



# **Rewire Your Brain to Speak Your Mind: Neuroscience Insights for Conflict Management**

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“Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and other great teachers were all born with a brain built essentially like anyone else’s. Then they used their minds to change their brains in ways that changed history.”

~ Rick Hanson, Ph.D., the author of “Buddha’s Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom”



# Roadmap

1. The brain on autopilot
2. Brains at war
3. The brain as a solution finder
4. Brain infusions for creative conflict management

# The Social Brain



The Human Spark | Brain Matters | Social Networks | PBS  
<http://youtu.be/x14s51udfro>

# Your Brain on Autopilot

The brain is wired to conserve energy and resources, look for patterns and automate them. Our behaviors, emotional memories, physical reactions become part of our subconscious brain maps, which are automatic and not easy to change.



# Your Brain on Conflict

**BRAIN JOLT**

**NEW DEER**

**NEW DOOR**

# Your Brain on Conflict

**BRAIN JOLT**  
(cont'd)

**NEW DEER**  
**RENEWED**

**NEW DOOR**  
**ONE WORD**

# Your Brain on Conflict

- Conflicts become our stories, identities, relationships that are so hard to let go of, in part, because of our biological wiring.
- The more we repeat our conflict behaviors, the stronger they become.





Recent research in the field of neuroscience indicates that we are continuously producing new brain cells and create new pathways in our brain throughout life. The brain's ability to rewire itself as a result of experience is called neuroplasticity.

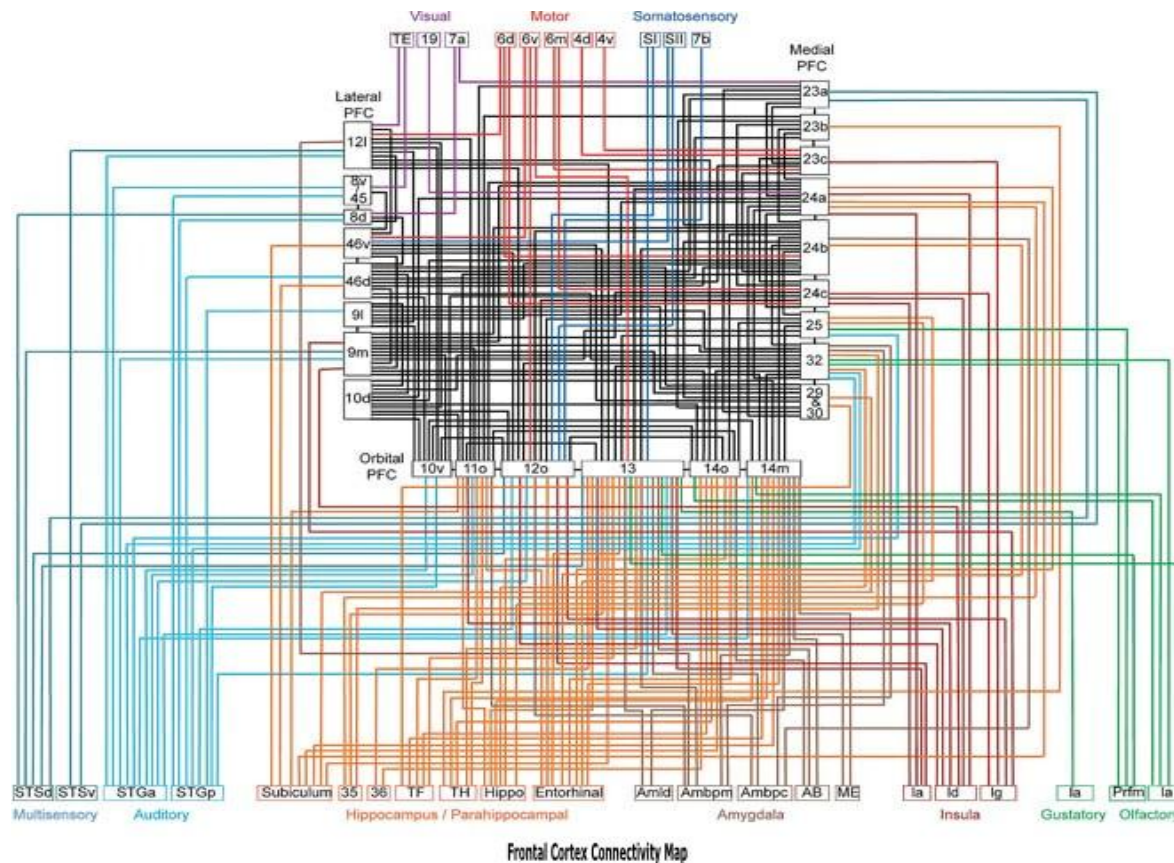


Image: Bruno B. Averbeck and Moonsang Seo, 2008. (Reprinted under Creative Commons Attribution License from Averbeck, B.B., and M. Seo, PLoS Comput Biol 4, No. 4 (4 Apr 2008): e1000050; page 185.)

# Neurons That Read Minds

The mirror neuron system in the brain may be linked to empathy.

Emotions are contagious.



The emotional brain is the puppeteer in the theater of the mind, the rational brain is the puppet that believes it can decide on its own.



# The Brain's Negativity Bias

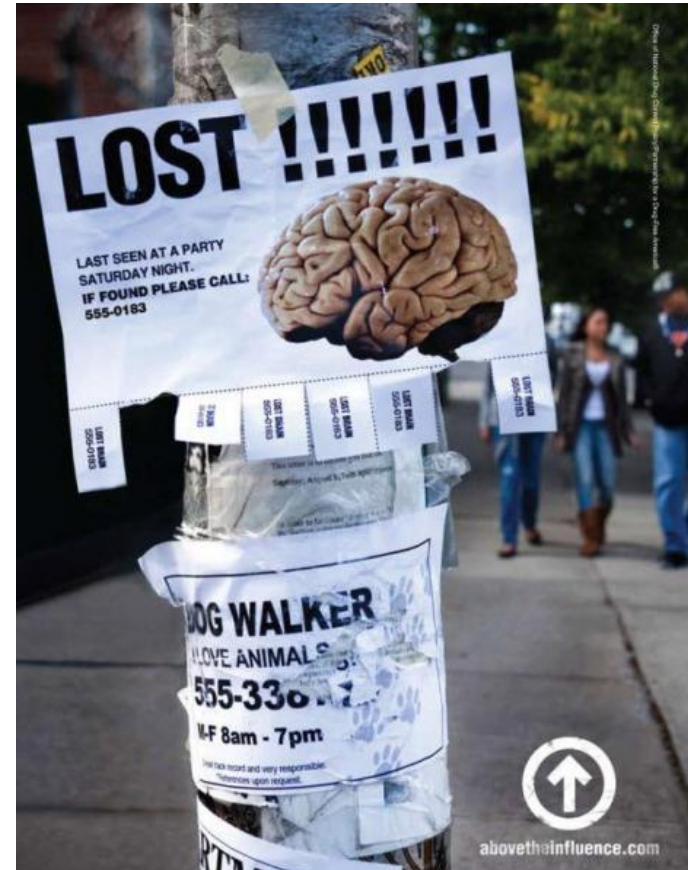
- Threats
- Uncertainty
- Social isolation
- Unfairness



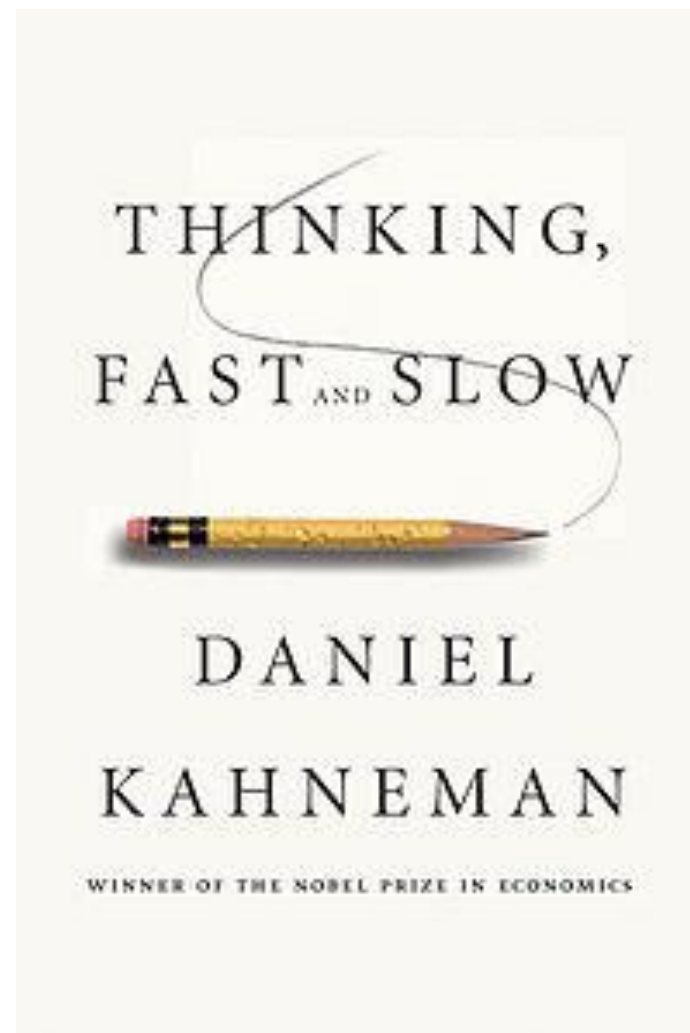
# The brain is a solution-finder.

## BUT:

- Our attention and working memory capacity are limited.
- We have cognitive biases.
- We complicate choices.



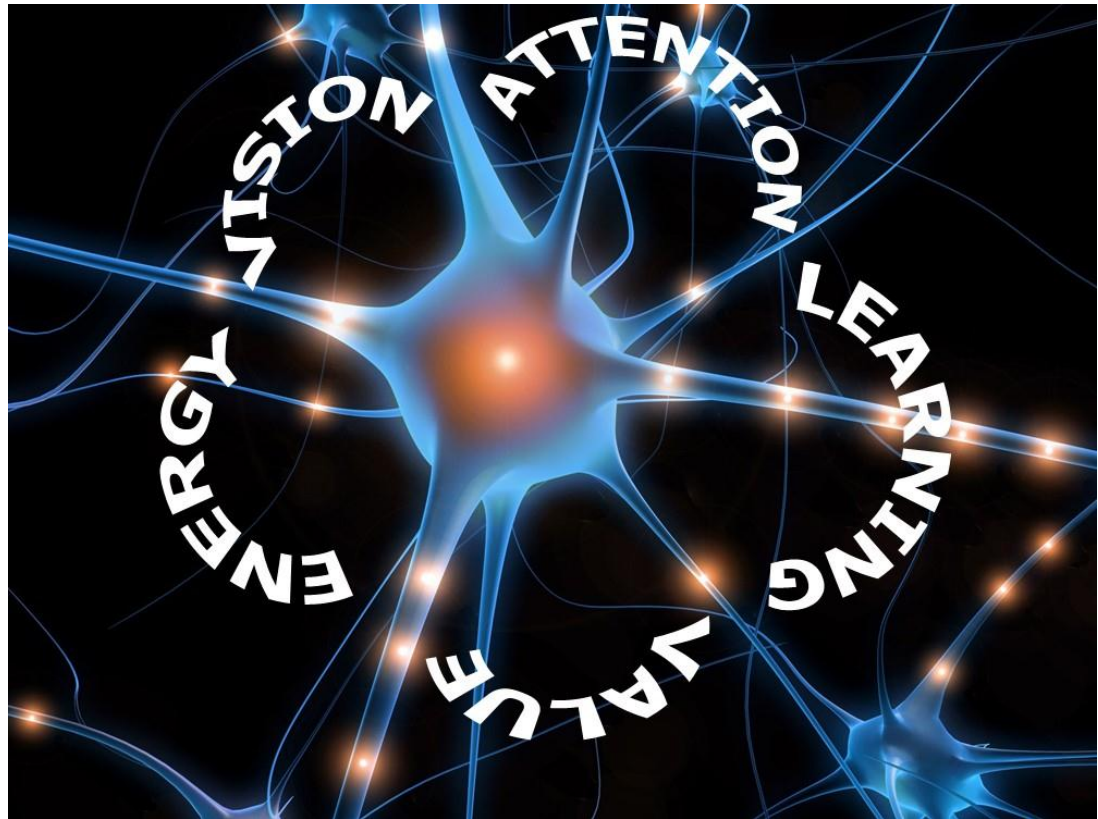
The brain is a solution-finder.



# Brain Infusions for Creative Conflict Management

## VALVE:

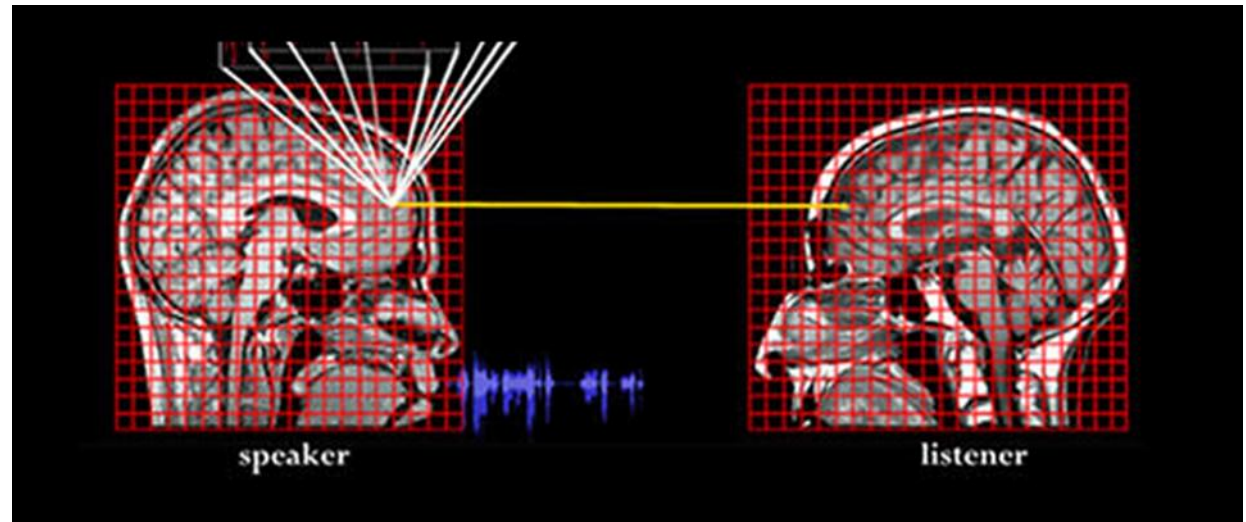
- Vision
- Attention
- Learning
- Values
- Energy



# Brain Infusions for Creative Conflict Management

## VALVE: Vision

- Patterns
- Stories
- Symbols





# Brain Infusions for Creative Conflict Management

## VALVE: Attention

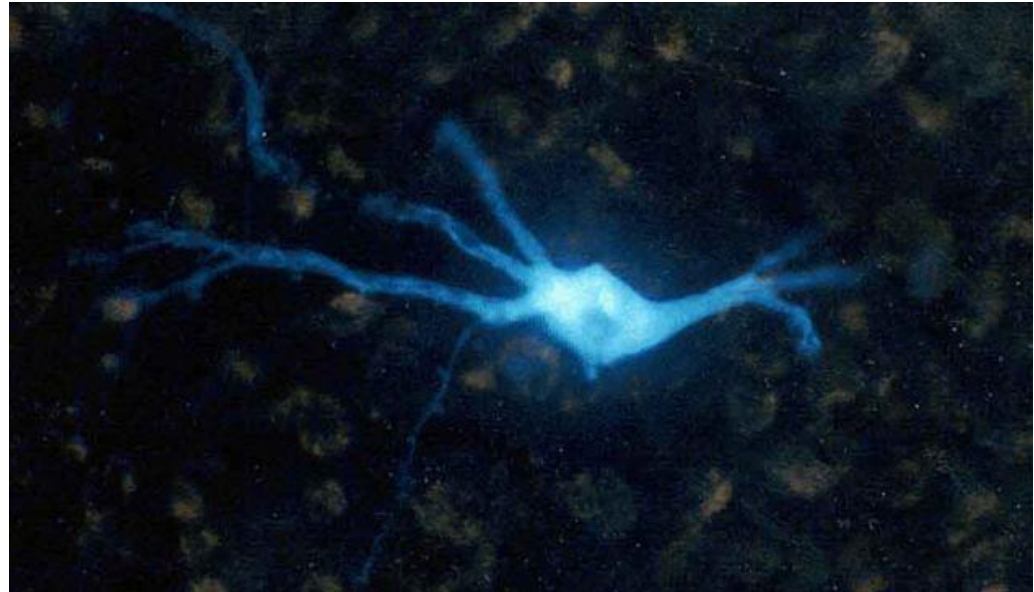
- Contemplation
- Rhythms
- Rituals



# Brain Infusions for Creative Conflict Management

VALVE: Learning

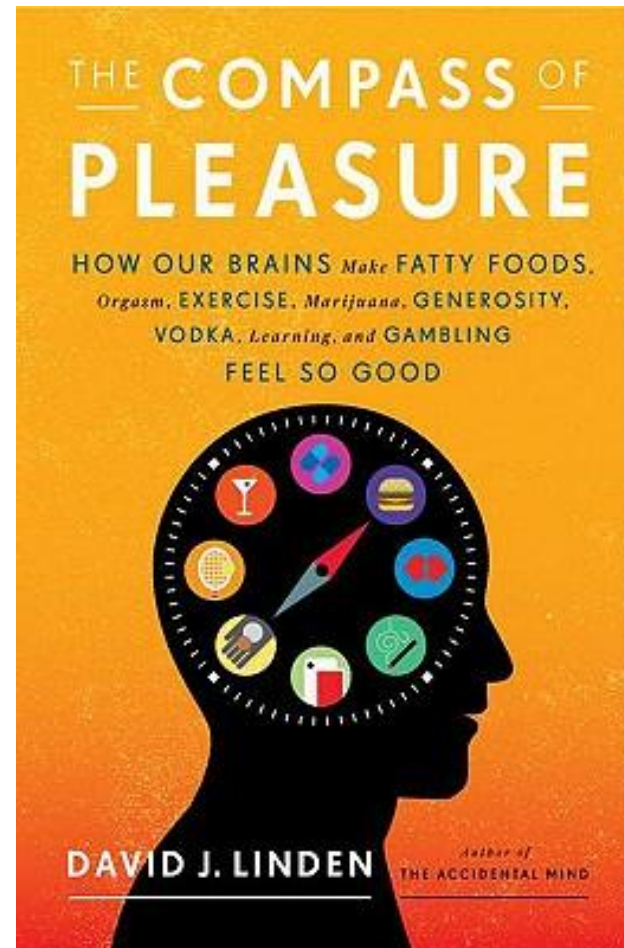
Rewards



# Brain Infusions for Creative Conflict Management

VALVE: Learning

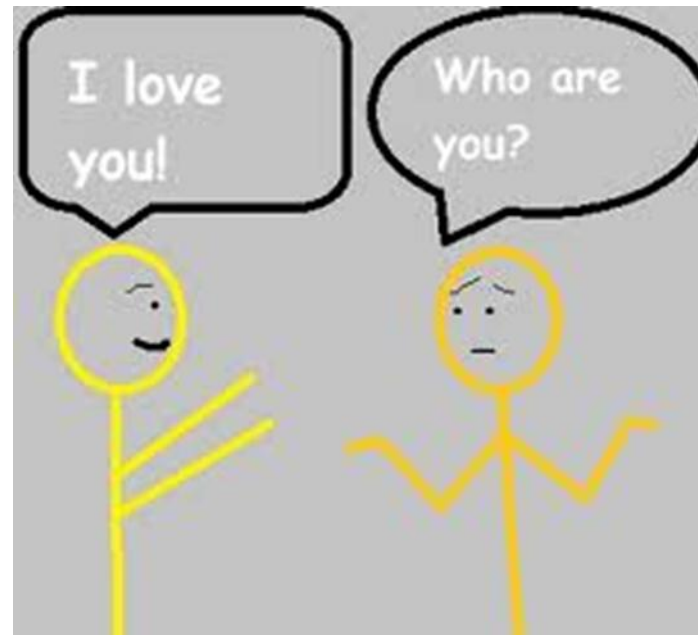
Rewards



# Brain Infusions for Creative Conflict Management

## VALVE: Value

- Status
- Fairness
- Autonomy



# Brain Infusions for Creative Conflict Management

## VALVE: Energy

- Movement
- Play
- Music
- Sensation & Perception



Artist Amy Caron stands beneath a giant homunculus in her two-room interactive/ theatre art show about mirror neurons and the brain.

Credit: Kristen Murphy/ Deseret News.

# Brain Infusions for Creative Conflict Management

## VALVE: Energy Sensation & Perception

"Dark clouds" & "dark thoughts"

"Heavy load" & "heavy duty"

"Soft cushion" & "soft skills"

"Warm beverage" & "warm welcome"

"Clean hands" & "Clean consciousness"



# Brain-Friendly Communication

- **Be engaging:** Don't simply tell people what to do, ask them questions, have a discussion, involve them in the decision-making process to cultivate a sense of ownership and control.
- **Be inspiring:** Offer support and encouragement, celebrate other people's achievements. Give compliments to people throughout the day. (Research shows that a person needs to hear five compliments before he or she can listen to a criticism without feeling defensive.) Be positive.
- **Be grateful:** Show gratitude and reciprocate when somebody does something nice for you. Appreciate the diversity of people and ideas.
- **Be mindful:** Approach each conversation with kindness and an open mind, practice relaxation techniques before difficult conversations. Notice body language. Be aware of your own triggers and reactions to different people and situations.
- **Be thoughtful:** Take time to prepare for your challenging conversations and look at the topic from various perspectives.
- **Be curious:** Ask open-ended questions: *who, what, when, where, how, why, etc.*
- **Be vulnerable:** Share how you feel. Admit your mistakes. Ask people for advice and favors. (People like to help. Helping others gives them a sense of autonomy and choice.)
- **Be courageous:** Don't hide from bad news. People would rather know the worst than fear the worst.
- **Be open and flexible:** Explore choices and options, but be aware of the analysis paralysis. (The prefrontal cortex can hold only about seven pieces of information at a time.) Lack of options undermines people's autonomy.
- **Be persuasive:** Use storytelling to connect with your audience. Both show and tell to activate the mirror neurons and aid in understanding. Listen actively. Search for common ground. Use effective words.
- **Be polite:** Encourage good tone and friendliness. Apologize when you make a mistake. Pay attention to the perceived safety of social interactions.

“You have brains in your head.  
You have feet in your shoes.  
You can steer yourself  
Any direction you choose.”  
~ Dr. Seuss

Thank you!  
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