

Brain chemistry and business

Dramatic strides in brain research, advances in scanning technology and the search for the causes of autism reveal chemical triggers that provoke specific human responses. Understanding these findings can be helpful in many business situations.

Here's how Laurence Gonzales describes, in his book "Deep Survival: Who Lives, Who Dies and Why," a Navy pilot making his first carrier landing at sea:

"The net effect of all the chemicals that come streaming through your system once the amygdala has detected danger is that the heart rate rises, breathing speeds up, more sugar is dumped into the metabolic system, and the distribution of oxygen and nutrients shifts so that you have the strength to run or fight. You're on afterburner."

All of us engage in activities that have the potential to set similar chemical reactions in motion: waiting in line at a grocery store while someone fumbles interminably for change, a snarling dog lunging at you as you cycle past. Any one of these events could result in some of the chemical reactions described above.

Consider now the contrast with the feelings experienced when offered fresh baked bread or being comforted by an empathetic friend.

Here's an example from my professional world: "I like those people, and the building," my client says after an initial meeting with a landlord. "The lease rate is a bit high, but they listened and I think we can do business with them."

There is a thesis worth of chemical and neurological analysis in this brief statement.

BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH



Paul
Suzman

— **Expectations.** Realistic expectations were set for the likely outcomes of the meeting. There were few surprises. Our client understood current market conditions and the landlord knew this. No one was blind-sided.

— **Respect.** The landlord's representatives made a positive initial impression. They had taken time to

learn about our client and made this obvious in their questions.

— **Positioning.** The landlord did a good job of differentiating but not overselling his property and rationalizing why it would work well for the tenant.

— **Timing.** No one rushed the conversation or tried for "the close." We worked through a number of key business issues and agreed that others could be worked out in due course.

The likelihood of coming to a positive final agreement had been increased by the tone of this initial discussion. Why? Because we perceived we were being treated fairly and with respect, from the outset. And our client had determined he could safely start letting down his guard.

When treated fairly and with respect, we generally experience a warm sensation or glow, which some scientists attribute to the neurotransmitter oxytocin, sometimes referred to as the "trust hormone" and which is most notable for triggering empathetic behaviors.

So how do we get the oxytocin flowing? Think warm cookies and their behavioral equivalent, and you won't go too far wrong!

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