

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/try-sleeping-on-it>

Judah Pollack illustrates the idea of mental “mode switching” from the task-oriented part of the brain to the more subconscious, artistic side with a cartoon depicting how Rolling Stones band member Keith Richards arrived at the idea for the breakthrough hit “Satisfaction.” Pollack is co-author of the book “The Net and the Butterfly: The Art and Practice of Breakthrough Thinking.”



## Transcript

- So, the last skill I wanna talk about is mode switching.. This is switching between your executive network and your default network.. And I wanna show you an animated video about how Keith Richards used mode switching to come up with a hit song.. (mid tempo music) Florida, 1965.. The Rolling Stones are on their first US tour but they're not the Rolling Stones yet, they're about as possible as Herman's Hermits.. What they're in need of is a breakthrough hit, a number one song, and no one knows it more than Keith Richards.. One night, in his motel room, Richards was trying to write that song.. So what's going on inside his brain when he was attempting to have this breakthrough? This is the executive of Keith Richards' brain, it's focused, on task, and has a goal, write a hit song.. There's just one problem, it's not very good at breakthroughs by itself.. See the executive network is great when you need to make a list or complete a project..

But when it comes to having a breakthrough, it needs some help.. That night Richards fell asleep and no longer on task, his executive went to talk to another network that lies deeper in the brain.. Now what we're about to show you is not unique to Keith Richards, you have the same exact room in your brain.. We all do, we just don't access it enough.. This is your genius lounge.. About 10 different brain regions in here all hanging out talking.. There's Mozart, Leonardo da Vinci, Marie Curie, Einstein.. Welcome to the part of your brain that's working on stuff when you don't think you're working on stuff.. That night, Richards' executive walked in and said quiet! All right everyone, we need a breakthrough hit.. Now go..

The executive went and busied itself with something mindless, in this case, sleep.. But it can be doing the dishes or the laundry, or taking a shower.. Meanwhile the geniuses started sharing all kinds of information from art to music to childhood memories.. This was the sum total of Keith Richards' experience and knowledge, and they combine and created his intuition, it created a breakthrough.. Richards woke up in the middle of the night and began to play.. (picking out melody of "Satisfaction") That was how the Rolling Stones got their breakthrough hit, Satisfaction.. But it is not just Keith Richards.. We all have an executive and a genius lounge in our brains.. The key to having more breakthroughs is learning how to switch between the two modes.. It's an absolutely true story, and Richards actually talks about how the next morning he woke up having no memory what he had done..

And he saw the tape recorder had run all the way out.. And so he rewound it, and it was 59 minutes of him snoring, and about 30 seconds of the opening bars of Satisfaction.. And he said he fell right back asleep and he could hear the guitar pick fall out of his hand and hit the floor.. These stories, as I said, they're kinda legendary, they're happening all the time.. And it's about this ability to kinda step in to this open space where we allow different random ideas to connect with one another, and then to step back out, to switch out of that mode back to the executive.. Because, we're gonna have a bias one way or the other.. Some people are gonna have a bias for the executive, and they're gonna say the executive network is what gets everything done.. It's all about hard work, it's about perspiration! It's about discipline.. Anybody can have a good idea, it's all about the implementation.. I'm sure you've heard all of these things at different times in your life..

Other people are gonna have a bias towards the default network, it's all about staying loose, giving yourself time, being open minded, just letting things emerge.. Both are completely true.. What we need, is we need the openness to allow them both to happen, to switch back and forth.. Now when we work with individuals, one of the things that we do is work with them to create these spaces.. These are the sort of spaces that happen when you're falling asleep, when you get into the shower.. We have a bias against them, we feel like if we're not using our executive network, we're not really working.. And we feel like

if we're using our default network somehow we're slacking off.. Somehow this isn't what we're supposed to be doing.. But to actually create time, to actually use our executive network to create a focus, to say this is a goal I want.. To fill our brains with a certain amount of information and then to be able to switch modes, to be able to let go, and just let your brain wander about, this is the key..

'Cause then when you actually have an idea, it will come back into your consciousness, and now you need the discipline again.. Now you need to work on it.. When it came out of his head and he had those opening eight bars, from Keith Richards, it wasn't done! The Rolling Stones recorded it the next day in Chicago, and they recorded it as kind of a slow bluesy thing, and nobody liked it.. It didn't work.. Two days later they were in LA, they had a different producer in a different studio, and the rest of the band started weighing in on what it should be, and from all of that back and forth, that's when you ended up with the Satisfaction that we all know.. So the switching between, the giving yourself the focus, but then giving yourself the leeway to have the idea, and then working hard on the idea.. This is what makes it all possible.. Now we've adapted what we've learned from the brain for people to use with their teams, for people to use with their organizations.. One of the things we talk about, and we have an article about this, is what we call quiet and loud brainstorming.. This is a way of bringing mode switching into a room full of people..

Where you simply give everyone a topic and then it's quiet for the first five minutes or 10 minutes, and everybody writes down their thoughts.. Then you open it up and it gets loud, for however long, a little bit shorter, five minutes let's say.. Everybody shares their information, and then everybody goes quiet again and writes what they think.. You keep bouncing in and out like this through this brainstorm, and it gives everybody a chance to bring their ideas to the table.. It kinda opens it up in a different way.. Another one that we like to use is biomimicking the brain.. So you've got this structure, you've got all these different pieces that your brain is using to create a breakthrough, to connect different ideas.. And so what we did is we figured out that if you fill the space with people who are mavens, they're really on top of what's going on in the world, people who are makers, they love building things.. People who are deep theorists, they're just caught in their heads and they know all the theories.. But then who are wide generalists, they know a lot about a lot of things..

Then you get people in there who have a lot of empathy.. You get people in there who have a tremendous amount of experience all over the place, and then you have people who are kinda like, they're deep in this in terms of their memory.. They've been around the block before with whatever it is you're working on, they know the history.. This is a way to actually mimic what your brain is doing when you have a breakthrough, but to mimic it outside.. To bring all of these disparate pieces together and then engage them in mode switching which can create more of these breakthroughs.. The reason we ended up looking at how to take what the brain is doing and apply it to people and organizations is because we kept running into these issues our clients had.. They kept getting told you need to be more collaborative.. You need to diversify.. You need to decentralize, you need to be flatter.. But nobody had any idea how to do these things..

And so people did things like have open offices.. They decided to have slack channels.. How's that working out for everybody? Right, everybody's wearing headphones.. They're reserving conference spaces so they can sit alone.. And they're lobbing bombs on open slack channels and just creating all kinds of mayhem.. 'Cause nobody knows how to do this.. But our brain has actually mastered how to handle complexity, how to move through complexity and find the signal for the noise.. And so by using the brain's systems and processes as a guide and mimicking it, to build tools, we have enabled people to start engaging with the complexity of the world, while at the same time being effective at being collaborative, allowing diverse voices into the room, being more transparent, being more respectful.. This is where the study of the brain is paying off in huge dividends because it is so well evolved for the world that we live in...