2026 ACCELERATOR RETREAT | GENERAL SESSION

Decoding the Lie

The neuroscience of what's really driving you

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HUMAN POTENTIAL ALCHEMIST

Special or Happy?

THE LIE AT THE CENTER OF AMBITION

Ambition gets celebrated as a virtue.

The brain tells a more complicated story.

You hit every target.

So why does it still feel like nothing?

> Restless. Empty. Quietly burned out.
> Your brain has a reason for that,
> and it starts with one molecule.

PART 01

The Dopamine Lie



Dopamine fuels the wanting, not the liking

DOPAMINE

Wanting

Loud, urgent, future-focused. It pushes you toward the reward and keeps you leaning forward.

OPIOID SYSTEM

Liking

The actual pleasure when you arrive. Quieter, smaller, and gone faster than you expect.

Your drive runs on a system built for **the chase**, not **the catch**.

Your brain rewards surprise, not success



Better than expected

Dopamine spikes. Your brain flags it: do that again.



Exactly as expected

Flat. The promotion you planned for barely registers.



Worse than expected

Dopamine dips. Falling short registers as loss.

Hit the goal you predicted and the brain shrugs. **That is the design, not a defect.**

FOR YOUR TEAM | PREDICTION ERROR

Surprise beats *scheduled.*

The same brain that shrugs at your predicted win is on your payroll.
Every person on your team runs on prediction error too.

SCHEDULED | FLAT



They saw it coming.

- Employee of the Month, same plaque
- “Great job, everyone” at the end of every pre-shift
- The bonus that arrives as promised

SURPRISE | SPIKE



They didn't see it coming.

- A handwritten note after a brutal double
- Naming the exact save at line-up: “Marco caught that allergy ticket”
- The GM stopping by just to say thanks

And stop moving their finish line. When your team hits the target, let the win land before you raise the bar.

The Hedonic Treadmill

01
Hit the target

→

02
Reset the baseline

→

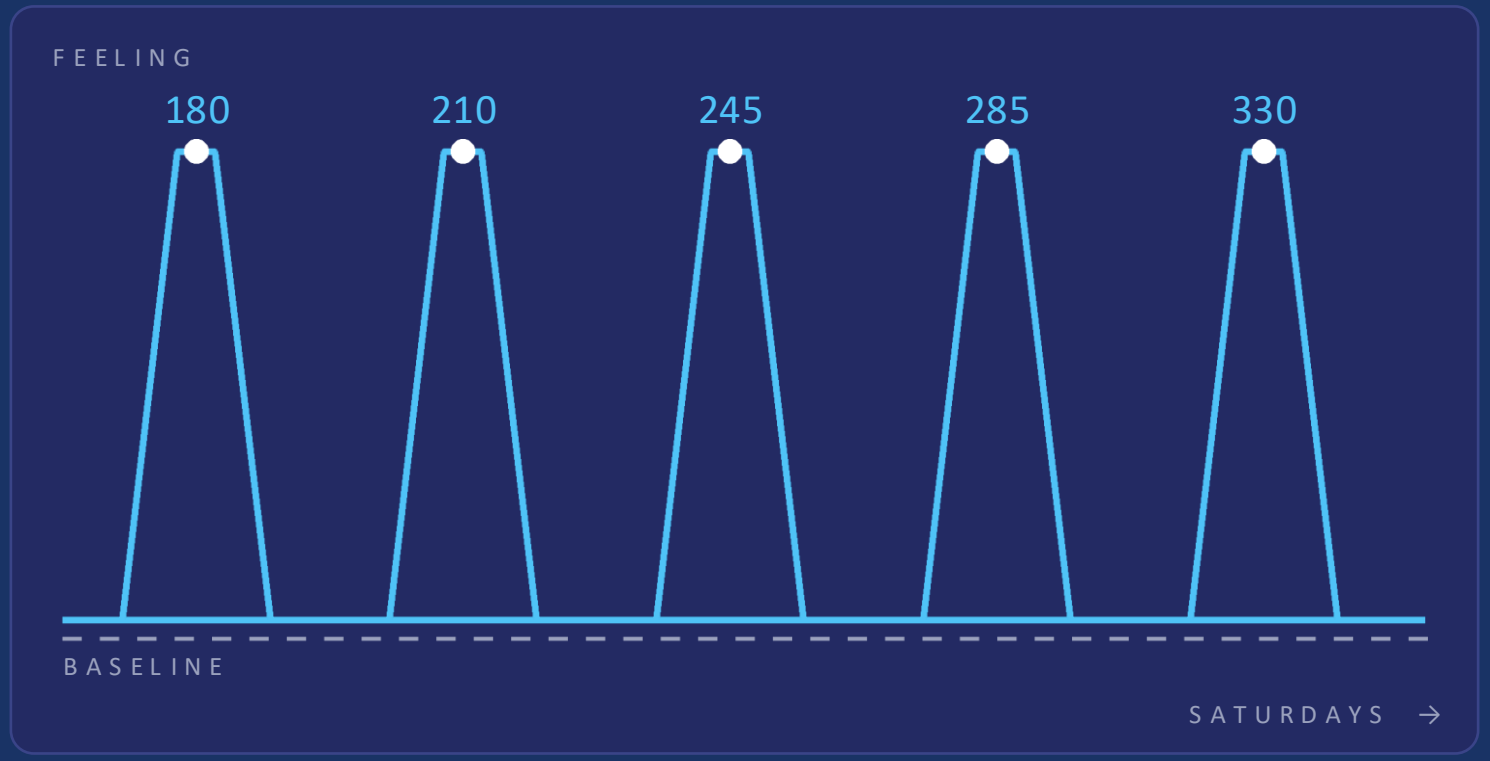
03
Same win now feels flat

→

04
Now you need a bigger hit

What thrilled you last year is this year's minimum.

Hit the target. Watch the feeling.



WINS

NEXT TARGET

330. What thrilled you a
285. Your wins, same feeling.
245. Same spike, same
Nothing goes wrong. The
Tick back to baseline. And
the target moved again.
one picture.

Hit the target

Your brain will never tell you when you have enough. You have to decide that yourself.



PART 02

Fuel or Compulsion?



How fuel and compulsion show up

SIGNAL	Fuel	Compulsion

Sustainable drive runs on three needs



Autonomy

"I chose this."

The goal reflects your values, not borrowed expectations.



Competence

"I'm growing."

Progress you feel from the inside, not just a title on the outside.



Relatedness

"It connects me."

The work ties you to people and purposes that matter to you.

PART 03

Ask Better Questions


What is actually driving me?


Am I chasing the right goals,
or just the next hit of "done"?



Whose definition of success am I running on?

Three checks before the next climb

1 **Source:** Would I still want this if no one ever saw it?

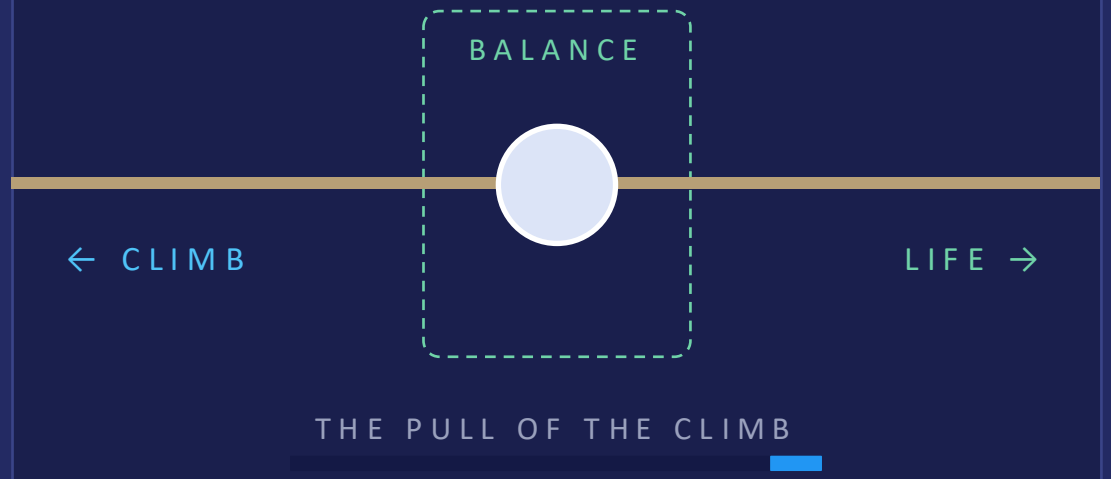
2 **Feeling:** When I get it, will I feel satisfied, or just relieved?

3 **Direction:** Does this move me toward who I want to become, or only toward the next title?

FORWARD TO PULL

The *climb*

- Your own place
- VP of operations
- Area director
- General manager
- Assistant GM
- Shift lead
- **Server**



BACK TO PULL

The *life*

Family
Thriving

Friends & neighbors
Thriving

Community
Thriving

Spirit
Thriving

Body
Thriving

The Pull.

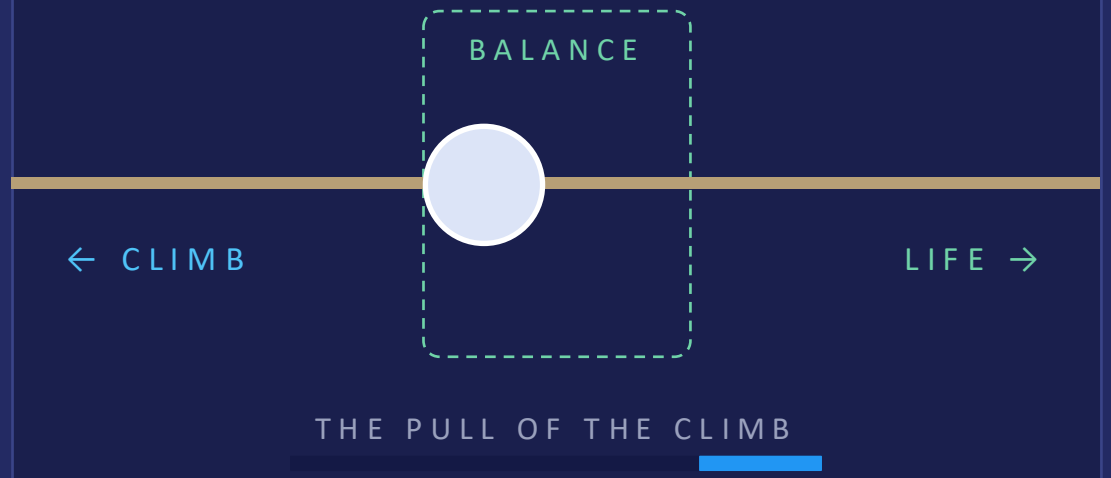
Stand up if it's true for you.

THE LEADER

FORWARD TO PULL

The *climb*

- Your own place
- VP of operations
- Area director
- General manager
- Assistant GM
- **Shift lead**
- Server



BACK TO PULL

The *life*

Family
Thriving

Friends & neighbors
Thriving

Community
Thriving

Spirit
Thriving

Body
Thriving

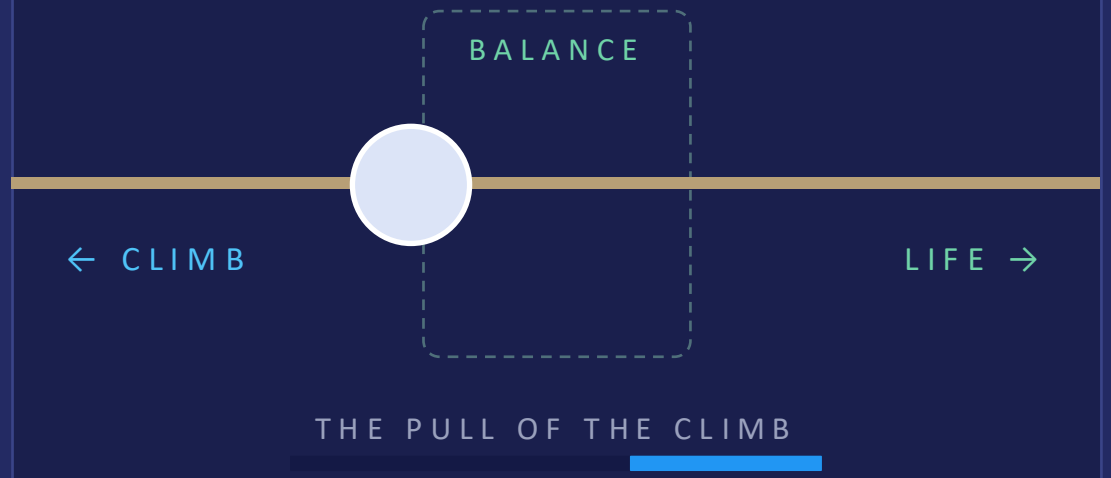
Stand if you've checked work messages in the last hour.

FAMILY

FORWARD TO PULL

The *climb*

- Your own place
- VP of operations
- Area director
- General manager
- **Assistant GM**
- Shift lead
- Server



BACK TO PULL

The *life*

Family
Missed Sunday dinner

Friends & neighbors
Thriving

Community
Thriving

Spirit
Thriving

Body
Thriving

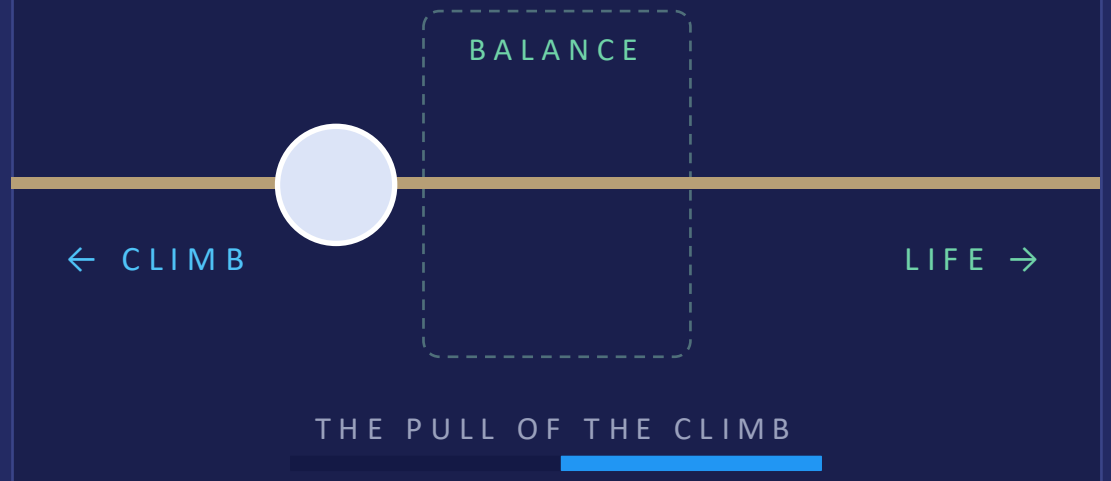
Stand if you've missed a family dinner for a shift this month.

FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS

FORWARD TO PULL

The *climb*

- Your own place
- VP of operations
- Area director
- **General manager**
- Assistant GM
- Shift lead
- Server



BACK TO PULL

The *life*

Family
Missed Sunday dinner

Friends & neighbors
Haven't called them back

Community
Thriving

Spirit
Thriving

Body
Thriving

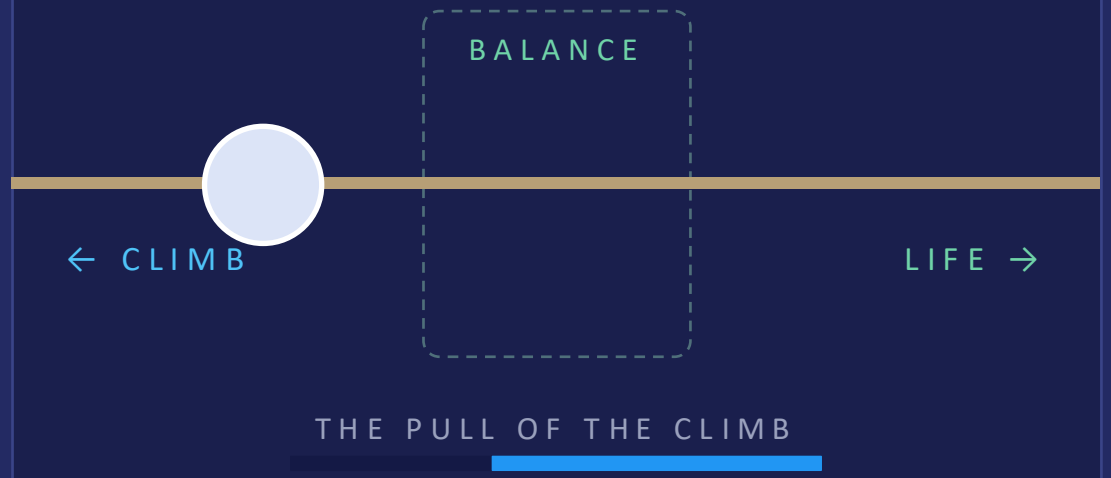
Stand if there’s someone you keep meaning to text.

COMMUNITY

FORWARD TO PULL

The *climb*

- Your own place
- VP of operations
- **Area director**
- General manager
- Assistant GM
- Shift lead
- Server



BACK TO PULL

The *life*

Family
Missed Sunday dinner

Friends & neighbors
Haven't called them back

Community
Gave up coaching the team

Spirit
Thriving

Body
Thriving

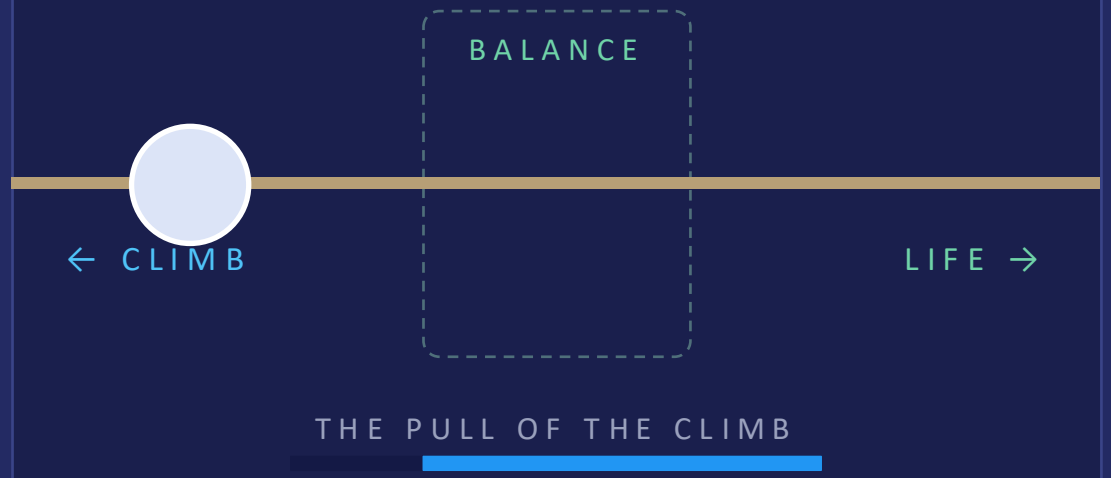
Stand if you've said no to something you care about because of the schedule.

SPIRIT

FORWARD TO PULL

The *climb*

- Your own place
- **VP of operations**
- Area director
- General manager
- Assistant GM
- Shift lead
- Server



BACK TO PULL

The *life*

Family
Missed Sunday dinner

Friends & neighbors
Haven't called them back

Community
Gave up coaching the team

Spirit
No quiet hour in weeks

Body
Thriving

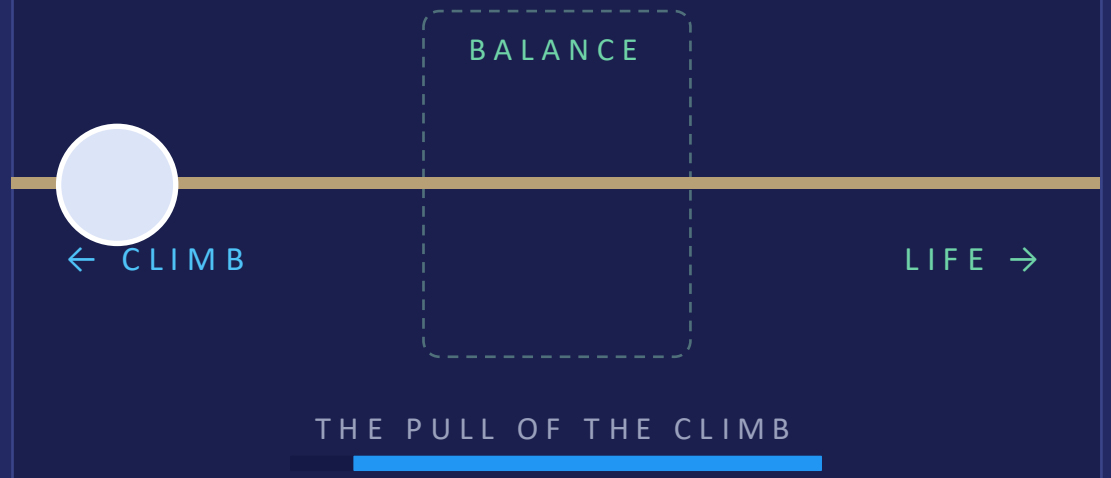
Stand if you can't remember your last quiet, peaceful hour.

BODY

FORWARD TO PULL

The *climb*

- **Your own place**
- VP of operations
- Area director
- General manager
- Assistant GM
- Shift lead
- Server



BACK TO PULL

The *life*

Family
Missed Sunday dinner

Friends & neighbors
Haven't called them back

Community
Gave up coaching the team

Spirit
No quiet hour in weeks

Body
Dinner standing at the pass

Stand if you've eaten a meal standing up this week.

FORWARD TO PULL

The *climb*

- **Your own place**
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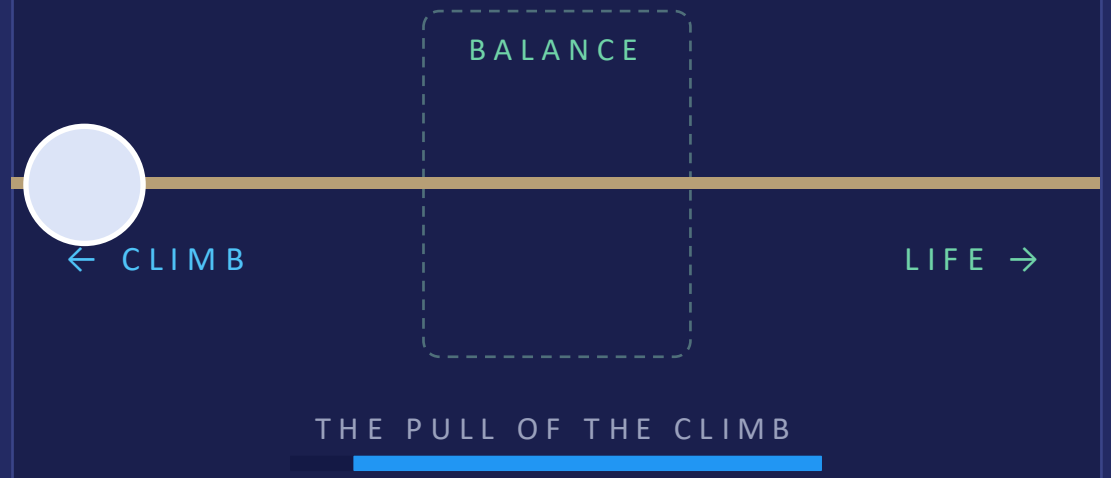
- Assistant GM
- Shift lead
- Server



BACK TO PULL

The *life*

Family
Missed Sunday dinner

Friends & neighbors
Haven't called them back

Community
Gave up coaching the team

Spirit
No quiet hour in weeks

Body
Dinner standing at the pass

Look around.

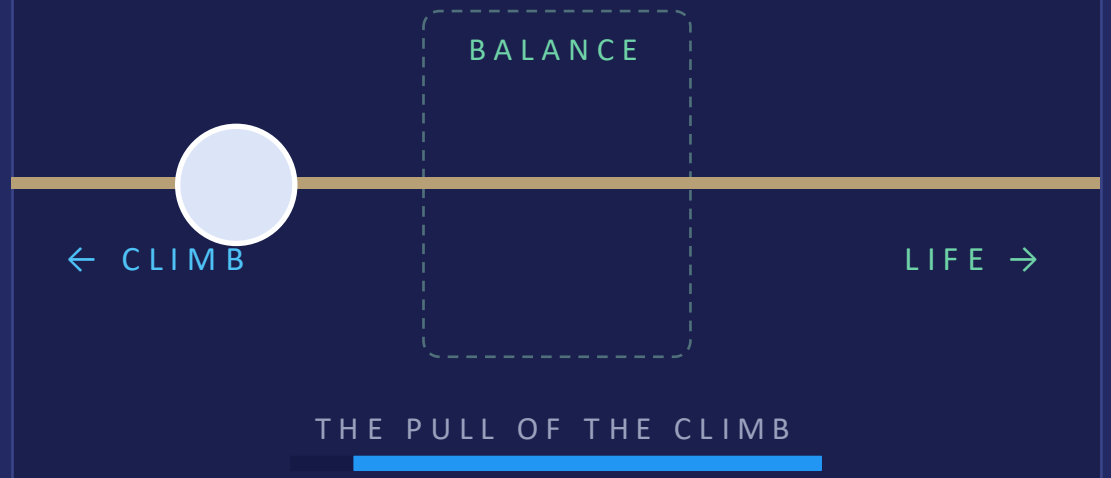
You made it to the top. Who's up there with you?

PEOPLE

FORWARD TO PULL

The *climb*

- **Your own place**
- VP of operations
- Area director
- General manager
- Assistant GM
- Shift lead
- Server



BACK TO PULL

The *life*

Family
Missed Sunday dinner

Friends & neighbors
Texting them today

Community
Gave up coaching the team

Spirit
No quiet hour in weeks

Body
Dinner standing at the pass

Think of someone important you've let slip.

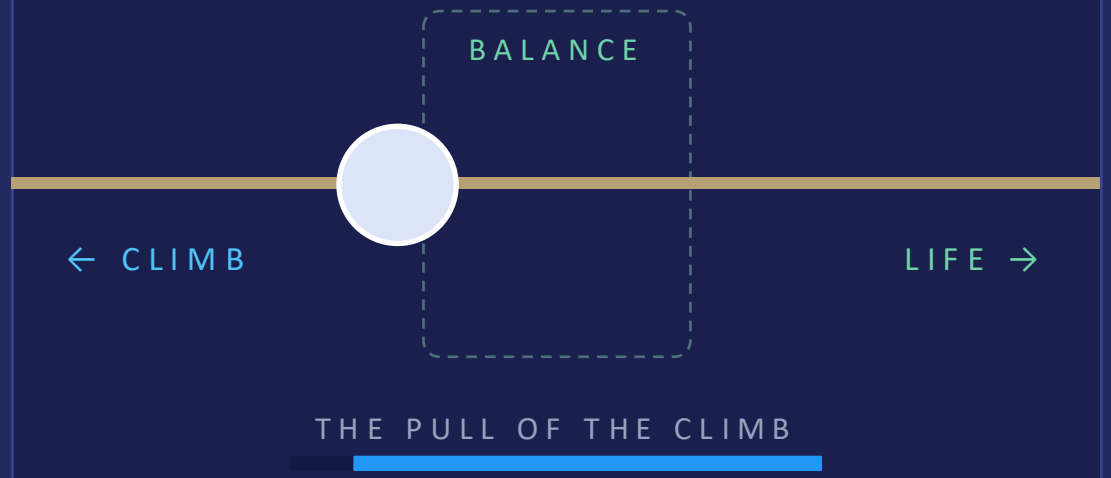
Sit down when you have their name. Text them before you leave.

FAMILY

FORWARD TO PULL

The *climb*

- **Your own place**
- VP of operations
- Area director
- General manager
- Assistant GM
- Shift lead
- Server



BACK TO PULL

The *life*

Family
Saturday dinner, booked

Friends & neighbors
Texting them today

Community
Gave up coaching the team

Spirit
No quiet hour in weeks

Body
Dinner standing at the pass

Plan a family dinner or date night this weekend.

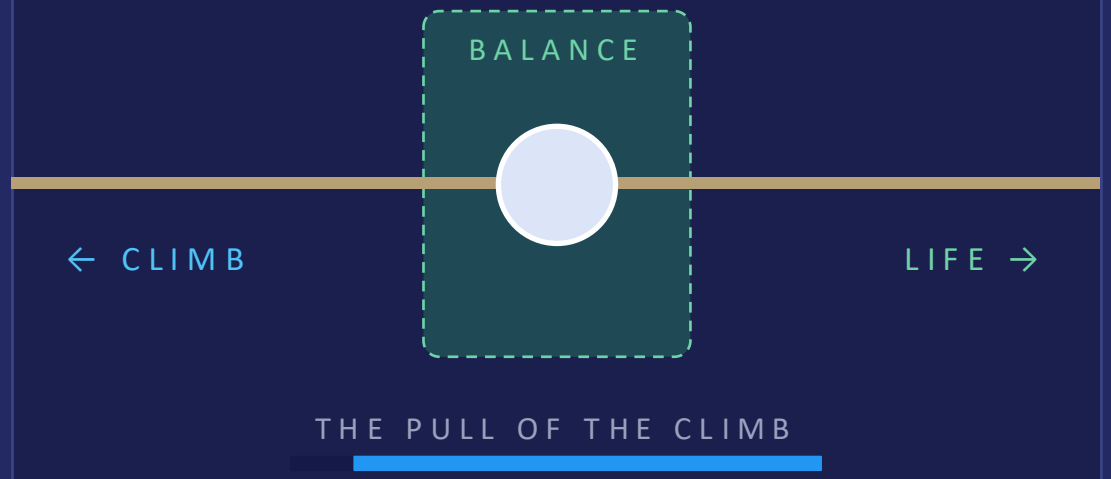
Book it like a VIP reservation. Then protect it like one.

BODY & SPIRIT

FORWARD TO PULL

The *climb*

- **Your own place**
- VP of operations
- Area director
- General manager
- Assistant GM
- Shift lead
- Server



BACK TO PULL

The *life*

Family
Saturday dinner, booked

Friends & neighbors
Texting them today

Community
Next: back on the field

Spirit
Quiet morning, protected

Body
One hour, scheduled

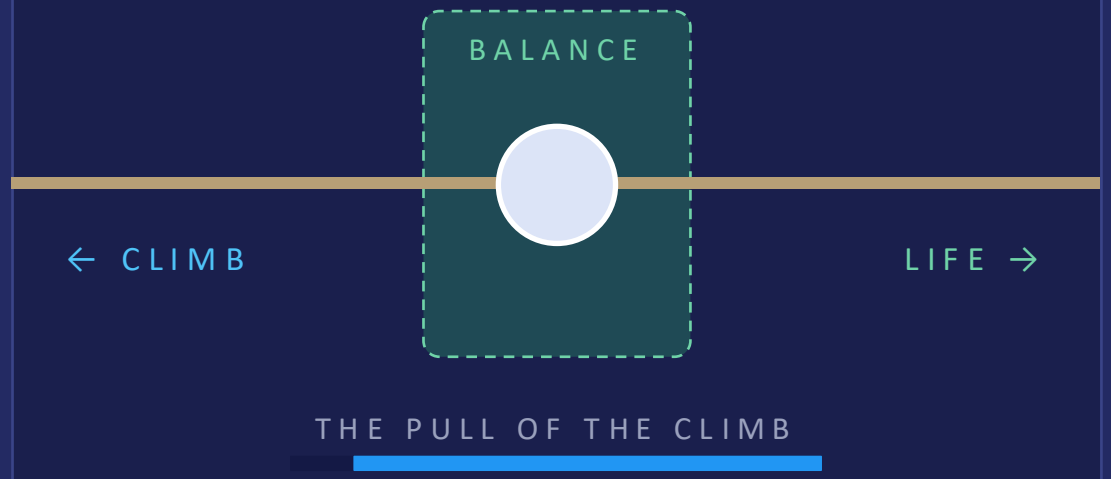
Block one hour this week that's just for you.

A walk, a workout, a quiet morning. Schedule it like a shift.

FORWARD TO PULL

The *climb*

- **Your own place**
- VP of operations
- Area director
- General manager
- Assistant GM
- Shift lead
- Server



BACK TO PULL

The *life*

Family
Saturday dinner, booked

Friends & neighbors
Texting them today

Community
Next: back on the field

Spirit
Quiet morning, protected

Body
One hour, scheduled

The climb pulls on its own.

Everything else needs you to pull back.

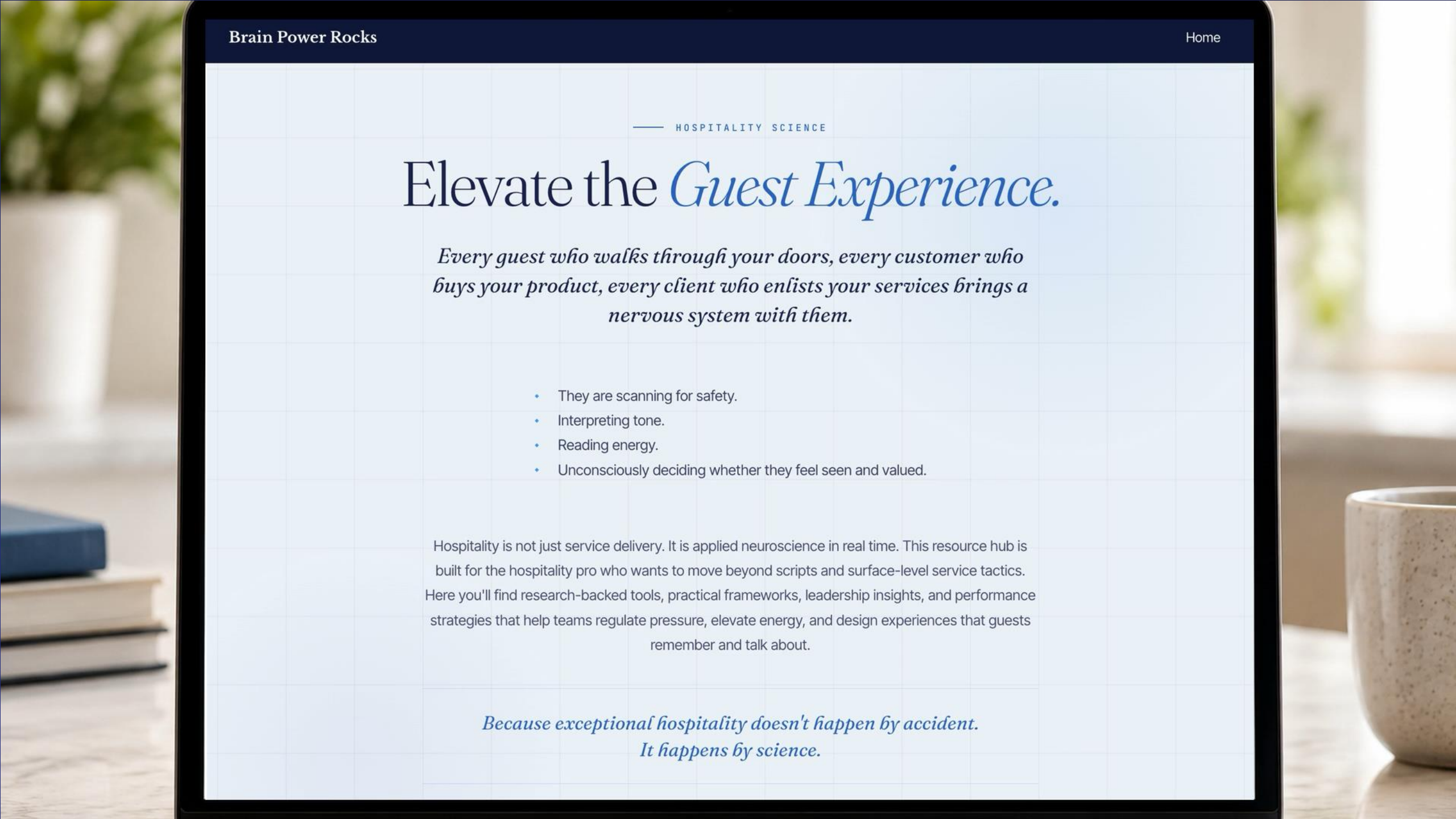
THE TAKEAWAY

~~Work → Success → Happy~~ **Happy → Work → Success**

Lead From Intention, Not From Impulse.

Keep the drive that sustains you.

Question the one that quietly drains you.


Brain Power Rocks
Home
HOSPITALITY SCIENCE
Elevate the Guest Experience.
Every guest who walks through your doors, every customer who buys your product, every client who enlists your services brings a nervous system with them.
They are scanning for safety.
Interpreting tone.
Reading energy.
Unconsciously deciding whether they feel seen and valued.
Hospitality is not just service delivery. It is applied neuroscience in real time. This resource hub is built for the hospitality pro who wants to move beyond scripts and surface-level service tactics. Here you'll find research-backed tools, practical frameworks, leadership insights, and performance strategies that help teams regulate pressure, elevate energy, and design experiences that guests remember and talk about.
Because exceptional hospitality doesn't happen by accident.
It happens by science.

THE BRAIN POWER LAB | FREE

Keep *decoding.*

01 The win test

02 Predict the spike

03 The moving finish line

04 Fuel or compulsion

05 The Fuel Filter

06 **Surprise beats scheduled** *for your team*

Tomorrow, someone on your team will do something nobody sees.

Be the one who sees it.

2026 ACCELERATOR RETREAT

Thank you.

Taking brain science out of the lab and into real life.

Dr. Melissa Hughes
HUMAN POTENTIAL ALCHEMIST
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