

Inspiring Hope in Our Students...and Ourselves



[Link to Handout](#)

Midwest Conference

Dec. 19, 2025

Peggy Rakas

PeggyRakas@gmail.com



Jon Batiste performing Blackbird

Peggy Rakas

Peggy Rakas is a lifelong educator who taught instrumental music for the North Merrick Schools on Long Island and is currently a clinician for MakeMusic and an adjunct professor at Hofstra University.

She is the founder of Teaching Positivity, an organization that provides positive psychology workshops for educators. She is a certified Optimize/Heroic Life Coach specializing in positive psychology, and she is the coordinator of the Harry Chapin Practice-a-Thon, raising money for local food banks on Long Island.

Ms. Rakas is a proud graduate of Bowling Green State University and Queens College.



THESE ARE DIFFICULT TIMES



THIS BASS CLEF FELL OVER



AND NOW IT'S VERY SAD

But There is Hope

If You Were a
Blue Footed Booby

[Nancy Tillman](#)



Teaching Positivity

*"When you change the way you look at things,
the things you look at change."*

Max Plank

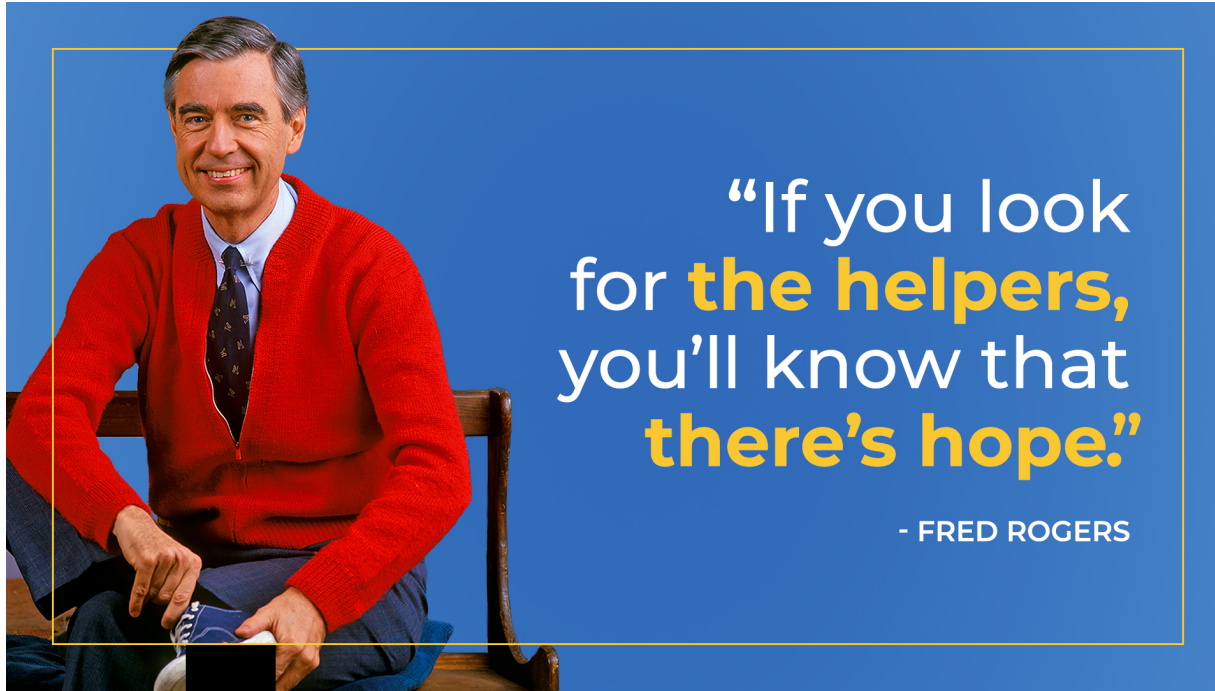
Remembering the Farmingdale High School teachers who died in the bus crash



Beatrice Ferrari

Gina Pelletiere





Hope is an Action Verb

Enter to win our grand prize!



Jon Batiste performing Blackbird

BIG IDEAS

- Why Should We Study Hope?
- How Do We Get More Hopeful?
- Positive Psychology Hope Toolbox
 - Easy Relaxation and Gratitude Practices
 - Rakas Positive Psychology Playlist
 - Making Hope Happen - Goals, Agency and Pathways.
 - WOOP- Wish, Outcome, Obstacles, Plan
 - Growth Mindset and The Power of One Tiny Habit
 - The Power of Self-Talk - Develop Agency with Anxiety Reappraisal and Distant Self-Talk
 - Reframe Mistakes as Opportunities to Grow
 - Cultivating Moments of Awe
 - Hope Worksheets for Students and Teachers
- One of the Secrets to Master Teaching



Teaching Positivity

Inspiring Hope in Our Students...and Ourselves

Peggy Rakas

Midwest Clinic - Dec. 19, 2025

[Link to Google Presentation Slides](#)

[Link to Hope Worksheets for Teachers and Students](#)

[Funny and Inspiring Posters for the Classroom](#)

[Link to Breathing and Gratitude Warm-ups - Rakas](#)



[Link to the Handout](#)

BIG IDEAS

- Why Should We Study Hope?
- How Do We Get More Hopeful?

WHAT IS HOPE?

Optimism is the belief that our future will be better than our present

Hope is the belief that our future will be better than our present, and we have the power to make it so.

Hope is an action verb

True hope requires active engagement rather than passive wishing.

"No matter how dark things might seem - there's always a glimmer of hope if we keep moving forward and taking action."

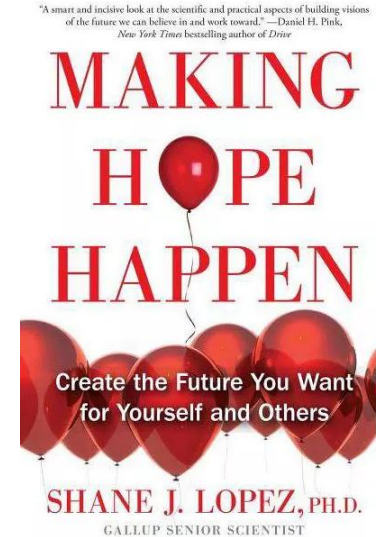
Jane Goodall

MAKING HOPE HAPPEN - SHANE LOPEZ

In the field of social sciences, the hopeful share core beliefs that set them apart from others.

Two of them are:

- The future will be better than the present
- I have the power to make it so - Agency



WHY STUDY HOPE?

The Impact of Hope

In a Gallup poll following 10,000 workers, the most powerful question asked was about hope.

69% who strongly agreed that their leaders made them
“feel enthusiastic about the future” were engaged.

Only 1% of those who disagreed with the statement were engaged -
[\(Rath and Conchie 2005 - 2008\)](#)

Teachers need to ask themselves, “Am I inspiring hope?”

- High-hope employees are 28 percent more likely to be successful at work and 44 percent more likely to enjoy good health and well-being.
([Avey, Lopez, Dollwet - 2013](#))
- Hope predicted academic achievement more effectively than intelligence, personality, or even prior academic achievement.
([Day, Hansen et al. - 2010](#))



Building Agency in Our Students...and Ourselves

Agency is knowing that we can take control of our life and influence our circumstances rather than being a passive recipient of events.

- Know that life is never going to be without obstacles and know that you are strong enough to overcome them.
- **Know that we can build our agency and that of our students with tools from positive psychology.**

I
am
enough

Enter to Win the Grand Prize



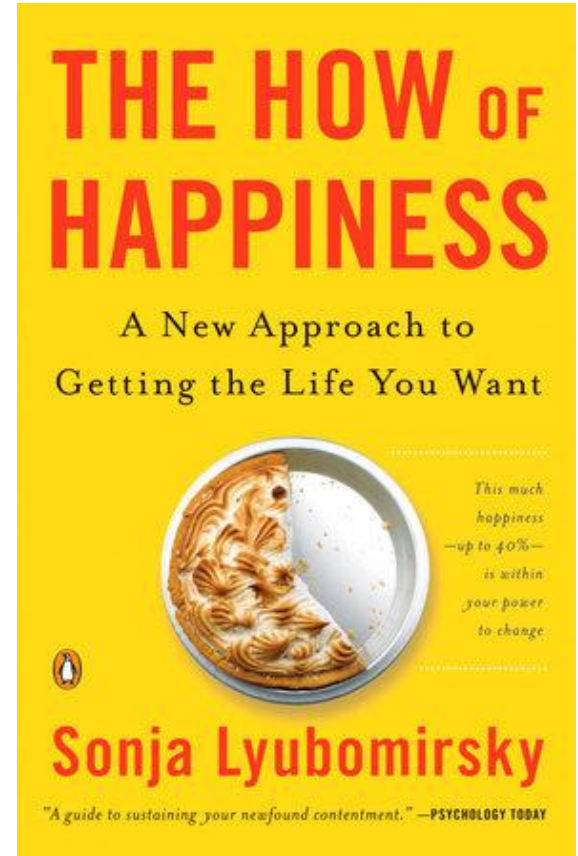
Jon Batiste performing Blackbird

Positive Psychology Toolbox



GRATITUDE

- Bolsters Self-Worth and Self-Esteem
- Enables us to Cope with Stress and Trauma
- Encourages Moral Behavior
- Builds Social Bonds
- You cannot hold a grateful thought and a negative thought at the same time



Gratitude Predicts Hope and Happiness

[Witvliet et. al., 2018](#)

Practicing gratitude makes you
better equipped to handle what comes
your way with a hopeful spirit



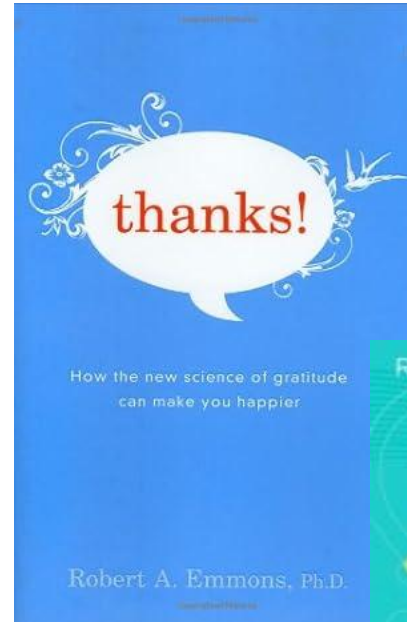
Thanks by Robert Emmons

“Gratitude is literally one of the few things that can measurably change people’s lives.”

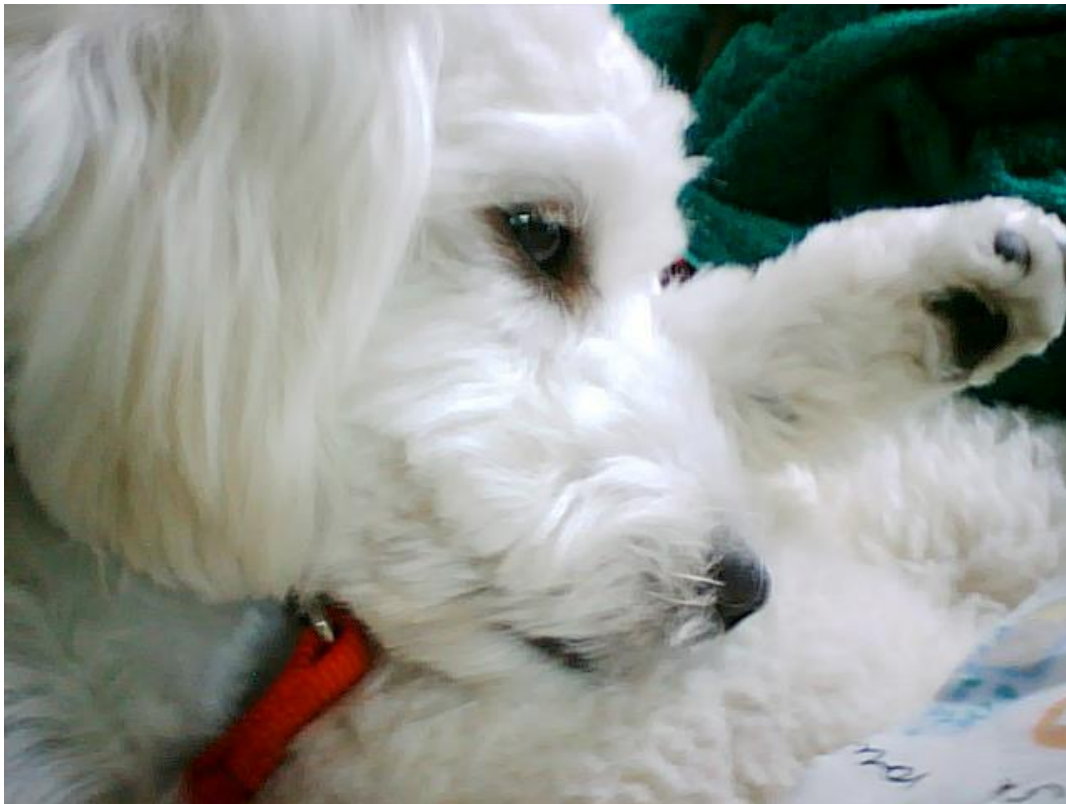
10 weeks of a nightly practice of writing 3 - 5 things you are grateful for resulted in a 25% increase in happiness.

Other studies confirm that even just visualizing something you are grateful for before sleep can raise your happiness levels.

As Emmons says: “It may sound simplistic, but the evidence cannot be ignored: if you want to sleep more soundly, count blessings, not sheep.”



I am grateful for my dog



Take a 2-minute Gratitude Break With Your Kids

- Close your eyes
- Concentrate on your breath. Breathe in, breathe out
- Bring to mind one thing you are grateful for
- Visualize everything about that one thing and how it makes you feel
- Return to your breath

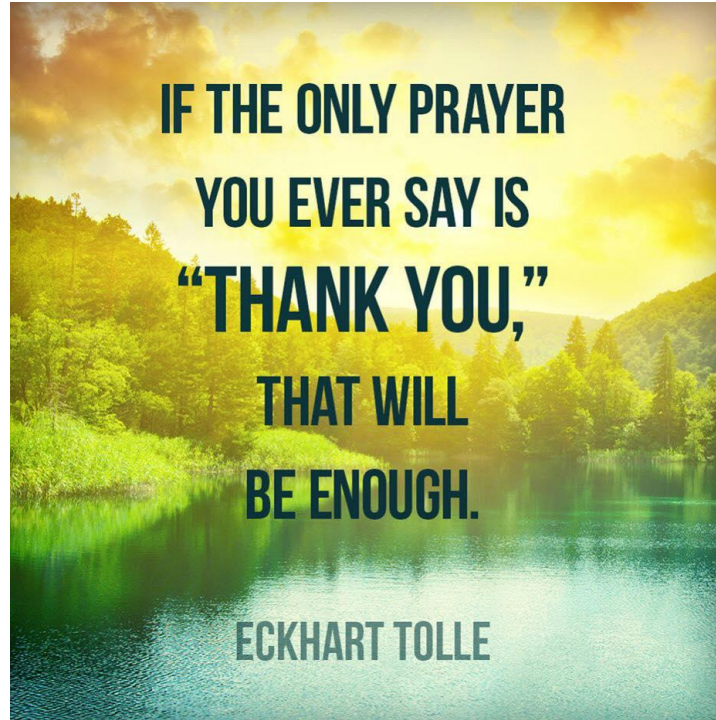


[Live Jelly Cam - Monterey Bay Aquarium](#)

Why does gratitude increase our hope?

- When people practice gratitude and become more grateful and happier, they begin to see that they played a role in creating that positive change. This strengthens their belief that they can influence what happens in their lives.
- When we recognize that our actions affect outcomes, we develop our sense of agency, our belief that we can make things happen, and as a result we become more hopeful.

Create a Gratitude Mantra





LETTUCE
REJOICE!

TeachingPositivity.com



Practicing gratitude: Turns out sometimes less is more, expert says

Jessica DuLong, CNN

Updated 5:14 PM EST November 28, 2023

You need a
light touch

Like a
butterfly

thank you,
Grace Scalzo

gracescalzophotography.com



Physiological Sigh or Cyclic Sighs

Quickest Breathing Pattern To Calm Down

Two inhales, followed by an extended exhale.

The second inhale is a fast, deep inhale.

Breath Count	In		Sharp In	Out						
	1	2	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	

The fast inhale fills the alveoli pockets in your lungs

from the [Huberman Lab](#)



[Physiological Sigh](#)

CYCLIC SIGHING

[Learn more](#)

arr. by Peggy Rakas

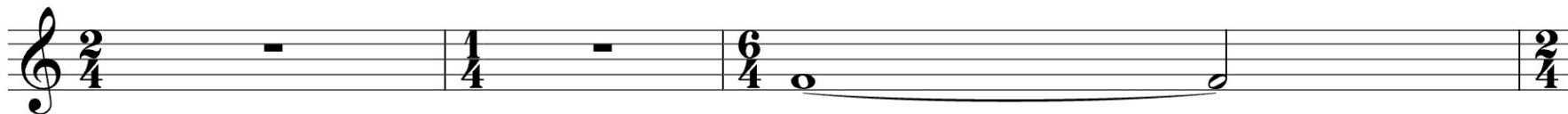
Deep breath in

Sharp breath in

Exhale or sing or play



4



CYCLIC GRATEFUL SIGHING

[Learn more](#)

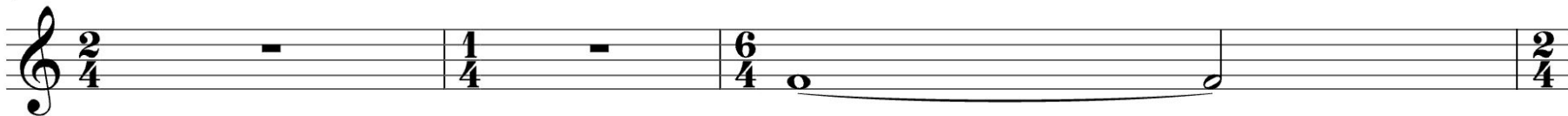
arr. by Peggy Rakas

Deep breath in Sharp breath in Exhale or sing or play



(Think) Thank you, thank you, thank you

4



[MakeMusic File](#)

CYCLIC GRATEFUL SIGHING

[Learn more](#)

arr. by Peggy Rakas

♩=70 Deep breath in Sharp breath in Exhale or sing or play

(Think) Thank you, thank you, thank you

4

7

10

Cyclic Sighing has been proven to reduce anxiety.

Gratitude practices are among the best tools for increasing our happiness levels.

One Cyclic Sigh is also known as a Psychological Sigh.

[Link to Breathing and Gratitude Warm-ups - Rakas](#)

Rakas Positive Psychology Playlist



Rakas Positive Psychology Playlist



Peggy Rakas • 9 titles

Don't worry, be happy! Both the 4-7-8 breath and Cyclic Sighing have been proven to reduce anxiety. Find those classic breaths here, along with a...
[Show more](#)

🔍 Type to search

Default



Cyclic Grateful Sighing



Classic 4 - 7 - 8 Longer Relaxation Breath



4 - 7 - 8 Gratitude Breath



4'33"
4'33"



Full Performance

Count Your Blessings 2-Part — PerformancePlus+

Enter to win our grand prize!

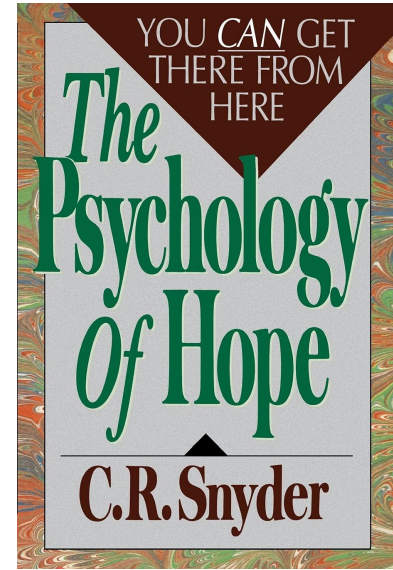


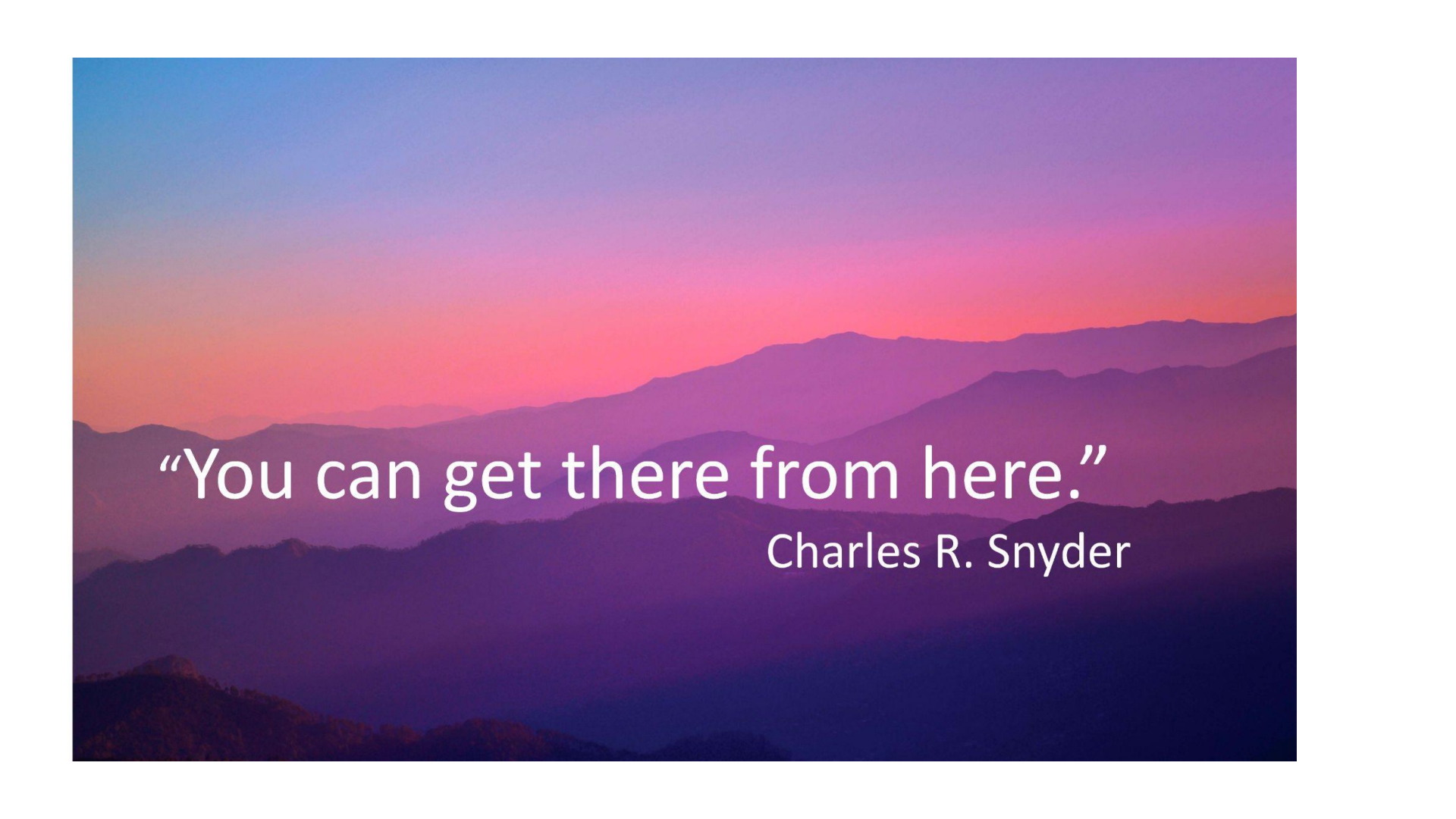
To have hope we need Goals. Agency. Pathways

Rick Snyder - The Psychology of Hope

1. **Goals.** You need to have a future "there" that fires you up!
2. **Agency.** You need to believe that you have the power to make that future a reality
3. **Pathways.** You need to know that there are a many ways to reach your goal (aka to go from "here to there") and that none of those paths will be free of obstacles)

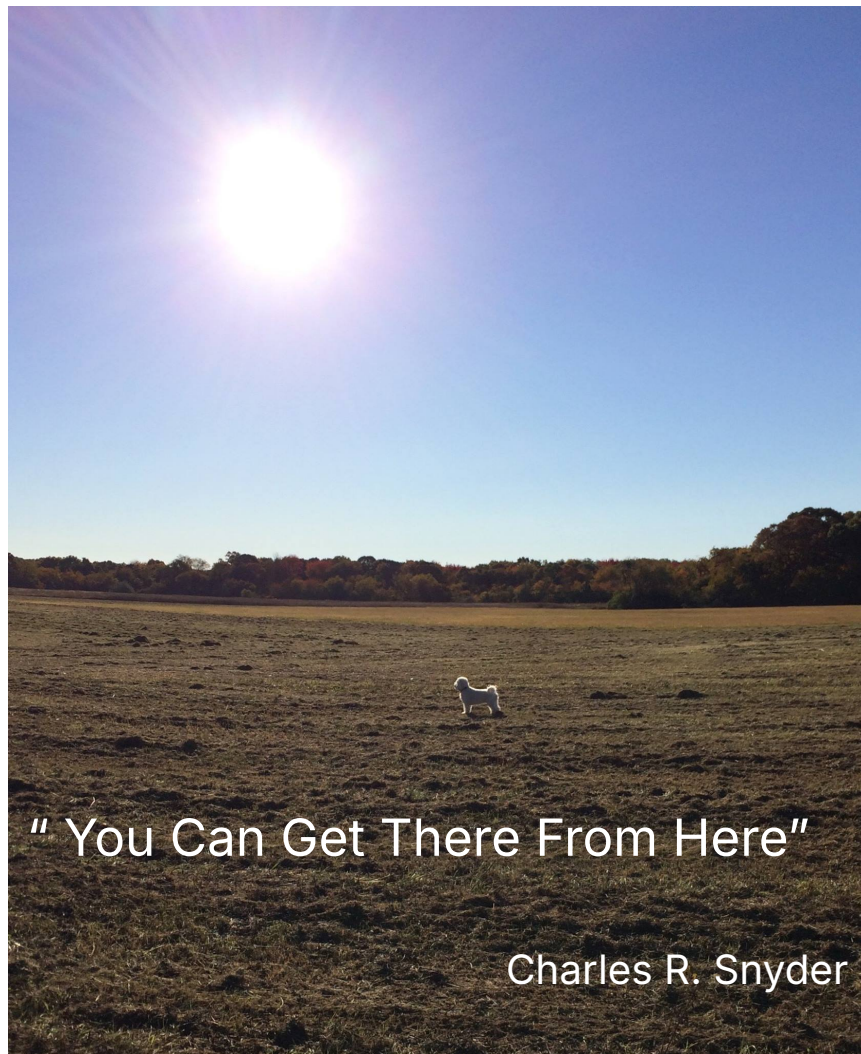
Goals. Agency. Pathways.





“You can get there from here.”

Charles R. Snyder



" You Can Get There From Here"

Charles R. Snyder

IDENTIFY OBSTACLES

To get
"there from here"
you need to know that
none of the paths will be
free of obstacles.



IDENTIFY OBSTACLES AND MAKE A PLAN

The Power of WOOP

Plan for the obstacles

Rethinking Positive Thinking

INSIDE THE NEW SCIENCE
OF MOTIVATION



Gabriele Oettingen

"Read this brilliant book and then go out and do what Gabriele Oettingen recommends.
It will change the way you think about making your dreams come true."
—ANGELA DUCKWORTH, Professor of Psychology, University of Pennsylvania, and 2013 MacArthur Fellow

W

You first name a **wish** that is challenging, but feasible.

O

Then you find the very best **outcome** and imagine this outcome.

O

Then you find your main **obstacle** and imagine this obstacle.

P

Finally, you make a plan, an **if-then plan** of how to overcome the obstacle.

WOOP Student Example

Character LAB

WWW.CHARACTERLAB.ORG

WOOP helps people do the things they really want to do.

W

WISH

What is an important wish that you want to accomplish? Your wish should be challenging but feasible.

My wish:

Get an A in science this quarter.

O

OUTCOME

What will be the best result from accomplishing your wish? How will you feel?
Pause and really imagine the outcome.

Best outcome:

My mom will be proud of me.

O

OBSTACLE

What is the main obstacle inside you that might prevent you from accomplishing your wish?
Pause and really imagine the obstacle.

My obstacle:

I can't figure out my science homework.

P

PLAN

What's an effective action to tackle the obstacle? Make a when-then plan.

When:
(my obstacle)

Then I will:
(my action)

*When I can't figure out my science homework,
then I'll google the questions I have.*



HOME

SCIENCE

PRACTICE

CONTACT

WoopMyLife.org

A dream without a
plan is just a wish.

Katherine Paterson

Teaching Positivity

HOPE WORKSHEET FOR MUSIC STUDENTS

- What are some highlights from your last year of playing or singing? 
- What's working with your music right now?
- What are some of the most challenging aspects of learning music?

*"When your goals are informed by the things you've struggled with,
those goals take on a richness of meaning."*

Mel Robbins

GOAL - Pick ONE MUSICAL GOAL you want to work on for this semester.

Choose something that matters to you.

*"Whatever you think your limits are,
you're wrong!"*

Mike Merzenich

OUTCOME - Close your eyes and imagine the best outcome. Imagine it fully.

Summarize it in 3 to 6 words.

What excites you about the outcome you want to create?

*"Your challenges are
trying to teach you something."*

Mel Robbins

OBSTACLES - What obstacles are in your way?

*"A goal without a plan is just a wish."
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*

PLAN - Make an if-then plan for your goal.

If plan A is not working, make a plan B.

Make plans A - Z if needed.

If _____

Then _____

**FAITHFUL
ATTEMPTS
IN
LEARNING**

Growth Mindset and the Power of One Tiny Habit

YET



[Learner Lab - Growth Mindset](#) start at 11:33 for Dr. Merzenich



The Pygmalion Effect, Growth Mindset, & Learning ft. Robert Rosen...



Watch later



Share

whatever

you

think

your

limits

are



you're

wrong

MORE VIDEOS

Dr. Michael Merzenich

" Whatever you think your
student's limits are,
you're wrong."

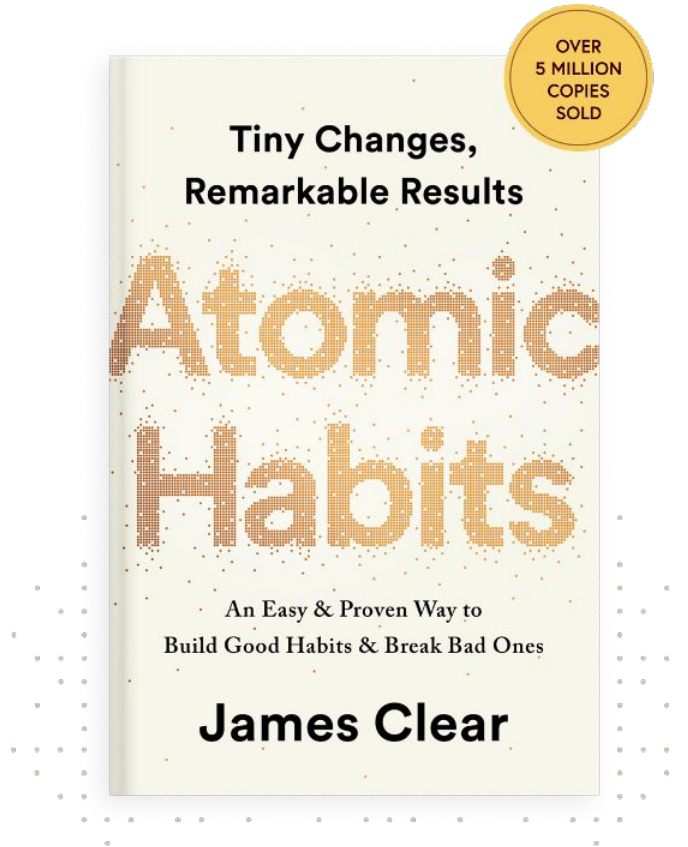
Peggy Rakas

Help Your Students Dream Big

- Ask what they want
- Encourage them to dream big and give them the resources they need to succeed



The Power of Tiny Habits





“One of my all-time favorite books.”

Arianna Huffington

Founder, Huffington Post & Thrive
Global

“Atomic habits are small 1% improvements in behavior that, over time, compound into full-blown behavior change and positive habits.”

a

Think of tiny habits like small sections of music that we need to perfect

Love theme from

PRELUDE AND THE LAST HOPE

TRADITIONAL
Arranged by
JOHN STUMP
Op. 40, No. 2

from the Opera Marche de Loie (*March of the Ducks*)
Resonator (Orchestral) Bells Flute Solo Un Poco Allegro

Quasi Cadenza Slower

rall. f p p p p ff pp

REFRAIN

f mf mp (Spoken)

Finale, Act. I In 4 Brightly

Moderately Quick 437 Solo, da Types

cantabile

p Very Slow g1 Faster Slower Rubato

Sopranos only voice off mf f sfz (legato tonguing) (May be sung A Capella) Solo of Yum-Yum P

Free Chant cresc.

Rhythmic trotting tempo stringendo

(Spoken) pp mutes

Slowly-Ad Lib. on Rubato

gioco

Like A March (flutter tongue)

morendo Stage Trumpets Guitar Solo

(left hand softly)

*If necessary, stagger breathing so as to sustain organ point here.

add Altos (or Organ)

(Repeat and Fade)

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Reframe Mistakes as Opportunities to Grow

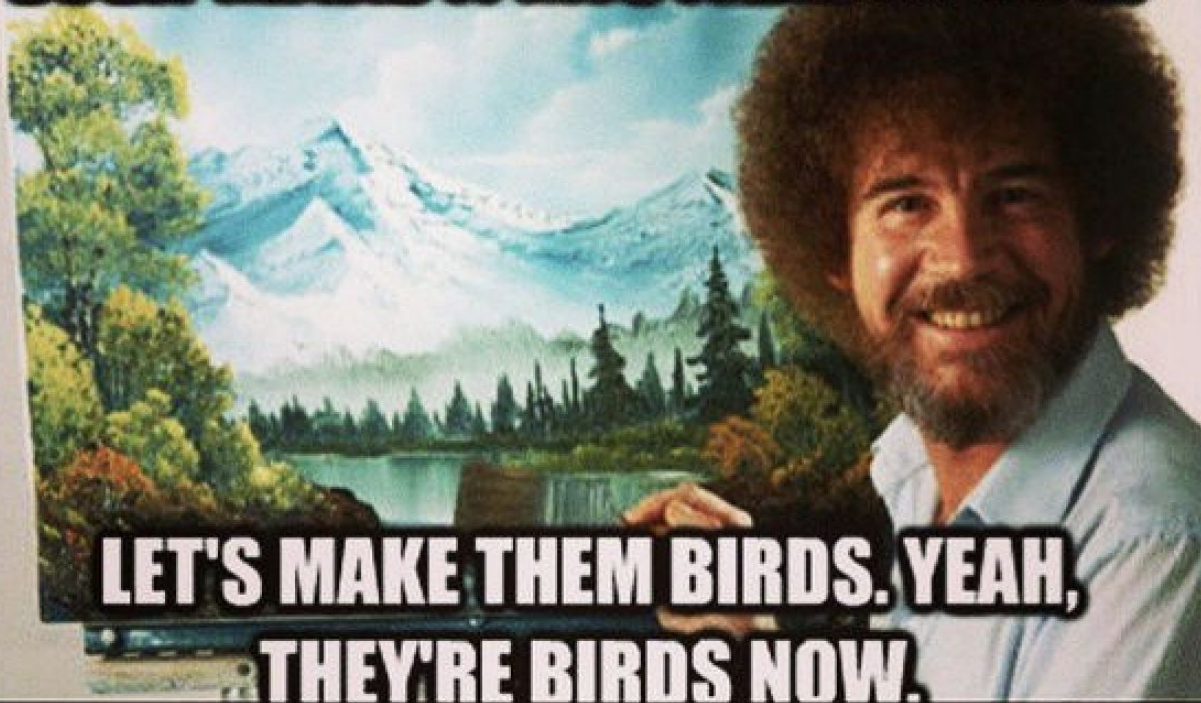


**FAITHFUL
ATTEMPTS
IN
LEARNING**

Fall
seven
times,

stand up
eight.

EVER MAKE A MISTAKE IN LIFE?



**LET'S MAKE THEM BIRDS. YEAH,
THEY'RE BIRDS NOW.**

What doesn't kill you
makes you stronger.
Except for bears,
bears will kill you.

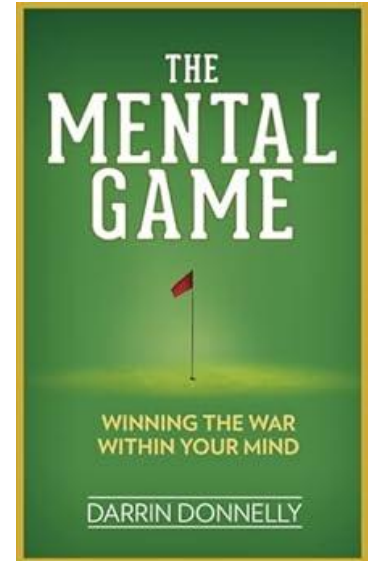
*And remember, we are all human,
so when you fail,
say “Oh Well” and start again.*

The Power of Self-Talk

Advice from Darrin Donnelly

The point of self-talk isn't to deceive yourself; the point is to direct yourself.

Don't listen to yourself
Talk to yourself



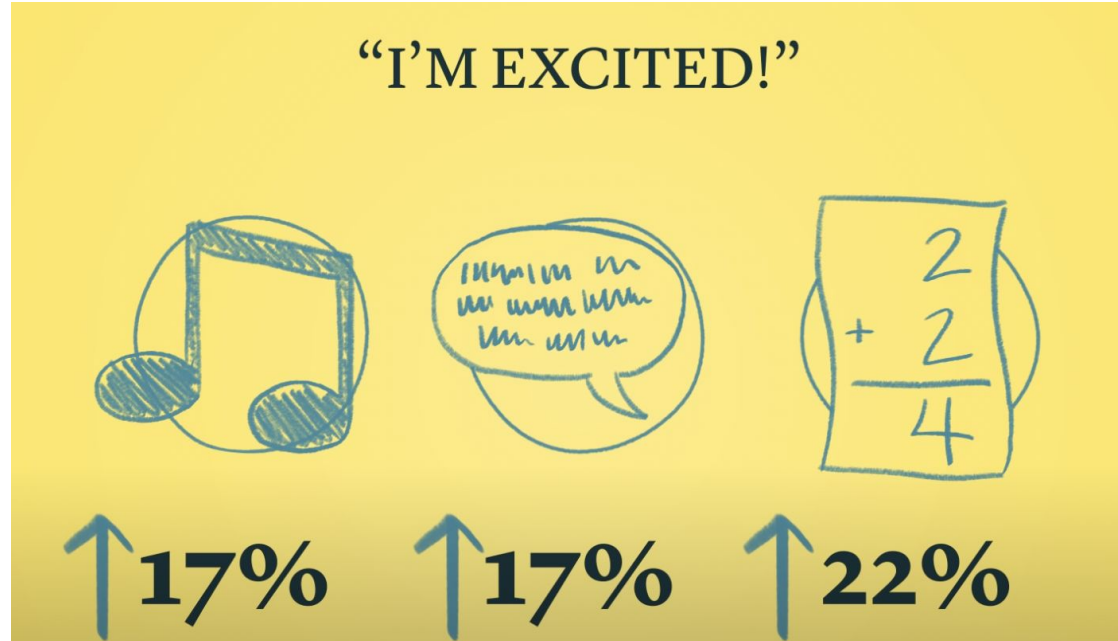
Anxiety Reappraisal

Anxiety Reappraisal

Replace "I'm afraid" with

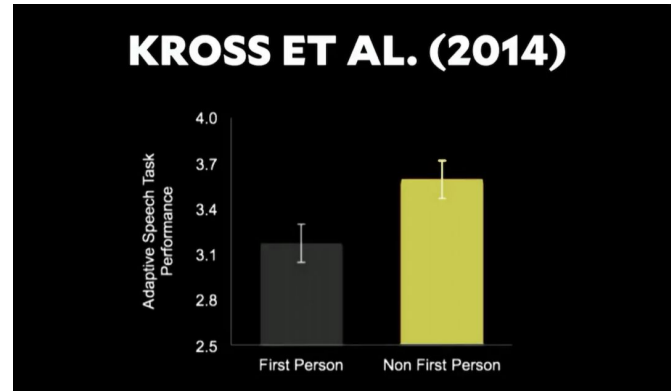
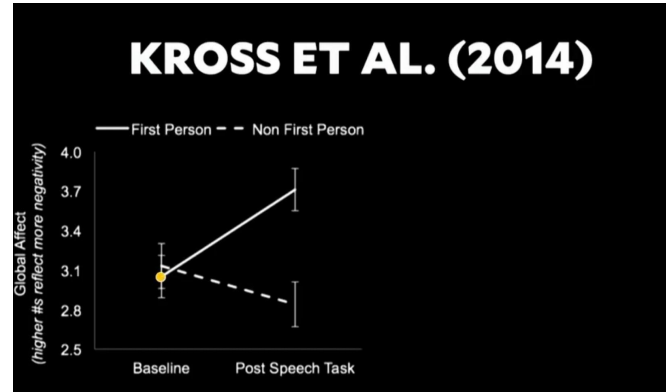
"I'm excited!"

(A. W. Brooks, 2016)



Distant Self-Talk

- Using distant self-talk, in second or third-person results in less shame felt by the speaker
- Others will rate you higher on how you performed



Third-Person Perspective can help reduce anxiety associated with a hard task
It helps you gain perspective

You've got this!

Even Better than "I'm Excited!"

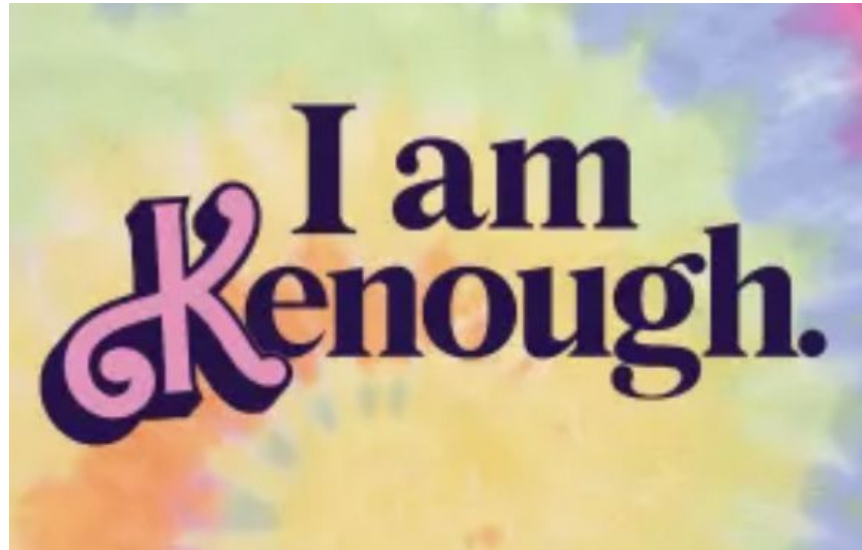
You're excited!

or

(Your Name), You're excited!

Better than I am Enough

(Your name), you are enough!



The Power of Awe

- Increased positive emotions (Joye, 2015)
- Lasting boosts to mood (Stellar, 2017)
- Increased life satisfaction (Rudd, 2012)
- The “small self” effect (Rudd, 2012)



Thórsmörk, Iceland (Photo by Jonatan Pie)

Change the Way You Look at Things

Awe Changes Your Time Perception

Awe Encourages Curiosity and Learning

Awe Enhances Creativity

A 2022 study published in *Emotion Review* (Richesen and Baldwin, 2022) found that awe seems to improve our ability to think creatively and reflect on things more deeply.

This is linked to how we process sensory information and ideas in our minds.

Forbes

3 Ways Seeking 'Awe' Is The Secret To A Sharper Mind—By A Psychologist

Mark Travers Contributor @

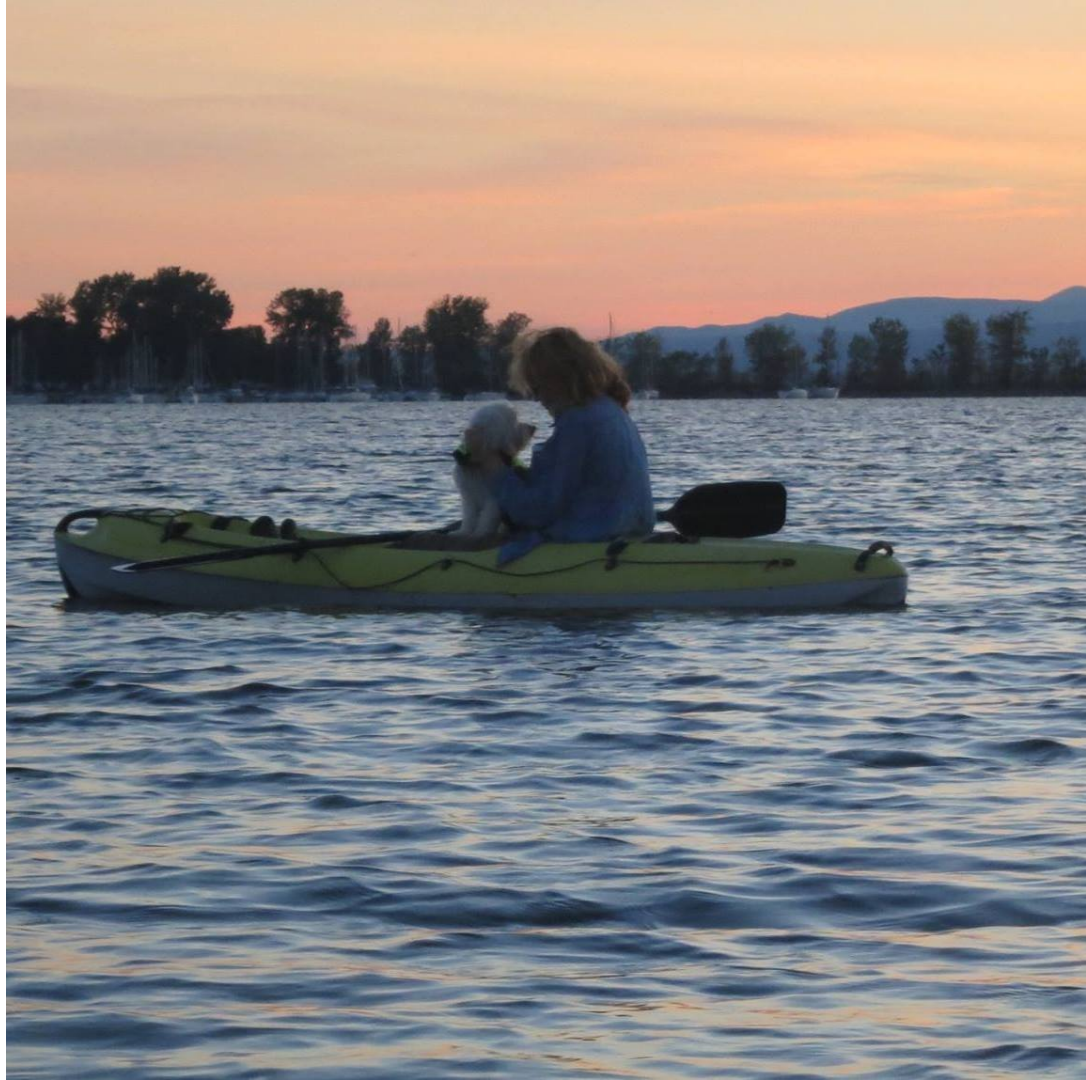
Mark Travers writes about the world of psychology.

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Jan 28, 2025, 05:30pm EST



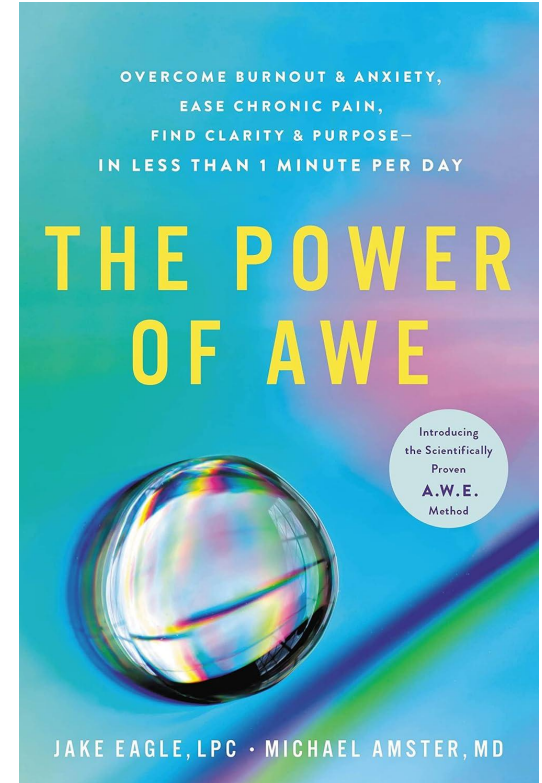




Microdosing Awe

- The method takes five- to fifteen-seconds, three times a day
- A type of "microdosing mindfulness," or a brief, informal mindfulness practice supported by research conducted at UC Berkeley.

"As lifelong meditators and mindfulness teachers, we confess we were almost embarrassed when we stumbled onto a 5–15 second shortcut to transcendence. This idea ran counter to everything we knew about meditation before we began our research. But, yes, it is possible. It only requires accessing the powerful emotion of awe in ordinary, everyday life. The changes in our lives have been profound, and after seeing the results repeated again and again in our thousands of patients, clients, and study participants, we've proven that our shortcut, coined the A.W.E. Method, works." Jake Eagle and Michael Amster



Use music to inspire hope and awe



[Now and Then](#)



[Blackbird - Jon Batiste](#)

Time for your Hope Worksheet!

Know that whatever you think your limits are, you're wrong!

*Know that whatever you think your students' limits are,
you're wrong!*

HOPE WORKSHEET FOR TEACHERS

GOAL - Pick ONE GOAL for your classroom that you want to work on.
Choose something that matters to you.

OUTCOME - Close your eyes and imagine the best outcome.
Imagine it fully. Summarize it in 3 to 6 words.

What excites you about the outcome you want to create?

OBSTACLES - What obstacles are in your way?

PLAN - Make an if-then plan for your goal.
If plan A is not working, make a plan B.
Make plans A - Z if needed.

MAKE A TINY HABIT TO SUPPORT YOUR PLAN



[Monterey Bay Aquarium](https://www.montereybayaquarium.org/)

MAKE YOUR TINY HABIT EVEN TINIER

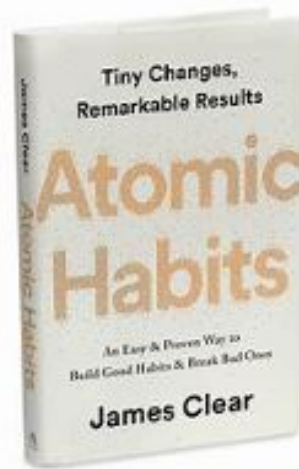
Is there a way to make that little habit even smaller?

*Now, think silly-small habits that can be done
in 2 minutes or less.*

Perhaps you can JUST SHOW UP 😊

What is your ridiculously small new habit?

When will you do it each day? Attach it to a habit you already have.



CONGRATULATIONS!

YOU just made your habit so small that it is almost impossible to fail!

*Remind yourself daily of the teacher you want to be,
and know that your new habit will support you!*

*And remember, we are all human
so.... when you fail,
say “Oh Well” and start again.*





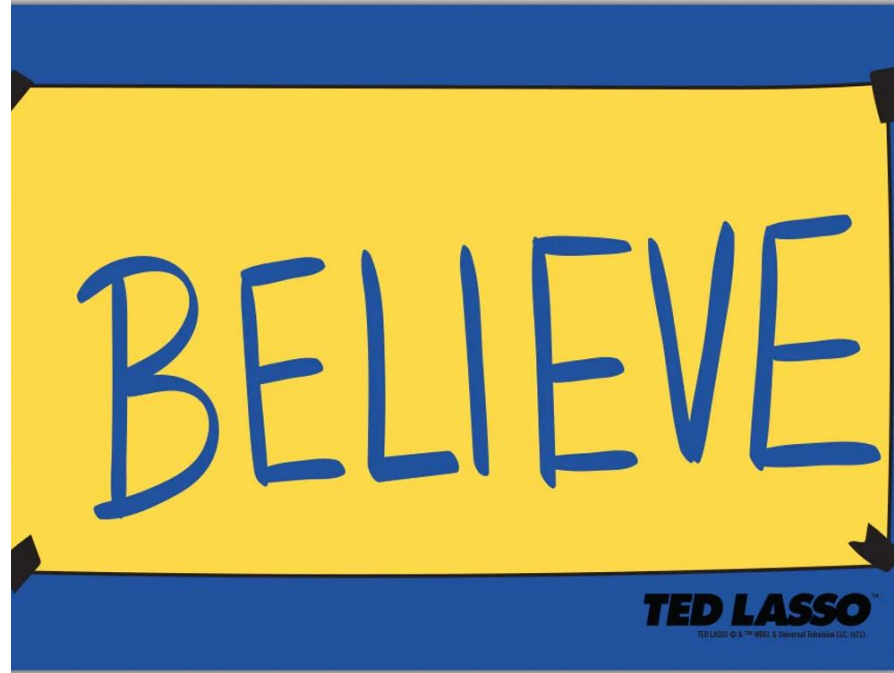
"Hope," Jane Goodall says, "is what enables us to keep going in the face of adversity. It is what we desire to happen, but we must be prepared to work hard to make it so."

No matter how dark things might seem - there's always a glimmer of hope if we keep moving forward and taking action.

[Wounda's Journey - Jane Goodall](#)

One of the Secrets to Master Teaching

BELIEVE in your students
BELIEVE in yourself





The Pygmalion Effect, Growth Mindset, & Learning ft. Robert Rosen...



Watch later



Share

whatever

you

think

your

limits

are



you're

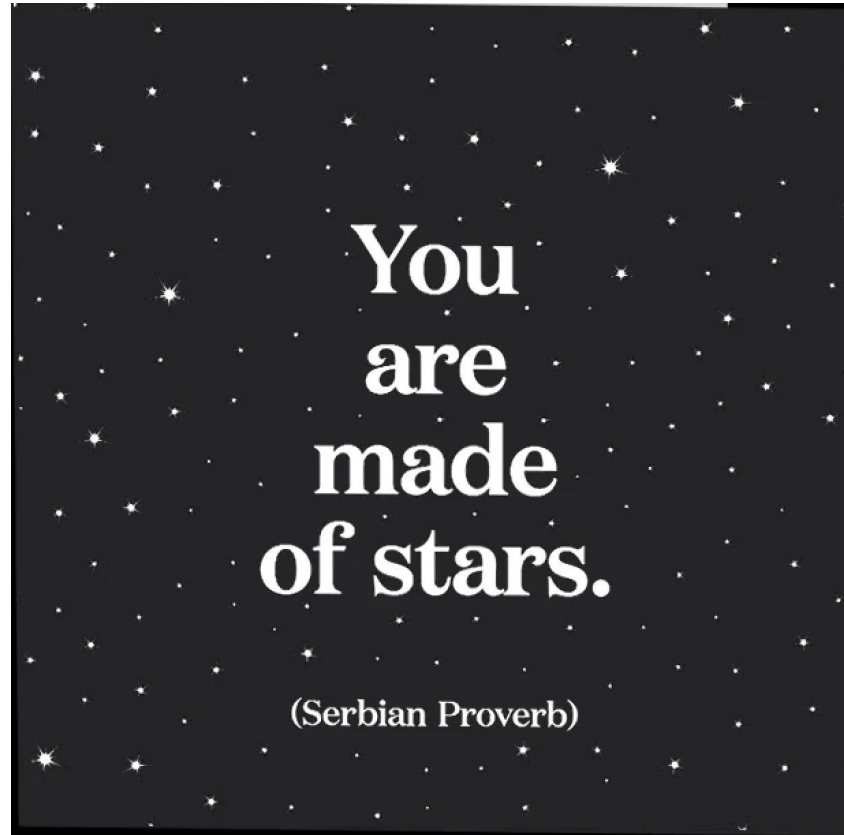
wrong

MORE VIDEOS

Dr. Michael Merzenich

" Whatever you think your
student's limits are, you're wrong."

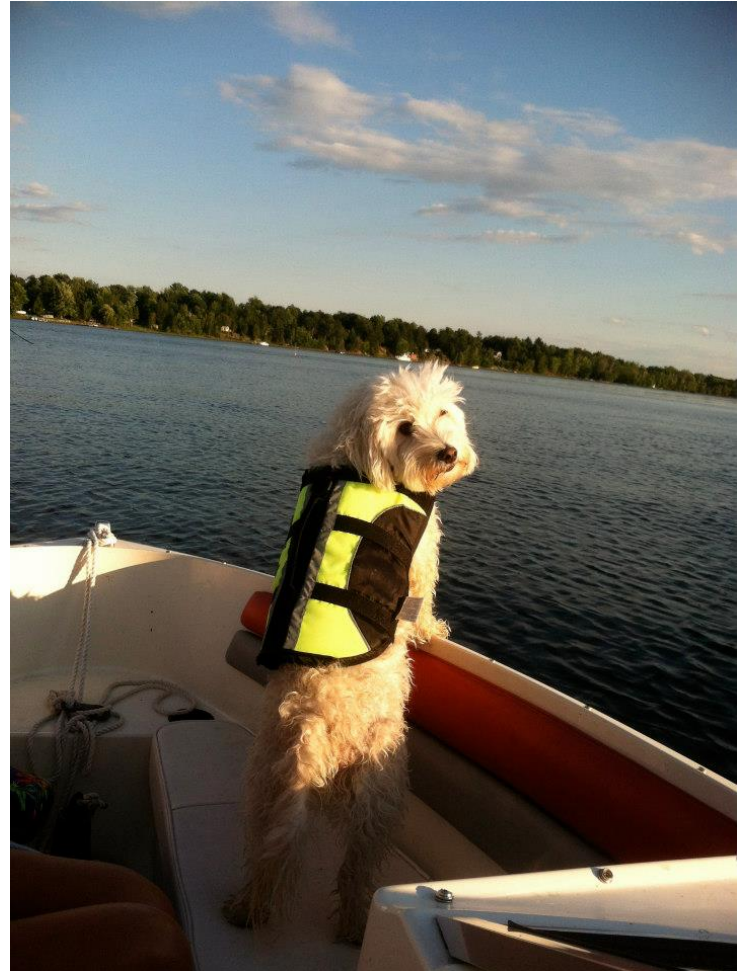
Peggy Rakas



and so are your students

"I am not afraid of storms
for I have learned how to
sail my ship."

Louisa May Alcott

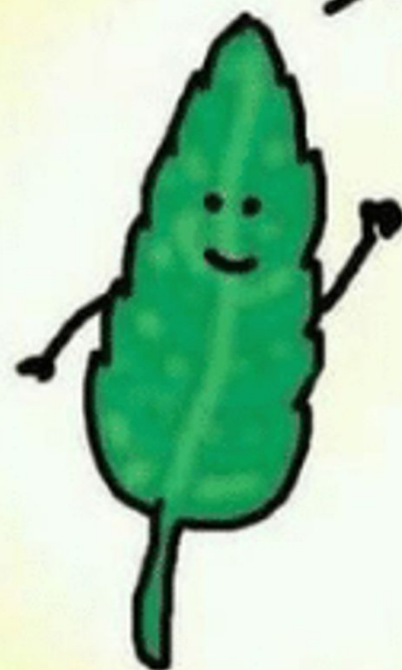


Today's the day
to make a
difference



And now, the winner of our grand prize!





-you can do it!
you've got
this!

encourage mint



Link to Handout

Please feel free to reach out

Peggy Rakas
PeggyRakas@gmail.com
TeachingPostivity.com

