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Hi! I'm Coach Margie

I'm glad you're reading the Brave Space newsletter. My newsletter is written to share information and support for people who need it.

Hello Margie,

This week's newsletter continues our understanding of thoughts.

"Thoughts are Things."

This week I'm getting nerdy - I want to explain the science of thoughts. Let's dive in. We're going to start with this question: **What is a thought? What exactly is it made of?**

Thoughts are **electrochemical reactions**. Great, Margie. What does that actually mean? Let's break it down!

Electro means electricity. Thoughts literally create energy and activity in waves, kind of like light waves or sound waves. **Thinking actually creates electricity!** The chemical part of the word means two things: First, that thoughts produce physical proteins. Proteins build brain structure - the actual mass of your brain, including gray matter. This creates a pathway: electricity travels on the gray matter that is created by these proteins.

Thoughts also create a chemical aspect. There is a chemical release in your brain. This happens all the time: think about being in the jungle and you suddenly hear something running at you quickly. You have a thought and that thought causes a chemical release in your brain (in this case, that chemical is adrenaline). **Definitions done! Let's dig into the science!**

Think about this: **80% of the thoughts you have today you had yesterday.** Why

exactly is that? What is the mechanism that makes that happen?

Well, it's because **thinking patterns are actual structures in the brain!** Those proteins create gray matter, and the electrical signals can travel along it. Repeating thoughts reinforce this structure, making it easier for electricity to travel over it and now that pathway can be used again in the future. **The more you think the thought, the easier it is to think it in the future**, and these are the pathways that become default thinking patterns! You might be thinking, "Well, that's great if it's a good thought, but not so good if it's a bad thought." Yep....keep reading!

And habits become the ultimate path of those thoughts. When you are trying to do something new (hmmm... like changing your relationship with alcohol) and you think positive thoughts about it, the repetitive thinking and action creates much more physical structure in the brain. **It creates new pathways that allow you to think the same thought today that you thought yesterday.**

This is a good news/bad news situation: the good news is that you can reinforce thinking patterns, the bad news is that **we often reinforce negative thinking patterns on accident.**

When we do the work of changing our relationship with alcohol, we can find ourselves making progress, but then feel like we're suddenly being negative again. (*"I just can't do this."*) That's us falling back into old ways of thinking. This happens because those old thought-structures existed long before we started doing this work and they are more well-worn than the new ones you're creating. **This process of shifting your thoughts is about incremental change** and it takes time. You are literally **repatterning the physical structures in your brain** - the fancy name for this is mind-directed neuroplasticity.

As you do this work, you literally grow your brain! Think about a piano master, for example. MRI scans show that the area of their brains that are related to playing piano - pitch, rhythm, finger movement - are actually larger than in someone who never learned how to play the piano! The piano player, through practicing and practicing and practicing, has literally created a physical structure in their brain that helps them to play!

This brain-growth process happens often through repeated activity, but it can also happen through thoughts! Researchers have been able to teach people how to play the piano using just their thoughts alone. This means that **you can create these new physical structures in your brain with thinking!**

Isn't that incredible?!? You can actually learn to be the person you have inside of you - the person you know you can be - by leveraging the power of your brain to

change! In terms of changing your relationship with alcohol, once you change the behavior (stop drinking), and you continue working on your thoughts about drinking, **you can free yourself from any desire for alcohol**. By changing your thinking about alcohol. That, friends, is *THE GAME CHANGER!* That's what worked for me and thousands of others!

Let's go a little deeper (just a little) into the science of all of this now. The actual physical components (the things that grow in your brain) are called **dendrites**. Dendrites are a branched extension of a nerve cell. They have a crystal or crystalline mass that looks like a tree.

Dendrites are malleable - meaning they can change and shift in size and direction. **When we think thoughts, dendrites change and grow**. Our minds undergo this growth during the moment-by-moment experience of our life - literally all thoughts you have are changing these dendrites. This is learning in action! **We cannot show up and do anything without first building a thought** and dendrites are there to help us do that.

So why is this a big deal? Because thoughts are real, physical things. **Dr. Caroline Leaf** says it really well: "When we learn, we are building thoughts. Thoughts occupy mental real estate. They are neurobiological correlates of our mind activity. Powerful technologies have established that these biophysical correlates of memory, which are called memory engrams, our thoughts, have real, solid, physical representations and are made out of proteins. And they keep changing in response to our thinking. **We essentially control our ability to build thoughts.**"

That's why this is important - because **we can make things easier for us tomorrow by thinking better thoughts today**. By trying on new thoughts, you are making it easier for you to have these new thoughts in the future through the proteins that you are laying down in your brain. You little brain builder, you!

The most important thing we can do is learn to consciously control our thoughts, every moment of every day. Because what you think today you will likely think tomorrow. And here's the kicker: **when we start beating ourselves up and getting discouraged by thinking old (unhelpful) thoughts, we are reinforcing those old ways of thinking**. When we find ourselves thinking old thoughts, it's just because those pathways have been our defaults for so long and going back to default sometimes is just how the process goes! Sticking with it, continuing to think new thoughts you want to have (and believe!), will eventually get you to where you want to be.

What you think about most will grow!

It takes time - as you practice during the first week (remember: repetition causes change) you'll start to feel a shift. It may still take conscious effort, but you'll notice that it starts to get easier. Keep doing it and as you get to three weeks, it is not only easier, but you've repatterned your thinking so much that these new thoughts begin to become default thoughts! **Within 21 days of practicing a thought that feels true to you, you have truly repatterned your brain!**

This work is not always easy but doing it over and over will literally change your life. Science is showing us how we have control over our thinking, our programming, our memory, our habits, our emotions, and our lives. **This is HUGE: it means that you can literally create the mind you want to have!**

So - you might be wondering: how long does this take to kick in? According to Dr. Caroline Leaf: "Studies show that just 4 days of creating an environment where you are observing, rejecting and focusing on things that feel good can see significant structural changes in the brain's cortex". This means that **with just 4 days of consciously practicing the same new thought, you can begin to change the structure of your brain.**

And, as stated above - it takes about 21 days for a single thought to become routine - but consider this: **it doesn't work without the emotion** (I talked about this in last week's newsletter). Length of time is correlated with changing the structure of your brain, not causal. **It is *feeling better* with that thought that allows this work to happen so much faster, not just how long you practice the new thought.**

Of course, you can pattern in a thought with negative emotion too. **It is emotion, and not necessarily only positive emotion, that is the key driver.** That's why I suggest you focus on things that help you feel better. Because it's also really easy to focus on things that don't feel good and to accidentally strengthen those structures that don't serve us. Who wants to feel bad? Not me!

You have the power to change the very structure of your brain and change your emotions. Emotions don't happen to you - they are made by you. They are made by how you think. "Just thinking about something can cause your brain to change the waves of energy that are generated on a structural level through genetic expression and on a chemical level through the release of neurotransmitters. The power of the mind to change the brain is incredibly exciting and hopeful." - Dr. Caroline Leaf

Think about it this way: **Imagine that you are driving on a straight, flat, freshly paved highway in a Ferrari.** You can go as fast as you want, and the ride is super smooth. That's what these patterned thoughts are like for us - there's almost no resistance.

If 80-90% of the thoughts you have today you have yesterday - you've likely been having those thoughts on a regular basis. Negative thoughts get ingrained - so many of us have been having negative thoughts for years.

The good news here is that you can repattern your thinking. By consciously choosing new thoughts you can, over time, change your default thinking patterns.

At first, it feels like you are walking a new path that's bumpy and not easy to use. But over time it gets worn in as you walk it over and over by practicing that thought. Each time you think this new thought, the path becomes smoother and easier to walk on. Then the path becomes smoother. Then it gets paved. Then you're back in your Ferrari!

Better still: this new highway starts to overwhelm the highways you used to have - **those protein structures in your brain that the thoughts used to run along start to break down.** When you stop using those old thoughts, those old highways will become overgrown with bushes, and it will stop being the default path. Eventually those highways will no longer be highways. And that's where your life changes - where it becomes difficult to think those negative things and it's much easier to think those life affirming things you've chosen!

The bottom line is this:

"Our thoughts can either limit us to what we believe we can do or free us to develop well beyond our expectations and the expectations of others."

- Dr. Caroline Leaf

You have control here - and it's so important for you to understand the science underpinning all of it. Every time you choose a better thought, every time you even just stop a thought and recognize that it's not serving you, you are creating new patterns in your brain that will either help you or hold you back. Ultimately, if you do this mindfully, you will create the opportunity to be the person you know you can be!

I've got a guided application exercise for you!

Enough with the science now. Let's put this into practice! Understanding the *how* of this process, what changes actually take place in the brain, will give you an amazing foundation for doing the work to shift your thinking. Before I describe the exercise, I want you to get really clear on how you have experienced this at other times in your life - that will give you context and understanding that will serve you

well as you go through this process!

To that end, I have some questions for you. Please think through these, answer them in your journal, and reflect on them throughout the week. The more you can become aware of how this process has happened in you (and it 100% has whether you've noticed it or not!) the better you'll be at guiding yourself through this process!

So - consider these questions:

- Where in your life have you experienced your thinking patterns changing? It could be anything - big or small - where you identify that your thinking shifted.
- What was that journey like? Was it an immediate shift or did it take time?
- Did you find that things changed instantaneously, or did you find yourself going back and forth between new and old ways of thinking?

Let these ideas roll around in your beautiful brain this week - get as good of an understanding as you can on how this process has played out for you, and what it felt like!

I'd love to know your thoughts on this topic. You can send me an email or drop your comments in any of my social feeds! If we're not already connected on social, let's connect! Click your favorite social button below and you'll go straight to my page.

Sending you lots of love and positive thoughts,

Margie

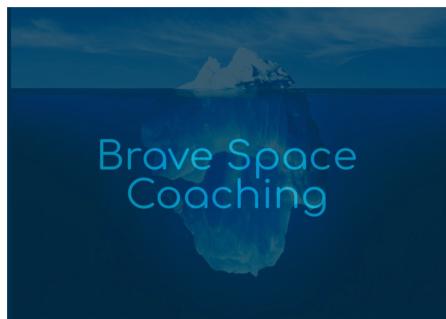
Margie, do you have questions about this topic? If this newsletter resonates with you and you'd like some help changing your thinking, I'm here for you.



Let's talk about how my coaching can help you and see if we're a good fit to work together! Click the [Schedule a Free Call](#), or the [Email Me](#) button.



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