SOLAR-POWERED FLIGHT

THE HAPPY SECRET TO BETTER WORK

YOUR LIFESTYLE HAS ALREADY BEEN DESIGNED

THE WEEK THAT WAS

March 6th, 2013

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**Shawn Achor: The happy secret to better work**

We believe that we should work to be happy, but could that be backwards? In this fast-moving and entertaining talk, psychologist Shawn Achor argues that actually happiness inspires productivity.

Shawn Achor is the CEO of Good Think Inc., where he researches and teaches about positive psychology.

[Visit TED's official page](http://www.ted.com/talks/shawn_achor_the_happy_secret_to_better_work.html)

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**Solar Impulse Launches Solar-Powered Flight from San Francisco to New York**

After much anticipation, the moment we've all been waiting for finally arrived in the early hours this morning as the Solar Impulse airplane embarked on the historic cross-country flight. At about 6:00 a.m., pilot Bertrand Piccard took off from Moffett Field at NASA Ames Research Center in Mountain View, CA, heading southeast, towards Phoenix -- the next stop in the cross-country voyage. From there, the Swiss-made plane will make its way towards New York City, and it'll do so without using a single drop of fuel.

[Read more](http://www.inhabitat.com/solar-impulse-launches-solar-powered-flight-from-san-francisco-to-new-york/)

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**Smart foam chair grows and packs itself when heated - video**

Belgian designer Carl de Smet displays his smart foam chair, which does not need nails or screws to be assembled -- it grows itself, using just a bit of heat. The 'shape memory' polyurethane can shrink down to five times its size in 10 minutes, and if damaged it can be repaired by heating it up again. De Smet has been working on the design since 2002.

[Read more](http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/video/2013/apr/10/smart-foam-chair-heated-video)
THE WEEK THAT WAS
It seems I got much more for my dollar when I was traveling. Why?

A Culture of Unnecessaries

Here in the West, a lifestyle of unnecessary spending has been deliberately cultivated and nurtured in the public by big business. Companies in all kinds of industries have a huge stake in the public's penchant to be careless with their money. They will seek to encourage the public's habit of casual or non-essential spending whenever they can.

In the documentary The Corporation, a marketing psychologist discussed one of the methods she used to increase sales. Her staff carried out a study on what effect the nagging of children had on their parents' likelihood of buying a toy for them. They found out that 20% to 40% of the purchases of their toys would not have occurred if the child didn't nag its parents. One in four visits to theme parks would not have taken place. They used these studies to market their products directly to children, encouraging them to nag their parents to buy.

This marketing campaign alone represents millions of dollars that were spent because of demand that was completely manufactured.

"You can manipulate consumers into wanting, and therefore buying, your products. It's a game." — Lucy Hughes, co-creator of "The Naga Factor"

This is only one small example of something that has been going on for a very long time. Big companies didn't make their millions by earnestly promoting the virtues of their products, they made it by creating a culture of hundreds of millions of people that buy way more than they need and try to chase away dissatisfaction with money.

We buy stuff to cheer ourselves up, to keep up with the Joneses, to fulfill our childhood vision of what our adulthood would be like, to broadcast our status to the world, and for a lot of other psychological reasons that have very little to do with how useful the product really is. How much stuff is in your basement or garage that you haven't used in the past year? The real reason for the forty-hour workweek is to develop the 40-hour workweek as the normal lifestyle. Under these working conditions people have to build a life in the evenings and on weekends. This arrangement makes us naturally more inclined to spend heavily on entertainment and conveniences because our free time is so scarce. I've only been back at work for a few days, but already I'm noticing that the more wholesome activities are quickly dropping out of my life walking, exercising, reading, meditating, and extra writing.

The one conspicuous similarity between these activities is that they cost little or no money, but they take time. Suddenly I have a lot more money and a lot less time, which means I have a lot more in common with the typical working North American than I did a few months ago. While I was abroad I wouldn't have thought twice about spending the day wandering through a national park or reading my book on the beach for a few hours. Now that kind of stuff feels like it's out of the question. Doing either one would take most of one of my precious weekend days!

The last thing I want to do when I get home from work is exercise. It's also the last thing I want to do after dinner or before bed or as soon as I wake, and that's really all the time I have on a weekday.

This seems like a problem with a simple answer: work less so I'd have more free time. I've already proven to myself that I can live a fulfilling lifestyle with less than I make right now. Unfortunately, this is close to impossible in my industry, and most others. You work 40-plus hours or you work zero. My clients and contractors are all firmly entrenched in the standard-workday culture, so it isn't practical to ask them not to ask anything of me after 1pm, even if I could convince my employer not to.

The eight-hour workday developed during the industrial revolution in Britain in the 19th century, as a respite for factory workers who were being exploited with 14- or 16-hour workdays. As technologies and methods advanced, workers in all industries became able to produce much more value in a shorter amount of time. You'd think this would lead to shorter workdays.

But the 8-hour workday is too profitable for big business, not because of the amount of work people get done in eight hours (the average office worker gets less than three hours of actual work done in 8 hours) but because it makes for such a purchase-happy public. Keeping free time scarce means people pay a lot more for convenience, gratification, and any other relief they can buy. It keeps them watching television, and its commercials. It keeps them unambiguously outside of work.

We've been led into a culture that has been engineered to leave us tired, hungry for indulgence, willing to pay a lot for convenience and entertainment, and most importantly, vaguely dissatisfied with our lives so that we continue wanting things we don't have. We buy so much because it always seems like something is still missing.

Western economies, particularly that of the United States, have been built in a very calculated manner on gratification, addiction, and unnecessary spending. We spend to cheer ourselves up, to reward ourselves, to celebrate, to fix problems, to elevate our status, and to alleviate boredom.

Can you imagine what would happen if all of America stopped buying so much unnecessary fluff that doesn't add a lot of lasting value to our lives?

The economy would collapse and never recover. All of America's well-publicized problems, including obesity, depression, pollution and corruption are what it costs to create and sustain a trillion-dollar economy. For the economy to be "healthy", America has to remain unhealthy. Healthy, happy people don't feel like they need much they don't already have, and that means they don't buy a lot of junk, don't need to be entertained as much, and they don't end up watching a lot of commercials.

The culture of the eight-hour workday is big business' most powerful tool for keeping people in this same dissatisfied state where the answer to every problem is to buy something. You may have heard of Parkinson's Law. It is often used in reference to time usage: the more time you've been given to do something, the more it will take you to do it. It's amazing how much you can get done in twenty minutes if twenty minutes is all you have. But if you have all afternoon, it would probably take way longer.

Most of us treat our money this way. The more we make, the more we spend. It's not that we suddenly need to buy more just because we make more, only that we can, so we do. In fact, it's quite difficult for us to avoid increasing our standard of living (or at least our rate of spending) every time we get a raise. I don't think it's necessary to shun the whole ugly system and go live in the woods, pretending to be a deer-mute, as Holden Caulfield often fantasized. But we could certainly do well to understand what big business really wants us to be. We've been working for decades to create millions of ideal consumers, and they have succeeded. Unless you're a real anarchy, your lifestyle has already been designed.

The perfect customer is dissatisfied but hopeful, uninterested in serious personal development, highly habituated to the television, working full-time, earning a fair amount, indulging during their free time, and somehow just getting by.

Is this you?

Two weeks ago I would have said hell no, that's not me, but if all my weeks were like this one has been, that might be wistful thinking.

“Can you manipulate consumers into wanting, and therefore buying, your products. It’s a game.”