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240 — Give Yourself Permission to Have More Fun with Dr. Mike Rucker

Amy Morin:

Welcome to The Verywell Mind Podcast! I'm Amy Morin, the editor-in-chief of Verywell Mind. I'm also a psychotherapist and a best-selling author of four (soon to be five) books on mental strength. In just a few weeks, my first-ever workbook hits the shelves. It's called 13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do Workbook. It's filled with mental strength-building exercises straight from my therapy office.

It will be available in stores on February 28th, but you can pre-order it right now so you can be one of the first people to get your hands on a copy.

Every Monday, I introduce you to a mentally strong person whose story and mental strength tips can inspire you to think, feel, and do your best in life.

The fun part is we record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys! Don't forget to subscribe to the show on your favorite platform so you can get mental strength tips delivered to you every single week.

Now, let's dive into today's episode!

Do you ever feel like life is all work and no play? Do you feel guilty doing fun things sometimes? Do you struggle to have fun at work? If you answered 'yes' to any of those questions, today's episode is for you.
We're talking about all the reasons why it's okay to incorporate more fun into your life and the steps that you can take to do that. Here to help us figure that out is Dr. Mike Rucker. He has a Ph.D. in organizational psychology and has a long background working in the tech and health industry. He's also the author of a new book called *The Fun Habit.*

It's based on his years of research as well as his own personal experiences. In it he describes how our usual pursuits for happiness aren't effective. Some of the things he talks about today are how to create time for fun, how to prevent burnout, and how to discover the best fun habits for you.

Make sure to stick around until the end of the episode for The Therapist's Take!

It's the part of the show where I'll give you my take on Mike's strategies and share how you can apply them to your own life. Here's Dr. Mike Rucker on why you should give yourself permission to have more fun!

Amy Morin:

Dr. Mike Rucker, welcome to *The Verywell Mind Podcast!*

Michael Rucker:

Thanks so much for having me. I feel like I'm at home, because I used to be part of the Verywell family.

Amy Morin:

Well, yeah, funnily enough. When I invited you to be on the show, it was because I wanted to talk about your book. I had no idea that you have a connection to Verywell. Do you want to talk about that for a minute?

Michael Rucker:

Yeah. It started when it was about.com. I've always been interested in health and wellness. When I moved to San Francisco I got involved with Gary Wolf in the Quantified Self Movement. That kind of led to an affinity for Digital Health. At the time, I
don't know how Rachel found me to be quite honest. Rachel now it's a figurehead in Verywell?

Amy Morin:
Yes. She's the general manager of Verywell.

Michael Rucker:
Yeah. Just for folks that don't know because I just name dropped.

Amy Morin:
Yeah.

Michael Rucker:
Yeah. She found me because I had been writing some case studies and things of that nature, and so I became the Health Tech writer for Verywell even this was during my academic work as an organizational psychologist, but it was really fun to be a reporter in that space.
I talk about it some in the book as well. I think certainly some of what I succumbed to and became problematic was the over quantification of health. I think I unpack where that can be helpful and where it can go awry as well.

Amy Morin:
To get the backstory for our readers who don't know. We used to be about.com and then we became Verywell later on. about.com was this huge conglomerate where we had information about pretty much anything in the world, all on one website. Then when Google things updated, it made more sense to break up into different verticals.
We broke up into different verticals. We have this spruce and we own Verywell, and even Verywell is now Verywell Health, Verywell fit, Verywell family, and Verywell Mind. I'm now part of Verywell Mind, but you wrote for Verywell Health, right?

Michael Rucker:
That's correct. Yeah. I think at the time it was just Verywell Health. I transitioned from About to Verywell Health, and then when I graduated I wanted to focus on psychology. I think at that time Google was getting even more intense. It's like, "Okay. We have these content expertise and now we got to break it down even further."

I imagine that happened on the financial side, too. Did that property kind of splinter off to even more specificity?

Amy Morin:

Yes. I mean that's what we found is that Google now much prefers that we are very specific on every site that we have. Yeah. For those of us that were still around in the about.com days, we now work under all the same umbrella but for different verticals.

Michael Rucker:

Yeah. Yeah. It was fun. Thanks for being able to look in the rear mirror. I'm really happy to be here because again, I've enjoyed my time with Verywell. I'm glad to be back as a guest.

Amy Morin:

Then you went on to write this book among many things that you've gone on to do. But you wrote this book called The Fun Habit, which as soon as I saw the title and I saw the cover, I thought, "Well, that that's an interesting topic, because it's not something that we really discuss that much as the idea of fun."

I think there's a belief that you shouldn't have fun or you don't need to have fun or fun is just something that is an afterthought, not something we should really incorporate into our lives. But I'd love to hear from you since you're the expert on the subject. What are some of the misconceptions you hear about fun?

Michael Rucker:

Yeah. I think there's a whole host of different headwinds, unfortunately. Some of us, depending on how we grew up still have this underpinning of the Puritan arc ethic. Somehow if we're really enjoying ourselves or taking time off the table, somehow that
could erode our self-worth, because productivity overall essentially. Some is that we want to have fun, but because of the modern work era, we really have these insidious devices that can capture our attention.

Whether you're using it to displace boredom just because you're so burnt out, it's just an easy way to pacify time, or for some like myself that are driven but don't necessarily understand the difference between busy and productive. We'll get these notifications from our Slack channel and email channel at 8:00 p.m. and we still feel like we have to engage in them, that kind of sucks out the ability to engage in leisure and fun.

Two, the fact that right now, for the first time in history, we are all living longer and that's allowing us to have kids longer, the so-called sandwich generation where folks between the age of 35 and 50 really have had domestic duties that have never been seen before. Generally, in prior eras, you had parents that could help out with the kids. That provided some relief where you could actually go out and enjoy yourself. Then actually there's been a lot of research to suggest that grandparents got a lot of fulfillment of being able to be parents again.

Now you're seeing as, again, we're having kids older. A lot of times our parents are in their 70s and 80s, I'll just use my N of one. My parents are in their 80s. There's no way they can take care of my kids that are young and I also feel an obligation to take care of them.

We have these extra domestic duties that where we still feel the sense of duty because these are people we love. We don't want to do something necessarily for ourselves because it might take away from that feeling. What has happened is you're seeing all sorts of crazy statistics.

Burnout was already an issue before the pandemic. The pandemic made it more complex. But the American Psychological Association just came out with some statistics that floated around LinkedIn the last couple weeks that one in four people are so burnt out. They don't even have energy to do anything by the time they get home.

You have the leisure statistics that suggest we're the second to last within regards to the developed world with companies providing leisure to employees at 10 days off per one year work. There's only one country behind us, Micronesia at nine. What's even more
scary is even though we're getting the least amount of vacation, only 50% of folks are using it.

There are all of these headwinds. The way I like to explain it that I think people like, "Oh, wow. I do remember that. I remember how asinine that was, is how we used to champion sleep deprivation in the '90s." You would never do that now because after decades of research, we know how asinine that the suggestion is to be like, "Dude, just grind it out."

Gary V has definitely come around. But I say succumb to that. I remember he's like, "Stop watching lost and start working when you put the kids to work, if you really believe." Now, he has a chief happiness officer at Vayner Media. Even the most staunch folks that were championing the "hustle" have walked that back because they know if you burn yourself out, you can't be productive.

I think we're seeing the same with leisure and certainly the EU is way ahead of us. Right now you have different countries in the EU actually playing legitimately with a four-hour work, or excuse me, a four-day workweek. Four-Hour Workweek is the hat tip to Tim Ferris's really difficult ideal.

We were talking about a pre-pandemic as this fanciful thing. Now it's being put into practice and you're seeing folks actually being more productive. You're seeing also folks do things that are a little bit more accessible, but equally as important, companies shutting down email servers at 5:00 p.m. so that you're actually protecting that space. Just for folks that are interested in the science to get there real quickly and then we can unpack it.

One of the biggest eye-opening things I found while I was doing this research was that this concept called the hedonic flexibility principle. What it suggests is that when we get in that mode, when we're not valuing fun, and there's some of evolutionary reasons why that might be the case, there theories, but there's certainly a lot of good reasons why we might have a bias towards negative thinking and not really wanting prioritize pleasurable thoughts and pleasurable activities.

But the people that do are the ones that show up as the best versions of themselves and ironically are the most productive. Again, going back to this and this study was out
of Harvard, MIT and Stanford, and it's an amazing study. Generally, a lot of these studies have small sample sizes.

This sample size is 28,000 people, a really rich dataset. What it showed is that predictably, when people are burnt out, they engage in what we call passive leisure. Essentially things where you just don't want to spend any more energy. You'll plop down on the couch channel surf, you'll scroll social media or doom squirrel like I did during the pandemic.

All of these things, even though they feel good in the moment, they're not invigorating at all. They continue to deplete you just work. They're not adding anything. One of the litmus tests that I found is helpful is can you look back two weeks from now and tell me what you were doing during that hour?

Did your brain think it was important enough to actually encode any of the information? Because that's what we want, this tapestry of memories we know that builds resilience. Those folks tend to be on this downward spiral. You get less productive. You wonder where joy is in life. You wonder why you're doing it. You're not feeling fulfilled.

Even if you are coming from this sense of duty where you're trying to serve others and that's a benevolent place to be, it's maladaptive because ultimately that you don't have anything to give. In the book as you probably know, I show that from all the way from domestic duties to folks that are really making huge impacts globally.

If they're not taking some time to enjoy themselves, they just can't show up eventually. The problem is it's insidious. It happens over time. You're like, "Uh, I'm fine." Then it doesn't come down crashing on you until four or six months later. It's really hard to unpack what happened.

The people that are able to create transition rituals, safe space for leisure really do. Like, "I'm going to work hard, but then I'm going to do things that I enjoy." Even if that's maybe work, but in the context of complete autonomy, for me it's I'm going to read a good book because I want to keep my saw sharp, but it's not necessarily something I'm doing for someone else or under the guise that I have to do it. It's more I get to do it.

Those are the folks that just crush it the next day. They have the vigor and vitality to do the hard things and then it becomes this upward spiral. They feel good about what they
did and then they're able to have that extra energy to engage in what we call active leisure. Things like hobbies, things like enjoying pro-social behavior with their friends because they're not just like, "Ah."

So many of us find this like, "I don't even know if I want to go out with my best friend because I'm so tired." What a weird place to be when you actually pull back the curtain. But that's where we've gotten. Unfortunately, I don't think I was as aware until I went on the book tour of how US-centric this problem is.

It's certainly a global phenomenon because it's ... Fortunate, the book's been translated in a bunch of languages. I'm getting feedback that everyone could use a little bit of a fun boost. We tend to be fun starved. But here especially in the US is like, "I just didn't even know it got that bad." Like, "Holy cow. I haven't taken a vacation for two years. What's that about?"

Amy Morin:
Yeah. From a lot of people who will just say just that "I'm too exhausted." By the time the weekend rolls around or I have a day to myself, I don't have the energy to do anything. I just want to lay down on the couch and not move for 24 hours as opposed to going out and doing something that I might have thought was fun years ago. I just don't have the energy to do that anymore.

Then they feel like they don't have any fun. The other big issue I hear from people is, "I don't know what's fun." Maybe my friends like to go to the beach. I go along with them. But baking in the hot sun on the sand, I actually don't find enjoyable."

But then they'll say, "But I don't really know what I like to do. I just go along with the crowd. Or if an invitation comes along, I might say yes." How do you recommend people figure out what do I consider to be fun?

Michael Rucker:
Yeah. I think it's just a matter of mindfulness. It's essentially a mindful exercise of trying to figure out what that is. For a lot of folks it will be what I really enjoyed this activity when I was younger. I don't know. For me, I bring it up in the book, I love Ironman, but I can't do them any ... I got injured. That's just not practical.
There are going to be some things from your youth that you write them down and you’re like, "Okay. This can't happen." But there are going to be a lot that you will want to do. The commonalities that I find with people that I work with a reconnection to music is a big one. I really love playing the guitar and I just put it down, life got too busy.

The big one is dancing, which kind of blew me away. Just a lot of people really like that activity for fun. But because they have nothing left after the workday or this, again, speaking of these weird social norms that hold us back like, "Yeah. I'd love to go dancing, but the dance class is only on Wednesdays and I can't go out on a school night." Really?

Amy Morin:
Right.

Michael Rucker:
Again, if you look back at the science, the people that do prioritize that actually feel better that Thursday and then it becomes cumulative. Then they actually want to do more and more things. That's just, "Sorry for the quick pause." But that's another ... It just these weird heuristics that hold us back.

To get back to answering your question, look in the rear-view mirror, see what might be missing that you used to have in your life. See what's still practical, then see what's out in front of you. Don't succumb to FOMO because a lot of times that's external influences like, "Oh, I really like what Sally's doing. I wish I could do that." Really? Do you?

Because I fall back on the work of Dr. Jeanne Tsai out of Stanford, another problem in the west is we so champion high arousal activities is like when someone says, "I just don't know how to have fun." It's because they're seeing Instagram influencers click their heels on the beach. They're like, "Well, that's not what I like to do."

Well, my wife is someone who really likes low arousal activities. For her ensuring that there's time to read a great book, which for her is super fun by a pool doesn't have a lot of people because she's introverted, that's okay to be your fun. But then it's the same ... You see this about self-care, too. There's that kind of guilt.
But when you allow yourself to find what those things are, give yourself permission and not have to prescribe to what somebody else is saying fun should be so that you have a reaction like that. I don't know what fun is really. Are you sure there's nothing out there? Then what are things that you want to do in your future? I think a helpful exercise is ...

Again, it's morbid as it is, I'm trying to do a rebrand, but it is a very helpful exercise that I took from psychology is when you are facing death, what is it that you want to look back on and feel good about?

Generally, those are things that are fun. I'm throwing out arbitrary numbers. But I would say it's a significant proportion. I was going to say 9 out of 10 people. But it is definitely a majority of people when they look back and wonder what that is, it's not going to be work-related. It's generally going to be something fun.

I wanted to spend more time with the people that I care about or I really wanted to master this craft because when I'm doing it lights me up. I feel a connection to that.
That's the third thing. What is it once work is over that you're going to feel good about? When you reminisce about your fond memories, you're going to be like, "I wanted to do that."

When you work backwards, you start to realize time is finite. Sometimes that last step can actually be a good motivator too. Like, "Holy cow. I only have 25 years left." You start to make better decisions. I found it to be a pretty helpful exercise.

Amy Morin:
I think so, too. When you fast forward and then try to look back, nobody's like, "I'm so glad I spent all those years cleaning my house or working overtime for a job that maybe didn't appreciate it that much."

Michael Rucker:
Just to unpack that really quick, there's good science why you should do that as well. I'll get to it really quick, because it's intense neuroscience, but it's important. As adults, we have so much, especially now more than ever, so much incoming information. We should give ourselves grace. We need heuristics and algorithms to be able to get through the day.
There's so much complexity. If we didn't boil it down to simple steps, we would go mad. In fact, that's probably leading to burnout today, because we do have so much to think about more than ever. Then just again, a component of happiness is comparing. We have more people to compare than we ever have.

Our parents had the people on the block. Right now we're like, are we as good as people on Instagram? Are we as good as people on the block? Have so many things. Taking a step back and understanding that. Like, "Okay. My life has gotten linear." When our behavior gets too habituated in that way, our brains are really efficient and they will start to store those common instances as a single memory.

That becomes quite problematic as you age. You lose cognitive plasticity because you're not really engaging your memory because you need to encode different experiences to have this rich breadth of what Dr. Cassie Holmes calls a tapestry of memories. If you don't have that, your brain stores them as a single event and you look back at a life that's essentially passed you by.

A good metaphor that's helpful for people to go, "Wait, I don't quite understand that," is if you had 300 copies of the same magazine. Would you keep all 300 because they're all the same thing? Or would you throw out 299 and keep that one?" That's essentially how your brain works as well, because we are efficient machines.

Creating these experiences, what I call variety, becomes extremely important. Not just for our own wellbeing because we look back at a life well lived, but also for things like cognitive decline. That's not just conjecture. There's empirical evidence to suggest that that's helpful.

Amy Morin:

I think of a good example of that is during COVID, when everybody said it felt like Groundhog Day because everybody was doing the exact same thing over and over and over, and we would lose track of whether it was Tuesday or Saturday because all of our experiences were very similar day in and day out. For a lot of us, when you look back over COVID, it's just this one big lump of time where not a lot of things stand out.

Michael Rucker:
Isn't it weird? Like for me, it's like when Zoom goes awry. Well when it's trying to catch up because you have bad bandwidth. Now, I'm still trying to figure out, get my footing with regards to that. Yeah. I encoded it as one memory. It seemed like even though it was a long stretch and I write about in the book, I got long COVID. It wasn't exactly fun for me either.

But now it's weird because it's like I am trying to play catch up. Time is dilating in interesting ways. I don't think I'm the only one from sharing that with others.

Amy Morin:
Right. You also talk a lot about in the book how we don't necessarily need to separate life from fun and non-fun. But instead we can just start incorporating fun into everyday things that we do. Sometimes we attempt to separate that. But then fun isn't necessarily a hindrance.

I'll give you an example for my own life. My listeners know I try to run a time to mile every day and see if I can beat my time. For a long time I didn't listen to music while I did it because I was supposed to be like, "Oh, I'm really trying to strive to reach this goal.

Michael Rucker:
I totally remember that.

Amy Morin:
Right. Then one day I listened to music and suddenly it was like my fastest time ever and I didn't even realize it because I was having fun while I was trying to achieve a goal. It was one of those reminders of, "Oh, yeah. It doesn't have to be either or, but you can do both at the same time.

Michael Rucker:
Yeah. It's funny. I remember that, because I was the same exact way. All the Puritans in my running club were like, "Ah, that's not." Again, that is a perfect example where you're like, "Okay. Naysayers, that's fine. That works for you." Figuring out what's intrinsic and
what ... Extrinsic is important. That helps us. We are products of what we bounce off other people.

I think our close friends we care about what they think. We care about their opinions. If we didn't, we'd be sociopaths. But at the end of the day, if someone's telling you, "Well, that's not what running is, like go jump." I did the same thing. For my first Ironman, I don't write about it in the book, but I do about the Ironman, but not what ... No, maybe I did. Sorry.

But I found out you couldn't wear headphones rightfully because they want you to be able to hear traffic. We don't need to go into potential safety concerns of wearing headphones. But for a race like that where they need to ensure, it totally makes sense.

For my bike, I rigged it up with a boombox type thing. I tried to make it somewhat aerodynamic, but every serious Ironman athlete was like, "That is an atrocity." You're supposed to do everything you can to cut off a few seconds. I'm like, "That's not why I'm here. I'm here just to hear that I'm an Ironman."

I make several cases in the book where, "Okay. Episodically, there might be things that we need to do that are hard and that aren't going to be fun for sure. Actually, I think most of us that want to contribute to the greater good in some way are going to need to do hard work. But that is depleting.

I think what we're finding, especially here in the US to link back to the original ideas at the beginning is that we're all approaching this in this lens of martyrdom that is so depleting. We don't have anything left to give. When you can make the hard stuff fun, then it starts to be invigorating.

You actually find that not only do you only need to episodically recharge your batteries, sometimes they're actually charging while the engine is on. Then what I just laugh about is ... Then you're having fun. You're doing all the things you wanted to do and now life's enjoyable in the most amazing ways.

Amy Morin:

I loved in your book, too. You talk about workplace fun. We often think of those two things as competing forces. We either go to work or you have fun. But there's ways to
incorporate fun into the workplace. I'll say, "At this point in my life, I feel like it couldn't get to be any better than it is. My podcast producer is my best friend. We work from a boat in the Florida Keys and we get to interview cool people on our show. Does it get much better than that?"

Michael Rucker:
That's pretty amazing.

Amy Morin:
It makes work fun every day. But I've had experiences where the workplace was definitely the furthest thing from fun. I know how much that affected the quality of my life. I worked in a call center one summer during college and it was dreadful. We had more phones ringing than there were people and everybody's yelling at each other all day long.

I remember I'd go out in my car during my lunch break just to get silence and I would dread having to go back into the office at the end of my lunch break and I couldn't wait to get home at the end of the day. What a different experience that made all of my entire life.

I mean, I lived for not being at work as opposed to just being able to enjoy my job where there's a blurred line now between people say work-life balance. But there isn't that balance that we don't necessarily only have fun outside of the office, but you can have fun at work. But can you talk some about how we do make work more fun?

Michael Rucker:
Yeah. Before I start though, I will say, man, you just nailed it. Because the three main variables that you can play with to make things more enjoyable are the people that you're with, the activities that you're doing in the environment, and it sounds like you just hit a grand slam.

Amy Morin:
Does it any better?
Michael Rucker:

No. That's amazing. Yeah. I think to unpack the work chapter, it was really interesting because I have colleagues, organizational psychology colleagues that have looked at this. But when I delved into it, what I realized is that the complexity of where people want to start, what I call forced fund in the chapter, it's like I don't necessarily like this group or what I'm doing. That is an extremely complex problem to unpack.

Where I started and I think it's been quite helpful is really what do you have control over within your space? What are the things that are going wrong where at the end of the day you're just not enjoying your time at all? How can you play with ideas to see if you can make it more enjoyable?

The first is where are your transition rituals? Where is it where you can say, "Okay. Work is over." This isn't necessarily making work more fun, but it's making it so that you're saving space to have fun outside of work so that you can come to work with a little bit of a better attitude.

Then once you figure what that is at the end of the workday, I prescribe to reclaim your lunch hour, because having that break within those two four-hour subsets has clearly shown that you come back and you're able to be a lot more productive. Many people show up in the afternoon and really don't have anything left because there's so many ways for us to make our work lunch essentially an extension.

Finding ways to have fun within the middle of the workday become important. I talk about a friend of mine, Tania Katan, who essentially just start to walk because that was enjoyable for her. She would go use her curiosity to find a cool coffee shop or whatever. Then when people saw how invigorated she was when she came back, they actually started inviting themselves along.

Fun for her was creating this affinity around walking and that's what they did during lunch. Another thing is figuring out, especially for folks that are working in innovative areas, and I steal this from John Cleese is how can you turn complex business problems into playful endeavors.

Essentially, not necessarily gamifying them in the traditional sense, but creating a safe space where you can use this heavy problem and unpack it in a playful way knowing
that whatever the outcome is in a discreet amount of time, you can break the eggs. Really just unpack that.

Then I have a tool set that's kind of a more macro tool set in the entire book, but how can you use elements of what I call saver to change elements of your work? We could get into that real quick. But essentially it's taking a step back and really becoming an anthropologist, seeing all of the components of your workplace, and then potentially manipulating what we just said that you've already crushed.

I guess you didn't really need to read the book. Where is it where you can align yourself with people that you really enjoy? That might be outside of your department. That's another thing. We always try to focus on what's right in front of our nose, but there could be really fun people that would still make sense to cohort with around shared affinities that are outside your department.

Then you don't have that ego depleting notion of like, "Well, I have to put on a good face because these are my cohorts. I mean, there are American social norms that we're not going to stir. We can't change. Also, we need to be good stewards of psychological safety. Maybe your ill-defined humor that will allow you to have fun isn't appropriate in your immediate cohort, because again, you need to care about other people's psychological safety.

Then you can play with the environmental variables. For you, it's being on a boat. But something that's more accessible might be just taking habitual meeting that everyone hates to be into nature. Something that simple can change the tenor. That's a loose definition of fun. But it's certainly a more pleasurable experience than being in the four walls of a yellow room.

Amy Morin:

Right.

Michael Rucker:

Then changing the activity itself. There's so many work activities that when you look at them, there might be more creative, fun ways to tackle them. Whether that's adding game mechanics, whether that's changing up the way you do it, giving yourself
timelines, approaching them in a playful way, there’s just so many opportunities to reinvigorate fun into the things that you do instead of the way that so many of us have habituated our time at work where it just essentially becomes drudgery because we just come in to punch the clock, do our thing, and then leave.

Amy Morin:
Right. There’s a lot of research about having a friend at work or having friendships at work and how good it can be for us. I spent most of my career working as a therapist and therapists are somewhat private people most of the time and we’re in our office with clients and we don’t really interact that much with each other. I had very different experiences at different offices that I worked at over the years.

Then one of my last jobs as a therapist, my sister was a therapist in the next door office and a just ridiculous experience to work with my sister, who is a fellow therapist in the same building. We have all these ridiculous jokes and things in the hallways when you pass each other and that sort of a thing.

I thought I just definitely made the job way more fun even though I was doing the same kind of work. Just having somebody in the hallway that can give you the side eye once in a while makes a huge difference.

Michael Rucker:
Yeah. Again, I think so many of us are afraid to cross pollinate. In your example, if you aren’t really finding attachment to your immediate colleagues, oftentimes, especially in bigger corporations, there are opportunities to figure out what folks are doing outside of work.

Again, it happened after the book was released, but that amazing example in France where the work culture was that fun was drinking after work and it was clearly not fun for him. They forced him into it and ultimately he won rightfully. If your immediate cohort isn't engaging in things that you enjoy, oftentimes you're going to find your tribe if you just look a little bit.

That could be a book club that's happening at lunch that you invite yourself to or as simple as that. Then meetup.com is another amazing place to look for that type of
affinity. Then generally, as long as you have a good relationship with your leadership, if it's something for personal development, generally, you can take time for work to do that.

There are all sorts of creative ways to figure out how do you recapture a little bit of your agency and autonomy, which is a central tenant of the book in all aspects of life. A little bit of control so that you're doing the things that you want, things that fill you up, but still moving the ship in the right direction.

Amy Morin:

Absolutely. Last question for you. Somebody who says, all right, I want to start incorporating a little more fun in my life. Where do I start or what do I do? What do you recommend?

Michael Rucker:

Yeah. We already discussed a little bit. It's common advice. You really do need to become mindful of how you're spending your time. So many of us as busy adults have habituated our behavior. Just a simple audit of the previous week, it's only 168 hours looking at how you're spending that time and looking for opportunities to potentially remove things.

Because an important piece that we haven't touched on yet is this isn't homework. This isn't to add fun to your already busy to-do list. This all starts with creating space for things that are already depleting. Figuring out what those are. Generally, again, I reference some time studies in the book, we kid ourselves that we don't have any time, even the most busy people are heterosexual ... or excuse me, wives and heterosexual relationships with kids.

Even those as generality can find an hour or two every day, again, according to these surveys. I will present that data and people will be like, "Ah. No, that's not me." "Okay, fine." Well let's look at least for two or three hours that you can change. Generally people are willing to at least accept that invitation.

If you're still struggling, just open up the health meter on your phone and look at all the time you spend on apps. Generally, that'll be eye awakening like, "Okay. I'm probably
lying to myself a little bit." Figure out where those spaces are and then just integrate one thing that you want to do, but do it for at least two to three weeks.

Because initially, change for anyone, even people that variety becomes hard. Especially again, some of the most beneficial things I see is when people connect to a new hobby. But that dissonance the first couple weeks like, "Ah, I used to be so good at the guitar."

Generally, it doesn't take as long to get back up to speed as we think. But even if you're not where you want to be, just normalizing that new routine over two or three weeks and then checking in with yourself the third week like, "Holy cow. He was right. The next day, I just have that much energy." That's a good step.

If you don't want to do that, another one, I already name dropped her, but look up Dr. Cassie Holmes, study from UCLA on just having the mindset that your weekends a vacation. Don't change anything, just go, "You know what? This is mine." Don't even mix up your schedule. All she did was provide the prime like, "Hey, this is yours. You use it as you please. This is a vacation from work."

Just that alone has for a majority of people will be enough. Like, "Okay. I'm going to start doing the things I want. I still clean the house. But yeah, I get it's my time. I'm not going to think about work. I'd be more mindful of the things I do. I'm going to escape."

You know what Matthew Killingsworth calls mind wandering, which is another ... when we just kind of aimlessly go through our day. It's a pretty direct path towards unhappiness.

If we can mitigate that, even just by being mindful that this is our space and we have control, and even if we're doing things, taking care of others, we're getting to do it rather than having to do it can be enough to change the tenor and hopefully get you back on track.

Amy Morin:

I love it. Well, I hope all of our listeners go out and start incorporating more time in their lives to have fun and do fun things and to bring more fun into the work that they're already doing. Dr. Mike Rucker, thank you so much for being on the Verywell Mind podcast.
Michael Rucker:
Thank you so much for having me. This is a pleasure.

Amy Morin:
Welcome to The Therapist's Take! It's the part of the show where I'll give you my take on some of the best strategies for having fun and share how you can apply them to your own life. Here are three of Mike's strategies that I highly recommend.

**Number one: get clear on the things that you can do for fun.** I've never met anyone who said their favorite activity was spending hours scrolling through social media, yet most of us probably have invested more hours than we'd like to count on social media apps at one time or another.

As Mike says, you might feel too tired to do too much. Consequently, you might spend your spare time doing things that require very little energy but aren't necessarily fun. Watching TV and staring at your phone passes time, but it doesn't necessarily leave you feeling invigorated when you're done. Get clear on what kinds of things you actually want to do for fun.

I like that Mike suggested looking back into your childhood or your past to think about what you used to love to do and perhaps figuring out how you can incorporate more of those things into your life now.

**Number two: prioritize fun.** If you wait for just the right time to have fun, it's probably not going to happen. It's important to make fun a priority. I've talked on this show before about scheduling things to look forward to. It's a strategy that we use to treat people with depression in the therapy office.

Having a few fun things on your calendar each month can do wonders for your mood and for your wellbeing. Figure out what you can do to make fun a priority. It might be that you set aside 30 minutes a day for a hobby or maybe just one day a month to go for a really long hike. In Mike's book, he does a great job of explaining the different kinds of fun.
One person's idea of fun might involve fundraising for a charity. Someone else's might be reading a book on a Saturday afternoon. But whatever your definition of fun is, schedule time to make it happen.

**Number three: pay attention to the people you're doing activities with.** Sometimes it's less about what you're doing and more about whom you're doing it with. In his book, Mike suggests things like taking a friend with you to happy hour if you're supposed to go to happy hour with your colleagues (and it's socially acceptable to bring somebody along).

If you don't particularly enjoy your coworker's company, bringing a friend might make it way more fun. There are lots of other things that you could do to make things more fun, like work out with a friend, run errands with your relative, or sit by a coworker that you like when you have to go to an all-day training.

Those are three of Mike's strategies that I highly recommend. Figure out what you like to do for fun, schedule time for fun, and make everyday tasks better by doing them with fun people!

To hear more of Dr. Mike Rucker's tips, pick up a copy of his new book, *The Fun Habit.*

If you know someone who could benefit from hearing this message, share this show with them! Simply sharing a link to this episode could help someone feel better and grow stronger.

Do you want free access to my online course? It's called “10 Mental Strength Exercises That Will Help You Reach Your Greatest Potential.” To get your free pass, all you have to do is leave us a review on Apple Podcasts or Spotify. Then, send us a screenshot of your review. Our email address is podcast@verywell.com. We'll reply with your all-access pass to the course.

Thank you for hanging out with me today and for listening to *The Verywell Mind Podcast!* As always, a big thank you to my show's producer (who makes working in the podcast studio way more fun), Nick Valentin.