**Course title:** Leadership Everyday/Every Way  
**Course #/term:** SW510-17-2019  
**Time and place:** Tues 8/27, 1-5; Wed, 8/28, 8:30- noon; Thursday,8/29, 8:30-12; 12-2  
**Credit hours:** 1  
**Prerequisites:** None  
**Instructor:** John Tropman  
**Pronouns:** He  
**Contact info:** Email: tropman@umich.edu  
**Phone (734) 663-3411;763-6275;645-7191**  
You may expect a response within 24 hours  
**Office:** 4668D  
**Office hours:** by appointment

## INTRODUCTION

**Goals.** Short courses were integrated into orientation activities with 3 goals in mind.  
- First, we want to help build the community.  
- Second, we want to introduce students to the concept of PODS (privilege, oppression, diversity and social justice). Please be sure you introduce your students to this acronym, what it stands for, and how PODS is woven through the curriculum. As was true last year, the School will be doing much this year that focuses on anti-racism and anti-oppression, so creating a foundation during orientation will be helpful.  
- Third, we are introducing foundational social work skills. Help students think about how they can build on these skills through their time in the program and through their careers.
1. **Course Statement** This mini-course will focus on an overview of the leadership (and Management) Mindset, using the 7C approach

   a. Characteristics, Features of yourself I including temperament, ethnicity, regional background, etc.

   b. Crucibles, Key events that shape your leadership Journal and approach

   c. Collaborations, Your personal Board of Advisors

   d. Competencies,

   e. Conditions, [Agency Culture and Structure], Context [The world out there] and

   f. Change [How fast are things moving?]

We will consider the "double helix" tension between management and leadership. The "suddenly I am a manager" perspective will be shared and preparations suggested.

Emphasis will be placed on "everyday leadership and management," with the idea that these practices can be used in daily life as well as in organizational positions. The emphaisus will be place on leadership for social justice and social good.

Participants will be encouraged to develop a leadership/management mindset, reviewing some of their biggest success and failures and extracting "and lessons learned from them.

We will begin a leadership/management journal which will allow them to record observations about leadership/management episodes.

The Plan will go into the Journal.

Participants will develop a leadership/management Journal to help well them through their work at the school as an important tool which then can relate to all their courses. These will be completed in class and used for discussions in the follow-up sessions, as noted below.
An assignment

Get a three Ring Notebook and clip Leadership materials in it, including the Syllabus, the slides, and your assignment and daily notes about your leadership activities. Develop a personal development plan in three components “A Better Me; A Better you; A Better Us – with an emphasis on elements of PODS and social good” Continue this at least through the end of September and use the notes for your assignment, due October 15th

Assignment 1

- A Better Me - Steps to improving my leadership
- A Better You: - Steps to help others exercise Leadership
- A Better Us – Steps to help my organization/family/, house of worship/. Community be leadership exemplars
- Length 5 pages – Page 1 is the Intro, pages 3-4 each focus on the me/you/us questions; Page 5 is the conclusion

Assignment 2

- Prepare and send in Asynchronous Assignment
- to me 1 -- 2Page outline of your Assignment topics Due 8/31/2020 on Campus
- Ungraded
- Watch a couple or so of the YouTube videos on Leadership

https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=Leadership%20site%3Ayoutube.com&ved=2ahUKEwifieef8ebjAhUBCM0KHfd6CN8Q2wF6BAgFEAg&ei=hJZFXd-3KIGQqtAb39aH4DQ

https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=Leadership%20site%3Ayoutube.com&ved=2ahUKEwjvkuGr1uvjAhWVBc0KHf72AogQ2wF6BAgFEAg&ei=ZBlIXe_QKJWLtAb-7YvACA


Listen to some of teh the TED Radio Hour broadcasts
“How to be better”
https://podcasts.google.com/?feed=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cubnByLm9yZy9yc3MvcG9kY2FzdC5waHA%2FaWQ9NTEwMjk4&episode=MDhlM2NlY2UtMWVjYy00ODM3LWFjMGlTJj00ZjExODY1Yzcz

Con fronting Racism
https://podcasts.google.com/?feed=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cubnByLm9yZy9yc3MvcG9kY2FzdC5waHA%2FaWQ9NTEwMjk4&episode=MjQwOGE0ODYtODhhYS00MDI0LWFjMDgtNmM2MTk5OGNiOTAY

The Consequences of Racism
https://podcasts.google.com/?feed=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cubnByLm9yZy9yc3MvcG9kY2FzdC5waHA%2FaWQ9NTEwMjk4&episode=NWRmYmRlNTMtM2MwLTQ0MzIyZmNhZjUw

Speaking Up
https://podcasts.google.com/?feed=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cubnByLm9yZy9yc3MvcG9kY2FzdC5waHA%2FaWQ9NTEwMjk4&episode=YTJhOGQ4MTEtYjkzMC00NmYxLTg0N2EtNzUwYTE3NzM0MmIx

Quiet
https://podcasts.google.com/?feed=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cubnByLm9yZy9yc3MvcG9kY2FzdC5waHA%2FaWQ9NTEwMjk4&episode=M2YwYWQ1N2UtN2FhNC00MDI3LTgxZTk5ZTQxYjA3ZjVjOWQx

Disruptive Leadership
https://podcasts.google.com/?feed=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cubnByLm9yZy9yc3MvcG9kY2FzdC5waHA%2FaWQ9NTEwMjk4&episode=MWV0ZTY2MTMtnzhdNi00NDkxLTFkNmUtMjI2N2QxOTQ0

Gender, Power and Fairness
1. **Course Flow and Meeting Times**
   Dates and times are: listed in the PPTs right at the beginning
2. We will have both synchronous and nonsynchronous times
   A few other important things about timing:

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**Competencies and Practice Behaviors**

i. Leading from anywhere on the stage
ii. Branding your leadership stage
iii. Sharpening and Honing your Strengths
iv. Knowing your shadow side

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2. **Class Requirements**
   Participation
a. Text and class materials

1. Some Ted Radio Hour clips
2. Some youtube clips
3. Is the MSW the New MBA?
4. Warren Buffet on Personal Branding
5. Raj Chetty and the American Dream
7. The Amazing Chef (THE LAST ARTICLE IN THE SYLLABUS)

Recommended
Vic Strecher _Life on Purpose_
John Tropman _Team impact_
Jean East _Transformational Leadership for the Helping Professions_
DR. James Curtis _Memoires of a Black Psychiatrist_

b. Grading

● Satisfactory S
● Unsatisfactory U

Additional School and University policies, information and resources are available here: https://ssw.umich.edu/standard-policies-information-resources. They include:

● Safety and emergency preparedness
● Mental health and well-being
● Teaching evaluations
● Proper use of names and pronouns
● Accommodations for students with disabilities
● Religious/spiritual observances
● Military deployment
● Writing skills and expectations
● Academic integrity and plagiarism

Class Schedule Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday
Tuesday, August 25th, 2020
2:15-5:15PM
Synchronous Lecture/Discussion
We meet 2:15-4PM

Topics
Introductions
The Assignments
The 7 Cs
Leadership and Management
View Dewitt Jones Video

Asynchronous Assignments: Review The Executive Leadership Profiles & Watch (Paste into Google; write down one thing that struck you about PODS leadership - The speaker is Lakeya Cherry, CEO, Network for Social Work Management)
https://utexas.zoom.us/rec/play/7sUrI-CrqG83G4KSuQSDAvZ5W460e6msgCZK_qdemUa3VyYFYAGjZ7QbM7OtCUdcaDEJPSi-D-c4GqtS
Wednesday August 26th 2020
8:30-11:59 AM
Synchronous
We meet 8:30-10:30 AM
Topics:
Discussion of Change Makers (Video) and PODS
Discussion of Executive Leadership Profiles (Slides 32-93)

Asynchronous Assignments:
Work on your assignment for sharing tomorrow
Thursday 9/27 Session 3
8:30 AM-3:30 PM
Synchronous
We meet 8:30-10:30 AM

Topics
Two Central Tools:
Producing Efficient Meetings (Doing Things Right)
Orchestrating Effective (High Quality (Doing the Right Things)

Review Assignments

Asynchronous Assignments
Prepare and send into me 1--2 Page outline of your Assignment topics Due 8/31/2020 on Campus
Ungraded

• Session 4
• Optional
Is The MSW The New MBA?

Recent corporate failures demonstrate the need for the very skills that social workers bring. Now a few schools are recognizing this and offering joint tracks that merge the interests of businesses and the communities they work in.

By Christine Bader 6 minute Read

The MBA is now the most popular master’s degree in the U.S., making up one quarter of all such degrees conferred. But a few schools are recognizing that a different course of study might better serve both aspiring business leaders and the world at large: a master’s in social work.

The University of Southern California’s School of Social Work just launched a business concentration for its students, and a number of universities now offer joint MBA-MSW degrees.

The cynical might assume that social workers are simply trying to make more money as government and social service budgets continue to shrink. (And why shouldn’t MSWs be able to pay off their student loans like everyone else?)

Businesses affect not only their employees and their families, but also the communities that depend on them.

But a number of corporate failures demonstrate the need for the very skills that social workers are trained in. At the same time, the MBA has come under fire for producing some of the leaders that brought on those failures—former Enron CEO and Harvard Business School grad Jeffrey Skilling comes to mind—and perpetuating the shareholder primacy mantra that has pushed the interests of business and the interests of society so far apart.
The USC program aims to produce “system thinkers who focus on the big picture, keeping in mind that businesses affect not only their employees and their families, but also the communities that depend on them.” All companies—and society at large—could benefit from that mindset. In addition to foundational courses and a field practicum, students in the business concentration can take classes focused on translating social work theories and skills to corporate environments.

In numerous industries, the costs of fumbling community relationships are all too obvious. Walmart scaled back plans to come to New York City in the face of significant community opposition. Freeport-McMoRan’s Grasberg copper and gold mine in Indonesia has managed decades of violence and unrest among its workforce and neighbors, forcing the company to spend nearly $30 million a year on security alone. Liesel Filgueiras, manager of human rights and indigenous relations for Vale, the Brazilian mining company, told me that a few disgruntled community members can block the railway leading in and out of a mine: “The social license to operate is an ethereal and tangible concept for most companies. For us it is extremely tangible: it means stopping our operations.”

Companies are trying to move beyond auditing to analyzing root causes and context—another skill that social workers possess.

I joined BP in 2000 after earning my MBA, and moved to Indonesia to crunch numbers on the assets BP had just acquired with its takeover of Arco. But I ended up focusing on a liquefied natural gas plant with a myriad of what we euphemistically referred to as “non-technical” risks, including the resettlement of 127 households; a notoriously violent and corrupt military that would be “protecting” our facilities; endemic corruption and a lack of social services.

My job quickly became less about spreadsheets and more about engaging with local communities to understand their needs, bringing in human rights experts to advise us, finding NGOs to partner with, working with every level of government, and developing policies and training modules for BP staff and contractors.

That sounds a lot like the National Association of Social Workers’ definition of its profession: “Social workers help people increase their capacities for problem solving and coping, and they help them obtain needed resources, facilitate interactions between individuals and between people and their environments, make organizations responsible to people, and influence social policies.”

In the area of supply chain management, companies are trying to move beyond auditing to analyzing root causes and context—another skill that social workers possess. The 2013 collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Bangladesh in which over 1,100 garment workers died was a tragic example of how the prevailing model of employing auditors to run through checklists is sorely lacking.
When I tried to limit working hours for the contractor building a BP chemicals plant in China, I didn’t understand why there was so much resistance from both the supplier and the migrant workers whose safety I was trying to ensure—until I figured out that they had left their families behind and wanted to maximize their earnings while they were away. (I still insisted on international standards because I wanted them to go home alive, but I learned how to make my case.)

I might have been helped by the social worker’s “person-in-environment” approach, which sensibly stipulates that “an individual and his or her behavior cannot be understood adequately without consideration of the various aspects of that individual’s environment (social, political, familial, temporal, spiritual, economic, and physical).”

Yes, business schools have courses in the so-called “soft skills” (a phrase whose time has clearly passed) of management, leadership, and organizational behavior. But even at Yale, my MBA alma mater that was founded as the School of Organization and Management, I wrongly viewed those classes as a gentle respite from finance and operations rather than the reason I was there.

Social workers help people increase their capacities for problem solving and coping.

When Robin Eastman was working as a case manager for people with developmental disabilities, the inefficiency of the nonprofit sector led her to seek an MBA alongside her MSW at the University of Maryland.

In her summer internship with Hilton Worldwide this year, she worked on a program to reward high-performing employees. Her social work training led her to propose that managers conduct “stay” interviews, as opposed to the exit interviews companies conduct once employees are already on their way out. These “stay” interviews would try to understand what it would take to retain an employee, strengthen the manager-employee relationship, and acknowledge that not everyone is motivated by cash alone.

“That was a key point that maybe a business person would think of,” Eastman admits, “but it’s a much more social work-y thing to do.”

Of course, companies cannot be full of social workers. Ex-BP CEO Tony Hayward was widely derided after the 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill for having said one year earlier that BP “had too many people that were working to save the world” and “makes its money by someone somewhere every day putting on boots, coveralls, a hard hat and glasses and going out and turning valves. … We’ve sort of lost track of that.”

He was right, to an extent: Companies obviously need people trained in the technical skills of their core business. But I saw from my firsthand experience in Indonesia and China that BP could not make its money without a bit of world-saving.

Interns and alumni from the USC program have worked at Target liaising with local government agencies; at Pan American Bank conducting community needs assessments; and at Wells Fargo
Life Management Services vetting service providers for high net-worth clients. These are all essential functions that serve not just the companies’ bottom lines but its external stakeholders as well.

Tomorrow’s CEOs will be working in an environment that demands proactive empathy with the needs of an ever-changing workforce, and innovative collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders on the most pressing issues that face our global society. That sounds to me like a job for a social worker who might be able to help not just the world’s companies, but its people and environment as well.

About the author

Christine Bader (Yale MBA ’00) is author of The Evolution of a Corporate Idealist: When Girl Meets Oil and a visiting scholar at Columbia University. She worked for BP from 2000-08.

More

**Warren Buffett to MBA students: This is what ‘sets apart a big winner from the rest of**
the pack’

Philanthropist Warren Buffett is joined onstage by 24 other philanthropist and influential business people featured on the Forbes list of 100 Greatest Business Minds during the Forbes Media Centennial Celebration at Pier 60 on September 19, 2017
Daniel Zuchnik | Contributor | Getty Images

At 88, Warren Buffett has a lot of wisdom — and sharing it with students is one of the many wonderful things he’s known for.

One lesson the Berkshire Hathaway CEO loves to teach is the importance of developing good personal qualities at a young age.

Establishing good habits — even the little ones, like saying “please” and “thank you” — is a major key to success, he told Yahoo Finance’s editor-in-chief last year.

A high IQ won’t make you stand out

Buffett elaborated on the topic in a talk to MBA students from the University of Florida in 1998.
The legendary investor started his speech with a little game: “Think for a moment that I granted you a right — you can buy 10% of one of your classmate’s earnings for the rest of their lifetime.”

The decision should be based on merit, Buffett advised, so it’d be unwise to pick the person with the highest IQ, the richest parents or the most energy.

“There’s nothing wrong with getting the highest grades in the class, but that isn’t going to be the quality that sets apart a big winner from the rest of the pack,” said Buffett.

He continued: “You’d probably pick the person who has leadership qualities, who is able to get others to carry out their interests. That would be the person who is generous, honest and gave credit to other people for their own ideas.”

And here comes the hooker: In addition to this person, Buffett told the students they had to sell short another one of their classmates and pay 10% of what they do.

“You wouldn’t pick the person with the lowest IQ,” he said. “You’d think about the person who turned you off, the person who is egotistical, who is greedy, who cuts corners, who is slightly dishonest.”

If you see any of those qualities in yourself, you can get rid of them. “It’s simply a question of which you decide,” he said.

There’s nothing wrong with getting the highest grades in the class, but that isn’t going to be the quality that sets apart a big winner from the rest of the pack.

Warren Buffett
CEO, Berkshire Hathaway

“If you write the good qualities down and make them habitual, you will be the one you want to buy 10% of when you’re all through,” said Buffett. “The beauty of this is that you already own 100% of yourself, and you’re stuck with it. So you might as well be that person, that somebody else.”

Buffett said he sees people his age — or even 20 years younger — with “self-destructive behavior patterns,” and they’re entrapped by them.

Essentially, integrity — honesty, virtue and morality — can make or break you in the professional world. And if you choose not to make it a priority, you risk getting stuck with a reputation for deceit.

**What Buffett looks for in a good hire**
All of this goes back to what Buffett himself looks for when deciding who to hire or invest in. His decision isn’t based on business metrics, test scores or degrees. Instead, it’s all about one’s personal qualities.

“There was a guy, Pete Kiewit in Omaha, who used to say he looked for three things in hiring people: integrity, intelligence and energy,” Buffett said. “If they didn’t have the first, the other two would kill them, because if they don’t have integrity, you want them dumb and lazy.”

It makes sense — if you can’t trust someone to act with integrity in a situation that demands it, then should they really be allowed anywhere near you or your brand?

The answers seems like a resounding “no,” but it also raises another, more difficult question: How do you know who to trust?

At Berkshire Hathaway’s annual meeting in 2007, an attendee asked Buffett that exact question.

The billionaire dipped into his store of wisdom and offered this sage perspective: “People give themselves away fairly often. When someone comes to me with a business, the very things they talk about, what they regard as important — there are a lot of clues that come as to subsequent behavior.”

**Don’t be someone who turns people off**

The big takeaway here is that if you want to be the person who is successful, who everyone wants to hire, you need to build habits of integrity.

There are a handful of ways to do that:

- Fulfill your promises
- Be honest
- Be trustworthy
- Give credit where credit is due
- Be mindful and emotionally intuitive
- Manifest humility
- Be willing to admit you’re wrong
- Offer help when it’s needed
- Treat others with respect
- Be charitable
- Be patient

Intelligence and ambition are valuable traits, but even so, a lack of integrity won’t make you stand apart from the others — nor will it get you hired, at least not by Buffett.

*Tom Popomaronis is a commerce expert and proud Baltimore native. Currently, he is the Senior Director of Product Innovation at the Hawkins Group. His work has been featured in Forbes,*
Fast Company and The Washington Post. In 2014, he was named one of the “40 Under 40” by the Baltimore Business Journal.

●
RAJ CHETTY

RAJ CHETTY got his biggest break before his life began. His mother, Anbu, grew up in Tamil Nadu, a tropical state at the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent. Anbu showed the greatest academic potential of her five siblings, but her future was constrained by custom. Although Anbu’s father encouraged her scholarly inclinations, there were no colleges in the area, and sending his daughter away for an education would have been unseemly.

But as Anbu approached the end of high school, a minor miracle redirected her life. A local tycoon, himself the father of a bright daughter, decided to open a women’s college, housed in his elegant residence. Anbu was admitted to the inaugural class of 30 young women, learning English in the spacious courtyard under a thatched roof and traveling in the early mornings by bus to a nearby college to run chemistry experiments or dissect frogs’ hearts before the men arrived. Anbu excelled, and so began a rapid upward trajectory. She enrolled in medical school. “Why,” her father was asked, “do you send her there?” Among their Chettiar caste, husbands commonly worked abroad for years at a time, sending back money, while wives were left to raise the children. What use would a medical degree be to a stay-at-home mother?
In 1962, Anbu married Veerappa Chetty, a brilliant man from Tamil Nadu whose mother and grandmother had sometimes eaten less food so there would be more for him. Anbu became a doctor and supported her husband while he earned a doctorate in economics. By 1979, when Raj was born in New Delhi, his mother was a pediatrics professor and his father was an economics professor who had served as an adviser to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

When Chetty was 9, his family moved to the United States, and he began a climb nearly as dramatic as that of his parents. He was the valedictorian of his high-school class, then graduated in just three years from Harvard University, where he went on to earn a doctorate in economics and, at age 28, was among the youngest faculty members in the university’s history to be offered tenure. In 2012, he was awarded the MacArthur genius grant. The following year, he was given the John Bates Clark Medal, awarded to the most promising economist under 40. (He was 33 at the time.) In 2015, Stanford University hired him away. Last summer, Harvard lured him back to launch his own research and policy institute, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative.

Chetty turns 40 this month, and is widely considered to be one of the most influential social scientists of his generation. “The question with Raj,” says Harvard’s Edward Glaeser, one of the country’s leading urban economists, “is not if he will win a Nobel Prize, but when.”

The work that has brought Chetty such fame is an echo of his family’s history. He has pioneered an approach that uses newly available sources of government data to show how American families fare across generations, revealing striking patterns of upward mobility and stagnation. In one early study, he showed that children born in 1940 had a 90 percent chance of earning more than their parents, but for children born four decades later, that chance had fallen to 50 percent, a toss of a coin.

In 2013, Chetty released a colorful map of the United States, showing the surprising degree to which people’s financial prospects depend on where they happen to grow up. In Salt Lake City, a person born to a family in the bottom fifth of household income had a 10.8 percent chance of reaching the top fifth. In Milwaukee, the odds were less than half that.

Chetty at age 9. He was later valedictorian of his high school, and he went on to earn an undergraduate degree and a doctorate in economics from Harvard University. At age 28, he was among the youngest faculty members in the university’s history to be offered tenure. (Courtesy of Raj Chetty)
Since then, each of his studies has become a front-page media event (“Chetty bombs,” one collaborator calls them) that combines awe—millions of data points, vivid infographics, a countrywide lens—with shock. This may not be the America you’d like to imagine, the statistics testify, but it’s what we’ve allowed America to become. Dozens of the nation’s elite colleges have more children of the 1 percent than from families in the bottom 60 percent of family income. A black boy born to a wealthy family is more than twice as likely to end up poor as a white boy from a wealthy family. Chetty has established Big Data as a moral force in the American debate.

Now he wants to do more than change our understanding of America—he wants to change America itself. His new Harvard-based institute, called Opportunity Insights, is explicitly aimed at applying his findings in cities around the country and demonstrating that social scientists, despite a discouraging track record, are able to fix the problems they articulate in journals. His staff includes an eight-person policy team, which is building partnerships with Charlotte, Seattle, Detroit, Minneapolis, and other cities.

For a man who has done so much to document the country’s failings, Chetty is curiously optimistic. He has the confidence of a scientist: If a phenomenon like upward mobility can be measured with enough precision, then it can be understood; if it can be understood, then it can be manipulated. “The big-picture goal,” Chetty told me, “is to revive the American dream.”

LAST SUMMER, I visited Opportunity Insights on its opening day. The offices are housed on the second floor of a brick building, above a café and across Massachusetts Avenue from Harvard’s columned Widener Library. Chetty arrived in econ-casual: a lilac dress shirt, no jacket, black slacks. He is tall and trim, with an untroubled air; he smiled as he greeted two of his longtime collaborators—the Brown University economist John Friedman and Harvard’s Nathaniel Hendren. They walked him around, showing off the finished space, done in a modern palette of white, wood, and aluminum with accent walls of yellow and sage.

Later, after Chetty and his colleagues had finished giving a day of seminars to their new staff, I caught up with him in his office, which was outfitted with a pristine whiteboard, an adjustable-height desk, and a Herman Miller chair that still had the tags attached. The first time I’d met him, at an economics conference, he had told me he was one of several cousins on his mother’s side who go by Raj, all named after their grandfather, Nadarajan, all with sharp minds and the same long legs and easy gait. Yet of Nadarajan’s children, only Chetty’s mother graduated from college, and he’s certain that this fact shaped his generation’s possibilities. He was able to come to the United States as a child and attend an elite private school, the University School of
Milwaukee. New York Raj—the family appends a location to keep them straight—came to the U.S. later in life, at age 28, worked in drugstores, and then took a series of jobs with the City of New York. Singapore Raj found a job in a temple there that allows him to support his family back in India, but means they must live apart. Karaikudi Raj, named for the town where his mother grew up, committed suicide as a teenager.

“We are not trying to do something that is unimaginable or has never happened,” Chetty told me. “It happens just down the road.”

I asked Boston Raj to consider what might have become of him if that wealthy Indian businessman had not decided, in the precise year his mother was finishing high school, to create a college for the talented women of southeastern Tamil Nadu. “I would likely not be here,” he said, thinking for a moment. “To put it another way: Who are all the people who are not here, who would have been here if they’d had the opportunities? That is a really good question.”

Charlotte is one of America’s great urban success stories. In the 1970s, it was a modest-size city left behind as the textile industry that had defined North Carolina moved overseas. But in the 1980s, the “Queen City” began to lift itself up. US Airways established a hub at the Charlotte Douglas International Airport, and the region became a major transportation and distribution center. Bank of America built its headquarters there, and today Charlotte is in a dead heat with San Francisco to be the nation’s second-largest banking center, after New York. New skyscrapers have sprouted downtown, and the city boundary has been expanding, replacing farmland with spacious homes and Whole Foods stores. In the past four decades, Charlotte’s population has nearly tripled.

Charlotte has also stood out in Chetty’s research, though not in a good way. In a 2014 analysis of the country’s 50 largest metropolitan areas, Charlotte ranked last in ability to lift up poor children. Only 4.4 percent of Charlotte’s kids moved from the bottom quintile of household income to the top. Kids born into low-income families earned just $26,000 a year, on average, as adults—perched on the poverty line. “It was shocking,” says Brian Collier, an executive vice president of the Foundation for the Carolinas, which is working with Opportunity Insights. “The Charlotte story is that we are a meritocracy, that if you come here and are smart and motivated, you will have every opportunity to achieve greatness.” The city’s true story, Chetty’s data showed, is of selective opportunity: All the data-scientist and business-development-analyst jobs in the thriving banking sector are a boon for out-of-towners and the progeny of the well-to-do, but to grow up poor in Charlotte is largely to remain poor.
To help cities like Charlotte, Chetty takes inspiration from medicine. For thousands of years, he explained, little progress was made in understanding disease, until technologies like the microscope gave scientists novel ways to understand biology, and thus the pathologies that make people ill. In October, Chetty’s institute released an interactive map of the United States called the Opportunity Atlas, revealing the terrain of opportunity down to the level of individual neighborhoods. This, he says, will be his microscope.

Drawing on anonymized government data over a three-decade span, the researchers linked children to the parents who claimed them as dependents. The atlas then followed poor kids from every census tract in the country, showing how much they went on to earn as adults. The colors on the atlas reveal a generation’s prospects: red for areas where kids fared the worst; shades of orange, yellow, and green for middling locales; and blue for spots like Salt Lake City’s Foothill neighborhood, where upward mobility is strongest. It can also track children born into higher income brackets, compare results by race and gender, and zoom out to show states, regions, or the country as a whole.

The Opportunity Atlas has a fractal quality. Some regions of the United States look better than high-mobility countries such as Denmark, while others look more like a developing country. The Great Plains unfurl as a sea of blue, and then the eye is caught by an island of red—a mark of the miseries inflicted on the Oglala Lakota by European settlers. These stark differences recapitulate themselves on smaller and smaller scales as you zoom in. It’s common to see opposite extremes of opportunity within easy walking distance of each other, even in two neighborhoods that long-term residents would consider quite similar.

To find a cure for what ails America, Chetty will need to understand all of this wild variation. Which factors foster opportunity, and which impede it? The next step will be to find local interventions that can address these factors—and to prove, with experimental trials, that the interventions work. The end goal is the social equivalent of precision medicine: a method for diagnosing the particular weaknesses of a place and prescribing a set of treatments. This could transform neighborhoods, and restore the American dream from the ground up.

If all of this seems impossibly ambitious, Chetty’s counterargument is to point to how the blue is marbled in with the red. “We are not trying to do something that is unimaginable or has never happened,” he told me over lunch one day. “It happens just down the road.”
Yet in Charlotte, where Opportunity Insights hopes to build its proof of concept, the atlas reveals swaths of bleak uniformity. Looking at the city, you first see a large bluish wedge south of downtown, with Providence Road on one side and South Boulevard on the other, encompassing the mostly white, mostly affluent areas where children generally grow up to do well. Surrounding the wedge is a broad expanse in hues of red that locals call “the crescent,” made up of predominantly black neighborhoods where the prospects for poor children are pretty miserable. Hunger and homelessness are common, and in some places only one in five high-school students scores “proficient” on standardized tests. In many parts of the crescent, the question isn’t What’s holding kids back? so much as What isn’t holding them back? It’s hard to know where to start.

The most significant challenge Chetty faces is the force of history. In the 1930s, redlining prevented black families from buying homes in Charlotte’s more desirable neighborhoods. In the 1940s, the city built Independence Boulevard, a four-lane highway that cut through the heart of its Brooklyn neighborhood, dividing and displacing a thriving working-class black community. The damage continued in the ’60s and ’70s with new interstates. It’s common to hear that something has gone wrong in parts of Charlotte, but the more honest reading is that Charlotte is working as it was designed to. American cities are the way they are, and remain the way they are, because of choices they have made and continue to make.

Does a professor from Harvard, even one as influential and well funded as Chetty, truly stand any chance of bending the American story line? On his national atlas, the most obvious feature is an ugly red gash that starts in Virginia, curls down through the Southeast’s coastal states—North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama—then marches west toward the Mississippi River, where it turns northward before petering out in western Tennessee. When I saw this, I was reminded of another map: one President Abraham Lincoln consulted in 1861, demarcating the counties with the most slaves. The two maps are remarkably similar. Set the documents side by side, and it may be hard to believe that they are separated in time by more than a century and a half, or that one is a rough census of men and women kept in bondage at the time of the Civil War, and the other is a computer-generated glimpse of our children’s future.

Top: A map consulted by President Lincoln in 1861, demarcating the counties with the most slaves. (Library of Congress)

Bottom: A detail from Chetty’s Opportunity Atlas, in which areas with poor upward mobility are shown in red. The similarities between the two documents suggest that it
will be difficult for Chetty to change the landscape of opportunity. (Opportunity Insights / U.S. Census Bureau)

In 2003, after earning his doctorate, Chetty moved to UC Berkeley for his first job. He was, at the time, the only person in his immediate family—his parents and two older sisters, both biomedical researchers—who had not published a paper. Education was highly prized. He was taught that it would be sacrilege to ever step on a book. When he visits his parents at their home, north of Boston, his mother still makes him a favorite dish with bhindi (Hindi for “okra”), which, she told me, is supposed to be good for the brain.

Both of Chetty’s parents descend from the Chettiar caste, a mercantile group historically involved in banking, and the kids were raised to carry on their cultural heritage. They learned Tamil in addition to Hindi. Chetty’s sisters married men with Chettiar backgrounds. Chetty rejects the caste system, though he first met his wife, Sundari, after one of his sisters got to know her through the Chettiar community. (Sundari is a stem-cell biologist.)

Chetty had always been drawn to public economics—the study of government policy and how it might be improved. And, as it happened, he was embarking on his career as a revolution in the field was under way. In the past, economists had to rely heavily on surveys, but the advent of cheap, powerful computing allowed for a new kind of economics—one that drew on the extensive administrative data gathered by governments. Survey participants number in the hundreds or thousands; administrative data can yield records in the hundreds of millions.

In November 2007, Chetty came across an ad from the IRS seeking help organizing its electronic files into a format that would be easier to use for research. He immediately recognized that completing the job would make it possible for scholars to go far deeper into tax data. He and John Friedman began the process of registering to be federal contractors—which involved, among other things, certifying that their workplace met federal safety standards, and calling on Friedman’s brother, who lived in Washington, D.C., to take a cab out to Maryland to hand-deliver their application materials, in triplicate.

Like many good ideas, the project seems obvious in retrospect, but the truth is that nobody could have known how useful the data would prove to be—and it worked only because Chetty and his colleagues have an almost superhuman degree of patience.

Nathaniel Hendren, who has known Chetty for seven years, told me he’s never seen Chetty happier than one Friday evening in the summer of 2014, when they were
sitting in some IRS cubicles at the John F. Kennedy Federal Building in downtown Boston. (The only way to access the government’s data was inside a federal building, on secure servers, with the computers logging their requests.) That night, Chetty and Hendren were wrestling with thousands of lines of code designed to pull together responses scattered across hundreds of millions of the 1040s, W2s, and other forms (taxpayer names are kept separate to protect privacy), while ensuring that nothing in the code introduced errors or subtle biases. At some point, Hendren recalled, he heard Chetty yell “Sweet!” Hendren looked over and Chetty, smiling, explained that his flight out of Logan airport that night had just been delayed: more time to work.

Over the past two decades, economists have tried to structure their work, as much as possible, to resemble scientific experiments. This “credibility revolution” is an attempt to explicitly link causes to effects, and sweep aside the old criticism that correlation is not the same as causation. One of the advantages of the large tax database Chetty and his colleagues constructed is that it allows “quasi-experiments”—clever statistical methods that approach the power of a true experiment without requiring a researcher to, say, randomly assign children to live in different cities.

For example, Chetty and Hendren looked at children who changed cities. They found that the later a child moved to a higher-opportunity area, the less effect the move seemed to have on future earnings. But they also devised additional tests to ensure that the effect was causal, such as looking at siblings who moved at the same time: a quasi-experiment in which two children grew up in the same family, but were exposed to a new area for a shorter or longer period depending on their age at the time of the move. The result was a highly credible conclusion, based on millions of data points, that moving a child to a better neighborhood boosts his or her future income—and the younger the child, the greater the benefit.

There was, however, a significant problem: Their conclusion contradicted one of the most influential poverty experiments of recent decades. In the 1990s, the federal government launched Moving to Opportunity, a program designed to relocate families living in public housing to safer neighborhoods, where they had access to better jobs and schools. Thousands of families in five cities were randomly selected to receive housing vouchers and support services to help them move to lower-poverty areas. After a decade of study, researchers concluded that while these “mover” families experienced some physical and mental-health benefits, test scores among the kids didn’t rise, and there were no signs of financial benefit for adults or older children.

In 2014, Chetty, Hendren, and the Harvard economist Lawrence Katz asked the IRS and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which had overseen the
program, for permission to take another look at what had happened to the children. When the earlier follow-up had been done, the youngest kids, who had moved before they were teenagers, had not yet reached their earning years, and this turned out to make all the difference. This young group of movers, the economists found, had gone on to earn 31 percent more than those who hadn’t moved, and 4 percent more of them attended college. They calculated that for an 8-year-old child, the value of the extra future earnings over a lifetime was almost $100,000, a substantial sum for a poor family. For a family with two children, the taxes paid on the extra income more than covered the costs of the program. “The big insight,” Kathryn Edin, a sociology professor at Princeton, told me, “is that it took a generation for the effects to manifest.”

Last July, I took a tour of Charlotte with David Williams, the 34-year-old policy director of Opportunity Insights and the man responsible for translating Chetty’s research into action on the ground. Williams and members of his team crammed into the back of a white Ford Explorer with color printouts of various Charlotte neighborhoods as they appear on the atlas. Brian Collier, of the Foundation for the Carolinas, sat in the front seat, serving as a guide.

As the driver headed northeast, the high-rises of “Uptown” shifted abruptly to low-slung buildings and chain-link fences. Collier pointed out a men’s shelter in the rapidly gentrifying neighborhood of Lockwood, where he’d recently seen a drug deal go down a block away from a house that had sold for half a million dollars.

We continued on to Brightwalk, a new mixed-income development with long rows of townhomes, before turning west for a loop around West Charlotte High School, a once-lauded model of successful integration. In the 1990s, though, support for busing waned, and in 1999, a judge declared that race could not be used as a factor in school assignment. Now the student population is virtually all minority and overwhelmingly poor, and the surrounding neighborhood is deep red on the atlas. The homes are neat, one-story single families, a tad rough around the edges but nothing like the burnt-out buildings in Detroit, where Williams previously worked on economic development for the mayor. “It reminds you how hard it is to tell where the real opportunity is,” Williams said. “You can’t just see it.”

Opportunity is not the same as affluence. Consider a kid who grows up in a household earning about $27,000 annually, right at the 25th percentile nationally. In Beverly Woods, a relatively wealthy, mostly white enclave in South Charlotte with spacious, well-kept yards, he could expect his household income to be $42,900 by age 35. Yet in Huntersville, an attractive northern suburb with nearly the same average household
income as Beverly Woods, a similar kid could expect only $24,800—a stark difference, invisible to a passing driver.

This dynamic also functions in poorer areas. For a child in Reid Park, an African American neighborhood on the west side of Charlotte, near the airport—a place that has struggled to recover from a crime epidemic in the 1980s—the expected household income at age 35 is a dismal $17,800, on average. But in East Forest, a white, working-class neighborhood in southeast Charlotte, the expected future income jumps to $32,600.

There are places like East Forest in cities around the country. Chetty and his team have taken to calling them “opportunity bargains”: places with relatively affordable rents that punch above their weight with respect to opportunity. He doesn’t yet know why some places are opportunity bargains, but he considers the discovery of these neighborhoods to be a breakthrough. John Friedman told me that if the government had been able to move families to opportunity-bargain neighborhoods in the original Moving to Opportunity experiment—places selected for higher opportunity, not lower poverty—the children’s earnings improvements would have been more than twice as great.

In the crimson sectors of Chetty’s atlas, the problem is both the absence of opportunity and the presence of its opposite: swift currents that can drag a person down.

Chetty’s team has already begun to apply this concept in another of its partner cities, Seattle, working with two local housing authorities to navigate the thorny process of translating research into measurable social change. It’s hard for poor families to manage an expansive housing search, which requires time, transportation, and decent credit. The group created a program with “housing navigators,” who point participants toward areas with relatively high opportunity, help with credit-related issues, and even give neighborhood tours. Landlords need encouragement as well. They can be wary of tenants bearing vouchers, which mean government oversight and paperwork. The Seattle program has streamlined this process, and offers free damage insurance to sweeten the deal.

Tenants have just started moving, but the program is already successful: The majority of families who received assistance moved to high-opportunity areas, compared with one-fifth for the control group, which was not provided with the extra services. Chetty estimates that the program will increase each child’s lifetime earnings by $88,000. In February, President Donald Trump signed into law a bill that provides $28 million to try similar experimental programs in other locations. The bill enjoyed overwhelming
bipartisan support, and this spring Chetty was invited to brief the Department of Housing and Urban Development. He told me he’s hopeful that the program can be expanded to the 2.2 million families that receive HUD housing vouchers every year. “Then you’d actually be doing something about poverty in the American city,” he said. “What I like about this is it’s not some pie-in-the-sky thing. We have something that works.”

Charlotte is among the cities interested in implementing the Seattle strategy, but officials also want to use the atlas to select better building sites for affordable housing. In the past, much of the city’s affordable housing was constructed in what Chetty’s data reveal to be high-poverty, low-opportunity areas. “Let’s not just think about building X units of new affordable housing,” Williams said. “Let’s really leverage housing policy as part of a larger economic-mobility agenda for the community.”

Opportunity bargains, however, are not an inexhaustible resource. The crucial question, says the Berkeley economist Enrico Moretti, is whether the opportunity in these places derives from “rival goods”—institutions, such as schools, with limited capacity—or “non-rival goods,” such as local culture, which are harder to deplete. When new people move in, what happens to opportunity? And even if an influx of families doesn’t disrupt the opportunity magic, people aren’t always eager to pick up and leave their homes. Moving breaks ties with family, friends, schools, churches, and other organizations. “The real conundrum is how to address the larger structural realities of inequality,” says the Harvard sociologist Robert Sampson, “and not just try to move people around.”

For all he’s learned about where opportunity resides in America, Chetty knows surprisingly little about what makes one place better than another. He and Hendren have gathered a range of social-science data sets and looked for correlations to the atlas. The high-opportunity places, they’ve found, tend to share five qualities: good schools, greater levels of social cohesion, many two-parent families, low levels of income inequality, and little residential segregation, by either class or race. The list is suggestive, but hard to interpret.

For example, the strongest correlation is the number of intact families. The explanation seems obvious: A second parent usually means higher family income as well as more stability, a broader social network, additional emotional support, and many other intangibles. Yet children’s upward mobility was strongly correlated with two-parent families only in the neighborhood, not necessarily in their home. There are so many things the data might be trying to say. Maybe fathers in a neighborhood serve as mentors and role models? Or maybe there is no causal connection at all. Perhaps, for example, places with strong church communities help kids while also fostering
strong marriages. The same kinds of questions flow from every correlation; each one may mean many things. What is the cause, what is the effect, and what are we missing? Chetty’s microscope has revealed a new world, but not what animates it—or how to change it.

Chetty has found that opportunity does not correlate with many traditional economic measures, such as employment or wage growth. In the search for opportunity’s cause, he is instead focusing on an idea borrowed from sociology: social capital. The term refers broadly to the set of connections that ease a person’s way through the world, providing support and inspiration and opening doors.

Chetty believes that if upward mobility can be measured with enough precision, it can be understood. “The big-picture goal,” he told me, “is to revive the American dream.” (Carlos Chavarría)

Economics has long played the role of sociology’s annoying older brother—conventionally accomplished and wholeheartedly confident, unaware of what he doesn’t know, while still commanding everyone’s attention. Chetty, though, is part of a younger generation of scholars who have embraced a style of quantitative social science that crosses old disciplinary lines. There are strong hints in his research that social capital and mobility are intimately connected; even a crude measure of social capital, such as the number of bowling alleys in a neighborhood, seems to track with opportunity. His data also suggest that who you know growing up can have lasting effects. A paper on patents he co-authored found that young women were more likely to become inventors if they’d moved as children to places where many female inventors lived. (The number of male inventors had little effect.) Even which fields inventors worked in was heavily influenced by what was being invented around them as children. Those who grew up in the Bay Area had some of the highest rates of patenting in computers and related fields, while those who spent their childhood in Minneapolis, home of many medical-device manufacturers, tended to invent drugs and medical devices.* Chetty is currently working with data from Facebook and other social-media platforms to quantify the links between opportunity and our social networks.

Sociologists embrace many ways of understanding the world. They shadow people and move into communities, wondering what they might find out. They collect data and do quantitative analysis and read economics papers, but their work is also informed by psychology and cultural studies. “When you are released from the harsh demands of the experiment, you are allowed to make new discoveries and think more freely about what is going on,” says David Grusky, a Stanford sociology professor
who collaborates with Chetty. I asked Princeton’s Edin what she thought would end up being the one thing that best explains the peaks and valleys of American opportunity. She said her best guess is “some kind of social glue”—the ties that bind people, fostered by well-functioning institutions, whether they are mosques or neighborhood soccer leagues. The staff at Opportunity Insights has learned: When an economist gets lost, a sociologist can touch his elbow and say, *You know, I’ve been noticing some things.*

**In Charlotte,** Chetty still aspires to practice “precision medicine,” but he told me his initial goal is more modest: to see whether he and his team can find anything that helps. Opportunity Insights is planning housing and higher-education initiatives, but social capital is at the center of its approach. It is working with a local organization called Leading on Opportunity, and looking at nonprofits that are already operating successfully, including Communities in Schools, a national group that provides comprehensive student support, as well as a job-training program called Year Up. Chetty is also using tax data to measure the long-term impacts of dozens of place-based interventions, such as enterprise zones, which use tax and other incentives to draw businesses into economically depressed areas. (He expects to see initial results from these analyses later this year.) Chetty may not have many answers yet, but he is convinced that this combination of data, collaboration, and fieldwork will make it possible to move from educated guesses to tailored prescriptions. “There are points when the pieces come together,” Chetty told me. “My instinct is that in social science, this generation is when that is going to happen.”

Chetty’s pitch to the nation is that our problems have technocratic solutions, but at times I sense that he is avoiding an argument. Surely our neighborhoods can be improved, and those improvements can help the next generation achieve better outcomes. But what of the larger forces driving the enormous disparities in American wealth? Poor people would be better off if their children had better prospects, but also if they had more money—if the fruits of our society were shared more broadly. “I can take money from you and give it to me, and maybe that is good and maybe it is not,” he said. “I feel like there are a lot of people working on redistribution, and it is hard to figure out the right answer there.” To focus on the question of who gets what is also, of course, politically incendiary.

Chetty believes there is more progress to be made through a moral framing that is less partisan. “There are so many kids out there who could be doing so many great things, both for themselves and for the world,” he said. Chetty’s challenge to the system is measured and empirical; it’s one that billionaires and corporations can happily endorse. But his stance is also a simple matter of personality: Chetty is no agitator. He
told me, “I like to find solutions that please everyone in the room, and this definitely has that feel.”

In Charlotte, even the circumscribed version of social change that Chetty is attempting looks daunting. Last summer, before the Opportunity Insights team came to town, I drove around to the back of West Charlotte High School, to a hamlet of pale-yellow temporary-classroom buildings, each set on concrete blocks. One building has been given over to Eliminate the Digital Divide, known as E2D, a nonprofit that takes donations of old laptops, then refurbishes and distributes them for $60 apiece to students who have no computer of their own. According to E2D, half of the county’s public-school students have been unable to complete a homework assignment because they don’t have access to a computer or the internet.

Inside the E2D building is a bright room ringed by a series of workstations where West Charlotte student-employees inspect laptops, set up hard drives, and test the final products. Whiteboards, photos, and posters with inspirational phrases like COLLEGE BOUND! cover the walls. By the door, a pair of yellow couches serve as a waiting area. When the boys get their computers, they work hard to suppress a smile, whereas the girls are prone to let loose. Sometimes they jump up and down, and sometimes they cry.

I met Kalijah Jones, a young black woman in a pale-pink sleeveless blouse and matching skirt. She had started working at E2D during her senior year, in 2017. Not long into our conversation, she said, “I love my life!”—this despite the fact that she was living in a homeless shelter at the time.

For Jones, the biggest benefit brought by E2D was not the computer or the job, but the social capital the program provided. Last year, she said, E2D’s West Charlotte lab was recognized with a local technology award, and the founder invited Jones and some of her co-workers to join him for the awards ceremony at the Knight Theater, where the Charlotte Ballet performs. One of the other honorees was Road to Hire, a program that pays high-school graduates as it trains them for jobs in sales and tech. The head of Road to Hire was at the ceremony, and he gave Jones a business card, which led to a paid spot in the program’s training program.

But in the crimson sectors of Chetty’s atlas, the problem is both the absence of opportunity and the presence of its opposite: swift currents that can drag a person down. There are, in these places, a few narrow paths to success, and 99 ways to falter. Jones made it through high school despite living in a shelter, and was accepted to Western Carolina University with financial aid. But she decided not to go, in part because she couldn’t imagine leaving her struggling mother and sister behind to live
on a campus three hours away. Last winter, the three of them left Charlotte, and the
prospects that were beginning to open up for Jones there, and moved to New Jersey,
where she grew up. When I last spoke with her, she’d found work at an Amazon
warehouse.

One Friday evening, I was in Chetty’s Stanford office when a ballerina arrived. Sanvi,
Chetty’s 3-year-old daughter, wore a pink tutu with matching hair ribbons and tights.
She declined—vigorously—the white sweater offered to ward off the evening chill.
Chetty and I had spent hours discussing his research, but when the nanny dropped
Sanvi off, it marked the end of the day. Chetty gathered his things and whisked her up
in his arms. “Hold me properly, Appa,” Sanvi admonished. Outside, we got into
Chetty’s aging silver Acura and headed to an Indonesian restaurant for takeout. Sanvi
bubbled with enthusiasm. “I want to be a fairy princess,” she announced from the
back seat. “Can I be a fairy princess?” Chetty glanced in the rearview mirror and
assured Sanvi that when she grows up, she can be whatever she wants.

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After stopping for the food, we pulled up to a light-brown ranch house, with beautiful
plantings out front. Inside, the house was clearly Sanvi’s. Taking a seat in the open
kitchen, I was surrounded by a tapestry of exuberant finger paintings taped to the
walls, interspersed with pages neatly torn from coloring books (penguins, parrots,
bunnies, each splashed with color). A pair of persimmon trees were fruiting out back.

Chetty told me that his interest in poverty dates back to the horrifying want he
observed on the streets of New Delhi. But only when he built the first version of his
atlas did he see what he should do about it. “I realized,” he said, “we could have the
biggest impact on poverty by focusing on children.”
Chetty thinks about revolution like an economist does: as a compounding accumulation of marginal changes. Bump the interest rate on your savings account by one notch, and 30 years later, your balance is much improved. Move a family to a better zip code, or foster the right conditions in that family’s current neighborhood, and their children will do better; do that a thousand times, or ten thousand, and the American dream can be more possible, for more people, than it is today.

In the 1930s, the poet Langston Hughes published what remains one of the most honest descriptions of that dream:

A dream so strong, so brave, so true
That even yet its mighty daring sings
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned
That’s made America the land it has become

The poem, though, is laced with a counterpoint of protest: “America was never America to me”—not to the “man who never got ahead”; “the poorest worker bartered through the years”; or “the Negro, servant to you all.” Still, for all its outrage, the poem ends with a paradoxical yearning: “O, let America be America again,” Hughes wrote. “The land that never has been yet.”

Hearing stories of the American dream as a boy in New Delhi, Chetty adopted the faith. When he became a scientist, he discerned the truth. What remains is contradiction: We must believe in the dream and we must accept that it is false—then, perhaps, we will be capable of building a land where it will yet be true.

This article appears in the August 2019 print edition with the headline “Raj Chetty’s American Dream.”

* This article originally stated that Minneapolis was the home of the Mayo Clinic.

What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team

New research reveals surprising truths about why some work groups thrive and others falter.

CreditIllustration by James Graham
By Charles Duhigg

• • • Like most 25-year-olds, Julia Rozovsky wasn’t sure what she wanted to do with her life. She had worked at a consulting firm, but it wasn’t a good match. Then she became a researcher for two professors at Harvard, which was interesting but lonely. Maybe a big corporation would be a better fit. Or perhaps a fast-growing start-up. All she knew for certain was that she wanted to find a job that was more social. “I wanted to be part of a community, part of something people were building together,” she told me. She thought about various opportunities — Internet companies, a Ph.D. program — but nothing seemed exactly right. So in 2009, she chose the path that allowed her to put off making a decision: She applied to business schools and was accepted by the Yale School of Management.

When Rozovsky arrived on campus, she was assigned to a study group carefully engineered by the school to foster tight bonds. Study groups have become a rite of passage at M.B.A. programs, a way for students to practice working in teams and a reflection of the increasing demand for employees who can adroitly navigate group dynamics. A worker today might start the morning by collaborating with a team of engineers, then send emails to colleagues marketing a new brand, then jump on a conference call planning an entirely different product line, while also juggling team meetings with accounting and the party-planning committee. To prepare students for that complex world, business schools around the country have revised their curriculums to emphasize team-focused learning.

Every day, between classes or after dinner, Rozovsky and her four teammates gathered to discuss homework assignments, compare spreadsheets and strategize for exams. Everyone was smart and curious, and they had a lot in common: They had gone to similar colleges and had worked at analogous firms. These shared experiences, Rozovsky hoped, would make it easy for them to work well together. But it didn’t turn out that way. “There are lots of people who say some of their best business-school friends come from their study groups,” Rozovsky told me. “It wasn’t like that for me.”

Instead, Rozovsky’s study group was a source of stress. “I always felt like I had to prove myself,” she said. The team’s dynamics could put her on edge. When the group met, teammates sometimes jockeyed for the leadership position or criticized one another’s ideas. There were conflicts over who was in charge and who got to represent the group in class. “People would try to show authority by speaking louder or talking over each other,” Rozovsky told me. “I always felt like I had to be careful not to make mistakes around them.”

So Rozovsky started looking for other groups she could join. A classmate mentioned that some students were putting together teams for “case competitions,” contests in which participants proposed solutions to real-world business problems that were evaluated by judges, who awarded trophies and cash. The competitions were voluntary, but the work wasn’t all that different from what Rozovsky did with her study group: conducting lots of research and financial analyses, writing reports and giving presentations. The members of her case-competition team had a
variety of professional experiences: Army Officer, a researcher at a think tank, director of a health-education nonprofit organization and consultant to a refugee program. Despite their disparate backgrounds, however, everyone clicked. They emailed one another dumb jokes and usually spent the first 10 minutes of each meeting chatting. When it came time to brainstorm, “we had lots of crazy ideas,” Rozovsky said.

One of her favorite competitions asked teams to come up with a new business to replace a student-run snack store on Yale’s campus. Rozovsky proposed a nap room and selling earplugs and eyeshades to make money. Someone else suggested filling the space with old video games. There were ideas about clothing swaps. Most of the proposals were impractical, but “we all felt like we could say anything to each other,” Rozovsky told me. “No one worried that the rest of the team was judging them.” Eventually, the team settled on a plan for a microgym with a handful of exercise classes and a few weight machines. They won the competition. (The microgym — with two stationary bicycles and three treadmills — still exists.)

Rozovsky’s study group dissolved in her second semester (it was up to the students whether they wanted to continue). Her case team, however, stuck together for the two years she was at Yale.

It always struck Rozovsky as odd that her experiences with the two groups were dissimilar. Each was composed of people who were bright and outgoing. When she talked one on one with members of her study group, the exchanges were friendly and warm. It was only when they gathered as a team that things became fraught. By contrast, her case-competition team was always fun and easygoing. In some ways, the team’s members got along better as a group than as individual friends.

“I couldn’t figure out why things had turned out so different,” Rozovsky told me. “It didn’t seem like it had to happen that way.”

Our data-saturated age enables us to examine our work habits and office quirks with a scrutiny that our cubicle-bound forebears could only dream of. Today, on corporate campuses and within university laboratories, psychologists, sociologists and statisticians are devoting themselves to studying everything from team composition to email patterns in order to figure out how to make employees into faster, better and more productive versions of themselves. “We’re living through a golden age of understanding personal productivity,” says Marshall Van Alstyne, a professor at Boston University who studies how people share information. “All of a sudden, we can pick apart the small choices that all of us make, decisions most of us don’t even notice, and figure out why some people are so much more effective than everyone else.”

Yet many of today’s most valuable firms have come to realize that analyzing and improving individual workers — a practice known as “employee performance optimization” — isn’t enough. As commerce becomes increasingly global and complex, the bulk of modern work is more and more team-based. One study, published in The Harvard Business Review last month, found that “the time spent by managers and employees in collaborative activities has ballooned
by 50 percent or more” over the last two decades and that, at many companies, more than three-quarters of an employee’s day is spent communicating with colleagues.

In Silicon Valley, software engineers are encouraged to work together, in part because studies show that groups tend to innovate faster, see mistakes more quickly and find better solutions to problems. Studies also show that people working in teams tend to achieve better results and report higher job satisfaction. In a 2015 study, executives said that profitability increases when workers are persuaded to collaborate more. Within companies and conglomerates, as well as in government agencies and schools, teams are now the fundamental unit of organization. If a company wants to outstrip its competitors, it needs to influence not only how people work but also how they work together.

Five years ago, Google — one of the most public proselytizers of how studying workers can transform productivity — became focused on building the perfect team. In the last decade, the tech giant has spent untold millions of dollars measuring nearly every aspect of its employees’ lives. Google’s People Operations department has scrutinized everything from how frequently particular people eat together (the most productive employees tend to build larger networks by rotating dining companions) to which traits the best managers share (unsurprisingly, good communication and avoiding micromanaging is critical; more shocking, this was news to many Google managers).

The company’s top executives long believed that building the best teams meant combining the best people. They embraced other bits of conventional wisdom as well, like “It’s better to put introverts together,” said Abeer Dubey, a manager in Google’s People Analytics division, or “Teams are more effective when everyone is friends away from work.” But, Dubey went on, “it turned out no one had really studied which of those were true.”

In 2012, the company embarked on an initiative — code-named Project Aristotle — to study hundreds of Google’s teams and figure out why some stumbled while others soared. Dubey, a leader of the project, gathered some of the company’s best statisticians, organizational psychologists, sociologists and engineers. He also needed researchers. Rozovsky, by then, had decided that what she wanted to do with her life was study people’s habits and tendencies. After graduating from Yale, she was hired by Google and was soon assigned to Project Aristotle.

Project Aristotle’s researchers began by reviewing a half-century of academic studies looking at how teams worked. Were the best teams made up of people with similar interests? Or did it matter more whether everyone was motivated by the same kinds of rewards? Based on those studies, the researchers scrutinized the composition of groups inside Google: How often did teammates socialize outside the office? Did they have the same hobbies? Were their educational backgrounds similar? Was it better for all teammates to be outgoing or for all of them to be shy? They drew diagrams showing which teams had overlapping memberships and which groups had exceeded their departments’ goals. They studied how long teams stuck together and if gender balance seemed to have an impact on a team’s success.
No matter how researchers arranged the data, though, it was almost impossible to find patterns — or any evidence that the composition of a team made any difference. ‘‘We looked at 180 teams from all over the company,’’ Dubey said. ‘‘We had lots of data, but there was nothing showing that a mix of specific personality types or skills or backgrounds made any difference. The ‘who’ part of the equation didn’t seem to matter.’’

Some groups that were ranked among Google’s most effective teams, for instance, were composed of friends who socialized outside work. Others were made up of people who were basically strangers away from the conference room. Some groups sought strong managers. Others preferred a less hierarchical structure. Most confounding of all, two teams might have nearly identical makeups, with overlapping memberships, but radically different levels of effectiveness. ‘‘At Google, we’re good at finding patterns,’’ Dubey said. ‘‘There weren’t strong patterns here.’’

As they struggled to figure out what made a team successful, Rozovsky and her colleagues kept coming across research by psychologists and sociologists that focused on what are known as ‘‘group norms.’’ Norms are the traditions, behavioral standards and unwritten rules that govern how we function when we gather: One team may come to a consensus that avoiding disagreement is more valuable than debate; another team might develop a culture that encourages vigorous arguments and spurns groupthink. Norms can be unspoken or openly acknowledged, but their influence is often profound. Team members may behave in certain ways as individuals — they may chafe against authority or prefer working independently — but when they gather, the group’s norms typically override individual proclivities and encourage deference to the team.

Project Aristotle’s researchers began searching through the data they had collected, looking for norms. They looked for instances when team members described a particular behavior as an ‘‘unwritten rule’’ or when they explained certain things as part of the ‘‘team’s culture.’’ Some groups said that teammates interrupted one another constantly and that team leaders reinforced that behavior by interrupting others themselves. On other teams, leaders enforced conversational order, and when someone cut off a teammate, group members would politely ask everyone to wait for his or her turn. Some teams celebrated birthdays and began each meeting with informal chitchat about weekend plans. Other groups got right to business and discouraged gossip. There were teams that contained outsize personalities who hewed to their group’s sedate norms, and others in which introverts came out of their shells as soon as meetings began.
After looking at over a hundred groups for more than a year, Project Aristotle researchers concluded that understanding and influencing group norms were the keys to improving Google’s teams. But Rozovsky, now a lead researcher, needed to figure out which norms mattered most. Google’s research had identified dozens of behaviors that seemed important, except that sometimes the norms of one effective team contrasted sharply with those of another equally successful group. Was it better to let everyone speak as much as they wanted, or should strong leaders end meandering debates? Was it more effective for people to openly disagree with one another, or should conflicts be played down? The data didn’t offer clear verdicts. In fact, the data sometimes pointed in opposite directions. The only thing worse than not finding a pattern is finding too many of them. Which norms, Rozovsky and her colleagues wondered, were the ones that successful teams shared?
**Imagine you have** been invited to join one of two groups.

Team A is composed of people who are all exceptionally smart and successful. When you watch a video of this group working, you see professionals who wait until a topic arises in which they are expert, and then they speak at length, explaining what the group ought to do. When someone makes a side comment, the speaker stops, reminds everyone of the agenda and pushes the meeting back on track. This team is efficient. There is no idle chitchat or long debates. The meeting ends as scheduled and disbands so everyone can get back to their desks.

Team B is different. It’s evenly divided between successful executives and middle managers with few professional accomplishments. Teammates jump in and out of discussions. People interject and complete one another’s thoughts. When a team member abruptly changes the topic, the rest of the group follows him off the agenda. At the end of the meeting, the meeting doesn’t actually end: Everyone sits around to gossip and talk about their lives.

Which group would you rather join?

In 2008, a group of psychologists from Carnegie Mellon, M.I.T. and Union College began to try to answer a question very much like this one. ‘‘Over the past century, psychologists made considerable progress in defining and systematically measuring intelligence in individuals,’’ the researchers wrote in the journal *Science* in 2010. ‘‘We have used the statistical approach they developed for individual intelligence to systematically measure the intelligence of groups.’’ Put differently, the researchers wanted to know if there is a collective I. Q. that emerges within a team that is distinct from the smarts of any single member.

To accomplish this, the researchers recruited 699 people, divided them into small groups and gave each a series of assignments that required different kinds of cooperation. One assignment, for instance, asked participants to brainstorm possible uses for a brick. Some teams came up with dozens of clever uses; others kept describing the same ideas in different words. Another had the groups plan a shopping trip and gave each teammate a different list of groceries. The only way to maximize the group’s score was for each person to sacrifice an item they really wanted for something the team needed. Some groups easily divvied up the buying; others couldn’t fill their shopping carts because no one was willing to compromise.

What interested the researchers most, however, was that teams that did well on one assignment usually did well on all the others. Conversely, teams that failed at one thing seemed to fail at everything. The researchers eventually concluded that what distinguished the ‘‘good’’ teams from the dysfunctional groups was how teammates treated one another. The right norms, in other words, could raise a group’s collective intelligence, whereas the wrong norms could hobble a team, even if, individually, all the members were exceptionally bright.

But what was confusing was that not all the good teams appeared to behave in the same ways. ‘‘Some teams had a bunch of smart people who figured out how to break up work evenly,’’ said Anita Woolley, the study’s lead author. ‘‘Other groups had pretty average members, but they
came up with ways to take advantage of everyone’s relative strengths. Some groups had one strong leader. Others were more fluid, and everyone took a leadership role.’’

As the researchers studied the groups, however, they noticed two behaviors that all the good teams generally shared. First, on the good teams, members spoke in roughly the same proportion, a phenomenon the researchers referred to as “equality in distribution of conversational turn-taking.” On some teams, everyone spoke during each task; on others, leadership shifted among teammates from assignment to assignment. But in each case, by the end of the day, everyone had spoken roughly the same amount. “As long as everyone got a chance to talk, the team did well,” Woolley said. “But if only one person or a small group spoke all the time, the collective intelligence declined.”

Second, the good teams all had high “average social sensitivity” — a fancy way of saying they were skilled at intuiting how others felt based on their tone of voice, their expressions and other nonverbal cues. One of the easiest ways to gauge social sensitivity is to show someone photos of people’s eyes and ask him or her to describe what the people are thinking or feeling — an exam known as the Reading the Mind in the Eyes test. People on the more successful teams in Woolley’s experiment scored above average on the Reading the Mind in the Eyes test. They seemed to know when someone was feeling upset or left out. People on the ineffective teams, in contrast, scored below average. They seemed, as a group, to have less sensitivity toward their colleagues.

In other words, if you are given a choice between the serious-minded Team A or the free-flowing Team B, you should probably opt for Team B. Team A may be filled with smart people, all optimized for peak individual efficiency. But the group’s norms discourage equal speaking; there are few exchanges of the kind of personal information that lets teammates pick up on what people are feeling or leaving unsaid. There’s a good chance the members of Team A will continue to act like individuals once they come together, and there’s little to suggest that, as a group, they will become more collectively intelligent.

In contrast, on Team B, people may speak over one another, go on tangents and socialize instead of remaining focused on the agenda. The team may seem inefficient to a casual observer. But all the team members speak as much as they need to. They are sensitive to one another’s moods and share personal stories and emotions. While Team B might not contain as many individual stars, the sum will be greater than its parts.

Within psychology, researchers sometimes colloquially refer to traits like “conversational turn-taking” and “average social sensitivity” as aspects of what’s known as psychological safety — a group culture that the Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmondson defines as a “shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking.” Psychological safety is “a sense of confidence that the team will not embarrass, reject or punish someone for speaking up,” Edmondson wrote in a study published in 1999. “It describes a team climate characterized by interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves.”
When Rozovsky and her Google colleagues encountered the concept of psychological safety in academic papers, it was as if everything suddenly fell into place. One engineer, for instance, had told researchers that his team leader was “direct and straightforward, which creates a safe space for you to take risks.” That team, researchers estimated, was among Google’s accomplished groups. By contrast, another engineer had told the researchers that his “team leader has poor emotional control.” He added: “He panics over small issues and keeps trying to grab control. I would hate to be driving with him being in the passenger seat, because he would keep trying to grab the steering wheel and crash the car.” That team, researchers presumed, did not perform well.

Most of all, employees had talked about how various teams felt. “And that made a lot of sense to me, maybe because of my experiences at Yale,” Rozovsky said. “I’d been on some teams that left me feeling totally exhausted and others where I got so much energy from the group.” Rozovsky’s study group at Yale was draining because the norms — the fights over leadership, the tendency to critique — put her on guard. Whereas the norms of her case-competition team — enthusiasm for one another’s ideas, joking around and having fun — allowed everyone to feel relaxed and energized.

For Project Aristotle, research on psychological safety pointed to particular norms that are vital to success. There were other behaviors that seemed important as well — like making sure teams had clear goals and creating a culture of dependability. But Google’s data indicated that psychological safety, more than anything else, was critical to making a team work.

“We had to get people to establish psychologically safe environments,” Rozovsky told me. But it wasn’t clear how to do that. “People here are really busy,” she said. “We needed clear guidelines.”

However, establishing psychological safety is, by its very nature, somewhat messy and difficult to implement. You can tell people to take turns during a conversation and to listen to one another more. You can instruct employees to be sensitive to how their colleagues feel and to notice when someone seems upset. But the kinds of people who work at Google are often the ones who became software engineers because they wanted to avoid talking about feelings in the first place.

Rozovsky and her colleagues had figured out which norms were most critical. Now they had to find a way to make communication and empathy — the building blocks of forging real connections — into an algorithm they could easily scale.

In late 2014, Rozovsky and her fellow Project Aristotle number-crunchers began sharing their findings with select groups of Google’s 51,000 employees. By then, they had been collecting surveys, conducting interviews and analyzing statistics for almost three years. They hadn’t yet figured out how to make psychological safety easy, but they hoped that publicizing their research within Google would prompt employees to come up with some ideas of their own.

After Rozovsky gave one presentation, a trim, athletic man named Matt Sakaguchi approached the Project Aristotle researchers. Sakaguchi had an unusual background for a Google employee.
Twenty years earlier, he was a member of a SWAT team in Walnut Creek, Calif., but left to become an electronics salesman and eventually landed at Google as a midlevel manager, where he has overseen teams of engineers who respond when the company’s websites or servers go down.

“I might be the luckiest individual on earth,” Sakaguchi told me. “I’m not really an engineer. I didn’t study computers in college. Everyone who works for me is much smarter than I am.” But he is talented at managing technical workers, and as a result, Sakaguchi has thrived at Google. He and his wife, a teacher, have a home in San Francisco and a weekend house in the Sonoma Valley wine country. “Most days, I feel like I’ve won the lottery,” he said.

Sakaguchi was particularly interested in Project Aristotle because the team he previously oversaw at Google hadn’t jelled particularly well. “There was one senior engineer who would just talk and talk, and everyone was scared to disagree with him,” Sakaguchi said. “The hardest part was that everyone liked this guy outside the group setting, but whenever they got together as a team, something happened that made the culture go wrong.”

Sakaguchi had recently become the manager of a new team, and he wanted to make sure things went better this time. So he asked researchers at Project Aristotle if they could help. They provided him with a survey to gauge the group’s norms.

When Sakaguchi asked his new team to participate, he was greeted with skepticism. “It seemed like a total waste of time,” said Sean Laurent, an engineer. “But Matt was our new boss, and he was really into this questionnaire, and so we said, Sure, we’ll do it, whatever.”

The team completed the survey, and a few weeks later, Sakaguchi received the results. He was surprised by what they revealed. He thought of the team as a strong unit. But the results indicated there were weaknesses: When asked to rate whether the role of the team was clearly understood and whether their work had an impact, members of the team gave middling to poor scores. These responses troubled Sakaguchi, because he hadn’t picked up on this discontent. He wanted everyone to feel fulfilled by their work. He asked the team to gather, off site, to discuss the survey’s results. He began by asking everyone to share something personal about themselves. He went first.

“I think one of the things most people don’t know about me,” he told the group, “is that I have Stage 4 cancer.” In 2001, he said, a doctor discovered a tumor in his kidney. By the time the cancer was detected, it had spread to his spine. For nearly half a decade, it had grown slowly as he underwent treatment while working at Google. Recently, however, doctors had found a new, worrisome spot on a scan of his liver. That was far more serious, he explained.
No one knew what to say. The team had been working with Sakaguchi for 10 months. They all liked him, just as they all liked one another. No one suspected that he was dealing with anything like this.

“‘To have Matt stand there and tell us that he’s sick and he’s not going to get better and, you know, what that means,’” Laurent said. “‘It was a really hard, really special moment.’”

After Sakaguchi spoke, another teammate stood and described some health issues of her own. Then another discussed a difficult breakup. Eventually, the team shifted its focus to the survey. They found it easier to speak honestly about the things that had been bothering them, their small frictions and everyday annoyances. They agreed to adopt some new norms: From now on, Sakaguchi would make an extra effort to let the team members know how their work fit into Google’s larger mission; they agreed to try harder to notice when someone on the team was feeling excluded or down.

There was nothing in the survey that instructed Sakaguchi to share his illness with the group. There was nothing in Project Aristotle’s research that said that getting people to open up about their struggles was critical to discussing a group’s norms. But to Sakaguchi, it made sense that psychological safety and emotional conversations were related. The behaviors that create psychological safety — conversational turn-taking and empathy — are part of the same unwritten rules we often turn to, as individuals, when we need to establish a bond. And those human bonds matter as much at work as anywhere else. In fact, they sometimes matter more.

“I think, until the off-site, I had separated things in my head into work life and life life,” Laurent told me. “But the thing is, my work is my life. I spend the majority of my time working. Most of my friends I know through work. If I can’t be open and honest at work, then I’m not really living, am I?”

What Project Aristotle has taught people within Google is that no one wants to put on a “‘work face’” when they get to the office. No one wants to leave part of their personality and inner life at home. But to be fully present at work, to feel “‘psychologically safe,’” we must know that we can be free enough, sometimes, to share the things that scare us without fear of recriminations. We must be able to talk about what is messy or sad, to have hard conversations with colleagues who are driving us crazy. We can’t be focused just on efficiency. Rather, when we start the morning by collaborating with a team of engineers and then send emails to our marketing colleagues and then jump on a conference call, we want to know that those people really hear us. We want to know that work is more than just labor.

Which isn’t to say that a team needs an ailing manager to come together. Any group can become Team B. Sakaguchi’s experiences underscore a core lesson of Google’s research into teamwork: By adopting the data-driven approach of Silicon Valley, Project Aristotle has encouraged emotional conversations and discussions of norms among people who might otherwise be uncomfortable talking about how they feel. “‘Googlers love data,’” Sakaguchi told me. But it’s not only Google that loves numbers, or Silicon Valley that shies away from emotional conversations. Most workplaces do. “‘By putting things like empathy and sensitivity into charts
Sakaguchi knows that the spread of his cancer means he may not have much time left. His wife has asked him why he doesn’t quit Google. At some point, he probably will. But right now, helping his team succeed “is the most meaningful work I’ve ever done,” he told me. He encourages the group to think about the way work and life mesh. Part of that, he says, is recognizing how fulfilling work can be. Project Aristotle “proves how much a great team matters,” he said. “Why would I walk away from that? Why wouldn’t I spend time with people who care about me?”

The technology industry is not just one of the fastest growing parts of our economy; it is also increasingly the world’s dominant commercial culture. And at the core of Silicon Valley are certain self-mythologies and dictums: Everything is different now, data reigns supreme, today’s winners deserve to triumph because they are cleareyed enough to discard yesterday’s conventional wisdoms and search out the disruptive and the new.

The paradox, of course, is that Google’s intense data collection and number crunching have led it to the same conclusions that good managers have always known. In the best teams, members listen to one another and show sensitivity to feelings and needs.

The fact that these insights aren’t wholly original doesn’t mean Google’s contributions aren’t valuable. In fact, in some ways, the “employee performance optimization” movement has given us a method for talking about our insecurities, fears and aspirations in more constructive ways. It also has given us the tools to quickly teach lessons that once took managers decades to absorb. Google, in other words, in its race to build the perfect team, has perhaps unintentionally demonstrated the usefulness of imperfection and done what Silicon Valley does best: figure out how to create psychological safety faster, better and in more productive ways.

“Just having data that proves to people that these things are worth paying attention to sometimes is the most important step in getting them to actually pay attention,” Rozovsky told me. “Don’t underestimate the power of giving people a common platform and operating language.”

Project Aristotle is a reminder that when companies try to optimize everything, it’s sometimes easy to forget that success is often built on experiences — like emotional interactions and complicated conversations and discussions of who we want to be and how our teammates make us feel — that can’t really be optimized. Rozovsky herself was reminded of this midway through her work with the Project Aristotle team. “We were in a meeting where I made a mistake,” Rozovsky told me. She sent out a note afterward explaining how she was going to remedy the problem. “I got an email back from a team member that said, ‘Ouch,’” she recalled. “It was like a punch to the gut. I was already upset about making this mistake, and this note totally played on my insecurities.”

If this had happened earlier in Rozovsky’s life — if it had occurred while she was at Yale, for instance, in her study group — she probably wouldn’t have known how to deal with those
feelings. The email wasn’t a big enough affront to justify a response. But all the same, it really bothered her. It was something she felt she needed to address.

And thanks to Project Aristotle, she now had a vocabulary for explaining to herself what she was feeling and why it was important. She had graphs and charts telling her that she shouldn’t just let it go. And so she typed a quick response: “Nothing like a good ‘Ouch!’ to destroy psych safety in the morning.” Her teammate replied: “Just testing your resilience.”

“That could have been the wrong thing to say to someone else, but he knew it was exactly what I needed to hear,” Rozovsky said. “With one 30-second interaction, we defused the tension.” She wanted to be listened to. She wanted her teammate to be sensitive to what she was feeling. “And I had research telling me that it was O.K. to follow my gut,” she said. “So that’s what I did. The data helped me feel safe enough to do what I thought was right.”

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Another article about Cher Andres
ver the past decade, José Andrés has seemingly cracked the world’s most difficult recipe, the one that lets him start with a standard-sized day and somehow fit into it the accomplishments of a dozen celebrity chefs.

He leads World Central Kitchen, the nonprofit he founded that serves hot, nutritious meals to people in crisis in Haiti, in Houston, in Puerto Rico. In 2018 alone it served 5 million meals. But that’s just one part of his day. This spring, he opened Mercado Little Spain, a 35,000-square-foot food hall at Hudson Yards in New York City, that could do for Spanish food what Eataly has done for Italian food, making it more familiar in America and showing its true glory. He also just published Vegetables Unleashed, a cookbook that aims to help people more easily introduce vegetables such as delicious asparagus and tomatoes into their diets without the fear that you’ll mess them up. Meanwhile, he’s opened his fifth Jaleo, an upscale but accessible tapas bar, at Disney Springs in Florida and—as a sort of sidecar to that full-powered motorcycle—a Disney Springs brick-and-mortar version of his Spanish food truck, Pepe.

Andrés currently has more than 30 restaurants. But if you told me that between the time this went to print and you read it that he has opened even more, I wouldn’t be at all surprised. Did I mention that he has two Michelin stars for his D.C. restaurant minibar, two for his Beverly Hills restaurant Somni and four of the other Michelin awards, the Bib Gourmands, for other restaurants? You don’t have time to eat at all of it for 10 celebrity chefs.

Andrés has 750,000 Twitter followers. He has thousands and thousands of employees, some of whom he’s never met but who follow him on Twitter and are inspired to faith and loyalty by his efforts to recognize the nobility of the immigrant and the value of the people who cook our food. One time I was at Atlantis Bahamas Paradise Island resort, where he has an outpost of his sustainable-seafood restaurant Fish, and cooks whom he’d never met told me one after the other that they were doing things they thought would make him proud, because of the leadership and values he conveys through social channels. For instance, they pay a spear fisher to hunt for invasive lionfish, and tourists pay to have the
villains breaded and fried, as everyone does their part to fight the good fight—in a nice restaurant.

As admired as he is, talking to José Andrés is not the easiest part of a journalist’s day. You typically run behind him while he charges forward, not unlike a Spanish bullfighting bull, eyes high, horns up, going places. He says brilliant things as he runs and has a devoted team, assembled over the past 26 years, who execute the ideas he utters when he turns his head slightly as he keeps going.

When I get this chance to talk to him, I have one big question: How? How, given the known human constraints of time and space, does he do it? The recipe surprised me. It all starts with the Spanish Navy and Socrates, Andrés told me.

It was service in the navy that first brought Andrés to the United States. He was a cook on a boat of midshipmen, and the discipline and division of labor made a lifelong impression on him: In no universe can a single sailor run a battleshop, but together, a navy is, well, a navy.

“That experience lives in me, body and bones and flesh,” he says now. “I would never be the person I became if it wasn’t for the values of the navy.”

Andrés started cooking at his parents’ knees, helping with the paella, and left traditional school at 14 for cooking school. He ended up working in a kitchen where he met Ferran Adrià, the father of modern avant-garde cooking, and he went on to work for Adrià, forging a lifelong friendship with the playful master of magickin food into spheres and mists. But it was there that Andrés also honed the other pillar of his cooking philosophy: “Socrates said something I use every day, not these exact words, of the team that you get from the navy, a depth of respect for the field and humility as taught by Ferran Adrià, and Socrates: You could work for a thousand years and only then touch the beginning of understanding the ocean, tomatoes or feeding people. “You cannot be arrogant, you cannot think you know everything. That is...” and Andrés makes a noise to finish that sentence, which I take as the noise of a head being cut off.

Finally, I begin to understand how to fit the work of 10 chefs into the life of one. First, you need the navy, Ferran Adrià and Socrates. Second, when it comes to feeding 5 million meals to the less fortunate affected by disaster—and 30-plus-restaurants worth of food to the more fortunate? It’s about staffing.

Andrés tells me. “I know my weaknesses. I am not the best one at running a kitchen. When I have to, I will, but I have a hard time maintaining concentration for long periods of time on a single project. Other people are much better at sustaining something over space and time,” he says. “Another weakness of mine is details. Don’t misunderstand me, I like details, but other people are much better at details than I am. I try to cover all of my weaknesses with good people. I’m not afraid to admit that; You have to always work with people who are good at what you are not good at.”

with the work he does for people in crisis and by speaking up on behalf of justice. “The courage to speak up—I have a lot of people with me who don’t have the chance to speak the way I do, so I speak up for all of us,” Andrés tells me. “I speak up for an American dream where you work not just for yourself and your children, but so that your whole community is thriving. I think I am very lucky, because when I’ve been in a disaster situation, I get to see the best of humanity coming forward to help. When there are moments of tragedy, natural disasters, what you see is that people only care about helping each other in those moments. So I’m lucky to see the best of humanity, and then I can speak up about it, and people come to work here because they see: Life is this Jedi battle of heaven against evil, and I can get on one side.”

And there it is: The secret to how José Andrés does it. The simplest Spanish recipe of all: Start with generous helpings of the Spanish.