going to be more productive overall if you start to notice when you're at an intellectual peak; do your most complex work then, create that bubble around yourself so that you are offline. If you do need to actually do some internet research, then at least bundle it together so that you're not mixing that with whatever writing or thinking you need to do.

M: Yes. So, not that I'm looking for little pats on the head, but can I be proud of myself that the other day I turned off my email and everything on my laptop and all that was open was my Word document, because I had to write something. Was that good?

C: Love it. Yes, it's really, really good. In fact, actually, even with your to do list, when you think about it, you might have 20 things on your to do list, or 400, whatever. If you have that open in front of you, it's going to be distracting. Actually it's more helpful just to keep in front of you whatever is the current task, and for the day, to keep in front of you whatever today's tasks are, because you're going to be slightly distracted, your brain has a limited amount of conscious attention, and you don't want to be frittering it away and distributing it across stuff that you don't have to think about right now.

M: Love it. So the message is: single task, don't multitask; find your optimal times of the day; batch your work into common-

C: Similar tasks, yes.

M: Similar tasks, and really just stay focused. It sounds really simple, but what I love is you said you can start with little bites.

C: Oh gosh, yes, you really do. You want to set up a dynamic where you're patting yourself on the back for any small achievements in this dimension, so that you feel like you want to do more of it.

M: Yes, and I got a pat on my head.

C: You did.

M: Alright, thank you.

So, in the productivity section of your book, and there are over 100 great pieces of advice that you can just put into action immediately from the book, my very favorite of those 100 plus is something that I have a lot of trouble with. It's about how to say no, and still maintain good relationships.

C: Yes, I think when we're talking about those moments, those days, maybe those years, when we feel overloaded, we've got too much to do, it helps to really be aware that everything we say yes to is a no to something else, right? Because we do have limited hours in the day.

M: I have to write that down, because it has to sink into my brain. You're right.

C: So, sometimes, we fear saying no because we don't want to have the difficult conversation, but as a result we're saying no to something that actually we should really be saying yes to, because it's more important. Maybe it's more important to something that's deeply meaningful for us, or maybe it's more important for other good reasons. But it's getting into the mindset that every yes has a no attached, and every no has a yes attached.

M: Yin and yang.

C: Yes, and actually there is a way of saying no that deals with the reason that most of us avoid saying no, which is that we don't like being unpleasant to people. Suppose you've committed to go to a meeting and then suddenly you have to pull out; you realize there's just no way you can honor other commitments that are really, truly critical to you unless you extract yourself. But you think, "Oh, I don't want to have that conversation."

There is a way of having the conversation, whether it's over email or in person, which is kind of all but guaranteed to ensure that you have a better conversation, and it goes like this. The way it works is that, if you're trying to pull out of that meeting, you normally say, "I'm so sorry," imagine you're typing the email.

M: Yes, "huge apologies".

C: "I'm so sorry, huge apologies, I'm so sorry, blah, blah," the challenge with that is that what you're doing is you're subtly putting the other person's brain on the defensive. When people are on the defensive, they are not going to respond in as expansive or generous or thoughtful a way.

M: You're right, of course not. I didn't realize I was doing that.

C: So what you do instead is, first of all you start with warmth. You often forget to do this when you're freaking out about saying no to someone. You start with, "I hope everything is coming together well for the meeting, it's going to be really great, important, blah, blah, blah." Then you say your 'yes', what is it you're saying yes to? "It's really important to me at the moment to..." I don't know. What is your yes?

M: Well, I was working on my book at that time.

C: Okay, right, so, "On my side, things are going great with the book, there is a lot going on, it's quite intense, and no complaints, but it does mean," and this is where your 'no' comes in, "It does mean that I'm having to make some tough choices about what I'm doing, and I'm so very sorry" – then you get to say sorry.

M: So I get to say sorry?

C: You get to say sorry.

M: But not first.

C: But just not at the top.

M: Okay.

C: And then you end with warmth – again, we often forget to do that. Say, “I do wish you all the best. If there is anything I can do, if there is someone else I can send in my place, blah.”

So it can be a tiny bit longer, but not that much longer. The trick is just that you don't start with the negative. People often say to me, “Well, this positive no,” as it's called, “Don't people kind of know what you're going to say?” And the answer is yes, probably, they've probably guessed that the reason that you're getting in touch or that you're talking to them is that you're needing to extract yourself from a commitment. But the very fact that you start with something that is warm, and then you talk about something that is important to you, in a positive way, it can't help but pique their interest. We know that that's how the brain's reward system works; it responds to a lot of things that are not at all what we'd normally think of as rewards, and it includes information and novelty. So, you pique someone's interest. It's not that they won't be disappointed, it's not that they're not sorry that you can't do this thing-

M: Yes, exactly.

C: -but your 'no' lands in a brain that's in a fundamentally different state, so to speak.

M: Right, it's open to that, and it's open-minded.

C: It's more open-minded, it's what, in the book, I call 'discovery mode' rather than 'defensive mode'.

M: Ooh, I like that, discovery mode, yes. Yes. We should all be in discovery mode more of the time.

C: Yes, so discovery mode is when your brain is more focused on rewards than on threats, and then very subtly saying the things you're excited about, even though it means you're needing to say no, it's enough to off-set the negativity.

M: Yes, and I think also, I know that when people have to say no to me, it helps if they explain. If they just say 'no' then I have to guess; do they hate me? Is it that my thing is stupid? Whatever it is. So I think that might also help.

C: Absolutely, and you're absolutely right, to explain. So the thing to try out is just to re-sequence your email, and not to start with 'I'm sorry'. Absolutely say sorry, but just start in a different sequence. I often end up typing and having to like, space, space, space, where I add in. Start with warmth – what is it you're saying yes to, and why is it important? What is it that you therefore, with regrets, with huge apologies, have to say no to, end with warmth.

M: Yes. Terrific. So that's my favorite tip. You should read her book and see what your favorite tip is, I'm dying to know.

So let's switch gears a little bit, because the other thing that I was mentioning many of my clients struggle with, is dealing with relationships at work. When they're going well, it's fantastic, but we all know that there are some really difficult people out there, and speaking from my own perspective, I know that sometimes people are

probably saying that about me, right? Any of us can be difficult about our special thing that we're difficult about, and we don't always know it. So, talk to us about how do you deal with difficult people? Some people are so difficult that you don't even want to raise an issue with them that you need to resolve, so what's your perspective on how, at work, can you build these relationships and handle these people that are just so prickly?

C: Yes, so the first thing you can do is simply work on what's going on in your own head, actually. So, letting aside whether you have a conversation with them, it's really helpful to know about something that in psychology is called the fundamental attribution error. The way this works is that if I show up to work and I am slow and a bit annoying, I know it's because I didn't sleep well last night. But if you turn up and you're slow and annoying, I think that you are inefficient and unpleasant. In other words, when we see bad behavior in other people we attribute it to bad character, a permanent state. When we see bad behavior in ourselves, we know that it's probably caused by circumstances.

So it really helps to remind yourself, something in the book I call 'good person, bad circumstances'. So if you see bad behavior, the chances are it's being created by difficult circumstances of some kind. It helps to also understand some of the neuroscience behind that, because again, when people are under even mild stress, work done by Amy Arnsten has shown that there is less activity in people's pre-frontal cortex, and what that means is, and many of you will know that the pre-frontal cortex is the seat of many of our more sophisticated and more delightful traits. It's the grown up stuff; it's conscious reasoning, it's self-control, it's planning, it's forward-thinking.

What we see is there is less activity in parts of the brain that are associated with self-control and reasoning and so forth. So, if you think about that, what that means is when people are under stress, they become kind of dumber and more annoying.

M: (Laughter) So at work we're really not at our best.

C: Right, right. I mean, the thing is, it's not just our imagination it's actually, you can see what's going on in people's brains when they're under pressure, or when they're in what I call 'defensive mode', when they're focused on subliminal, minor but still important threats in the environment, things that threaten to undermine their social standing or their sense of self-respect.

So you've got this reality that, 1% of the population, it's said, are psychopaths. That isn't great, but it does mean that if someone is behaving in a difficult way it's statistically unlikely that they're a psychopath. It's much more likely that something is creating this bad behavior, it's something that has put them on the defensive, it doesn't matter whether you think it's reasonable, the point is, it's way nicer to assume that someone is perhaps under pressure in some way than that they're evil.

M: Okay, so how does that help me deal with them, then, so I'm having more positive, or generous thoughts about the reason behind their behavior?

C: I like having a bit of fun with this actually, because you can consider what might be causing them to behave the way they are; you can be very earnest about it, and very thoughtful, and you can think about what difficult circumstances they may be wrestling. Or you can think, "Maybe someone threw up on them this morning." Maybe it's their baby, maybe it's their cat, maybe it's a stranger on the subway.

So you can just start to- It almost doesn't matter what the story is, at least in the first instance, because it changes your demeanor towards them. What we do know is that emotions are strangely contagious, so if you're annoyed by someone behaving badly, you will be radiating that at them. You might think-

M: Woah, this is an important insight, that it's contagious. So the way I react to someone that's annoying me is contagious back to them, and to others.

C: Yes, and behavioral scientists are not agreed on exactly what's going on here, but we do know that emotions sync up between people in as little as five minutes, sometimes studies show as little as 30 seconds, even when you're not talking to the person concerned, or even working with them.

M: Wow.

C: So, we do know that emotions are contagious, we're not exactly sure why, or how, but we're clear that it happens. So, by shifting your own mental state, you're not just making yourself feel a bit better, maybe amusing yourself, you're actually most likely changing your demeanor towards them, which is going to de-escalate the situation rather than escalate it. That's even without talking to them.

M: Okay. What if it's someone who like my client has a really difficult boss. This person's boss probably doesn't even realize that she's doing this, but makes this person feel really small. How do you handle that? Because it's hard to go to the boss and to say certain things. What do you do?

C: Yes, absolutely. So, a bit like the positive no, which is a little routine that you can follow when you need to say no to something, there are really tried and true routines that you can use when you are dealing with situations such as your boss has done something challenging, and you're either going to sit there and fume for the rest of your life, or you've got to find a way to manage it more effectively.

I wrote an article HBR about this, actually, just pulling out how to actually address a topic with a difficult co-worker, even if they're your boss, and there is this really nice little step-wise process, which is also in the book. It starts by first of all setting collaborative intentions; remember that you're contagious. So if you go in thinking, "I want to tell her what's what..."

M: "Give her a piece of my mind," yes.

C: Because of various other things we know about the brain, your ingoing state of mind will affect your perceptions. That's a whole big other topic, which is in Chapter One of my book, actually, because it's so fundamental. But our perceptions are very, very subjective. So your mental state when you go in; you may not be able to say, "I want

to come out of this thinking she's amazing, or he's amazing," but you can say, "I would like to feel at the end of this that I've done a good job of explaining where I'm coming from, or where I'm at." Maybe that's a reasonable intention to have going into the conversation.

Then there are just a bunch of things you want to do. First of all you want to pick out some facts, you want to be as factual as you can; this is especially important if you're dealing with someone really difficult. So, no emotion, no interpretation. So, not, "You always ignore me in meetings and don't let me speak."

M: Yes, even if you feel that's true?

C: Even if you feel that's true. What you want to say is, "Last Tuesday, in the meeting, I tried to get into the conversation three times, and I heard you interrupt or speak over me each time I tried to come into the conversation." The more that you can be factual and specific, the better.

Then there is a second type of fact that you can lay out, which can't be argued with, which is how it made you feel. You can say, "That made me feel really worried that my contributions weren't either valuable enough to be heard," or whatever. Then you pause and you say, "Tell me how you see it."

M: Right, so you ask the difficult person, "Tell me how you see it"?

C: Correct, because if you don't, you won't know what's going on in their head. They may not be as thoughtful as you would like in what they come back with, but you have to give that space to understand what's going on, because it gives you more information as well. Then you say, "What can we do differently?" or, "What would be a better way forward? What would be a good way forward?" There is a choice of words that you can get comfortable with, which does not mean, "Ahh, I hate this." It's quite dry; so you start with your facts, then how it made you feel, which can't be argued with, neither of those things can be argued with, then you pause, you ask, "How do you see it?" and then you say, "What's a good way forward?"

It's just a very safe route map; I've taught it to CEOs who are having a lot of difficulty with their board and they need to talk to their board in order to avoid being fired.

M: Wow, okay, that's a tough situation.

C: Yes. It's a nice step-wise process that can guide you through, even more powerful, as I say, if you set good collaborative intentions at the start of it, so that you're going into it in the right way.

M: Wow, and in this situation, I don't want you to divulge more than, or anything that you can't, but just, in general, do you find that if you're going to have this conversation it's better to have it with the entire group – in that case it would have been the board – or with one person?

C: No, much better to have it with one person, for all sorts of reasons, but the chances are that it's one person that you really want to talk to. In the case of the board it was definitely the CEO needed to talk to the Chair, and that was really the source of the

issue. So you need to do a bit of strategizing; what's your intention? What do you want to carry into the conversation? Which situation do you want to pick out to talk about? You may have 14 things that you want to talk to them about. I am often coaching my clients to say, "Pick one. Pick one, and think about how to talk about it in as dry and as factual a way as possible, and if you are unable to talk about it in as dry and as factual way as possible, pick another one instead."

M: Right, because you've got to be able to just make it about the facts. It's sort of like the old TV show Dragnet where the police detective Joe Friday asks the witness for "The facts ma'am, just the facts."

C: Yes, exactly. Exactly. And that's the magic of this process, you're talking about factual facts, as it were, things that happened that are not subject to interpretation. So as soon as you say something like, "You ignored me," you are in the realms of interpretation.

M: Or, "You were being a jerk," right? Because that's very judgmental.

C: Yes, or, "You interrupted me," or as soon as you use the word 'always' or 'never', they can argue against it. Then they also can't argue against how it made you feel, and there is an art there to not saying, "It made me feel incredibly irate." You know, it's helpful if you can pick an adjective that's saying, perhaps, 'frustrated', or 'challenged', or 'worried'. You know, something that is not immediately-

M: Or, 'concerned about my abilities'.

C: Yes, exactly, not immediately antagonistic, yes, exactly.

M: Yes, great.

So, Caroline, now, the third area that I know most of my clients, even if they don't start with this, find that what's underlying a lot of things is really confidence. Even the most confident people can feel unconfident in some situations, and frankly, I've discovered that some people that I think are super confident, I end up working with them and they say, "No, I really don't feel that confidence."

So, tell us about how do you actually feel confident and therefore be able to better convey confidence? How do you help people engage with the neuroscience on that?

C: Yes, so again, it goes back to this question of, how do you get yourself into a place where you're not on the defensive when you're potentially facing something really quite scary, like giving a big presentation. Those of you who were listening a little earlier will know that I mentioned that when people are under pressure, under stress, if it's negative stress that feels uncontrolled then it's possible to see that there's less activity in people's pre-frontal cortex, which means that it's just simply harder to think straight and to be as brilliant as we are when we're not under stress. We kind of all know that when we're put on the spot and we freak out.

M: Yes, that's why I can do the thing perfectly at home by myself.

C: I mean, right, exactly. That's why those performance differences present themselves. So, the question is, how can you keep yourself out of defensive mode? There are a few different, really quite interesting things.

So, one thing that has worked beautifully, even in quite challenging circumstances, is this idea of tuning into what your values are. This has been used with kids, adults, and it works in lots of different circumstances. So, before you're going into the thing that is worrying, or stressful, to take a moment – even better if you can take a pen and even write a few sentences – but to take a moment and think, “What really matters to me?”

Research has shown that even when the things that you value are nothing to do with what you're about to do, it puts you back in touch with the things that matter to you. We know that purpose, personal purpose, is a really motivating force in psychology, and psychological literature has been clear about this for many, many years. It helps you focus on the rewards in life and in the situation ahead of you, rather than the imminent threat. It helps you get some perspective.

So that's been a very interesting thing for me. I'm giving a lot of speeches at the moment and I often use that as a way of re-focusing myself on what really matters before I go on the stage. That's been fantastically helpful.

M: Yes. So, I'm just thinking of what might be an example of that. So, could it be something like, I might think of my family, my kids, and-

C: Yes, it doesn't even have to be work related. When I was writing the book, it's funny, you write a non-fiction book and you think it's going to be like a regular work project, except that it's an artistic project, so some of the ups and downs that you think of painters and artists having-

M: Michelangelo, or whatever.

C: Yes, cutting off their ear.

M: That was Van Gogh, but-

C: Yes, I know. There are some lows. There are some lows when you're writing a book; it's a very solitary experience.

So it really helped me to have the name of three of my clients on a post-it note in front of me, saying, “This is for...” So and so, and so and so, and so and so, just to keep myself focused on, “what is it I'm doing this for?” It's to help people live better lives and be at their best more often. That really helped me.

So that's confidence really in a broader sense than simply walking on stage, but it's still a sense of confidence that you're doing the right thing and it's worth continuing.

M: I really like that.

C: Anyway, that's one of several things that are in there, there's a chapter on confidence.

M: So much good stuff, and you're just reminding me of this Ted Talk that millions of people have now seen that is Amy Cuddy about your physical -

C: Yes, power posing.

M: Right, power posing, and-

C: That's one example of something that comes up several times in the book, which is the very close link between our mind and our body. I mean, it's hardly new, right? I mean, there are major spiritual traditions that have talked about this for quite a long time.

M: Yes, but some of those have not quite... They've hung out in the 'woo-woo' world, as opposed to the business world.

C: Yes, exactly. So, for example, when we're happy we tend to smile, when we are relaxed we tend to breathe deeply, when we are confident we tend to stand tall and proud. And the body doesn't seem to distinguish all that much between cause and effect; so, you turn those things around the other way and what the studies seem to suggest are that when we find a reason to smile, even if it's a bit lame, it boosts our mood. So studies have actually shown that fake smiles will boost our mood, which is kind of weird, so I prefer to describe it as 'find a reason to smile', and then breathing deeply, it does seem to tell our body that there is no threat in the environment, and therefore we can chill out. With power posing it's the same mechanism – actually there is some debate about exactly what the mechanism is, but the idea being that if you're standing proud and tall, you must be feeling confident. At least, that seems to be what your nervous system suddenly interprets to be true.

So, there is a nice story in the book, I have taught this stuff to many clients over the years, and one of them, Gemma, in the book, was in this very, very high stakes meeting, and she had this phrase, which I've used because it was such a good- The phrase she used to remind herself was to 'take your space'. So she had this going through her head the whole time, "Take your space,"

Not in a competitive way, obviously.

That was what she reminded herself to do, throughout the whole meeting, which she said she felt really helped her.

M: What I was just thinking about when you said taking up your space, and the smiling bit, particularly the smiling bit, is, do you think that it would be different for men versus women, this piece of advice, because some women will say, "Oh, women are supposed to be all smiley, but we need to look serious," and so forth.

C: Just taking a step back, I would say, there's a lot of advice in the book. I do feel that everyone is a little different. Everything that is in the book is in there because I've seen it work in a huge number of different cultural settings, I've seen it work with men and women. I also had a rule that I didn't put things in the book unless I used it myself.

M: Oh, good one.

C: Well, I just figure, you want to walk the talk and all that.

So, I'm really confident that what's in the book does work across contexts, including gender, and I've done a lot of work with senior women as well as with senior men. I think that for everybody, you need to just find your groove, find your rhythm. It's all about self-awareness; knowing yourself, and knowing what's going to give you a boost in the moment. For someone else it might not be smiling, I don't know. The research is fairly clear that it seems to boost people's mood whatever your personality, and whatever your particular demographic detail.

But for you that might not be your go-to technique. I mean, it actually is for me, but before I'm- it's funny we've ended up talking about this, but before I go into a big, high stakes situation, I will make sure to walk around and go and say hello to as many people as I can, I'll shake their hands. Sometimes people comment on this. I'll go and introduce myself to loads of people, and I'll smile broadly at them. So that's the finding a reason to smile; I don't just stand there grinning.

M: Right, right. I like that a lot.

C: Although technically, apparently it's supposed to work even if you do that, but still, I walk around and find a reason to smile. But for other people, it might be simply the walking around and making some kind of human contact with someone. Or it may be standing tall, or whatever. So I think the trick is to skate through the book and see what you feel intrigued enough to try.

M: So, just wrapping up here, at the beginning we promised that Caroline would reveal the-

C: 'Reveal' (Laughter).

M: The big reveal, right?

C: "Two weird tricks that will remove belly fat."

M: (Laughter) We did not promise that, okay. We do not know how to remove belly fat.

C: Like these awful ads.

M: Yes, I know, I get them too.

So, we're going to talk about how anybody can have more good days.

C: So this is the, 'if you do nothing else', two really neat ways of making a difference to your day, however bad it's shaping up to be, or however bad it was.

So there is something you can do as you're going in to whatever it is that's about to unfold, and it relates to the fact that your brain can only process part of reality, and the way it works is that what you tend to see and hear consciously matches what's already top of mind for you. So, some of you might know the phrase 'confirmation bias', and that is an example of something that is a broader phenomenon that is called 'selective attention', which is the fact that your brain can only consciously pay attention to a selection of reality. So you might as well make it a selection that is kind

of enjoyable, I guess, or at least be very deliberate about what it is that you tend to see and hear, and the simplest way to do that is just to be very conscious of what's top of mind for you as you're going into a situation.

So to be clear, if you go into a conversation with someone and you're expecting them to be a jerk, your brain will think: "Ah, expectation of jerk, I will make sure to see and hear every piece of evidence that this person is indeed a jerk," and if you doubt that, then there are lots of classic studies that are out there that are very compelling, but just know that, say if you've bought a new car, then suddenly you notice all the models of the same car on the road, that's your brain doing this same matching, saying, "Oh, new car, top of mind, now I'm going to see all the cars on the road that match that." I bought a pair of Nike sneakers for the first time about a month ago, and I came out of the Nike store in New York and suddenly saw half of New York appears to be wearing Nikes. I was blown away, I'd never noticed before. Why? Because Nike sneakers were top of mind for me. So what is it you've got top of mind, as you're going into the day? Be more deliberate about setting your attentions and deciding where you want to put your attention, and you'll see more of it.

So, even just saying, "I want to see three good things in the next five minutes," you'll see three good things that you otherwise might have missed.

M: Because your brain will be looking for that.

C: You'll be deliberately looking for that, because that will be top of mind, yes. Whereas if you spill coffee on yourself in the morning and you're in a bad mood, then your brain will tend to notice everything that confirms the world is a terrible place.

M: Just to share the intention that's been working really well for me, because I worry about lots of things. Mine is, and tell me if this is one of those that would work, is I'm going to be more relaxed about everything.

C: That's wonderful.

M: Is that one that fits into that?

C: Yes, and what does that mean you're paying attention to?

M: That means I'm paying attention- So, your coffee example made me think of it. So, if coffee spills on me, I'm just going to be more relaxed, it's okay, so what if I'm going to be on Facebook Live with coffee down my shirt? It's okay.

C: And it helps to go even one step further, and say, what is it you do want to pay attention to?

M: Ah okay, so I can improve on this.

C: Yes, so if your attention is to be relaxed, then you can notice everything in the environment that puts a smile on your face and makes you feel, "Wow, this is kind of fun, and groovy," and it makes me sound obviously 300 years old, saying the word 'groovy', but...

- M: Oh no, I understood it. Okay, so now, since we're just wrapping up here, what is the other piece?
- C: Okay, so, the other thing-
- M: Yes, there are two things that you can do.
- C: Right, so it's not just that your brain can only process part of reality, it can only also record part of reality. So when you look back on the quality of a day or a conversation, you remember two points. Not every single thing that happened, but your brain takes an average of the most intense moment, and the end, it's something known as the peak-end effect, in behavioral economics.
- So, it turns out you can't always navigate your way around the days to create the most amazingly intensely fantastic moment, but you can be a bit more deliberate about ending the day on a high, and that's going to drag up your average in terms of how you remember the quality of the day. Simply by asking yourself at the end of the day, "What were the good things that happened today?" I do this sitting on the couch with my husband at the end of every day, and sometimes we struggle to think of good things, but the very fact that we force ourselves to remember at least one or two small things, maybe more once we get started, means that we remember the day in a different way, it gets stored in our memory banks in a fundamentally different way. That is, again, pretty profound, actually, because if you can sort of edit your experience of reality by setting intentions, and you can edit your memory of reality by ending on a high, and doing a three good things review of the day at the end, you're pretty much shifting quite a lot of the way you're experiencing life.
- M: I love that. That's great. It reminds me a little bit of a gratitude kind of practice, what you and your husband are doing, thinking about the positives.
- C: Exactly, and the way you remember your days ends up adding up to how you feel about your life, so yes, it's worth doing.
- M: Wow, now that is really profound. Life is the summation of all our everyday moments. Wow. So, on that note, I just want to thank Caroline so much for sharing so much from your fabulous book, and if people want to have their very own copy of the book, how do they do that? And to hear more wisdom from you.
- C: So, the simple place to go is my website, which is carolinewebb.co – not .com, there are lots of Caroline Webbs in the world, I'm .co – Carolinewebb.co
- M: She's the best one.
- C: (Laughter) And you can get a few different things there. Certainly it will give you links to places that you can buy the book, and it's out in a lot of different countries, so it will take you hopefully to the right link for wherever you are. You can also, if you want, just to test this out a little bit, you can download a free chapter of my book, you can sign up for my monthly newsletter, and you can also download a free discussion guide, if you've already read the book and you want to talk about it with colleagues or friends. And what else? There's a quiz.

- M: Yes, I'm a sucker for a quiz, give me the quiz, Caroline, where's that? That's on your site?
- C: The quiz is on the website too, all of this is on the website, carolinewebb.co and the quiz is not just a 'have a laugh' kind of quiz, it also gives you the chance to download one tip from each chapter of the book.
- M: Wow, that is fantastic. So that's a really generous offer, and so we're all going to go single task now, right, go straight to carolinewebb.co, it's Webb with two Bs, and then if you want to get tips from me, I have a weekly blog as well.
- C: Which is amazing.
- M: We just love each other. And that's at maybusch.com/blog. So your lives are just going to be zooming along when you get this, and then my blog posts might help you a little bit more, but this is just fantastic.
- C: Thank you so much.
- M: So I just want to say, thank you all for being here and for sharing all of this wonderful time that we have, and all of this wonderful wisdom, and on behalf of me and Caroline, we just want you to put it to use; we want you to have really good days. So, thanks all, and until next time.

LINKS

[Watch the full interview](#)

[Caroline's book 'How to Have a Good Day'](#)

[Learn more about Caroline's work](#)

[May's blog for weekly advice and tips on achieving success in your career and life](#)