

Attitude —IS YOUR— Superpower

*How to Create Incredible
Life-Changing Success*



Eduardo Clemente

Endorsements

“If you are serious about becoming a high-performing leader and one that is loved by their team. Invest into yourself and read *Attitude Is Your Superpower*. Eduardo will forever change the way you look at developing your most important skill; Your Attitude.”

—Hernani Alves, CEO, Balanced IQ Leadership; author,
Balanced Accountability and
The Champion Advantage

“I wish I had access to this book earlier in my life and my career! It’s filled with powerful yet easy actionable tips to improve your attitude and life.”

—Tracy Jackson, SPHR, SHRM-SCP |
President & CEO

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Changing Success

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Attitude Is Your Superpower

How to Create Incredible Life-Changing Success

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To Luana

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Introduction

HAVE YOU EVER finished a training session or program, walked out of the room (or disconnected the online session), and thought, *There's still something missing*? I have. Those feelings, time and time again, were the initial spark for this book. I took one leadership training which was a truly amazing experience with immersion in different cultures and countries, as well as with in-room learning sessions. I could see the frameworks and good practices we learned were important, yet I knew that not everyone who studied them would succeed in achieving their goals—even though the tools were widely available and anyone was technically capable of putting them into practice. I kept asking myself what key ingredient was missing for those who weren't seeing the success they wanted. I thought of my own career and life lessons, and realized the key factor that allowed me to grow and provided amazing opportunities was not a technical skill. It had nothing to do with how well I applied certain frameworks or best practices. It was my attitude. I realized what an important mindset tool attitude is for everybody, and so I wrote this book to share those insights with you.

This book is *not* a checklist with 172 things you must do to solve all your problems. I have enough of those at work, and I bet you do, too. And that's part of the challenge of today's business world. Most of us started school at four or five years old, and from the beginning, we had to do tests that measured our math skills, language comprehension, science understanding, and so on. Then we went to college or university or took a specialized training programs focused

on technical abilities. Your instructors probably taught you spreadsheets, software, coding, profit-and-loss statements, or whatever “hard skills” you need for your job. I studied business management, which, for example, included accounting, so it was all about Excel and formulas.

It doesn’t stop with graduation, either. As you might have discovered, as adults, there are countless opportunities to continue learning. You can take leadership trainings, watch video courses, study industry guidelines, and read books and books and books on how to work more efficiently and productively. I know—I’ve taken, watched, and read *so many* of them. You end up with long checklists of action steps to do business better.

For years we have been programmed to test well for technical competencies and on memorizing and repeating what was shared with us. When we’re done with our official education, we’re told that to improve our career prospects, we should continue developing those same skills. So we do, and we believe this is what it takes to be successful in life. To some degree, all the teaching and the endless resources do help, but, as I mentioned I’ve always felt they miss the most important part: You can know all the hard skills and business concepts, but if you don’t have *the right attitude*, the rest doesn’t matter. A great attitude is key to getting ahead at work and in life.

You probably figured out by now that the real world is different from school. Once you have a job and you’re in the door, the world doesn’t care what grade you got in the last semester of coding class or if you know a specific formula to calculate compound interest, for example. (Especially as you can google most of those things today.) People look to see

what you can bring to the table. They want to know if you'll make the team more or less productive, if you'll collaborate well with colleagues, if you'll be engaged, and if you'll help solve problems. Even if you had a great education, it probably didn't teach you about these invisible things. They're not easy to pinpoint or grade, but they are what people notice. They're the undercurrents you feel at the office. If you want to get ahead at work and in life, you need to pay attention to the invisible things. And from what I've learned throughout my career, they all fall under the category of *attitude*.

Attitude Accelerates Careers

I started my career as a junior auditor, going into banks where I thought I would be just one amongst many. I thought I was—and hopefully still am—quite intelligent, but so were all my colleagues, and some were even technically better than me when it came to those hard skills. A few early career lessons, which I'll share throughout this book, taught me the value of a great attitude, and I leaned into that—hard. Quickly, I was offered opportunities that took me across continents, companies, groups, and experiences.

Today, I'm an executive director at a bank that is part of the largest banking group in Africa. I have four major areas of the bank and more than two hundred people reporting to me. With my colleagues' help, I get to positively impact the finance industry in our country and throughout the continent. Every day, I have the opportunity to do work bigger than myself, and that means everything. My attitude got me here, and that's why I want to share this message with you. Perhaps you think being a bank's executive director sounds boring! Whatever your aspirations are,

though, the right attitude can get you there.

You Can Actively Improve Your Life

Maybe you know your attitude is a problem at work. You show up and do your job, but it feels like things aren't clicking. Something's off. You might even be in a negative spiral, productively or psychologically, stuck thinking you're just not good enough, you'll never get ahead, and the world is unfair. Perhaps you feel pretty good about your attitude, but you know there's always room for improvement, and you're curious about what you can tweak to do better. Or, maybe, you have never even thought about your attitude and the impact it can have on how you feel at work, in your relationships with others, and your potential success.

Whatever your current position, you have the opportunity to take action at work and in life. You don't have to just accept your lot. You can actively improve your situation because it all comes down to attitude, and your attitude is not set in stone. Even better—you don't need a million training courses or a year-long MBA to adjust it. You can improve your attitude one pep talk and one step at a time. I promise it won't be that hard!

So, how do we tackle this? It's nice to say, "Have a good attitude!" but what does that actually mean, and how do we achieve it? That is what this book answers. It's not a prescriptive, step-by-step guide, and it's definitely not a research paper, but I wrote this book to tackle these questions with you. I hope reading it will feel like being in conversation with a mentor. We don't have the opportunity to sit down face-to-face, but this is what I'd share if you came to my office asking for advice. In these pages, you'll find a collection of my experiences, thoughts, and views on

what's worked for me—and what I believe will work for you. It's a pep talk in all the things they don't teach at school, but I really wish they would. I hope you'll allow me to be your mentor in this way because I truly believe this can help you create incredible life and career success.

Expect to Learn, Be Challenged, and Get Inspired

In this book, you'll learn that attitude is about how others perceive you and how you perceive yourself. It's separate from your personality, and you'll discover why that's a very, very good thing. We discuss this in chapter one, and every subsequent chapter is devoted to an element that contributes to a great attitude. These are skills that will help you and that you can work on.

You'll see the role confidence plays in a positive attitude and what to do if you don't feel very confident right now. In turn, confidence creates positivity, which is an essential factor in attitude. Just as negativity can spiral, so can positivity. In these pages, you'll discover how to start putting small, positive ideas into your work, and then watch as they spin back around to you, becoming more positive and even more impactful.

You'll learn how a growth mindset is essential to the world we live in today and for adapting to anything that comes along. Adaptation is one, if not *the* most important skill that will be required in the coming decades, and your attitude plays a key role in becoming more adaptable. (Did you know we're currently in the fourth industrial revolution? We'll talk about how attitude can make us successful, despite the crazy rate that changes are happening in this industrial revolution.) You'll learn what emotional

intelligence is, how it impacts your attitude, and that you can be more like basketball legend Michael Jordan than you probably imagine.

You'll learn what happens when you say yes more often than *no*, and the power of being a problem *solver* instead of a problem *finder*. Anyone can find a problem; not everyone can solve them. You'll bring these tools together in figuring out how—and when—to manage people's expectations of you, so this doesn't all become overwhelming. And you'll also see how these ideas work together to create a drive for excellence that will make you more valuable at work and more connected to its purpose.

Most importantly, you'll learn that developing a good attitude is not actually that onerous. It can be confusing, intimidating, or a bit outside your comfort zone, but that's why you have this book—as your easy guide through this process. And I will not ask you to do anything extreme! You don't need to. All the ideas in this book can be implemented in baby steps as you adjust to moving beyond your comfort zone.

You Can Step Into a Better Attitude

A *bad* attitude follows you around like a cloud. Think of those cartoons where the poor little guy is standing looking miserable with the world's smallest cloud directly above him, pouring rain on his head. But all around him is dry and sunshine-y. I don't know if your cloud is pouring buckets of rain or just drizzling a little, but either way, this is your personal pep talk on how to grab that cloud and throw it aside, so you can finally stand in the sunshine. Or, if that feels kind of intimidating, you can slowly sidestep out from under that cloud, and this book will show you different paths

and approaches to take.

Life should not feel like it's constantly raining on you. Work doesn't need to be a hopeless battle against miserable weather. It should be fulfilling, valuable, and packed with exciting opportunities. And if it does still rain occasionally, you can feel confident stepping back into the sun. Choose the right attitude, and the rain won't stop you. So let's start by talking about what attitude is, anyway. You probably have a good idea already, but I have a specific definition that might just make you think differently.



PERCEPTION

HAVE YOU EVER seen the television show *House*? It's a medical drama featuring Dr. Gregory House, a brilliant, sarcastic, and caustic doctor who specializes in diagnosing weird and complicated medical conditions. He's a genius, and he's horrible to be around. He has no compassion, he's intensely demanding, and he irritates everyone he sees. He thinks he's amazing, and everyone else thinks he's the worst human being to ever walk onto a hospital ward.

We're talking about two different views here. There's how House sees himself and how others perceive him. The same is true for you and me—although hopefully others don't think we're like House. It gets interesting when there's a disconnect between how we see ourselves and how others do.

I might say I've got a great attitude because I tell it as it is. If someone suggests we do an impossible task in three days, I'll say we can't. It's impossible. And I believe I'm doing something great, as I'm helping us be realistic. However, they might think I'm just a negative old naysayer who just keeps shutting them down or someone not willing to think differently to find innovative solutions. Same situation, different perception. That's what attitude is all about.

This is different from intelligence. No one can say House isn't smart. Or rather, they could, but it wouldn't change the

fact that he is incredibly clever. His intelligence doesn't change just because someone says he's dumb. With attitude, though, it *does* matter what others think, and that's incredibly important because you have to work with others. Intelligence is an internal characteristic, and you have it or you don't. Attitude, on the other hand, is an external characteristic, which is all about how you end up being perceived by others.

Working Well with Others

If you're not working alone, you need to work with and through other people. And let's face it: *no one* works alone, even if you're working from home or in an empty office. You still interact with clients, co-workers, or contractors. Although it might feel like it at times, you don't do everything yourself, so you need to work well with others.

It's human nature to react better to people you relate to, feel comfortable with, or respect. There are many studies and literature that show this, from the importance of creating rapport to the use of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) in creating an unconscious connection between you and others so you can perform better when working with others. We don't need to love—or even like—everyone we work with. We don't need to share the same beliefs and ideas about the world. But it is easier to work with people who we at least find professional, positive, and helpful. In turn, others find it easier to work with us when we are professional, positive, helpful, and willing to work with them. Think about your own experiences. If you have an issue or a problem you need help with, which type of person would you rather go to for help?

If people perceive you as someone who always creates

problems or says no to every request, they'll stop asking you questions and stop involving you in decision processes. They won't want to engage with you. They'll see you like one of those fighter jets in Star Wars with a deflector shield surrounding you, preventing anything from getting in. After a few hit and misses, they'll stop even trying to get through to you. And if nothing gets through to you, you won't be able to do your job as well. You certainly won't *improve* at work because you'll miss out on opportunities for feedback and to take on interesting projects.

This is about having an attitude that makes people want to engage with you. It's about being part of your workplace, being able to speak with people, and them feeling like they can respond to you honestly—without just saying what they think you want to hear. Being well perceived makes you approachable. It makes people eager to share their problems and ideas with you. That doesn't happen if you act like you're always in battle with a deflector shield up.

Being Liked Isn't the Answer

Being liked is about making everybody else happy. When you want to be liked, you care more about others' happiness than your own. You say yes to everything that's asked of you. We end up spoiling our colleagues when we're happy to do their bit for them. We end up supporting and even spoiling them as we try to make them happy.

We don't need to be a puppet that does everybody else's wills. It might seem a good idea at first. *Do what people ask, and they'll love you for it!* And sure, that will last for a few months. Then, it will quickly fall apart.

In time, people stop looking at you as your own person. You become like a weathervane that turns to whichever side

the wind is blowing. You can't be trusted to hold your ground, which is especially problematic for senior managers, department heads, and executives. In those roles, companies usually want people who have their own ideas. They want leaders who are honest, excited to put new ideas forward, and even a little disruptive. Leaders have to say no sometimes. It's very hard—I would say even impossible—to be successful at senior levels when you say yes to everything, hoping everyone will like you. Oh, and another thing to remember is that time is a finite resource, so if you say yes to everyone and everything in the hopes of being liked, the odds are good that you will end up failing at some, if not most, of those things, if not from other factors then simply from lack of time. And, of course, that also creates a bad outcome.

Some workplaces create a culture where only the yes-man or yes-woman succeeds, but those are usually not the most successful companies. When you read about places that are doing incredible things, they all say they want *dissent*. They're looking for disagreement. They want people to share their views and opinions and discuss options because that's where they find value.

If you're always saying yes, what value are you adding? Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon and ranked by *Forbes* magazine as one of the top two richest men in the world, is apparently a fan of the Ben Carson quote that says if he has two board members who always agree with each other, he'd only need one of them as he doesn't need two people who think the same in the one room. And it's true, isn't it? If you always agree with others, you don't bring any new or unique value.

So, saying “yes” all the time, hoping people will like you for it, just isn’t the way to get ahead because *being liked isn’t the answer*.

Be Engaged in Solving Problems

Although Bezos and countless other successful leaders talk about disagreement, it’s not about saying no just for the sake of it. Instead, the way to get ahead is to be *engaged* in solving problems.

If a colleague tells you they want to do something you disagree with, you should engage in their problem. Sure, you could be the yes-man, giving them the go-ahead or positive reinforcement in an attempt to make them like you. You could also say no and tell them to take a hike because you’re that type or “realistic person.” Or you could try to understand the problem they want to solve. You could start by asking more questions about the issue. You could say, “Listen, I believe there might more ways to look at this. Let’s keep an open mind. I understand your problem and it’s great that you are trying to fix this, so let’s put our heads together, exchange ideas, and find a solution that works.”

That’s where you create engagement because the next time that person has a problem, they will look at you as someone they can share things with. This might sound stupid, but this approach will, hopefully, make you seem like a good person. Not a *nice* person, or a fun person, or even someone they want to have a drink with, but a good person they can talk to at work—someone they can engage with because they perceive that having those engagements with you will add value to them in the end.

The 360 Exercise

You might think you’re the most empathetic person in the

world, but if your whole team says you have no empathy, then *you have no empathy*. If no one sees your empathetic nature, it doesn't exist. So how do you know what others see in you? How can you tell if they think you're a good person—the type of person they want to engage with? You need to ask.

If you're already employed, and if you can, you should do a 360 exercise. This is just a way of getting more information about how people perceive you, which is always helpful. Usually, these exercises are run by an outside party, but they can be conducted by your company's human capital team if you're confident they can manage the process confidentially. The person running the exercise sends a questionnaire to the people you work with—your peers, your teams, and those you report to.

The questions vary based on your industry, your role, and who writes the questionnaire, but they generally ask about your attitude and behaviors. Do you use feedback as a tool to develop people? Are you always ethical? When you have a deadline, do you still provide guidance in a detailed way? Are you client-centric? Are you good at managing the team?

The questions will revolve around the key behaviors for your role and company, and how you display them, and people will respond by rating you on a sliding scale from one to ten, for example. But the goal isn't to see if you're "good" or "bad." Rather, there's something more interesting going on because you also rate yourself. Then you compare your ratings to those of your colleagues.

The real goal is to understand the gaps between how you see yourself and how others perceive you. You're not looking

to get the highest score or “win” the exercise. You’re looking for gaps between your rating and that of your colleagues, and you’re looking to see how big those gaps are.

Let’s imagine you’re using a rating scale of one to five. On the question of how well you manage your team, you rate yourself a five, but all your team members score you at three. That’s a two-point difference, and on a five-point scale, that’s a big gap. That tells you something is wrong. You might think you have many tools for managing people, but you’re either not using them, or they’re not effective. It’ll take some digging to discover why the gap exists but knowing something is wrong is the first vital step.

Understand the Gaps

Personality tests can help fill in the details. There are countless different versions of personality tests. Some claim to be scientific and well-researched, and others are clearly just for fun. The more famous ones include The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, which asks a relentlessly thorough ninety-three questions, and DiSC, which measures dominance, influence, steadiness, and conscientiousness.

I’ve taken a few different personality tests and think you do have to take them with a pinch of salt. They say your personality shifts with time, your experiences, and your overall happiness, so the results aren’t absolute. I also don’t think any particular methodology is better than the others—despite what the marketing materials say. All personality tests categorize people—usually into four personality types. Some use colors, others use words, but regardless of the categories, the value is in knowing what it means to be mapped in a particular way.

If a personality test reports that you have a dominant

personality, that likely means you're more goal-oriented than focused on what your colleagues are feeling. You drive the conversation more than others in the room. You have clear goals, and you're driven to achieve them. It doesn't matter what that personality type is named or what color or animal or celebrity personality it's assigned. The insights come from understanding what it means to be goal orientated.

The advantage of personality tests is that they usually put these traits into context. For example, they'll ask, "When you're under stress, are you more worried about failing to deliver on your task or the wellbeing of your colleagues?" That gives you a very tangible idea to work with. I would think, *No, if I'm up against a tough deadline, I'm not going to be concerned about whether my co-worker ate a healthy lunch or got enough sleep. I'm going to be thinking about the task at hand. I'm going to focus on doing a good job.*

A 360 exercise gives you personalized feedback, but it can be ambiguous, as the questions aren't usually tied to specific examples. It can also be subjective, as people respond based on how they feel in the moment. If you made someone mad this morning, they probably won't give you positive feedback this afternoon—even if you usually have a good relationship with them.

Personality tests add another piece to the feedback puzzle. They give you more objective insights into how you respond to real workplace challenges. They're a tool for gathering more information, and the more information you have, the more you can understand yourself. When you add these test results to the 360 exercise responses, you can

connect the dots between them and see commonalities. This helps you better understand how others perceive you.

More Information Provides More Understanding

The first time I understood what my colleagues really thought of me, it didn't come from a nicely organized, constructive 360 exercise or an interesting personality test. It came at an office party with the accounting department of my previous bank. Most accounting teams have end-of-month processes in which you close the books for the month and prepare financial statements. End-of-month was always a busy time for our team. For a few solid days, we worked long hours and were swamped with work.

After months of this, it came time for me to move to another job role, and the team threw me a leaving party. It was at my own party that the women in the team finally admitted something. They said they called the end-of-month processes my "time of the month." Apparently, I had a reputation for getting moody and difficult to work with once a month. They'd whisper about it between themselves. "Don't go see Eduardo right now. It's his time of the month."

I can't say I loved hearing that—especially at my own leaving party. But when I looked back, I could see it was true. I usually like to play around at work, joke, talk to people. In those month-end days, though, I'd sit in my office all day, work on computer files, and not speak to anyone. When people dared approach me, I'd either send them away quickly or deal with their issue without any friendly conversation. I was all business. I thought, *I'm stressed. I don't have time. I'm in work mode.* I didn't think it was really noticeable. But apparently, it was.

Face-to-Face Feedback

I wish the women in the accounting department had said something before I left—you know, when I could have actually done something about it. I suppose they didn't because it's awkward to tell your colleague they're a total pain at the end of every single month. This experience also showed me that if we are leading a team, it's important to create moments in which they can give us feedback, as well as a safe environment for them to do so. Then, we can know these things when we can act on them.

This is why 360 exercises are fantastic. They're anonymous. Respondents don't include their names, and you never know where the comments came from. Many times, you don't even see individual comments—just average ratings.

Face-to-face feedback has its place, though. If you're not getting the insights you wanted, then ask one or two people you're close to for feedback. Ask, "Can you help me? I've had this feedback on a 360 exercise, and I don't understand it. Why do people think this? What do you think about me?"

I've done this and got some great, helpful advice, but you have to ask the *right* people if you want honest answers. Ask someone you have a good relationship with, someone you trust won't feel pressured to say what you want to hear. Whoever you talk to must be unafraid of giving you real answers. Usually, this is a peer, not someone who reports to you. It *could* be a more senior person who reports to you and who you're close to but be careful you don't put undue pressure on anyone.

Be Ready for Feedback

Whoever you get your feedback from, you do need to be

ready for it. This doesn't work well if you're going to get defensive and just throw the negative responses out of the window. You need to be prepared to think about what you hear and to understand why people might perceive you a certain way. Tell yourself that no matter what's written on those results, you're going to accept it.

If you discover your team thinks you have no empathy, first take time to absorb that information. Take it in without reacting. Don't go around the office demanding to know who gave you that feedback. Just think about it. Quietly consider what you might be doing to give the impression you're not empathetic.

Then, look at the rest of your information. If you're doing this thoroughly, you'll have a lot of feedback to work with. You'll have responses from your team, your peers, your line managers, and personality tests. And usually, there are clear links between them. Take your time, review the details, and find the common threads.

Switch Your Focus from Your Thoughts to Others' Perceptions

As you mull all this over, remember that it doesn't really matter what *you* think. Attitude is about how *others* perceive you. Someone can think they're the best employee ever because they're quick to point out problems when new ideas are presented, but they're actually perceived as someone negative who shuts down others' ideas.

Of course, this works both ways. Sometimes, you think you're a great employee, but your colleagues don't agree. Other times, you think you're doing everything wrong, but others still seem to like you. You might not realize you're always available to help people solve problems, and they

love you for it. Either way, it's important to switch your focus from your thoughts to others' perceptions. That allows you to understand how your attitude is seen by others.

Your Attitude Is Not Your Personality

It's important to understand that your personality has nothing to do with how you relate to other people. Personality is deeper than that. It's formed of everything you feel, value, and believe. Your personality is deeply engrained and isn't something you can change quickly. It can evolve with time and life experience, but it won't shift overnight or just by reading a book—not even this one.

Attitude, though, is separate from personality and much easier to control. You can change your attitude without changing who you are. Think of actors who change characters from movie to movie. When they get on set, they display different attitudes depending on the character they want to portray, but they retain their personality. They can demonstrate whatever attitude is needed for that particular role, but they are still themselves, no matter who they're playing. You can shift the attitude you display from moment to moment but still remain your true self. You can improve how you react to situations without compromising your belief system or pretending to be something you're not.

I can't tell you how to define your personality—and that's not the goal here. There are many methodologies around this, including those personality tests you can take online, but people often break it down to simple questions. Are you more goal-driven or people-driven? Do you follow the rules or get creative? Are you pessimistic or optimistic? With the answers to those questions, we give ourselves labels. "I'm a goal-oriented person," or, "I'm an optimist," we'll say. You

can give yourself any label, be any of these things, and still improve your attitude because your attitude is not your personality.

You may be faced with the same situation every day, but how you respond can change based on your mood. If you're stressed, the queue outside a store can make you mad, yet in the same situation, you could actually enjoy the chance to stand in the warm sunshine. Your personality didn't change from one day to the next. You're still the same person with the same beliefs, values, and ideals. You didn't change your personality, but you reacted differently. Your attitude changed.

When someone is told they don't have a great attitude, they often respond by saying, "But that's just how I am. I'm very realistic. I'm not always looking for a silver lining. I call it as it is. I won't say the world is pretty and colorful and full of stars because I know it's not."

But *realistic* is related to personality traits such as *detail oriented*. A person with this trait can focus on details in a positive way, where they see all the possibilities, or a negative way, where they focus on the potential flaws and things that can go wrong. You can approach the same problems with the same personalities and see wildly different attitudes at play.

The No Is Always Guaranteed

I am always me—even when the ladies in the office were avoiding my "time of the month" moodiness. My attitude towards them changed during those long workdays, but my personality stayed strong. Once I realized how I was perceived when I was stressed, I worked to change it. Today, I'm far from perfect, but I do manage my stress a bit better.

I try to engage in small talk and stay approachable with all colleagues.

Change is possible, but only when you *do something*. If you don't do anything, nothing will change! This applies to most things in life, but especially to improving your attitude. You might not be able to solve all your workplace issues, but a great attitude can solve many common challenges. And it's not as difficult as you might think.

As you'll discover in these pages, once you understand how you're perceived, you can improve your attitude with simple, small steps. It doesn't have to be difficult. Focus on one small goal and then the next, and I'll guide you along throughout this book.

The great thing is that all these steps are very low risk. You can try the advice outlined in this book without worry. You won't lose anything in trying to improve your attitude. The opposite is also true, though. No action promises no progress. If you don't contribute to the team, you won't be seen as an essential team member. If you don't show your capabilities, you won't be first in line for a promotion. The no is always guaranteed. But what will you lose in trying? Nothing. Doing nothing will just keep you where you are, and in a fast paced, fast changing world with so many new ways of thinking, the risk of doing nothing is tremendous. So, if the risk of doing nothing is huge, there is no downside in trying to improve your attitude, and there are several potential gains if it works, what are you waiting for? You might even gain some confidence, which is exactly what we're talking about next.



CONFIDENCE

WHEN I FIRST BECAME an executive director at my bank, I quickly realized I had to change my management style to adapt to my new reality. I'd been excited about the new challenge, but I didn't realize what I was getting into. Someone said to me that being head of a department, as I was before, was very different from being an executive director. This made sense, but I had no idea what it really meant. I had confidence in myself and knew I could do the new job, but I didn't exactly know what the job was.

As Chief Financial Officer, I'd been involved in almost every one of our group's responsibilities. If anyone asked a question about our department, I knew the answer, usually right then and there. And I loved being involved in all the details. As executive director for finance, data, operations, IT, and legal, I suddenly had five areas and more than two hundred people reporting to me. It was impossible to know exactly what every colleague was working on. After being so used to dealing with details, this was very different.

Instead of having all the answers all the time, I now had to say, "I'll check into that and get back to you." I had to start delegating, as I couldn't be involved in every area of our focus. I became less operational and more strategic. It was clear my old way of doing things wasn't going to help me succeed in this new role. I had to adapt.

Luckily, by this stage of my career, I'd learned to notice

when one tactic wasn't working, and I was confident I could make the necessary changes to become a better executive. I just wasn't sure what those changes should be. I looked around for help. I started doing online trainings and reading about neuroscience, leadership, coaching, and social safety. *Reading* was really *training*. I was learning to work new muscles in leading people, managing teams, and creating an environment of trust so my colleagues could thrive. The more I read—or trained—the more I felt prepared for challenges. That gave me some much-needed confidence as I navigated this new role.

This might all sound obvious. Of course it went down this way! But I had to make a conscious effort to change my leadership style and my ways of working into a more productive way for the current situation. So, let's dissect what really happened: I was going through big changes at work and was faced with the reality that I could not keep doing things the same way. I got curious about neuroscience and read and learned and trained on the subject. This led to being better prepared for challenges, more confident, more effective, and generally feeling more positive about work.

I'd been through this cycle earlier in my career. This time, when new challenges threatened to rock me, the same process of *curiosity, learning, and confidence-building* helped me yet again. Wherever you are in your career, it will help you, too. These are key skills in the school of life.

The Job Is to Add Value

Although I hadn't exactly known the job description for an executive director, I understood one vital thing: the job was to add value. In fact, that was true for all my job roles—and all of yours, too. Whatever your job title, *this* is your job.

Adding value is the essential work. People don't like to work with someone who says, "I can't do that. That's not my job." I can't stand when people refuse to help because the task isn't their "responsibility." I mean, you have a brain. That brain doesn't stop working at the end of your job description. How do you add value, regardless of whether the situation falls within your area? You speak up. You share ideas. You offer suggestions for solutions. However, the problem for many is that it takes *confidence* to speak up in big meetings, or even in one-on-one conversations.

Let's say you work in the operations group at a bank, responsible for processing transfers and making payments. In a meeting, someone else talks about the bank's need to improve its brand image. You could easily say, "I don't know. That's not in my job description. The marketing team can figure that out." But if you allow yourself to be curious and see those opportunities as challenges to put your creativity to the test, you start feeling more confident. That confidence prompts your ingenuity, your mind starts teeming with ideas, and you put them on the table. Yes, within the bank you work in the operations team, but outside of work you are also a client and a consumer, and you know what brand images are attractive to you. So, you see, there is almost always a different angle from which to look at issues and add your personal value. Whether the marketing team uses your suggestions or not, you're now seen as someone who adds value to the company. You're a team player who's willing to think beyond your own area. In this particular case, it's not about being a marketing expert, but mostly about empathy in understanding the issue and sharing your views on it in a constructive way.

Many companies complain about silo mentalities. Their employees are just focused on their own silos and on solving their own problems, and this creates big-picture issues. If you trust you can at least talk about ideas, you're actually going to have a hard time sticking within your silo. You'll want to share your thoughts, and you'll feel good about offering solutions to other people's problems, as well as being opened to having other teams and colleagues contributing to your own issues.

Sometimes, your ideas will be good, and your colleagues will like them. You'll add value across silos. You'll become known as a great shoulder to lean on, an ear to bend, a partner to unite with, and hands to help when action is needed. In a world where companies are fighting the challenges of silo mentality, you are incredibly valuable when you are confident and unafraid to contribute. Don't we all prefer to work with someone like that? We want to be around people who help us solve our problems rather than just point out the issues or create barriers.

Start by Opening Up to Learning

Some people are naturally confident. The rest of us are not destined to a lifetime of hiding away, however. We can deliberately grow our confidence. I learned this from Heather E. McGowan and Chris Shipley, authors of *The Adaptation Advantage: Let Go, Learn Fast, and Thrive in the Future of Work*. Their book discusses the idea that when you open yourself up to learning and discovering new things, you find you can talk about new subjects. Without your even realizing it, this makes you more confident.

I once went to a training in which the presenter mentioned CRISPR, a technology that can manipulate genes

and which scientists hope could help make adults disease-free, or even change babies' DNA so they can't get certain diseases later in life. Theoretically, it could also be used to ensure a baby has blue eyes or will grow to seven feet tall and be an incredible basketball player. There are clearly a lot of ethical issues involved in that type of gene manipulation. Although it had nothing to do with my job (or the reason I attended the training session), I thought CRISPR was the most fascinating discussion of that day. I wanted to learn more about it.

I went home and watched a few documentaries on gene editing. I read some books on the subject and continued to find the whole thing interesting. CRISPR was said to be one of the technologies likely to have the biggest impact on the world in the next ten years. I was curious and wanted to learn more. What else would influence the world in the not-too-distant future? Nanotechnology, apparently. There are tiny nanorobots that can revolutionize industries in ways as varied as conducting maintenance on planes or being injected into the human body to clear blockages in arteries. It sounds like science fiction, but people are already testing this technology. That's amazing!

I went down this rabbit hole of reading about emerging technologies, and most of them had nothing to do with my work as the executive director of a bank. I don't think nanorobotics or genetics will change the future of banking (not directly, at least). Yet, I was curious about these subjects. The rabbit hole led me to read about neuroscience, which taught me about the chemicals in the brain and how they work. The human brain is pretty cool. The neuroscience books I read also talked about the importance of exercise,

eating, and sleeping well. That last part didn't really grab my attention as much, although I now understand better the importance of all those components in productivity.

But the ideas got me thinking about productivity, so I started learning about that. I grabbed a famous book on the subject. I won't mention its name, but it had great reviews, and I was curious about what I'd learn. About a third of the way in, I couldn't do it anymore. The book just wasn't getting me where I wanted to go. It was checklist-driven, naming twenty-or-so things you must do to achieve any one thing, and it was very organized. I am not very organized. I quit reading it. And that is okay. Sometimes, you start learning about a subject and love it, but it doesn't get you anywhere other than adding knowledge. Other times, you get curious but quickly discover a new subject just isn't your thing. Following your curiosity is still valuable.

Curiosity Creates Confidence

In learning about genetics and nanorobots and brain chemistry and productivity, I discovered that I am capable of learning *anything*. Perhaps I won't be able to create my own tiny robots that cure diseases, but I have proved to myself that I have the ability to learn. Then, when I'm faced with challenges at work or in life, I feel confident I can learn enough to meet that challenge. That confidence makes me feel more positive about the situation. I don't believe we all need to be specialists. I'm a proud generalist—I like knowing about several different things without feeling the need to have a Ph.D. in any of them. I feel that such a broad set of knowledge helps me understanding the world and other people's views better, and also helps with reinforcing trust that I can relate to most subjects or conversation I'll be

faced with.

Sometimes, following your curiosity will prove useful in a more direct way. I recently started reading about blockchain, which is a peer-to-peer, decentralized, distributed ledger that records transactions efficiently and in a verifiable and robust fashion. Amongst other uses, it's the basis for cryptocurrency, a digital form of payment. As someone in the banking industry, you can imagine why I find digital currencies and the potential of blockchain fascinating.

I was interested in reading about blockchain not just for work purposes but because I was genuinely into it. I don't code, and I don't have any of those technical skills, but I think it's so cool that people can create these complicated technologies and make them useful. Then, in a meeting with my group at work, someone presented some potential blockchain projects. "Wow," I said. "Tell me more about this. Let's find a way of using that technology here."

Perhaps that sounds like a reasonable response for someone in banking to be interested in technology that enables a new currency. However, cryptocurrency involves managing finances *without* traditional banks. It would be easy to think, *my gosh, this technology will automate a lot of finance procedures. It could put my job at risk. I don't want to bring this into our company so quickly. Maybe we should leave this until, oh, I don't know, after I'm retired?*

But curiosity had led me to learn a little about this subject already. It meant that when the subject was raised in that meeting with my group, I was confident in our ability to do interesting things with blockchain and the potential it has to allow banks to do amazing things for their clients. I didn't have all the answers or know how those projects

would look. I still don't know! But I'm confident we can figure it out and I definitely want to be part of that process.

Small Gains in Confidence Accumulate

You don't need to become completely confident tomorrow. Small gains in confidence accumulate. And small gains can be made in small steps. It's like a computer game. You try one new thing, it works, you win some gold coins, and you replicate your actions. You learn that the strategy works, so you do it again, win more coins, get more confident, and level up one step at a time.

You might try a move and fail, but you start that level over again, choose a different strategy, and, when you win, you get that fun feeling of victory. That's positive reinforcement at work. That feeling becomes a little addictive (mostly driven by the dopamine release in your brain, as I learned when I did all that reading on neuroscience!) You suddenly find you're craving the chance to take another step and try a new level. And every time you try something new at work—an original idea, clearer communication, a more efficient process—you add value to those around you.

Add Value Even in Difficult Environments

Although we all appreciate working with helpful colleagues, some companies have complex dynamics. If you're in a company that makes you feel like you shouldn't speak up and contribute solutions, here's my recommendation: Do it anyway. Just do it in private.

If you suspect that offering ideas to another department in a big meeting might make the other group leader feel trapped or resentful, take that person aside. Talk to them

one on one, offer your idea, and, if they want to present that idea as their own, let them. You may have solved a problem, but you don't need company-wide credit. In time, you will contribute to various challenges, which means many people will see your value. In time, you'll become seen as someone who's there to help—not someone seeking praise. And when leaders have to determine who adds value, they're going to think of you. This is true in open, dynamic companies *and* in those more complicated and closed. What needs to differ is your approach and strategy to put this practice in place.

Confidence Leads to New Opportunities

Whatever environment you're in, confidence can accompany you into new challenges. When you believe in yourself, you can apply that attitude to whatever situation is put on the table. You say *no* less often. For example, when someone asks if you want to lead a group investigating blockchain opportunities in traditional banking, you're more likely to jump at the chance. You're going to set yourself up to solve existing problems and experience new opportunities. When faced with a challenge, you're going to think, *I can figure this out*. You may not know if it'll take thirty seconds or several months, but you're confident you'll wrap your head around the problem and find a way to fix it.

Without that confidence, you're more likely to see problems as too big or too complex. You won't instantly see the answers, and you won't trust yourself to figure them out. For most people, that lack of confidence leads them to get defensive. They don't want to fail at a difficult task, so they don't let themselves get into it in the first place. They back away, hide, and say *no* to projects, so they protect themselves from failure. But *believing in yourself* creates a

positive attitude, which opens you up to new opportunities. Remember: If you don't do *something*, nothing changes. Building your confidence and starting to believe in yourself is a small step towards changing—improving—the opportunities that come your way. You are worthy of those new opportunities. And when you're more confident, you'll feel more positive about those opportunities. That connection between confidence and positivity is what we'll explore next.



POSITIVITY

IMAGINE THIS: There's a big promotion up for grabs at work, and rumor has it that someone in your department is going to get the gig. You'd love the job. It's the step-up you've been looking for. The responsibilities would be challenging and the results rewarding. You cross your fingers and your toes and wait with bated breath to hear who's been chosen for the role. Then the news comes. It isn't you.

As you sit at the same old desk feeling sorry for yourself, you look back over the last few years in your current role. Did you do everything you could to get promoted? Or did you coast a bit, getting by with less than maximum effort, contributing what was needed but not much more? Perhaps you have to acknowledge that you didn't do everything possible to get promoted, and maybe your boss was justified in their decision to put someone else first. But that doesn't make you feel any better. You lost out on a more interesting, more rewarding job because you didn't go the extra mile.

That's a depressing thing to imagine, right? What a way to start a chapter entitled *Positivity*! But before you close this book in disgust, let me share why I took you through this short imagination exercise—and it wasn't just to make you feel miserable.

Studies show that our fear of loss is stronger than our desire for gain. Psychologists call this *loss aversion*, a term

coined in 1979 by Daniel Kahneman, winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics, and his associate Amos Tversky, a cognitive and mathematical psychologist. In his 2011 bestselling book, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Kahneman defined loss aversion by saying, “The response to losses is stronger than the response to corresponding gains.”

When we think about work, this means we’re more motivated to *avoid losing* a promotion than we are by the thought of *getting* the promotion. It might sound like simple wordplay—what does it matter if we switch the perspective? But research shows it does matter, and its impact has been used extensively in marketing, finance, education, and other industries.

If that example did not resonate with you, maybe because your goals are not work driven, try the following exercise: Define a goal you want to achieve in three to five years. Make it a goal you really, really want, but one you will need to apply some effort to achieve. Then, close your eyes and visualize yourself five years in the future, on the verge of achieving that goal... only it did not happen. You failed. Now, let that feeling sink in and experience it truly. Once you’ve done that, open your eyes and list all the reasons you imagine you did not achieve that target. Include everything that could have contributed to your failure. That list is a guide. It’s a reminder of things to avoid so that you can prevent that negative feeling five years from now. If you keep that list in mind, it will be a gift that motivates you moving forward.

So, returning to the initial example, let’s frame this in the most motivating way: How do you *avoid losing* out on a promotion? The work starts by improving how people

perceive you, as we've discussed. If people perceive you as difficult, they'll feel negative about you. You must break the cycle of negativity by being more positive, more engaging, and more helpful in solving problems.

Confidence Creates Positivity

Positivity is about believing *there is always a way to figure things out*. Of course, there will be hurdles with every challenge, but when you have a positive attitude, you know you will find a way over or around those hurdles.

But you can't truly hold that positive attitude if you don't trust yourself. If someone tells me to cook a turkey, well, I have no confidence I can do it, so I do not feel optimistic about the endeavor. Sure, I could try—as long as no one had to eat it. I don't fancy giving my friends salmonella. However, if I watch some cooking shows, maybe find an easy-to-follow recipe for people who don't know how to use an oven, I might feel more confident. And that confidence will make me feel more positive about cooking without poisoning anyone.

There's a bit of a chicken-and-egg situation here. You could certainly argue that you need to feel positive before you can motivate yourself to take the actions that develop confidence. That said, I do think you need to believe in yourself before you can feel positive. You must trust you can solve problems and figure things out. And then you become more positive. Confidence is almost like a life hack. It's a cheat code in a video game that lets you shortcut your way to the next level. If you're working on confidence, as we talked about in the last chapter, you indirectly work on a positive attitude.

If the idea of confidence feels too big, I want to

encourage you to revisit the last chapter. Read it through again and think *smaller*. Take tiny steps. Experiment. Just be open to the ideas. Then, know that you don't have to have "mastered confidence" to become a more positive person. Confidence creates positivity, yes, but you can consciously work on being more positive no matter how confident you are—or are not. You just need to be mindful of it.

Imagine you've decided to have a more positive attitude at work by saying yes to more challenges. *Yes, I can do that!* Only you don't feel confident you really can do these new things. That makes saying yes kind of hard. If you did believe more in yourself, you might find you're saying yes more often without even realizing it. But when you don't have that confidence, saying yes must be a conscious choice. It might make you feel queasy and uncomfortable, but you can still deliberately do it. And I think you should, because a positive attitude both opens you to more opportunities and increases your chances of success in ever-growing circles. Besides, in cases like those, if you said yes to something, and are now afraid you won't make it, don't be. You can ask other people for help, and guess what? Other people also prefer to help those they perceive as positive. That's good news!

Positivity Is Contagious

Positivity is contagious in two ways. First, it multiplies within yourself. The more you do it, the easier it becomes. Start small and let it grow to be an overwhelming part of your attitude. Second, it's contagious for those around you. When others see you being more upbeat and positive, they start feeling that energy, too. They start believing in you and themselves. They begin to mirror your attitude. This is

particularly true when you're in a leadership role, as people look to you to set the tone. This creates an opportunity to spread a positive attitude throughout your team. And if you're not a leader? Well, there's no better time to start practicing for the role.

It's important to note that the flip side is also true: negativity is contagious, and it spreads even quicker than positivity. A negative attitude requires less work than a positive one, and since humans are all a little bit lazy, the path of least resistance spreads fastest.

If you're always grumpy and believe people generally aren't worth bothering with, those people will stop talking to you. When you're forced to engage, they'll say no or be distant and unhelpful. They won't want to spend their energy on you. Then, you've proven yourself right. They haven't got anything to offer, so you reinforce your original negativity about them, and it becomes even stronger. They won't help you, you won't help them, and it becomes a never-ending story.

This plays out on a team level, as well as person-to-person. When you have two leaders who are hostile towards each other, that attitude spreads to their teams. People follow the leader. Even if there are personal friendships between the two groups, the professional relationships can quickly deteriorate.

With a little bit of action, though, we can take advantage of positivity's contagious nature. Bringing in collaborative leaders who work well together can turn the tide of a team, as well as its individuals. It may take longer than spreading negativity, but positive attitudes do catch on. The more we think we can play nice with other teams, achieve our goals,

hit targets, find solutions, and innovate, the more we can, and the more others can, too.

Positivity Must Be Realistic

I'm not talking about unrealistic positivity, though. Saying, "We can do it!" doesn't magically make unachievable goals possible. You can't declare, "We're going to fly a plane to the moon next week," and expect it to materialize just because you believed in it with all your might. In the bestselling book *Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter*, author Liz Wiseman talks about this kind of extreme positivity. She says that unrealistic statements and goals like this make everything worse for you and, even more so, for your teams and those that work with you. In part, this is because when you say everything is "easy," you devalue the continuous efforts of others and remove the challenges implied in "moonshots." If you're extremely positive all the time, you start saying yes to things that clearly aren't achievable. Then, when you don't reach the moon, your confidence gets knocked. You lose faith in yourself, and that can spiral downwards. So, we're talking about a healthy, realistic dose of positivity here.

How can you tell if you're realistically positive or absurdly positive? Unfortunately, there is no easy, absolute test. The answer will vary according to each person's capabilities, knowledge, and starting point. For me, it's absurdly unrealistic to say I'll climb Mount Everest this year. The most I've ever climbed is a flight of stairs. For a well-established mountaineer, however, it might be realistic. But if you sit that mountaineer at a desk and ask her to write a thesis on how genetics affects body weight, well, it would be

unrealistic to expect her to succeed.

It's pretty easy to spot the absurd. Flying to the moon, climbing the world's tallest mountain, and writing hundreds of thousands of words in a thesis are absolutely unreal goals for most people. The trick is to avoid lumping every big goal into the category of absurd. We can often do more than we initially imagine. If we open our minds to possibility, "unrealistic" goals often come within reach. And we *must* open our minds to these big, but not totally absurd, goals, or we get stuck doing simple, unimpressive, uninspiring stuff.

When you can break a big goal into small, potentially achievable steps, you've found something that may push you beyond your comfort zone without being totally unrealistic. These small steps are critical. Let's say you want to run a marathon this year, but you've never done more than walk from the couch to the kitchen. You don't start by running 42 kilometers on your first attempt. At least, I sure wouldn't! But you can break that distance goal into smaller steps. Maybe your first attempt is a single kilometer, then two, five, and so on. You increase your goals in increments. If a goal—any goal—can be broken into realistic increments, it's something you can pursue without risking the pitfalls of overly extreme positivity.

You've reached the realm of unrealistic positivity when you start saying yes to anything, without considering if there are achievable steps within the goal or if the goal could be feasible at all. You can't go on autopilot, saying yes to requests and assuming you'll be okay, because feasibility is not a fixed element. The request might be easy enough, but if you've already said yes to ten other projects, then

taking on this eleventh one will be unrealistic at this moment—not because it's unachievable, but because it's unachievable *for you at this time*.

Like so much in life, this requires balance. You want to open yourself to new opportunities by being willing to take on new challenges, but not so much that you lose yourself in the process. It's almost like drinking. If you enjoy a social beverage, a few drinks can open you up to engage and socialize. You might even get up the nerve to ask out that special someone! But if you drink too much, you'll most likely make a fool of yourself—and there goes your chance of a date.

Contagious Positivity Improves Workplaces

When we become more positive more often, and those around us also have a more positive attitude, our work environments improve tremendously. You simply *like* going to work more. You enjoy being around your colleagues. You can have more fun, more engaging conversations, and more laughter. Work becomes a nicer place. Does that sound basic? It is! But don't we all prefer a more enjoyable environment in which to spend our working hours?

A more positive workplace sets a better stage for people to relate to each other. You end up sharing more with your colleagues, both in professional stories and personal details. This greater involvement fosters deeper relationships, stronger bonds, and a sense of camaraderie. In turn, that creates a sense of safety. Work becomes somewhere we can be honest. When we're not playing office politics and watching our backs, we can put more energy towards accomplishing our goals. And who doesn't want that? This is how positivity drives professional success!

A Positive Attitude Is a Helpful Attitude

Let's break that down further. When you have a positive attitude and work in a contagiously positive environment, how do you connect that to professional success? Again, this will sound basic, but that's the beauty of it: You help. You help colleagues, team members, leaders, other departments, and anyone else you can.

Being helpful isn't necessarily about solving everyone else's problems. Sometimes, you won't have the time, skills, or technical understanding to solve a problem, and that's okay. You don't need to do other people's work for them. Instead, being helpful is about saying, "Listen, I feel positive we can do this. I'm willing to help you navigate the issue. Let's talk it through, exchange ideas, and explore what comes up." A helpful attitude is about being willing to get involved.

Remember: nothing good comes from saying *no* to every opportunity. If you don't play the lottery, you'll never win. Contribute to the conversations in your workplace, and maybe nothing good will happen. Or... you might just win the lottery. Only in contributing is there the chance to solve a problem or coach someone to a solution. And why not? What do you have to lose by helping? Ten, fifteen, or maybe thirty minutes? Yes, time is important, but I know I appreciate it when someone gives me ten minutes of their time. Others will appreciate it, too.

This helpful attitude doesn't mean you become a pushover who puts everyone else's projects before your own. It's perfectly okay to say, "I would love to help, but I'm swamped right now." Even better, you could suggest a later time you could help, for example, after lunch once you've

finished that big presentation. You could also refer them to another colleague who could help. When you can't contribute yourself, point them towards someone who can, and possibly even better than yourself, so you haven't just dismissed them. Even in saying *no*, you can demonstrate the right kind of attitude by making people feel that you care about and understand them.

The key is to make saying *no* the exception, not the rule. When you're always too busy to help, people perceive you as someone who's never there for them. Yet if you're usually helpful, but one day you're overwhelmed, colleagues will turn around and give *you* their time. They'll want to reciprocate and help you in return.

You Don't Have to Wait to Be Asked

Being helpful goes further than saying yes when asked to contribute to a project. You often have the opportunity to be helpful without even being asked.

Imagine you're in a meeting and a colleague delivered a presentation that was a bit subpar. They were missing some key details that you thought were important. There are a few ways to handle this. You can do nothing, but this means the group doesn't benefit from the opportunities you've spotted. You could point out the missing details right there in the meeting, which would mean criticizing your colleague's work in front of others—which is not great for your working relationship (unless that is clearly the company's culture and style of providing immediate feedback).

Or you could wrap your head around being helpful. After the meeting, you could go and talk to your colleague or, if not possible, you can send a few comments on things you

noticed, suggestions for strengthening the presentation, or even the specific, missing details. Perhaps you forward them an interesting article on the subject which might add to their subject knowledge or a book recommendation. When delivered respectfully, without showing anyone up in public, these little touches position you as a collaborative colleague rather than a critic or a naysayer. In these situations, you don't need to be asked to contribute. You can be proactively helpful. That's the kind of person I want to work with!

Studies have also shown that we are unconsciously more willing to give something to a person who has given *us* something before, even if their gift was very simple. So, you are not just helping, but also creating a good chance that those colleagues or friends will be more willing to reciprocate and help when you need it. This is actually a very famous tool used by con artists, but that is not the goal here—you are not conning people into giving you something. The aim is just to create a positive, generous environment in which you continue to give and be positive, not just preparing to take in the future.

Occasionally, someone won't be receptive to your input. If they feel insecure in their job or have a hard time taking feedback, they might not want to hear your ideas. If you sense that attitude from a colleague, ask before offering help. "Hey, I noticed you're working on that project, and I think I might be able to help. Do you want to talk over some ideas?" If they're open to the input, that's great, but if they close down, that's okay too. You offered help, you adapted your contribution to that person's receptivity, and that's all you can do. Don't push past other people's thresholds, as that will definitely not be seen as the right kind of attitude.

Be perceptive of those indicators and stay within the limits you sense.

Positivity Is a Superpower

In the famous French cartoon *Asterix*, the main characters are warriors defending their village against Roman occupation. While the rest of the area has fallen to the empire, Asterix and his fellow villagers can fight the invaders because they have access to a magic potion that gives them superhuman strength. Asterix guzzles down the little bottle of elixir, and poof! He flashes bright, spins and sparks, and the weird wings on his head flap strong as his biceps flex. For hours he has the might to defeat the invading Romans... before the magic wears off and he needs another drink.

Confidence, as we discussed in the last chapter, is like that magical potion. If you can gulp down a few drops of confidence, it gives you superhuman powers of positivity. That yes attitude is incredibly powerful. It will instantly make you more helpful, productive, and even happy. A healthy, realistic dose of positivity will spread inside you, making it ever easier to enact, and it will spread throughout your environment, giving you stronger relationships with more positive colleagues.

This isn't a once-and-done effort; you need to keep drinking the potion. Keep experimenting with ways to grow your confidence, keep taking that dose of magic, and the contagious power of positivity will accumulate in yourself and your work. It's an ongoing journey to become a more confident, positive person, but it isn't a particularly difficult road. Take these small steps, and you'll move in the right direction. You'll keep growing into a person who is perceived

well by others, and whose career grows because of that—while also feeling better and happier with yourself. And, as we'll explore next, that development skyrockets when you employ a *growth mindset*.



GROWTH MINDSET

SAY YOU WORK in a factory, and it's your job to glue a piece of wood onto a larger piece of wood. It's not the most mentally stimulating work, but it pays the bills, gives you job stability, and means plenty of time with your family. You're home every evening to enjoy dinner and help your kids with their homework.

And say one of those kids is studying coding. She's young, curious, and excited to learn. You want to help her out, so you do what every self-respecting parent does when trying to understand their kid's homework: You search Google. And you find coding is kind of interesting. You learn some basics and help your kid get an A grade. Because you're curious, you keep learning, practicing, and getting pretty good at coding in your spare time.

Then, your factory closes. Everyone gets laid off. You need a new job, but the manufacturing industry is struggling, and there aren't many opportunities. You don't feel great about your prospects for factory work. But what if you got a coding job? You don't have career experience in tech, but you're confident in the skills you've developed. This puts you in a more positive place than if you'd never explored a new interest.

But to get here—to this positive place where the job prospects aren't so bleak and there's hope for finding work in a new, interesting area—you had to employ a growth

mindset. *That's* what you were doing when you explored a new idea.

We Are Not What We Do

Who you are is not the same as *what you do*. You *are* a person with values, things you care about, and ideas you think are important in this world. What you *do* is much more flexible; you can do factory work *and* coding, for example. A growth mindset means understanding that skills are not set in stone. You can develop your abilities and the value you bring to the world. You can learn, shift, try, fail, succeed, and grow. You can remain steady in *who* you are, yet evolve in what you *do*. For this to work, we need to shake the notion that we are what we do.

When most of us are asked, “Who are you?” we reply with our profession. *I'm an accountant*. When we meet new people, we use our profession as a means of introducing ourselves. *Hey, I'm Eduardo. I'm an executive director at the bank. Great to meet you*. This association between who we are and what we do starts early. When you were a kid, how many times did adults ask what you want to do when you grow up? Or, more likely, “What do you want to *be* when you grow up?” The latter and more common version of this question equates *doing* with *being* and lays the foundation for this subtle but impactful association.

Studies have shown just how impactful this mindset is. Several researchers have explored the impact of losing a job on a person's wellbeing, and the results are significant. In the United Kingdom, the *Unemployment, (Re)employment and Wellbeing* study conducted a systematic review of 4,028 studies. From this, they concluded that with marriage, divorce, parenthood, and widowhood, wellbeing levels

initially fall but then return to their pre-event level. They also discovered this isn't true for unemployment. When people lose their job, their life satisfaction levels drop *and do not recover*, even after finding new employment.

A study out of Berlin called *Subjective Well-Being and Adaptation to Life Events: A Meta-Analysis on Differences Between Cognitive and Affective Well-Being* by Maïke Luhmann, Wilhelm Hofmann, Michael Eid, and Richard E. Lucas said, "Unemployment has very persistent negative effects on cognitive well-being ... Unemployment and bereavement had much more negative initial effects on subjective well-being than divorce or retirement." In *Measuring the Impact of Major Life Events Upon Happiness* by Dimitris Ballas and Danny Dorling, a job loss is ranked fifth in a long list of life events that negatively affect happiness. These authors found that people felt job loss was worse than health problems, financial worries, family relationship issues, challenges with education, problems in the workplace, and boredom caused by a lack of any important life events.

From these and many more studies, we know the negative impact of being fired is up there with getting divorced, the death of a family member, and a personal health crisis. Then exact order of "which is worse" varies based on which study you reference, but across the board, research concludes that losing a job has a profound negative impact on wellbeing. I believe this is because getting fired feels like a comment on our personality. It suggests we are not good enough to be the person we claim to be. This idea, along with the research findings, makes unemployment appear hopeless, but remember: these are

common circumstances, not definitive ones.

When we understand that *what we do* is distinct from *who we are*, we can consider these elements separately. We can change *what we do* without losing our sense of *who we are*. That is incredibly reassuring. Of course, there are other complexities involved in losing a job, like social, economic, and family factors, but understanding this distinction puts you in a much better position to get back into the workforce with more confidence. And we know how important confidence is in achieving our goals.

Even when change hasn't been forced upon us, it helps to understand the distinction between *who we are* and *what we do*. We can choose to change what we do even as we stay in the same job. We can develop, grow, and improve our skills. We can learn. This is a growth mindset. Ironically, it makes us less likely to be fired (as we're adding more value to the company) and better able to adapt if we are forced to change. Win-win.

A Growth Mindset Takes Work

Some people have a natural growth mindset, and this comes easy to them. Others need to work on this concept. If it doesn't come naturally to you, start by acknowledging that despite the years you may have put into your company, the job is not who you are. You have the ability to do, learn, and discover other skills. Most of us have hobbies outside of work, which proves we can do more than one thing. I can prepare a fantastic financial budget *and* play a decent game of soccer. You can do multiple things, too. Realize that it is possible to grow beyond your current comfort zone. Start learning new things—even if just for fun—and prove to yourself that you can do it.

I know you can, as your brain, like mine and everyone else's, has neuroplasticity. *Neuro* means brain, *plasticity* is the ability to permanently change, and research shows we all have neuroplasticity, even as adults. There are some fantastic videos referenced in the Resources section of this book which explain this phenomenon in more detail, but it's enough to know that neuroplasticity means we can forge new pathways for signals to flow inside our heads as we learn and relearn information. We have the physical ability, but we do not always have faith in our ability. Often, we simply don't believe we can do new things. Perhaps this is because, for some, this mental growth requires work. It doesn't come naturally for all, yet we can all do it. Remember House, the brilliant, sarcastic, caustic doctor who specializes in diagnosing weird and complicated medical conditions? He always believes his team will find a solution to his patients' symptoms. It might take weeks or even months, but he is sure his doctors will grow to meet the new challenge.

When you have House's confidence, it impacts your attitude. Others will perceive you as someone who has faith in them and their abilities. They'll want to share their challenges with you, as you make them feel they really can solve their problems. That opens you to a lot of engagement with colleagues. In turn, those conversations expose you to new knowledge in areas outside of your own.

It is also an important tool for yourself—if you believe your skills can evolve and you can “intake” different knowledge on a variety of subjects, then, when you try something new, the process of trying is one of learning, building confidence, and developing a future skill

(developing the pathways and connections in your brain that I mentioned before). I find it strange that some people have a fixed mindset. I mean, if you believe skills are innate—we are either born with them or not—how can we learn to drive or speak a new language? We do it by practice, repetition, and building confidence that we *can* do it. Practice is a big component of this exercise but the belief in yourself and that you can improve or change is always the starting point.

This Adds Value—and Makes You Valuable

Let's do another mental exercise. Imagine you're the chief financial officer of a big company. The finance team always speaks to you about their problems because they need your help and guidance. The head of marketing, however, never talks to you about his challenges. He just sees you as the numbers person.

But if you have a confident, positive attitude and tend to be open, sharing your views on matters beyond just financial subjects, Mr. Marketing might get the feeling that you're a good person to bounce ideas around with. He comes to you and says, "Listen, I have this idea for marketing to a new audience. What do you think about it?" You *want* Mr. Marketing, or anyone else, to feel they can ask you these questions as your contribution increases your value within the company. You start discussing ideas transversal to the company. A small contribution here, a discussion there, gives you a horizontal view across the business. You see the big picture without being deeply involved in all areas. This snowballs and gives you even more useful insights, as you can picture aspects that just

can't be seen from an isolated little silo. You make yourself incredibly valuable.

So what if it's not your job to do Mr. Marketing's work? I hate when someone says, "Sorry, I can't do that. It's not in my job description," or, "That's not my department. I can't help." Someone who sits there and says this does not have a future in my team. If there is stuff to do, we do it. This is how my team adds value to our group and the wider company. We employ a growth mindset. We have confidence we can solve problems. We dig in and do the work—even if it's outside our comfort area. We're willing to grow beyond what we can already do.

For myself, my team, and you, growing our skills and knowledge is incredibly valuable. It helps us contribute more to our work, play with challenges outside of work—like helping our kids with their coding homework, and be prepared for changes in work and in life. Yet work, in its current form or however it may change, isn't all about *what we do*; it's also about *who* we do it with. We work with others, even when we're alone in an office or working from home. We work with people who have their own emotions, experiences, and ideas. While we can use a growth mindset to broaden our technical skills, we can also use it to improve our personal connections. That's what we'll explore next as we discuss emotional intelligence.



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

THE FIRST TIME a colleague told me he'd taken a full day off work to get his ID card renewed, I thought he was lying. I figured he'd been playing hooky. He probably spent the day at home on the PlayStation or recovering from a very good party the night before. I hadn't been in Angola long at the time—I'm originally from Portugal—and I didn't know much about the ID application process, but I had seen enough of my new country to know it was very different from Europe.

Life is not easy in Angola. The civil war, which ran from 1975 to 2002, destroyed much of the infrastructure, and systems aren't always reliable. Some people have long commutes to work. You could have to get up at 4.30 am to get to work by 8 am. You spend the day dealing with stress at the office, hit traffic on the way home, get in around 9 pm, and find there's no electricity.

In some houses, if there's no electricity, there's no water because the water pump won't work. Without power, you also can't turn on the air conditioning, so it's too hot. You're sweating, you can't cook dinner, and you can't take a shower. Some homes have generators to kick in when the power cuts out, but those can also be unreliable, so you spend all your "relaxation" time fixing generators and water pumps and whatever else goes wrong at home.

If you want to travel, you need to apply for a visa, which may mean spending a full day in a queue. Even standard medical appointments can mean losing half a day in waiting. Daily life is full of hardships, and I think it's made Angolans very resilient. They take many of these difficulties in their stride and always keep going with a smile and being cheerful about life.

When that colleague gave me the excuse about the ID card keeping him from work, I started asking questions. Colleagues told me how things like this work in Angola, and I began to understand that renewing your ID meant more than quickly signing a few forms. Understanding created empathy, and I realized he wasn't trying to get off work. He was just attempting to juggle his job with necessary and annoying errands.

I experienced many little miscommunications like this in my first year in Angola. There was a lot to absorb in my new culture, and it was usually the small stuff that tripped me up. Different countries have different cultures, but sharing the same language (Portuguese is the official language in both Angola and Portugal) gives you a false sense that the differences are not so many. At times, though, I'd say a word that wasn't appropriate and accidentally offend someone, or I expected certain reactions from colleagues or friends, just to end up observing very different outcomes.

Over time, though, I asked questions and learned more about Angola and its culture. I started to understand what life here was like and became immersed in it. I developed empathy for my colleagues who lived with these hardships without complaining, and I experienced those hardships myself. In short, I developed my emotional intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence Is Empathy... and More

There's a small book called *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* by Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves that's pretty famous in the world of EQ. Instead of IQ, which measures your intelligence quotient, EQ looks at your emotional quotient. In non-scientific language, that means your level of *emotional intelligence*—how well you understand emotions (yours and those of others around you).

In this book, I learned that while attitude is how others perceive you, EQ is how *you perceive others and yourself*. That impacts how you behave, which, in turn, affects how others perceive you, which determines your attitude. It's cyclical.

For me, emotional intelligence is about managing my relationships with and responses to other people. It's considering how others feel about my interactions with them. It's not letting stress or frustration take over. I know that when I'm feeling tense, I'm more likely to be blunt just to get things dealt with quickly—but that bluntness doesn't bring out the best in others or reflect well on me. It's recognizing when I'm tired and more likely to speak without thinking, so I can consciously pause and consider what I say before putting it out there. It's not saying the first thing that comes to mind in the heat of an argument. Instead, it's taking time to create rapport and positive connections with people.

If you think this sounds a lot like empathy, you're right. Empathy plays a huge role in emotional intelligence. Empathy is about understanding people's issues and perspectives, and that's essential for strong emotional

intelligence. However, empathy is not the only factor. EQ is a broader subject that employs empathy, amongst other things, to develop self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.

Those first two—self-awareness and self-management—are about knowing yourself, understanding your emotions, what triggers them, and managing your actions. The latter two—social awareness and relationship management—are about how you relate to groups and can trigger other individuals' emotions. I highly recommend reading *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* to learn more about this simple framework. It taught me to consider my reactions to others and how they change when I'm relaxed, stressed, under pressure, tired, and so on, and how to manage my relationships with others.

Be Less Mechanical and More Human

You *do* need to engage your emotional intelligence. If you don't use EQ as a tool, you end up treating everyone the same, regardless of their situation or the emotions they're bringing to the table. On the surface, that might sound fair and equal, but it doesn't work. Blanket rules don't create supportive environments where team members feel safe, trusting their leaders are there for them no matter what.

That sense of security in work and relationships is vital. It provides psychological safety. Without it, people distance themselves and hold back from offering their full effort in an act of self-preservation. When people only think about their own issues without considering others' emotions and relationships, they become narrow-focused.

However, if you try to understand each other's problems and work with them, you actually come out better off.

Instead of acting like a machine mechanically solving issues without considering the impact, you lean into the strength of your humanity. Additionally, this drives you to better decisions and solutions. As you put yourself in someone else's "shoes" you understand their point of view, usually find common ground in both positions, and have a better understanding of the full picture from all angles, which helps you reach far better outcomes.

Then, you are automatically perceived better by those you interact with. They feel you understand them, and they like—or at least appreciate—you for that. Remember that your attitude is how others perceive you. So, in this way, emotional intelligence and attitude are entwined. It's really difficult to demonstrate a positive attitude if you're bad at managing your EQ. On the flip side, tapping into and improving your emotional intelligence inevitably improves your attitude, and therefore your success, prospects, and happiness at work.

EQ Is Not Static

Thankfully, it is possible to strengthen your EQ. Some people are quick emotional learners, and this comes easy to them. It seems like an innate ability for those lucky ones. A few were taught as children or learned later in life to be especially aware of emotions. Others struggle with this, and that's okay.

Regardless of your natural talents or how you were raised, you have the capacity to develop your emotional intelligence. Just as you learned in the last chapter about applying a growth mindset to your practical skills, you can do the same for this less tactile subject. EQ is not static, and neither are you.

Just as you can learn to code, understand blockchain, or discover how to cook a turkey, you can train yourself to better understand and manage your emotions, be aware of social dynamics, and respond well to the emotions inherent in relationships. Use the insights from the previous chapter to applying a growth mindset to this subject.

The Four Stages of Competence

The four stages of competence is a learning model that describes the psychological progression of learning. Its exact origin is somewhat unclear; various teaching and coaching settings reference it earlier, but it became popular in the 1970s when Noel Burch used it to teach “the four stages of learning any new skill” at Gordon Training International, an HR training organization.

This model says that you start learning at stage one: *unconsciously incompetent*. You don’t know what you don’t know. You have no idea you aren’t good at a particular skill. If the skill is, say, learning to drive, you might think it will be easy. This is a dangerous stage in certain situations. As we are not aware of our shortcomings, we might take actions, risks, or make decisions that are far beyond our level of competence, setting ourselves up for potentially negative outcomes.

Stage two is *consciously incompetent*. Now, you know you aren’t good at a particular task or skill. You’re aware of your shortcomings. You grind the gearbox as you try to shift gears and forget to check the mirror before signaling, even though you know you should. You are now aware that you can do things but you still have to go slower than you might want, and do steps one at a time. But this a very important stage. It’s when you get to this, here, that you realize you

still have things to learn and that realization will allow you to focus your efforts. It's at this stage that your growth mindset kicks in.

In stage three, *consciously competent*, you can do the skill, but it takes deliberate effort. You change gears without too much clunking, but you have to think through every step as you go. By now, you are competent and can go through it, so it's not so much about learning anymore, but about practicing and continuing to train yourself.

The final stage is *unconsciously competent*. You're good at the skill and don't even have to think about it anymore. This is when you drive while thinking about work, the weather, or what you want for dinner that night.

You can move through these four stages with any skill. So, the first step in strengthening your EQ is to become conscious of your current ability—or incompetence! You may already know this in your gut. Many people have a sense of whether they're good at recognizing their and others' emotions or whether they struggle to connect. Be honest with yourself, take the first step, and become consciously incompetent.

Easy Tools to Improve Your EQ

If you need help assessing where you currently stand, you can adapt the 360 exercise from chapter one to focus on EQ—and it works wonderfully. This is the process in which an outside party or your HR department sends a questionnaire to your colleagues. The answers are anonymous and let you see how others perceive you and how that differs from how you see yourself.

Take the same steps as outlined previously, but instead of focusing on the key behaviors for your role and company,

ask the organizer to choose questions about your professional relationships, how you manage your emotions, how you relate to others, and how colleagues feel about you and around you.

Another simpler and less formal tool is just to ask for honest feedback from people you have a close relationship with. Sit down with someone you trust and ask for their opinion on how you manage your emotions and relationships with others. *Do you think I show empathy? Would you describe me as more people-focused or results-focused? Why?*

Of course, if you're like Hitler, it'll be hard to find people who'll be honest with you. But I guess that's not you, so the first step is being consciously open to receiving feedback, even if it's negative. If you are brave and willing to do this, you can find someone—a coach, mentor, line manager, colleague, or friend—who'll be open with you.

When you find this person and go into the conversation, try not to get defensive. It's easy to criticize negative comments. *She's wrong. He didn't understand the situation. I'm not really like that.* If you openly criticize, your trusted person might clam up. They won't want to keep going if you're not willing to listen. We talked about this challenge in chapter one as it's common and very human! Revisit those pages if you need a refresher. There are also some self-assessments you can take. One of them is available online with a code you can get in the *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* book I mentioned before.

Know Yourself, Understand Others

The tools above ask other people questions, as others often see us more clearly than we see ourselves. Yet, there

is still immense value in asking yourself questions. You will have more honest and accurate insights about the *motivations* behind your behavior than outsiders.

Here's a question to demonstrate this: What type of people are you biased against? When I say *biased*, most people think about groups who have traditionally been marginalized because of their gender, race, sexual orientation, ability, or other factors. That's important to consider. Then, I want you to go further.

We can be biased against behaviors. Do you prefer people who go straight to the point and have zero patience for people who take thirty minutes to say two sentences? Do you like people who explain everything in detail and get mad when folks can't be bothered to give proper explanations? What kind of people set you off? What messes with your nerves?

When we talk about biases, I certainly don't mean to clump racism, for example, in the same category as disliking certain behavior quirks. Discrimination is distinct and unacceptable. I'm talking about biases in a broader sense to draw your attention to the many, many ways our emotional intelligence fluctuates based on who we're working with. We must be aware of our biases—both severe and minor—before we can improve on them. Sometimes this is something as simple as unconsciously preferring to engage or work with people very similar to you, but that will not always be the case, and we need to identify how we can better engage with anybody.

Following the example above, you might be the type of person who likes to thoroughly discuss every topic in the agenda, but you may have one or two team members who

prefer to get to the point and ready to take action after just reading the agenda. It's important you understand whether this is an unconscious bias you have, as those team members might set you off or make you lose your temper. Understating this beforehand will help you be better equipped to respond to the situation in a far more constructive manner which doesn't alienating them in the process.

To better respond to people who set you off, you need to put yourself in that person's shoes. You need to understand their stresses and frustrations. Say you're in an executive committee meeting. A colleague, who's also in the room, is in an interim role, and you know they're aiming to keep the job long term. As their trial period ends, they're going to be stressed. If their back is against the wall, they won't want to admit if they've done something bad, as the repercussions could easily jeopardize their future job.

When you're talking to someone in that position, it will always go better if you understand their stress. Be aware that they may perceive every suggestion you offer as a commentary on their future prospects. They might easily overreact because, as they see it, every move will have far-reaching implications. When you put yourself in their shoes, you can understand the best way to present suggestions or even just to interact with them.

Sometimes you won't understand the experience. You might not have been through their situation or even be able to imagine it. But the effort to understand others is always worthwhile. They will notice. They will perceive you as an understanding, empathetic colleague. They'll see you as a more positive, warm, open person. You'll be someone they

legitimately want to connect with. Those connections will create more options, opportunities, and reciprocal benefits.

Ask Questions and Create Rapport

To go beyond the initial effort, ask questions. Questions help us understand other people better as we learn their biases, triggers, strengths, and challenges. This is easier when you've gone through the process yourself. When you've dug deep and discovered your own degree of emotional intelligence, you can apply your experience to learning about others. It's easier to spot emotions in other people when you've already acknowledged them in yourself.

You can ask questions in all sorts of situations, formal and informal. Some examples include: Why do you believe that makes a difference? Why is that important to you? What makes you say that? If I were in your shoes, what would I be feeling?

Be aware of your own emotions and reactions as you listen. Emotional intelligence is about understanding your own emotions as much as others'. But getting a sense of others from these questions will make it easier to manage your relationships with them. With your greater understanding, you can adapt how you speak to people, create stronger rapport, and have more productive conversations.

Rapport is the sense of connection you have with someone. It creates stronger relationships that help both parties thrive. Have you ever gone to a dinner party and not known many people, then got chatting with the stranger sitting next to you? By the time you leave, you feel that person could be your new best friend. You don't know why, but there was a click. You connected. You had great rapport.

Our subconscious is always looking at people's reactions and reading what our conscious minds don't see, so you can start creating rapport with your unconscious behaviors. It can be established in the way you move, your rhythm when you talk, and things you have in common with others. Sometimes, though, you have to deliberately create rapport. When it doesn't come naturally, but you want the shared benefits of connecting with a specific person, you must work to consciously create connection.

You do this by creating a space where people feel positively towards you. It doesn't need to be profound, as even small details create a sense of connection. Say the first time we talk, I ask where you're from, and you tell me your home town. If I've been there, I mention that, and I tell you about the steak house I loved. You know that restaurant, and we agree they cook their ribeyes perfectly. Instantly, there's a warmer feeling between us. Without realizing it, you're more open to me than someone else in the room who has no connection to you.

These connections can be anything: supporting the same soccer team, being educated at the same school, and having mutual friends are all common ways of creating rapport. It's small talk, but small talk with purpose. It creates the impression that we are similar and, for better or worse, it's human nature to gravitate towards people who are similar to us. It feels safe.

This makes creating rapport an easy trick to improve your perceived attitude while also improving your EQ. You create connection as you learn about the other person and what makes them tick. In one move, you're creating stronger connections *and* improving your ability to read the

other person's emotions. This makes it so much easier to have open conversations. The other person is predisposed to like you and whatever you have to say. They're more likely to accept your ideas and even your bad news. And you can better present your ideas in a way that works for the recipient.

People Are Not the Same

When we connect with and understand others, we start to truly appreciate that people are not the same. Nobody is the same. People are not carbon copies of one another. They don't have the same skills, outputs, problems, and issues. They don't put in equal amounts of effort or deal with equal challenges. People are different.

Everybody is worthy of empathy, care, and humanity, but everyone is not the same, and they should not be treated the same. I think we are much fairer when we treat people in accordance with their situation. I want to be treated fairly for what I contribute to the world, my work, my family, and friends. When I'm having a hard time, I expect people to treat me in accordance with that, too. And I want to do the same for others.

Although I hope it never happens, imagine a close friend of mine suddenly died. I would be devastated. At work, I'd be distracted and slow. In most places, the law wouldn't allow me time off as it only offers bereavement leave for immediate family members, and company policies often follow suit. If my team leader insists on applying the rules without considering my unique situation and how I'm affected by my grief, neither of us will do well. I'll continue to struggle. I'll perform worse at work. I might be pissed at them and the company.

But if my boss understands that I'm not coping, if they react to my unique situation and give me time off, even though the law and company policy doesn't "allow it," I would respond well. I'd feel connected to them and cared for by the company. I'd know they understood what I was going through. Although grief isn't something you can get over in a short time, the break would give me a chance to process my emotions and come back to work with more focus. But again, remember: this is not a recipe. For some people, being able to continue working through a period of mourning is actually what they need to keep their mind occupied. Ask questions and understand the people around you.

Let's look at a more commonplace example, and one that I have first hand experience with. I can be impatient and sometimes come across as arrogant. I learned this about myself over years of developing self-awareness and understanding others' perceptions of me, and I try to control these less-than-awesome traits. I tend to grasp concepts quickly and like to promptly move to the next subject. In meetings, though, you can't always move at your personal pace. Other people might ask questions about the idea we're discussing. They might ask a lot of questions. We might end up talking through an idea for what feels like a lifetime.

I once asked my line manager what I needed to work on, and he asked me to remember that everyone comes to subjects at different levels of understanding. I know my work well, but if you draw me into a conversation about quantum physics, I'd have to ask a lot of questions. Our culture often teaches us to be humble about the things we

excel at, but if you grasp concepts quickly, you might share my frustration with discussions which seem to drag on. *Why don't we move on already?* However, if we take a moment to step into other people's shoes, we remember that grasping these ideas might not be easy for everyone. Others may need more time, and it's considerate and kind to give them what they need to be comfortable with the conversation.

I am not at the level of unconscious competence with this yet. I have to actively think about it. I slip up, get impatient, and have to remind myself that everyone around the table is different. My colleagues have strengths that I do not. They naturally understand things that take immense work for me. We are not the same, and that is okay. But if we all make this effort with each other, we will also help all of us have the opportunity to reach the same levels of knowledge together, and that will actually make us a much stronger team.

Keep Developing Your Competence

When I catch myself being impatient, I can manage my behavior. I take a deep breath. I force myself *not* to speak or ensure I'm the last to speak. I listen to the questions and conversations that clarify the idea. I stay quiet and in the moment. I remember that whoever is running the meeting has responsibility for speeding things up if needed. They are using their skills to manage the discussion. And meanwhile, I can develop my consciously incompetent skill set.

This takes time. Developing skills, asking questions, and creating rapport cannot be done in an instant. It's easy to think of the work environment as an impersonal space, but we're building *relationships* with our colleagues. That's

worth the time investment.

Depending on your role, you may also be building relationships with clients. I was an auditor early in my career, so these skills weren't as essential then. I didn't talk to clients much as a junior auditor. (And no one likes auditors much, anyway!) As I became more senior with a team reporting to me, EQ became more relevant. For most people, though, especially those in sales, big teams, and less technical positions, these skills will be vital from day one.

And from day one, you can work on this. No matter where you currently stand, you can climb the stages of awareness and ability to become unconsciously competent. It takes some work, but nothing earth-shattering. Eventually, you won't even have to think about employing your emotional intelligence—it will simply be your normal way of living. The great news is that you don't have to wait for that stage to reap the benefits of emotional intelligence. Every step will improve how you are perceived, making this absolutely worthwhile.



ADAPTABILITY

BACK WHEN I WAS twenty-three years old, still in my hometown of Lisbon, Portugal, and fresh out of my management degree, I joined an audit firm as a junior auditor. On my first day on the job, this very special lady (who I came to realize was always there to support all of us) welcomed the group of new recruits—there were about twenty of us, all hired after graduation season. She showed us around the company, gave us the general idea of how everything worked, and, at the end of the session, asked, “Who here is willing to work in Angola, Cape Verde, or East Timor?”

At first we all kind of looked at each other a bit bewildered, then I remember quickly thinking *Why not?* I hadn’t traveled much at that time. I didn’t have a girlfriend, kids, or anything that made traveling for longer periods an issue. So I stuck my hand in the air, and a month or so later, I was in Angola, West Africa. My main job was to audit a bank there. I probably visited five or six times in eighteen months, always for at least four weeks, before that bank offered me a fantastic job working directly for them.

I thought about it briefly and told them that I already understood the project, given I’d been auditing the bank for a while, but I would like to understand the scope of responsibilities and how we would manage the transition since I had no family, friends, or any support in Angola. After

that brief conversation, I immediately said yes. The bank was already well established in the market, they were also one of the biggest banks in the country, and I'd be the head of the accounting and planning department. In Lisbon, it would be years, maybe even close to a decade, before I got an opportunity to manage my own department of fifteen people in a company of that size. This opportunity would essentially fast-track my career. Yes, it could go wrong, but I trusted myself and was confident that even if it didn't work, I would gain invaluable experience. Besides, I was young, so I would still have a chance to go back and start over if needed.

My friends and family thought I was nuts, though. Angola's more than twenty-year civil war had only ended four years earlier. In their heads, it was still a dangerous place and some news about the country that reached Portugal focused on the negative sides. My family thought I was crazy, but I knew the country better than them. I knew there were many good things, and it was not at all what they imagined. I figured I had a great opportunity to grow my career and try my hand at new skills.

And boy, did I have to grow! I had not only to adapt to the country's culture, but the new job was two or three tiers above my old one, and that was a challenge. I didn't have a lot of experience in this area, so I put in plenty of hours. Some nights, I was in the office until 1 a.m. trying to understand what the hell was happening in this dynamic, fast-growing bank. My employers had taken a risk in hiring me since I was relatively young and inexperienced, and I wanted to do right by them, so I worked long and hard. I only realized later on, with more experience, that they did

not hire me just for my technical skills but, above all, for the attitude they perceived while I was there as an auditor.

I had fun, too, adapting to new responsibilities and figuring out challenges. The bank was already a good size when I joined, but Angola had a new economy coming out of the war, and it was in a growth phase. Nothing was boring. Everything was growing and changing. It was dynamic. I learned so much and got to be involved in many areas and different projects within the bank. It felt like I was helping shape the company and the industry in Angola.

After nine great years, everything was ticking along smoothly. We'd assembled a great team. People knew how to do their work. The team was very autonomous, and my challenges started to drop off. I didn't have to do as much problem solving or adapting to changes. When an opportunity came up at a relatively new bank in the country, I decided to accept the new challenge. This new bank was much smaller and somewhat unknown in Angola, but it was part of the biggest African banking group. I had no idea what the culture would be like, but I thought there was a lot of potential for growth—both for the bank and for me. Plus, being in an international bank definitely seemed to open a lot of learning opportunities, as well.

When you start a new job, it can feel a bit like being the new kid at school. *Are they going to like me? Will I fit in?* I knew I could do my new job well—I had confidence and a positive mindset!—but would colleagues like the way I did things? Would their culture match my style? I soon came to realize their culture was very, very different from that of my previous company. I was used to a less formal decision-making process, with much more autonomy in making my

own decisions and those of the area I was heading. In this new challenge, I found a more formal structure with a strong governance process and great oversight from the larger group to which the bank belonged. Decisions were more collaborative and committee driven, rather than taken individually, but that came at some expense of speed and flexibility. I was used to individuals moving faster without needing to run things by committees or get approvals.

The transition was tough—after all, I had spent nine years in the previous role, so most things there felt like second nature. After the first month, I realized I was somewhere with a very different culture, and about six months in, I wondered if I could ever make this work. But I kept at it. I asked for help when I needed it and moved forward always with the goal of contributing positively to the bank's evolution. Finally, one day, about a year in, I looked up and realized I was comfortable at the new bank. There wasn't a specific moment where everything shifted into place, but it was rather a gradual process of adapting and integrating into this new world. And eventually, it felt like a world I understood. This was a place I could navigate with comfort and where, despite doing things differently, I felt I could still add value. Also, it was, as I anticipated before accepting the challenge, a place where I was learning and evolving a lot as a professional and as a person.

Not long after, the bank's leaders invited me to take a more challenging role as the chief financial officer, and just a year after that, they challenged me again to move to the role of executive director. They said they liked what they saw and what I brought to the company, and that my attitude was my biggest asset. That validation was big for

me. I hadn't understood this company entirely from the get-go, but I kept working at it, adapting, trying to do the right thing, and it paid off. I learned that I could adapt and bring my best to any environment—and that I could add value in doing so.

Adaptability Is A Lever for Attitude

My willingness to adapt acted as a lever throughout my life, shifting me into a position where my attitude could be perceived positively. When I was new to Angola and a job beyond my experience, I worked hard to adapt to the culture and the role, and my colleagues liked my attitude. As a result, I found success at work and in my new country. (I've been in Angola for more than fifteen years now, and it is truly my home.)

It wasn't a simple process. I wasn't completely aware of it at the time, as I was young and not very introspective, but I was unconsciously making some complex adaptations that helped me settle into and succeed in my new world. They were complicated, for a start, because Portuguese and Angolan cultural expectations can be quite different. It can be dangerous to make generalizations about countries, but it's unrealistic to pretend there aren't any differences.

Generally, Portuguese people can be very direct at work, more blunt. As you might imagine, this can lead to massive arguments or sometimes to being perceived as arrogant. You can completely disagree with a colleague, and the discussion can get heated and tough. Then, you'll go out for lunch or dinner, laugh, joke about football together, and get along great. Work arguments don't usually impact personal relationships. We leave disagreements at the office. In my experience, what I felt arriving in Angola was that if you're

blunt with someone, they'll take it more personally, and that can cause problems. Naturally, they don't want to cooperate with someone they believe has an issue with them or that they feel is arrogant or dislikes them.

I've seen many people arrive in a new country with a mentality of, *I do things this way, and everyone here just needs to accept that*. If that's the attitude you want to take, that's your prerogative, but you can't expect it to lead to success. When I moved to Angola, I learned that if I wanted useful communication that led us forward, I needed to adapt my way of speaking. I'm naturally a little harsh and impatient, but I have to be more easygoing if I want successful work relationships in Angola. And you know what? I like being easygoing! It's a great way to be in the world. Adapting to the style of my adopted country was a great tool to communicate better in every situation.

Later in my career, when I moved on to new challenges at a new bank, adaptability helped me build relationships, even as I struggled to find my place in a very different culture. My new colleagues were very welcoming and warm. I think they liked my attitude—even if they wondered, at times, why I did things in “weird ways”—and they were more than willing to work with me. I was able to connect with people, and I genuinely felt like part of the team from a very early stage. Adaptability was key to an attitude that helped me succeed.

So, what is adaptability, exactly? It's your capacity to adapt to change. Part of that is a willingness to take risks in jumping into new environments. That could be physical, like moving to a new workplace, or something less tangible, like adapting to a new political climate or by investing in

different ways. But your ability to be comfortable with risk is hard to change. It's deeply engrained, starting with life lessons from childhood. It's easier to change your level of curiosity, which is the other element of adaptability. You can approach change—a new location, job, or other situation—with curiosity about what's coming. What will it be like? How can it help you progress? What could you learn? For people who are more risk averse, I do feel like instead of thinking about the risk, considering the opposite can help put things into perspective. *What can I gain and improve in myself by taking this step?*

Benefit from Curiosity

In the movie *The Last Samurai*, Tom Cruise plays Captain Algren, an American military advisor captured by the Samurai, a group of traditional warriors in Japan. Algren slowly learns the Samurai code and adapts to their ways. I won't spoil the plot in case you haven't seen it, but it's pretty cool to see this character learn something new from the Samurai culture and use it to finally find peace—the one thing he's missing after witnessing so many war crimes.

You might not be on a journey as profound as healing the wounds of war, but I bet you can benefit from change if you're willing to adapt to it. Often, *change* is seen as a scary word, but when you prove to yourself that you can adapt to change, you feel more positive about future changes and more confident in facing them. A willingness to adapt to change translates to a better attitude. Another small tip that works is replacing the word *change* with *improvements*. That way, everything will feel a lot more positive and less daunting.

When you *don't* adapt to change, you don't feel like part

of the team. On a global scale, refusing to adapt to a new country's culture likely means you won't stay. You might last two, three, five years, but at some point, you'll probably return to your original country. I was willing to adapt to Angola, and it became my home. I'm on Team Angola!

In the workplace, stubbornly refusing to adapt means you have a mentality of *me versus them*. You end up with your agenda in conflict with that of the team. You don't fit in. And frankly, that's not very fun. It's not interesting to always be on the outside. You might do okay financially—after all, you're still being paid—but you're not developing fulfilling relationships, you're not collaborating on exciting work, and you're not making friends. Sure, you could say you're not there to make friends; you're there to do the work. But when you're friendly with colleagues, you can do *better* work. Your professional partnerships are stronger, and together, you make more progress on projects. Plus, those stronger relationships help you become less stressed and more tranquil, which creates a better mindset for you to focus and get creative. After thirty years of research, Gallup, a well-respected analytics and advice firm, said, "Our research has repeatedly shown a concrete link between having a best friend at work and the amount of effort employees expend in their job. ... We've consistently found that for women *and* men having a best friend at work leads to better performance."

Your World Will Change

If you're not planning to move countries or workplaces, you must still be ready to adapt to change as the world is constantly evolving. Right now, we're moving fast in the midst of the fourth industrial revolution.

You've probably heard of the first industrial revolution, which came at the beginning of the 19th century. That was when water and steam power began to mechanize the production process. Farmers flocked to the cities to work in factories, and in many places, it was the first significant shift away from an agriculture-based society. A century later, Henry Ford helped bring about the second industrial revolution. In 1913, the famous car maker created an assembly line that could mass-produce an entire car. It was around that time that electricity became commonplace, and mass production of goods really took off. The third industrial revolution was when electronics, telecommunications, computers, and the internet came along in the mid-20th century, completely changing how we live and work. Most of us are familiar with this one as we've grown up within it.

The fourth industrial revolution, which we're experiencing now, is propelling us forward with automation, machine learning, big data, the internet of things, sensors, and all the inventions that connect the world at a faster pace than we've ever seen before. With massive innovations in combining technologies, there are many more developments within sight. I've talked about blockchain and nanotechnology. Artificial intelligence, gene engineering, self-driving vehicles, cyberwarfare and its prevention, breakthrough materials, digital art, wearable devices, biologic drugs, virtual reality environments, 3D printing, and intelligent robots are just a handful of other examples of changes driven forward by the fourth industrial revolution.

We're experiencing so many developments that change our world, but we're also experiencing a new pace of change. The time gaps between these revolutions are

shrinking while their impact is growing. Previously, a development might take fifty years, and now its equivalent will occur in just a decade. Think about what you have on your phone, for example. You used to be able to fill a desk with your calculator, schedule, phone, ruler, camera, clock, notebook, and work files. Now, there's a concept in technology that says the number of transistors we can fit on a microchip will double every two years, thanks to smaller and more cost-efficient development and manufacturing processes. Gordon Moore, the former CEO of Intel, observed this happening in 1965 and predicted it would continue for at least a decade. More than fifty years later, his concept has proven consistently accurate, and it's now referred to as Moore's law. Thanks in large part to this exponential increase in technological power, your entire desk now fits on a phone in your pocket.

Cell phone upgrades are just one example, and I bet you can name a hundred others that show the speed of change is cumulative and exponential. Change is getting faster, it will continue to get faster, and it affects everyone—just ask the guy who manufactured desktop calculators! In our lifetime, we will *never* experience change occurring as slowly as it is today. Change will come faster tomorrow and every day after that. This is our reality. Do you find that daunting or exciting?

Your Workplace Will Change

Your attitude towards this depends partly on the notion we discussed in chapter four: we are not what we do. I am an executive director of a bank, but that is not *who* I am. It's what I do. I don't imagine it will happen, at least not in my lifetime, but let's say blockchain takes over the world,

traditional banks are too slow to adapt and go out of business, and I become unemployed. There are no more old-fashioned banking jobs which I can apply for. That's okay. I've developed my confidence and a positive growth mindset. I can get a job as, say, the head of data for a medical technology company, an outdoor clothing manufacturer, or an airline. If I worked hard and became considerably more imaginative, I could even become a YouTube star. (I'd probably need a lot of coaching for this one, but... why not?) Ten years ago, I wouldn't have believed that could be a real, income-earning job, yet today it is (even if I don't understand it completely). We cannot imagine what kind of jobs there will be in another ten years. But whatever comes, I face it with a growth mindset. I can choose to take on something new because I can learn and adapt beyond my existing experiences. You can too! Remember neuroplasticity... we all can!

Yes, it can be daunting to face the unknown, but when you are confident in your capacity to adapt, you can confidently take on a new industry, a new job, or a new way of doing your work. The world is changing so fast that the techniques, technology, and assumptions you use in your current position will likely be completely different in five years. Your job will require other skills.

When I got my first job, being a good finance guy meant you had to be really good with Excel spreadsheets. You needed to know accounting left, right, and center. You had to understand all the accounting rules and formulas. Now, computer programs do a lot of that for you. The most skilled financial people today understand *analytics*. They look at data science, visualize what it means, and tell stories with

that data. They make sense of marketplace behavior, trends, and predictions. Ten years ago, no one asked the finance people to do that. It was all about numbers. Now, computer programs do debit and credit calculations, and people are there to make sense of the output. I don't know what will happen in another ten years, but I can confidently say the work will be different again, and substantially so.

Anxiety Is Natural and Surmountable

Whichever industry you work in, I bet you've seen a similar degree of change. And as we move deeper into the fourth industrial revolution, more is on the way. Change is coming! If that makes you uncomfortable, I understand, and I'm not saying you should "just deal with it." Being asked or forced to change isn't easy. Research proves what many of us have felt: change can create anxiety—especially when it feels like it impacts us personally. One example comes from a paper called *When Change Causes Stress: Effects of Self-Construal and Change Consequences*, written by Barbara Wisse and Ed Sleebos, and published in the *Journal of Business and Psychology*. It says, "Organizational change can be a major stress factor for employees. ... Change is more likely to lead to stress when the change has consequences for matters that are central to employees' sense of self, and particularly so when the personal self is salient."

This means if you approach change knowing you can adapt to whatever it brings and the change does not determine your identity, you will feel more confident handling the change. You won't be in a defensive place, trying to protect yourself from potential failure. You'll be focusing instead on *curiosity*. You'll be looking forward to

trying, tweaking, and experimenting with this new thing. By default, that removes you from negativity and pushes you into a more open, peaceful attitude. Anxiety is hard to eliminate head-on, but you can short-cut the process by being curious about the possible ways to adapt to your new circumstances. And if you want to go all in, drive the change yourself. Put yourself in the driver seat and decide what comes next. Like the famous management consultant Peter Drucker said, “The most effective way to manage change is to create it.”

The Move Must Be Deliberate

As with the other concepts we’ve discussed in this book, fostering a sense of adaptability requires intentional action. Nothing changes if you don’t. The *no* is guaranteed. It’s like when you see a cute guy or girl on the other side of the bar and want to ask them out. If you don’t, you definitely won’t get a date. If you do, there’s a fifty-fifty chance you’ll be buying them dinner on Saturday night. I know which odds I prefer. We often don’t take action out of self-preservation—we don’t want to fail, so we don’t do anything. But as we’ve seen, the world is changing, with or without our participation. Is it a risk to try adapting to something new? Yes! But it’s less risky than staying static in a fast-changing world.

You can grow your confidence by practicing adaptability. Get curious about new opportunities. Take on a new project. Choose challenges over comfort, flex your adaptability muscles, and see what happens. Even if it feels tough, you are resilient enough to handle it. And that’s what we’ll talk about next.



RESILIENCE

IN PROFESSIONAL BASKETBALL, a *very good* three-point shooter will *miss* almost six shots out of every ten. Three-point shooters are the players relied upon to score—you guessed it—three points by getting a field goal from beyond the arc line around a basket. Some players, like Steph Curry or Ray Allen, are actually recruited to teams because of their ability to pull off these game-changing shots. These two are the current top players in the NBA all-time three-point shots made records. They and other three-point shooters are paid significant salaries thanks, in part, to their extraordinary focus on this single shot. And yet, they only succeed in scoring around 40 percent of the time. This is a low number—but not because they're bad players; they're the best in the world. It's just the nature of the game. The shots are hard. Not everyone can make them, and those that can only manage it around four times out of ten.

So, what does a three-shooter do when he misses? He tries again. And again, and again, and again. For him, missing is part of the process. He doesn't shoot, miss, and decide he's not cut out for the game. No, he knows that missing the first doesn't mean he'll miss them all, and he tries again.

That is resilience in action. Resilience is the ability to keep going, even when you feel like you've failed, or things haven't gone your way, or you missed the last six shots.

Resilience is refusing to give up. It's persevering until you achieve your goal—whether that's winning a game, climbing Mount Everest, cooking the perfect roast turkey, getting that promotion, or feeling like you're making a difference in the world.

We all like stories of people who overcame hardships and refused to quit at the first sign of struggle. We're inspired by paraplegics who climb Everest and people who fight their way out of poverty, get an education, and give back to their community. Those are the folks we want to work with!

However, most of us—me included—are unlikely to accomplish such incredible feats, and that's okay. We don't need to scale mountains or be heroes, but if we want others to enjoy working with us, we need to harness the same resilient attitude. Good things require effort. You might get lucky and occasionally have things come easy, but generally, you'll need to put in effort to get what you want from life and work. Effort inherently carries the risk of failure. It means pushing up against difficulties. Sometimes, people encounter a challenge and think it's a sign they should quit. But challenges are part of the process, just like missing is an inevitable part of basketball.

Like all the skills we've discussed in this book, you can cultivate resilience. Doing so will help you continue to play the game, even after a missed shot. Since you can't win if you quit, this is vital. You must be in the game and *keep playing* the game to stand any chance of success. But resilience has another benefit, too. It makes you the workplace hero. Just as we all love success stories of those who've overcome adversity, people love working with anyone who shows resiliency.

The problem with learning to be resilient is that it requires you to face risks. How can you keep going after failure if you never risk failing? And how can you adapt to change—as we talked about in the previous chapter—if you can't stand the risk involved in changing? You start by re-positioning risk.

Proactively Choose How You'll Position Risk

Let's imagine at the weekly team meeting your boss says he wants a volunteer to take on a new project. It sounds challenging. It's not the type of work you're comfortable with, but you've been developing your growth mindset, and you're positive you'll figure out this new project. It is a stretch, though. You're not completely confident you're ready for it. Here's what you do: Be honest, to yourself and to others.

Admit you're not ready for this challenge and acknowledge that it's two or three tiers above your current level. Then, be honest about your desire to try. Tell your boss you want to put yourself out there, learn, grow, and hopefully succeed, but you're not an expert in this area, and you may need some help and guidance. This proactive conversation lets you position the risk realistically. You, your boss, and your team can then effectively assess the risk and make an appropriate decision.

They might give the assignment to a more experienced colleague. That could happen, especially if it's seen as a do-or-die project. In that case, appreciate that you didn't have the stress of taking a risk on such a vital task and you might even have a chance to accompany the project as a learning opportunity. Then, take another shot next time there's an

opportunity. However, you might be assigned the project *and* get the support necessary to increase your chances of success. Your group may say, “Yeah, that’s cool. You can take this on, and we’ll get someone experienced to run through the details with you.” This is your best chance for success! Plus, you’ve positioned the risk appropriately, so if things don’t work out, your boss won’t be blindsided. They know failure is an option, and they can plan accordingly.

Failure Is Learning

It’s worth mentioning here that I don’t love the word *failure*. I’ve used it in this example as it’s how we often think of risks: they succeed or fail. Failure, though, implies a total loss, which is rarely the case. When things don’t go as planned, you usually learn something valuable that contributes to success in the next challenge.

Well-known, forward-thinking businesses like Google, Amazon, and Netflix actively reward employees for taking on a growth mindset, being adaptable, and taking risks. Some companies even give team members the stage after a “failure” to publicly share what happened so that everyone can learn. In places with such a work culture, you don’t need to re-position risk using the honesty strategy we discussed, as they already understand failure is essential for learning.

Admittedly, these companies are not that common yet, but they are a growing trend. Most businesses have a more traditional, closed attitude. If that’s your workplace, honest statements are crucial in managing expectations. And when you manage expectations effectively, you minimize the risks involved in stretching your skills, adapting to change, and developing your resilience.

Leaders want this! They want their team members to

learn, understand more, and be ready for the next challenge. This is why most leaders will welcome your initiative and readiness to take on risks. I think it's wonderful when a colleague is ready to take a stab at something new for the good of the company. Someone with that positive attitude is so much more appealing than the person who always says no, stays in their shell, and protects themselves at all costs. This means the risk of stretching, growing, and trying is always worthwhile, *and* you can manage the risk by re-positioning it in advance. That is truly wonderful.

Avoid Absurd Resilience

Some people don't struggle with resilience. Some never give up, ever, no matter how difficult, absurd, or destructive the challenge. These folks will continue to push at a project no matter how clear it is to everyone else that they're trying to shove a round peg in a square hole; it simply won't work.

You don't want to be resilient to the point that you don't give up when you really should. Unfortunately, there is no clear line marking good challenges from ridiculous ones, and a moonshot challenge for one person could be well within reach for another.

The only way forward is to apply good judgment. Take on challenges that feel outside of your reach but not absurd. Try difficult tasks, but take them on in increasingly difficult increments. What that means in practical terms will change as your experience and perspective change.

It's also good to have a mentor or friends who are not personally involved, but who you can speak with about those projects to gather independent and detached feedback. It might be a great way to understand when you

are investing in something that is destroying value rather than creating it. And when that happens, you can recognize that you failed, realize what you learned, and move on to the next challenge with the same energy and commitment but more prepared by the former lessons. Success in many cases is a process of iterations—several failures or incomplete results whose learnings lead to a final accomplishment.

Risk Changes with Perspective

Risk is often about perspective. If you only have ten dollars in your bank account, placing a ten-dollar bet is a significant risk; if you're a millionaire, you won't feel any risk. As you continue taking risks and developing your resilience, your perspective will change. Some challenges might look small compared to a big risk you recently took.

After I moved to Angola, where I had no friends or family, other decisions or situations just didn't seem like such a big deal. I have yet to encounter a challenge as big as that decision, decades ago, to move country and change my life completely. Going through with that move gave me so much confidence in facing subsequent difficulties. I survived that experience; I can cope with whatever's next.

If you've never done something as drastic as moving to another continent, gain confidence by growing from wherever you are in this journey. The first time you move jobs is a big deal when you haven't done it before, but it will improve your resilience to change. Even if the move turns out to be a disaster, approach it with a growth mindset, and it will create confidence that you can survive disasters! The experience of adapting to change makes you resilient to more change.

At one point, a couple of weeks after moving to my new house in Angola, I got home on a very rainy night to find my living room and one of the rooms completely flooded. Water dripped from the living room ceiling so strongly I could have probably taken a shower there. I had a few seconds of thinking, *Now what do I do?* Then, well, I just got a mop and took the water out. I put some buckets in place and found someone to come and fix the ceiling in the coming days. It wasn't the only time something went wrong in my house. I've had power cuts, broken pipes, more flooding, and blown-out generators during power cuts. Every time something falls to pieces, I think, *Okay, this isn't the first time something's gone wrong. I handled it before, and I'll do it again. I'll get this sorted somehow.* And sooner or later, the issue gets fixed—every time.

That small dollop of confidence massively reduces the stress involved. Of course I don't love it when something breaks in my house, but it's never been as stressful as that first time because I know it will eventually work out. As with many other things, we build a resilience muscle. We become used to taking on things that are not easy and powering through them, and while doing so, we always become more confident in our capacity to do it again in the future. That makes taking risks, well, less risky. It builds confidence and reinforces a positive mindset.

Be Like an Icebreaker

When you're in your backyard shooting some hoops, and you shoot *and miss*, you can have another go right away—assuming your friends are willing to share the ball. In a competitive game, you've missed that play, but there's likely to be another chance before the final whistle.

Life is rarely as fast as basketball. If you take a risk and it goes bad, it might be a long time before you take another shot. You can actively reduce the recovery time by choosing to take “failure” as a learning opportunity. This isn’t about just trying to feel better when things go wrong. This is finding the real, tangible lessons in the experience that can improve your chance of success in the next challenge. Go into risks knowing that you might fail and that would be okay. You’ll live through it, you’ll learn from it, and it will create a greater chance of success next time.

Imagine you’re one of those massive icebreaker ships. They don’t stop because there’s ice. They expect the ice! They know there will challenges. They *will* face resistance—there’s no question about it. But they embark on the journey anyway, and they keep going when that ice hits. All of us are hit with challenges in our day-to-day lives, sometimes constantly. The people who succeed are those who remember that challenges are part of the process. They keep going, and so can you.

As you go, you’ll undoubtedly face problems—extra-large chunks of ice that seem like they’ll never shift out of the way. Again, facing these is part of the process. So, let’s talk next about problem solving and how a great attitude can make it easier to break up that ice.



PROBLEM SOLVING

IMAGINE FOUR PEOPLE standing in a square, facing each other. Their all pointing at each other, arms crossed, creating almost a circle of accusation—everyone pointing at everyone else. This is what often happens when problems come up in business. Each team member looks for someone else to blame, and everyone points the finger at anyone who might have done something wrong. And in the end, people are so busy pointing fingers that they don't solve the original problem. Even worse, they might not even *find* the problem, let alone solve it, as they all believe someone else is the culprit and should bear responsibility for it.

I call these people *problem finders*. You might have seen them in your workplace—or even been one yourself on occasion. When issues arise, problem finders focus on discovering what went wrong, who's to blame, and how everyone else's faults contributed. They're quick to point out every little thing that went wrong. Yet while they're talking the issue to death, they don't get any closer to *solving* the problem. Sometimes, they actually find themselves further away because their relentless discussion has unearthed so many issues that they don't even know what to solve anymore.

It's Easy to Use Blame as a Defense Mechanism

Problem finders use this behavior as a defense

mechanism. Their subconscious thinks, *As long as I keep talking about who is to blame, it won't be me.* And it's a great defense mechanism because it seems so smart. "Look at me! I noticed all these issues that no one else spotted. I'm smart enough to ask the tough questions. I'm preventing and solving problems. If it weren't for me, we'd be in so much trouble. And if we go ahead? Well, I told you this strategy wouldn't work, so you can't blame me when it all goes wrong."

Certainly, people don't usually say it so blatantly, but this is the undercurrent involved in problem-finding. People don't fall into this behavior because they're a "bad person." It usually shows up in company cultures that are relentless with failure and don't use it as a learning tool. In these places, failure is heavily weighted negatively on performance reviews, rather than serving as an opportunity to learn for future attempts. Or it comes up when people are in the habit of being negative. They haven't worked on their confidence, positivity, growth mindset, emotional intelligence, adaptability, and resilience like we've explored in this book. They're afraid of risks, and potentially being blamed for a problem is a really big risk. It could cost them their job, their livelihood, and even their identity—if they're stuck in the trap of thinking they are what they do.

Sometimes people were rewarded for this behavior the first few times, being praised for pointing out issues, so they continue. Yet, they don't realize this attitude wears on their colleagues. Initially, they might have appreciated the help, but soon they get tired of all the negativity. By that time, though, the problem finder has created a habit for themselves.

This attitude can also come from a misplaced kindness. Perhaps the problem finder is trying to protect their team from risks. They want everyone to stay safe, so they're afraid for anyone to take a risk. They become a problem finder as it's the only way they know of protecting the colleagues they care about.

Problem Finding Is Destructive

I have great empathy for people struggling with these difficult attitudes, and I wrote this book, in part, for them as a guide to finding and training themselves in a more positive approach. If you've been the problem finder in your workplace, I understand that it's an easy attitude to fall into and one that feels safe.

However, you need to know that it's destructive. Colleagues will stop coming to you with their ideas as they'll see you as a negative person. You might think you're being helpful in finding possible pitfalls, but they'll perceive you as someone who always shoots down suggestions. They'll get irritated with your lack of enthusiasm, so they'll instead go to someone who'll share their excitement over the new project.

We can't blame them for that. Imagine you tell me you're going to buy a car, and I shake my head and sigh. "I don't think that's a good idea," I say. "You know the value of a car depreciates the moment you buy it. And what if you crash? You could kill your wife, your kids, yourself. You could run someone over. Why don't you just take the bus?"

I bet you're rolling your eyes right now. Yes, all my objections are legitimate to a degree, but they're not going to stop you from buying a car. All that happens is you feel drained by my negative energy. You have no energy to

continue talking to me, convincing me of all the ways you'll mitigate those concerns. You just want to back away from me, right? And you definitely won't tell me when you're thinking of taking flying lessons!

Problem-finding in the workplace has the same effect. It draws people away from you. When colleagues expect you to immediately find the negatives, they stop sharing ideas with you. Your negativity draws opportunities, initiatives, and projects away from you. You miss the chance to take risks—even small ones—and grow. It becomes much harder, if not impossible, to succeed long-term at work.

Pointing Blame Amplifies Issues

Your attitude can amplify this effect by making people want to point the finger back at you. Remember the four people all pointing at each other? This is what naturally happens in most workplaces: One person starts pointing out blame, and the others point it right back. As the blame gets thrown around, it escalates as people subconsciously pile on to make the others' blame worse than what's been thrown at them.

The manager comes to Jane and says, "Why did you do that? It created this big problem?" Jane says, "No, no, no, it wasn't my fault, because the marketing team? They were the ones who sent me those incorrect stats." So now there's the initial problem plus incorrect information. The manager visits the marketing team leader, who tells him, "Well, we gave out those stats because the sales team said the other ones weren't valid." And now Sales is involved, and they have another excuse.

All this redirecting and snowballing of the issues takes up a crazy amount of time, too. The poor manager could spend

days, if not months, circling the problem without actually fixing it. He could analyze a million small problems that led to the big mistake, and sure, that's useful research to a point, but wouldn't the company have been better served if he'd spent about an hour meeting with all the teams involved in that process, stating that they had an issue with this process, and asking everybody to provide ideas on how to make it better and guarantee it won't happen again. If there is no mention of blame or guilt, just of gathering people to contribute ideas on improvements, is that not a much more positive attitude towards the problem? Will it not end up arriving at a better result? And won't all involved feel better at the end? Yes, because they are busy being part of the solution rather than shifting blame and pointing fingers which, despite the defense mechanism it's triggered by, no one really enjoys doing.

You Don't Need as Much Info as You Think

People tend to discuss an issue to death under the excuse of gathering information. Because how can you fix a problem you don't understand, right? You *do* need some understanding of a problem before you can fix it, but not as much as you might expect. In most cases, if you have 50, 60, or 70 percent of the information you *think* you need, it's time to move forward. When you wait until you have 100 percent, you're usually too late to solve the issue effectively.

Think about a plane that's in trouble. The cockpit suddenly fills with alert sirens and flashing lights. The aircraft is losing altitude—fast. No one knows what happened. The seconds flash by, and the plane plummets faster towards the ground. The pilots have a choice; they

can pull out their big, hefty handbook with all the possible solutions and iterations they need to go through and try to establish what went wrong, or they can read *just* the main possible causes, grab the joystick, use experience and action, and force the plane into a controlled landing.

The first option might help them feel 100 percent assured of what the problem is, assuming it had occurred previously and was known, but they might take too long to go through all the possible causes, and then it's too late to act—in which case, it won't stop them from crashing. The second option means the pilots must act without all the information, which isn't easy, but may prove much more effective. They save the day. And they leave the hunt for 100 percent of the information, discussion, and blame to the review committee, who will gather months after the immediate crisis has been averted.

Your challenges might not be as immediate or life-threatening as a malfunctioning plane, but you'll still benefit from *solving* the problem instead of simply *finding* it.

Take Action

Problem *solvers* take action, even before they have all the information. If you've traditionally fallen into problem-finding, you're well-suited to this. You're probably pretty smart, as you quickly spot problems. Solving those problems just requires going one step further to mitigate or resolve the issue. Use the tools you've learned in this book to adapt to the issues at hand, face the risk of suggesting new things with resilience, and feel positive about reaching a solution. Purposefully push yourself beyond the comfortable place of pointing out problems, and start pointing out potential solutions.

Often, everyone expects someone else to take action, and this becomes a problem. The great news is that simply taking action is enough to break the rut. The action doesn't even need to be "right." The entire resolution is rarely placed on one person's shoulders, so you don't need to fix everything alone. You can offer help, suggest solutions, and throw ideas around. Get curious, explore ideas, and experiment. Trust in the process, and keep going, even when it feels like nothing will work. Imagine you're trying to solve a puzzle. It doesn't matter who cut the picture into pieces; you can still shuffle the pieces around, turning them again and again until they slot into place, and you fix the image.

Maybe your idea will be the one that fixes everything, or perhaps it'll trigger a colleague to remember something from another project that can be applied to this one, and that will be your saving grace. Whether you offer the winning idea or help others get there, you'll enjoy a rush of dopamine released in your brain, giving you this incredible feeling of accomplishment. It's amazing and kind of addictive. You'll start feeling really good about problem-solving and want to do more. Trust me—I've been there!

And the more you throw yourself into problem-solving, the more natural it will feel, and the better you'll be. You'll start coming up with really innovative ideas and effective solutions. You'll have fun fixing even the most challenging issues, your colleagues will love working with you on the tough stuff, and that sense of accomplishment will grow. That will make life at work feel much more joyful and fulfilling for you, as well.

There Is a Time for Discussion

In our example of the plane, the pilots didn't waste time trying to get to a 100 percent understanding of all the potential causes of the problem before acting, but that doesn't mean no one cared what went wrong. Any time there's a major malfunction on an aircraft, a review committee will meet to review all the data, understand the issue, and help ensure it doesn't happen again. If it was due to human error, like poor construction of an engine part, they might hold the manufacturing company accountable for their fault. They will factor their findings into future pilot trainings so that others can act quicker in resolving such problems, as well.

Once you've solved a problem, you can absolutely discuss what went wrong. If people or groups need to be held accountable, do that. If disciplinary action is necessary, take those steps. I'm not suggesting these things shouldn't happen, but rather they should almost always occur *after* you've solved the problem. There might be rare instances where more urgent disciplinary action is required—fraud, theft, or endangerment situations come to mind—but these are not common. For most business challenges, you should focus on problem-solving first, as it resolves issues around client experience, reducing risks, efficiency gains, and so on. *Then* you can delve into the details of the problem and understating how to deal with cases of real human error or misbehavior .

If you work for an app development company putting gaming apps out to the market and your latest app gets negative customer feedback, don't just focus on the problems. Understand the negative feedback enough to take action. Get clear on what the customers don't like, but

don't sit around dissecting who is to blame for those features. That can wait. Customers just want to use the app in a seamless and efficient manner. If you take too long to problem-solve because you're focusing on blame, then by the time you've solved the issue, you might not have any more customers to sell it too. They'll have moved on to other apps with better experiences. So, get just the information needed to take action: there's a glitch where the app freezes after displaying a commercial, then it closes unexpectedly. At this stage, it doesn't matter who wrote the code. It doesn't matter which group designed the app or the way commercials integrate with the game. You just need the glitch fixed. So, take action, rewrite the faulty code, and get the new version out into the market as quickly as possible.

Then, you can talk over who wrote the original code and why they messed up. *Then*, you can see if there are any useful lessons from the experience. Perhaps the coder made a mistake because they were exhausted; they have too much work on their plate and need more people on their team. Maybe they weren't very skilled because the manager didn't have a large enough hiring budget to get more experienced staff. Or perhaps they just didn't care and purposefully sabotaged the project, so you need to fire them.

There are probably other aspects you could get curious about, bringing more insights into future projects. That really would be useful—just not when you're trying to slow the tide of negative customer experiences and bad reviews in the app store. Realize the problem, solve the problem, then learn from the problem—in that order.

Problem Solvers Are Engaged,

Positive, and Valuable

People will look at you very differently when you become a problem solver. They'll come to you for ideas and even seek you out from other departments, asking if you have a few minutes to bounce ideas around. That's great for you because you'll end up knowing a lot of what's going on in the company. You'll be more engaged with other teams and, even if you're not involved in the execution of their ideas, you'll have a great overview of what's happening. Then, when those ideas come up in a meeting, you'll already know what it's all about. You'll feel part of the project and able to add more value to the discussion.

It has another important benefit in that you are now getting involved in different ideas and helping finding solutions to many different issues. Your colleagues will stop thinking of you as just "Henry the guy from sales" who they only talk to about sales issues, but as "Henry the guy who always has really nice ideas for me." That will also help you detach *what you do* from *who you are*, because you end up doing many different things. So, this had the bonus of helping with your adaptation, as well.

You might worry it'll take a lot of time to solve everyone's problems. When will you find time to do your own job? That's why we partner this behavior with *managing expectations*, as we'll talk about in the next chapter. When you effectively manage others' expectations, you can set the boundaries. You can help others and earn an excellent reputation without sacrificing your time and energy. As with everything we've discussed in these pages, this doesn't just fall into place; you have to be purposeful in this. So, let's dig into how we can deliberately manage expectations.



MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

HERE'S A SMALL TIP for you to use when starting a new job or working with different people in your company: Under-promise. Seriously. Under-promise... then over-deliver. I'm not talking about under-promising in the sense that you refuse to do the tasks required of you. You're expected to do your job, and you need to deliver on that work! I'm talking, most of all, about *deadlines*.

Deadlines make the business world go round. "I'll do this for you tomorrow." "We need that report by Wednesday." "How quickly can you get this done?" Sometimes it feels like all people do is set and ask for deadlines.

Now, at your new job, if you tell your new boss you'll get the report done by tomorrow, they will believe you'll get the report done by tomorrow. But what happens if you start pulling together the numbers, realize it's a lot more work than you anticipated, and end up taking three days to get the report on your boss's desk? They won't be impressed. The first time, they might give you the benefit of the doubt, but I bet they'll be a bit wary about assigning your second project.

If this happens regularly, your boss will perceive you as someone who doesn't keep their word. They won't believe you'll do what you promise. They probably won't keep

asking what went wrong or if you're okay; they'll just assume you're unprofessional and don't care about the work. That's a bad place to be. That is a ruined reputation.

Under-promising and over-delivering is an easy, low-risk way to ensure you don't get caught in the trap of missing deadlines and creating a bad perception of yourself. Even if you have fallen into this trap in the past, this trick works fast, so you can immediately feel the effect of people perceiving you better.

Imagine your team leader asks when you can have the audit report for the last quarter ready. It's Monday morning, and you think the work will probably take three days, but instead of saying "end-of-day Wednesday," you tell your boss you'll have it ready by Friday. This does two things: it gives you some wiggle room in case the numbers don't add up and you have to do some more in-depth reporting, and it allows you the opportunity to over-deliver.

When the audit report comes together smoothly, and you email the document over on Wednesday, your team leader will be impressed. "Wow, you got that in fast. Thanks!" When you repeat that feat, constantly getting projects in ahead of or on the deadline, you'll be perceived as someone who over-delivers. Your team leader will trust you. They'll feel confident in you.

I can see you rolling your eyes already. You might be thinking: *People assign me deadlines; I don't get to choose. My job doesn't work like that—our project deadlines can't be moved. I couldn't say that to my boss; they're the one who sets the rules. Isn't this manipulative?* These are great considerations, and we'll look at them all.

If You Ask, You Might Be Surprised

Let's start with how to under-promise and over-deliver without falsely manipulating people or being insincere. It begins with the other person. When someone comes to you about a project, ask when they need it by. They might say Friday. Then, consider if you honestly *can* get it done by then. Perhaps you think, *Okay, if I really apply myself, I could probably get it done by then.*

That might sound reasonable in your head, but it's a big "if!" What if something comes up that prevents you from putting in so many hours on this project? What if this work takes longer than you thought? What if you don't have all the information you need? What if you get sick, or you have to pick your kid up from school early? Under-promise and over-deliver. Say you can get the project to them by Monday morning at the latest.

Assign yourself a few extra days (or whatever feels appropriate for the project's size, scope, and importance) to give you a little breathing space for all the what-ifs. If you think a task will take three days, give it a week. You can get creative, too. Perhaps you offer to deliver parts one and two of the project by the requested deadline, but say you'll need an extra few days for part three. Then, if you can over-deliver by finishing early, you create an image of someone who exceeds expectations, but if it takes you the full week, you're okay. You're not disappointing anyone or making yourself look bad.

Remember: the person assigning the project does have the opportunity to push back. It's not like you're being a dictator in announcing your deadlines. (At least, I hope you're not!) You're having a conversation, and the other person can—and might—say that no, Monday isn't okay.

They really do need the project in their hands by Friday. That's good information, and now you can shuffle your priorities around to meet the new challenge. However, I think you'll be surprised how often a colleague or leader will say, "Sure, Monday's great. Thanks."

That being said, there are several situations where deadlines are non-negotiable, in which case this technique is not applicable. This tip, like many others in the book, require good and sound judgement in applying them, to the case at hand.

EQ Will Help You Determine When to Ask

What about when you can't under-promise—when Friday really is the deadline, and Monday just won't do? I often worked to regulatory deadlines when there was no chance of extending the due date or scope of work. In these situations, the best way to develop a good attitude is *not* to ask for impossible timeline extensions but to lean into the second part of the phrase: *over-deliver*. We'll talk more about what that looks like in the next chapter when we discuss excellence, but for now, I want to help you understand when under-promising is appropriate because it can be tricky.

Let's start by being very clear: it does not mean you can promise to deliver less than you're supposed to. If a golf hole is par-4 (and for my non-golfing friends, that means you're expected to finish that hole in four shots), then you don't always aim for par-5. No, you try your best to achieve what's expected. We're not under-promising when it comes to showing up and doing quality work. We always want to deliver quality. This is about timelines.

Under-promising on delivery dates works great in environments where there isn't too much pressure on deadlines. Any time a due date is not critical, I want you to test this idea. Instead of nodding along and immediately accepting whatever deadline is assigned, how would a *conversation* go? What would happen if you asked for a few more days? Try it out, experiment, and see.

Use your emotional intelligence (EQ) to understand when you can play with under-promising and over-delivering. You might remember we talked about this in chapter five. EQ includes self-awareness and self-management, which, in this situation, covers your ability to know what you're capable of achieving in a particular time frame.

It also includes the more outward-looking traits of social awareness and relationship management. This is where you tap what other people really need when they're asking for this project. Yes, they want that particular piece of work, but perhaps they also need to prove their competence to *their* boss or get the okay from an approvals board to try a risky but exciting new strategy. When you can see the social dynamics at play, you can choose how to respond.

The new executive board has been slashing jobs left, right, and center. I think my boss is worried she'll be next. I'm not going to ask for a few extra days on this task; I'll just get it in fast, so she can forward it to the executive board and prove our department's worth.

Or, *The sales team thinks the world revolves around them. It'll probably upset them if I say I need a few more days, but it'll be worth it to save my sanity. I can't keep dropping my workload every time they ask for something.*

Businesses aren't machines—they're made of people

with emotions, social dynamics, and relationships, both good and bad. Take a few moments to think about these elements so that you can decide the best way to under-promise and over-deliver.

Also remember that things rarely go according to plan, so if you give someone a deadline based on the best case scenario, you are most likely setting yourself up to deliver late against the expectation you created yourself. And that image you are forming is important, so consider all these factors when compromising on dates. In some cases, you will carve out one or two days in the deadline, and, as often happens, problems arise, an emergency kicks in, and you end up delivering exactly on the date you agreed, and that is great. Sure, you did not over-deliver, but you solved issues, navigated through emergency situations, and still delivered on time, and delivering on time is always good for your image. The issue is that we often want to show up as extra positive and we minimize the effort involved in the work, sometimes saying things like, “Don’t worry—I can get this done for you in the next hour,” just to realize it’s not that easy and it takes until the next day.

Don’t Fear Over-Delivering

This might bring up some fear. What if your coworkers then expect you to over-deliver every time? To that, I say you should be Michael Jordan. You want to be the person everyone trusts to make that final shot. There was a lot of responsibility on MJ’s shoulders as his teammates looked at him to perform when it mattered. You might not like the idea of so much pressure. I mean, what if you miss?

MJ famously said, “Twenty-six times I’ve been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and

over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”

And he *did* fail—plenty! According to StadiumTalk.com, he ranks as number seven in basketball’s most missed shots of all time, missing 12,354 attempts in his career. Yet he’s still one of the greatest players ever because he kept getting back into the game. He showed the resilience we talked about in chapter seven. Wouldn’t you rather be in the game than sitting on the sidelines? Yes, you might miss, but you’re building your resilience, and you can handle it. And what if you don’t miss? Set fear aside and allow yourself to be “the one that always over delivers.” That is a tremendously positive image to have in the business world.

Use the Opportunity to Add Value

I’m not telling you to be MJ because he’s famous. It’s not about being the star but about consistently adding value. MJ missed shots but kept contributing to the team’s efforts. In the second half of his career, he started taking fewer shots and instead worked with his team more. That’s when the Chicago Bulls became unstoppable, winning six NBA titles in eight seasons.

This is all about consistently adding value to your workplace. When you’re perceived as someone who over-delivers, colleagues will trust you to add value to projects. If they need something quickly, they’ll come to you as they trust you to deliver work faster than expected. And if you miss once? They won’t kill you! You can miss 12,354 times—and twenty-six of them could be critical misses—and *they won’t mind* as long as you’re still adding value to the team in the long run. If you are consistently good and over-delivering, the misses are going to be seen as a natural part of the process. Adding value earns points towards forgiving

failures.

Yes, there is some risk that if you over-deliver, your colleagues will come to expect it. But if you don't, there's the risk that you'll always be on the sidelines, and no one will ever put you in the game. So, which is worse?

Be Honest About Your Abilities

It takes courage to say you can't meet someone's suggested deadline, particularly if that person is senior to you. Plus, some people just have a tough time saying *no* or being upfront about their limitations. This hurts them even more than an uncomfortable conversation about deadlines might. It means they're more likely to make promises they can't keep.

If someone asks me to do a chemical analysis on a new type of fabric, and I say, "Yes, okay, I can do it by the end of next week," I just shot myself in the foot. I don't know anything about the chemicals in fabric! I have to go to YouTube, watch a ton of videos to figure out what a chemical analysis even is, and learn which tools I need before I even start the task. It's not going to go well. I won't deliver. And even though people know I'm not skilled in chemistry or with textiles, they won't be impressed because I said I would get it done, and I didn't.

It would be better for me to say, right up front, "Sorry, I've never done that before. Can we do it together the first couple of times? Then, I can pick it up from there. Or could I work with someone more experienced? I don't think I can manage it on my own."

It is always better to be honest about your abilities, as it helps you manage expectations. If this will be your first time doing a fabric chemical analysis, you might not be able to

over-deliver; you'll need all the available time to figure things out, and the report might only be passable, without an extra overly impressive additions. However, you can prevent people from perceiving you as dropping the ball by letting them know, upfront, that this is your first attempt.

That's really neat! I think it's kind of comforting that you can try new things without the pressure of people expecting you to be brilliant. It takes courage to admit you're inexperienced or lack confidence, and some bosses aren't that easy to talk to. But this courage pays off when you set manageable expectations for yourself and ensure people know when you need support.

On the other end of the spectrum, if you are experienced in a project or task, and someone is trying to define a deadline you know is unattainable, you should—I mean, you *need* to—speak up. Sometimes the people assigning deadlines don't know the full scope of work and might not be experienced in all the components. It's up to you to align expectations and be upfront on best scenario deadlines and, even better, on the average time needed. Yes, you might be thinking that sometimes people won't listen or care, but it's still important to say it upfront. And trust me, when the project timelines fail, they will remember you warned them, and next time they will listen. This always improves your image of being truthful, open and honest, and contributing to the benefit of the team.

Manage Expectations Through Honesty

As a leader, I always prefer colleagues tell me upfront, within the first minute, if they will have trouble with a task. This gives me the chance to help them myself if I have time or appoint a third person to help, so they don't have to

navigate the challenge alone. It also means I can manage my expectations of the final product and its timeline.

Many times during my career, people have said to me, “Yes, yes, yes, I understand. I know what you want. I’ll get it done.” Then, on the day of the deadline, they shuffle over and say, “I’m sorry, but it’s not ready.” I don’t ask why it’s not done—at least, not immediately. I first want to know why they waited until the last minute to tell me there was a problem. I can’t do anything about it then! If they’d said something sooner, I could’ve had two weeks to assign them more help or change the scope of the task, but when we’re right up against a deadline, any possible solution becomes more complicated. It likely means I now have to pull an all-nighter or two to completely re-do the project. That sucks for me, and it doesn’t feel good for them, either.

I think leaders, managers, and colleagues always prefer you be open and honest about your limitations. Well, I expect this probably wouldn’t be true if you worked for the mob, but I believe that nowadays, fewer and fewer companies have mobster-like attitudes. Modern businesses are more open and engaged with employees than in previous decades.

You might not be able to over-deliver when trying to do something new and challenging, but you can certainly ensure you don’t ruin the way people perceive you. When you’re completely honest about your capabilities, you and everyone else can manage their expectations appropriately.

This can be most challenging when you’re new to a company, and you’re worried about admitting you don’t know everything. But when you’ve just started a job, no one expects you to know it all! Sure, they hope you know *some*

things from your previous experience, but not *everything* on your first day of work.

Yet if you tell people, from the get-go, that you know how to work the software and run reports, they'll believe you! They'll expect you to work the software without help and run just the right reports. So you'd better be able to deliver. If you're honest, upfront, that you don't know the software, they won't be surprised. You're new to the job. Why would you know it?

Vulnerability Creates Credibility

In addition to everything we discussed above, you also get the added bonus of creating the perception that you are an honest, self-aware person. That goes a long way in winning others over. We like being around honest people who are realistic about what they can and cannot do. We warm to people who recognize their limitations, openly admit them, and are willing to improve on them. I mean, we all love an underdog, don't we? Vulnerable people draw us in. Know-it-alls, however, make us want to back away and stop talking to them.

This means admitting where we're not confident actually has the opposite effect to what most people expect. It doesn't make you look weak; it makes you seem honest. It doesn't look like you're discarding your responsibilities; it seems like you're willing to learn and take on more.

Although we traditionally shy away from vulnerability in the workplace, it helps create closer relationships between colleagues. I don't mean vulnerability in terms of curling up and crying that you can't do anything. Instead, it's about being honest with colleagues—about your strengths and weaknesses, and in turn, those colleagues become more

open and willing to work with you. This also adds to your credibility, so when you *do* ask your boss to give you a stretch task and promise you can deliver, they will be ready to trust you.

Manage Expectations at All Levels

In most situations, you have the power to manage expectations. We've talked mainly in the context of new jobs, but this is true at all career levels. Even, and sometimes especially, in senior roles, I have come to the conclusion that I can't manage a task myself, and I need to bring in a consultant or help from another team. No matter what position I'm in or which task I'm asking for help with, the risks and the benefits are the same. It is always worth under-promising and over-delivering where you can, and being honest about your limitations where necessary. Managing expectations for yourself and others is a lifelong task.

And remember: the no is always guaranteed. If you don't ask for a few extra days on a deadline, you won't get them. But if you do, you have the opportunity to over-deliver and create a great impression. You create the space to do incredible work that adds real value to the company. And you earn goodwill so that when you fail—and you will, on occasion—your teammates rally around and help you continue driving towards excellence. Another very important component of over-delivering is around quality. Here, you should not under-promise, but rather be very clear about the expectations other people (colleagues, bosses, clients, etc.) have on your deliverables. Then, don't just do what was asked, but go the extra mile, strive for excellence, and over-deliver. That drive to do great work, have a great

attitude, and deliver value is what we'll discuss next.



DRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE

WHEN I WAS OFFERED my first job working directly for a bank in Angola, I already knew the bank and its people. I'd been visiting from Portugal for about eighteen months, on and off, as a junior auditor on a consultant basis. Towards the end of that stint, my primary contact at the bank was a lovely guy who himself hadn't been in his role for long, and who actually used to work at the audit firm I represented. One day, as I had my head down working on spreadsheets, he came up looking a little distressed.

"Listen, I need to talk to you about something. I have an opportunity somewhere else," he said. "It's a great job, at the C-suite level at another bank, and I can't pass it up. But it's stressing me out because the people here—they trusted me to take on this role, and I've only been doing it for six months. I can't leave them in the lurch. If I'm going to leave for this new challenge, I have to give the bank a good person to replace me." I thought he was going to ask me for names, or run some names within the bank by me, just to see what I thought. I wasn't ready for what he said next.

"I know you like being here, Eduardo. Your work is incredible. You can totally do this alone. I'd feel really good about recommending you—like I'd be doing the bank a favor by leaving them in great hands. Would you be willing to take on the job?"

I said, "If you're asking if I'm willing to move to Angola

full-time, then yes, I would. But we've got to figure out some details first." That's where the discussion started. My friend pitched my name to the bank, and they liked the idea. The person I'd be reporting to already knew me and we had a good rapport, so the bank and I negotiated a contract.

Hearing that story, you might say the job fell into my lap. In some ways, it did, but for a reason. My friend wanted to put my name forward because I'd exceeded his expectations as an auditor during the time we worked together, and he liked my attitude towards the colleagues and the job. The bank agreed with his suggestion because they knew I had a reputation for delivering excellent work. That wasn't an accident, and it wasn't because I was more talented than any other junior auditor out there. I definitely don't consider myself to be special. But I put in a lot of effort. I was driven to do excellent work, almost treating it like a personal challenge. Can I do this job? How well can I do it? What can I deliver that goes beyond expectations?

Over-Delivering Goes Beyond Deadlines

In the last chapter, we talked about managing expectations by under-promising and over-delivering. The former will help with the latter, but you can take the idea of over-delivering even further. And when you do this, you're indulging a drive for excellence, which can create opportunities beyond your wildest imagination. I certainly couldn't have imagined emigrating to Africa. I didn't think I'd get to manage a team of fifteen people at the age of twenty-five, and I would've thought you were crazy if you'd said I'd be an executive director within two decades. Sure, that sounds like a long time when you're young, but it's also

a big career leap in a country I didn't know and without any friends or family for support.

A drive for excellence is about delivering what people ask *then adding extra value* to your contribution. It's refusing to limit your capacity to think and, instead, letting your brain expand beyond your job description. It's not always about how fast you deliver but what you bring to the work. There are so many ways to over-deliver beyond managing deadlines, and they're all based on carefully considering what you're asked to do and how your personal thoughts can add value.

When you are on a tight timeline, this can be difficult, and when you're navigating new challenges, completing the request alone might use all your ingenuity. There might not be many opportunities to add value beyond doing what you've been asked. That's okay. There will be other times—and many of them—when you can demonstrate your drive for excellence and really over-deliver on projects.

Add Ideas to Add Value

At that first job as a junior auditor, back when I was just visiting Angola, my company had several key values that they drilled into us employees. One of them was: *Exceed the client's expectations*. Now, some people say auditing is boring. I don't think that, but I agree there's a closed system to it, and it often feels like there isn't much space for exceeding expectations. That's certainly what my colleagues and I thought as we rolled our eyes every time our managers droned on about it. We used to think it was fine for the consultants because they could bring in all sorts of ideas. But for us auditors, what more can you do? Change the font size or add some new formulas on the spreadsheet?

But management explained: most auditors comb through the client's financial reporting, find a problem, and state the problem. To exceed expectations, you need to discuss the issue with the client and help them think of solutions. You're still going to file your report, but you're also going to give advice on resolving or mitigating issues.

This approach has two major benefits. First, you're discussing the problem with the client, so they're not surprised when they get the report. You might not think this matters much, but no one likes to be caught off-guard, so discussion is a small kindness towards the client at all hierarchical levels, not just with the CFO or the CEO. Second, you're helping the client by discussing possible solutions. You're not just the annoying guy there to point out problems. You're the one giving them hope for the future. Even if you don't have the power to enact ideas, just sharing them is enough to be impactful.

When these ideas come from you, when they contain a part of you, you will amaze clients. You see, people usually ask for things within their known reality. When a client asks for a financial audit, it's often because they know—or at least suspect—there's a problem with their financials or need to comply with a legal or regulatory requirement. This is their known reality. When you add something of yourself to the report and its suggested solutions, you step outside of what they already know. You're offering something beyond what they can envision—because they don't have your background, knowledge, experience, way of thinking, or imagination.

If technology companies always did what their customers asked, we would never have had the iPhone. People wanted

better phones, and they wanted smaller, more convenient iPods, but no one was sitting around asking for their iPod to be *connected* to their phone. Yet Apple did it, and it resolved a lot of people's issues. No more trying to get the smallest music player possible so it would fit in your pocket alongside your phone. Now, you just needed one device. It doesn't sound that dramatic on paper, but just look at how many people have iPhones today or how Apple's product inspired the creation of so many other smartphones and even new business models, and you realize how impactful the idea was.

Henry Ford did something similar when he developed the Ford Model T, which is thought of as the first affordable automobile. If he'd asked customers what they wanted, they probably would've said faster horses or a better carriage. They wouldn't have asked for a car. That was outside of their known reality. Yet Ford's imagination (along with determination and hard work) gave customers something they didn't even know they needed but now couldn't live without.

You don't need to do anything as dramatic as inventing the iPhone or creating new modes of transport. Just trying to deliver a little more than expected will work. People will notice and perceive you better for it. Add extreme ideas or small suggestions, and you will be seen as someone who creates value.

Let's look at a more relatable area. Say you're working on an information analysis report. There's a fixed deadline, and you can't negotiate to under-promise and over-deliver on it. There's also a set scope of work. The client is very clear about what they need, so you can't under-promise

there, either, and honestly, you should never under-promise on quality or features. You should give your best pitch, put your best idea forward, and then *still* do more than expected. You have to meet their expectations. But once you're doing the work, you're going to come up with your own insights, and you can include them in your report. You can add your ideas, and since you know the project so well, those ideas will create value for the client. And hey, they can always discard your ideas if they don't like them—but there's a really good chance they will like what you've got to say.

Do this consistently, and you'll develop a reputation as someone who always adds value. You'll portray *an attitude of excellence*. Then, people will be more open to your other ideas. You'll have proven yourself trustworthy for delivering excellence, which will give you more leeway for trying new things. The impact snowballs. Knowing others trust you creates an openness within yourself, so you come up with new, bigger, more brilliant ideas. Remember that excellence is not the goal. (You will never achieve excellence.) It's about the process, the habit, of how you deliver an attitude of always creating and adding more value to those around you.

As I mentioned when talking about problem finders versus problem solvers, consider what you think of colleagues who you perceive as always delivering above your expectations. Or, if you are a client of a company that systematically surprises you with added value you didn't request or expect in the price, what do you think of that company? Are those not the colleagues you'd like best to work with, or are those not the companies you enjoy being a

client of? So... be them!

Overcome Hesitancy

If you feel hesitant on hearing this message, you're not alone. People can struggle with this idea for many reasons. Maybe they're not used to exposing themselves in this way. They might not believe their ideas are worth mentioning. Perhaps they're afraid of offending someone by stepping on their toes, or maybe their company culture doesn't like employees sticking their noses into other people's issues.

If your hesitation is social- or culture-based, you can over-deliver *informally*. Don't stick your ideas in a dry email but add them, quite literally, to the conversation. *Talk* to people. Have casual conversations instead of formal communication. Send the sales director what they asked for via email, then get up and visit that department. Pop your head in the door and mention that you just sent over the report, but it gave you an idea that you wanted to talk about. Use your emotional intelligence skills to judge how to have that conversation.

When your hesitancy is due to doubt over the value of your ideas, remember our discussion about risk. Yes, there *is* a chance that your idea might not work. The sales director might say you don't know what you're talking about. That could happen! But I think by now you know what I'm going to say to that. The *no* is always guaranteed. You will definitely *not* add value if you don't try. And what is the risk of staying still, refusing to contribute, and never improving your attitude?

Start with a small step that carries minimum risk, and add a little of yourself to your work in an informal way. Chat about things with colleagues over lunch, or make a quick

phone call. “I just had an idea, and I wanted to hear your thoughts.” Then, use your adaptability and resilience to keep going. Maybe eventually, you’ll find yourself naturally doing this in formal meetings in front of everybody! And perhaps you’ll keep it small, continuing to move forward at a pace that pushes you just enough.

As Excellent as Possible

When my friend put my name forward to replace him, and the bank jumped on the idea, I remember asking, “Why me? I’m a foreigner. You can probably find someone you know who’s already in the country. And I’m still relatively junior. Isn’t there someone with more experience on the team?” They responded that I acted differently from those they already had on board. They’d noticed that I didn’t just point out issues; I helped solve them. They didn’t realize, but I was putting my company’s key value into practice by exceeding clients’ expectations. I was using myself to be excellent—or at least as excellent as I could manage at the time. I wasn’t a genius or extremely experienced, but my drive to do the best I was capable of ensured my work was noticeable.

You have the opportunity to be excellent, too. Whatever you think of your skills or experience, you can push yourself to be as excellent as possible right now. Don’t just get the job done and go home. Contribute a part of yourself. Let people see what you’ve got. It will allow them to know you better and understand the amazing things you are capable of. You can always drive yourself towards excellence. In other words, excellence is part of your attitude. Always be positive to add value, always contribute to create more value, and that in itself will develop the habit of aiming for

excellence. And, as we'll see in the next chapter, this is also the antidote to feeling bored at work.

Conclusion

CHANGE IS COMING. That is one thing we can be sure of. We have no way of telling what it will bring, but in this fourth industrial revolution, we know it will come faster than ever before. And I think that's exciting! We so often think of change as negative, but the changes coming your way can truly be *improvements* if you choose to face them with a great attitude.

Attitude is about how you react to situations and how others perceive your reactions. It's what will help you be successful more than any technical skills you've learned. And the great news is that your attitude is not your personality. You can change your attitude without changing who you are, and this change is absolutely within your reach—but only if you're willing to *do something*.

Take the actions described in this book. Use these chapters as your personal pep talks, encouraging you to improve how others perceive you, so you can engage and work well with them. Remember that whatever your title, your job is to add value, and all these tools will help you do more of that. Start by growing your confidence—which comes from getting curious about the world around you and opening up to learning wherever you can. Curiosity creates confidence, and even small gains can accumulate to the point where you are confident taking on new opportunities at work.

Confidence, in turn, creates positivity. You will start to believe there is always a way to figure things out. And that positive attitude is contagious—it will snowball within yourself and simultaneously spread to your colleagues,

improving your own performance and the environment you work in. Be proactively helpful, and you will grow to meet any challenge. You are not defined by the challenges you haven't yet taken on as *you are not what you do*. You are more than your profession, and you can develop your capabilities far beyond the boundaries of your job description. It takes effort, yes, but you can improve your growth mindset, which adds value to you individually and to your workplace, which in turn makes you more valuable.

As you do all this, apply emotional intelligence to manage your relationships with and responses to other people. Develop your self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management to be less mechanical and more human, knowing yourself and understanding others. Ask questions, create rapport, and remember that not all people are the same. It's worth making an effort to understand your colleagues so that you can be stronger as a team.

In both team settings and your individual work, be willing to adapt to the changes that come your way. This will create the best chance of success. Your world and workplace are virtually guaranteed to change in this fourth industrial revolution, so approach that change with curiosity, asking, *What can I gain and improve in myself by taking this step?* Become resilient to these changes, and remember that even the best players miss shots—usually over and over again. The key is to keep going, refusing to quit in the face of “failure,” and choosing instead to learn from those experiences. Keep going, and keep working. Focus on problem-solving over problem-finding. Take action, even when you don't have all the information you'd like. When

you are problem-solving, you are engaged, positive, and incredibly valuable. You're helpful in every area you can think of.

Balance this by managing expectations: under-promise by participating in setting timelines, and over-deliver by consistently hitting deadlines. Earn trust and credibility by being honest about your abilities, and drive yourself towards excellence by delivering what people ask, then adding extra value, always and with consistency. Contribute your ideas and a part of yourself to the work. Whatever your skills or experience, you can be as excellent as possible right now.

This Is the Antidote to Feeling Bored

If you become stronger in these areas, you will advance your career, but you will also start feeling better about yourself and your work. You'll contribute to work in a meaningful way. You'll feel satisfied when you find solutions to problems. You'll enjoy better, more productive, fulfilling relationships with your coworkers, and you'll simply enjoy your environment more. You will also, most surely, discover new areas of interest and find yourself excited by things you probably were not even aware of before . You'll start feeling a hunger for learning that will drive this positive loop.

This is the antidote to feeling bored with your work. If you don't feel challenged enough, be a problem-solver for yourself and take responsibility for adding more value to projects. We all like to feel as if we're contributing to our environment. We like knowing that what we do every day makes a difference. Start working on these skills, and you *will* feel better about yourself, your work, and what you do in this world. Maybe you came to this book to improve your

career success, and the skills we've discussed will do that—but the bonus is that you will actually enjoy your work more. You'll feel more accomplished, more ready for whatever challenge comes your way. You'll simply be happier! And who doesn't want that?

It's easy to see this at play when we consider the opposite. When I'm in a meeting where we're doing everything against what I've encouraged here—we're problem-finding, being negative, staying stuck in a fixed mindset—I get so *drained*. By the end, I feel exhausted, and we've achieved nothing. But when I bring a positive attitude to meetings, even difficult ones, I leave feeling like there's a light at the end of the tunnel. I'm energized knowing I have a task to dig my teeth into and can add value to the project.

A positive attitude will propel you forward at work, but it will also impact how you feel as a person. And that's incredible because *you are more* than an employee. You are not what you do, right? You are so much more, and while these skills help you perform better, they will also leave you feeling more fulfilled in life. If that's not a good motivator, I don't know what is!

The No Is Always Guaranteed

Let's be honest here: the ideas in this book are not that cumbersome. Sure, some are a little intimidating when they're new, but we've talked about how to adjust the risk level and start small so that you can play with all these ideas without much risk. You can experiment and get curious without putting everything on the line.

And it's easy to get started. There's no checklist of thirty things you must do first! Consider the attitude you'd like to have and point yourself that way. Choose something small

from this book—whatever appeals to you—and get started. If nothing stands out, go back to the 360 Exercise from chapter one and begin there, or think of the colleagues you most enjoy working with and consider why you like collaborating with them. Then, start trying to emulate those attitudes yourself. Go at your own pace, but keep going. Tweak these tools to work for you, and you *can* do this. You should, too, because the *no* is always guaranteed. Perhaps you're sick of me saying this, but it's such a great reminder. If you change nothing, nothing will change. So, you have nothing to lose here!

Trust yourself to try these ideas. Believe you can do it. Whatever comes your way, you'll find a way through. You don't need to do it all alone, either. When you improve your attitude, your colleagues will want to work with you. They'll be thrilled to partner up and make progress together. You'll succeed as a team. Together, the world and your work will be a little less daunting and a lot more exciting.

Whatever challenges you face and wherever your job goes, these same skills will continue to serve you. Continue employing them at every stage of success. As an executive director, I rely on them as much now as I did when I was a junior auditor—and probably even more. You can use these skills when things *aren't* going great, too. You can mess up, backtrack, fall into negativity, then use the very same tools to come back from that. Your attitude is never written in stone—it's fluid. One or two bad moments will not ruin your life, so you don't need to fear them. Be willing to experiment with improving the way you approach your work. Take the advice on excellence and apply it to your own journey as well. You can always do more, driving for

excellence in your attitude, and in doing so you will create your own reinforcement loop of attitude-excellence-attitude.

Are You Ready?

Nobody will do this for you. The way you tackle the world is up to you. If you always carry an umbrella because you're afraid of the rain, you'll never see the sun. So stop mindlessly waving that umbrella around and pause to consider how you want others to perceive you. Do you want to be thought of as a negative person or someone who consistently adds value? The way others perceive you will be a major part of determining your success in this world, but you have the power to influence that! Positive change is in your hands. So let me leave you with one last question, and this is what all it's about: *Are you ready to do the work, improve your career, and really have an impact on this world?* If so, you can do it. You have everything you need for success. You determine your attitude and your attitude is your very own superpower!

Resources

Unemployment, (Re)employment and Wellbeing study:

<https://whatworkswellbeing.org/resources/unemployment-reemployment-and-wellbeing>

Subjective Well-Being and Adaptation to Life Events: A Meta-Analysis on Differences Between Cognitive and Affective Well-Being by Maïke Luhmann, Wilhelm Hofmann, Michael Eid, and Richard E. Lucas:

<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025948>

Measuring the Impact of Major Life Events Upon Happiness by Dimitris Ballas and Danny Dorling: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dym182>

Neuroplasticity videos:

<https://www.newworldai.com/neuroplasticity-gives-you-the-power-to-shape-the-brain-you-want-dr-lara-boyd/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpN1yQap_is

Why We Need Best Friends at Work by Annamarie Mann, published by Gallup: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236213/why-need-best-friends-work.aspx>

When Change Causes Stress: Effects of Self-construal and Change Consequences by Barbara Wisse and Ed Sleebos:

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-015-9411-z>

The Adaptation Advantage: Let Go, Learn Fast, and Thrive in the Future of Work by Heather E. McGowan and Chris

Shipley: <https://www.amazon.com/Adaptation-Advantage-Learn-Thrive-Future/dp/1119703097>

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