



# slack

# VARIETY PACK

Episode 4: Burst Pack

Speaker 1: You are listening to the Slack Variety Pack, a collection of stories about work, life, and everything in between. Brought to you by Slack. If you don't know what Slack is, head over to slack.com and change your working life forever. On this episode, the weird science behind knuckle cracking.

Speaker 2: It looks like the joint is coming apart.

Speaker 1: What it feels like to spend 24 hours straight on Facebook.

Kaitlin: It's currently 6:00am, my eyes are starting to kill me.

Speaker 1: Meet the people who personalize their cubicles.

Speaker 4: For example, Incredible Hulk gloves that you put on your hands and they make noise.

Speaker 1: First, we hit the high note.

Speaker 5: Slack Variety Pack?

Speaker 6: Yeah.

Speaker 5: Cool.

Speaker 28: Making work less work-y.

Speaker 1: In our first story, meet two guys who took the concept of choir out of churches and schools, and started their own. Little did they know, it would open up a whole new world of opportunities. Collaborating with rock stars, performing at awards shows, and even opening for one of the kings of late night TV. Co-founder, Nobu Adilman, tells the story.

Nobu: [00:01:20] It was about five years ago. My friend, David Goldman and I unintentionally started a choir, and we called it Choir! Choir! Choir! This is the story of how my friend and I unintentionally started a night that has since taken over our lives. Here's David.

David: The plan wasn't to start a choir. The plan was to get together with friends and to have some fun.

Nobu: Before choir, I was a TV guy. David managed a really popular diner in Toronto called Aunties & Uncles.

David: Anyone who came in there with any regularity would at least, if not recognize, would sometimes even say to me that I never stopped singing. Part of what I was doing was trying to make people have a good time. Of course, they were eating eggs, they weren't there to sing, and that's, I guess, in some ways, why choir is more successful, because people come in with the idea that they're going to sing, not eat an omelet.

Nobu: A Choir! Choir! Choir! session is pure joy. There's people of all ages, backgrounds, and there's something that happens when people get together week in, week out, year after year, to sing. A couple of friends of mine met each other at choir during tough moments in their lives, and now they're married. People who have moved to town by themselves have made lifelong friends. One guy told me the other day that coming to choir has made him a better father. Our first night, there was maybe 25 of us, that was close to five years ago. Now our two Facebook groups have a total of 14,000 members. Of course, there could be some doubles in there, I'm not sure.

This is how we do it. Nobody auditions, there's no commitment, you just show up. Don't show up if you don't want to come. Doesn't matter. We recently opened up for Jay Leno, we've performed with Tegan and Sara, and also, we've shared the stage with punk legend Patti Smith. Now we get e-mails from all over the world with people asking us, "How do you start a choir?" I just say, "Get people together, sing a song. It's easy." In the interest of being more helpful, here are five tips on how to start a choir. David, what's number five?

Choir: Number Five.

David: Start with a simple song. People love Aretha Franklin, but singing Aretha Franklin in a room of 100 people would be more difficult than singing Yellow Submarine and not necessarily exponentially more fun. Try to find a song that's easy to sing, that people can sing in unison, and they won't have a hard time remembering. I think you're off to a good start.

Choir: Number Four.

David: When you find a song that you want to arrange, don't worry about sticking to the original, because you're going to have so much more fun if you just rip it apart. No one is looking over your shoulder, change lyrics if you want, create vocal lines that have never existed before. You're just going to create something way more fun.

Choir: Number Three.

David: Get out of church, first of all, or synagogue, or mosque, or wherever it would be that you'd sing. Sing in a bar, sing anywhere where you're comfortable, get people loose, and let them sing and have a party.

Choir: Number Two.

David: To start a choir, you don't have to be a professional musician. Just some raw talent and the knowledge that you're going to have to work really, really hard. If you're going to attempt conducting, always realize that for a very long time, while you're waving your arms around, you're probably going to look really stupid.

Choir: Number One.

David: Okay. Finally, just don't listen to people who tell you how to start a choir, it makes no sense.

Nobu: Yeah. We don't have any rules for what we do. We started on a whim and it's been really fun. People ask us how to start a choir. We don't know how to start a choir, we know how to start Choir! Choir! Choir! but you probably know better how to start your own choir, so just go with your heart.

This has been five tips on how to start a choir. We've got an ongoing series we call Epic Nights where we invite bands to come and play their songs with us. It's a really special thing. Here's a taste of us singing a song called Coax Me with members of the band, Sloan.

[Song plays 00:05:38-00:06:08]

Speaker 1: Slack, your team's collective brain.

iPhone Cord: Hi, I'm an iPhone cord from three iPhones ago.

USB: Remember how you have a camera? I'm the USB for that.

Car Charger: I'm a car charger for your 3GS.

Controller: I'm a controller for your old PS2. Still work.

Coax Cable: Hey, remember me? On a co-ax cable.

Fitbit: I'm a Fitbit.

Ethernet Cable: I am 60 feet of yellow Ethernet cable.

Audio Cable: I'm just a random audio cable.

Charger: I'm the charger for your old BlackBerry.

BlackBerry: I am your old BlackBerry.

Charger: Together, we make up that box of cables lying around your house.

Speaker 19: Every year, millions of useless cables all across the country are forgotten, left to rot in a closet or a garage, these stupid cords will never get used again. Yet, we hang on to them for some dumb reason. Why not take a few minutes every day to remember your forgotten cords? Wear a parallel port cable around your wrist or pin an A/C adapter to your jacket and let everyone know that you appreciate everything these cords have done for you.

Speaker 20: It's time to pull the plug.

Speaker 19: Paid for by the Foundation for Useless Cables.

Speaker 21: Channel change. The science of knuckle cracking.

Speaker 1: You know the sound, but did you know that we still haven't figured out what exactly happens when you crack your knuckles. That is, until now.

George: It's an age-old human experience that divides us. Are you or aren't you a knuckle cracker?

Speaker 23: I find it disgusting and it just tickles my nerves.

Speaker 24: I need to crack my knuckles. It's relief, it's basic.

Speaker 25: I am not a cracker. I find cracking offensive.

George: Where does the crack come from? What makes that puzzling pop? Since forever, theories, myths and old wives' tales have clouded the fact that no one knows jack about it. Is it the bashing of bones? The popping of bubbles? Is it the joint juice escaping our knuckles? After decades of dissent, scientists out of one of the country's top universities think they have finally seen how the sound is created. Overnight, the world went nuts for it, especially crackers. What really got me was that the study was led by my big brother, Greg Kawchuk, who is a professor in rehabilitation

medicine, and apparently the Sherlock Holmes of joint cracking. I reached him in Singapore, where he was speaking at a medical conference to sort out all the confusion about this simple little pop.

Hey Greg.

Greg: Hey George. How's it going?

George: Last week, I woke up to Facebook and all of my feeds, and there was this one study about knuckle cracking that went viral, and you were behind the study. What the hell?

Greg: Yeah. Beyond the study, the whole thing was just so crazy. I had people sending me the study, saying, "Hey, this might be something you're interested in," not realizing it was us who did it.

George: What exactly was the study?

Greg: We had noticed that there was a gaping hole in the literature where there had been this argument about what is it that causes this popping sound. This argument has existed almost since World War II.

George: Around that time, scientists believed the crack was a formation of an air bubble in the joint. To illustrate, clasp your palms together, pull them apart quickly, and you'll produce a flatulent popping sound. That was lucky, actually.

Greg: This other group comes along in 1971 and says, "No, it's the collapse of the bubble which causes this sound."

George: Pretty much like popping bubble wrap.

Greg: Then there's been mayhem ever since.

George: It was the Hatfield and McCoys of joint science, a butting of heads over the cracking of knuckles, and it raged decades with no hope of resolution until my brother realized that modern technology could settle the score.

Greg: All this new technology, which would help us answer this question, got developed after the fact, but no one really ever thought to go back and look at some of these older problems or old arguments with this newer technology.

George: Brother Kawchuk and his team used an MRI machine, stringing together hundreds of rapid-fire photos to create a video of a colleague's finger cracks. To get his knuckles to crack, they had to use something far less sophisticated.

Greg: It involved a rope and a zip tie, and we put the zip tie and the rope around a colleague's finger. He was lying down in the MRI, I was on the other side pulling on the rope, and we had to devise this whole set of signals so we wouldn't pull this finger off, but that's as technical as it got. Extremely low-tech.

George: Which crack code was right? Was it the old-school theory of a sudden formation of a bubble in fluid? Or was it the more recent thought that it's the collapse of a bubble? As it turns out, neither.

Greg: The finger looks like nothing is happening, and then all of a sudden, this surface tension between the two sides of the joint becomes overwhelmed, and the two surfaces suddenly fly apart. It looks like the joint is coming apart, and this little black cavity forms. Then it all goes back to normal. No one had ever seen that in real time before. We were like, "What?"

George: Remember when I called my brother the Sherlock of knuckle cracking? Make that the Stephen Hawking of knuckle cracking. He was able to clearly see that there are actual little black holes being created in your knuckles. Seriously, no sloshy fluid, no bubble wrap, instead, a black void, a vacuum, like the emptiness of space that stretches into existence and then pops out of existence with a big bang.

Greg: It was a really unique experience to see something that no one else had seen yet. This joint coming apart and then this black bubble forming out of nowhere.

George: How many pull my finger jokes occurred during this experiment?

Greg: That's what we called this study, and that's all that happens to me now. You wouldn't believe. You're trying to be up there as a scientist and be all serious about these findings and the right statistics, and then everyone runs up to you after and you think, "Wow, I'm going to get some great questions." All they want are selfies with you pulling their finger. It was a defining moment in my career.

George: Even though we all love a good finger pull, is it as harmful as many imagined? My brother says no.

Greg: No one is going to get more arthritis from this, yet we can't say it's good for you, either.

George: That's not what he's really looking at. His study is scratching the surface of something much deeper.

Greg: I think what our study tells us is there are some interesting things going on in that maybe we can learn about joint health. Why is it that some people's joints maybe wear out before others and why is it that some people's joints look pristine into their 90s? Perhaps cracking your knuckles is a sign that everything's okay.

George: Thanks, Greg.

Greg: Hey, George. Call your mother sometime.

Speaker 1: Work with a knuckle cracker, married to one? Share the story, [soundcloud.com/slackvarietypack](https://soundcloud.com/slackvarietypack).

Channel change. The social psychology of social media.

Kaitlin: [00:14:11] The sun is just setting. It's gorgeous. It was too hot this afternoon, but now it's like that perfect temperature, and I'm stuck inside on my computer.

Speaker 30: That's Kaitlin.

Kaitlin: It is currently 4:55 PM.

Speaker 30: She's going to spend 24 hours on Facebook. I know what you're thinking. Aren't we all basically on Facebook 24 hours a day already? What if you weren't allowed to leave? What if you weren't allowed to sleep? We wanted to know what that would feel like and Kaitlin agreed to do it.

Kaitlin: I don't want to do this. I'm going to do it though. I'm going to do it.

Speaker 30: Reluctantly.

Kaitlin: Also, full disclaimer, I already had a beer.

Speaker 30: To help us understand what's going on in her brain, we talked to this guy.

Alfred: Every generation tends to struggle with big technological change and information. 500 years ago, people were complaining about news.



Learning about new things everyday was just too much. How could you process more than one piece of news a day?

Speaker 30: That's Alfred Hermida, director of graduate school of journalism at the University of British Columbia, and author of the book ...

Alfred: Tell Everyone: Why We Share and Why it Matters.

Speaker 30: Those 24 hours start off on a pretty positive note, with that familiar charge.

Kaitlin: I posted my Facebook status update. 73 people liked me photo. 19 people liked my status update. It feels kind of nice. I'm definitely seeing that there's a bit of a rush. Oh, I just got another one. Did you hear it?

Alfred: Dopamine in our brain encourages us to seek and to want more. When we post something, what we're then looking for is a reaction to it.

Kaitlin: Kelly commented on my status. What did she say?

Alfred: The weird thing with our brains is we're more geared to want stuff than to be satisfied by it.

Speaker 30: Kaitlin isn't just staring at her news feed the whole time. There are some ground rules.

Kaitlin: It's been 2 and a half hours.

Speaker 30: She has to keep Facebook open on her laptop and if she leaves the room, she has to have the Facebook app open on her phone.

Kaitlin: I just posted that I was going to have 3 pieces of bacon for dinner and all of a sudden I've got 7 people who like that idea. This is like a pat on the back for all your bad life choices.

Speaker 30: She also can't just be passive the whole time. She has to tag herself in photos, answer friend requests, and reconnect with former classmates.

Kaitlin: For the record, I had 1,338 friends. This is exhausting having to interact with this many people.

Speaker 32: When you look at the science around this, basically once you get to over around 150 friends, it's really hard to keep track of everybody. The thing with something like Facebook is that we're connected to friends but

they're not really friends. They're kind of people we know. The beauty of social media is having that light touch, that light connection of friendship. I know what a lot of my friends are doing and have this peripheral awareness of what's going on without having to make that straight connection.

Speaker 30: After midnight, things start to get weird.

Kaitlin: I've been on Facebook now for 7 hours. No. 9 hours. I don't know how to count anymore. I think I'm getting dumber.

Speaker 30: Kaitlin starts to lose control of her voice.

Kaitlin: I've publicly said ... I'm having a hard time talking.

Speaker 30: And her sense of self.

Kaitlin: I don't want this guy commenting on my stuff. I want cool people commenting on my stuff.

Speaker 30: Until she finds an unlikely friend.

Kaitlin: I just had another person contact me. We're not especially close but they just started talking to me about how frustrated they are with their career. It seemed like a really huge conversation to have. I felt like maybe this person should be talking to a friend or family. Then I realized I'm the only person awake right now.

Speaker 30: By the time the sun comes up, she's transformed.

Kaitlin: It's currently 6:00 AM. My eyes are starting to kill me. I've created a page called "A Quiet Space." There's nothing posted on it. It's literally just a blank page. I find it quiet. Facebook is very loud. God I hate this.

Alfred: Here's a case of how much time are you spending on social media and are you spending too much time considering everything else you should be doing? The danger here is that it's so easy to get sucked into that world.

Kaitlin: 4 hours left.

Alfred: Everything is pulling us to spend more and more time in these spaces.

Kaitlin: 3 hours.

Alfred: We haven't quite yet built in the controls [inaudible 00:18:52] socially to understand that, "No no, hang on. Facebook, don't manipulate me."

Kaitlin: There's an end in site. I can see it.

Alfred: I don't want to let you control me. I need to be in control.

Kaitlin: 10 minutes. Just 10 minutes. I just spend 24 hours on Facebook. I was forced to interact with people. Normally when I'm on Facebook, I don't interact. I'll post something, I will like something, I won't check in with someone that I haven't spoken to in a long time to see how they're doing. That part was actually the rewarding part. I think we go on Facebook wanting to connect with each other but we don't do that. We just do it on a very superficial level. I think I'm going to take a break from Facebook for a bit, that's for sure. Now I'm going to shut down my computer and I'm going to go have a beer with some friends.

Speaker 1: Slack. Work. Life. Balance.

Speaker 33: Let's face it. Talking on the phone with your boyfriend, girlfriend, or spouse while at work is the worst. It's almost impossible to sound both affectionate and professional and the same time. Rather than fight it and teach you how to sound like a normal human being, we thought we'd give you a few tips on how you can perfect the awkward office call.

Speaker 34: Hello.

Speaker 33: Ah, yes. The hello. Picking up the phone and saying hello is probably the most important part of the awkward call because right off the bat, you need to establish to both your co-workers and to your partner that you're about to sound like a total alien. Let's listen to that hello one more time.

Speaker 34: Hello.

Speaker 33: Once you've established a tone in your voice that doesn't sound anything like you, it's time to move on to the trickiest part of the call. Question period. During question period, your significant other will start asking you questions. It could be something as simple as, "Hey. What do you want for dinner?" Or it could be something complicated like, "Are you still mad at me?" To make this awkward call even more awkward, always respond to a question with another questions.

Speaker 34: Yeah. Oh, good. How are you?

- Speaker 33: At this point, you and your significant other have not talked about a single thing, but it's time for you to start wrapping up the call. The quicker you get out of there, the better off everyone will be. To wrap up the conversation, it's best to blurt out a made up excuse for why you have to go. Here's an old standard that works every time.
- Speaker 34: Hate to do this. I'm slammed. Got to go.
- Speaker 33: The final chapter of the awkward office call is probably the most challenging. The, "I love you." To ensure that you don't offend your partner by not saying it back and to avoid the ridicule of your coworkers, it's best to end the call by simply throwing together a random assortment of mumbled words.
- Speaker 34: Okay, call you on the way home, okay? Okay. Yup. Okay. All right. Okay. Love you, too.
- Speaker 33: And viola. You're done. Remember these rules next time you need to have an awkward office call with the love of your life.
- Speaker 1: Channel change. History at work. Meet an inventor who came up with an ideal to revolutionize the office but accidentally created misery for millions.
- Speaker 35: You know it. You might have even worked in it. It started off with great intentions. A way to humanize the place we spend most of our lives, the office. You know what they say about great intentions. It was the 60s. The dawn of a new decade and things were loosening up. Radical thinking seemed to be inserting itself everywhere. Well, almost everywhere. It hadn't quite reached the office. See, the corporate office has basically stayed the same for most of the 20th century. A large, open room, filled with row upon row of desks. No privacy, no personalization, just a lot of typing and phone calls.
- Speaker 36: This is the executive floor. It should be organized, but it's not. You'll find account executives and creative executives all mixed in together. Please don't ask me the difference.
- Speaker 35: Robert Probst wanted to change that. He was an inventor and lead designer at furniture design company, Herman Miller. He had a vision. He studied the way people worked in offices and how they moved around. He realized that office workers needed privacy and autonomy and they needed to interact better with each other.

Speaker 37: One of the regrettable conditions of present day offices is the tendency to provide a formula kind of sameness for everyone.

Speaker 35: He partnered with industrial designer George Nelson. Together, they came up with Action Office. Action Office was amazing. Totally modern and bright like the pop art of the time. Desks and work spaces were separate pieces and of varying heights, depending on the task you wanted to do. Instead of keeping workers in their place, it was all about movement. The critics loved it. Unfortunately the office purchasing departments did not. It was just too expensive, not to mention difficult to assemble. Companies needed something more efficient so Bob Probst went back to the drawing board. He made some huge improvements and in 1968, he unveiled Action Office 2.

Action Office 2 was Probst's gift to the office worker. It was made up of interlocking walls and components that were flexible and easy to assemble. A 2 or 3 sided vertical division carved out a worker's space for privacy, but also allowed them to see what was going on in the rest of the office. The walls were soft with tack boards and push pins so that workers could personalize their space without bothering your neighbors. The new Action Office would allow anyone to create their ideal workspace. It worked. Action Office 2 became so successful that competitors like Steelcase and Knoll started to create knock offs. Probst's concept was validated.

His vision has turned into a nightmare because in case you hadn't guessed it, Robert Probst's had invented the cubicle. Companies didn't care about freeing the workers. Action Office 2 allowed them to stuff as many workers as possible into as small a space as possible cheaply and quickly. It was all about the bottom line. In the US alone, 40 million employees have worked in 42 different versions of Action Office 2. In 2005, sales reached 5 billion dollars. Not only are offices filled with them, sometimes the spaces they occupy are so big, we call them cubicle farms.

Speaker 37: The cubicizing of people in modern corporations is monolithic insanity.

Speaker 35: These days, some progressive companies have started to embrace Probst's original vision for the human performer. If you're one of the many still stuck in the cubicle, take heart. You can fight the power in your own way like these people.

Speaker 4: On my desk, I have everything from a Wonder Woman Pez dispenser, a Dolly Parton prayer candle ...

- Speaker 38: I've got a lot of Legos on my desk. A lot of Lego mini figured. At least a hundred. Over a hundred little things.
- George: Take a look at your cubicle right now. What non-worky things are on your desk? Is it a picture of your kid, a favorite coffee cup? Or is your desk decked out? Is your space a shrine? Are you an adult with toys and trinkets, curios and clutter? These guys are.
- Speaker 40: Initially I was trying to go with a nautical theme. I had the lamp that looks like a lighthouse. There's a framed picture of a clipper ship and book ends that are anchors. That sort of went out the window pretty quick. Now there's action figures and old issues of Vice Magazine and a broken radio.
- Speaker 4: I've also been gifted things or inherited things from people who had left. For example, Incredible Hulk gloves. They're kind of the size of 2 shoe boxes that you put on your hands and they make noise. It's kind of funny. Sometimes they say, "Hulk smash."
- George: Dr. Greg is an organizational psychologist. He's seen a lot of desks in his time.
- Dr. Greg: People really have a tendency to like to decorate and I don't know how much of it is actually intended for an audience, that is to say I'm actually trying to say to somebody else something about me, as much as I'm trying to say something to myself about me. I think I'm the audience of my own decoration.
- George: Dr. Greg doesn't see these shrines as distractions or even hindering productivity. He thinks they're generally a good thing.
- Dr. Greg: There's a kind of trend towards dehumanizing the work space. The far end of it now is you don't even own your cubicle. You just show up and find a workspace. You plug in your computer which is sort of your life, your work life, and you work from there. I think they function as a source of inspiration to get out of the normal and get into a more playful space. There are businesses where the object is to get out of work and be in play.
- George: In fact, if you ask the desk shriners out there, they all say the same thing.
- Speaker 42: [00:29:25] I love to be surrounded by the things that bring my joy.

- Speaker 40: With all this stuff on my desk, I could look in any direction and there'd be something that made me happy like a picture of my dogs or a picture of my wife or an action figure of Master Chief from Halo.
- Speaker 4: I think everyone has their own style of space. I feel as though as a creative person I need to be surrounded by things that provide me with joy.
- Speaker 42: I like the fact that my office is a sanctuary so while I'm working I can be surrounded by the things that I love.
- Dr. Greg: More often than not, I find there's actually very curious and interesting things around people's offices. When I go to people, I say I'm doing individual coaching or I'm working with a team. I spend quite a bit of attention noticing what's around people's desks. In fact, it's a great way to connect with people, to ask them questions about why do you have this particular photograph there or what's that curious stone you have on top of your computer?
- George: Is there any risk of over doing your shrine?
- Dr. Greg: I don't know how intentional people are thinking through, "I would like everyone to think that I'm this really super cool and creative person so I'm going to go out and get super cool and creative things and adorn my desk so I create a certain false image." There's risks attached to creating those false images of course.
- George: What are those?
- Dr. Greg: Well, you fall short. There's a danger to overselling. I think it'd be very neat if people would actually listen to your story and go back and look at their own cubicle and contemplate why they have what they have there. Maybe having listened to the story, they'll contemplate changing some of the stuff that they've got around them.
- George: Around my desk I only see a wilted salad and an empty glass. I always thought all those toys always overcompensated for creativity, but my space tells me I really don't have a personality. Got to get me a shrine or even just a pair of those growling green hulk gloves.
- Speaker 4: Oh sorry. I put them down and they're still making noise. Hulk smash.

- Speaker 1: That about does it for episode 4. Next episode. Next time on Slack Variety Pack, meet a group of women who are changing one of Silicon Valley's biggest problems.
- Speaker 44: I want companies to be excited to have more black women on their teams, but I do want to be known for the work that I'm doing.
- Speaker 1: And discover the origin of the elevator pitch.
- Speaker 45: It takes a lot of balls. Once you step into that elevator, then you've got to nail it.
- Speaker 1: The details. All the stories in this episode from starting your own choir, to knuckle cracking science, to how to have an awkward office phone call has it's own Sound Cloud file at [soundcloud.com/slackvarietypack](https://soundcloud.com/slackvarietypack) so that you can send just that story to your friends. Find out more information about this podcast on [slack.com/varietypack](https://slack.com/varietypack) and subscribe to the podcast on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. You can also leave us your feedback at 415-992-7561. Thank you for listening. Slack. Making work less worky.