

Hidden curriculum: mental health and success

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Today's talk

- Redefine success
- Discuss some of the hidden struggles
- Discuss some of the hidden tools to manage success and mental health
- Discuss some of the ways you can be happy while working in a competitive environment

Mental health

Be more observant of struggling students and colleagues

Nobody heard him, the dead man,
But still he lay moaning:
I was much further out than you thought
And not waving but drowning.

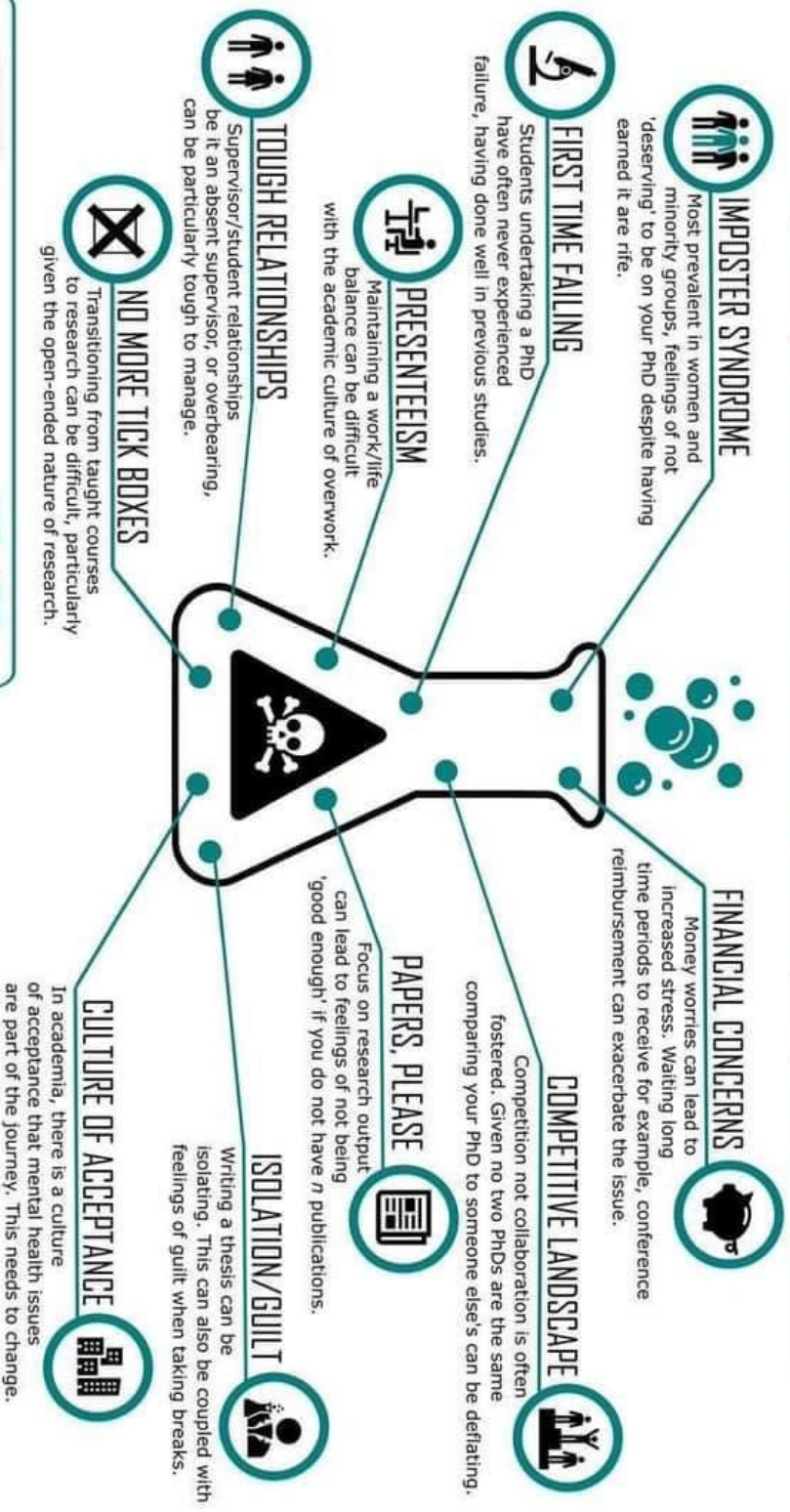
Poor chap, he always loved larking
And now he's dead
It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way,
They said.

Oh, no no no, it was too cold always
(Still the dead one lay moaning)
I was much too far out all my life
And not waving but drowning.

- Stevie Smith (“Not Waving but Drowning”)

MENTAL HEALTH DURING YOUR PHD THE TOXIC MIX

A study by the University of California, Berkeley, found nearly half of postgraduate students met criteria to classify them as depressed.¹ This poster explores the common stressors that PhD students may be exposed to during their PhD.



SELF-HARMING?
SUICIDAL THOUGHTS? CALL SAMARITANS NOW ON 116-123

Reference: 1. Graduate Student Happiness & Well-Being Report, 2014, University of California, Berkeley.

Part of the #mentalhealth series by Dr Zoe Ayres (@zjayres). Free to distribute.

Statistics on mental health among students

- All PhD students
 - 24% of all PhD students suffer from clinically significant symptoms of depression (Satinsky, et al. 2021)
 - 17% suffer from anxiety (Satinsky, et al. 2021)
- Econ PhD students
 - 18% of graduate students experience moderate or severe of depression and anxiety (3x the population average)
 - 11% report suicidal ideation in a two-week period
 - Average PhD student reports more loneliness than a retired American
 - Only 26% report feeling their work matters (vs. 70% faculty)
 - Many students are not in treatment

I'm from a lower ranked university and I don't feel like I'm in the club. How can I get ahead?

- Imposter syndrome is *real* but not *true*
 - Real means you feel it, therefore it must be validated by yourself and by our friends and loved ones. Listen, empathize
 - True means it reflects something concrete in the world -- it doesn't
 - All stories are false but some are useful. Imposter syndrome is a story we tell ourselves about who we are and how we fit into this world -- if it helped us get to where we were going, I would say it's useful, but it's all about slowing you down, therefore it's not useful
 - Ignore it
- A lot of these things are insecurities, not real characteristics about you
- Don't let others tell you who you are and are not
- Believe in yourself -- it's true. If you don't believe in yourself, no one will

**I'm depressed, I'm having a hard time passing my prelims,
I can't find a good advisor, I feel like quitting**

- You're not the only one -- this is actually far more (and far too) common than you may know
- Advising-advisee is a two sided matching problem with considerable search costs and a limited set of possibilities
- Be curious and have fortitude -- it'll end
- Try to find a healthy community in the meantime, academic or otherwise
- Consider getting a therapist, as well as a life coach
- Exercise, diet, sleep

Citizenship and Service

- **Public goods and service are part of being in community**
 - Some people strive to become editors or previously defined molded leaders
 - Just because it's an equilibrium doesn't mean it's the only option
 - Allocate time where SMB>SMC as those are the public goods missing bc of market failures
- **Be entrepreneurial and innovative**
 - #AEA5k -- community, fun
 - Codechella -- teaching outside the classroom
 - Substack -- investing in my human capital while teaching others
 - Mentorship
- **Be the thing in the profession that you think should be there**
- **Service, compassion, can themselves give meaning**
- **Inspired action**
 - Do things that are \$1 more valuable than the willingness to pay to avoid the hardships you've had in graduate school and you've redeemed the hardship

Success

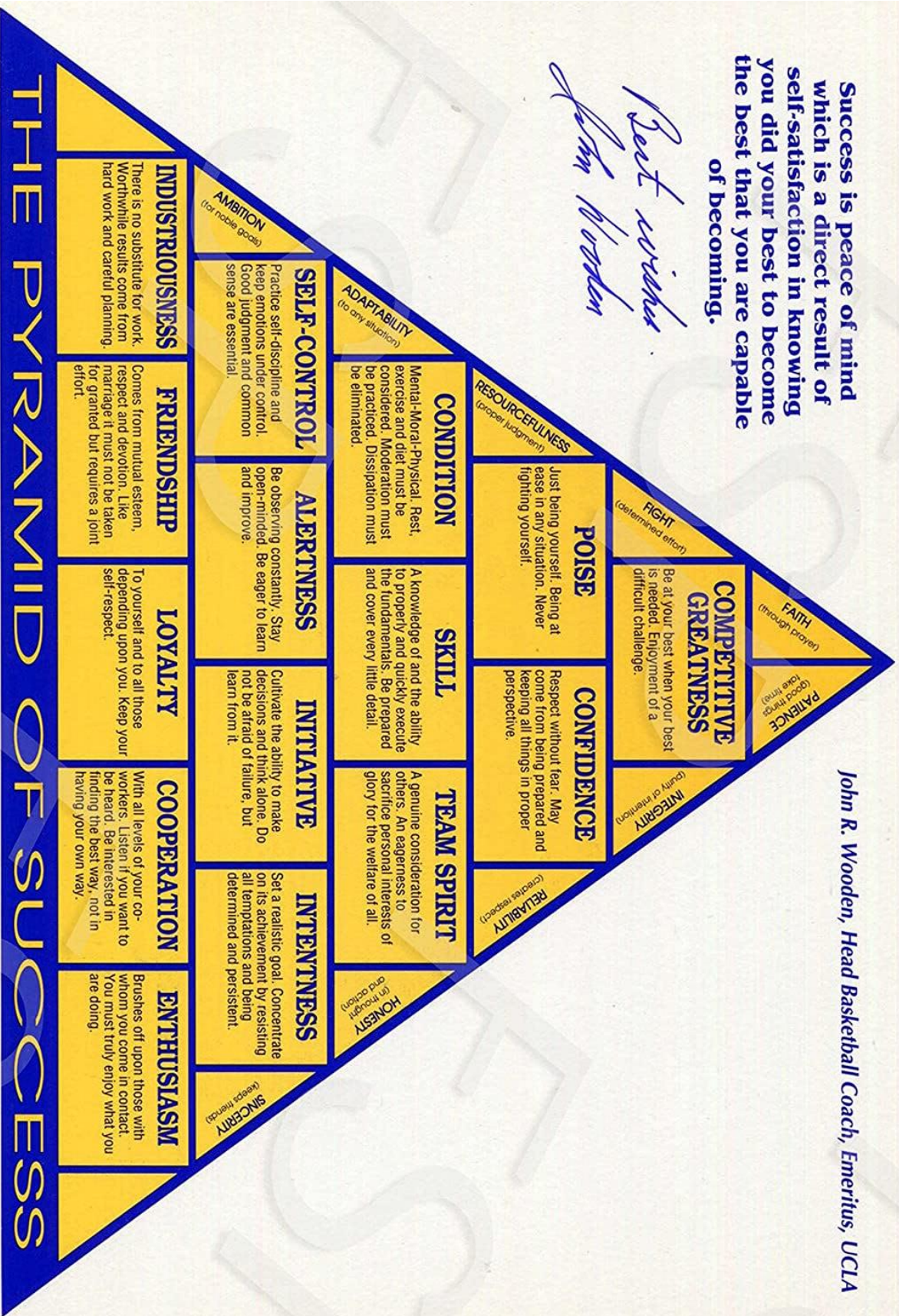
What is success?

- “I don’t really concern myself with wins and losses” -- Ted Lasso
- “Success is a peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming.” - John Wooden (UCLA basketball coach)
 - Success is a *peace of mind* due to *self-satisfaction*
 - Success requires *knowing you did your best*
 - Potential is endogenous and involves *hard work, practice, training*
 - Seek *regular rest, mentorship, supportive relationships*
 - *Pay attention and learning from mistakes*
- Find the correct counterfactuals
 - One’s own production possibility frontier, not another persons
 - Don’t fall into the unfair and somewhat toxic trap of defining success by inter-person comparisons
 - Success is *intra-person* comparisons between your current self and your own potential self
 - Success is entirely about you, not others
- Luck favors the prepared
 - Be prepared
 - Trust in karma and good fortune -- it’ll come

Success is peace of mind
which is a direct result of
self-satisfaction in knowing
you did your best to become
the best that you are capable
of becoming.

Best wishes
John Wooden

John R. Wooden, Head Basketball Coach, Emeritus, UCLA



How do I promote my student's success?

- Many people came from departments that were indifferent to student success and they are now successful
 - Selection on the dependent variable
 - Survivor bias
 - We don't observe the ones who dropped out
 - Don't forget the metaphor of the leaky pipeline
- Our goal should be to create successful economists
 - Create a model and culture of mutual respect and support
 - Does *not* mean withholding criticism.
 - Hold students to high standards, validate them, believe in them, invest in them, expect them to succeed
 - Consider Ted Lasso as a model -- team environments can help students achieve their potential while reducing costs
- Be yourself as a mentor and professor, not someone else

Make realistic, ambitious and virtuous goals

- **1 year plan (when)**
 - Where do you want to be in a year? (**goals**)
 - Why do you want to be there? (**values**)
 - What steps are necessary to reach that goal? (**planning**)
- **5 year plan**
 - Where do you want to be in a year?
 - Why do you want to be there?
 - What steps are necessary to reach that goal?
- **10 year plans**
 - Where do you want to be in a year?
 - Why do you want to be there?
 - What steps are necessary to reach that goal?

Social media

I heard that tweets can increase my academic success, is this true?

- Several RCTs have been done to study this and results are mixed
 - One study finds 3 additional cites one year later: 2.5 additional cites (baseline of 0.5)
 - Blog mentions on large platforms (Freakonomics, Marginal Revolution, Chris Blattman) cause extremely large increases in abstract views, but almost no change in pdf downloads
 - Maggio et al. (2019) finds a small positive effect on page views but no effects on downloads
- Probably some inequality here, as there is considerable selection in who gets tweeted
- Since you cannot control this, try not to lose sleep over it
 - Do your best work
 - Don't forget why you got into this
 - Remember what's important in your life -- meaning, happiness, intellectual joy, relationships
 - We are all just people
- Consider promoting others work and trusting karma that your work will get covered

Every time I get on social media, I get stressed out. Do I need to be on it?

- No. You shouldn't do things that make you stressed out unless they are essential to your goals
 - I have friends who are extremely successful and do not use social media at all - many find it too toxic an environment or just not a good fit
 - There is considerable self selection and vocal support for social media by some, but you should not take it to mean that it has to be something you do
- At the same time...
 - Working through anxiety is a good skill
 - Do not be afraid
 - Some people have found a community
- Ultimately, your happiness is the most important thing
- Don't forget the definition of success

Economics culture and hierarchy

Hierarchy in economics is different from every other social science and it's horrible and people have studied it from an organizational perspective

- What am I talking about?
 - Superiority complex
 - Insularity
 - Hierarchy within
 - Getting a job
 - Getting published
 - Getting together
- What is so bad about it?
 - It can cause extreme insecurity and depression
 - Can cause backbiting, gossip, and jealousy
 - Can make you become someone you don't like
- How do I live inside something so toxic?
 - Don't let your values get gradually replaced by values you don't want
 - Remember why you got into this in the first place
 - Try to minimize your time spent with toxic people; find good, loving, supportive people
 - Try to ignore the many merit badges the AEA hands out through its passivity, neutrality and the influence of certain personalities

I find there is a lot of fighting within economics that I find distressing. Is this real or is it banter?

- **Some of it is real**
 - Intra subfield fights (randomization, Deaton, credibility revolution)
 - Critique of papers (Albuoy vs. Acemoglu)
- **Some of it is banter**
 - #EconTwitter fights are just water cooler arguments
 - Be respectful and curious, not judgmental
- **Some of it is just, to be honest, really toxic people -- just like in every field**
 - Cancellation stuff -- just remember, no one can tell you who you are unless you let them
 - Economists think they are the smartest people in the room, and sometimes they are and other times they are not at all (but they still don't realize it)
 - Humility (and humanity) is undervalued.
- **Know who you are, and know you are perfect**

Research and tenure

I have an interesting question, but I don't have a clean, exogenous experiment. What do I do?

- **Pillars of science**
 - Description is a major part of science -- don't let anyone tell you different
 - Causality is also a major part of science -- don't let anyone tell you different
 - Theory is a major part of science -- don't let anyone tell you different
- **Descriptive papers are critical and important, but often hard to publish**
 - In my research, I early on published a lot of descriptive papers because I didn't know the thing I was studying
 - Collection of new datasets, new phenomena, require description
- **Learn your field, do what you love**
 - Good papers and bad papers take the same amount of time
 - Choose projects with high upside
- **Write the best paper on the topic**
- **You can control the inputs, less so the outputs (lots of random stuff)**

How to get tenure

- **Each department is different**
 - Each junior faculty is facing a unique situation even within the same department
 - Talk to faculty, go to lunches, get to know your colleagues
 - Be curious not judgmental towards your department, listen and learn
 - Most of us are price takers and inside each department are invisible rivers and traps -- find them and be careful
- **6 articles in 6 years**
 - Journals are different
 - Top 5s are worth a lot
 - Top fields are worth a lot too
 - But good research you care about is worth the most
- **Mentors versus sponsors (you'll need both)**
 - Mentors give good advice
 - Sponsors fight for you
- **Figure out your preferences (“tenure on the market” vs “tenure in your department”)**
- **Networking, outside letter, conferences, presenting, be brave and socially appropriate**
- **Swing for the fences, don't be afraid of failure**

Some tenure hacks

- You get tenure based on three things:
 - Research (nothing replaces this)
 - Teaching (depends on the school)
 - Collegiality (fudge factor -- make it hard for people to deny you tenure)
- **Consider bundling each of these as much as possible**
 - Make them complements not substitutes
 - If effort on one is raises marginal product of another, you've bundled them
 - Metaphor:
 - You need to fix the car, and you need to spend time with your kid
 - Solution: ask your kid to help you fix the car
- **Examples**
 - Teaching by using your papers
 - Co-teach with other faculty, teach their papers
 - Teach classes in your field

The fields and the methods are changing so fast, I feel like I can't keep up. How do I keep up?

- My stuff and other people's stuff!
 - #CodeChella
 - Online seminars
 - EconTwitter can be helpful
- Keep reading, keep studying, try to find joy in the process of learning again
- It's not a bad thing to be the least skilled person in the room -- it's a gift because you will learn more

Selling your work

- Research distribution is a two sided matching problem -- no one knows you!
Go first.
- If you don't advocate for your work, no one will
- Put yourself out there -- tell people you'll be in town, network, find ways to own the process of distributing findings
- No one knows who you are -- you will need to own this part of the property right
- Learn the skills of expert speakers, find your voice, continue to improve

Concluding remarks

Concluding remarks

- These are just some of the things I think about; I don't claim to be a guru
- Be protective of your mental and emotional health
- Make good friends and be a good friend -- it weirdly enough affects research and success
- Learn your production function
 - Ideas, data collection, writing, knowing when to quit, seeing it through to publication, grind away
 - When you find good coauthors, protect those relationships -- they are key to longterm success
- Remember all the two-sided matching and search costs
 - Finding others is key
 - Go to conferences
 - Present
 - Be engaged
 - Take people out for tacos!
- Have fun!
 - Don't forget why you got into this. Why did you get into this?
 - Continue to be inspired