

# E.D.S.O



Our biology hasn't changed in fifty thousand years, but our environment certainly has. Today's workplaces tend to be full of cynicism, paranoia and self-interest. But the best organizations and teams foster trust and cooperation because their leaders build a Circle of Safety that separates the security inside the team from the challenges outside. From the book, Leaders Eat Last, author Simon Sinek describes several chemicals our bodies release in an effort to get us to repeat behaviors that are in our best interest, as well as in the best interest for others.

## The Selfish Chemicals

Two chemicals — *endorphins* and *dopamine* — are the reason that we are driven to hunt, gather and achieve. They make us feel good when we find something we're looking for, build something we need or accomplish our goals. They are the chemicals of progress.

### **E** is for Endorphins: The Runner's High

Endorphins serve one purpose and one purpose only: to mask physical pain. That's it. The experience of a "runner's high," the feeling of euphoria many athletes experience during or after a hard workout, is in fact the endorphin chemical surging through their veins. This is one of the reasons athletes continue to push their bodies harder and harder. It is not simply because they have the discipline to do so; they do it because it actually feels good! Without endorphins to give us the edge we need to keep going, we would not keep striving even when we were tired and exhausted.

### **D** is for Dopamine: An Incentive for Progress

Dopamine is the reason for the good feeling we get when we find something we're looking for or do something that needs to get done. It is responsible for the feeling of satisfaction after we've finished an important task, completed a project, reached a goal or even reached one of the markers on our way to a bigger goal. It is dopamine that makes us a goal-oriented species with a bias for progress. When we are given a task to complete, a metric to reach, as long as we can see it or clearly imagine it in our mind's eye, we will get a little burst of dopamine to get us on our way.

This is why it feels really good to work hard to accomplish something difficult, while doing something quick and easy may only give us a little hit if anything at all. In other words, it feels good to put in a lot of effort to accomplish something. There is no biological incentive to do nothing.

Dopamine is also highly, highly addictive. Drugs, alcohol, and gambling all release dopamine. The behaviors we reinforce can actually do us harm. There is another thing to add to that list of things that can hijack our dopamine reward system: social media. Texting, e-mail, the number of likes we collect on Facebook or the number of followers we have on Twitter feels good to us. Craving a hit of chemical feel good, we repeat the behaviors that we know can produce that hit.

Each point in our journey individually and together is an opportunity to feel like we're making progress toward something bigger than ourselves. Accomplishment may be fueled by dopamine. But that feeling of fulfillment, those lasting feelings of happiness and loyalty, all require engagement with others. Though we may not reminisce about that goal we hit a decade ago, we will talk about the friends we made as we struggled to make it. TOGETHER is better!

# The Selfless Chemicals

Two chemicals — *serotonin* and *oxytocin* — help us form bonds of trust and friendship so that we will look out for each other. Because of these two chemicals, we pull together to accomplish much bigger things than if we were to face them alone. When firing at the right times and for the right reasons, they can help turn any one of us into an inspiring leader, a close friend, or a trusted teammate. And when we find ourselves inside a Circle of Safety, stress declines, fulfillment rises, our want to serve others increases and our willingness to trust others to watch our backs skyrockets!

## **S** is for Serotonin: The Leadership Chemical

Serotonin is the feeling of PRIDE. It is the feeling we get when we perceive that others like or respect us. We all want to feel valuable for the effort we put forth for the good of others in the group or the group itself. If we could get that feeling alone, then we wouldn't have awards ceremonies or player or team awards. We want to feel that we and the work we do are valued by others, especially those in our group. Serotonin is attempting to reinforce the bond between teacher and student, leader and follower, coach and player. This is why we can't feel a sense of accountability to numbers; we can only feel accountable to people. The more we give of ourselves to see others succeed, the greater our value to the group and the more respect they offer us. The strong, supportive ones of the group, the one willing to sacrifice time and energy so that others may gain, is a prerequisite for leadership.

## **O** is for Oxytocin: Chemical Love

Oxytocin is most people's favorite chemical! It's the feeling of friendship, love or deep trust. It is the feeling we get when we're in the company of our closest friends or trusted colleagues. It is the feeling we get when we do something nice for someone or someone does something nice for us. Without oxytocin, we wouldn't want to perform acts of generosity. There would be no empathy. We wouldn't be able to develop strong bonds of trust and friendship. It is because of oxytocin that we feel human connections and like being in the company of people we like. It makes us social!

**So why learn about these chemicals? How does this relate to our culture for Lady Viking Basketball?**

Endorphins play a part every time our players fight through fatigue and exhaustion while working out. From daily reps in summer open gyms, team camps, strength and conditioning workouts, and during the regular season, our student-athletes work tirelessly to improve.

Dopamine helps us reach our goals, small and big. The more difficult the task becomes, the more dopamine we get when we achieve it. This is because achieving something worthwhile take time and a daily commitment to excellence. The positive daily habits we create for ourselves now will determine our future success.

Serotonin makes us feel valued when we are around each other as a group. We don't want to let each other down and each player holds themselves and others accountable for what our program and culture expects of us. When we work to become a great team member, serotonin works positively for us in more ways we can describe.

Oxytocin helps us form bonds of trust and builds positive relationships for our team to feel connected. The more we give of ourselves to help each other succeed, the more it comes back full circle to boost or morale, commitment to one another, and ultimately the trust we place in the team!