

# Foreword

## **The Hope of Science and the Science of Hope**

Think of this book as a beacon of hope.

The dire statistics and horrific stories that litter our newscasts present the modern world as aimless, chaotic, and lost, going backward in almost every area of social importance. There is an element of truth to that characterization, but there is also a force for good in the modern world that has the potential to reverse all of these trends. What it is and what it says is what this book is about.

We can have a large impact on the prevention and amelioration of abuse, drug problems, violence, mental health problems, and dysfunction in families. As this book shows, we know how to do it, we know what it would cost, and we know how long it would take. We even know the core principles that underlie these successful approaches, so we can narrow our focus to what really matters. We know all these things because modern behavioral and evolutionary science has proven answers that work. The careful, controlled research has been done. The answers are in our hands.

Unfortunately these answers and the foundations they stand on are often invisible to policy makers and to the public at large. Some of this invisibility is unintentional—it is sometimes difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff in scientific knowledge. Some of this invisibility comes because vested interests are threatened. Tobacco companies, for example, thrived on the ignorance and confusion that they themselves fostered.

Beacons are needed in exactly such situations. They cast light so that what was unseen can be seen. They give direction so that instead of wandering aimlessly, we can stay on course during long and difficult journeys. And they allow us to mark and measure whether we are making progress, providing reassurance that every step we take is bringing us closer to our destination.

Tony Biglan brings four decades of experience on the front lines of behavioral science to this far-reaching, carefully argued, and compelling book. A major prevention scientist, Tony knows many of the people who have tested these methods; he himself was involved in key studies, policy innovations, and legal struggles. He tells the stories of knowledge developers and of the people whose lives have been affected, showing in case after case that these methods are powerful tools in the creation of deliberate social change.

Tony is not content merely to list these solutions; he organizes them and shows the core principles by which they operate: increasing nurturance, cooperation, and psychological flexibility, and decreasing coercion and aversive control. He distinguishes empirically between the psychological and social features that are engines of change, and the psychological or social features that come along for the ride. And he nests this knowledge in an examination of what might need to change for us to make better use of it.

Over and over again, the same small set of features have been shown to have profound and lasting effects. Spend a dollar on the Good Behavior Game with children in first or second grade, and save eighty-four dollars in special education, victim, health care, and criminal justice costs over the next few decades. Aggressive boys randomly assigned to play this simple game at age six or seven had two-thirds fewer drug problems as adults!

There initially may be a “too good to be true” reaction to results like this, but Tony takes the time to walk the readers through the research, and its quality and replication. As common themes emerge, unnecessary skepticism gradually washes away and we begin as readers to wake up to an incredible reality. Because of our belief in science and the hope it provides, we as a society have spent billions on research to learn what works in addressing our social and psychological problems. Today we have a mountain of answers that could enormously impact our lives.

Tony provides the means for parents and others to take advantage of what we know right now. At the end of every chapter he provides sections on action implications for particular audiences, and summarizes what has been shown into a manageable set of bulleted takeaway points. He opens the door that policy makers and the public might walk through by listing the policy implications of what we know for the ability to better our children and our society.

As the book progresses, you realize that our failure to work together to ensure that research matters in the creation of a more nurturing society is itself produced by features of our current system. Children are nested within families, who are nested within communities. Communities are nested within political and economic structures. All of this is evolving—but not always positively. Sometimes social evolution is crafted by organized forces linked to economic visions that are producing rapidly increasing economic and health disparities. This wonderful book casts light and provides direction even here. Regular people can play the social evolutionary game too. We can develop our systems toward a purpose if we have the knowledge and foresight needed to do so. This book provides a healthy serving of exactly that knowledge and foresight.

In the end readers will know that together we can create a more nurturing and effective society, step by step. We have the knowledge to do better—much, much better. And ultimately we *will* follow such steps—knowledge of this level of importance does not remain forever unused. But why wait? Why not act now? By bringing together the fruits of behavioral and evolutionary science, the modern world can begin a grand journey, buoyed up not just by the hope of science in the abstract but by the substantive scientific knowledge we already have in hand. We will learn more as we go, but because of the hope that science represents, we as a human community have already funded the knowledge developers who have created this body of work. It is time to use what we have together created. It is time to apply the science of hope.

—Steven C. Hayes

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University of Nevada

Author of *Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life*