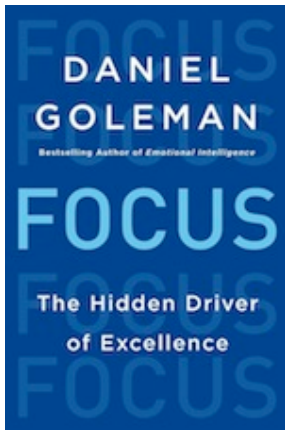




Our Favorite Books of 2013

By [Jill Suttie](#), [Jeremy Adam Smith](#), [Jason Marsh](#) | December 16, 2013 | [1 Comment](#)

Greater Good's editors pick the most thought-provoking, important, or useful nonfiction books published this year on the science of a meaningful life.



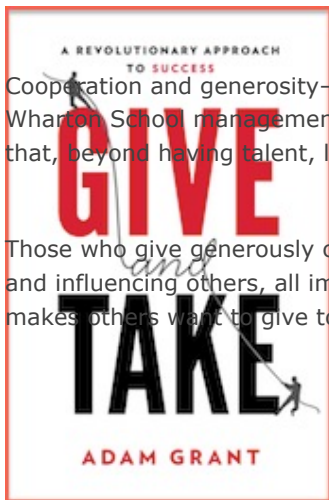
***Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence*, by Daniel Goleman**

In today's world of Internet bombardment, it's easy to become distracted by social networks, video games, and emails to the exclusion of more important activities, like having an uninterrupted conversation or finishing a work project. What is this costing us as a society?

A lot, writes bestselling author Daniel Goleman. In *Focus*, Goleman makes the case that paying attention is a lost art form that needs resurrecting, especially for our kids. Knowing how to focus on our inner thoughts and feelings, to be present and empathic with other people, and to pay attention to larger systems and societal trends are important for personal success, as well as for solving world problems like global warming.

To learn more, read [this Q&A with Daniel Goleman](#) about *Focus* in *Greater Good*!

Goleman's book covers research that shows how important focus is to happiness, productivity, and relationships—both personal and professional. While featuring stories of successful people who've honed their focusing skills, he argues that kids should receive mindfulness training—which builds attention and counteracts [mind-wandering](#)—if they are to become productive citizens. —JS



***Give and Take*, by Adam Grant**

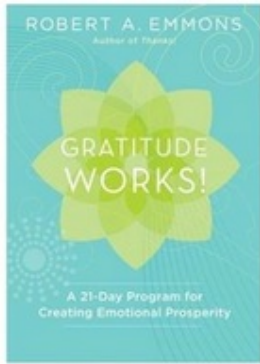
Cooperation and generosity—not competition—is the road to success in business, according to Wharton School management professor Adam Grant, author of *Give and Take*. Grant argues that, beyond having talent, luck, and a willingness to work hard, how one interacts socially at work is critical to success.

Those who give generously of themselves are better at networking, collaborating, evaluating, and influencing others, all important for business growth. That's because giving to others makes others want to give to you—as long as it's not expected in a *qui pro quo* way—and can become contagious, spreading within an organization.

Since givers look for the best in others and are open to criticism, they are skilled at employee development and can be flexible and responsive to changing markets. All of these make givers—and not takers—better at business, which leads Grant to suggest tips employers can use to promote more giving in their workplaces in order to improve their bottom line. —JS

Read an excerpt from *Give and Take*, "[10 Way to Get Ahead Through Giving](#)."

***Gratitude Works!: A 21-Day Program for Creating Emotional Prosperity*, by Robert A. Emmons**



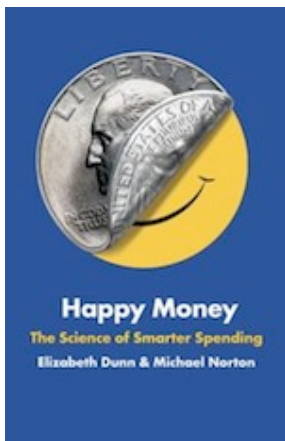
Read an adaptation from *Gratitude Works!*, "How Gratitude Can Help You Through Hard Times."

Robert Emmons directs the GGSC's [Expanding the Science and Practice Gratitude](#) program, and he's one of the world's leading experts on thankfulness.

His new book, *Gratitude Works!*, turns decades of research into tips, tools, and quizzes anyone can use to deepen their appreciation for the good things in life and to enhance relationships with the people who give us the good things.

The book especially shines when Emmons unpacks some of the contradictions inherent in gratitude. Readers learn that we appreciate things most when they are about to end; that too much thankfulness can make us less happy; and that life's hardest moments are the ones when we need gratitude the most.

"Gratitude works," he writes, "but not always in the manner that we think it does or for the reasons that we think it does."—JAS



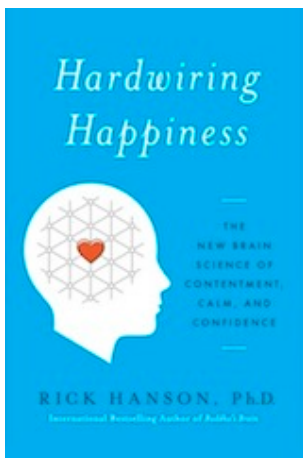
Read an adaptation from *Happy Money*, "How to Make Giving Feel Good."

***Happy Money: The Science of Smarter Spending*, by Elizabeth Dunn and Michael Norton**

One of our [core beliefs](#) here at the Greater Good Science Center is that "Happiness and altruism are intertwined—doing good is an essential ingredient to being happy." Over the past five years, researchers Elizabeth Dunn and Michael Norton have been turning that "core belief" into a scientific fact, finding in study after study that giving to others ("prosocial spending") makes people happier than spending on themselves.

This year they distilled the key lessons from that research in *Happy Money*, a concise and readable overview of (often counter-intuitive) findings from their work and the work of colleagues like Lara Aknin and Jordi Quoidbach.

The book upends the timeless does-money-buy-happiness? debate, arguing that, after we can cover our basic needs, happiness depends less on how much money we have than on how we spend it. The five core principles they identify for happy spending—which, in addition to spending on other people, include buying experiences instead of material stuff and not overindulging in the things that give you pleasure—offer a roadmap to getting the "biggest happiness bang" for your buck. Not a bad resource to have around the holidays. —JM



***Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence*, by Rick Hanson**

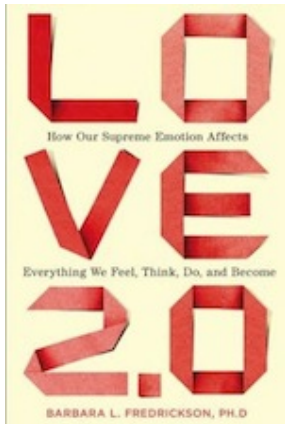
In his bestselling *Hardwiring Happiness*, neuropsychologist and Greater Good Science Center Advisory Board member [Rick Hanson](#) has one key message for you: your attention physically shapes your brain, and so if you point your attention toward the good in life, the better your brain will get at fostering goodness, and the healthier it will become.

Easier said than done? Hanson knows that, and his book provides the HEAL method—four concrete steps you can take that will help you see and cultivate the good in your brain: **H**ave a positive experience; **E**nrich it; **A**bsorb it; and **L**ink positive and negative

Read an excerpt from *Hardwiring Happiness*, "How to Grow the Good in Your Brain."

material.

Hanson is a clear, warm writer with a gift for metaphor—his description of the brain of Teflon for the good and Velcro for the bad has become a classic—and *Hardwiring Happiness* is a terrific example of the kind of book we love the most at *Greater Good*: scientifically grounded advice for living a better life. —JAS



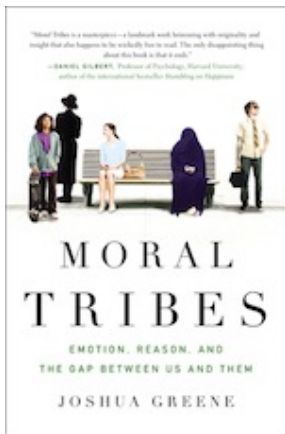
***Love 2.0: How Our Supreme Emotion Affects Everything We Feel, Think, Do, and Become*, by Barbara Fredrickson**

The concept of love needs an upgrade, suggests emotions expert Barbara Fredrickson in *Love 2.0*. Rather than looking for love only in romantic partnerships, Fredrickson suggests we can experience “positivity resonance”—a warm, pleasant feeling that has profound benefits to our health and happiness—anytime we have a positive interaction with another person, even a stranger.

Read an adaptation from *Love 2.0*, "Five Ways to Renew an Old Love."

We are born to love—literally—as long as we feel safe in the presence of another person. Our *vagus nerve* helps us to make eye contact and synchronize facial expressions with other people, increasing feelings of love. The hormone *oxytocin* is released in the body during positive social encounters, reducing stress, and lowering our heart rate and blood pressure. Even our brains tend to “synch up” with another person when we feel connected.

Though these systems are not under our conscious control they can be augmented by cultivating more positivity resonance in our life. Fredrickson suggests using loving-kindness meditation, gratitude practices, or focused attention on positive interactions to increase positivity and improve our health, outlook, and relationships. —JS



***Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them*, by Joshua Greene**

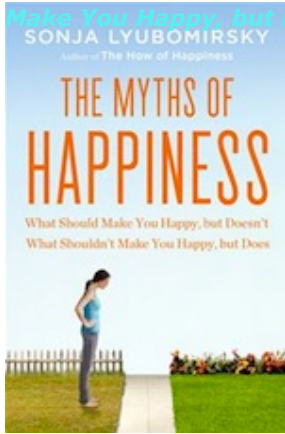
Our brains were designed for tribal life, for getting along with a select group of others (Us) and for fighting off everyone else (Them). But modern times have forced the world’s tribes into a shared space, resulting in epic clashes of values over everything from abortion to the death penalty.

Read a Q&A with Joshua Greene about [how to close the gap between us and them](#).

In *Moral Tribes*, Harvard neuroscientist Joshua Greene explains the cognitive processes that go into moral decision-making and why we have problems when tribal morals collide. Because our sense of right and wrong is rooted in our emotions and cultural biases, certain things just feel wrong to us and it can be difficult to shift views when challenged.

Greene suggests that we recognize when to trust these moral feelings—e.g., when we feel remorse for hurting someone or guilty about stealing—and when we should engage more reasoning and reflection—e.g., in debates about how to treat prisoners. His book ultimately guides us in the quest for a meta-morality and a philosophical model—deep pragmatism—that we can use to help settle troublesome moral conflicts. (The roots of morality were also explored to great effect this year in Paul Bloom’s just-published *Just Babies: The Origins of Good and Evil*.) —JS

The Myths of Happiness: What Should Make You Happy, but Doesn't, What Shouldn't



Does, by Sonja Lyubomirsky

Many of us hold on to fallacious ideas about happiness, thinking we'd be happier if we had the right relationship, a good job, or perfect health, or that our happiness would be destroyed by loss. But UC Riverside happiness researcher Sonia Lyubomirsky says otherwise: believing these myths about how happiness works keeps us stuck and doesn't reflect how one truly cultivates happiness in life.

In *The Myths of Happiness*, Lyubomirsky guides readers through the abundant research on happiness while applying it to particular myths. For example, she explains how hedonic adaptation—the tendency to become inured to happiness highs over time—can make long-term romantic relationships feel stale. But we can counteract hedonic adaptation by cultivating appreciation and compassion for our partners, which will make us happier and help

Listen to a podcast of Sonja Lyubomirsky discussing the "myths of happiness."

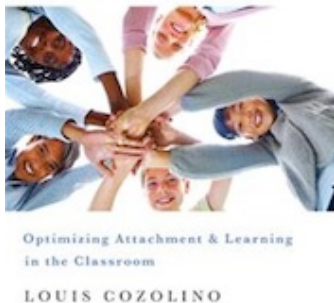
our relationship thrive.

In many cases, the true path to happiness is not dependent on what happens to us, but how we react to it. Skills like mindfulness, gratitude, giving, and compassion can all help us manage setbacks as well as augment our happiness over time. Her book makes it easy to find the myth that keeps you stuck and to find your way to a happier life. —JS

The Social Neuroscience of Education: Optimizing Attachment and Learning in the Classroom, by Louis Cozolino

The Social Neuroscience of Education

Years of research have shown that our brains are designed to maximize learning and social connection. But how can we put that information to use in the classroom?



In his comprehensive book, *The Social Neuroscience of Education*, psychologist Louis Cozolino details the psychology and neuroscience research findings that explain the importance of social connection in education. We learn how important early life experiences can be, how stress impairs learning, how children learn best in small bursts of focus, and how teacher bias is a natural bi-product of our evolution, which nonetheless must be counteracted in the classroom.

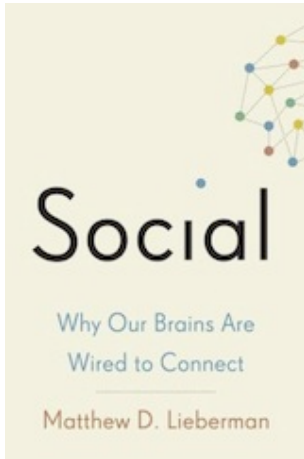
Read an excerpt, "Nine Things Educators Need to Know about the Brain."

Cozolino provides educators with a set of tips for putting research findings into action. By developing supportive relationships, scaffolding learning, providing context for students, and other strategies, teachers can augment learning in their classrooms. While some of this may seem intuitive, Cozolino's book makes a strong case for why it's imperative to engage students' social brains if we want our schools to deliver. —JS

Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect, by Matthew

Lieberman

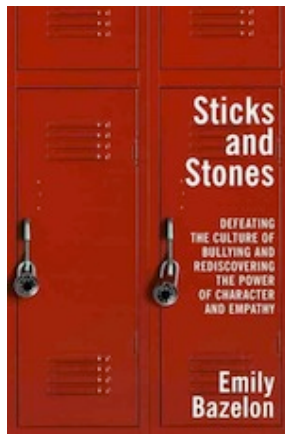
Why are social relationships so primary in our lives? UCLA cognitive neuroscientist Matthew Lieberman answers that question in his book *Social*, by providing a clear picture of the three neural pathways in our brains devoted to connecting socially: one that makes us feel social pain and joy, one that helps us attend to and predict others' behaviors, and one that helps us subconsciously accept the social norms around us.



The book is chock full of fascinating research. For example, we learn that social pain involves the same neural pathways as physical pain and can be lessened with Tylenol; that our brain's "resting state" is not very resting, and is constantly monitoring our social surroundings; and that we learn best when we engage our social neural pathways, so that preparing to tutor someone else can help students learn material better.

Taken together, the research shows that we have "a tapestry of neural systems woven together to bind us to one another." Because of this, Lieberman makes recommendation on how to modify our schools and workplaces—and our personal lives—to better take advantage of our social reality. —JS

Read the [full review](#) of *Social*.



Read the [full review](#) of *Sticks and Stones*.

Sticks and Stones: Defeating the Culture of Bullying and Rediscovering the Power of Character and Empathy, by Emily Bazelon

Media stories on teenage bullying seem ubiquitous these days, fueling concern and outrage. But the media can't capture the nuances of bullying or the complex social climates that perpetuate it. And, sometimes, the national spotlight makes matters worse, casting aspersion on whole towns or schools.

These are the issues explored in Emily Bazelon's book, *Sticks and Stones*. Bazelon, senior editor at Slate.com, interviewed bully victims and perpetrators to uncover the dynamics of bullying from the perspective of those involved. Her insights are provocative and enlightening, helping underscore the complexity of the problem and the need to engage teens in prevention.

Bazelon argues that parents too often overreact to what teens consider normal "drama," making it difficult to curb bullying effectively. Ultimately, she suggests schools adopt programs that change whole school cultures—programs aimed at increasing empathy and character building—rather than the "zero tolerance" programs that are less effective. —JS

Honorable Mentions:

The Bonobo and the Atheist, by Frans de Waal

Bouncing Back: Rewiring Your Brain for Maximum Resilience and Well-being, by Linda Graham

How to Find Fulfilling Work, by Roman Krznaric

Just Babies: The Origins of Good and Evil, by Paul Bloom

Mastermind: How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes, by Maria Konnikova

Ungifted: Intelligence Redefined, by Scott Barry Kaufman

What Makes a Hero? The Surprising Science of Selflessness, by Elizabeth Svoboda