

Psychological Strategies to Support Employees at Work and During Return to Work

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1

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 SAINT MARY'S
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2

The neurobiology

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“Survival mind”



Paleomammalian brain

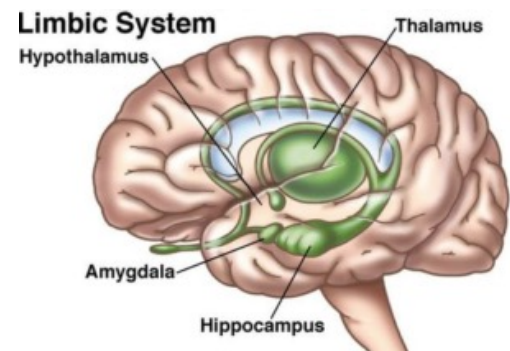


Built for survival



Functions automatically
and unconsciously

Limbic System



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Source: Roxo et al, 2011; Tirch et al, 2014

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4

Executive mind



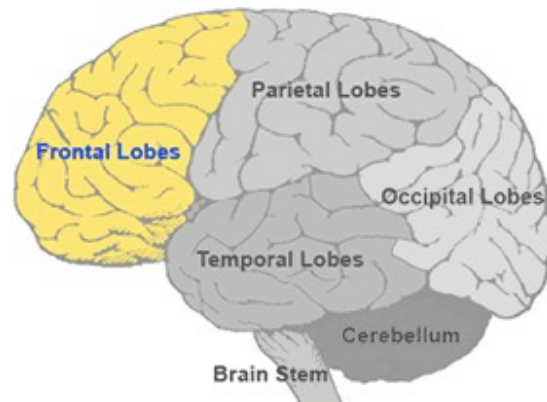
“Frontal lobe”



Controls behavior



Like a battery

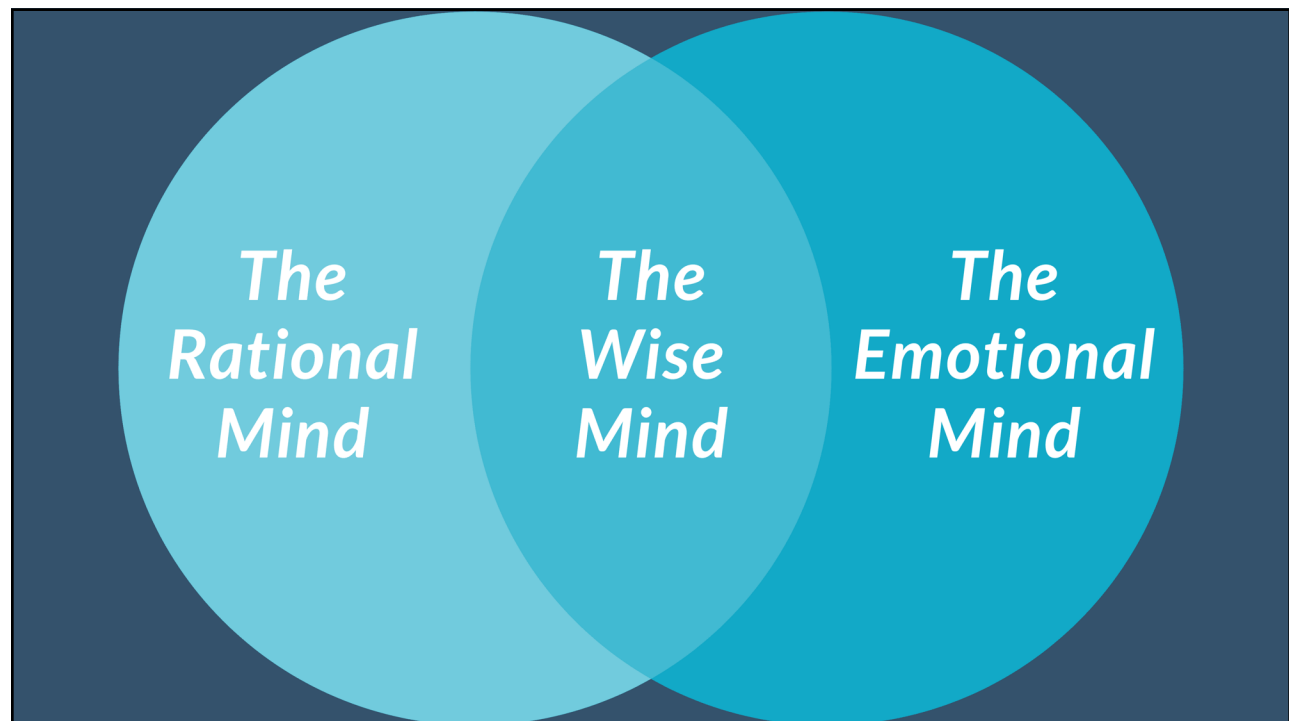


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Source: Lowe, Reichelt, & Hall, 2019; McGonigal, 2013

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5



6

Battery Management

Be intentional
about charging
your battery

Noticing
charges and
drains

What are you
spending your
battery on?

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Source: Feldman Barrett, 2019

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Your stress thermometer 1-10



RED (9-10)= Emergency

ORANGE (6- 8)= Distress

YELLOW (3-5)= Prevent

GREEN (1-2)= Maintain



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What does GREEN look like
for you?
(Body, Mind, Behaviour)

GREEN (1-2)= Lots of extra battery

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What does YELLOW look like
for you?
(Body, Mind, Behaviour)

YELLOW (3-5)= Demanding but
sustainable

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ORANGE (6- 8)= Demanding and unsustainable

What does ORANGE look like for you?
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RED (9-10)= Crisis

What does RED look like for you?
(Body, Mind, Behaviour)

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12



WELLNESS LEADERSHIP

Common Stress Signs

(Sonnentag & Freses, 2012)



1 PHYSICAL

Headaches, sweating, stomach issues, muscle pain and tension, feeling dizzy or tired, sexual problems, fast heartbeat, dry mouth, shortness of breath, chest pain.



2 MENTAL

Worrying, imagining the worst, being forgetful, not able to concentrate, racing thoughts, going over things in your mind, making mistakes, feeling low, not coping, feeling triggered.



3 EMOTIONAL

Sad, lonely, angry, overwhelmed, tearful, ashamed, catastrophising, distant, not feeling good enough, fizzy, unsettled, about to explode,



4 BEHAVIOURAL

Avoiding people, crying, eating more or less, biting your nails, sleep problems, drinking or smoking more, being irritable or snappy



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Return to work tips

- The cause of the leave can be a battery drain.
- Probably have less battery available than before.
- Understanding their own battery limits can help with a successful return to work.
- Stepwise addition of battery drains.
- Adding batteries to the system.



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14

Clean fish, dirty water

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15

Psychological safety



IT'S OKAY TO NOT BE OKAY



IT'S OKAY TO MAKE
MISTAKES



IT'S OKAY TO SPEAK
UP/DISAGREE

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Source: Edmondson, 2018

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Psychological Safety... What is the opposite?



- x Blame
- x Judgement, ridicule
- x Silence
- x False agreement
- x Gossip, rumours
- x Mistakes are hidden
- x Cannot be your full self

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Psychological Safety is Not...

- Just being nice to workers
- Letting workers do what they want
- Having no expectations
- Being soft, indulgent
- Absolving accountability
- Allowing performance standards to slip

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Google's Aristotle Project

- This research project examine what makes effective teams
- Team effectiveness was measured by
 - Executive Evaluation
 - Team leader evaluation
 - Team member evaluation
 - Sales performance against quarterly quota
- The key finding was it is less about who is on the team and more about how the team works together

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5 Factors that most influenced team effectiveness



19

Psych safety in the workplace

- **Associated with increases in:**
 - job satisfaction
 - job performance
 - perceived leader effectiveness
 - extra effort
 - organizational citizenship behaviour
 - organizational identification
 - organizational career development
- **Decreases in:**
 - Negative perceptions of career growth opportunities
 - turnover

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Source: Crawshaw & Game, 2015; Frazier et al., 2015; Molero, Moriano, & Shaver, 2013

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Psych safety in the workplace

• Associated with

- increase in OCB
- self-efficacy
- autonomous motivation
- proactive work behaviour
- innovation and creativity
- higher organizational commitment
- job satisfaction
- employee engagement and perceived energy and vigour at work
- a reduction in organizational deviance

21

Mental Health Accommodations

22

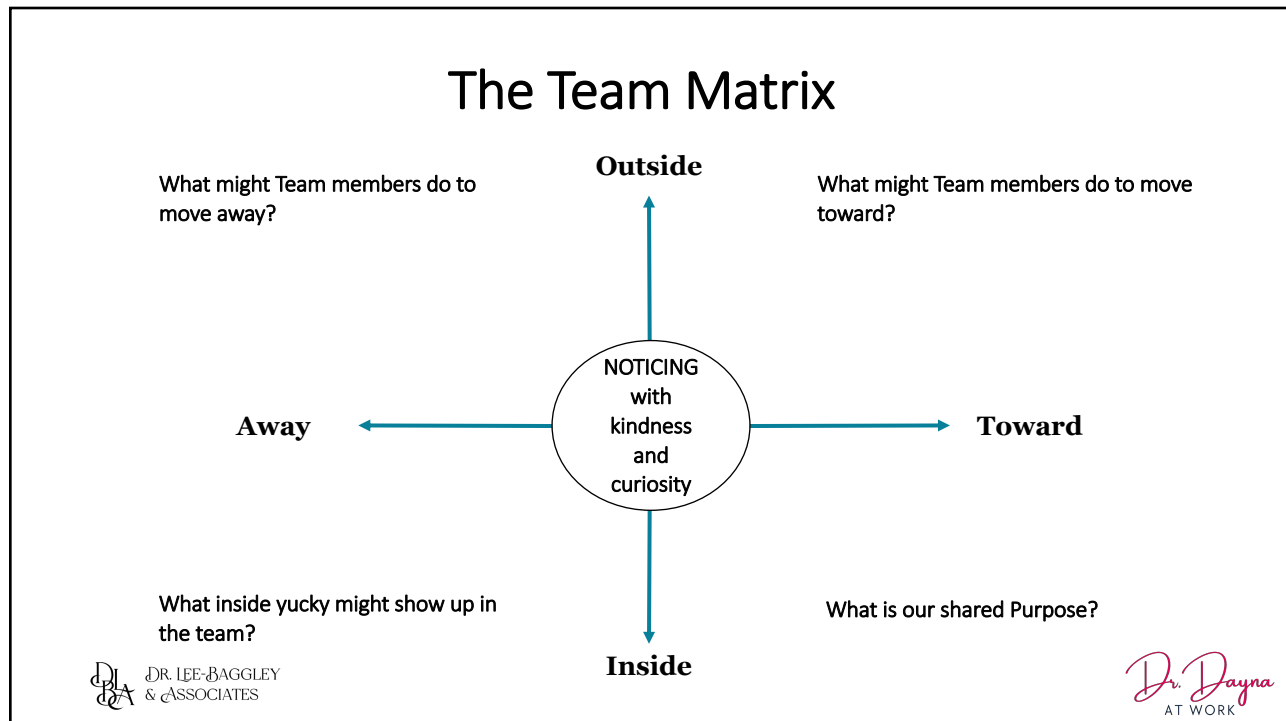
Mental health accommodations

- What should I say when an employee discloses a mental health challenge?
- How do I respond when an employee seems to be struggling but hasn't disclosed anything?
- What are examples of effective accommodations for mental health?
- How can we adjust performance expectations while maintaining fairness and accountability?
- How do we handle team dynamics or perceived inequities when one employee receives accommodations?

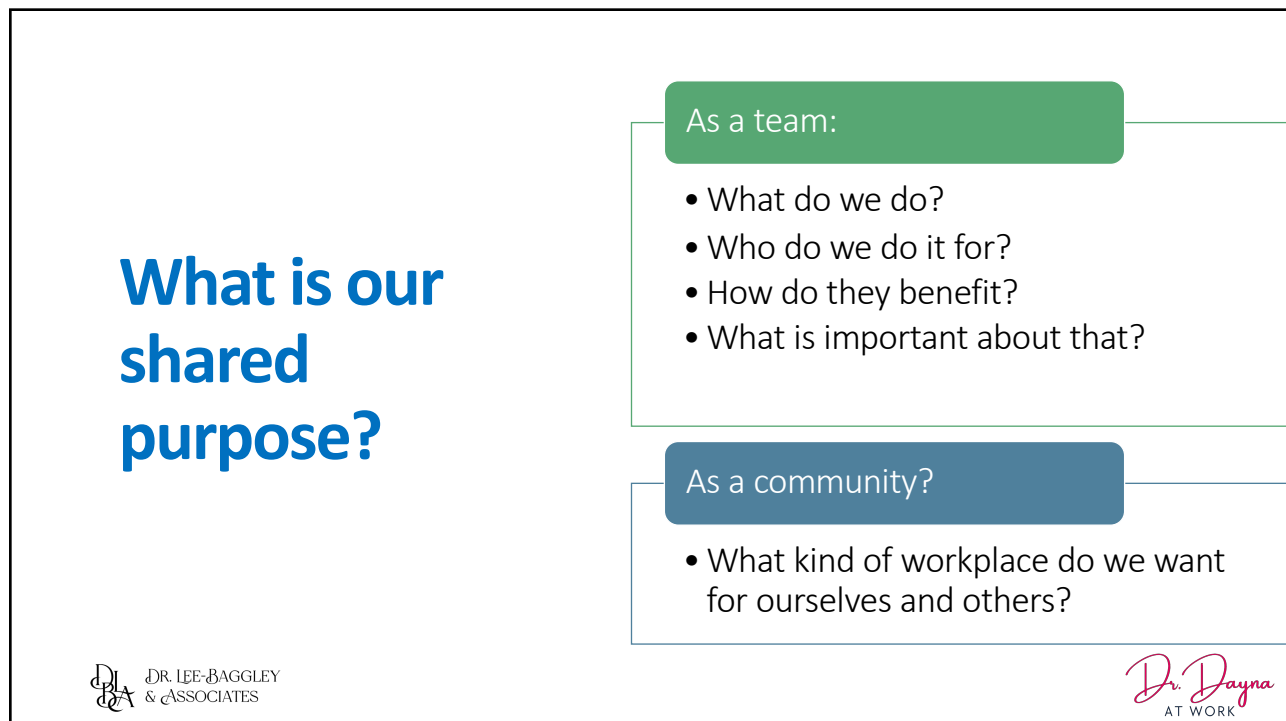
23

The Matrix: Evidence Based Tool

24



25



26

What does the team matrix do

- Reframes conversation “towards or away”
- Avoids “right/wrong” and “good/bad” discussions
- Gives language to make mistakes
- Doesn’t mean everyone behaves the same way
- Provides a way to have difficult conversations

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What can we use the Team Matrix for?

- Conflict
- Motivation
- Communication
- Performance appraisals and PIPs
- Burnout
- Difficult conversations

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Discussing accommodations: An employee discloses a mental health condition and asks for accommodations.

29

Shared purpose for accommodations

“We have a shared purpose of you succeeding here, it benefits you and the company when you’re doing well. Accommodations can help you feel better about your work and make it more consistent for everyone on the team. What can move us toward or away from the shared purpose of you succeeding here through accommodations?”

30

Step 1: Respond with Appreciation

Say something like:

- “Thanks so much for sharing that with me. That’s very helpful.”

Why:

- This shows respect, appreciation, and creates psychological safety. Avoid adding anything else in the moment. No “but” or “and.”

Note:

- Employees have a responsibility to share sufficiently if they want accommodations

Step 2: Match Symptoms to Supports

Say something like:

- "What symptoms are impacting you the most at work?"
- "Here are some common accommodations for those symptoms. Would you be open to trying one of these out?"
- “Let’s treat this as an experiment and see what makes you feel most consistent in your work.”

Why:

- Employees may not know what they need. Focusing on symptoms (not diagnoses) helps you stay within your lane and find practical solutions.

Mental Health Symptom	Potential Workplace Accommodation
Fatigue	Flexible start times, reduced hours, task prioritization, remote work options
Difficulty concentrating	Quiet workspace, noise-canceling headphones, written instructions
Memory issues	Task checklists, reminders, project management tools, job coaching
Sleep disturbances	Later start times, compressed workweeks, hybrid work flexibility
Low motivation	Short-term goal setting, frequent feedback, varied tasks to maintain engagement
Overwhelm from multitasking	Simplified task lists, reduced multitasking, designated focus time
Trouble with decision-making	Decision-making support, peer collaboration, structured workflows

33

If an Employee Makes a Request That Seems Unreasonable

34

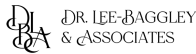
Step 1: Validate the Request

Say something like:

- "I hear you. I get that this would make your job easier."
- "I understand why you're asking for this."

Why:

- Validation helps the employee feel heard, which opens the door to collaborative problem-solving.



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35

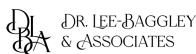
Step 2: Set Clear Boundaries Using Shared Purpose

Say something like:

- "I want to help you succeed and avoid distress. Here's what I can do."
- "Some of the things you've asked for are outside my control, but here's what is possible right now."

Why:

- It's okay to acknowledge what you can and can't offer. Clarifying the boundaries allows everyone to problem solve more effectively within the boundaries.



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36

Step 3: Frame the Conversation in Terms of Shared Purpose

Say something like:

- "We have a shared purpose of helping you succeed here. When you're doing well, it benefits both you and the team."

Why:

- Shared purpose helps move the conversation from "employee vs. management" to "we're in this together."

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37

If the Team Has Concerns About Accommodations

38

How to talk to the team

Say something like:

- We have a shared purpose of having a sustainable workforce, that means that we all have enough batteries and won't burnout.
- A toward move for us is to recognize that everyone is different in how they need to recharge and manage their batteries. It's also a toward move for us to support different ways of recharging and managing batteries.
- In the end recognizing individual differences in recharging and battery management benefits everyone because each person becomes more reliable. Someone may have adjusted work responsibilities but if they can be more consistent in carrying those out, then it's actually less stressful for everyone.

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Why:

- This puts everyone on the same "side" by thinking about moving toward and away from recharging and battery management. It also helps the team see that we are often accommodating for everyone and that benefits everyone when the whole team is managing their batteries and stress thermometers more effectively.

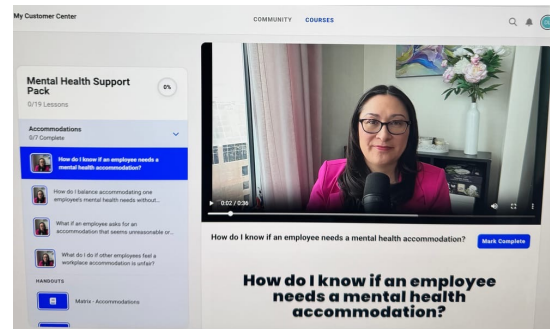
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40

Manager Support Pack: Mental Health Accommodations

- Quick course on what managers, leaders and HR can do to support mental health in the workplace
 - Mental Health accommodations
 - How to handle disclosures
 - How to bring it up if someone is struggling?
 - What do I need to know?
- Contact us at drdayna@dlba.ca to learn more



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41

Additional resources

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42

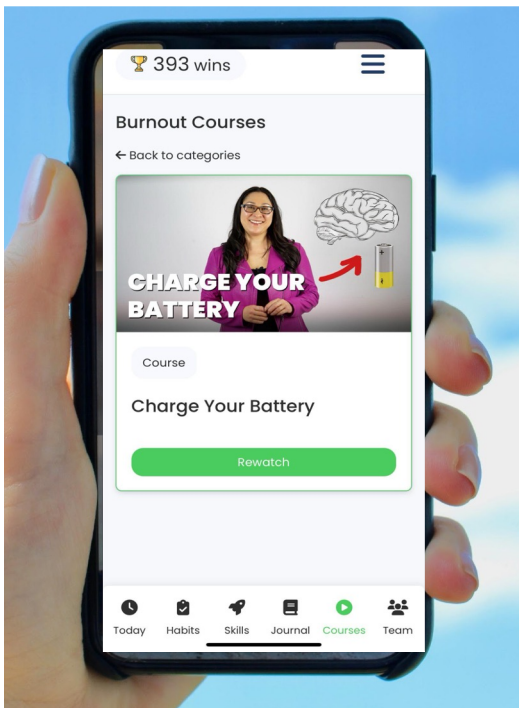


A guided experience
with proven science.

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43

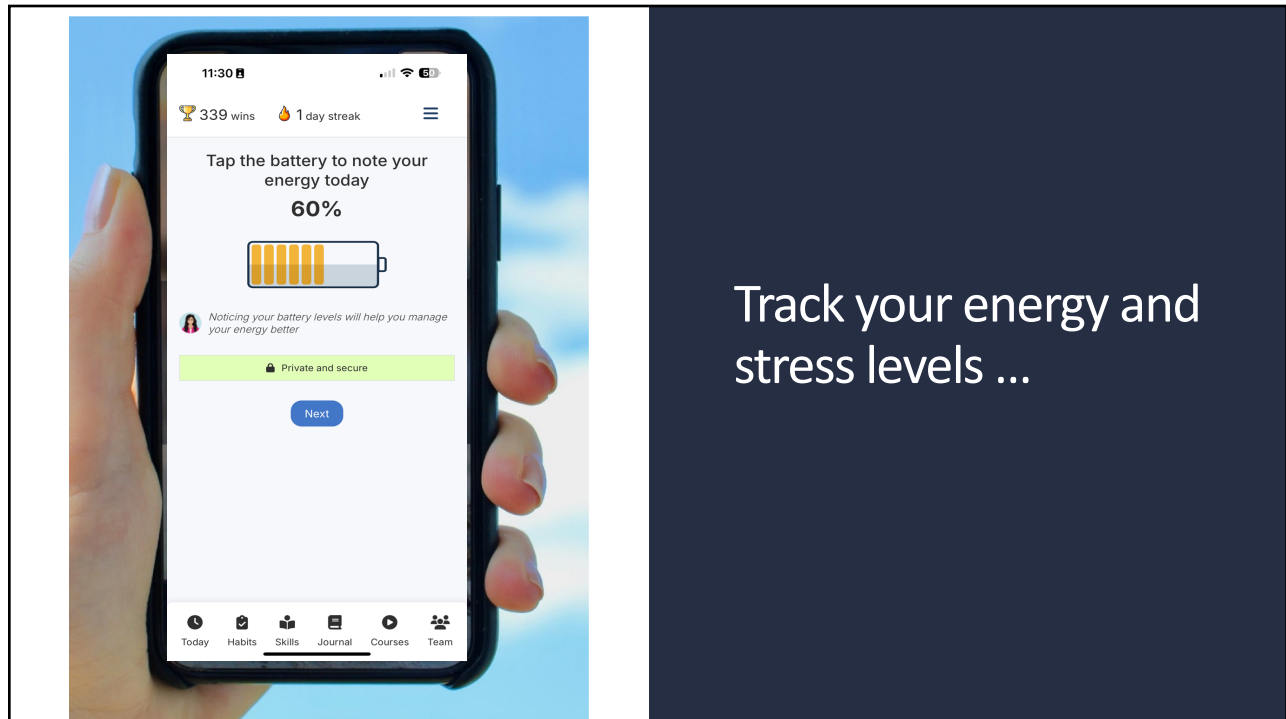
43



Charge your battery
course

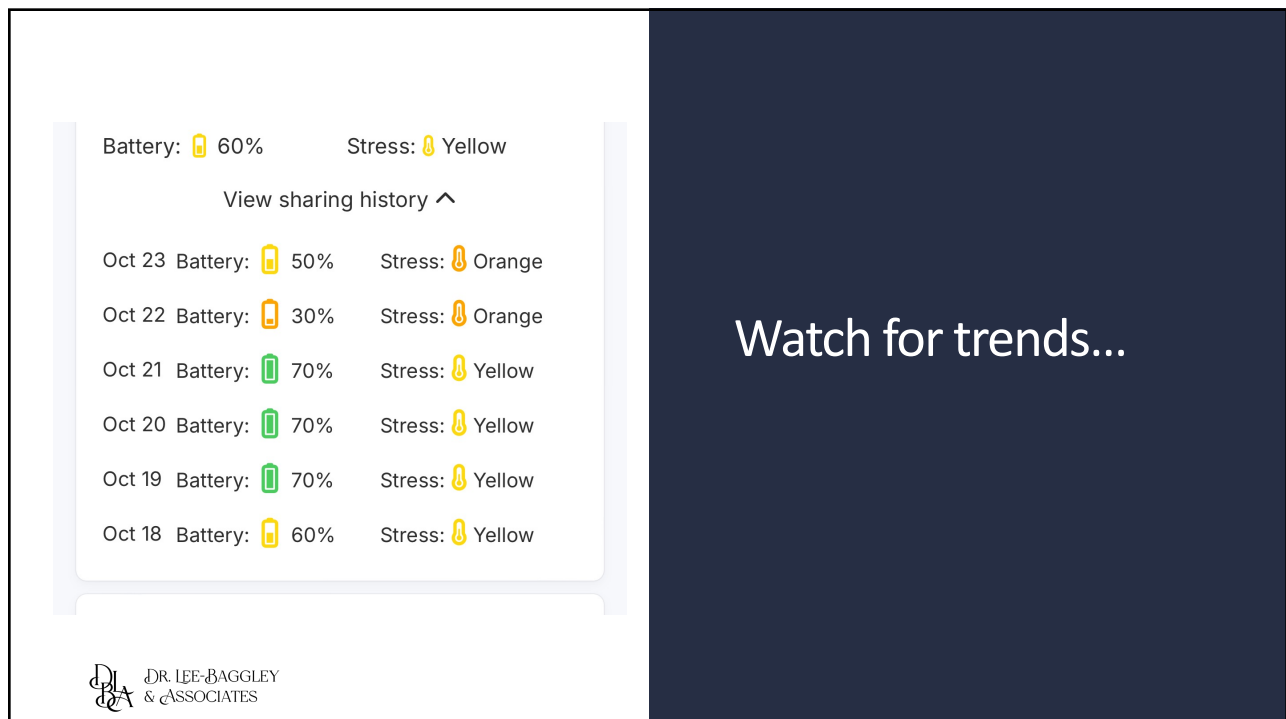
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44



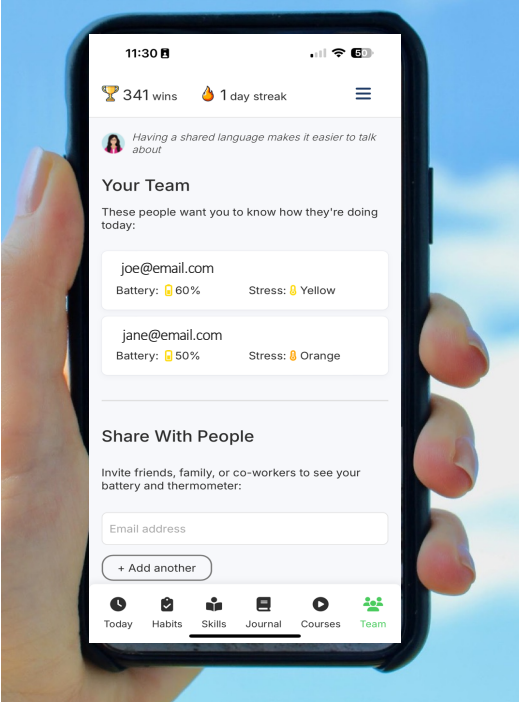
Track your energy and stress levels ...

45



Watch for trends...

46



11:30 341 wins 1 day streak

Having a shared language makes it easier to talk about

Your Team

These people want you to know how they're doing today:

joe@email.com
Battery: 60% Stress: Yellow

jane@email.com
Battery: 50% Stress: Orange

Share With People

Invite friends, family, or co-workers to see your battery and thermometer:

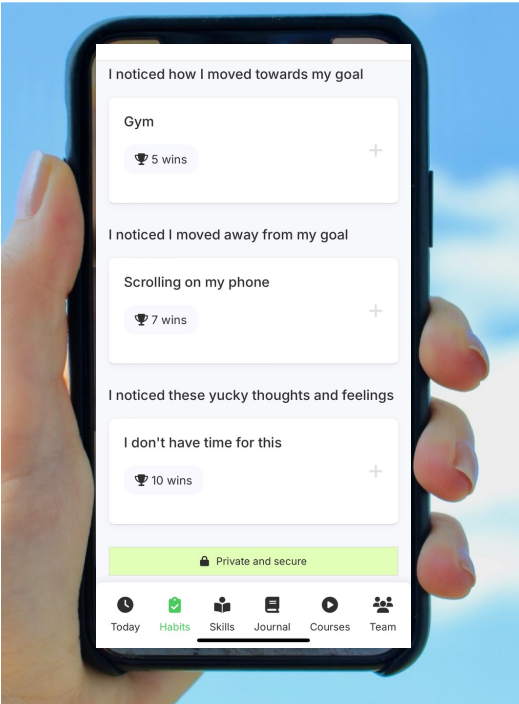
Email address

+ Add another

Today Habits Skills Journal Courses Team

Share with your network of support.

47



I noticed how I moved towards my goal

Gym
5 wins

I noticed I moved away from my goal

Scrolling on my phone
7 wins

I noticed these yucky thoughts and feelings

I don't have time for this
10 wins

Private and secure

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Track your toward and away moves

48

Practice skills to make more toward moves

49

Complete the short survey and receive:

- copy of the slides
- handouts
- free one month code for Dr. Dayna app
- tips to charge your battery

<https://www.drdaynamethod.com/feedback-cspdm-2026-09-15>

Thank You

www.DrDaynaAtWork.ca

Contact us at:
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 902-800-0018

50