

# Emotional Disaster Recovery

## Debugging the Self with Effective Monitoring

# The workplace is a battleground.



Once, I was an eager and ambitious DevOps Engineer working at a start-up I really loved getting up to go to work to. It was that black pearl of a company you find once or twice in your career. Then I broke production. It wasn't for long, a dozen minutes at most! But I am still ashamed of how I reacted that day.





I panicked and ignored Slack calls from my team to help. I felt like I was dying and I was terribly angry at myself because I brought down our app that served thousands of childcare facilities around the world.

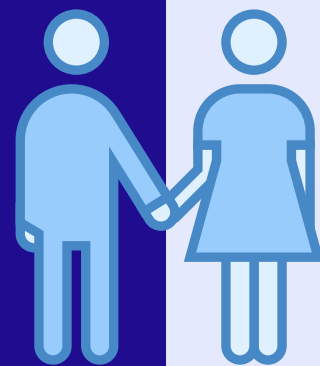
So not only did I crash production, I also failed thousands of kids, simultaneously.

Anyone else bring down production?

It feels like a rite of passage in our line of work.



**Our  
workplace  
is our  
livelihood.**



**And the  
people we  
love  
depend  
on us.**

# HELL IS OTHER PEOPLE.

**What he  
meant was...**

**The feeling of being pinned  
by the gaze of others &  
worrying over their view of  
you.**

Sartre is actually misunderstood here. What he meant is the feeling of being pinned by the gaze of others, worrying over their view of you. And at a company, it's a lot of others.

It's a **host** of factors that set the stage of a battleground worthy of Shakespeare. So much of it is self-created. The disaster of taking down the app thousands of parents use to check on their kids at nursery: no one in the world was burning as much as I was that day.





Parents couldn't use the app for just a few minutes yet no one felt worse than me.

**So much of our  
battleground is self  
created.**



# The actual crisis: Level 1





A large, bright orange and yellow fireball or explosion against a black background. The fireball is the central focus, with a bright yellow core and a surrounding orange and red glow. The background is dark, making the fireball stand out prominently.

# My internal crisis: Level 100



## Stressful events, stressors and psychological strains in young professional engineers<sup>1</sup>

A. KEENAN and T. J. NEWTON

Department of Business Organisation, Heriot-Watt University, 31-35 Grassmarket, Edinburgh, EH1 2HT, Scotland

The second most popular source of stress, interpersonal conflict, is quite distinct from the more familiar concept of role conflict (e.g. French and Caplan, 1972). Interpersonal conflict refers here to negative interpersonal encounters involving covert hostility, verbal aggression, angry exchanges between individuals, and so on. Once again one or two examples will illustrate the point. One subject explained: 'If you really want a nasty. A man walked off the site saying I had insulted him. He was clearly ragging me but I could not think of anything constructive to shout back.' To quote another: 'One of the fitters said there was nothing wrong with a door latch I had asked him to fit and started swearing at me. He was calling into doubt my judgment and the way in which he said it hurt me.' As these examples illustrate, the central feature of this category relates to negative interpersonal encounters, often with strong undercurrents of hostility.

154 A. Keenan and T. J. Newton

Table 1. Proportion of stressful incidents reported in each of the 10 higher order categories

Category description	No. of respondents	Percentage of total
Respondents' time and/or efforts wasted	41	25.5
Interpersonal conflict	26	16.2
Qualitative aspects of work		
Overload	9	5.5
Underload	16	9.9
		} 15.4%
Quantitative aspects of work		
Overload	7	4.3
Underload	6	3.7
		} 8.0%
Conditions of employment e.g. pay/career prospects/ job security	11	6.9
Role conflict	7	4.3
Role ambiguity	2	1.2
Lowered self-esteem or self confidence	9	5.6
Other	27	16.9
Total	161	100



You may not be taking down production every day so let's take a far more common example of interpersonal conflicts at work, one of the most common stressors at work.



How do  
we  
navigate  
all this  
stress?



How do  
we do it  
with  
grace?



# Tao Hansen

Tao Hansen  
@worldofgeese

Developer  
Advocate  
@garden\_io



My name is Tao and today I want to talk about stress. More specifically stress reaction, anger and how to deal with it at work. I've been meditating for about 8 years. I meditate with my wife (almost) every morning. My longest retreat in silence was for 5 weeks.

I will do a short guided meditations and a live demo at the end of a brain under meditation.







**worldofgeese** 🦢🌐🦢 @worldofgeese · Aug 20

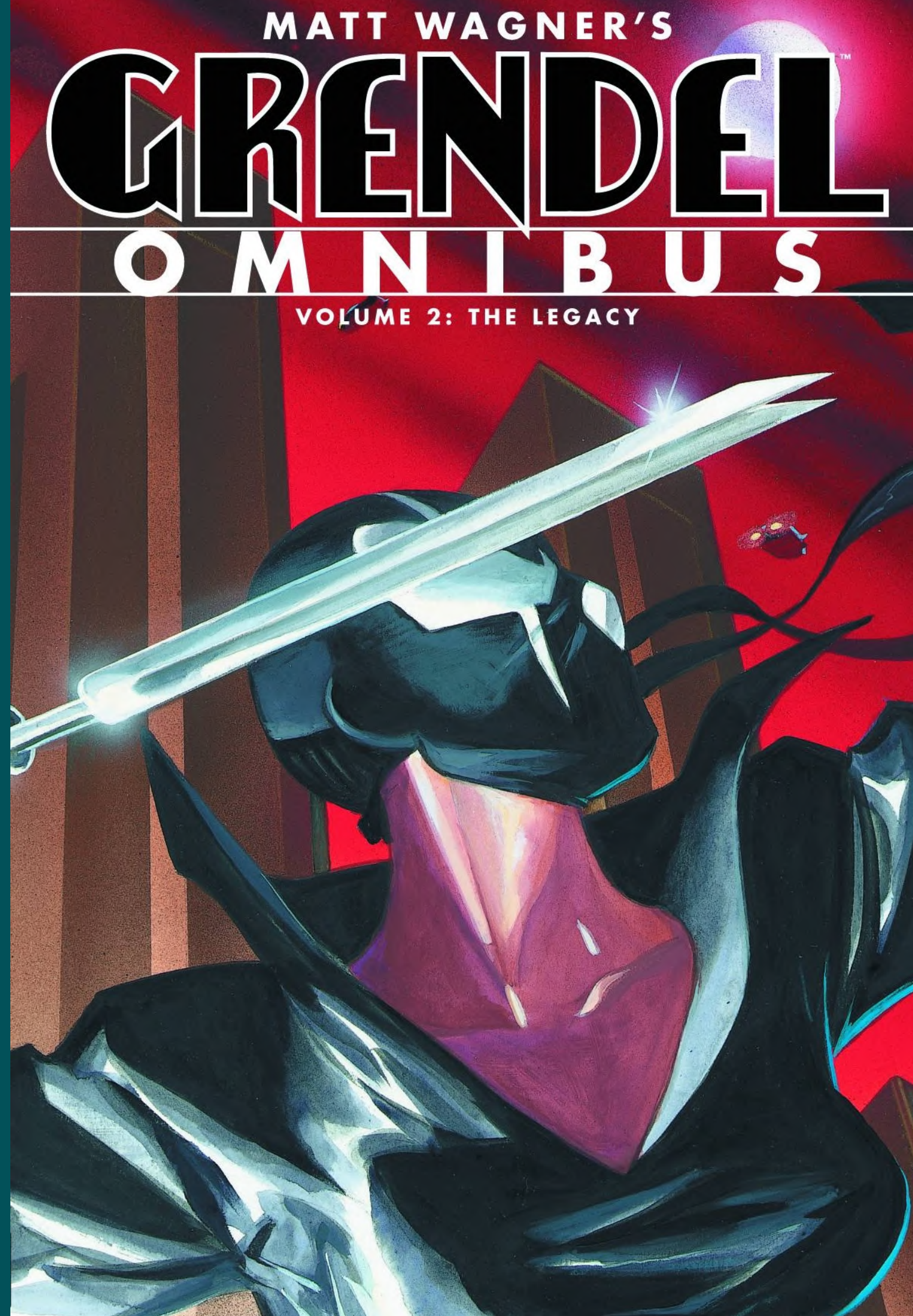


I've been thinking over the weekend how to imbue tech Twitter with more compassion for and sensitivity to the labor of their fellows. It's a space I desire to have a positive impact on.

- I started thinking about talk when I became a Developer Advocate 6 months ago at garden.io because of Twitter. I wrote this tweet because lots of people were angry on Twitter, at their jobs, at themselves. This talk is my first real try to make a positive impact and bring out more kindness. I want everyone to have scientifically validated tools for dealing with anger at work \*and\* on Twitter.
- But first, the story of Grendel.



# Behold



- In my father's comic book chest were hundreds of issues. Chaos. Grendel seized me. Matt Wagner wrote Grendel as a study of the nature of aggression.
- The mask of grendel has had many owners.
- What unites them is rage.

## *The Devil*

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[Wagner](#) . Wagner, Matt. Grendel Omnibus

[Pitch](#) 2: The Legacy . Edited by Diana

Schultz, 1995



The mask of Grendel eventually destroys the wearer even when worn to do good.

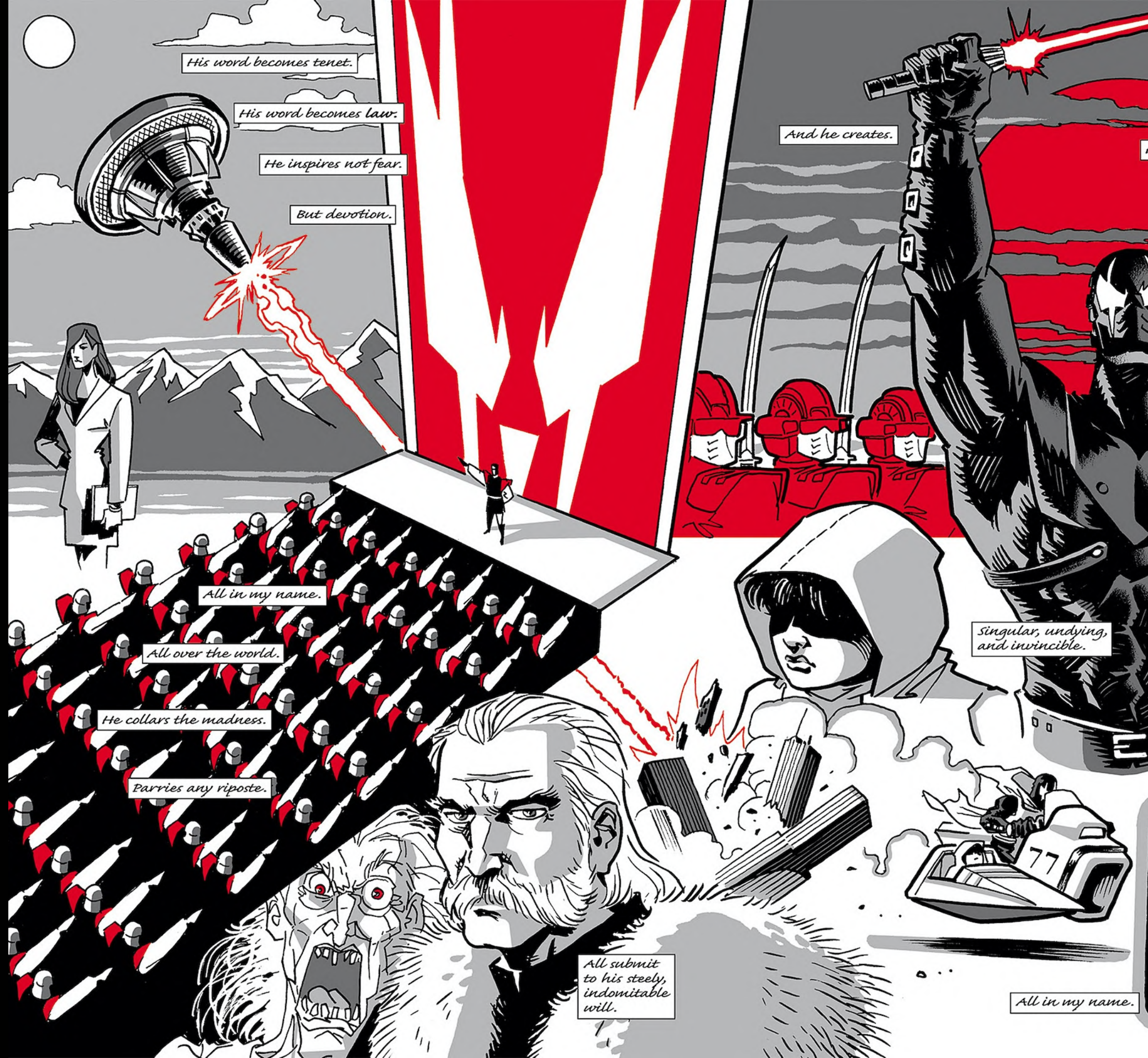
**Our  
anger is  
infectious.**



Across the Grendel cycle, the mask is passed on and grows in influence until it becomes a word synonymous with The Devil and unites a great army in the name of the Grendel Khan. So powerful is this force of anger, it possesses those around us.

Think of when you have been angry. The world

disappears. Only  
Pitch  
anger remains.



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permission, from  
[Matt Wagner](#) . Wagner,  
Matt. Grendel Omnibus  
Volume 1: Hunter Rose .  
Edited by Diana Schultz,  
2012



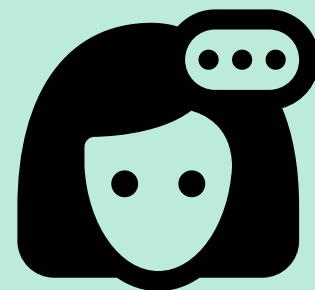


Put on the mask of  
Grendel and you put  
on the mask of rage.

Put on the mask  
of rage and you  
become it.



**Is anger ever  
appropriate in the  
work place?**





# No.



It's never appropriate. It doesn't mean we won't experience it. We are human. But we do have a choice of what to do with the anger.

Managing emotions and their expressions can be done skillfully.



Catharsis descends from the Greek *katharsis* with a "k" meaning to cleanse or purge.

In Catharsis Theory, emotions build up like water under pressure until they threaten to explode dangerously if we do not release them.







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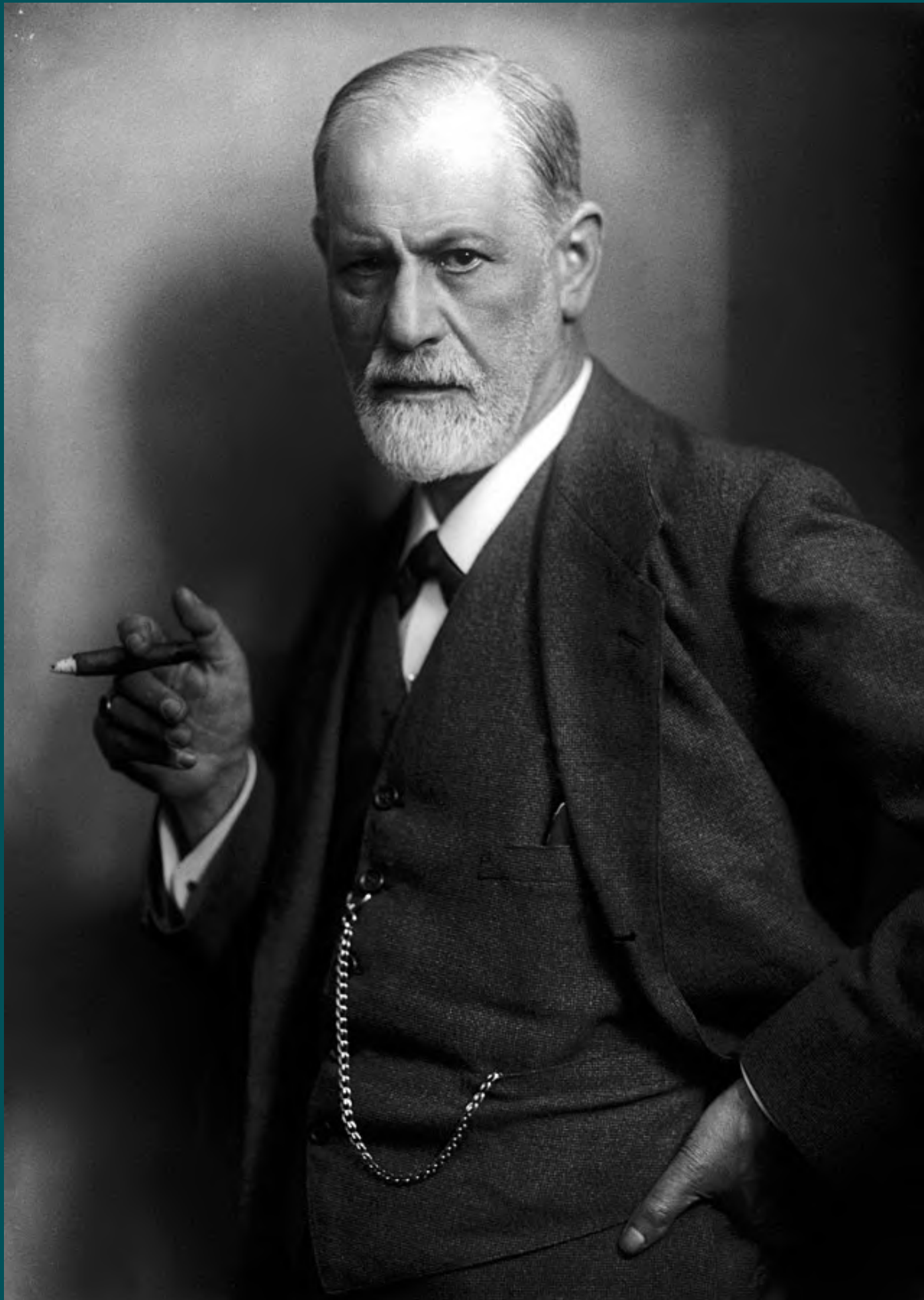


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**Profit?**







# Sigmund Freud



The theory of therapeutic catharsis descends from Sigmund Freud and his mentor Josef Breuer.



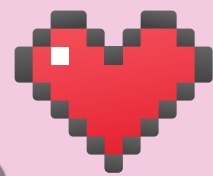
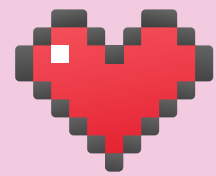
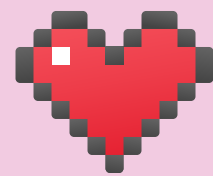
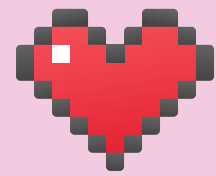
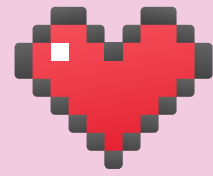


# Sigmund Freud

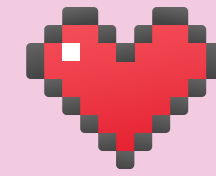


Yes, the man who famously popularized cocaine is responsible for the hydraulic theory of emotions otherwise known as catharsis theory.





Pitch



Let me introduce you to professor Brad Bushman.

- Spent his life putting and end to this myth.
- In a study of 600 college students, those who expressed their anger by punching a bag remained angry.
- What did he think of frueds theory?



"THERE IS NO  
SCIENTIFIC  
EVIDENCE TO  
SUPPORT IT."



"VENTING  
ANGER IS LIKE  
USING  
GASOLINE TO  
PUT OUT A  
FIRE."



# LET'S TALK STRATEGIES!



Luckily, we are not possessed by the spirit of Grendel. We can practice techniques with large body of supporting scientific evidence. Thousands of studies have been done under the umbrella of mindfulness.

- Mindfulness is the moment to moment attention on anything that's happening **in our experience** without any judgment or taking them for **me** or **mine**.



# Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

- Developed by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn in 1979
- Emphasis on waking up to being present
- Examines effects of chronic stress

# Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy

- Published in 2002 by three practicing clinicians.
- Acute problem focused
- Focus on low mood and negative thought pattern early in the program

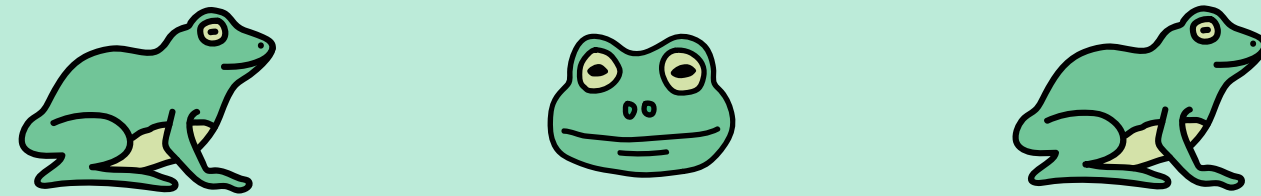
- “The program has taught me how to anchor myself. I have discovered that I am able to cope with extreme stressful situations without ‘falling to pieces.’ I feel less scattered, which was my original goal.”—Hospital-based nurse

- “This program has supported me to cope with the stresses associated with work. It has also enriched positive experiences to a high degree. My work load is overwhelming at times and mindfulness has enabled me to have a ‘breathing space’ to refocus at times of panic/feelings of being out of control.”—Community-based nurse



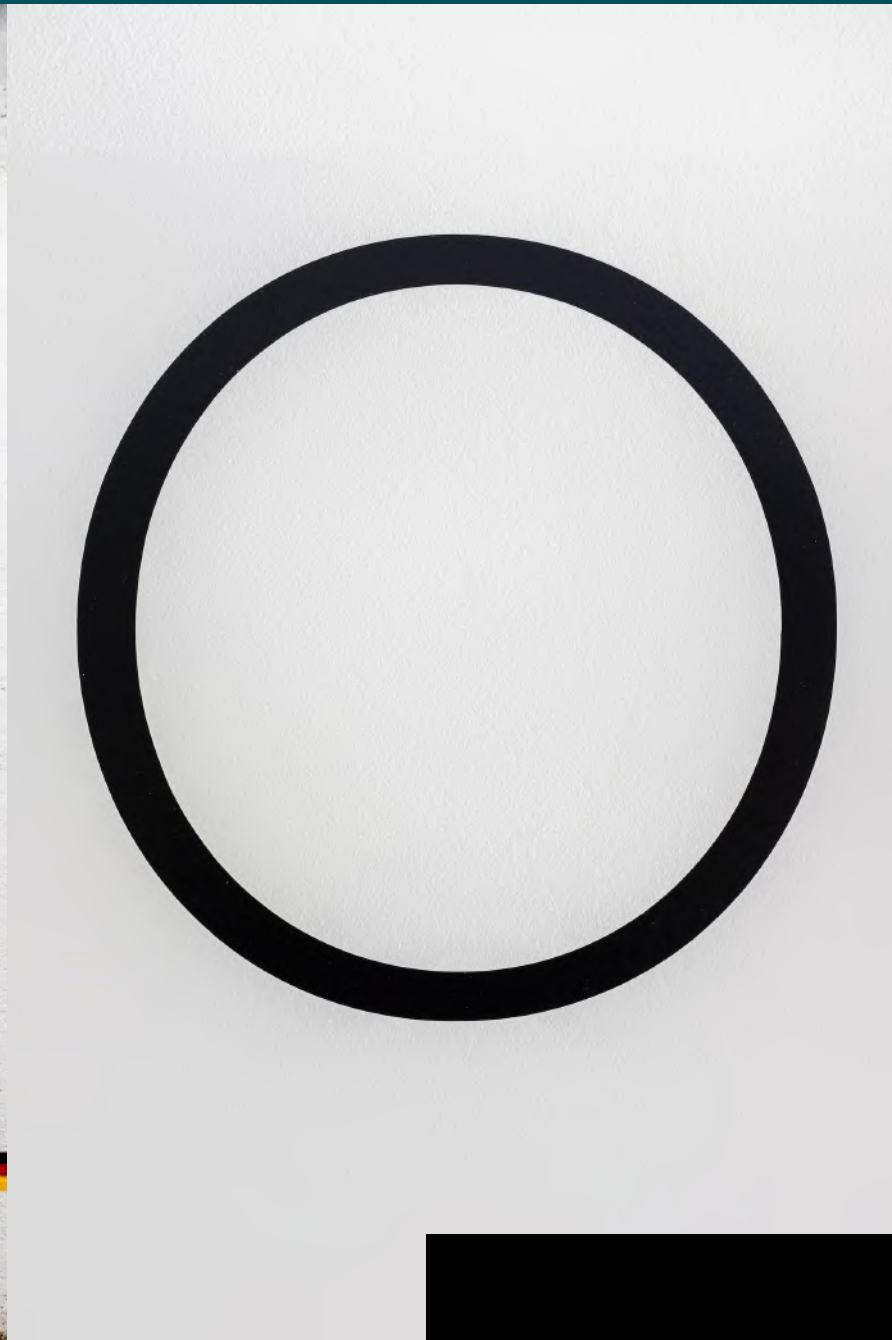


**You don't even need to  
complete an 8 week course to  
reap the benefits.**



**Mindfulness-based  
interventions as short as a  
single session of 5 minutes can  
be effective!**





Let's talk technique. STOP is the acronym to remember when faced with a difficult situation at work or in your personal life.





is for stop and take stock.

Stop reacting and feel, hear, see whatever you are experiencing. By stepping outside the difficult emotion, you have stopped the act of becoming.







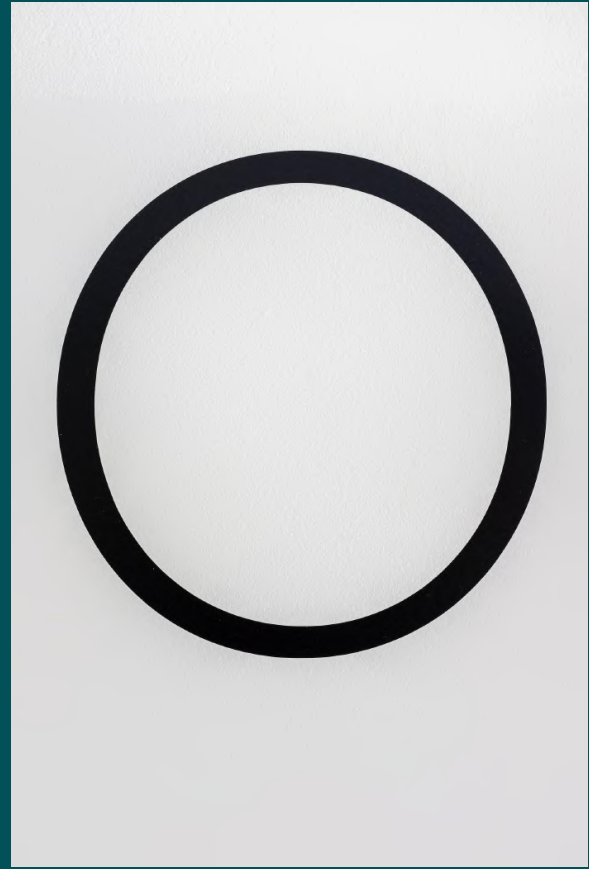
is for take a breath.

Navigate your attention to the the breath while simultaneously remaining aware of the negative emotion.

- The point is not to narrow but to expand your scope of awareness.





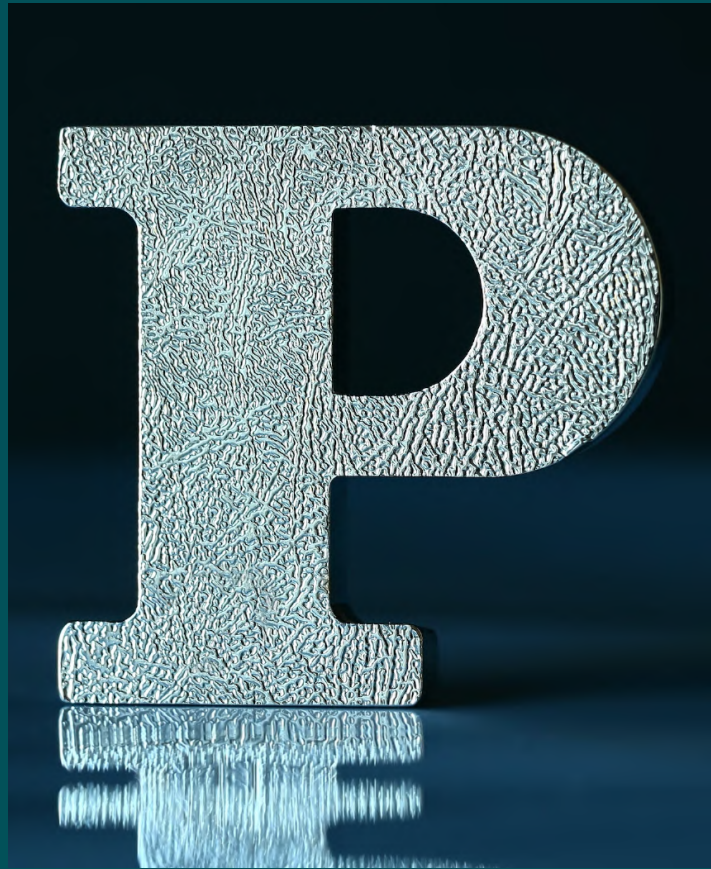


**is for open and observe.**

Continue to expand your awareness to include your body, the space around your body, sights and sounds.







**P** is for proceed.

Proceed with curiosity,  
not reactivity; be kind.  
If you are in an  
interpersonal conflict,  
you may wish to give  
voice to your feelings  
without owning them.  
"I am feeling this  
way" ...




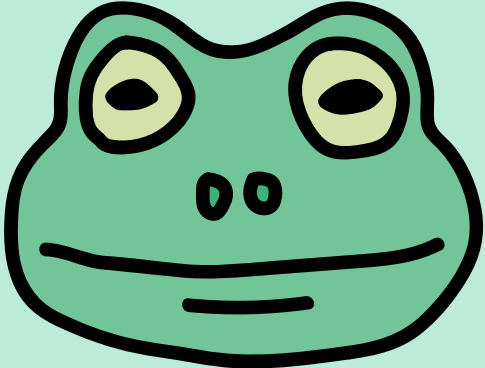




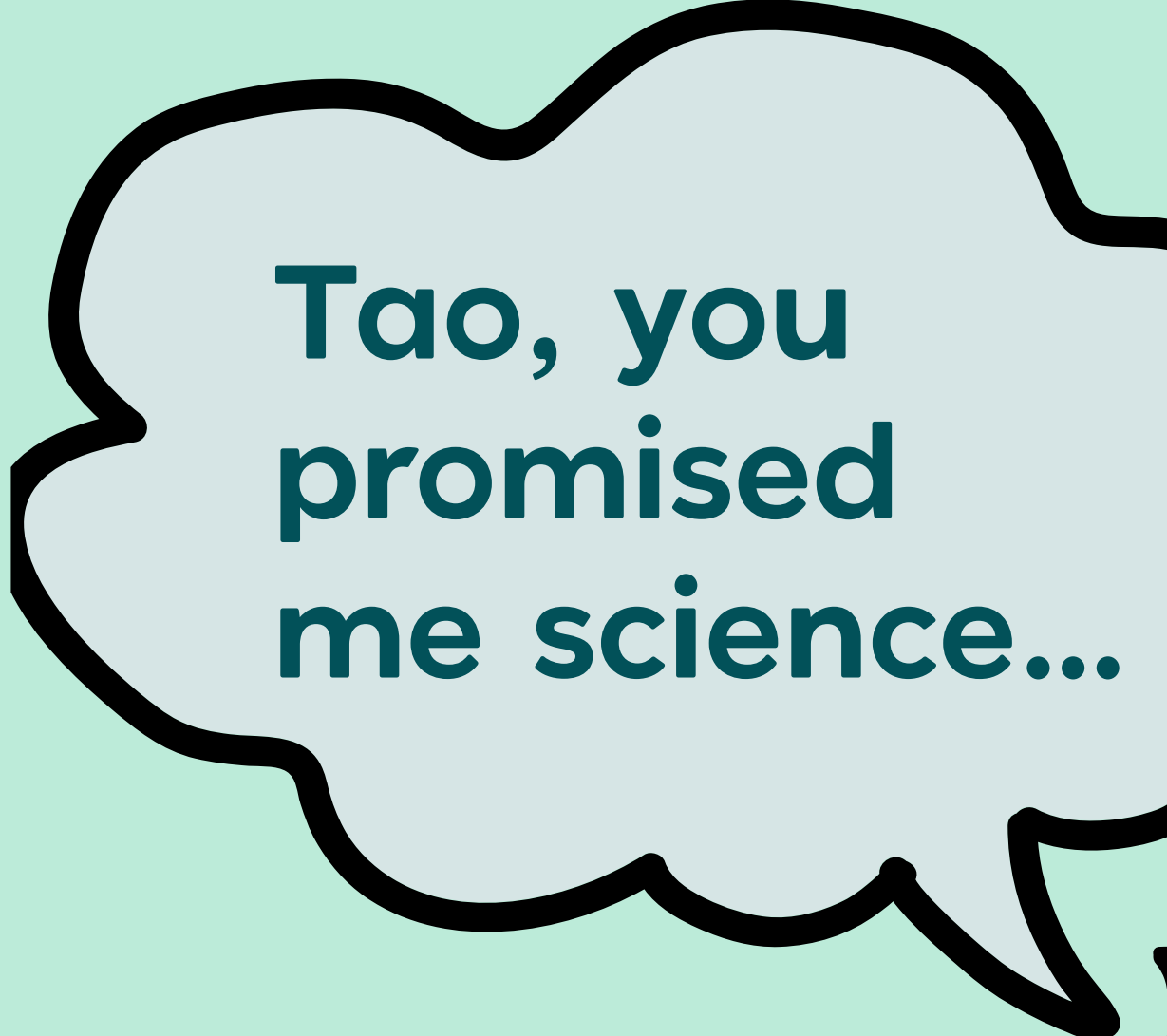

**GREAT JOB!**







**Tao, you look  
look  
ridiculous...**

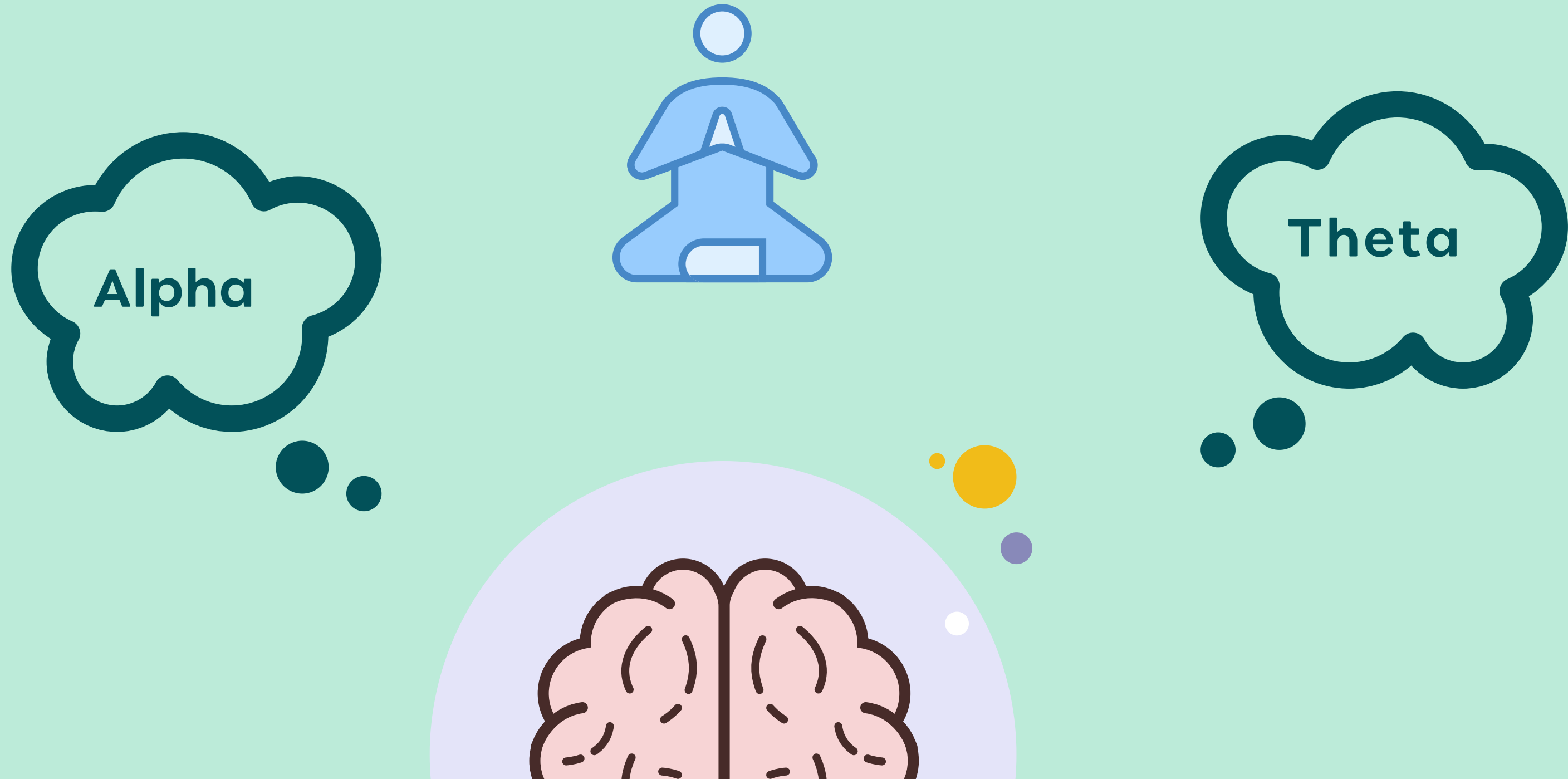


**Tao, you  
promised  
me science...**

In the talk, I put on a mobile electroencephalogram device. I assure you this, has the backing of science!

- Let's start with brainwaves and what they are.



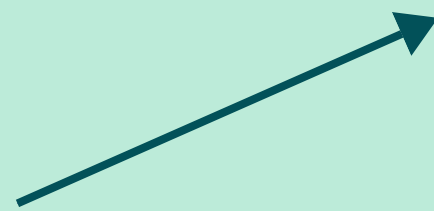
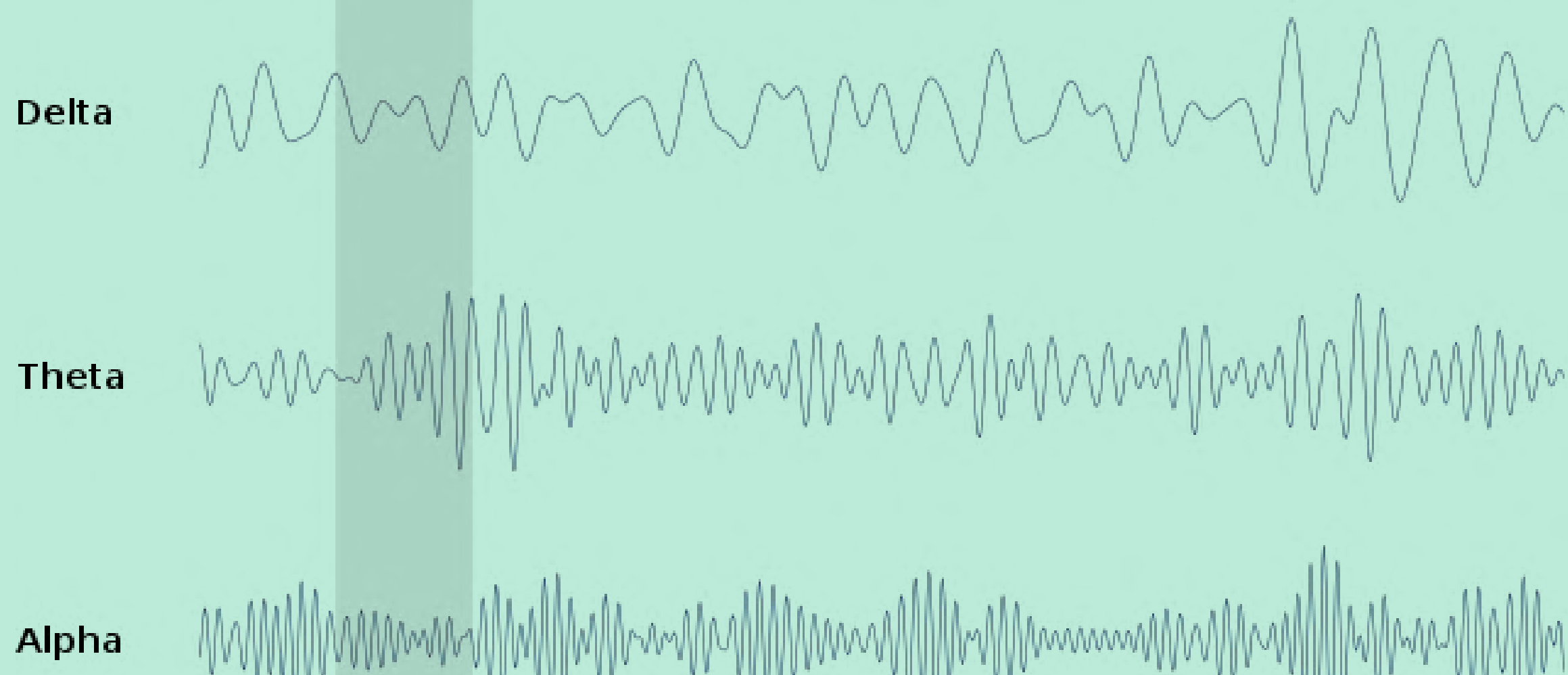


Lomas, Tim et al. "A systematic review of the neurophysiology of mindfulness on EEG oscillations." *Neuroscience and biobehavioral reviews*, vol. 57 (2015): 401-10.

doi:10.1016/j.neubiorev.2015.09.0

- The brain has billions of neurons.
- They communicate with electrical pulses that can be grouped and measured.
- We are only interested in alpha and theta brainwaves.
- The brainwaves most commonly associated with mindfulness
  - Based on a meta-analysis of 56 research papers





Here are your  
brainwaves  
visualized! 🧠

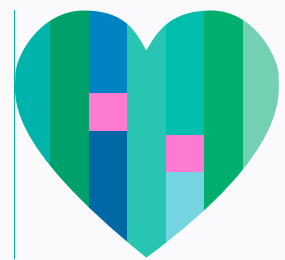
We can group brainwaves according to frequency or rate of waves in a given time frame.

- Alpha is elevated, it means physical and mental relaxation
- Theta is slower and indicates deep relaxation
  - Often seen in monks or very experienced meditators
  - App on my phone connected by Bluetooth to mEEG can stream the data to an endpoint

If I really try, you might start to see higher alpha relative to the other waves.

- Watch for the blue line, which charts my alpha brain waves





# Thank you!

If even one person applies STOP in a work place situation based on what they learned in this talk, I will feel as though I have done my job right.

Pitch

**Tao Hansen**

garden.io

Developer Advocate

@worldofgeese

