INTRODUCTION

This reality is the difference between fleeting happiness and a permanent mindset that fosters success in every personal and professional endeavor. The goal of this book is to help you become a positive genius so that you can achieve true greatness in every aspect of your life and career.

the power of positive genius

Before I was born, my father, who was a neuroscientist at UC Irvine at the time, made me an unwilling subject of one of the very first EEG experiments conducted on an unborn child. He and his colleagues hooked up electrodes to the belly of my very pregnant (and clearly very patient) mom to see if they could detect and analyze my brain wave patterns. The tests failed (I'm not sure what that says about my brain), but some influences in our lives run deep. Even before birth, I was wired for a love of psychology and science.

A mere six years later, I willingly volunteered for another neuroscience experiment, which, though of course I had no way of knowing it at the time, would ultimately lead to the writing of this book. By that point my father was a professor at Baylor University. All of my babysitters happened to be students from his introductory psychology classes, and I was in love with all of them. But as I slowly started realizing that my relationships with them weren't going as well as I'd hoped (for instance, my parents had
to pay the girls at the end of the date), I decided—after observing
the successes of Ariel in The Little Mermaid—that I would need
to become part of their world. So I asked my dad if I could be part
of one his classroom demonstrations. He was so excited that his
son might be following in his footsteps that he didn’t stop to won-
der if I had ulterior motives—as indeed I did.

Regardless, he brought me to Baylor University for one of his
famous lectures. I remember sitting in the bulgy, brown chair in
front of the class as he attached electrode after electrode to my
scalp with conductive jelly. I didn’t care; I was just happy because
all of my girlfriends’ eyes were on me.

But in his excitement about having his son in class, my dad
made a simple mistake. He forgot to ground the wire and left it
lying across a copper strip on the floor. When he turned on the
machine, the current passed right through me—it was as though
I had stuck my finger in a socket. To this day, I don’t blame my
dad for shocking me. I do blame him for laughing along with the
entire class as I angrily pulled off all my electrodes and strode off
with as much indignation as a six-year-old could muster.

Not surprisingly, I never did get to date any of his students.
But I am grateful to my dad nonetheless for hooking me up to
that torture machine, because his experiments gave me a lifelong
fascination with studying how the brain perceives the world. That
evil instrument was a primitive evoked potential machine, a device
that records the electrical activity along the scalp, thus allowing
neuroscientists to measure and record levels of activity in the
brain as it processes stimuli from the external world.

Look around at the people in your office, on the subway, sit-
ing across from you at the cafe. Have you ever wondered if the
world you see is the same one they see? Have you worked with a
stressed manager who constantly points out only the flaws and

none of the good, or spent time with a relative during the hol-
days who complains about everything despite being surrounded
by love, and thought to yourself: How could they possibly see the
world that way?

The reason some people see the world so differently from
others is that the human brain doesn’t just take a picture of the
external world like a camera; it is constantly interpreting and
processing the information it receives. Every time the world pro-
vides us with information, whether the report of a down stock
market, a stressful e-mail, or a smiling coworker, our brains ex-
pend energy creating our understanding of this information. This
energy is called “evoked potential,” and EEGs were some of the
first instruments that allowed us to peek behind the curtain and
better understand this process.

While the human brain receives eleven million pieces of in-
formation every second from our environment, it can process only
forty bits per second, which means it has to choose what tiny per-
centage of this input to process and attend to, and what huge
chunk to dismiss or ignore. Thus your reality is a choice; what
you choose to focus on shapes how you perceive and interpret your
world.

Today, using EEGs, fMRIs, and eye-tracking machines, we
have the ability to measure and study those energy patterns. And
more important, we are now learning how to change these energy
patterns to help us create a more positive interpretation of the
world around us.

This is key, because the better your brain is at using its energy to
focus on the positives, the greater your chances at success.

This book is all about how to evoke your potential, by changing
your mindset.
EVOKE POTENTIAL

The goal of science is prediction. If you take vitamin 
C, doctors want to be able to predict whether it will lower your chances of getting a cold. If you drop a bowling ball at one hundred feet, physicists want to predict how hard it will hit the ground.

The goal of business is to build revenue and create sustainable, growing income. Since a business can only be as successful as the people working in it, companies have long sought a way to use science to predict high performance in individuals. Yet for all the research that has been done on the topic, no theory has ever been able to fully explain the science of human potential—until now.

Back in the nineteenth century, Sir Francis Galton was among the first to study how our brains' energy patterns predicted performance. Without the aid of EEGs, of course, he posited that intelligence could be quantified and predicted by the speed of the brain’s processing system. The faster your brain is at discerning sensory stimuli and reacting, he hypothesized, the smarter you are. But of course, reaction time is only one small piece of the complex equation of human intelligence.

From the 1920s through the 1980s, scientists thought potential could be measured by IQ, which was basically just a measure of one’s verbal and math skills. So businesses and governments poured money into pumping up math and reading in public schools and shut down the arts and music programs. HR departments designed tests based upon IQ, then hired everyone from salespeople to CEOs using those same yardsticks of intelligence.

Problem was, they had it all wrong. As it turns out, IQ and technical skills combined predict only 20 to 25 percent of job success. That means that over 75 percent of your career outcome has nothing to do with your intelligence and training—which is a huge problem because in a down economy companies spend a majority of their training budgets attempting to raise employee intelligence and technical skills. This money, scientifically speaking, is irresponsibly spent.

So how else can we predict professional success? If IQ is a bad predictor, maybe SAT scores, a more modern testing tool, would be better? Not the case. As a matter of fact, they are much worse. SAT scores predict only 8 to 15 percent of college freshmen’s GPA, which means that for around 88.5 percent of college students SAT scores are no better at predicting academic success than a pair of dice. (Again, it is a shame that we waste hours and hours preparing for predictive tests that are not actually predictive.)

The next metric businesses tried to use to predict prospective employees’ performance was grades. High school grades are twice as predictive of college success as SAT scores. Great, grades must predict potential for future success in the workplace too, right? Thomas J. Stanley, PhD, author of The Millionaire Mind, begs to differ. After a decade of research, he found no correlation between grades and professional success: a coin flip would be as predictive of greatness as grades. This explains the oft-cited paradox that so many C students in business school end up running companies and so many A students end up working for them.

Enter researchers like Howard Gardner and Peter Salovey. Gardner was the first to argue that the ability to understand one’s own feelings as well as the feelings of others was more important than IQ. In 1990, two psychologists, Peter Salovey at Yale (whom you will read more about later) and John D. Mayer at the University of New Hampshire, published an earth-shattering paper arguing that the predictive value of IQ was low and that the ability to understand feelings was a far greater predictor of human potential. They dubbed this emotional intelligence.
Most of you are probably familiar with emotional intelligence. It refers to your ability to regulate your emotions, and for the past two decades it has been thought to be the key to succeeding in the often stressful and volatile world of business. Spurred on by Daniel Goleman’s internationally bestselling book *Emotional Intelligence*, which popularized research like Salovey’s, companies all over the world began testing employees’ and potential employees’ emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) instead of IQ. The big debate among academics and at companies became, Which is more important, IQ or EQ? This is where society and science took a major wrong turn. Now, please do not misunderstand, I think emotional intelligence was one of the best theories to come out of psychology labs in the 1990s. But the question of which kind of intelligence was more important was the wrong one.

Soon, Gardner introduced his second main category of intelligence, the ability to understand and relate to other people. He called it “social intelligence,” and again, Goleman introduced it to the business world with his bestselling book *Social Intelligence*. Again, the science was valid, but its value as a predictor of potential was undercut by the misguided “which is most important” debate.

Companies and researchers have been arguing this question ever since. Which is most important: IQ, emotional intelligence, or social intelligence? This is talking in circles. It’s like asking which is more important in sports, offense or defense, or who is more important to a business, clients or employees. To be truly successful, instead of thinking about intelligence in isolation, we need to focus on how to combine all our intelligences.

Once I immersed myself in the research, it couldn’t have been clearer. Yes, all these intelligences matter, but what matters most is how your brain knits them together. Thus the question should not be, which intelligence is most important, but how we can learn to harness and amplify them.

THE PRISM OF SUCCESS

How can you predict or measure greatness?

The question is not merely a preoccupation of today’s leaders seeking to take their teams or companies from good to great; it’s been around since the dawn of civilization. In fact, it was addressed by the very first ancient Greek philosopher.

Thales of Miletus had a problem: he wanted to figure out how great the Great Pyramid was. But as it was the tallest building created (and would be for another thousand years!), he could hardly measure its height with a tape measure. And sadly, he had no Internet service, so Wikipedia was out.

So how do you figure out how tall the Great Pyramid is without the ability to measure it?

Any ideas? I didn’t figure it out at first, which might explain my geometry grade in high school. Fortunately, Thales did. He thought, What if I measure the length of the pyramid’s shadow? If I could do that, then perhaps I could calculate the missing leg of the pyramid.

But as the sun moved, the shadow of the Great Pyramid would shorten or lengthen, so he soon realized he needed another piece of information: when the sun was in perfect position where the height of the pyramid and its shadow would be equal (an isosceles triangle, for those of you who like geometry). Thus he merely stuck a stick in the ground, measured the height of the stick, then waited all day until the sun made a shadow exactly equal to the height of the stick. At that precise moment, the pyramid’s shadow would be equal to the height of the pyramid.
I started working with companies in the midst of the Great Recession to find the missing dimension. At first my goal was to help companies stop making the mistake of arguing about which side of the triangle was most valuable. But I couldn’t stop there, because I was still left with some really important questions: What are emotions based upon? Where does a person’s perception of the world, which is not an emotion, fit in? And most important, what predicts how a person will use all three of the intelligences to create greatness?

After five years of extensive research, it all finally clicked: the hidden leg of the triangle—the one that allows us to summon, combine, and amplify these three existing intelligences—is the ability to see a reality in which success is possible.

There’s no question that emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and IQ have an impact on our success rates. But these all arise from one place: our underlying reality. Before you feel an emotion about the world, before you connect to another person, before you begin solving a problem, your brain has already created a reality about whether success can be achieved. That reality is the key to everything. It is what lets you see opportunities instead of obstacles, new roads instead of dead ends, paths to success instead of failure.

While I was consulting out in California, one of the senior innovation leaders at Google told me he felt that “some people just saw a different reality at work, which changed how much they could lead or innovate.” He was right. Everything we do in business and in life is largely determined by our underlying reality, or our mindset. In other words, positive genius isn’t just the amplifier of all other forms of intelligences; it’s also the precursor.

This book does not negate all the research on IQ and emotional and social intelligence. Your IQ reaches you what you need to do,
emotional intelligence shows how, and social intelligence illuminates with whom. Those three intelligences are the legs of your “triangle of success.” But if you want to amplify your potential, you need to turn that two-dimensional triangle of success into a three-dimensional prism by constructing a positive reality first.

After all, you can have all the IQ and emotional and social intelligence in the world, but if you believe that your behavior doesn’t matter, then you’ll never bother to apply all those cognitive, social, emotional, and intellectual resources to accomplish your goals. Everyone knows someone like this, someone who has all the core intelligences but never uses them because he doesn’t believe it would make a difference anyway. Unused intelligence, whether in a smart but unmotivated employee, a brilliant but disengaged student, or a visionary but disaffected leader, does nothing to evoke your potential.

Other people are experts at creating positive realities. These are the people who seem to have the Midas touch at work, the people who turn every opportunity, every relationship, every setback to gold. They are the people who continually find new possibilities to pounce on. They are the ones who discover ways around the obstacles that seem most insurmountable, the ones who solve the problems that seem most intractable.

It’s not that they don’t see the negative realities in the world, it’s that they also see they have the ability to do something about them. They can see the tragedy in the earthquake in Japan or understand the difficulty in treating breast cancer or recognize the racial injustices in our educational system—but they are also the ones who search for ways to help the survivors or raise money for medical research or continue to work to invent a more fair system. These people are what I call positive geniuses, and in this book I’ll show you how you can become one as well.

Only once we can see and construct a reality in which we have the power to create positive change—one in which our behavior matters—can we truly summon and utilize the entirety of our brain’s abilities and intelligences to achieve ever-greater success and happiness. Success, then, is not just about how much intelligence you have; it’s about how much of your intelligence you believe you can use.

This change to the way we approach intelligence changes everything. Every single business outcome—from sales volume to customer retention to revenue growth to career advancement—and even every personal outcome—from relationship quality to life satisfaction to better health—are governed by this basic equation. By mastering the five skills in this book, you will learn to turn your own triangle of intelligences into a prism of success.

Along the way I will share research showing how these skills have been used to quadruple sales at call centers, increase engagement at companies by 31 percent, raise accuracy rates among doctors by 19 percent, lower fatigue by 23 percent, increase customers’ likelihood to refer by nearly 30 percent, significantly improve customer satisfaction, increase the likelihood of living to age ninety-four, raise the likelihood of a promotion by 40 percent, and even more.

But that isn’t the end of the story. Not only can positive genius help us see a greater range of opportunities, solutions, and routes to success, it can help others—our colleagues, our teams, our families—do so as well. Exciting new research proves that by sharing our own positive reality we can help others architect theirs, exponentially increasing the amount of collective intelligence we have available. You’ll learn how to reap the benefits of this later in the book, using a technique called positive inception.

And here’s some great news: It doesn’t matter how many advanced degrees you have or how socially adept you are or how
BEYOND OPTIMISM: SEEING THE FULL PITCHER

In November of 2011, I got an exciting e-mail. The Harvard Business Review wrote to tell me that my research on the happiness advantage was going to be on the cover of their magazine for January/February 2012! The whole issue would be dedicated to how happiness leads to successful business outcomes. As I worked on crafting the article, I thought to myself, *Finally, this research is making it into the mainstream of business understanding and leadership. We need people to take it seriously. I just hope they don't put a big smiley face on the cover. No way they'd do that.*

When I received my copy just in time for Christmas, I had to laugh. Sure enough, I was staring at a large smiley face, with dollar sign dimples. But then I saw it: look at this cover, what’s wrong with this picture? The smiley face has no eyes! It is blind happiness. This is exactly what’s wrong with most people’s understanding of happiness in the workplace. Happiness is not about being blind to the negatives in our environment; it’s about believing we have the power to do something about them.

Once, after I gave a lecture at a large tech company, the cheerful CEO generously offered to take me to the airport so we could keep talking about how to apply my research at his company. I got into his beautiful black Escalade and put on my seat belt. He jumped in, but he didn’t put on his, even when the seat belt alarm started chiming over and over. I had just met this CEO, but I decided to ask, “You don’t wear seat belts?” And he energetically said, “No, I’m an optimist!”

That’s not optimism, that’s insanity. Optimism is good for many things, but it will definitely not keep other cars from hitting you or keep you from flying through the windshield. That is irrational optimism. An irrational optimist has a vision of reality based on desire and delusion, not how things actually are. Irrational optimism is why financial bubbles form, why we buy homes we can’t afford, and why we prematurely put up banners that say “Mission accomplished.” Irrational optimists see the world through rose-colored glasses without realizing that those tinted lens don’t enhance their vision, they distort it. And as a result, their decisions and actions are Pollyannaish and flawed.

You can’t sugarcoat the present and still make good decisions for the future.

True success emerges from positive realities, not positive delusions. So how do we architect a reality that is both positive and real?

This is the question I’ve sought to answer in my work all over the world. In 2011, while conducting a study (later published in 2013 in the top social psychology journal) at UBS with Yale researchers Ali Crum and Peter Salovey, I had a breakthrough.

We discovered that if we could change someone’s perception of the stress they were under, we could actually change how stress affected them physically. By simply showing employees videos about the more positive (and again, real) effects of stress on the body, we observed a 23 percent drop in fatigue and other stress-related symptoms (backaches, headaches, etcetera). I’ll explain this study more fully later in the book, but the point is that simply by helping people see a new but equally true reality in which stress...
could be motivating and energizing, rather than debilitating, we
could make that more positive outcome actually become real.

Positive genius is not about optimism or pessimism, or seeing
the glass as half empty or half full. Because in truth, half empty
and half full are not the only possible options. Both optimists and
pessimists are so focused on how to interpret the single glass in
front of them, they can miss the fact that there is a third, equally
ture reality—a pitcher of water on the table to refill the glass.
Positive geniuses, on the other hand, can see the full pitcher, and
with it a greater range of opportunities, possibilities, and paths to
success.

HOW POSITIVE REALITIES HELP US
SCALE MOUNTAINS

If you are still having doubts that the skills of positive genius can
help us surmount seemingly insurmountable obstacles or solve
seemingly unsolvable problems or meet seemingly unmeetable
challenges, consider the following example.

Two U.S. Army Rangers stand with heavy backpacks looking up
at a hill in southern Afghanistan. The hill is precisely 600 feet
tall. But after the mental and physical fatigue of fierce combat,
the first soldier’s brain judges that hill to be around 900 feet.
And the soldier does more than just misjudge the hill; he actu-
ally sees a 900-foot hill, not a 600-foot hill. What he perceives
becomes his reality. The steeper his brain perceives the hill to be,
the more fatigued his body becomes. He collapses on one knee,
ready to give up despite heavy enemy pursuit. Why soldier on
when his brain tells him success is impossible?

Yet all is not lost. His fellow Ranger was recruited because
she is a positive genius.

When this second Ranger looks at the hill, despite her injuries
and fatigue, her well-trained brain perceives the hill as 600 feet
and thus surmountable in time. This gives her the energy and mo-
tivation to quickly climb another 50 feet, upon which she notices
a less steep and more rubble-free path up the hillside leading to a
helicopter extraction point. Her brain is now convinced that a suc-
cessful mission is possible, allowing her to summon her cognitive
resources to map the best path up the hill. Now feeling even more
positive and convinced that she will get herself and her partner
up to the top of the hill, where they can be rescued by helicopter,
her brain releases extra energy reserves, called success acceler-
ants, allowing her to rally her physical and emotional resources
to help her teammate to climb. Eliminating all distracting noises
both internal and external (doubts and gunfire), she drags her
partner toward the extraction point. As they climb, she tells him
repeatedly that they will make it until he too finds the energy
and drive to keep climbing. It's not long before they reach the
top, where they are rescued. Success became their reality.

This is not an entirely theoretical story. In fact, it is based upon
an actual experiment performed by researchers at the University
of Virginia led by Dennis Proffitt, who were looking at how our
perception of physical space is constructed in the brain.11 What
they found was that when we are in a negative or fatigued state
of mind, our brains actually perceive hills as being significantly
higher and backpacks as significantly heavier. And this principle
doesn’t apply just to hiking; further research has revealed that
when we’re in a negative mindset, all loads feel heavier, all ob-
stacles loom bigger, all mountains seem less surmountable. This
is especially true in the workplace, and it’s why, when we look at stress, workload, and competition from a negative mindset, our performance suffers.

In the above example, IQ alone would not have saved those soldiers. Neither would emotional intelligence or social intelligence, or any combination of the above—if that Ranger hadn’t created a positive reality first. After all, the ability to conjugate verbs and calculate standard deviations would not have gotten those soldiers to the top of the hill. Nor would the ability to regulate emotions or navigate complex social dynamics. But a positive reality could and did.

In this scenario, the second Ranger used the five skills of positive genius that you will learn in this book. First, she perceived a reality in which success was possible (skill 1). Then she mapped a route to success (skill 2). Once she made progress on that route, her brain was able to release success accelerants to get her there faster (skill 3), all the while canceling out distracting and destructive negative noise (skill 4). Then, once she had reaped the benefits of her positive reality, she created positive inception (skill 5) by transferring that reality to her teammate.

These are the exact skills you will learn in the following chapters of this book.

1. REALITY ARCHITECTURE
   Choosing the Most Valuable Reality
   - Recognize the existence of multiple realities by simply changing the details your brain chooses to focus on.
   - See a greater range of realities by training your brain to add vantage points and see the world from a broader perspective.

- Select the most valuable reality that is both positive and true, using a simple formula called the positivity ratio.

2. MENTAL CARTOGRAPHY
   Mapping Paths to Success
   - Identify and set better goals by highlighting markers of meaning in your life and learning to distinguish true areas of meaning from decoys and mental hijackers.
   - Chart more direct routes to your goals by reorienting your mental maps around those markers of meaning.
   - Keep yourself squarely on the path to success by mapping success routes before escape routes.

3. THE X-SPOT
   Using Success Accelerants
   - Zoom in on the target (proximity). Make your goal seem closer by building in a head start, setting incremental subgoals, and highlighting progress to date instead of what is left to accomplish.
   - Magnify the target size (likelihood of success). Increase the perceived likelihood of hitting your target by creating “champion moments” that remind you of when you have been successful in similar situations, decreasing the perceived number of your competitors, and choosing goals that you have a perceived 70 percent chance of reaching.
   - Recalculate thrust (energy required). Preserve and channel your cognitive resources better, think about tasks
in terms of objective units rather than in terms of the effort involved, and decrease your focus on things you worry about or fear.

4. NOISE CANCELING
Boosting the Signal by Eliminating the Noise

- Learn to cancel out any negative or useless information (noise) that distracts you from the true and reliable information that helps you reach your fullest potential (signal).
- Hone your ability to distinguish the noise from the signal by learning the four simple criteria of noise.
- Improve your ability to hear the signal through simple strategies for reducing the overall volume of noise by just 5 percent.
- Learn to actively cancel out internal noise of worry, fear, anxiety, and pessimism by emitting three simple waves of positive energy.

5. POSITIVE INCEPTION
Transferring Your Reality to Others

- Once you’ve created a positive reality for yourself, learn how to transfer it to others and reap the exponential benefits of your collective intelligences.
- Franchise success by creating simple, easy-to-replicate positive patterns and habits and then helping them spread.

- Wield more positive influence and increase the likelihood of your reality being adopted by taking the “power lead” in a conversation and rewriting the social script.
- Plant meaning in others’ realities by appealing to emotion and crafting shared, meaningful narratives.
- Create a renewable, sustainable source of positive energy that motivates, energizes, and summons the collective multiple intelligences of those around you.

Once you master these five skills, you will see the difference in virtually every personal and professional realm. You’ll be more energized, more motivated, more driven, and more productive. Your ideas will be more creative and innovative and will yield better results. You’ll suddenly start seeing new routes around obstacles and faster paths to achievement. Instead of being crippled by stress and adversity, you’ll be able to turn them into opportunities for growth. And once you master the final skill, positive inception, you’ll be able to refract the light of your positive genius on your coworkers, clients, family members, and others around you.

BRINGING THE RESEARCH TO LIFE

If you’re a reader of books on happiness, business, or leadership, you’ve probably noticed what I’ve noticed: if they quote research at all, they all tend to quote a lot of the same studies. Thus I’ve striven in every chapter to bring you brand-new original research done over the past few years, as well as pull from lesser-known
but equally groundbreaking studies from my colleagues that haven’t seen the light of day in a business book.12

But while all these studies paint a revealing and fascinating picture, research is useless unless it is lived. The goal of this book is not merely to entertain and enlighten; it’s to show you how to use the skills of positive genius to improve your work performance, accomplish your professional goal and ambitions, and raise your success rates. That’s why I’ve also included real-world stories and examples from my experiences teaching these skills in the working world—from raising positive genius at Bank of America after a 40 percent drop in stock price, to training leaders at Johnson & Johnson in the midst of one of the largest recalls in company history, to teaming up with Adobe and Google, to helping Hugo Boss transform its company by creating meaningful social interactions. Between all the science, the stories, and the research-based strategies, by the time you finish this book, you will have a deep understanding of exactly how to create a better reality and magnify the volume of happiness and success in your life and, equally important, how to transfer that positive reality to others.

By the time you’ve finished this book, you will have learned to use this five-step process to evoke the potential you have lying hidden and to use it to transform literally every aspect of your world. Visit the companion website at BeforeHappiness.com to see a video of me describing this research, to test yourself, or to get updates on new research since publication.
barely noticed them. That’s because I had gotten lost in the labyrinths of corridors on the sub and had arrived a few minutes late to the dinner. As I sprinted in, out of breath and fearful of the captain’s wrath, I slid immediately into my seat, without so much as a glance at my surroundings. A split second later, the stoic commander walked into the room, followed by the nervous second in command, the XO (executive officer). The XO’s body language confirmed the theory, “The closer to Caesar, the greater the fear.”

The XO immediately scanned the room and noticed a horrific breach of protocol just as I did: someone had had the nerve to sit down while the captain was still standing. That’s when I finally noticed that the rest of the midshipmen and crew were standing respectfully behind their chairs waiting for the commander to be seated before they took their own seats. Panicking, I immediately pushed my chair back to stand at attention with the rest of the midshipmen. But since it was my first night on the submarine, I had not yet been fully briefed on all the aspects of its design: for example, the fact that the chairs on a nuclear submarine are bolted to the floor.

I frantically tried to push my chair back so I could stand up, but it would not budge. Instead I looked as if I was having a minor epileptic fit in my chair while everyone else gave the commander his due respect. By the time I got myself up, everyone had sat down, and I was the only one standing there awkwardly.

While I certainly learned my lesson about arriving late to dinner, I still didn’t understand one thing: Why was my chair bolted to the floor? I found out the next morning at 4:00 a.m.

I thought that the captain had already written me off as a bumbling fool, so imagine my surprise when he sent an officer to wake me up in the middle of the night and bring me to the control center. And imagine my further shock when he said he had called me there to give me the opportunity to try my hand at steering the entire nuclear submarine. (As I later discovered, this was all part of a lesson the commander often imparted to young officers—particularly the green ones like myself.)

I obediently took the wheel, and after I had steered the vessel several hundred feet, the commander took a sip of coffee from his “World’s Greatest Boss” mug (really) and quietly issued an order: “Dive.” Then about four officers—not very quietly, I might add—started urgently screaming, “Dive! Dive! Dive!” Instinctively, I pushed down on the controls, and the entire sub shot down at a sixty-degree angle toward the ocean floor. The hull of the submarine popped, and suddenly I felt the floor quite literally slipping out from underneath my feet. At first my brain was emotionally hijacked, but then, as I looked around, I could suddenly see why chairs had to be bolted to the floor. The room had been turned virtually on its side, and what had once been “the floor” was now at a sixty-degree angle toward what had once been the ceiling. Had the chairs not been bolted down, they would have gone flying. That was when one of the officers explained that I had just unwittingly taken part in a drill called “Angles and Dangles.”

The commander then instructed me to pull up on the controls...
sharply and continue until the submarine breached the surface. After the submarine crested, in what must have been a magnificent scene to someone on the outside, it plopped back underwater like a huge, exhausted catfish, and the control room lurched back to its original position.

This story is not about why chairs on a submarine are nailed down, or why you should always arrive on time for dinner with the commander of a navy submarine. Looking back, I could see that Angles and Dangles had taught me a much bigger and more important lesson about the brain's ability to perceive multiple realities.

Before that day, my brain assumed that “floor = down.” Period. That was my reality. But not so on a submarine. On a submarine, as I learned that day, the floor could be up, down, sideways, or at sixty degrees. The captain, through his years of experience, had no problem seeing that reality. That is why he was able to sit there smugly, sipping his coffee, while I flew backward into a bolted-down chair. And he didn’t even spill a drop.

Angles and Dangles is a real treat for a brain researcher because it so perfectly demonstrates how our brains take shortcuts (which psychologists call heuristics) to create our perceptions of the world. Equating the floor with “down” is the simplest heuristic there could be. After all, it instinctively makes sense; gravity should always pull perpendicular to the floor, and under most conditions this is the case. So brains take the shortcut of assuming that the floor is always “down.” But as Angles and Dangles demonstrated, in some instances these shortcuts fail us: if the floor is slicing out from under you, the world can look very different.

That’s when I realized that in just about every situation you can think of, there exist multiple realities that are just as true as the realities our brains are wired to expect. And as my subsequent research has borne out, developing the ability to override shortcuts and perceive these multiple realities is the first step to expanding our triangle of intelligence to a three-dimensional prism of success.

But don’t worry, this isn’t nearly as hard as it might sound. Like everyone else, you have a reality that affects every decision you make and every action you undertake at home and at work. The real question is: Does your reality really work?

Research coming out of positive psychology labs across the globe shows that two individuals in the exact same situation and external world can have two completely different perceptions of the world that are both equally true. Because your brain can process only forty bits of information per second every minute of every day, you are merely picking and choosing from the eleven million pieces of information your senses are receiving. In truth, there is not one reality: there are millions of possibilities that could be constructed into a reality in every given second. It all depends on which information your brain chooses to process! So if your reality is a choice, the important next question is: Have you chosen the one that will help you harness your multiple intelligences to their fullest potential and lead to greater success and growth? And if not, how can you select a more valuable one?

In this chapter you will learn three proven skills that you can use to improve your reality and become more engaged, productive, and innovative at work.

**Strategy 1: Recognize Alternative Realities.** One of the first and most important tools of positive genius is the ability to realize that multiple versions of reality exist. Otherwise, your brain will keep re-creating the same negative realities even when the external world changes. Maybe you know people like that in your office, people who always choose to see a negative reality even when the external world has changed to positive. The
research I did in collaboration with Yale at UBS demonstrated that by simply changing which facts you choose to focus on, you can significantly improve your response to stress at work and decrease your fatigue symptoms by a stunning 23 percent in one week. For example, by simply adopting a “stress is enhancing” mindset, you can dramatically reduce the negative effects of stress, such as headaches, backaches, and tiredness. Stress is inevitable, but its effects are not. In this section I’ll reveal how, by raising your awareness of multiple realities, you can change how the external world affects not only your work performance and success levels but even your health.

Strategy 2: Add Vantage Points. In neuroscience and positive psychology, your vantage point is defined as the point from which you observe the facts you will use to create your reality. For example, if you are looking at a door from one vantage point in your office, you will see a door you can easily pull open. From another angle or vantage point—say, the hallway—you might see a door that you need to push hard. But you need not have only one vantage point. In truth, both motions will open the door; it just depends which side of the door you’re on. What if a manager could see that pushing people with punishments and pulling them with rewards could both work but that sometimes one would work better in the situation at hand? The result would be a more motivated and productive team.

Research shows that a reality at work based on only one vantage point is limited and full of blind spots and that it prevents forward movement. Let’s say, for example, that you left your keys on the floor of your car. If you looked in only one window, you might not see them. But if you changed your vantage point, going to another window and peering in from another angle, you could. The same is true of situations at work. My research has shown that the simple act of adding vantage points—changing your viewpoint as you evaluate your options—can significantly increase your ability to see new valuable details, which, in turn, broadens your perspective and helps you find a broader range of ideas and solutions. In addition, researchers have found that the ability to add vantage points is crucial to creativity and innovation. By merely adding vantage points, you can begin to combine your emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and IQ to solve bigger problems and achieve more ambitious goals. In other words, if you want to find the keys to success, you might need to look through a different window.

Strategy 3: Pursue the Most Valuable Reality. Once you are aware that your reality is not locked, and you have added vantage points, you can pursue the reality that will help make you more successful. After all, it’s not enough just to know that multiple perspectives on the world exist; you have to be able to evaluate and choose among them successfully. Research shows that by simply changing your perspective in the workplace you can achieve greater long-term growth, 37 percent higher sales, and 31 percent more productivity, and perhaps even increase your likelihood of living to age ninety-four. The ultimate goal of this chapter is to help you find and then pursue your most valuable reality in all domains of your life.

STRATEGY 1: RECOGNIZE ALTERNATIVE REALITIES

The economic crisis and recession of 2008–11 created a work equivalent of the navy’s Angles and Dangles, as tens of thousands of Americans felt the ground slip out from underneath their feet. I witnessed it firsthand when I was called in to consult with