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# Transforming Classroom Culture

Liz Norell

For all the talk in faculty development circles about transforming our classrooms, there is very little guidance for faculty attempting to navigate the mindset shifts necessary to approach their work differently. We each want to create a classroom where our students feel included and able to learn to their full potential. Much of what we encounter in workshops and teaching books, though, focuses on teaching techniques. Before we identify the right tool, we must determine what exactly we'd like to accomplish. For me, the overarching goal is this: How can I create a classroom environment filled with energy, enthusiasm, curiosity, and a true sense of belonging?

Creating a classroom where each student can succeed requires us to begin by looking at ourselves. The professor in a college classroom holds more power than any other single person; how we enter the teaching space and how we frame our work with students will have the single biggest impact on what learning takes place. Our work will fall short if we don't begin by understanding how our mental and emotional states influence how we teach and how our students learn. As Harriet Schwartz writes in *Connected Teaching* (2019), we “have the responsibility to “create learning spaces and relationships that balance challenge and support . . . and to prioritize student learning and development” (p. 40).

Sociologist Irving Goffman argued that we engage in what he calls the “presentation of self” in different parts of our lives. It's as though we are inhabiting a character; indeed, Goffman talked about “front region” (i.e., the stage) and “back-stage” selves, the difference being whether we are within seeing or hearing distance of our audience. In these performances, Goffman writes in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), “we find performers often foster the impression that they had ideal motives for acquiring the role in which they are performing, that they have ideal qualifications for the role, and that it was not necessary for them to suffer any indignities, insults, and humiliations, or make any tacitly understood ‘deals’ in order to acquire the role” (p. 46). As a faculty member in a classroom, we want to exude authority and competence—for good reason—and so we put on this persona of subject matter expert. To admit a gap in our own knowledge or a failure in working with students would be to break that illusion of total authority and competence . . . in other words, to be vulnerable. In theatrical terms, doing so requires us to break the fourth wall.

The process of shedding our teaching persona and becoming a more authentic person in our classroom is what I call *presence*, and it happens when we narrow the differences between our front- and back-stage selves. There will, of course, always be differences

between who you are among your friends and with your students. The more differences, though, the more cognitive bandwidth you must use to regulate your behavior and speech, a point made especially clear in Annie Murphy Paul's book *The Extended Mind* (2021). That self-regulation steals valuable—and quite limited—cognitive resources from our primary task of teaching, which is to attend to our students and their needs.

To narrow those differences requires comfort with who you are separate from the confident persona we project when we assume the role of Very Knowledgeable Professor. Academia poorly equips us to do this, though. Inner work helps you understand yourself, your motivations, and your emotional states. The tools below will provide potential inroads to engaging with that inner work. Each is just a tool. Ultimately, each of us has a responsibility to understand ourselves in ways that help us be present with our students and their learning needs. As Parker Palmer counsels in his seminal book *The Courage to Teach* (2017), “Understanding my identity is the first and crucial step in finding new ways to teach: Nothing I do differently as a teacher will make any difference to anyone if it is not rooted in my nature” (p. 74).

Ultimately, by engaging in an intentional process of cultivating greater self-awareness, you will bring a fuller, more authentic self into the classroom. You'll be able to see your students more clearly, which will reduce their anxiety. You'll bring more positive emotions into the classroom, which Sarah Rose Cavanagh tells us in her book *The Spark of Learning* (2016) will influence the emotional states of our students. Your classrooms will be characterized by a more prominent sense of community and care, and all of this will yield greater learning. This is not an empty promise; I've seen it happen, and I hope you will too.

## Strategies to develop self-awareness and presence

### 1. MINDFULNESS

Those who lack a regular meditation or mindfulness practice might imagine that developing one requires Herculean levels of self-control or inner calm. But that's simply not true. Indeed, the human mind is *designed* to patrol our environment constantly, looking for potential sources of danger; that instinct is an important survival tool! The practice of mindfulness is to step outside of *judging* your wandering mind and bring your attention back into focus when you notice it's wandering. The benefit of working on this skill is that it can help you step outside of an emotional cascade when you start to feel caught up by negativity or anxiety.

One of my favorite meditations is metta meditation. *Metta* means positive energy and kindness to others. As a meditation style, metta focuses on directing that kindness to others rather than trying to completely still your thoughts. My favorite metta meditation is below, and it proceeds in several rounds. First, repeat the first four lines while think-

ing of yourself. Second, repeat the next four lines while thinking of someone whom you love and hold dear. Finally—and this is the hardest part—choose someone with whom you currently have a difficult relationship, then repeat those second four lines directed to them. (Prefer to listen? [Here's one free version online](#), though there are many!)

*(Directed to yourself)*

*May I be happy.*

*May I be well.*

*May I be safe.*

*May I be peaceful and at ease.*

*(Directed to others)*

*May you be happy.*

*May you be well.*

*May you be safe.*

*May you be peaceful and at ease.*

## 2. ENNEAGRAM

The Enneagram is an increasingly popular tool for developing self-awareness. While the scientific evidence behind different personality tests is sometimes debatable, as tools, these frameworks are useful to the extent that they help us come to greater self-understanding. What I love about the Enneagram is that it helps me see patterns of actions in myself, and over time, that awareness allows me to catch myself in one of those patterns and decide whether I want to persist in it.

There are a number of internet sites offering Enneagram tests to help discern your dominant Enneagram type. I particularly like a [free one from the Eclectic Energies site](#) (I recommend the “classic” test). I’d recommend holding your dominant type a bit lightly at first; sometimes we can mistype ourselves because our ego has so much experience engaging in Goffman’s front-stage self-modulation. Once you’ve got two or three guesses about your possible dominant type, the [Enneagram Institute has a robust website with descriptions and suggestions](#) for starting to recognize your patterns of coping with stressful or challenging situations. (They also offer [a paid test](#).)

## 3. PLAYING BIG

Tara Mohr’s book, *Playing Big* (2014), and her training program of the same name are designed to help women become more present and authentic in their lives—and to do so on their own terms. While the tools of Playing Big are geared toward women, men certainly also benefit from them.

One of Mohr’s most powerful pair of tools are the inner critic and inner mentor. Self-doubt and self-criticism are hallmarks of the imposter syndrome that plagues so many

of us. They spring from an “inner critic” that, for many, sounds like a loop of negative thoughts. Mohr emphasizes that the inner critic is not an enemy but rather a tender place of vulnerability and fear we each possess. Ultimately, the inner critic’s job is to keep us from failing, from hurting, from suffering. If we don’t take risks, we lose nothing. The compassionate response to the inner critic is to acknowledge the fear with which it’s leading; for example, you might say, “I appreciate your concern, but I’m strong enough to handle disappointment.”

The inner mentor, by contrast, is the quieter part of us, the part that knows what we want to do but is so often drowned out by the shouting voice of the inner critic. Mohr provides a **free guided inner mentor meditation** you can try yourself. The activity involves first relaxing fully and then envisioning a visit to yourself 20 years into the future. Imagine yourself, today, zooming back 20 years and giving your past self some broad advice about what to prioritize and what to let go. This is a potentially powerful practice.

#### 4. ANTI-RACISM WORK

I want to acknowledge that I am a White woman who has lived a comfortable life, one filled with privileges I have largely taken for granted. I’m not an expert on racial justice, anti-racism, or social justice. What I can share is that engaging with others—especially White others—on issues of race and institutionalized racism has helped me know myself better, which I can then bring into my work with students. My advocacy for this work has sprung from participating in several reading groups and communities of practice. I’ve read, listened to the wisdom and experiences of others, and tried to approach this with the most open mind and open heart I can.

As uncomfortable as this work can be, it is necessary. As Dr. Bettina Love writes in her fantastic book *We Want to Do More Than Survive* (2019), “We cannot have conversations about racism without talking about Whiteness” (p. 118). Indeed, she continues, “White folx cannot be coconspirators until they deal with the emotionality of being White” (p. 144).

I recommend finding others at your institution or in your social circle and creating a community to do this together. Keep the group a manageable size—eight to 12 has worked well for me—and commit to saying the uncomfortable things. Do not lean on a person of color to lead this work unless you’re prepared to compensate them for their time (and generously). This is your work, not theirs.

Additional resources are available at <https://www.liznorell.com/tpc2021>.



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# Recipe for Engagement: Connection Strategies That Work

*Hope Nordstrom and Julia Osteen*

Connectedness and relationships are important for students' learning experiences. But online instructors may be tempted to think it is too challenging to fully engage all of their students. How can instructors whet their students' appetites and keep them coming back for more? In this article, we set up the student engagement buffet by providing context indicated by research and offer student engagement activities as ingredients for your online course.

## Setting the context

Engagement in growth-fostering relationships provides a foundation for the development of both individual and relational competence as we build community with each other through connectedness and belonging. Drawing on the tenets of relational-cultural theory, Miller and Stiver (1997) propose that growth-fostering relationships encompass essential attributes called "The Five Good Things": zest, clarity, sense of worth, productivity, and desire for more connection. These five elements are at the heart of connected teaching and can be enhanced through meaningful interactions and growth-fostering relationships.

Connecting with others is not a one-time event, nor is it a big production. Hartling and Sparks (2008) encourage us to consider connection as a continuum. They suggest that connection is not an on-or-off kind of thing. The extremes at either end of the continuum highlight chronic disconnection or growth-fostering connection. But there is middle ground where conditions within a relationship can either indicate disconnection or connection (p. 171). Schwartz (2019), who builds her work upon a foundation of relational-cultural theory, helps us understand that we build our capacity to grow and create growth-fostering relationships when we build connections through big and small interactions (p. 147)

Instructors often find it particularly challenging to engage students with content. While this is true for most courses, engaging students online provides an additional layer of complexity. Developing a community of inquiry can support instructors with engaging students. Here, social presence (Akyol and Garrison, 2008) is a crucial element. It is concerned with building relatedness and considers how engaged the learners are with one another and the instructor. This element includes indicators of belongingness, such as a relational learning climate, a group identity, and collaboration among group members. Social presence helps us to understand how we can go about creating growth-fostering connections.

## Engagement activities

### COMMUNITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Community-building activities help to set a tone of comradery rather than competition. In addition, they encourage students to feel a sense of ownership in the class and influence students' success. Some might term these kinds of activities icebreakers; however, we prefer the term *check-ins* as the activities we suggest go beyond silly, get-to-know-you kinds of introductions. Instead, they ask for deep reflection and often include connections to the content learned in the class. Although there are many community-building activities out there, here we share two for consideration: Just One Word and Where Are You on the Train?

#### Just One Word

**How it works:** This activity invites students to consider how they are showing up for class. The specific question posed is, "What one word describes how you are coming to our class today?" We then provide students with a minute or two of private think time to reflect individually. Whether in large groups or small ones, the students share their words and why they chose them. We have also had students post their words to a Zoom chat or an online tool such as Padlet.

**Benefits:** This activity is simple and can be completed in a relatively short amount of time. It helps students consider their frame of mind as class begins since outside influences can determine how well they engage during class.

#### Where Are You on the Train?

**How it works:** This check-in activity entails presenting students with an image. Picture a train with people spread out inside and around it. One is back at the station house; another is running behind the train shouting, "Wait!"; another is on the train saying, "I'm working hard"; and still another is in front of the train saying, "I already know all of this." Instructors invite students to consider the class content and where they are on the train concerning that content. Instructors can have students share where they are and why in small groups or large groups.

**Benefits:** This is another simple activity that can be completed in a short amount of time. Students build connections not only with each other but also to the content of the course.

### BUILDING NORMS

Whether in person or online, a classroom has a set of implicit rules or norms. Building norms as a class provides an opportunity to clarify norms and expectations for students and foster shared responsibility in the course. In collaborative contexts, a set of norms guides how the group works together and defines the productive behaviors or mindsets expected.

**How it works:** The instructor can provide examples of norms or propose norms and ask the class to expand on those or add additional norms. While keeping in mind that everyone in the class comes with different perspectives, the instructor can invite the class to consider how they need to work together during the time together so each person can leave with information that is valuable to their work. The students can reflect on and record behaviors they consider ideal for working effectively in a group. After reviewing the class's suggestions and identifying themes, the instructor can review the proposed norms with the class and determine whether the class can support the norms before adopting them.

**Benefits:** Having a clear set of norms can build trust and connections among participants by making sure that everyone feels that they are heard and that their contributions and questions matter. Norms that are explicit to the entire group provide a structure for addressing behaviors that distract from the group's goals.

## DISCUSSION PROTOCOLS

A protocol is a way to structure a discussion so that it supports the learning of all participants. A clear purpose is made explicit and provides a scaffold for all students to be engaged. Teachers can develop discussion protocols for a variety of content including readings, videos, and images. Due to the richness that students bring to the table, a discussion protocol can lead to a smorgasbord of deeper thinking. Even though there are a variety of discussion protocols, we share two for consideration: Save the Last Word and Connect-Extend-Challenge.

### Save the Last Word

**How it works:** This activity invites each student to share one most significant idea from the content, have others respond, and then provide “the last word” with that particular idea. The instructor divides students into small groups of three or four. The first student shares their idea or quote and explains why it resonated with them (around three minutes). The other participants each have one minute to respond—saying what it makes them think about, what questions it raises for them, and so on. The student who began has one minute to close discussion with a reflection. This repeats for each person in the group. When debriefing the experience with the class, the instructor asks, “How was this a useful way to explore the ideas in the content and to explore your own thinking?”

**Benefits:** The process is designed for students to build on each other's thinking by sharing and reflecting on the ideas they present.

### Connect-Extend-Challenge

**How it works:** As students engage with the content, they consider the following questions:

- How are the ideas and information *connected* to what you already know?
- What new ideas did you see that *extended* or pushed your thinking in new directions?
- What is still *challenging* or confusing for you to get your mind around? What questions do you now have?

**Benefits:** The protocol helps students connect new ideas to prior knowledge. It also encourages them to think about questions they have or challenges they face as they reflect on what they are learning. This protocol works well with the whole class, in small groups, or individually.

For these and other student engagement activity ideas, access the [Recipe for Engagement website](#).

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# Walk the Talk: Design (and Teach) an Equitable and Inclusive Course

Ching-Yu Huang

The past 18 months (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter anti-racism movement, and our recognition of gender identity) brought us to see systemic challenges and disparities in higher education. The new emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion has pushed each of us to recognize hidden barriers and inequities that our students have been dealing with all along. In my desire to be a compassionate teacher, I ask myself: What else should I be doing to be “inclusive”?

Let’s take a moment to envision what an equitable and inclusive classroom looks like. As instructors, we see inclusive teaching is to build a welcoming, bias-free classroom climate, incorporate diverse voices into course content, and adopt Universal Design of Learning (UDL) for improved accessibility and different learning needs. At the same time, students perceive an inclusive classroom as a place where they can share different perspectives and express their voices, their diversities are being seen and respected, and they have equal opportunities to succeed.

Though it sounds pretty straightforward, inclusive teaching hasn’t been picked up as widely as we’d hope. Although you may be only partially conscious of your hesitancy, please take a moment to complete this [selective checklist of the 20 inclusive teaching strategies](#). You will be surprised by the degree of inclusive teaching you may already be employing or are only narrowly missing. After all, inclusive teaching is fundamentally *good teaching* with an intention to remove any potential barriers that will impede student learning and to provide necessary resources to support academic success of *all* students. It is above and beyond accommodation for students with disabilities or conversations about social justice issues. Many of us who care deeply about students have intuitively adopted some (if not many) teaching practices to support an inclusive classroom without explicitly knowing the impact they have on our students. But there isn’t a one-size-fits-all inclusive teaching checklist for our courses. Each of our classrooms, in fact, is unique on account of our different teaching styles, student populations, and disciplines.

*Inclusive teaching is a multifaceted approach.* This framework to achieve inclusive teaching is composed of five distinct, yet interconnected themes (Figure 1). With this framework, we can design a custom bundle of inclusive pedagogical practices for our curriculums and classrooms.



Figure 1. A Five-Theme Framework for Inclusive Teaching

## Theme 1: Build an inclusive classroom climate

For our students to feel welcomed and safe, we must build a learning community where they can cultivate a sense of belonging by developing meaningful relationships with their instructors and peers. This process begins with a deep understanding of ourselves (self-identity) and the impacts of our actions and words. It is necessary to recognize and admit our **implicit biases** before we might begin to unlearn them. We need to take the time to get to know our students—from their preferred names and pronouns to their career aspirations. With a self-created survey, we can always gather more personal information in advance of each semester to help craft a desirable classroom climate.

A syllabus with friendly tone and inclusive language (using “we” or “us”) always cultivates a warm atmosphere before students and I even meet. Since I noticed that students are often not aware of my intentions to promote inclusion, I now include a personalized Inclusive Teaching Statement to communicate exactly why, how, and what I am doing to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the classroom. An instructor’s positive talk along with constructive praise and meaningful feedback can help students recognize their “abilities” to learn and succeed, particularly for underrepresented students who constantly experience hardship and face challenges (Canning et al., 2019). First-generation students, female students, and students of color often receive less guidance and mentorship than their non-first-gen, male, and White peers. These pep talks and small gestures (micro-affirmations) have a disproportionately affirmative influence in their classroom experience, their motivations to learn, and their persistence and achievement.

To promote social belonging, we can introduce activities that prompt students to know and learn from each other (peer learning). One way I’ve facilitated this is by creating

casual chats during what I call “coffee hours” and “lunch hours” (names denoting a laid-back atmosphere) in addition to my “office/student hours,” where my students and I connect and build rapport. I schedule my coffee hours at different times of the day and switch dates occasionally so everyone has a chance to attend.

## **Theme 2: Pedagogical practices for inclusion**

Sometimes we have students entering our courses with less background knowledge than their peers. This underpreparedness is common for students who attended schools with inadequate resources or are financially disadvantaged, limiting their access to academic opportunities—such as advanced placement courses, boot camps, and summer internships—that are more routine for students from wealthier families. Traditional, lecture-based teaching can favor already privileged students and discriminate against underprepared first-gen and minority students because people learn best when they have a strong foundation to begin with (Paul, 2015). By contrast, a well-structured, active learning course provides interaction, feedback, and support that promotes comprehension, retention, and skill building, particularly for underrepresented student groups (Haak et al., 2011).

One way I assess and intervene in this imbalance in background knowledge is by assigning pre-lecture assignments (with incentives) to activate students’ prior knowledge and prompt them to identify concepts about which they need further clarification. For students who are introverts, are from other countries, or fear or are inexperienced with public speaking, preassigned discussion forums allow them to organize their thoughts and formulate their arguments in advance and establish anticipation for in-class participation. When students are prepared to engage, it facilitates equal opportunity for learning.

With my students coming with a variety of interests, experience, and skill sets, I encourage team collaboration and projects as well as formation of study groups to show how they can learn from one another. Inclusive pedagogical practices are those that promote student engagement and metacognition, embed effective learning skills and study habits into the course structure, and provide peer-learning opportunities. These practices offer underprepared students resources and skills they will need to excel in college, yet they are completely lacking in these students’ prior educational experience due to systemic inequality and disparities.

## **Theme 3: Equitable access to resources**

As a concept, accessibility does not have to be limited to students with accommodation requests but can apply to all students and their learning needs. While adopting UDL is a great way to accommodate these individual learning differences, it may not acknowledge unique student needs that we do not actually see, as students are often resultant



(or hesitant) to ask for help. We must make certain that all students have equal access to learning materials, resources, and environments. In recent years, I have adopted free and accessible learning materials and textbooks (open educational resources) for most courses I teach. When I introduce a new educational technology for classroom learning, I prioritize the free version or provide alternatives for students with financial hardship or other concerns. During campus closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I sent out a student resource survey to gather information on their access to internet service; electronic devices such as computers, webcams, and printers; and other learning resources necessary for them to succeed in my courses. If not, we worked together to find solutions to ensure adequate access.

Attention challenges are growing in today's youth. So, I edited my 75-minute lecture recordings into several 10–15-minute-long segments based on topics. These shorter video clips make it easier for students to pause for questions and return to content that they found challenging, and they can be reviewed in chunks that fit students' overloaded schedules. Adding captions to lecture recordings, in addition to benefiting students with hearing impairments, deepens engagement for international students, non-native English speakers, and students whose home situations aren't always ideal for learning (i.e., with lots of background noises). I offer multiple assignment formats (i.e., PDFs, Word docs and Google Docs) to avoid compatibility issues and accept alternative formats, such as image files or audio recordings, from students who rely on their phones to complete and submit their assignments. With inclusivity in mind, we can pave an equitable pathway for student learning before they even make the request.

#### **Theme 4: Diverse course content**

Representation matters! To achieve inclusion, we must broaden the range of voices that students hear and include in our course content experts of all genders, ethnicities, and backgrounds. When teaching biology, I seek stories and images of Asian scientists, Iranian chemists, and women biologists of color and discuss their contributions to our current understanding of biology. I address how the building of scientific knowledge is a collective effort by an international science community. We must design assignments and discussions in a way to include all voices from our students and encourage them to seek culturally diverse resources in their research. Diverse role models not only support diversity in the classroom but also encourage inclusion through our emotions, motivation, and social belonging. We all strive to be better when we feel we belong to and self-identify as part of a profession or community.



## Theme 5: Fair and valid assessments

In my early teaching career, I mistakenly assumed that all my students knew how to prepare college papers. It wasn't until I attended a **Transparency in Teaching and Learning** workshop that I realized how my misperceptions unfairly put already disadvantaged students into an even worse situation! Since then, each of my assignments includes purposes, step-by-step instructions, rubrics, and criteria with examples demonstrating levels of "high quality" as well as opportunities for revisions and peer evaluations. While we worry that our students lack many process skills, such as critical thinking and problem-solving, we also know that we don't acquire these skills overnight. Students who have not yet been challenged (or taught) cannot automatically jump through the hoop to connect, analyze, and evaluate for further applications on their own. We can provide classroom activities and strategically guide students to consider different perspectives, seek connections between ideas, and learn ways to transfer their learned knowledge and skills to new contexts.

Throughout my education, summative assessments (i.e., exams and quizzes) were the only metrics to determine how good I was at performing in my academic work. While we emphasize that mistakes are part of the learning process, using only summative assessments for student performance sends a contradictory message. Exams and quizzes, which don't represent the full scope of what students are learning, should not be the only way to track students' learning performance. In my courses, students are rewarded for their effort, dedication, and thoughtful participation (60 percent of their final grades), which captures and reflects their learning progress. This practice not only steers them away from extrinsic rewards (i.e., grades) but also rekindles their interest in what they are learning.

Students who are underprepared or unfamiliar with academic practices and resources (i.e., first-gen or transfer students) often struggle at the beginning of their academic years. It also takes time for students to become acclimated to an individual instructor's exam style and format and adjust their study habits when needed. Averaging student performance over time can punish students for these adjustment periods, which diminishes and misrepresents their actual achievement, even if they reached levels of content mastery by the end of the course. Recent discussions about "ungrading" can not only help us to refocus our goals on student learning but also explore fresh ideas for more equitable grading.

## Be authentic and innovative in inclusive teaching and learning

I chose a heart puzzle for inclusive teaching because our compassion and care for students form the foundation of this framework. Such an inclusivity mindset echoes the centerpiece of the heart and guides other pieces to fit together as a whole. There is no

one way to put these puzzle pieces together. If we pay attention to what our students need the most, each puzzle will reveal itself as a unique assembly that reflects our teaching style, student population, and classroom culture. Let students speak to you, and remember: you are making this puzzle together. We need to give ourselves permission to make small, incremental steps as we seek innovation. Inclusive teaching is a lifelong journey that requires continuous learning, adjusting, and evolving. I hope this framework encourages you to take your first steps toward inclusive teaching—and many more.

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# Online Teaching: The Balancing Act of Synchronous and Asynchronous Delivery

*David Betancourt*

Synchronous and asynchronous online teaching have benefits and challenges. Empowering faculty with the ability to best serve student needs in a virtual platform may include discovering a balance between the two methods. I hope that after finishing this article, the reader will be able to identify synchronous and asynchronous delivery models, identify benefits and challenges of each, and develop a plan to implement a teaching strategy for either delivery mode.

First, however, let us define the terms. *Synchronous* teaching is when the instructor is online and live with students for any part of delivery, instruction, feedback, activities, engagement, and assessment. The instruction takes place in real time. *Asynchronous* teaching is when the instructor is offline as students navigate content delivery, instruction, feedback, activities, engagement, and assessment. Most faculty who teach online may already be using a bit of both. They may be lecturing through Zoom in real time while requiring students to complete a quiz or test on the learning management system (LMS) by a certain deadline, then giving them feedback during the next face-to-face class or independently on the LMS.

## Commonalities

Regardless of method, successful online teaching and learning have common characteristics.

- Content should be accurate and relevant, delivered in an informative and captivating manner. Relevance could refer to the context of the information as it relates to current affairs, student experiences, or the sequencing of information as it relates to the course curriculum.
- Instruction should be clear, articulate, engrossing, and learner centered.
- Feedback should be timely, differentiated, constructive, and targeted. Differentiated feedback where the instructor considers written, aural, or visual formats in a learner-centered approach. Targeted constructive feedback is an opportunity to expand the learning process by providing individualized guidance toward the student's improvement.
- Activities should be accessible, student-centered, and participatory. The goal is for every student to have the opportunity to take part in an activity.

- Engagement should be frequent, interactive, and personable. Pay attention to how student respond and leverage that knowledge.
- Assessment should be transparent, available, and affirmative. That last one often gets lost. Consider the assessment component as another opportunity for the student to learn and you are already heading toward a more affirming assessment practice.

## Synchronous teaching

There are five benefits to synchronous teaching that align closely with the common face-to-face practices that we are familiar with.

1. The ability to model face-to-face lecture format
2. The ability to see and hear students (discussions, Q&A)
3. The ability to provide immediate feedback
4. The ability to guide and assessed group work in real time
5. The ability to leverage social components (relational teaching)

There are also numerous challenges. Here I address six of them, along with a handful of strategies to consider in meeting each challenge.

### CHALLENGE 1:

#### LECTURE FORMAT BECOMES STALE AND PREDICTABLE

Instructors can address this challenge by using multimedia—such as photos, videos, and memes—to vary their delivery. Another strategy is to create shorter lecture blocks. This could involve prioritizing content that must be delivered live rather than content that can be delivered asynchronously. A third consideration to remember is to be yourself. Often the screen creates a false sense of needing to speak or act differently than when you are teaching face-to-face. Mistakes seem magnified. But mistakes are human. Be yourself—mistakes and all. A fourth consideration is to keep the content relevant. Are you able to tie in some, all, or any of the content to what is happening in the world today? Can the students relate to what you are sharing?

### CHALLENGE 2:

#### EXCESSIVE SCREEN TIME

You can address this challenge by occasionally shutting off the screens. This is most effective when you give *students* the opportunity to turn off their screens. A second strategy is to take another look at the content and decide whether any of it can be “flipped.” This gives the students a chance to view and study the material on their own time.

**CHALLENGE 3:  
STUDENTS DO NOT ATTEND CLASS**

This one is tough not to take personally, but don't. We cannot possibly anticipate every challenge that every student is facing. Students do not often have a quiet place to study or zoom. They might be sharing devices. They might not have internet. There might be domestic issues. The list goes on. These have nothing to do with our investment but everything to do with how our students can navigate the course. One simple but impactful strategy is to reach out to students to see whether they will share their challenges. Maybe you can help. You can create a message template, so you do not need to reinvent the messaging every time.

**CHALLENGE 4:  
STUDENTS KEEP SCREENS OFF**

There are few teaching moments more disheartening than trying to engage with black screens. Encourage student screens "on" by explaining *why* you would like them on. You can combine this with having dedicated on/off screen time. A directive to turn screens off for the next few minutes can have the positive effect of students turning their screens back on when it is time. Again, don't take it personally. We would like to believe that students are completely prepared, dressed, and in a good environment to be on screen for the lesson. Experience has shown us that this is often not the case.

**CHALLENGE 5:  
STUDENTS DO NOT ENGAGE IN COURSE**

This is a challenge that holds true for face-to-face teaching as well. The strategies remain the same for online teaching. Leveraging the online tools in real time gives students the opportunity to engage in a variety of ways. Polls, discussions, breakout rooms, and the chat box can all be used as engagement tools. Likewise, enabling microphones (with etiquette explanations) is another powerful tool. Low-stakes quizzes engage students directly with a level of accountability. One of the most powerful strategies is to take the time to get to know your students. Students respond to teachers who care about them. Ask them questions.

**CHALLENGE 6:  
TECHNICAL ISSUES**

If you use technology, issues come with the territory. Practice empathy. When a student asks for an extension because their internet was down or the college platform was being "buggy," practice empathy. Consider the work you can do in setting up and running your course to make the online experience about the content, passion, and learning that you want them to experience instead of how to navigate the online platform.



## Asynchronous teaching

There are four benefits to asynchronous teaching that underscore this method as a learner-centered model.

1. Self-paced for students (differentiated learning speeds)
2. Individualized learning schedules
3. Individualized frequency of content delivery and instruction (contact points)
4. Coaching model implementation

Further, asynchronous teaching has the added benefit of giving the instructor flexibility about how they use and schedule their time.

There are also numerous challenges with asynchronous teaching. Here are five of them, along with a handful of strategies to consider in meeting each challenge.

### **CHALLENGE 1:**

#### **TIME MANAGEMENT FOR STUDENTS**

There are steps we can take to help students with time management. Embed guidelines for time management in syllabi, announcements, and assignments. You can give students an idea of how long the assignment could take or suggest completing it ahead of the deadline, so they have time to revise. If the assignment is large and can be broken down, you might add soft deadlines. Use the announcement tool frequently to keep the deadlines at the fore of students' thoughts. The announcements don't always have to be clinical. They can be encouraging in nature while still addressing time on task.

### **CHALLENGE 2:**

#### **COURSE MANAGEMENT**

It is imperative that the course be organized. That requires a lot of up-front work, but the benefits become quite evident the longer you teach the course (from term to term). Organize content, announcements, activities, and assessments sequentially. There is a tool on every online platform to do this. That allows students to work through the course instead of spending time searching the course for material. Have one central location (one platform) for the students to access, and carefully consider which tools move the learning forward most effectively. One more strategy is to encourage students to activate notification features so that announcements are received without having to log in to the platform.

### **CHALLENGE 3:**

#### **DELAYED FEEDBACK OR CLARIFICATION**

An asynchronous platform can still provide you with the opportunity to share impactful feedback with students. Some strategies include frequent low-stakes assessments. Including learning outcomes, objectives, and rubrics is also effective. You can create a feedback template, so the messaging is both differentiated and easily accessible. Any work that can be digitized may also allow for automated, immediate feedback.

### **CHALLENGE 4:**

#### **STUDENTS DO NOT ENGAGE**

This challenge and the accompanying strategies are the same whether it is asynchronous or synchronous. See the strategies under Challenge 5 in the previous section.

### **CHALLENGE 5:**

#### **SENSE OF ISOLATION FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS**

Relational teaching came to the fore this past year as students were feeling isolated, and we as faculty were finding that we needed ways to help students feel less isolated. Some tools that are effective include using frequent announcements, icebreakers, and discussion forums that encourage engagement. Taking the time to reach out to students through a forum or scheduled office hours is an efficient way to help them feel more connected.

## **Considerations**

Here are four considerations when developing your balanced online plan.

First, revisit the takeaway priorities for the content you are delivering. What are the most important concepts or skills that you hope for the students to take away from the course? Work toward those. Second, what can be prerecorded, and what cannot? Are there certain lectures, or activities in the course that absolutely cannot be prerecorded? Third, what can be automatically assessed, and what cannot? Creating an efficiently run course allows you to consider how best to use time that has been freed up. Fourth, how can you engage your students synchronously and asynchronously? This is the question that allows reflecting on all that has been shared. The actionable item is to then pick, plan, and implement an individualized, balanced teaching model that mixes synchronous and asynchronous methods.

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# Engaging Students in a Hybrid Classroom

*Heather Gilmour and Julie Wienski*

The 2020–21 academic year was challenging for all of higher education. Much like other institutions across the US, our college opted for a combination of in-person and online instruction. Each institution found a way to make the learning happen, and the different flavors of pandemic teaching all offered their own peaks and valleys. Our learning environment was influenced by our mission: “to educate the whole person in spirit, mind, and body for leadership in service to others.” Given that we were both teaching first-year students, the decision was made to keep our intro courses HyFlex to provide the students with some in-person instruction. In our discipline, sport management, students and faculty all expected and were familiar with experiential learning and active classroom settings. Additionally, ours is a small college that students have purposely selected because they will be in a “high-touch” environment, and they are excited for hands-on learning activities both in and out of the classroom. Establishing a classroom community became paramount as pandemic anxiety permeated the campus. Therefore, we each had to draw upon our professional experience as educators and former coaches to truly humanize the classroom.

## **Finding inspiration by being human**

We were inspired by teaching and learning literature and specialists who focus on the human element of the teacher-student relationship. Fink (2013) emphasized abandoning traditional pedagogy and adapting to the current idiosyncrasies of a situation. For example, “the real task for teachers is to learn about new ideas, identify what is good in the traditions of their own particular discipline or realm of teaching, and then create a new form of teaching that combines the best of both” (p. 289). This quote beautifully sums up how we as professors had to constantly bob and weave in our delivery of instruction, presence, and relationships with students every time we entered the classroom. Raygoza et al. (2020) reminded us to be present, listen deeply, make space and take space, be comfortable being uncomfortable, and cocreate norms. Essentially, the overarching theme radiating throughout was that authenticity and transparency were essential to creating a positive classroom culture and trust with our students. One of the best energizers and icebreakers we incorporated, with both students and professors participating, were temperature checks at the beginning of class (e.g., select your emojis and feelings for the day or week, indicate your rose and thorn today, name what’s going well or your appreciation item today). Seemiller and Grace (2016) provided valuable information about the optimal ways that Generation Z learns—for example, Instagram, providing avenues for accessible, abundant information, and offering choice between working independently

or in a group. Overall, Generation Z shines with facilitated learning rather than traditional pedagogy and prefers active and experiential activities where they can directly apply information from lectures or texts to real-world situations. Finally, the **K. Patricia Cross Academy**'s online learning resources offered excellent examples of both group and individual activities—such as scavenger hunt, Jeopardy, jigsaw, and Julie's favorite, "fact or opinion"—for class either synchronously or within face-to-face settings.

## **Real-time assessments in event management**

Ultimately, we needed to use teaching strategies that would emphasize small-group teaching, with low-stakes assignments that gave students the opportunity to connect with each other, with us as faculty, and with the content. Specifically, for the Event Management course, Heather was incredibly creative as that course had traditionally been highly experiential in nature. To replicate such experiential pedagogical strategies, which were hallmarks of our program, in an online or HyFlex format during a pandemic seemed unattainable. But reexamining the learning outcomes for the course helped to focus on strategies, assignments, and low-stakes assessments that could help to provide experiential context for the course. During the first two weeks and online portion of the course, students engaged synchronously on Zoom in activities that they could subsequently replicate and draw from in future in-class discussions about event planning, organization, management, and evaluation. The class was flipped, with readings and slides available before class meetings and small group questions and discussions completed in Zoom breakout rooms; each week students participated in synchronous online activities that lasted no more than 15 minutes, such as virtual escape rooms, scavenger hunts for items found in their rooms or homes, and Kahoot! games. The activities were deliberately easy. The experience rather than the difficulty of the activity was the focus as students were exposed to a variety of online and virtual events popularized in the COVID era, and they were able to discuss the course concepts as applied to the activities we completed in class. The in-class activities provided an opportunity for students to develop community during the online sessions, as well as a basis for future face-to-face and asynchronous online discussions.

## **Students cocreating learning**

The COVID classroom scenario, meeting for two weeks online, then switched to HyFlex that met synchronously online twice and in-person once per week, allowed for creative pedagogy that aligned with Barr and Tagg's (1995) "Learning Paradigm," where students were cocreators of their learning, providing feedback on each new exercise and pedagogical strategy. The traditional in-person classroom was static, with lectures, some in-class activities, and conventional assignments, but teaching in a pandemic provided the opportunity to take risks with instruction and required a heightened level of faculty-student



interaction. We got to know students better than when meeting with them only face-to-face; as we needed to establish a connection quickly so that students would engage with each other and with us as faculty within the synchronous online Zoom classroom. Yet we also needed to find ways to track their learning, highlighting the necessity of real-time assessments with low-stakes activities requiring students to work together in groups and then complete worksheets tying the activity to the course content; these were due the same day to help us assess and change as needed. Later in the semester, as we had to move more classes online due to campus outbreaks, Heather instituted “silent meetings,” where there was no pressure to talk. In these meetings students worked in breakout rooms with their assigned groups on either small or large projects, and each person had assigned tasks to complete. Some rooms were in fact silent, while in others, students would take the opportunity to talk with their group; what the students needed that day determined the room dynamic, not what she had assigned for the group.

The students directed the learning, and because we had spent time creating connections early on, they were willing to share their questions and comments and help each other when needed. Students learned more about us than we might normally share. For instance, Heather’s Red Sox fandom was a constant in her classroom, as was her affection for *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter*. She began each class with a current playlist for students to listen to music. By the end of the semester, she was receiving song suggestions, *Star Wars* references, book recommendations, and New York Yankee taunts as well as questions regarding events, internships, future courses, and college navigation. Students learned all about Julie’s Netflix affinity and outdoor excursions, especially trips to Northampton’s dog park. These first-year students were fully engaged with the course, our program, and the college, all while we were socially distanced, isolated, online, and constantly spraying sanitizer in our wake.

## **Moving forward—together**

Most importantly, this pandemic made us all completely flip our lives, relationships, education, basic needs, and maybe even our life’s purpose. We had to do things differently, think outside the box, and in some cases, do the opposite of what we planned or were used to doing. The two of us definitely had to do this as professors every day, and we’ve seen our colleagues do the same. It is our hope that these lessons we’ve learned about humanizing our teaching and truly, authentically existing together with our students, collectively, in this pandemic will not be forgotten. Higher education cannot and should not go back to the traditional, conventional trajectory. New trails have been forged—antinormative paths of engaging students to learn and grow. These new paths will lead us all on exciting journeys of teaching and learning if we stay open to these experiences, embrace these gifts of change, and be collaborative.

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# Put the Hammer Down and Build Your Teaching Toolbox

Jeremy A. Rentz

“The one doing the work is the one doing the learning.”  
—Many potential sources

**T**ake a moment and ponder how that phrase applies to your courses. Seriously, stop reading and reflect.

It took me a long time to truly understand how “the one doing the work” applied to my engineering classrooms. I was already doing student activities in class, but I didn’t recognize the learning power each activity could possess when designed and executed well.

For proper context, *work* refers to any talking, thinking, or activity during seated classes, live Zoom sessions, or online modules. When you lecture you are doing the work, learning how to improve your delivery, flow, and selection of concrete examples. When students are engaged in group work, discussions, and problem-solving, they are doing the work, which is when their learning occurs.

Again, stop and reflect. For the courses you are currently teaching, who does the work: you or the students (Figure 1)?

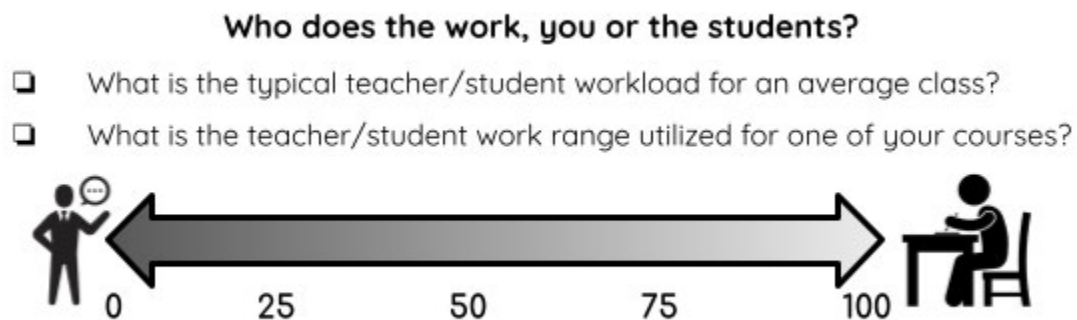


Figure 1. Another Self-Reflection Question: Are You Doing Too Much of the Work in Your Classes?

I run the gamut with respect to classroom workload. Students do all the work during some classes, while other sessions have students doing 75, 50, and 25 percent of the work. And I must be honest, I like to hear myself talk. For groundwater talks with local residents, I spoke continuously for 75 minutes; yes, they likely learned little. As with many teachers, the lecture is the faithful *hammer* in my teaching toolbox, easy and comfortable to wield. I am not alone; nationally, lecture remains the dominant teaching strategy.

Unfortunately, there are problems with the hammer when it comes to student learning. Lecture (student reading too) attempts to get information *into* students' brains. But thanks to decades of research in cognitive psychology and related fields, we know that the secret to meaningful, long-term learning is getting information *out* of students' brains. Often, *retrieval* is linked to this phenomenon (Agarwal, 2019; Brown, 2014; Lang, 2016). Keeping explanations brief, I offer the following translation. To learn, students must answer questions. To learn everything within your class, students must answer a lot of questions.

You may be thinking, "I assign many homework questions; I've got this." Potentially, yes, but think about the environment in which students are answering those questions. Imagine a table at the coffee shop with a few students, textbooks, phones, laptops, and possibly a class folder with assignments from your previous courses. When students complete homework, they can access many different types of information. In this environment, are the students pulling information out of their brains to answer your questions? Sometimes, yes. But more often, I would surmise that students are locating an answer from one of the resources at their fingertips. For some scenarios and tasks, answer locating can be acceptable and desired. But on exams, you generally don't test for locating answers and likely don't allow these resources. Further, when students are in their next class or in their job, they may not have access to that specific resource that got them through your class. For all these reasons, my translation for retrieval and long-term learning needs a qualifier:

For meaningful, long-term learning, students need to answer a lot of questions *without* resources.

The classroom is the only place where we can (mostly) influence students' actions and limit resource availability. So, to give students the opportunity to answer questions without resource temptation, we need to frequently put our hammers down during class and get students to do some work. We need to grab our pliers, if you will. Continually modeling this learning strategy in class will also showcase its power to students and, over time, convince them to study by answering questions without resources.

When you put your hammer down and stop lecturing for a moment, you also significantly affect another challenge associated with lecture and learning. As you ramble on during lectures, any student learning that is occurring diminishes. Recall the last conference you attended where the speaker droned on for 45 minutes. Do you remember everything discussed, or did your mind start to wander after 10 or 15 minutes? To combat this problem, you need to add breaks to your lectures, where you stop talking and put your hammer down. These breaks are the ideal time to ask questions and get the students to do the work.

There are many ways you can implement breaks in lectures and ask questions. Below are two strategies that have been successful in my classes and can be implemented without much effort in any course.<sup>1</sup>

### Think-write-pair-share

Think-write-pair-share (TWPS) is a simple but powerful modification to a commonly used strategy for asking questions during class. First, consider the typical think-pair-share context. Once you pose a question, do you really give students time to think? Further, students often want to get right to the pair, where they can lean on others for help, hide behind someone who did the reading, or show off their intellect. But when you move quickly to pairing, you miss a substantial opportunity to get every student in class working. Adding the **write** step helps address several of these issues, and it can ensure that everyone puts in some effort answering questions.

Having students write answers helps provide them with appropriate time for thinking as you can watch the students for visual cues to ensure all students have time to participate. Written answers also bring along introverts who may not want to pair but do want to succeed. Most importantly, handwritten answers keep students honest. In an ordinary think-pair-share, when a student hears the correct answer from their partner, they might think, “Oh, yeah, I knew that,” without actually having arrived independently at the answer. Written responses, more than thinking alone, force students to confront what they do and do not understand before pairing and sharing.

To ensure student participation, use student peer pressure and your instructor presence. Walk the classroom and give gentle nudges when needed. If you have large sections or poor active learning buy-in, you might collect answers for low-stakes participation points.

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<sup>1</sup> I would also like to highlight Gail Rice’s *Hitting Pause: 65 Lecture Breaks to Refresh and Reinforce Learning* (2018). During my 2021 Teaching Professor Conference session, the last group activity showcased several of Gail’s strategies, including Make It Right, 3 Connections, and Bag of Goodies.

## Let the students do the examples

TWPS works great for concept questions, discussion, and fact memorization, but most fields of study require complex problem-solving. In the classroom, this often means faculty completing example problem after example problem at the board. But as experts, do we need the practice, or should students be doing the work? Again, put the hammer down and **have students complete example problems**, either independently or in groups.

My students work through three or more progressively more difficult problems in sophomore-level classes after a short introductory lecture. Here, differentiation keeps all students working during class; not all students will complete every problem. Scaffolding is essential, and parts of problems work well when students try something novel. Three complete, complex problems are not advised. Students need practice with the newest and most important material, so make sure the initial example problem represents one of these small steps. Once students have attempted new material, they need practice connecting it with previous material, so add some complexity for subsequent examples.

Often, students don't do the work in classes, so you may need help with buy-in. Simply label the problems "In-Class (Group) Assignments" and collect them for participation points. Once students realize that completing problems during class improves their exam grades, you will no longer need to collect work.

When putting the hammer down, be intentional and plan each plier use. In my classes, all questions and problems are on slides or handouts, and I know exactly when and why each is used to get students to do the work. All questions and problems should require thinking and should not elicit an immediate response from most students. When students are learning new material, you want to engage slow thinking processes as students are novices whose instinctive thoughts may be incorrect (Brown, 2014). All questions and problems should also align with assessment. In-class questions should be clearly linked to exams so you do not waste students' valuable time with unnecessary material. Question frequency matters. Students are novices (Figure 2), and you have 15 weeks or less to help them progress to apprentices or practitioners. The more questions students answer without resources, the more they will learn. Finally, think about all the work you put in to become an expert. Your students will not get to your level during the course, and you cannot hold them to expert standards. Progressing is the philosophy for in-class work, where mistakes help solidify learning.





Figure 2. Stages of Student Development

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# Teaching Trauma-Burdened Students: Life-Balancing Self-Care Strategies for Educators

Susan Egbert and Sean Camp

“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as realistic as expecting to be able to walk through water and not get wet.”

—Rachel Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal* (p. 52)

It is a sad reality that many, if not most, of the students we teach have experienced some form of significant trauma in their lives. When we refer to trauma, we are using the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (n.d.) definition of the term: “an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.” It is important to realize that the origin of trauma does not have to be violent or abusive, as trauma is generally an individual experience that may manifest both consciously and unconsciously. Different students may be exposed to the same events but experience those events in vastly different ways, where one student’s reality is traumatic and the other’s less so (Imad, 2020). This individual response to trauma constitutes a student’s trauma “story”—the narrative they use to make sense of their experience.

As educators we are frequently exposed to these difficult trauma stories, and we feel their impact profoundly as we educate and support students whose moods and behavior (and educational engagement) reflect the pain they feel. In this way, their trauma becomes our stewardship.

*Trauma stewardship* is a term Laura van Dernoot Lipksy and Connie Burk (2009) introduced to describe the practice of being self-aware and intentionally caring for oneself to remain effective and avoid becoming overwhelmed by the challenge of caring for others. For educators, this means helping the students we serve manage their suffering without taking it on as our own.

When we do not acknowledge or address our trauma stewardship, we risk burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma.

**BURNOUT: a feeling of physical and emotional exhaustion that results from prolonged stress and frustration and leads to a depleted ability to cope with demands and feelings of powerlessness**

**COMPASSION FATIGUE: a deep erosion of our compassion and ability to tolerate the strong emotions and difficult stories of others**

**VICARIOUS (SECONDARY) TRAUMA: a change in how we view the world that results from repeated exposure to others' traumatic experiences**

Educators are especially vulnerable to vicarious trauma because we naturally become attached to, protective of, and concerned for the students we teach, mentor, and support. It is normal for us to struggle with concern for these students, the frequent reminders of the obstacles they face, and the human desire to relieve their pain. Over time these struggles can overwhelm us. Without realizing it, we may become hopeless, detached, and exhausted rather than resourceful, connected, and energetic.

Warning signs of vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue include hypervigilance, diminished creativity, an inability to embrace complexity, physical ailments, difficulty listening, and deliberate avoidance, and a sense that one can never do enough. The Mental Health Commission of Canada (2013) offers a mental health continuum model that suggests a range of well-being from healthy to ill (Figure 1). It is normal for educators to find themselves at various places on this continuum, depending on the stressors we experience and our ability to cope.

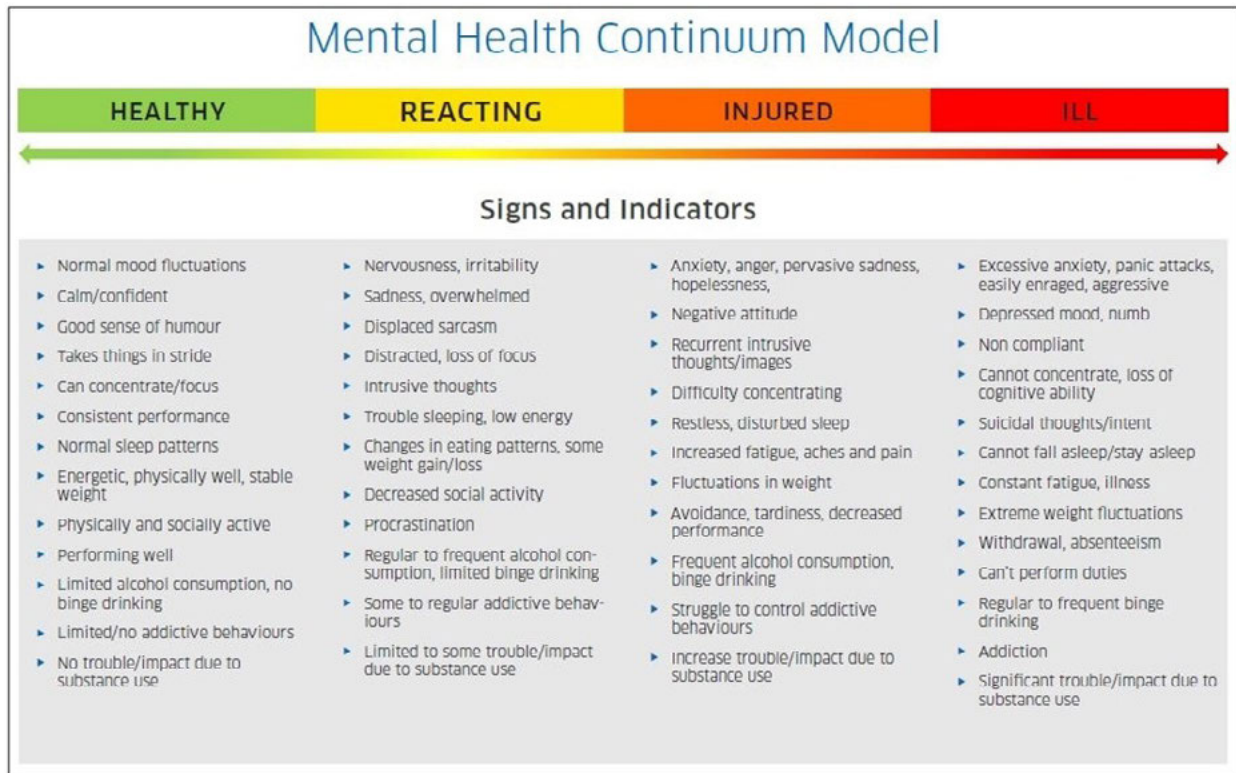


Figure 1. Mental Health Continuum Model

Note. Source: Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2013). The mental health continuum model. <https://uwaterloo.ca/campus-wellness/wellness-topics/mental-health>

By engaging in the practice of self-care through trauma stewardship, we can avoid time spent in the “red zone” when dealing with situations that threaten our own well-being and sense of balance.

## Self-care with intention: The practice of trauma stewardship

The following personal self-care strategies, adapted from *Supporting the Wounded Educator: A Trauma-Sensitive Approach to Self-Care* by Dardi and Joe Hendershott (2020), are good suggestions that apply to educators who are feeling the impact of being in the classroom with trauma-burdened students.

1. **Journal.** Journaling is a safe way for us to decompress negative emotions and situations as well as give ourselves the mental space to realize there is hope amid chaos and stress. Use writing to “download” and process your experiences as a professional educator.

2. **Choose your words wisely.** It seems to be human nature to criticize ourselves, especially in challenging academic situations. Be aware of this tendency and fight it; be intentional with your positive self-talk.
3. **Know your triggers.** There is strength in understanding how we react to situations that upset us and cause us emotional distress. Allow yourself to feel what you feel, learn to understand why you are responding the way you are, and know that you have the skills and experience to manage triggering situations.
4. **Unplug.** The quantity and quality of time we invest in our devices (media, gaming, social media, etc.) often leaves us in a worse emotional space than when we logged on. Be mindful and hold yourself accountable for the impact that the time and mental energy you spend on devices is having on your sense of well-being and effectiveness.
5. **Learn to say no.** It is necessary for us to create healthy boundaries by declining requests that create anxious, burdensome feelings. Be sure your *yes* to other people is not a personal *no* that drains away the mental and emotional resources you need to care for yourself and others.
6. **Learn to say yes.** Sometimes natural helpers are the slowest to accept help from others. Be willing to say yes when someone offers their time or resources to ease your burden.
7. **Be intentional with kindness toward others.** Acts of kindness are self-renewing for both the giver and the receiver. Look for opportunities, no matter how simple or small, to make someone else's day brighter.
8. **It's not a competition.** In her book *Rising Strong: How the Ability to Reset Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*, author and social worker Brené Brown discusses the negative impact that comparison has on our ability to be creative and to experience joy. Stop measuring yourself and your gifts against what you think others bring to the table; your situation is uniquely yours.
9. **Laugh.** "If laughter cannot solve your problems, it will definitely dissolve your problems so that you can think clearly what to do about them," stated Dr. Madan Kataria, founder of Laughter Yoga, in an interview with *Talking Concept* online magazine (Sweta, 2021). Laughter really is the best medicine. Learn to see the humor in the situations being an educator brings, find your inner child—and don't go a day without laughter.
10. **Know when to say when.** Educators are often known for burning the candle at both ends—continuously. No one can keep this up forever. You don't need a justifiable reason to take time for yourself; give the best version of yourself space to thrive.

In addition to personal strategies, it is important that educators have connections to colleagues who understand our situations and the unique challenges we face. The following self-care suggestions are useful when considering our relationships and interactions with others as we do this critically important work.

1. **Be a trusted colleague.** We all need associates who knows how to listen, laugh, and offer constructive feedback. Be a safe and supportive resource for other educational professionals.
2. **Avoid negative interactions.** “Everything influences each of us, and because of that I try to make sure that my experiences are positive,” said Maya Angelou in a 2011 interview with *O, the Oprah Magazine* (Deutsch, 2014). Don’t allow negativity to overly influence your perspective and change the way you view your work.
3. **Be a mentor, find a mentor.** The greatest benefit of mentoring is relationship—healthy, honest, mutually renewing relationships. Seek out others to learn from and pay it forward by sharing your experiences and wisdom with others.
4. **Forgive.** In the heated and stressful environment of academia, there are often intense moments and painful interactions in which we are not always our best selves. Forgive others for these inevitable episodes, recognize that they are only human, and don’t forget to grant yourself the same compassion.

When we view the trauma of the students we teach in terms of stewardship, we remember that we are being entrusted with their stories and educational experiences. We recognize that our potential to shape their lives is an incredible honor as well as a tremendous responsibility. Committing to our own self-care with planned strategies makes us more effective and reduces burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma.

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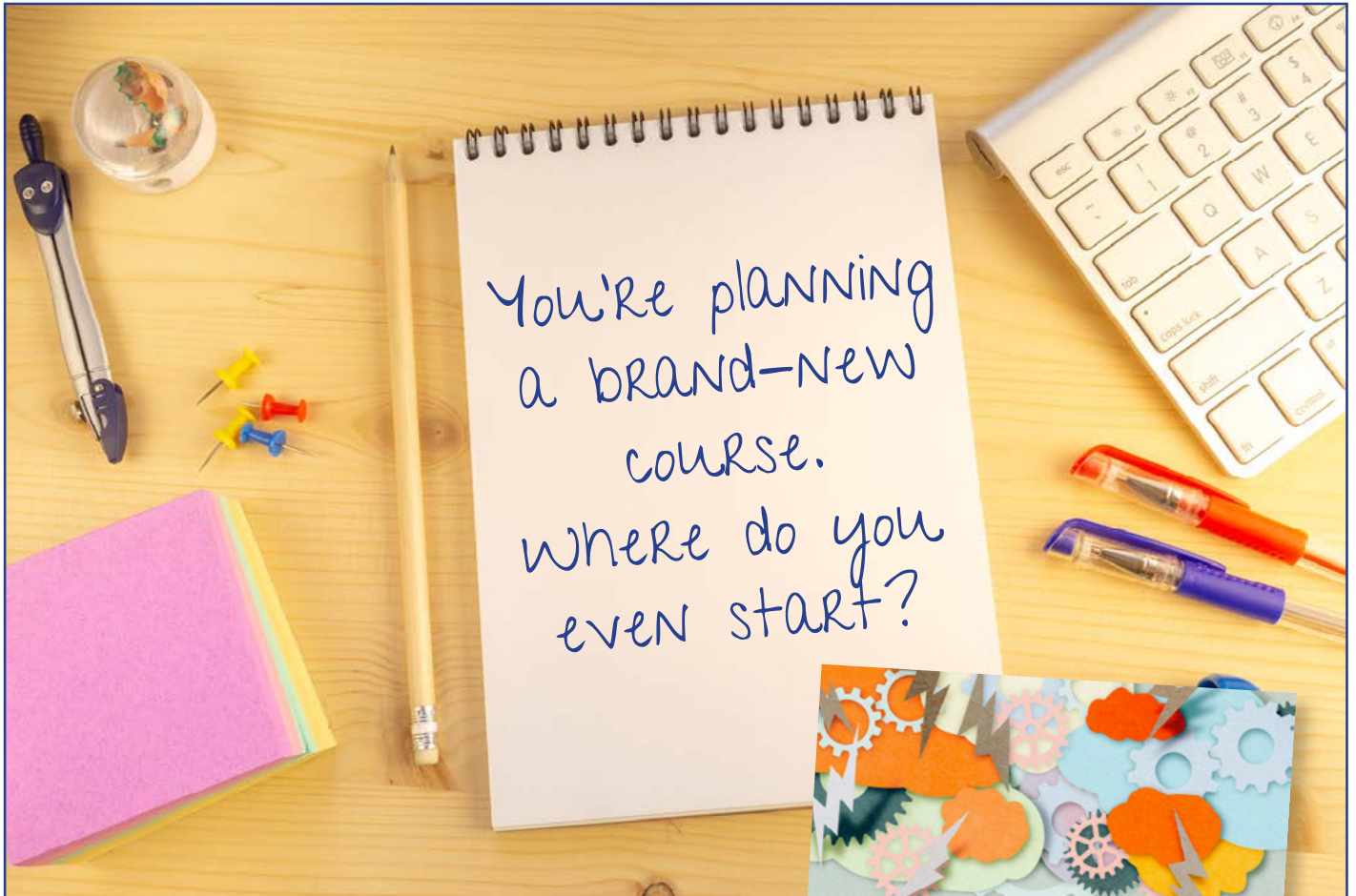
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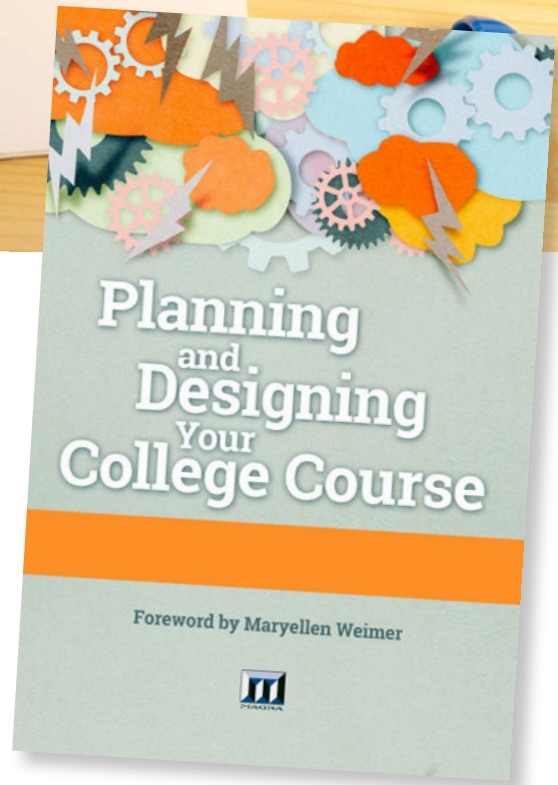
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# Seven Strategies for Embracing the Emotional Labor of Teaching

Ashley Harvey

While attending a student success workshop a few years ago and gaining strategies to connect with students, I thought, “What about how hard I work just to be friendly and kind?” Although the workshop was beneficial, it seemed like a foundational portion of my labor was invisible. What about the herculean, behind-the-scenes self-regulation that I employ to enjoy, not just endure, my students and to be an accessible instructor? I worried that other instructors were more naturally likeable but also hoped that I wasn’t alone in my desire and work to be a better version of myself.

At the time, I used the term *emotional labor* to explain the hidden labor we do at work and at home. I didn’t start thinking about strategies to optimize my emotional labor until I taught a new class on social and emotional learning (SEL) in early childhood. While teaching future preschool teachers about the importance of teacher self-reflection and emotion regulation in promoting children’s academic success (Katz, 2014), I was struck by the parallels to my own role. I decided to investigate emotional labor and translate relevant strategies for early childhood educators to postsecondary educators. What follows are seven strategies for navigating emotional labor in order to better teach college students.

## Strategy 1: Acknowledge emotional labor

In 1983, Arlie Russell Hochschild conceptualized and defined emotional labor as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (p. 7). Research into emotional labor has focused on service occupations and less on education, with notable exceptions (see Mahoney et al., 2011). Examples of emotional labor in service roles include being pleasant as a cashier or server and staying calm as a medical professional. There is also emotional labor at home, which includes being annoyed when someone is not doing their chores but managing to ask them nicely anyway. My own emotional labor as a teacher is evident in the tension created in being kind even when I am irritable. It is essentially an internal process to create an external display and this invisible labor deserves acknowledgment (Hochschild, 1983).

One way to “see” our emotional labor is to describe it with a metaphor. I often think of my large in-person classes as Broadway matinee performances. For online teaching, I imagine myself as an anchor for students who could potentially feel adrift. Other faculty have shared metaphors such as “flipping the switch” and “putting on their teacher hat”

or asked, “What would Mr. Rogers do?” Regarding emotional labor during COVID-19, some faculty have said that having fewer in-person performances decreased their emotional labor. Others have described increased labor due to managing their own, their family members’, and their students’ emotions.

Mahoney et al. (2011) studied several forms of emotional labor for teachers: suppressing negative emotion, faking positive emotion, and expressing genuine positive emotion. These authors found that of those three forms, only professors’ genuine positive emotion correlated with what we want: higher job satisfaction and commitment and lower emotional exhaustion. So, how can we cultivate genuine positive emotion so that we can enjoy our jobs more and have more energy? Here’s where we return to the strategies from early childhood education.

*Pause and reflect: What percentage of your brain power in teaching goes to emotional labor? Is there a metaphor for your emotional labor in teaching?*

## **Strategy 2: Increase self-awareness**

Katz (2014) suggests that teachers gain self-awareness in areas that include self-regulation (e.g., how we respond to stress, emotional awareness), their strengths and weaknesses as a teacher, and their beliefs about their role. In gaining awareness about my own self-regulation, I now understand that when I am stressed, I tend to stiff-arm everyone and default to *no*. I also know that I’m sensitive to criticism and prone to shame. Regarding strengths, I’m organized, but a weakness is that I cannot learn names (hasn’t Zoom been great for that?). In terms of my beliefs about my role, I became aware that I believed that email wasn’t my real work and was just an annoying detractor, and now I’ve come to accept that emailing kindly is a key part of my job.

*Pause and reflect: What is your self-awareness regarding self-regulation, your strengths and weaknesses, and your beliefs about your role?*

## **Strategy 3: Examine beliefs about challenging behavior**

Let’s see how self-awareness ties into our beliefs about challenging *behavior* (not challenging *students*). We all have “hot buttons” or things that students do that set us off (CSEFEL, 2013). For example, because my default response under stress is to stiff-arm and always be running late, one of my hot buttons is when students interrupt me before class when I’m rushing to get technology set up. I can unconsciously believe that the student is intentionally inconveniencing me, and I am more inclined to say no to their requests. Now I remind myself that it is scary for them to approach a teacher; I take a deep breath, thank them, and ask whether they can talk after class or email me.

*Pause and reflect: What is a hot button for you? What is your negative belief about the student? What empathy for students can you summon? What is another way you can respond and still be authentic?*

## Strategy 4: Reframe beliefs about students

An extension of examining our beliefs about challenging behavior is to reframe our beliefs. If our goal is to experience genuine positive emotion, one way is to reframe negative beliefs about students (CSEFEL, 2013). When I catch myself thinking something negative about a student, I try to reframe it (see Figure 1). For example, I remind myself that every instructor has different policies and course structure, or how challenging it can be to find information on websites.

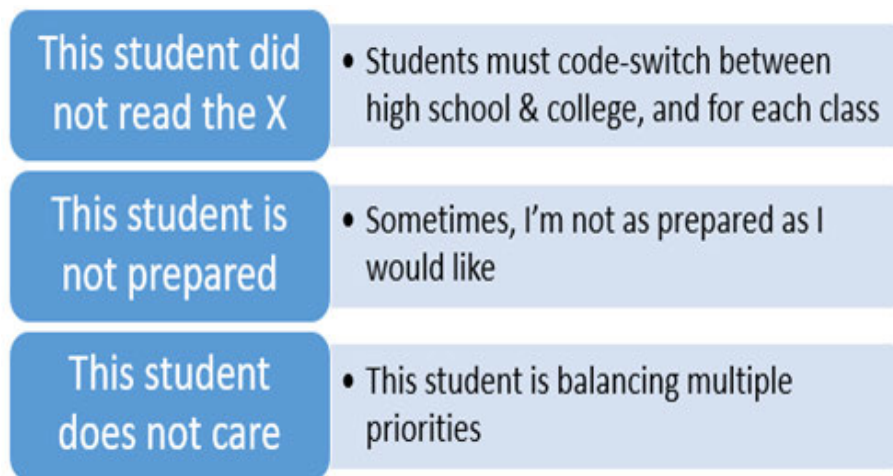


Figure 1. Reframing Negative Beliefs about Students

Sometimes I find myself in a faculty conversation where we are complaining about students: “Kids these days . . . they are not as good writers, not working as hard, not as prepared . . . as we were.” I think of a quote from the family historian Stephen Mintz (2014): “For more than three centuries, Americans have feared that the younger generation is going to hell in a handbasket” (p. 258). I refer to this as the student decline perspective, which I modeled after the family decline perspective identified by Stephanie Coontz in 1992. If I reframe students as *transforming* instead of *declining* (see Figure 2), then I recognize that college students are increasingly diverse, that students are changing and sometimes for the better, and that nostalgia is real (i.e., we probably were not as great as we remember). Then I realize that students have a lot to teach me and we are all on the same side.



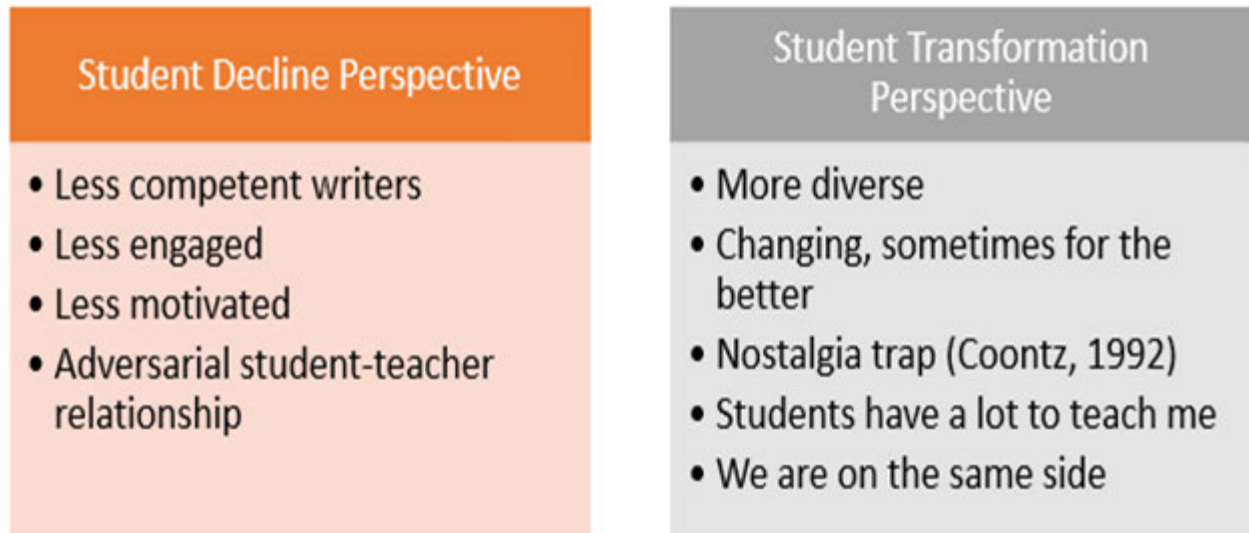


Figure 2. Comparison of Student Decline and Transformation Perspectives

Note. Adapted from Coontz, S. (1992). *The way we never were: American families and the nostalgia trap*. Basic Books.

*Pause and reflect: What is one reframe you use for a student’s challenging behavior?*

### Strategy 5: Practice positive rehearsal

To experience genuine positive emotion for our students, we can normalize our negative reactions but avoid rehearsing negative thoughts (“I don’t want to go to class!” on repeat). When I’m reluctant to teach, I use positive rehearsal to divert my negative thoughts and remind myself that students deserve to have a teacher that enjoys them. I remember that just as we wouldn’t want a preschool teacher who doesn’t like little kids, college instructors owe it to their students to like them. Sometimes when I’m stuck in negative rehearsal (“kids these days”), I rehearse the strengths of this generation of emerging adults, such as their acceptance of diversity, openness to difficult topics, commitment to self-awareness, and respectful challenging of the status quo.

*Pause and reflect: What positive statements do you rehearse?*

### Strategy 6: Identify guidelines for responsive relationships

Responsive relationships with students can promote genuine positive emotion (CSEFEL, 2013). To help reach this goal, we can identify guidelines for our interactions with students to fall back on when we are stressed or triggered. Here are some examples:



- Be genuine, curious, and empathic.
- Avoid defensiveness.
- Practice authoritative teaching: kindness with rules.
- Use a humanistic tone: “You are basically a good, capable person.”

We all strive to communicate with students in a way that preserves their self-esteem and promotes self-efficacy. When I’m irritated, I imagine colleagues in positions of power at my university who have interacted with me in a kind way, even if I have been frustrated or ignorant.

*Pause and reflect: What guides you in creating responsive relationships with students?*

## Strategy 7: Cultivate a prevention mindset

This last strategy is about preventing negative emotion. The clearer our course materials and policies are, the fewer challenging behaviors our students exhibit (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2017), and the less negative emotion we must manage. Developing empathy for how students code-shift between every class has motivated me to give students multiple pathways to navigate an online course. When students ask me where something is on Canvas, I thank them for letting me know about their confusion and ask them where they were looking so that I can put a hyperlink there. I also keep running lists of elements to clarify before teaching the class again.

*Pause and reflect: What do you do to prevent challenging behaviors?*

## Conclusion

An implicit theme in these strategies is empathy. Paradoxically, the more we can acknowledge and validate our negative emotions and reactions, the more we can experience empathy for our students. If we can experience genuine positive emotion rather than just suppress our negative feelings or fake positivity, then we can enjoy our jobs more and for longer.

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