

**Effective advice for
those suffering from
depression**



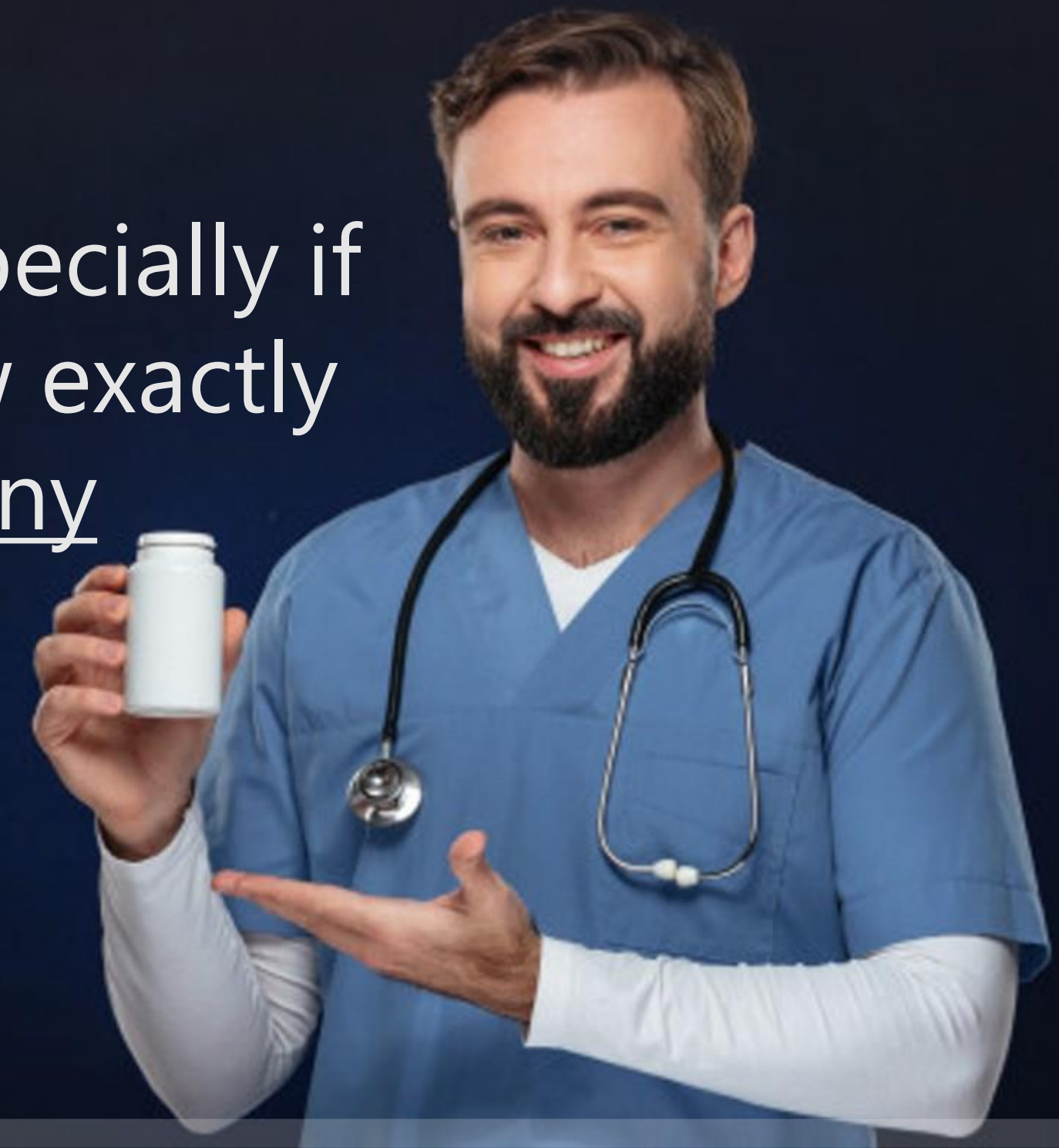
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The first thing I would say, is that *if you're dealing with someone who's depressed, and they're really depressed, you should try giving them antidepressants. Because if they die, you can't help them.*

Okay, so, if you're suffering, you are obligated, in a sense, to hold on to whatever rope someone throws you.

And one of the things, *I do with my clients all the time,* especially if they're really in trouble, is to tell them: "Look, I don't know exactly what's going to help you, but, don't arbitrarily throw out any possibilities, because you might not have that luxury."

Antidepressants helped a lot of people, and there are technical reasons why that's the case.



That's a simple answer, it's not relevant to what I already described. Except that, *if you're offered a gift by your society and it works, try it!* I don't care, what your presuppositions are.

Apart from that, lots of the time you see people, who are suffering with depression, for example. There's a multitude of reasons, but I'll take one common reason.

You can think about it, as associated with the story of Peter Pan.

A Peter Pan is someone who won't grow up, right?
Now, the problem with Peter Pan is, he gets to be king.
But it's king of Neverland, Neverland doesn't exist.
So, being king of nothing isn't that helpful.



Well, one of the things that you often see with people who suffer from depression, (and I'm not making a blanket statement about the cause of depression because there's lots of them).

Is that people, who don't have enough order in their life, tend to get overwhelmed.

So for example, if someone comes into me to see me, and they say they're depressed, I always ask them a very standard set of questions.

1) "Do you have a job?" If you don't have a job, you're really in trouble in our society.

First of all, your biological rhythms tend to go off the rails right away, because there's no reason to go to bed at any particular time, and there's no reason to get up.



For many people, *if they don't get up at the same time, they foul up the functioning of their circadian rhythms, and **that's enough to make them depressed*** right off the bat. Especially if they start napping during the afternoon.

*They also don't have a purpose. **People aren't good without a purpose.*** And this isn't, this isn't hypothesizing.

We absolutely understand the circuitry, that underlies positive emotion.

*We know how it works. **Almost all the positive emotion,** that any of you are likely to experience in your life, **will not be a consequence of attaining things.***

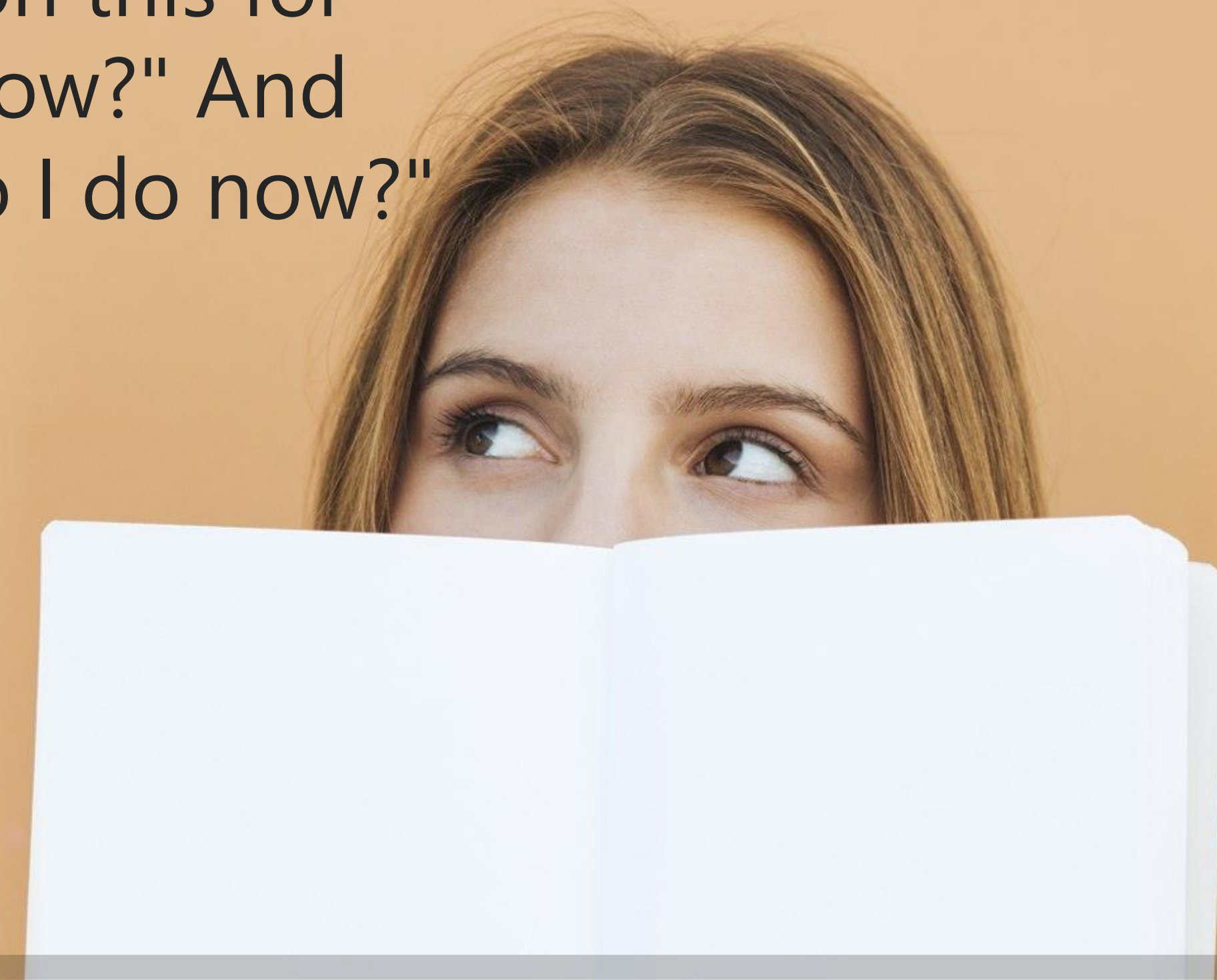
It will be a consequence of seeing, that things are working, *as you proceed towards a goal you value.*



That's completely different! And you need to know this because people are often stunned! For example, they finish their Ph.D. thesis, and *their presupposition is*, that they're going to *be elated for a month*, and often instead, *they're actually depressed*.

And they think: "What the hell, I've been working on this for seven years, and I handed it in, and what do I do now?" And that's what depresses them, right? It's the "what do I do now?"

Well they're fine, *if they enjoy the pursuing the thing*, as long as it was working out, they get a lot of enthusiasm and excitement out of that, 'cause that's how our nervous systems work.

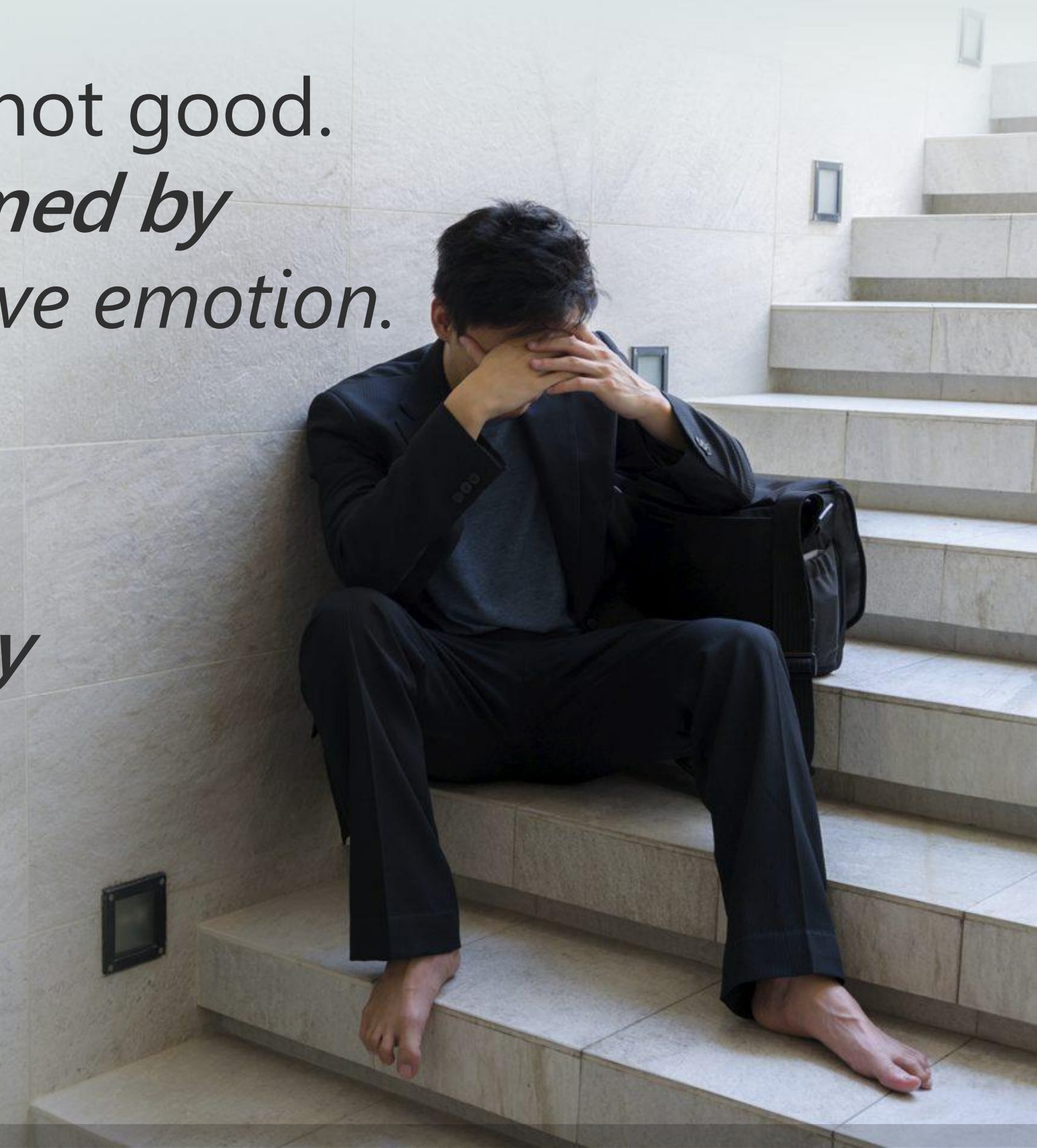


Most *of your positive emotion is goal pursuit-emotion.* If you take drugs, like cocaine or amphetamine, *the reason they're enjoyable is because they turn on the systems that help you pursue goals.* That's why people like them.

So if you don't have a job, you got no structure. That's not good. *Plus, you tend not to have a point. So you're overwhelmed by chaotic lack of structure, and you don't have any positive emotion.*

2) "Well, do you have any friends?"

So, sometimes you see people who are depressed: *they have no job, they have no friends, they have no intimate relationship, they have an additional health problem, and they have a drug and alcohol problem.*





My experience has been: if you have three of those problems, it's almost impossible to help you.

You're so deeply mired in chaos, that you can't get out, because, *you make progress on one front, and one of the other problems pulls you down.*

So one of the things I tell people *who are depressed* is like: "Don't sacrifice your stability."

"**Get a job**, even if it's not the job you exactly want, get a damn job. You need a job."

Find some friends. *Get out in the dating circuit. See, if you can establish an intimate relationship.*

Put together some of the foundational items, that are like pillars, that your life rests on.



Well, that's the practical thing to do. So that's one example with regards to depression.

Well the thing is, you don't just launch it on them, you know, *you've gotta negotiate with the person*.

And you also got to *teach them to negotiate with themselves, and this is something that's very useful to know*. You know, um, you can tyrannize yourself into doing things, but I wouldn't recommend it. What I would recommend instead, *is that you ask yourself, what you're willing to do*.

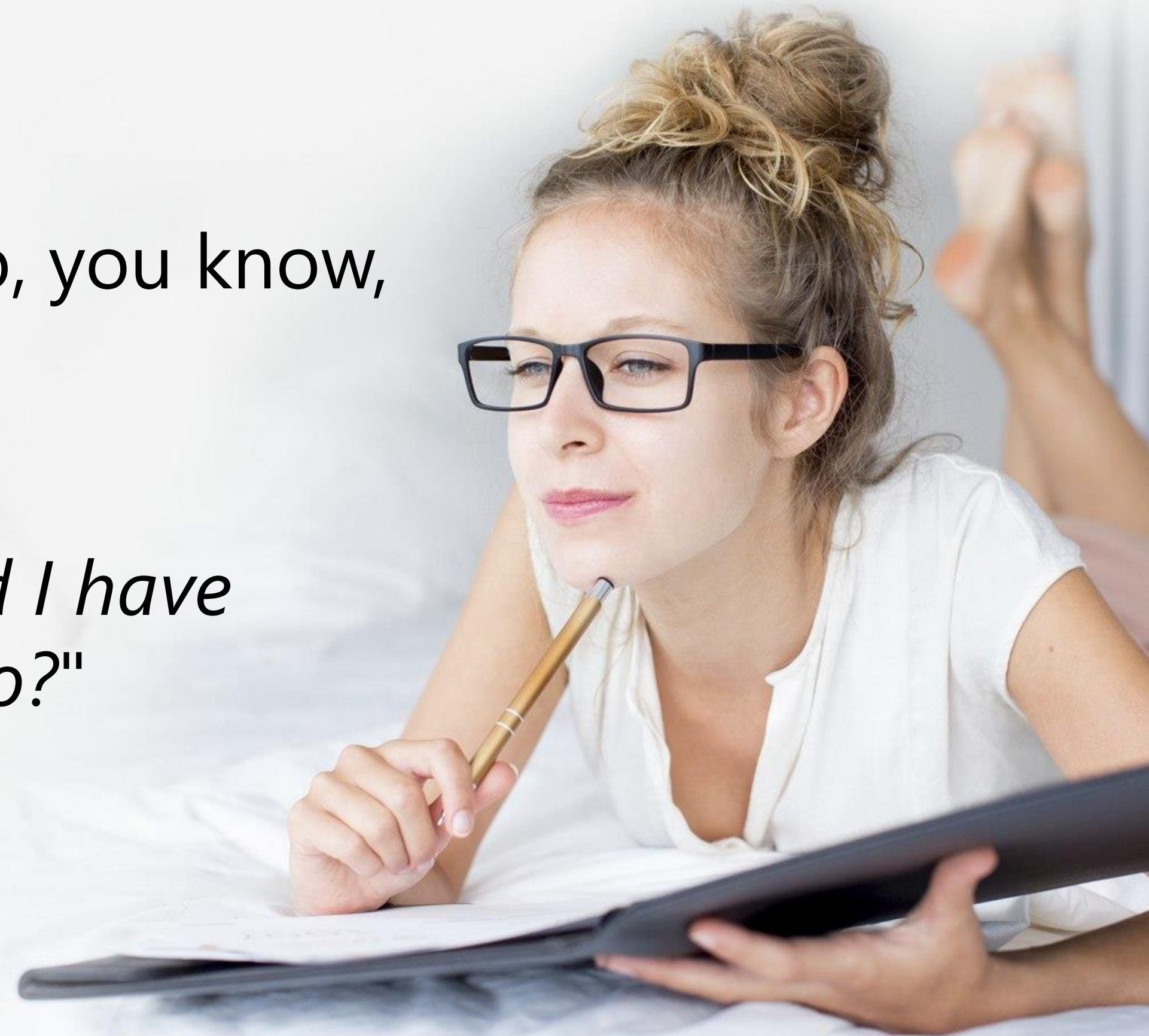
It's a really effective technique. It's like a meditative technique, so, for example, you can get up in the morning, and you can say:



"Well, you know, I'd like to have a good day today, so I'd like to go to bed tonight without feeling guilty, because I, you know, I didn't do some things I said I was going to do, and I, you know, I'd like to have kind of an interesting day.

So I have to fulfill my responsibilities, and I want to, you know, enjoy the day."

Then you can ask yourself: "Well, okay, what would I have to do, in order for that to happen, that I WOULD do?"



And *the probability*, if you practice this for 3 or 4 days, is your brain will just tell you. It'll say: "Well, you know, there's that piece of homework, that you haven't done for like three weeks, You should knock that sucker off, cause it would only take you 10 minutes. And you've been avoiding it and torturing yourself to death for, you know, like 72 hours straight.

And if you do that, *here's a little interesting thing you can do*, and, you know, maybe **this is a little obligation you should clean up.**

So, what you do in a situation like that, is *you teach the person to negotiate with themselves.*



Say, well: let's figure out, what your aims are. You gotta have some aims, whatever they are.

And they might say: "Well I'm so depressed, I don't have any aims". And then I say: "***Well, pick the least objectionable of the aims.***"

And act it out for a while, and see what happens.
Because sometimes, your emotions, your emotional systems are so fouled up, that you have to pretend, you have to act the thing out, before you can start to believe it.

I mean, people always assume, they have to believe and then act, but, but that's sometimes that's true, and lots of times it isn't.



So the trick — if you're doing therapeutic work with somebody, and you're helping them establish a structure — *is to find out what they'll do.*

Now, *if they want to get better, which is not a given*, because there are often payoffs for not getting better, that's basically the payoffs of being a martyr, or maybe the payoffs of doing, what your entirely pathological family members want you to do, because they actually want you to fail.

Assuming you wanna get better, there's usually something you can figure out, that would constitute a step towards some sort of concrete goal.

And my presumption, it's a behavioral presumption, fundamentally, is that **small, accruing gains, that repeat — are unbelievably powerful.**

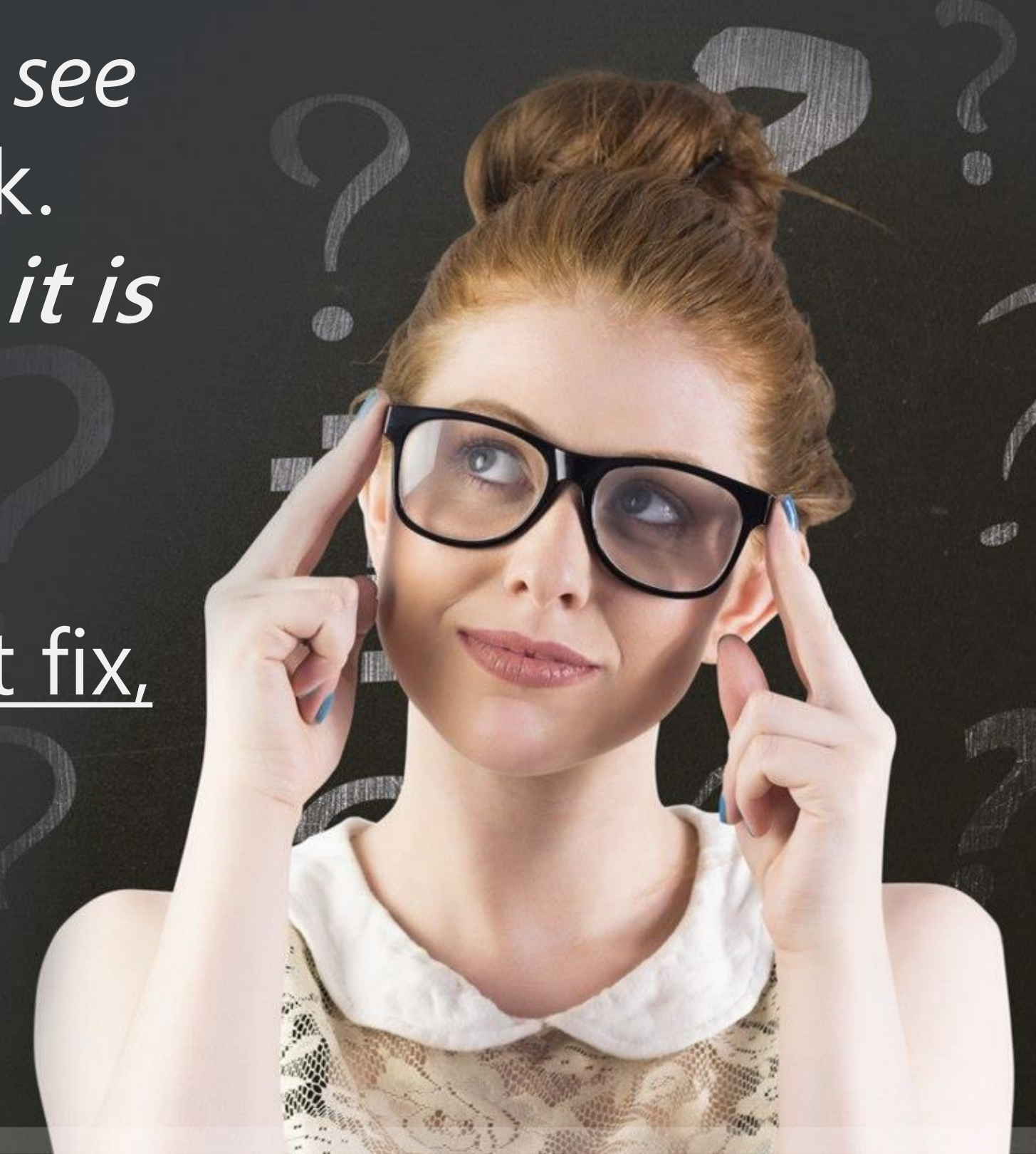




So you know, *this is another thing to know about in your own life*; it's something I learned in part from reading the writings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, he was a great Russian philosopher a novelist.

You know, he said: *You can look at your life, and you can see what isn't right about it.* I mean all you have to do, is look. *And then you can start to fix that. And the way you fix it is by noticing what you could, in fact, fix.*

You know, people are often trying to fix things they can't fix, *which I would not recommend.* Because *if you try to fix something you can't fix, you'll just ruin it.*



Like, you can find all sorts of undergraduates, who are perfectly *willing to restructure* the, uh, you know, the *international economic system*, who cannot keep the room clean.

And there's actually a gap there, you know, which and it's surprising that people don't actually notice.

So, I would say: "If you pay attention, you can see things that you could fix." *They yell at you*, they really do! We even know how that happens.

Let me, *let me give you an example* because rooms are full of stories.

And the *stories have*, have *effects on you*, so here's a classic experiment.



So you take two groups of undergraduates, you bring them into your lab, and you give one group on a multiple-choice test that has a bunch of words in it, that are associated with being old.

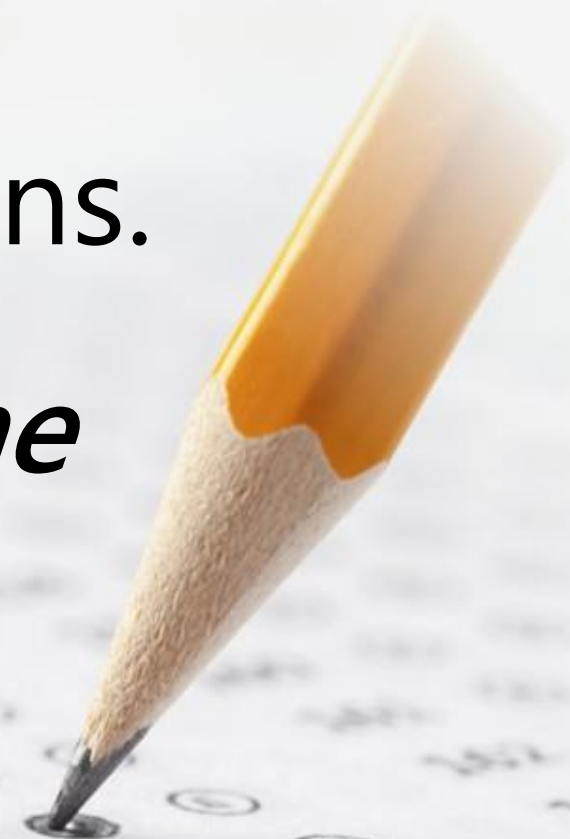
And you give the other group the same multiple-choice test, except the words are associated with being young.

This is independent of the content of the test, it's just descriptions.

And then you time the undergraduates, as they walk back to the elevators.

The ones who read, *the ones who completed the multiple-choice test*, that had more words associated with aging, walk slower back to the elevators.

And they don't know that. *And they don't know they're doing it.*



And that- *that study's been replicated in various forms, many many times.*

You're unbelievably sensitive to the story that *your environment* is telling you because your environment is **not made out of objects.**
That's just wrong.

Your environment is basically made out of something like tools and obstacles.

You're a tool-using creature, you're a tool perceiving creature.

The things you, is like, if I take you out of this room, and I say:
"Well, what was in the room?"

You're not gonna say, uh you know, "random patterns in the carpet". Because they're - they're real, just as good an object as anything else.



You're gonna say "chairs", because you can sit on them, and you're gonna say "handrails" because you can hold them, you gonna say "stairs", because you can walk down them. That's what you see, and that's what you interact with.

And if you pay attention to your environment, which is you, by the way, extended — **all of your experience is you; *it will tell you all the time, what you should do.*** All you have to do is do it. But then you have to decide if you want to do it.

One of the things I've noticed about people, cause I've wondered, once I started studying these *mythological stories*, and I got this idea about the fact that **life can be meaningful enough to justify its suffering.** "God, that's such a good idea!"



Cause it's not optimistic, exactly. You know, some people will tell you "well, you can be happy." It's like, those people are idiots.

*I'm telling you, they're idiots! There's gonna be things that come along, that **flatten you so hard, you won't believe it.***

And you're not happy then! And so, *if life is to be happy, well in those situations* — "What are you doing? Why even live?"

But life isn't to be happy. *If you're happy, you're bloody fortunate, and you should enjoy it.* You should, because **it's the Grace of God**, so to speak.



With regards to meaning, I thought "*Well, people know, when they're doing something meaningful, they can tell! So why the hell don't they do meaningful things all the time?*" It seems obvious. You could do it. I mean it's hard.

You know, cause other people want you to do other things, and *it's a struggle*, but — *everything's a struggle*.

And then I thought "Well, Oh I get it, I see why". It took me about ten years to figure this out. **People have a choice!**

Choice 1: **"Nothing you do, means anything."**



Well, that's kind of a drag, right? Meaninglessness of life, and all that existential angst, you know, that's kind of a pain.

But the upside of *"Nothing that you do is meaningful"*, is: *You don't have to do anything*. You've got no responsibility!

Now, *you have to suffer because things are meaningless*, but that's a small price to pay, for being able to be completely useless!

The alternative, the alternative is: **Choice 2 "Everything you do matters"**.

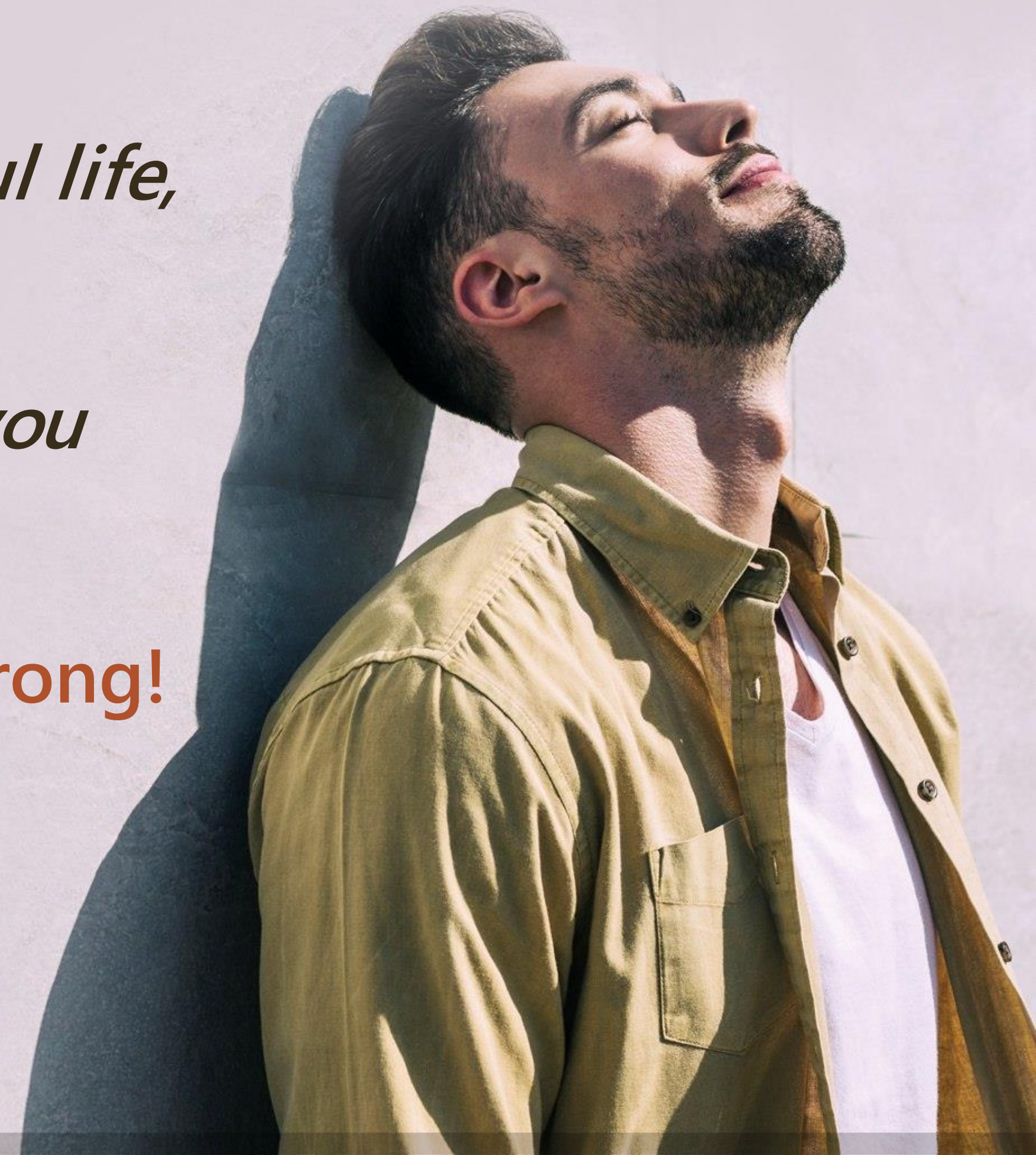


Really! If you make a mistake — it's a real mistake! If you betray someone, you tilt the world a little more sharply towards evil, rather than good. **It matters, what you do!**

Well if you buy that, *then you can have a meaningful life*, but — there's no mucking around.

It means responsibility. *It means that the decisions you make, are important.*

It means, that *when you do something wrong, it's wrong!*



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