

## Five Ways to Train Your Brain from Shawn Achor

### 1. Three Gratitudes

Before you go to bed each night, write down three things that you're grateful for. Try to do this every night for at least a week. The more specific you list is the better. For instance, if you are grateful for your children, write down something specific they did today that made you smile.

**The Benefit:** Research shows that people who keep a daily gratitude list feel better about their lives as a whole and feel more optimistic about the coming week. Compared to control groups, they exercise more frequently and report fewer physical complaints. They also experience more positive emotions, fewer negative emotions, and exhibit more helpful behavior towards friends and neighbors (Emmons & McCullough, 2003)

### 2. Maximizing Strengths

Go to [viacharacter.org](http://viacharacter.org) to take the VIA Strengths survey and find out what your Signature Strengths are. Now try to use one of these strengths in a new and different way every day for a week. Try to shape a normally boring daily task into one that uses your strength in a creative way.

**The Benefit:** In a 2005 nationwide study, people who completed this task every day for just one week showed increased levels of happiness and decreased symptoms of depression directly after the experiment AND a full 6 months later (Seligman, et al., 2005). Students who use their signature strengths have higher GPAs and fewer absences (Harter, 1998). Employees who have the opportunity to use their top strengths and work every day report greater job satisfaction and 38% higher productivity levels (Gallup, 2005).

### 3. Journaling

A few times in the coming week, take 20 minutes to write in your journal about a recent positive experience. Try to be as specific as you can about the experience and why it made you happy.

**The Benefit:** People who write about positive experiences at least 3 times a week report enhanced positive mood and a 50% drop in doctor visits up to three months later (Burton & King, 2004). Also, couples who journal about their relationship are significantly more likely than control group couples to still be together 3 months later (Slatcher & Pennebaker, 2006).

### 4. Creating a Habit

Think of a positive action you would like to incorporate into your daily routine and start doing it once a day. It could be meditation, yoga, writing an email to a far away friend, or reading 20 pages of a book. Even if you enjoy the activity, it will be difficult to maintain at first; introducing any new task requires activation energy that is often hard to come by.

**The Benefit:** the more days in a row you complete the action, the more you will be training the neural pathways in you brain and the easier it will become. Eventually, your brain will have adapted accordingly and your positive action will have turned into second nature. William James, the father of American psychology, said that it takes 21 days to make a habit. To help you on this quest, we have provided a 21-day habit grid that you can use to track you progress on [shawnachor.com](http://shawnachor.com).

### 5. Mindfulness

Every day, take 5 minutes to sit quietly and watch you breath go in and out. Try to clear your mind of other thoughts and just think about you breathing.

**The Benefit:** People who meditate on a regular basis experience less stress, enjoy more energy, and bounce back from illness faster. They report higher levels of happiness and lower levels of depression. They also have a decreased risk of heart disease and a higher tolerance of pain (Shapiro, Schwartz & Santerre, 2005)