



# Master your emotions to boost workplace performance and build better relationships

Mastering emotional intelligence helps you make better decisions—and build engaging relationships with your team to boost productivity and performance at work

*I'm going to ask you to reflect on your life. Close your eyes. Take a nice, long breath. Imagine your alarm goes off at 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning. I want you to check in with yourself. How do you feel when you wake up? Do you say, "This is going to be the best day" or "I can't believe that I've got to do this?" Next, you're in the car or on the bus headed to work. How are you feeling? Are you checking your messages? Are you listening to the news? Are you dropping off kids?*

*Then, you walk into your office. Do you look around and feel excited and energized, or do you feel frustrated, fearful, or anxious? Now, lunchtime arrives. Are you having a nice, casual lunch where you relax and eat poached salmon, or are you chowing down something fast, like a big Subway sandwich? Afternoon hits—time for more meetings. How do you feel in those meetings?*

*OK, next you have to commute. Maybe you're not going home. Maybe you have a dinner appointment with a client. Is it enjoyable? Not enjoyable? Do you want to be there? Then, evening comes and you've made it home. Are you eating dinner with family, or have you missed dinner? Are you reading to the kids, or are they already in bed? Finally, it's time to go to sleep. You put your head on your pillow. How do you feel as you fall asleep at night? How many pleasant or unpleasant emotions are you experiencing?*

*The question this exercise asks is, Honestly, do your feelings matter? And they do. Focusing on feelings and emotional intelligence is a great place to start building healthier and happier relationships.*

## Emotional intelligence affects life—and work

I'm a scientist. My passion comes from studying emotional intelligence and understanding where people are in their development, how to measure these skills, and how to use them to predict things of great importance.

Historically, people saw emotional intelligence as a soft skill. Many still think of it that way. But now they call it noncognitive abilities or nonacademic abilities. And I'm here to tell you that it's actually a very hard skill. Emotions leave indelible memories, and sometimes scars, in our brains. At Yale's Center for Emotional Intelligence, we've done hundreds of studies to show that emotional intelligence matters a great deal for our effectiveness at work and at home.



**Marc Brackett, Ph.D.**  
*Director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence*

In this abbreviated transcript from a recent Schwab Advisor Services™ event, Yale professor and scientist Marc Brackett shares tactics to hone your emotional intelligence and become more self-aware. Brackett compels advisors to harness the wisdom of emotions by learning to recognize, understand, label, express, and regulate them. These skills lead to more effective communication, closer ties with clients and colleagues, and an increased ability to understand their needs.

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## Using tools to identify moods

To get started on this journey, I'll teach you about a science-based tool called the Mood Meter. There are two axes on the meter, Pleasantness (X axis) and Energy (Y axis). Both axes offer a range from minus five to plus five. On the Pleasantness axis, minus five would be you thinking to yourself, "I can't believe I'm wasting time reading about feelings right now." Minus three might be kind of emotionless. At plus five, there may be no words in English to describe the positive feeling you have about getting to read about emotions right now. So you're somewhere between minus five and plus five on the X axis.

The Energy axis has to do with your level of activation. Here, we're talking about your physical or mental energy. Plus five on the Y axis would mean you have so much energy that you just want to jump up and down and scream. At minus five, you feel like you're at the end of your rope.

Now, take a look at the four quadrants created when you cross the axes. The yellow quadrant signifies you are feeling high energy and pleasant; the red quadrant indicates you're feeling high energy but unpleasant. You could also be in the blue quadrant, which means you're in your deepest pool of despair. Or, you may be in the green quadrant—feeling pleasant, but your energy is kind of low.

Do you believe that there are people in your office who are in the yellow and green quadrants? Are some of your colleagues feeling down, disappointed, lonely, or even alienated? Can you think of people who are stressed, worried, or overwhelmed?

“Historically, people saw emotional intelligence as a soft skill. ... I'm here to tell you that it's actually a very hard skill.”

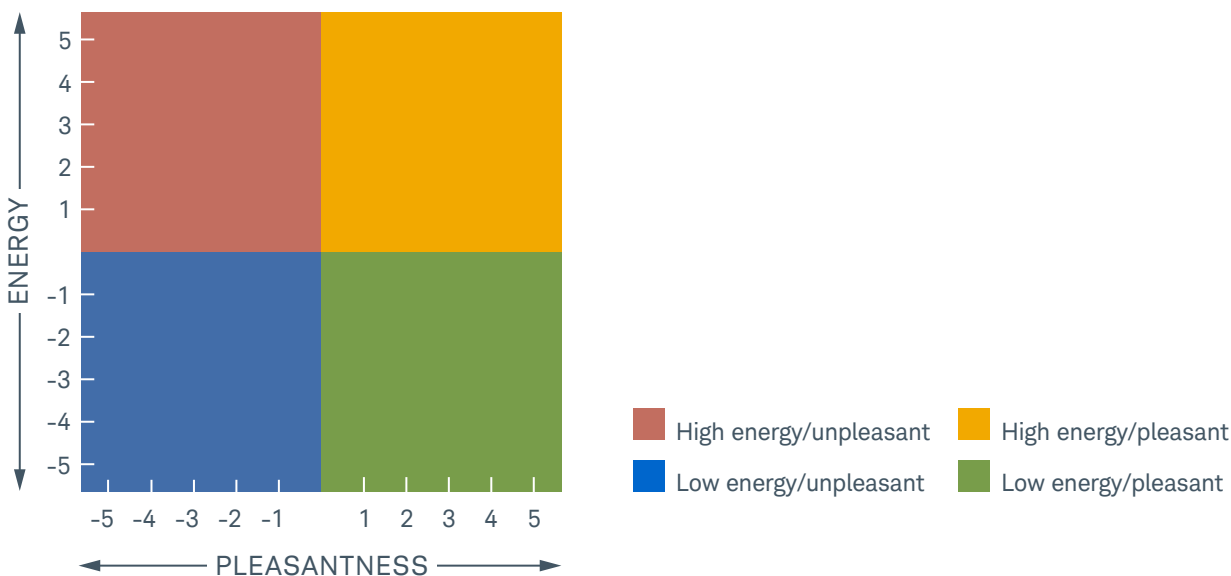
What's the word that best describes how you're feeling? You could be pleased, content, excited, or ecstatic. You could be down, devastated, helpless, or depressed. You could be calm, content, tranquil, or relaxed. You could be peeved, irritated, angry, or anxious. Take a second and place yourself in one quadrant. Now that you're more in touch with where you are, let's talk about why research tells us these emotions matter.

## The top five reasons why emotions matter

### 1. Attention memory learning

How you feel right now is driving your attention capacity. Emotions drive your presence. If you are bored, you're not present. If you feel curiosity and interest, you're sitting there like, "Give me more." Or maybe you're feeling disengagement. When you're stressed, it's very hard to take in information. Have you ever been in a meeting with someone when you've been angry? And at the end of the meeting, how much do you really remember about what happened? You don't, because the neurons that are responsible for dealing with the stress are the same neurons that are responsible for taking in information. So if they're dealing with stress, they're not taking in information.

## Mood Meter: Quadrants of emotions



## 2. Decision making and judgment

Ever made a bad decision? Emotions drive our decision making and judgment. Recently, I did a study on the way teachers' emotions influence their thinking. I randomly assigned teachers to be in different quadrants of the Mood Meter, yellow or blue. All I did was say, "Take five minutes and write about a great day. Now, think about a day where you weren't doing so great." That's called "mood induction." Then I had the teachers grade essays. At the end of the study, I asked these educators, "Do you believe that how you felt influenced the way you evaluated these students?" Ninety percent of them denied it. They said, "There's no way that how I felt would change the way I would evaluate somebody." Yet there were actually one- to twofold grade differences in how the teachers evaluated the essays. That tells us emotions can affect outcomes without our conscious awareness.

## 3. Relationship quality

Do you work with someone who displays negative emotions or is not skilled in regulating them? Maybe they have facial expressions that give a disgusted look. Generally, we don't want to be around people who don't know how to manage their emotions. Emotions are constantly influencing the quality of our relationships. And we pick up on those signals. Certain negative emotions say to others, "Avoid." Genuine displays of more pleasant emotions say, "I'm approachable. I'm here for you."

## 4. Physical and mental health

Recently, the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, in collaboration with the Born This Way Foundation, surveyed thousands of high school kids on two questions, "How do you feel?" and "How do you want to feel?" Across public, private, rich, and poor schools, we found that 75% of the time kids spend in school, they say they're feeling negative feelings. They're feeling tired, bored, and stressed. And I don't think it's much different in our nation's corporate setting.

Would you feel alarmed if data showed that 75% of the time, people who worked for you felt tired, bored, and stressed? I would be concerned about those people's decision making, commitment, and presence. Negative emotions can make you feel unsafe psychologically, stressed out, or like you're only 50% there. These emotions are going to drive you to have higher cortisol levels, which deplete your immune system and influence your heart.

## 5. Everyday effectiveness

I also research adults' and kids' creativity. And I'm very interested in what differentiates the most creative people from the rest of us. What we know is that there are certain personality traits, like being open to ideas, which help people be creative. Right now, we're not so interested in creative personalities but rather in creative product. What I mean is, Who actually generates something that's different and unique? And what we're finding

in our research is that the distinguishing variable is the skill of emotional intelligence.

Kids and adults who have the ability to regulate their emotions are the ones who achieve the greatest products. Why is that? Because you've got to deal with frustration and disappointment when you're doing something creative. You've got to deal with negative feedback. And unless you have emotional skills, you're not going to generate as much creative output.

### Avoiding the emotional takeover

My father had an interesting girlfriend about 15 years ago, after my mother passed away. This woman called me up one day and said that she and my father were getting married and they were selling my family home to move into an old four-story Victorian house in New Jersey. My father was in his 60s and had undergone a quadruple bypass, and I was thinking, "Wait, how about a ranch-style home or something?"

So, I took this woman out for dinner, and I asked her if she thought this was the right course of action. She said, "Marc, every decision I've made in my life has been with my heart, and my heart is telling me this is the best thing for your father and me." I had to take a breath and refrain from speaking. I know her "hopeless romantic" reaction lacked reasoning—that's emotional takeover. Emotional intelligence is all about making your emotional and cognitive systems work together.

## Developing a skill set for managing emotions—and staying present

My hunch is that you are a busy person, so you're worrying about your phone and your investments. But I want to know what your emotion regulation strategy is. When you notice yourself getting distracted, tired, a little hungry—maybe you want coffee or water, or you've got to go to the bathroom, or you're thinking about your kids or your work—what's your strategy to come back to the present moment?

Notice it, acknowledge it, and bring yourself back to the present. Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Think about your strategy in the context of the people you work with. Are you managing a team of 25? Working with 10 people or with 50? Imagine you walk into a meeting and say something like, "You know, it's going to be a rough day today. We have a lot going on. When you get that feeling, I just want you to notice it, acknowledge it, and recognize the stress you have is impermanent." Do you think that will be effective? It's hard. Emotion management can be tough, especially in the workplace.

Tons of workplace research from Gallup has recently come out, indicating that approximately 70% of North American workers are not engaged. From the Harvard study on stress and mortality to a study done by the University of Warwick on happiness and productivity, more and more people are talking about why emotions matter in the workplace. The question is, What are the skills needed to be emotionally intelligent? There are many. That's why we started the Center for Emotional Intelligence. The idea is to use the power of emotional intelligence to create a healthier and more effective and compassionate society.

At the center, I have a team of about 35 people. Half of them are scientists. They do studies on adults and kids, from CEOs to preschoolers. The other half of our team conducts trainings in different organizations. We train on five skills. The first skill is recognizing emotions, being accurate at identifying your own and others' emotions. The second is understanding, then labeling, expressing, and finally, regulating. Let's go through those a little bit.

## Five essential skills for handling your emotions

### 1. Recognizing emotions

Are you reading people's emotions accurately in their face, body, and voice? Try this exercise to test your abilities. Guess someone's expression. Then, have that person tell you the emotion they meant to convey.

This task is very subtle and difficult. You might think the person is anxious, but he's actually showing contempt. We know that not all emotions are easily recognizable, and people see different things in the same expression. Misreading them leads to miscommunication. Maybe we should ask people how they're feeling instead of assuming we can tell. Most of us need formal training in how to read emotions. This is a real skill that needs to be developed.

### 2. Understanding emotions

Here's your quiz, and you've got 30 seconds. What's the difference between what makes people feel disappointed as opposed to angry?

Disappointment has to do with unmet expectations. For example, you might be disappointed when thinking, "I thought I was going to get the raise." However, if you thought you were going to get the raise but feel like your boss intentionally sabotaged you, then you're not disappointed. You're angry. That's because anger always has a theme of injustice or unfairness.

Understanding emotions means knowing the causes and the consequence of emotions, including how they affect our thinking, judgments, and behavior. But sometimes, people display emotions that don't necessarily correlate with the ones they're feeling. For example, kids can respond with anger when they're actually feeling disappointed. So we regulate what we see but not necessarily what's going on in the inside.

### 3. Labeling emotions

What are the words that we use? Do we have that rich, sophisticated vocabulary to describe emotions? What is the difference between jealousy and envy? Jealousy means you don't want someone else to have it. Envious is you want it too.

Jealousy is a relationship-driven emotion where you feel threatened by someone else. You feel like you're going to lose something important to you. Jealousy is a tricky one in the workplace, right? When you have 33 people, you're bound to get along better with certain people than with others. And other people get really jealous, and they gossip about it. They ask, "Why is he spending so much time with this person?" That's because they want the relationship too.

Envy is like thinking, "I'm sure that you make more money than I do, and I hate you for that." I may be envious of your possessions, of your skill set. But, really, it's not that I don't like you. I'm envious of your ability or what you have. The question is, Which one causes more challenges in the workplace? The answer is jealousy. And that's why we say, "You have to name it to tame it." If you don't have the vocabulary—if you don't know what you're actually feeling—it's hard to know how to regulate it. Think about it. How sophisticated is your emotional vocabulary?

### 4. Expressing emotions

We also need to know how and when to express emotions with different people across different contexts. Do you know someone who is socially inappropriate? There are three levels to social inappropriateness. The first level is individual differences. For example, my two brothers aren't as comfortable talking about emotions as I am.

Once, they came to listen to me speak. At the end of my presentation, one of my brothers looked at me and said, "You shamed our family! You share things. You're too vulnerable. Don't even walk out with me. I don't want them to know that we grew up in the same family." I kept on thinking, "I wished he would be a little bit more comfortable with feelings. He might get married or have a relationship." So there are differences between people in our own comfort level with feelings.

The second level is norms, like social norms or family and business norms. If you've worked in three or more organizations, did you notice that each one had a different feeling? Be honest. Some are warmer than others. Some are colder than others. Some have people informally chatting. Other people are stoic.

Thirdly, there's a larger, cultural piece. I teach a martial art called hapkido. The rules are really different in Korea than they are here. We don't bow to each other here. We shake hands. And if you're in corporate America, it's like, "Tough! I'm a man." And that's the

norm. We expect that. We teach to that. Yet, people who come from other countries don't get that attitude. We assume that our way is the universal way, which it's not.

We do research on people's self-awareness, and there is about a .1 correlation between people's self-rated emotional intelligence and their actual emotional intelligence. Think about that. There is little to no relationship between our beliefs about our skills and our actual skills. But it's hard to hide your feelings—they leak. Masking emotion often sends a mixed message. The more you suppress, the less you're able to take in information. What happens is that you get lost in the emotion.

## 5. Regulating emotions

It's important to know how and when to express emotions and how to regulate them. You can use thought and action strategies to prevent, reduce, initiate, maintain, and enhance emotional responses. What does that mean, exactly? Well, when you're in a meeting with a client, you can't be like, "I'm sorry, man, this isn't going so well." You can't handle the stress by doing yoga. You've got to have cognitive strategies. You've got to know how to regulate in your head. You have to engage in the self-talk or the reappraisal.

Let's take a look at ineffective strategies. This includes negative self-talk, such as "I hate my life. I hate everybody I work with. I'm never going to be any good at anything." These reactions are things like venting, complaining, avoidance, denial, suppression, or rumination. Are you the type of person who can't fall asleep at night because your brain is racing and you can't stop thinking? There's also blaming, aggression, and procrastination. And psychological manipulation is a big one in the workplace.

## "There is about a .1 correlation between people's self-rated emotional intelligence and their actual emotional intelligence."

Then, there are effective strategies, like breathing, mindfulness, relaxation, or positive self-talk. You say, "I'm going to take the high road." There's also positive reappraisal where you think, "You know what? This man just started. Why am I blaming him for being so ineffective? There's something I can do to support him and to help him achieve his goals."

Next, there are strategies that require more planning, like making sure you get enough sleep. There's nothing better than getting more sleep, healthy nutrition, and exercise. Do you have that social support system you need? Do you have people you can call when you're in need? Or do you do something constructive? Do you read, cook, or swim? Do you focus on solving the problem instead of ruminating? Do you shift or change your goals? And in the extreme cases, do you feel comfortable seeking treatment?

It's easy to just blame. It's easy to yell. It's easy to deny or avoid. But it's effortful to engage in healthy emotion regulation. You have to be deliberate and conscious, and want to do it.

## Calming down the storm

On my way back from Australia, I was ready to have a complete conniption because the Chicago airport was shut down due to a storm. I was like, "I'm not getting home tonight after 26 hours of flights, and I haven't seen my family in three weeks." I was freaking out and walking through the airport saying, "This is ridiculous!" Then I sat in a chair and said, "All right, Marc, do that breathing exercise." I started breathing and speaking my mantra. Breathe out, breathe in, "deep," exhale, "slow," inhale, "calm," breathe out, "ease." Then, I told myself to simply smile and say "release" on the last exhale. The exercise worked for me. And it was amazing to me that my craziness went, all of a sudden, to "OK, you know what? I've got to check into a hotel."

## Nudging people toward the right Mood Meter quadrant

What's interesting about this work is that it's also about knowing how to get people in the quadrant that you need them to be in to achieve your goals. Some days, all of us kind of live in a certain quadrant, right? Some of you are more the anxious type like me. You worry about why you worry, and you've got too much on your plate. Some of you may be a little down, a little pessimistic. And others of you may be like, "Good morning, everyone! It's so good to see you!" I have a friend like that. She's wonderful, but by Friday, it's like, "Claire, you've got to calm down." I'm an introvert, so that energy makes me feel like I can't breathe. I can't talk. I need space.

Emotion management is about knowing how to regulate the full range of emotions, about dealing with stress. It's about knowing that "I need to be in the blue a little bit." It's getting to the green. It's getting to the yellow.

Emotions are also useful for different ways of thinking. For example, I just launched a project with the support of the Born This Way Foundation called The Emotion Revolution. And when I was in my initial meetings, they were so exciting.

Brainstorm meetings are a great place to be when you're generating ideas. But do you think excitement is the best emotion to be in when doing a budget? It isn't. You need less energy and more focus. Blue, actually, is a great place for doing budgets—low energy, slight disappointment—because that space induces more convergent and deductive reasoning. In other words, you're going to be more nitpicky and more aware of errors when you're in a blue mood. If you want to get people to agree with you, you want them in the green space—pleasant but low on energy. If you want to share or persuade about an injustice, you've got to get in the red.



So, it's important to see that all emotions are valid. Most people say, "Red, blue, ugh." Actually, red is great. For example, the red that I have is about our nation's funding for schools. That topic drives me crazy. If I didn't have the anger, I wouldn't have the motivation to make change. It's not a bad thing. It's how you deal with it that matters.

## Recognize the origin of your patterns, and future growth

You have to think about your own emotional development when it comes to this work. All of you have a personality and a temperament. Some of you are worriers; some of you are not. Some of you are very outgoing and social. Some of you are shy. You can't change that. It's your personality. But you can change your behavior.

I want you to take a minute and think: What did you learn about emotions growing up in your household? I grew up in a family that was very neurotic. My mother worried about why she worried. And I used to come home and say, "Mom, I'm being bullied." She'd reply, "Don't tell me all the details or I'll have a breakdown." And I remember that my neighbors played games after dinner. It was like, "We worry. *They* play games."

What was your emotion education like? Did you grow up in a family where your parents did something like the following? You're coming down the stairs for breakfast and your dad says, "Good morning, I'm looking at your facial expression. Are you maybe overwhelmed or anxious? OK, let's breathe together. Let Daddy give you a research-based strategy to help you regulate." Was it a suppressing family? "We don't have feelings here. No, we drink alcohol." Or maybe you grew up in a family where everyone was arguing. How much training did you receive in recognizing your own and others' emotions, understanding them, labeling them, expressing them, and regulating them?

Now, think about the people you work with. How many of them do you think have had a formal education in effective emotion management? There are tools for this. We call it an Emotional Intelligence Charter. Why not ask the people you work with how they want to feel? My hunch is they want to feel respected and supported and motivated and appreciated. And then the question is, What do we do as an organization to create those kinds of emotions? How do we interact to make sure that people feel safe, feel respected, and feel supported?

You've got to build awareness. So we built an app, based on the Mood Meter, which provides tools to allow you to try these skills out. We call it the Mood Meter app. You can learn how to plot yourself with a hundred words and can start thinking about the reasons. You can say, "No, I want to shift. I don't want to be in the blue. I want to be in the yellow or the green." And then you can say, "Wait a minute, I need some strategies here." And it provides you with research-based strategies.

Or you can import images from your family or workplace or vacations that may help you feel different emotions. You may choose to look at your little puppy. And then, very interestingly, it allows you to look at your report after a week or a month, and you can say, "Holy cow! I've been living in the blue 51% of the time. How has that been influencing my relationships? How has that been influencing my productivity, my performance, my decision making?"

## Becoming aware of your behavior with science-based tools

Many of you know who Viktor Frankl was. You might have read his book called *Man's Search for Meaning* when you were in high school. And I've learned a lot from reading his work, and I think he really speaks to the value and importance of emotion regulation. What we need to do is move from automatic, mostly unconscious strategies that are unintentional, uncontrollable, and outside of awareness to more deliberate ones. Because when you're activated, you tend to not be very aware of how you're behaving. And for that, we developed a tool we call the Meta Moment.

**"What we need to do is move from automatic, mostly unconscious strategies that are unintentional, uncontrollable, and outside of awareness to more deliberate ones."**

First, you must identify those triggers. Do you have people who activate you? I gave a talk a few months ago to this bunch of academics, and in the middle of my presentation one academic looked at me and said, "A lot of us in the room would disagree with this theoretical model." I was triggered. But I built space by breathing and then activating my best self. So I said to myself, "Marc, you're the feelings master, right? How would a feelings master respond to that trigger? He knows how to reframe it and say something like 'Wow, that's an interesting perspective. Tell me more.'" I became composed. I didn't lose it. Because that breathing and space helped me choose an effective strategy.

And I think the idea of best self is actually well spoken about in Warren Buffett's quote that it takes 20 years to build a reputation and 5 minutes to ruin it. Because once people notice you're not skilled in dealing with your emotions, it kind of changes their perspective of you, right? The trust changes. Whether or not they feel like they can confide in you changes.

## Emotional mastery takes practice—and patience

Now, let's think back to the first exercise we did. I'm going to ask us all to take a nice, long inhale. Perhaps today, you could start asking yourself some questions. Say, "How was my morning?" At lunch ask, "How am I feeling right now?" Check in before you

walk into your home, because we know that when we get home we're tired and our resources are depleted. And then we have to be a parent or a partner, and it's tough when your resources are depleted. That's when you need these skills the most.

I always say when you're on vacation, who cares if you have emotional intelligence, right? Nobody cares. It's when someone kicks the sand in your face—that's when you need these skills. You need to recognize emotion in yourself and others, understand the differences in and the causes of emotions, learn how to accurately label emotions, be comfortable with and understanding of the expression, and know how to regulate effectively.

Imagine, in a year from now, you have spent this year practicing, building your awareness and developing a toolbox of strategies to become more emotionally intelligent. What's one thing that might be different about you as a person? What's one thing that might be different about your performance? About your relationships? Emotional intelligence is all about patience, patience, patience and practice, practice, practice. Your positive practice over time can make a huge difference.



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for Emotional Intelligence*

Marc Brackett, Ph.D., is director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and a senior research scientist in psychology at Yale University. His research focuses on the role of emotions in learning, decision making, relationship quality, mental health, and workplace performance; the measurement of emotional intelligence; and demonstrating how emotional intelligence training improves lives.

Brackett is a consultant at Facebook, working on the development of tools to help resolve online conflicts and bullying. He serves on several research advisory boards, including the Born This Way Foundation and the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley, and he regularly consults with corporations and school systems. His work has appeared in *The New York Times* and *Time* magazine, and he is a frequent guest on National Public Radio.

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