

Editor's notes:

Social media has arrived in the workplace (as if there was any doubt), according to a survey conducted by Internet marketing firm 6S Marketing. The survey, which drew on a database of more than 10,000 respondents, found that 70 percent of workers use some form of social media, with FaceBook most popular (named by 70 percent). 47% use Twitter (the majority are 19 to 25 years old), and only 20% depend on MySpace. 58% blog, with 47% blogging for personal reasons, 57% blogging for work, and 35% for both reasons. And 61% of business say they track what's being said about their companies on-line.

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According to new research, the human brain takes a rest of its own when you go to sleep.

A study paired EEG (electroencephalogram) readings with data collected by electrodes measuring electrical activity inside the brain while patients slept.

The results showed that neurons within the brain sometimes take short breaks during sleep, and that these rest periods allow us to remain asleep even though the brain registers noise or some other disturbance.

In other words, neurons rest so people can rest, too.

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Here are a few dates to celebrate this month:

World Vegetarian Day, October 1 -- Founded by the North American Vegetarian Society in 1977, it's a day to consider the health benefits of a meat-less diet, which studies show can significantly reduce the risk of heart disease, cancer and other illness.

10-4 Day, October 4 -- On the fourth day of the 10th month, think of all those radio operators who use the phrase "Ten-Four" as an affirmative response.

Thanksgiving, October 12 -- According to some historians, the first Canadian Thanksgiving after Confederation was observed in April 1872 to celebrate the recovery of the Prince of Wales from a serious illness. In 1957, Parliament proclaimed the second Monday of October as the fixed date.

Leif Erickson Day, October 9 -- Celebrating the date that Norse explorer Leif Erickson first landed in North America, sometime in the early 11 century.

Columbus Day, October 12 -- Italian -born explorer Christopher Columbus landed on the island he dubbed San Salvador on this date in 1492.

Halloween, October 31 -- Trick or treat!

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Christopher Columbus: Things you may not know

October 12 is Columbus Day, the date in 1492 that sea captain Christopher Columbus landed on the island of Guanahani, which he renamed San Salvador.

Columbus was probably born in Genoa, Italy in 1451 -- his exact birthday is unknown, and some scholars believe he was actually born elsewhere, possibly in Corsica. He claimed to have taken his first sea voyage at age 10. Columbus mistakenly believed the Earth was smaller than it really is. No ship of his time could have carried enough food and water for a voyage from Europe to Asia, and so his plans for such a trip were met with skepticism from the European leaders he approached for funding.

Spain, though, had just ended a long and difficult war to expel Muslims from the Iberian peninsula, and its rulers were somewhat desperate to find any competitive advantage in trade over its neighbouring European nations. Aside from financial support, the king and queen of Spain agreed to name Columbus "Admiral of the Ocean Sea," appoint him governor of any new lands he discovered, and allow him to nominate three people to any office in newly discovered countries. The Spanish rulers may have agreed to these terms because they didn't really expect Columbus to return from his journey.

But he did return, and made three more trips across the ocean. Columbus died in 1506, but his legacy endures.



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Halloween's mystical origins

The day we call Halloween has its origins in Samhain, a Celtic festival some 2,000 years old.

The Celts of Ireland, Britain, and northern France celebrated their new year on November 1 and believed that the line between life and death blurred the night before.

The Celtic priests, called Druids, built large sacred bonfires and sacrificed animals to their deities and tried to gain mystical information from the dead for their prophecies concerning the coming year.

The Celts would place a skeleton in their window on Hallows' Eve -- the night before Samhain -- to represent their dead. The jack-o'-lantern comes from an Irish legend about a farmer named Jack who tricked the devil and trapped him in a tree. The devil got revenge with a curse that forced Jack to wander the earth forever, by the light of a candle inside a hollowed-out turnip.

The common practice of trick-or-treating on Halloween may have originated with the medieval tradition of "souling," in which poor people would go door-to-door on All Souls' Day asking for donations of food in exchange for prayers for the dead.

In North America the first recorded practice of anything resembling modern trick-or-treating was in 1911, in Ontario. A newspaper reported on children in costumes visiting neighbour and shops, singing songs in exchange for candy and nuts.

Proven techniques for persuading all kinds of people

Persuasion is a skill you need every day, whether you're negotiating a big business deal or telling your children to eat their vegetables.

Try these techniques for influencing people of any age in any situation:

Speak their language -- Listen to how people express themselves, particularly when it comes to sensory words. Some people will see things ("I don't see what you mean"); others will hear ("That doesn't sound like fun:"); and others will feel ("I don't feel good about that.") Use their preferred mode of expression back to them ("I see your point . . . I hear what you're saying . . .") and they'll accept your point more readily.

Use their names -- People love to hear the sound of their own name. Just don't overdo it. For a new acquaintance, make sure you're pronouncing it right, and don't use it before you've established some sort of rapport.

Use action words -- You've got to ask for the response you want. Don't ask someone to "try to" do something, or to "think about doing" it, if you need him or her to do it now. Be direct without being pushy.

Get your foot in the door -- You don't have to lead off with your main point. First get the other person's attention, and then apply some persuasive techniques: offering an additional benefit, changing your request to what you really want, or letting them turn you down now so he or she will be obligated to agree later.

Groan if you've heard these . . .

Who can resist a good pun -- or a terrible one? Here are a few guaranteed to make you crack a smile, or someone's head:

She was only a whisky maker, but he loved her still.

What would you get if you threw a hand grenade into a French kitchen? Linoleum Blownapart.

He wondered why the baseball kept getting bigger. Then it hit him.

How does a backward poet write? Inverse.

Don't join dangerous cults: Practice safe sects.

Did you know that positive thinking isn't all mental? Here are a few simple physical activities you can do to improve your outlook:

- **Keep your back straight** -- Good posture makes you appear stronger and more confident, and when you're perceived that way by others, your self-image will improve.

- **Smile** -- You'll look more attractive, and the mere act of smiling can often lift a person's mood and spirits

- **Exercise** -- You'll relieve physical stress, release endorphins, and enjoy the positive effects of being in shape.

