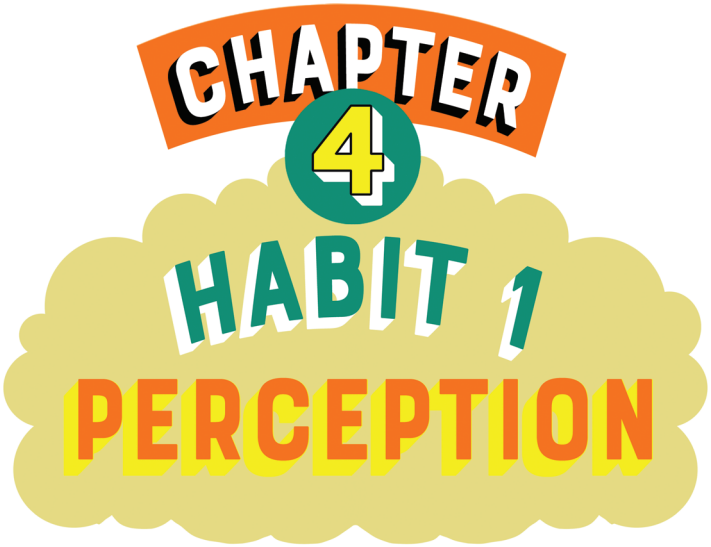


Lemon, you look terrible, and I once watched you eat oysters while you had a cold.

Jack Donaghy, season 5, episode 19

Who hasn't made mistakes? I once French-kissed a dog at a party to try to impress what turned out to be a very tall twelve-year-old.

Liz Lemon, season 5, episode 10

A book hasn't caused me this much trouble since Where's Waldo *went to that barber pole factory.*

Tracy Jordan, season 4, episode 2

If you don't recognize these quotes or character names from *30 Rock*, forgive me, but I must ask: What on earth were you doing from 2006 to 2013? This brilliant sitcom was the brainchild of Tina Fey. Inspired by her years as the head writer of *Saturday Night Live*, *30 Rock* centers around the trials and tribulations of the hapless Liz Lemon (played by the multitalented Tina Fey herself). Liz is the head writer and showrunner of *TGS*,

a sketch comedy series on NBC, which takes place in the studios of 30 Rockefeller Plaza in New York City.

In the first episode, we learn that Liz has a new boss, Jack Donaghy (Alec Baldwin, in the role he was born to play), head of both NBC television programming and, yes, microwaves. (NBC was then part of the General Electric family; television and microwaves being an absurd combination.) Where Liz is the type who could walk around all day with mustard on her shirt and neither notice nor care, Jack is the type who wears tuxedos after 6 p.m. because—as he explains when Liz asks one evening why he's in a tuxedo at work—"What am I, a farmer?" In Lemon, as he calls her, Jack sees a mess in need of a mentor. And in himself, Jack sees a wiser, shrewder, richer, more powerful, better-looking, more debonair man than most; in other words, the perfect mentor to anyone lucky enough to be offered such a gift. The series follows Jack and Liz's mentor–mentee relationship as Liz navigates the daily headaches caused by *TGS*'s two self-absorbed, vain, eccentric, needy, and jealous costars, Tracy Jordan (played by the inimitable Tracy Morgan) and Jenna Maroney (played by the fantastic Jane Krakowski).

Jack's mentor philosophy extends well beyond one's professional life. To Jack, a person must master all areas of life if one is to earn respect in his or her professional life. So Jack takes it upon himself to improve Liz's pathetic love life. In season 1, this includes urging her to finally break up with her ludicrous, on-again-off-again boyfriend, Dennis Duffy, who for some reason still sells beepers in 2006. By season 3, Liz has long since parted ways with "the beeper king of New York" and moved on to new prospects, some more promising than others.

In an episode titled "The Bubble," Liz is dating her unusually good-looking new neighbor, Drew (played by guest star Jon Hamm, who—if I may say—was a masterful Don Draper in *Mad Men* but might just be at his best when showing off his comedic chops). As Liz spends more time with him, she notices differences in the way the world perceives and treats him, "Disney prince" handsome that he is.

One day, when Liz and Drew are meeting on their lunch breaks, they see a traffic cop leaving a parking ticket on his window. When Drew pleads with the cop not to give him the ticket, the unapologetic cop persists—until he looks up, stares into those baby blues, rips up the ticket, and offers to feed the parking meter himself. They then are stopped in the street by fashion designer Calvin Klein, who asks Drew to be his next underwear model.

When Liz returns to work, she's carrying a doggy bag from Plunder, the moment's trendiest (and most preposterously named) restaurant. She approaches Jack and her blond, short-skirt-wearing assistant, Cerie, who are reviewing notes for that week's *TGS* episode.

"You went to Plunder?!" Jack asks Liz. "How did you get in there?"

"I don't know," Liz says. "It was packed! But they just gave Drew a table. It is ridiculous how people treat him. The chef sent over food. Ladies sent drinks. Mayor Bloomberg asked him to dance."

"Well," Jack says, pointing to himself and the notoriously hot Cerie, frequent lust object of *TGS*'s nerdy male writers. "Beautiful people are treated differently from . . . moderately pleasant-looking people," he says looking back at Liz, with a hint of disdain in his voice. "They live in a bubble."

Scoffing at what she believes is his misplaced identification with Drew-level attractiveness, Liz gives Jack her trademark over-the-top eye roll. He then pulls a photo—carefully protected in a plastic sleeve—from his wallet of himself at 25 and hands it to Liz.

"What the *what*!" Liz says with a stunned smile. "You have a Superman chest! Oh my God, the lady will have two tickets to the gun show." Jack nods, with a knowing and wistful look in his eye. "And your eyes were so much bluer; what happened to your eyes?"

Jack yanks the photo from her hands. "My point is, the bubble doesn't last forever. So get in there with Drew, and enjoy those perks while you can."

Throughout the episode, we see Liz riding Drew's bubble coattails . . . and also beginning to discover their drawbacks. Drew and Liz meet one afternoon to play tennis. Of course, they immediately get a court, thanks to people who voluntarily give up theirs for him and then ogle him from the sidelines.

"I should probably warn you," Drew says to Liz as they take off their jackets and get their rackets ready to play, "I was pro in college. Yeah, I started teaching kids at the Y, and then all their mothers wanted to take private lessons from me. I promise I'll take it easy."

But then Drew airballs his first attempt at a serve. And then his next attempt. When he finally hits the ball, it lands in an adjacent court.

"Been a long time since college, huh?" Liz asks.

"What do you mean?" he says with a confused smile.

In another scene, Drew cooks dinner for Liz at her apartment. As Liz takes her first bite, she tries not to gag. "Now, what is this?" she asks Drew.

"Dr. Drew's salmon bourguignon."

"What is this orangey taste?" she asks.

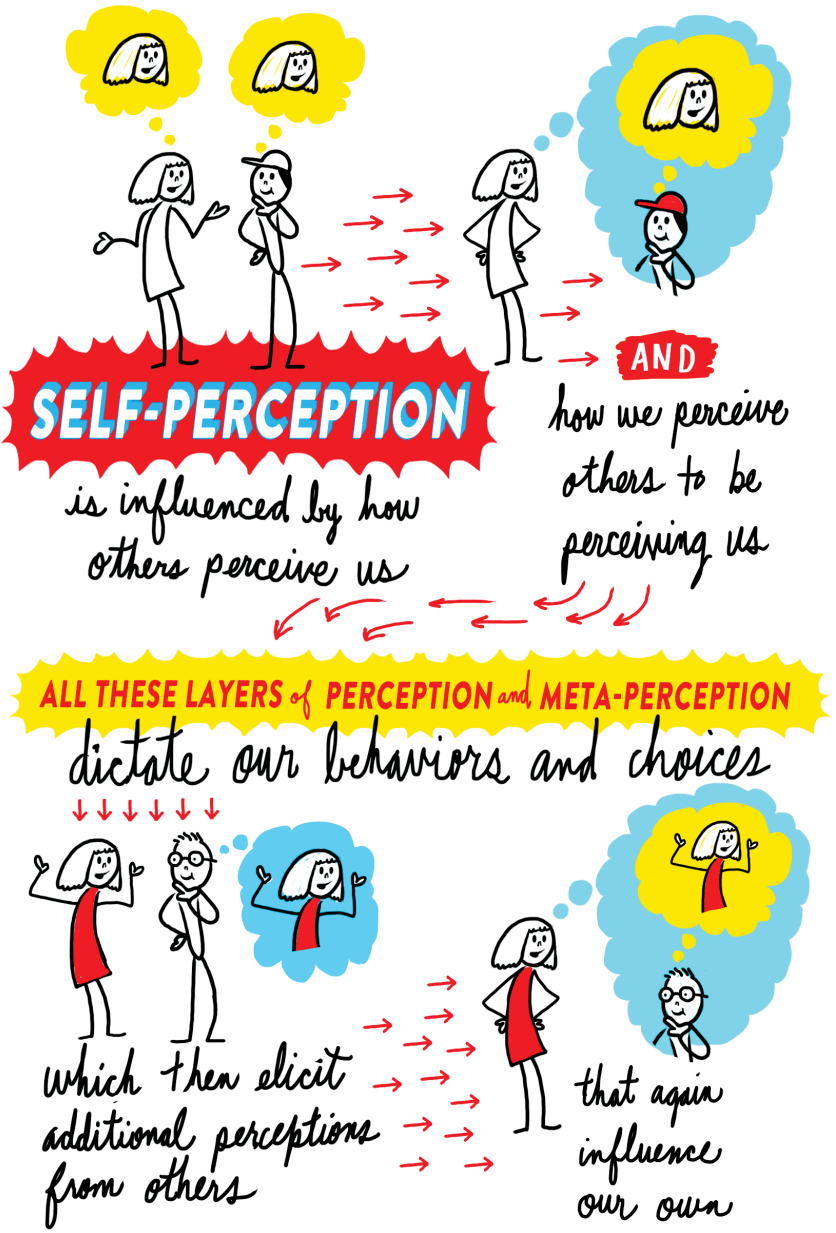
"Gatorade," he says, with matter-of-fact confidence.

Later, she takes a reluctant bite of the mysterious dessert he made and begins choking.

"Are you choking? Are you choking?" Drew asks, beginning to lose his cool as Liz gasps for air and covers her throat with her hands. "I'm a doctor, I'm a doctor, stay calm." He grabs Liz by the shoulders and starts jolting her about. "I just need to shake it loose."

Panicked, and realizing that this doctor doesn't know how to doctor, Liz self-administers a Heimlich maneuver by throwing herself over the back of a chair.

This is the danger of being in the bubble, Jack explains to Liz the next day at work. "When you're in the bubble, no one ever tells you the truth. When I was in the bubble, I thought I spoke perfect French." Jack then mutters French-sounding gibberish.


SELF-PERCEPTION
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ALL THESE LAYERS of PERCEPTION and META-PERCEPTION
dictate our behaviors and choices
which then elicit additional perceptions from others
that again influence our own

In chapter 1, we referenced powerful brain research that says our self-perception is highly influenced by how others perceive us and how we perceive others to be perceiving us. All these layers of perception and metaperception serve to dictate our behaviors and choices, which then elicit additional perceptions from others that again influence our own.

The world perceives Drew as so handsome that no one wants to point out any of his shortcomings. So much so that he was able to make it all the way through medical school and residency to the point of becoming a doctor who doesn't know the Heimlich maneuver. Drew then perceives himself as having all these talents and skills he actually lacks. And, as we see later in the episode when Liz tries to show him what life is like outside the bubble (e.g., having to wait for tables at restaurants and pay for meals), he has come to perceive himself as entitled to the litany of perks life throws at him and is decidedly disinterested in giving them up (and who can blame him).

Perception—our own, that of others, and those we have of the world and the people in it—is powerful. Perception matters.

Here's the thing about being a teacher. We are never going to get the benefit of any kind of Drew bubble. (If you have Jon Hamm's good looks, congratulations! But you're still going to have to earn your students' trust the same as the rest of us . . . moderately pleasant-looking people.) Nor should we; it's not our students' jobs to protect us. We are not going to remain in the dark about our students' perceptions of us—because we are breaking bold. Through the BBSAT, we are going to ask them exactly what they think of us.

From the first moment our students lay eyes on us, they begin making judgments about the kind of people we are. The truth is that some or maybe even most of these judgments will be unfair. Nevertheless, we have to take them seriously. Because

our students' perceptions of us have a direct impact on how likely they are to learn from us, and we have to do everything in our power to create the optimal conditions for learning. That is what this part of the book is about. If we can convince our students to trust us and accept our invitation to a productive, healthy, and appropriate student–teacher relationship, we are boldly on our way toward optimal learning conditions. This starts with accepting that, without the protection of a bubble, our choices, behaviors, and words matter. They should be carefully designed to resonate with students so that they perceive us as people who genuinely care for them and who are committed to earning their trust and helping them excel.

In an ironic turn, part of this requires holding our students in a kind of bubble, but one that will serve only their best interests. Let's call it the breaking bold bubble. In the breaking bold bubble, we are not coddling our students, nor are we shying away from facing with them their opportunities for growth and improvement. No Dr. Drews here. The breaking bold bubble is a place free from bias and full of unconditional belief in our students. No matter who our students are—what they look like, where they come from, how they dress, how they identify, what they believe in, how they speak, even how they've performed in school to date—we refuse to believe they are anything but brimming with potential. In the breaking bold bubble, we refuse to accept any notion of them other than their being capable of achieving whatever they put their hearts and minds to achieving. And we refuse to let our biases—unconscious and otherwise—cloud our perceptions of them. Instead, every student walks into our classrooms to a teacher who has taken the time to unearth and shed her unconscious biases and rid herself of all superficial and stereotypical opinions, and who consciously chooses to see students for their full, beautiful humanity. Every student walks into our classrooms with our full faith and the affirmation of our conviction that each is equally capable of success—in our classrooms and in his or her life. That is the space—the bubble—we will hold them in so long as we know them.

Day One: Our Students' Perception of Us

We start with perception because everything starts with perception. In fact, we are evolutionarily wired to judge a new acquaintance in about seven seconds. Mark Schaller, a prominent psychologist from the University of British Columbia, studies the hows and whys of our rapid-fire first impressions. With almost no conscious effort or awareness, we size people up in mere seconds when we first meet them (Schaller, 2008). The roots of this automatic behavior date back to when we were nomadic cave dwellers and would stumble upon fellow humans out in the wild. Our most immediate concern was ascertaining whether this stranger seemed trustworthy or threatening. This speedy perception of a person is an adaptive behavior, designed to keep us alive—literally.

Although humans are better than not at receiving accurate first impressions, inferential errors are inevitable. Schaller (2008) postulates that our first-impression mechanism might have evolved to err on the side of false positives when it comes to identifying someone as potentially dangerous to our safety. This is because the costs of misjudging a dangerous person as safe are higher than the costs of misjudging a safe person as dangerous. This false-positive mechanism still has its invaluable moments in our modern lives, yet context always matters. If we fail to evaluate a person within a larger context, we might do more harm than good and in more ways than one. If we habitually deem a whole group of people a threat when they are not, we are stuck in a pattern of prejudicial beliefs that harm us, the group in question, and the culture at large. Or we might deem someone—such as a

If we habitually deem a whole group of people a threat when they are not, we are stuck in a pattern of prejudicial beliefs that harm us, the group in question, and the culture at large.

teacher—a threat who not only is not a threat but could also be an enormous benefit.

Then there is the matter of experience. If our near-instantaneous perception process is, ultimately, about determining who is trustworthy and safe, then how trust works is also at play. As we'll see when we unpack trust in chapter 7, those who take calculated risks and are willing to trust more people become better trusters. They hone their instinct for whom to trust and whom not to trust more than do people who generally feel suspicious of more people. Higher trusters, then, go on to have more relationships and a larger, healthier network of connections than those who are more reluctant to trust. If we are immune to the wisdom of experience, our reflex to err on the side of deeming people a threat will not evolve past its pitfall of precluding sufficient healthy relationships to allow for a happy life.

All this research means a few key things for us as educators:

1. Our students are going to size us up on day one and within the first few seconds of meeting us.
2. In blanket terms, our students—who have less trusting experience by virtue of their age—are hard-wired to err on the side of deeming us untrustworthy.
3. The context of our classrooms and the larger community in which we teach, which has a very real and direct impact on our students' openness to trust, will tip the scales of earning their perception either in our favor or against it.
4. Where nature, experience, and/or context cause our students not to perceive us positively, it's up to us—*not* them—to change their hearts and minds.

I have experienced firsthand the power of context to influence how I'm perceived. My second full-time teaching job was at a public school in East Los Angeles. The district was in a largely Hispanic neighborhood, plagued by poverty and entrenched economic issues. The circumstances of so many of these students'

lives were incredibly challenging and often sad. My next teaching job was at an international baccalaureate (IB) school in a middle- to upper-class Denver suburb. For the most part, the families at this school were of means, and the students were raised with access to numerous privileges and opportunities. In both cases, I was teaching middle school students. And in both cases, I brought my same self into the classroom every day; the Molly Kieschnick who taught in East L.A. was the same Molly Kieschnick who taught in Denver.

Yet the perceptions of me in these schools were light-years apart, just as the circumstances surrounding them were. In Denver, the students saw me as credible and knowledgeable. In East L.A., they did not; they saw me as different from them and therefore incapable of understanding their experiences or relating.

The irony is, I had more in common with my students in L.A. than they could have imagined. I would even say I had more in common with them than I did with my Denver students. My mother is primarily of German descent; from her, I get my fair skin. My dad is Puerto Rican. From him I get my dark hair and eyes and olive undertones. But, given the way the DNA came together, it's easy to miss my Hispanic roots by looking at me. Yet that ancestry and heritage are very much a proud part of who I am. I also did not grow up in a house of privilege. My parents worked hard for every penny they earned, and my siblings and I took out loans and all worked multiple jobs to put ourselves through college.

Despite my background and upbringing, I had to work much harder to earn the trust of my students in East L.A. The larger context was powerful, and it took daily effort to bridge the perceived divide between me and my students and to convince them I was not some outsider who neither understood nor cared for them. It took choices made again and again to reassure them that we were all on the same team and that they were safe in our classroom. Because, when the day is done, this is what perceiving and perception are about—they are about protecting, with all our might, our sense of safety, even when there might not be a real threat.

Because our most important aim is to make our students feel safe when they are in our care, we have to accept that they will sometimes make inaccurate snap judgments of us, and we *cannot* hold it against them; it is, after all, a function of their biological hard-wiring. And then we have to accept that we are duty bound to chip away at their incorrect perceptions and replace them with an accurate one—which is that we care deeply for them, not just as students but also as fellow humans.

Day One: Our Perception of Our Students

Through our daily commitment to building and maintaining healthy, productive relationships with all our students, we are conveying our care for them again and again. This book is a road map to doing just that. But before we can dive into the habits that

will nurture relationships, we have to check our biases at the door. Otherwise, if marred by bias, our attempts to build relationships will be taken as disingenuous. From day one, and all the days that follow, we must commit to eliminating any biases we have—and we all have them—that cause us to perceive any of our students unfairly.

First, we must accept an uncomfortable truth: just as we are hard-wired to make snap judgments, we are hard-wired to have prejudices. The evolutionary theory behind this is similar to the one behind our reflex for instantaneous first impressions. "By nature, people are group-living animals—a strategy that enhances individual survival and leads to what we might call a 'tribal psychology,'" says Steven Neuberg, Arizona State University professor of social psychology (Arizona State University, 2005). Neuberg coauthored a study about humans' tribal instincts, which predispose us to prejudice. This is an adaptive technique to grasp the threat level when encountering another tribe of wandering fellow humans. Our knee-jerk prejudices prevented us from trusting the untrustworthy too quickly and before it was too late.

The bad news: this evolutionary technique has largely outlived its original purpose. Unfortunately, we have mountains of evidence that, today, such prejudices and tribal instincts cause way more problems than they solve. Furthermore, the menu of possible prejudices is lengthy—race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, appearance, and so on. Biases that target certain groups of students in the classroom have been shown to have very real impacts on the learning that can then take place in it. When students are repeatedly on the receiving end of behaviors that show racial or ethnic bias, they are more likely to disengage from learning (Milner, 2018). Slights or microaggressions that reveal a teacher's discrimination, racism, or bias against a certain group are linked to stress, frustration, depression, anxiety, and a range of physical health problems for those in the targeted group. This is, of course, only amplified when these same students experience the same microaggressions in the rest of their lives and worlds. When students are pushed into such emotional and physiological states of anxiety and stress, their

self-efficacy—their belief in their capacity to succeed—is diminished (Bandura, 1995).

Left unchecked, biased beliefs that certain groups are less capable of learning or achieving than others are going to find their way into a person's behaviors, nonverbal cues, and spoken words. And as we'll see in the chapter about belief in students, these beliefs can influence our students' belief in themselves. It's that metaperception at play: when someone expresses belief in our potential and we take it on as our own, it is to our benefit; when someone expresses a lack of belief in our potential and we take it on as our own, it is very much to our detriment.

> When students are repeatedly on the receiving end of behaviors that show racial or ethnic bias, they are more likely to disengage from learning.

In the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002, teacher expectations were found to be more predictive of a student's success in college than that student's own motivation and effort (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014)! In 2010, MetLife conducted a sprawling survey of more than 1,000 representative K–12 teachers to gain insights into their various beliefs about education and students. Nearly all teachers agreed that there is a strong correlation between expectations placed on students and their ability to learn (MetLife, 2010). Yet, in the same survey, only 36 percent of respondents reported that they believe that "all of their students" can achieve academic success (MetLife, 2010). We know that our beliefs in our students, and the biases behind any negative or unfair beliefs, have real consequences for our students' performance. At the same time, too often, even the most well-meaning among us—and you are well meaning, as you are reading this book, ready to boldly assess yourself in the most vulnerable of ways specifically *for* your students—hold negative and biased beliefs about some of our students.

But there is good news: our evolutionary design is not an excuse, it is not destiny, and we can overcome it. We can consciously work to identify our unconscious biases and rewire them

with equitable, unbiased perceptions of all students. When we do this, we are joining forces to evolve our hard-wiring for *today's* world. And we are also joining forces to reduce inequities and disproportionalities and their very dire effects on certain student groups, one classroom at a time.

PRIMING FOR POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS: LET'S FOCUS ON WHAT WE CAN CONTROL

If we can't control the automatic judgments people make of us or that we make of others in the first seconds of meeting, then let's focus on what we *can* control.

Influencing Our Students' Perceptions of Us

The work of nudging your students to hold a positive perception of you is a process with no finite end point. Perceptions happen fast, and then they happen slowly. Meaning, if a student holds a less-than-ideal perception of you based on those crucial first moments of meeting, you can work to change that perception over time. You can take steps to chip away at their beliefs about you and rebuild them with new and positive beliefs, one by one. Over time, you will transition from efforts to change your students' perception of you to efforts to build and nurture healthy, productive student–teacher relationships. This takes time, patience, and deliberate effort through the use of tools that are shown to work. The factors that can serve to support positive perception and relationship building in every interaction follow in these pages. For our purposes now, we will consider what you can do to positively influence student perception in—and even in advance of—those first crucial moments of meeting.

Communicate Your Beliefs *before* School Starts Prior to the start of a new school year, communicate with your students through your teacher website, email, welcome letters, or other tools available to you. Although it might be fun to share specific plans you

have for the year, what matters is beginning to communicate your unconditional belief in your students and that yours is a classroom of camaraderie, compassion, creative learning experiences, and equity, where mistakes are welcome and risks are encouraged. For all that hard-wired human nature, they might not yet believe you—and that's OK. What matters is that, because you've shared your general belief system in advance of the school year, students will be showing up on day one with a "pre-perception" you've already begun to influence positively. In doing so, the scales of perceiving you as safe and not a threat will be at least somewhat more likely to tip in your favor.

Dress to Impress A study out of Southern Illinois University found that 55 percent of our students' first impression of us is based on our appearance (Cox, n.d.). The School Superintendents Association interviewed students about their perceptions of various ways teachers dress. Students felt that although teachers in blue jeans look friendlier, they are less credible. Suits or clothing that is too professional can send the message that a teacher is overly serious or rigid. Other research suggests that it's wise to dress more professionally in the first days of school; only when trust has been established can you begin to dress somewhat more casually, bearing in mind that you are role-modeling what professional casual dress should look like (Rocca, 2007). Harry Wong, a former teacher turned expert on classroom management and author of *The First Days of School*, offers a good rule of thumb: "Always dress better than your students. If you don't care how you look, how can they care about you?" (Sternberg, n.d.).

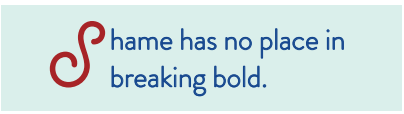
Make Eye Contact with Every Student, and Use Their Names as Often as Possible In chapter 8 on connection, we'll discuss the principle of immediacy—the idea that the more connected we feel to a person, the more we like her and the more open we are to learning from her. We'll walk through several tools to close the "immediacy gap," or the sense of distance—physical or mental/emotional—between two people, which will be useful throughout the entire school year. On day one, though, two tools

are vital to apply. First, make certain you look every student in the eye to avoid appearing as though you are talking only to certain students. Make every student feel part of the conversation, and make every student feel seen. Second, make a point to use students' names to begin establishing a sense of familiarity and appropriate rapport.

Influencing Our Positive Perceptions of ALL Students

We are all here to break bold. That means we're showing up prepared to be vulnerable and to assess ourselves with courage and honesty. Unless you are more evolved than most, you hold some unconscious biases. You probably hold a handful of conscious biases as well. That is OK. You are human. As you'll see in the coming pages, shame has no place in breaking bold. Our weaknesses and deficits are opportunities for improvement—so long as we can honestly face them and courageously form a plan to grow.

Research out of Stanford University's Center for Education Policy Analysis found that not only does every human have biases, but it is counterproductive to try to ignore or suppress them (Dee and Gershenson, 2017). Suppression sucks your energy and takes relentless effort; it is also not a solution. The only solution to biases is to take steps to rewire and remove them. There are tools and tactics one can use to identify and remove biases. This is a crucial area of teaching and one with an arsenal of research. We encourage you to do your own to find what resonates with you. To get you started, here we'll use the awareness, motivation, individuation, empathy model, which has been found to reduce teachers' unconscious biases and improve student outcomes (Dee and Gershenson, 2017).



Awareness A bias cannot be removed if we don't know we have it. To know our biases requires bravely observing our behavioral and thought patterns with regard to our students: Do we tend to

call on girls more than boys? Do we give more constructive feedback to our white students than we give to our black students? Do we discipline Hispanic students more than we discipline Asian students? Do we talk in a softer tone to one group and a harsher tone to another? Do we tend to label some students as smart and others as not smart, or some students as "gifted" and others as "special needs"? Do we tend to focus on our students' weaknesses rather than on their strengths? Do we give more affirmations to struggling students than we give to those achieving at a high level, or vice versa? Are certain student groups consistently getting higher grades than other student groups? Are certain students speaking more in class compared to others?

Such questions are revealing. They can also be difficult to answer on our own, both because it's hard for every human to see herself clearly and because it's frightening. This is why we have the bold standard of assessment, including asking our students to assess us. If you find you are struggling to assess yourself, invite a trusted (and, most important, honest) colleague or friend to observe your behaviors, verbal and otherwise, toward different student groups.

In an ideal circumstance, you will have identified your biases well before the start of a school year so that you can begin to build relationships with your new students from a place of conscious bias reduction. However, the best time to start this work is right now. The best time to reduce bias in your classroom is today. The best time to begin consciously treating all your students with equity is this minute. Even if it's too late to start this school year with a plan to eliminate bias in your classroom, it's not too late to start today.

Motivation Once your biases become known to you, please commit to the first rule of breaking bold: do not shame-spiral. Shame will keep you stuck; it'll paralyze you or prompt you to suppress the behavior over which you feel shame instead of courageously making plans to reverse it. Instead of holding on to shame, accept that you have these biases and accept that you also have the wherewithal to change them. Because here's the other

thing about being human—on the other side of those inevitable biases *that we all have* is the downright inspiring human capacity for growth and evolution. We are stronger than our thoughts, and we are larger than that old, outdated evolutionary wiring. Tap into that strength and decide it's time to change. (Please know we'll delve deeper into this and offer more constructive tools to this end in the chapters on vulnerability and compassion.) Your students—who very much want to trust you, learn from you, like you, and feel cared for by you—are depending on you.

Individuation Individuation is the conscious work of seeing every student for the individual and unique person he is. It's decoupling the person from the group before assessing him. Please be aware that this is not being "color blind" or ignoring the realities of a student's life (Graide Network, 2018). Counteracting the typical biases certain people tend to experience requires understanding the roots of those biases so that you can target and apply their opposite behavior. Individuation asks that we see the students' reality to give context to their circumstances and form opinions based solely on their humanity and individuality. The good news is that the habits in this book will guarantee that you get to know each student on a personal level and see her just as her. Although this will take some time, individuation—as a mindset you take to every interaction with a student—can start today.

Empathy Empathy is the act of imagining what it is like to walk in another person's shoes. Empathy is an internal thinking and feeling process; when we take action based on it, that is compassion—a habit we will discuss in detail in chapter 6. Empathy is malleable and something we can practice and improve (Dee and Gershenson, 2017). The first step to developing our empathetic muscle is a decision—the decision to believe there is *always* a point of commonality between you and another person. Empathy is recognizing that relationships *can* take root in the fertile soil of what makes you the same, no matter how small that "same" might at first appear to be. Empathy is also the decision to form

a habit of actively listening when people share with us what it is like to be them. That means giving them our full and undivided attention and listening for the sake of learning, not for the sake of responding. It means believing them and then pausing to reflect on and consider their perspectives before forming a response. A powerful tool to this end is to repeat back to students what they share with us to show our concerted effort to understand and to confirm that we understand. That small act can achieve common ground before you respond, even if your response contains constructive feedback.

> Empathy is malleable and something we can practice and improve.

Awareness, motivation, and individuation are steps to developing empathy. And it is impossible to develop a habitual practice of empathy and simultaneously keep biases alive. It is also impossible to habituate empathy and *not* begin to behave with more and more compassion.

The work of identifying and reducing bias takes time, commitment, and maintenance. In the meantime, there are stopgap and lightweight solutions we can use while we develop longer-term and fundamental corrections to our biases.

Tyrone Howard, professor in the Department of African American Studies and Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at UCLA, has devoted his career to studying race, equity, and education and how educators can reduce structural impediments and individual biases to remove learning barriers for our most vulnerable students. He suggests combating microaggressions—those small but destructive manifestations of unconscious bias in our classrooms—with micro*affirmations*. Microaffirmations are small confirmations of a teacher's positive perceptions of all students and can include "I see you. I value you. I appreciate your differences. I am committed to understanding your needs. I believe in your potential. I want to support you" (Milner, 2018). (In chapter 8 on connection, we include additional

small ways you can indicate your belief in students and reaffirm connection.)

Our aim is to wholeheartedly believe these microaffirmations. Once you've done the work to reverse your biases—and once you've practiced all 12 habits laid out in this book to the point of living them daily—you will believe them. In the meantime, just say them. Develop a habit of saying them. Their repetition and consistency will begin to change the synaptic patterns of your brain such that you *do* begin to believe them, and your students will begin to believe you, too.

How Perceptions—When Positive—Strengthen Relationships

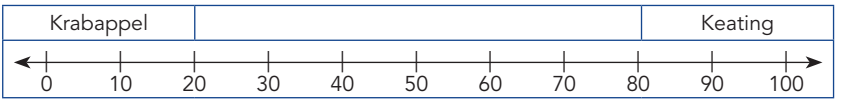
We know what happens when our students believe our positive perception of them. They begin to take on those beliefs as their own. Then those beliefs begin to shape their actions and behaviors. When these beliefs are affirming and positive, their perception of us is, too. The seeds of a strong, caring, mutually respectful student–teacher relationship are planted.

We are powerful. Let's use our power for good.

Perception: The Keating-Krabappel Spectrum

	Self-Assessment Statements	1 = strongly disagree 10 = strongly agree
1	Students' first impressions of me are positive.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
2	Students believe I am dressed appropriately every day.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
3	I take measures to make my students feel emotionally and mentally safe in my classroom.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
4	Students believe that we have shared experiences and that I can relate to them.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
5	I actively work to remove my biases against all students and student groups.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

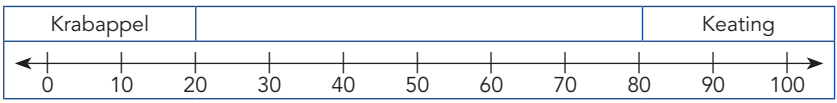
	Self-Assessment Statements	1 = strongly disagree 10 = strongly agree
6	I do not allow prejudices and microaggressions in my classroom.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
7	I make eye contact with every student, in every class.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
8	I use all my students' names as often as I can.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
9	Students believe that I see them for the unique individuals they are.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
10	Students believe I care about their experiences and their lives outside school.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



Perception: The Breaking Bold Student Assessment Tool

	Student Assessment Statements	1 = strongly disagree 10 = strongly agree
1	My first impression of my teacher was positive.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
2	My teacher dresses well for work each day.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
3	I feel safe and comfortable speaking in class and having real conversations with my teacher.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
4	I have some things in common with my teacher and believe he/she can relate to me.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
5	My teacher treats all students the same.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
6	If a student treats another student unfairly or says a hurtful thing, my teacher talks to us about it and explains why it's hurtful.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
7	I feel like my teacher talks to me and acknowledges me in every class.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

	Student Assessment Statements	1 = strongly disagree 10 = strongly agree
8	My teachers knows my name and knows all my classmates' names.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
9	My teacher sees me for who I really am.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
10	My teacher cares about my life outside school.	O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O–O 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



PERCEPTION: TOOLS TO BREAK BOLD

Leverage Digital Tools to Shape How Your Students Perceive You

Use a website (built for your class), learning management system (LMS), and/or social media platform to shape children's perception of you prior to their arrival in your school or classroom. Before the school year starts, communicate with students to prepare them for joyful, engaging, and successful classroom experiences with you.

Suggested tools: LMS, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Squarespace, Weebly, Google Sites.

Tools to Reduce Bias

We've suggested the awareness, motivation, individuation, empathy model as a method of reducing bias. If this model doesn't resonate, Google "bias reduction" for alternatives that do.

Invite a trusted and honest colleague or friend to observe your teaching to look for biases you might be missing. We suggest that you have this person read this chapter and chapter 6 on compassion prior to observing you.

Considerations as You And Your Trusted Friend or Colleague Look for Biases

- Are you labeling some students positively or negatively?
- Do you talk to certain students or student groups more often than others?
- Do you call on certain students or student groups more often than others?
- Do you give positive affirmation or negative affirmation to certain students or student groups more often than others?
- Do you grade certain students or student groups more harshly or more leniently than others?

Dress the Part

Always dress better than your students. Early in the school year, dress more professionally. As trust develops, there's room to dress more casually, always keeping in mind that you are modeling professional-casual dress.