



SHINE

Brain Science, Practical Psychology, Ancient Wisdom
and the Cycle of Excellence

Edward M. Hallowell, MD

On a snowy Sunday at Boston's Logan Airport, I made a decision that was to change my life.

I decided to get my shoes shined. No, the shine my shoes soon took on did not change my life. But the man who shined them did. Here's how it happened.

Once I decided to get my Weejuns shined, I looked around for a shoe-shine stand. A few gates away I saw an empty stand with an old man seated nearby, a walker next to him. I went up to him and asked, "Do you happen to know where the shoe-shine guy has gone?"

He sat right up and gave me a smile as broad as Magic Johnson's. "*I'm* the shoe-shine guy," he proudly proclaimed. "Name's Dr. Shine. Step right on up into my office!" He was a hefty man, maybe 65 years old, wearing a plaid flannel shirt and gray work pants. He slid his chair over to the stand, leaving his walker in its place.

I climbed up, took my place in the old cracked black leather seat, and placed my feet on the smooth brass shoe plates.

"You in the corporate world?" Dr. Shine asked, giving my loafers a spray of water.

"Sort of," I said. "I'm a psychiatrist and writer in the business of trying to bring the best out of people."

Dr. Shine paused and looked up at me, once again showing that wide smile. "Well ain't *that* a coincidence. You see, that's what I do, too! I shine shoes, but what I really do here is work my special magic to find the spark inside people so when they leave me they can shine on their own."

"How do you do that?" I eagerly asked.

"*I reach out*," he replied with obvious passion. "It's that simple. But I gotta be *quick*, cause I only get as long as a shoe-shine. My goal is to change lives one shoe-shine at a time. Everyone's got that spark in them somewhere; I know that for a *fact*. But sometimes *they* don't know it... or they forgot it. Too many folks spend their lives keepin' it hid up inside of them, like they savin' it up for some day that's never gonna come."

"What do you do with *them*?" I asked.

"I just keep fishin'. Keep reachin' out. Course, I got an advantage, you see, because I'm down here, I'm beneath them, so they're not 'fraid of me. I'm nobody to them, I'm just the shoe-shine guy. So, they're mo' likely to tell me what's really goin' on. The minute they get to what's real, that's when I yank!" And, at that, he snapped the shoeshine cloth for emphasis. It made a loud *crack*.

"Yank?" I asked.

"Like I just hooked a fish! Now I got 'em. And I reel 'em in. I tell 'em they just gotta be real, let that spark light 'em up, that if they do that, they gonna light up their whole world. That's what I tell them, *and it's the truth*. They just gotta stop hiding and catch on fire. Then they gotta reach out and get others goin' too. It's all about reachin' out, ya know?"

"You're amazing," I replied. "May I ask, why do you have that walker over there?"

"Oh, that old thing," he said. "It's because I have M.S. My doc says I should quit this job, but I tell him *no way*, this is my best therapy. I might as well lie down forever when I quit work. And I ain't ready to lie down. Not by a long shot."

"Who do you work for?" I asked wondering what group was lucky enough to employ this man.

Without missing a beat, Dr. Shine replied, "I work for *you!*"

I had that conversation with Dr. Shine just before I published my most recent book, which I had intended to call by another title. But because of that conversation, I named the book *Shine* and I dedicated it to Dr. Shine. He embodies what I have discovered is the most reliable way to draw the best out of yourself and other people.

So, how do we draw the best out of people when so many of the rules and practices in life have changed? How in today's new world can people reach their best at their best, given the speed of life and the torrent of information and obligation? Is there a coherent, evidence-based plan that every person can use to bring the best out of themselves or the people they manage? With the help of Dr. Shine, I offer a theory here of how to do just that. It includes 5 steps. I call it the Cycle of Excellence.

“My goal is to change lives one shoe-shine at a time. Everyone’s got that spark in them somewhere; I know that for a fact. But sometimes they don’t know it... or they forgot it.”

Step 1: Select

Like choosing a mate, choosing a job determines everything that happens next. Unfortunately, millions of people choose a job for the wrong reason. They choose the first job they're offered. Or they choose the highest-paying or most prestigious job. Or the job one of their parents wanted them to take. Or they inherit the job. Or take a job hoping to learn to like it. A decade later, they're stuck in the wrong career. They will never achieve at their highest level until they find the right job, the right fit. They will never feel fulfilled until they make the switch.

Like choosing a mate, choosing a job determines everything that happens next.

The Right Job

What's the right job for you? Or for the people who work for you? Or for anyone? The right job is to be found at the intersection of three spheres:

Sphere One: What you like, preferably love, to do.

Sphere Two: What you're really good at.

Sphere Three: What adds value, e.g., what someone will pay you to do.

In *Shine*, I offer a 20-question quiz to help you find where those three spheres intersect in your life, or the lives of the people who work for you. A sampling of the questions includes:

- What skills of yours are you most proud of?
- What talents of yours do others praise the most?
- What do you do when you have nothing to do?
- When were you happiest in your life and also most fulfilled?
- What would you like to do if you knew you could not fail?
- What do others seek you out to do for them?
- What are you bad at that you're trying to get better at?

When put together, each of these questions (and the others in the quiz) help you zero in on where the three spheres intersect. That's the X on your life's Treasure Map.

Step 2: Connect

This is the most powerful step in the Cycle of Excellence, and the one in the most jeopardy in today's world. Today, we are more connected electronically, by far, than ever before in human history. Paradoxically, we're becoming increasingly disconnected interpersonally. People don't know each other. They don't connect on a human, emotional level. They are strangers working side by side. This is a drag on performance, an enemy of excellence.

To be at your best, you must feel good within yourself and within your job. You should look forward to work. Emotion is truly the on/off switch for superior performance.

Do all you can do to create a positive connected atmosphere where you work. People who thrive in what they do almost invariably feel that spark Dr. Shine talked about. They engage with hugely positive energy, both with the task and with others.

To be at your best, you must feel good within yourself and within your job. You should look forward to work.

Tips on How to Connect

1. Notice people. People feel invisible these days. Notice what a person is wearing and comment on it. Comment on a turn of phrase, an accent, a perfume. Notice if a person seems sad, or happy, or tired. Notice and comment.
2. Pay attention. This is a corollary of #1. Attention is in short supply in today's world. The more you pay attention (notice we use the same verb with attention that we use with money!), the more the other person or group will feel valued. Feeling valued is a precursor of peak performance.
3. Give people the time of day. Time is also in short supply. Who has time for... anything? The leading sexual problem in the country today is not erectile dysfunction or premature ejaculation, it is people not making time to have sex! Be it your sex life or your work life, giving time leads to the best results.
4. Listen. This is on *everyone's* top ten list of advice points. Why? Because so few people actually do listen. Notice how excited you get when you detect another person is actually listening to you, fully and completely. Listening is another catalyst of peak performance.
5. Put yourself in the other person's place. We so tend to pigeon-hole these days. We get one sound-bite and we assume we know the other person completely. Empathy—the art of understanding another person—is a dying art. Practice it. It isn't easy. But when you do it, it pays large dividends.

Step 3: Play

No, I do not mean go do what kids do at recess. By play, I mean something far more powerful and profound. By play, I refer to the highest activity of the human brain. By play I mean any activity in which the imagination gets involved. Any activity in which your brain lights up. Any activity in which you become so involved that you lose self-consciousness altogether. The opposite of play is doing exactly what you're told. Robotic behavior. No one ever achieved greatness by doing exactly what they were told.

So, play. And encourage others to play.

Tips on How to Instigate Play

1. Ask open-ended questions, questions that do not have a yes or no answer. Ask “why” questions. Ask yourself, and others, how you could vary standard procedure to get better results. Ask yourself to write with your opposite hand, metaphorically. Think outside of your usual parameters. Ask everyone to come to work dressed out of character. Then they will have permission to think out of character as well.
2. Model a questioning, rather than an answering or dictating, attitude.
3. Decorate your workspace personally and imaginatively.
4. Start with a conclusion, then work backward one step at a time. This is how many mystery writers contrive their plots. Organic chemists use it all the time; they call it “retrograde synthesis.”

5. Intentionally argue against what you actually think. Take the opposite point of view in order to understand it better.
6. Schedule time in which you have nothing to do but think. It is amazing how few people say they do their best thinking at work. The most common place people say they do their best thinking is in the shower.
7. Take more showers.

If you can't take legitimate pleasure in what you do well, you will never feel fulfilled, no matter how much you achieve.

Step 4: Grapple and Grow

This is the step that most people associate with achieving peak performance. And, to be sure, hard work is a pre-requisite for excellence. But hard work alone won't do the trick. If you're in the wrong job, all the hard work in the world won't help. I could never play center field for the Red Sox, no matter how hard I worked. And if you're working in a disconnected organization, you will never achieve at the level you could were you working in a positively connected group. And if you're not allowed to think creatively, to play, you will never bring out your best either.

The mistake most people make is to jump in here at Step 4 and demand of themselves or their people extra hard work. If you haven't paid attention to Steps 1, 2, and 3. then you will never get the maximum benefit from your hard work or the hard work of others.

Tips on How to Work

1. In today's world, boundaries are critical. Technology has broken down boundaries, and you must reconstruct them. With no boundaries, you spend too much of your time dealing with unplanned interruptions. Turn off your electronics long enough to get some serious work done.
2. Pace yourself. The brain can't go flat out all day long.
3. Get regular physical exercise. It will more than pay you back in terms of improved efficiency and skill at work.
4. Grit matters more than talent. Grit, the ability to bounce back, comes from developing steps 1, 2, and 3, not simply from sucking it up and trying harder.
5. Make your goal be making progress every day. If you make progress at a task that is both challenging and meaningful, you will grow in confidence, and confidence creates peak performance.

Step 5: Shine

This fifth step culminates the cycle. As you grapple and grow, you start to shine, both in your own eyes and the eyes of others. Recognition solidifies confidence and self-esteem, as well as adding to motivation.

Get in the habit of recognizing yourself for what you've done well. Take a moment to celebrate, if only in a silent high-five you give to yourself. These little moments build you up in a good way. If you can't take legitimate pleasure in what you do well, you will never feel fulfilled, no matter how much you achieve.

If you are a manager, recognizing others is one of your most powerful tools for bringing out the best in your people. Use it often, use it wisely, and use it strategically.

Tips on Recognizing Yourself and Others

1. Recognize effort, not just results. Sure, results are what you want, but effort will lead to results, as long as you've used the first four steps properly.
2. Use the human moment—face to face, not email to email—when recognizing others. The human moment is infinitely more powerful than the electronic moment.
3. Monitor your progress or that of others. Monitoring progress improves performance.
4. Try always to make others look good.
5. Remember, your own self-esteem is one of your most important assets, and the self-esteem of the people who work for you is your organization's most valuable asset. Treat each accordingly.

In Sum

Taken together, the Cycle of Excellence provides a plan that *will* bring out the best in you or in your people. It is rooted both in brain science, as well as practical psychology and the most ancient and tested wisdom. *It works.*

I said at the beginning that Dr. Shine changed my life. Indeed he did. It was seeing how bravely and boldly he did all he could do to serve others, and in so doing make the most of his own life, that provided the missing ingredient and inspiration for *Shine*. He inspired me at a time when I was feeling somewhat doubtful about the future of this world. Seeing him at work made me slap myself and say, “Get on it. Deliver what you have to say. Shine the shoes *you’re* meant to shine. Reach out!” And so, now, I am reaching out to you.

Each of us has it in him or her to draw out of ourselves and others more than we know we have.

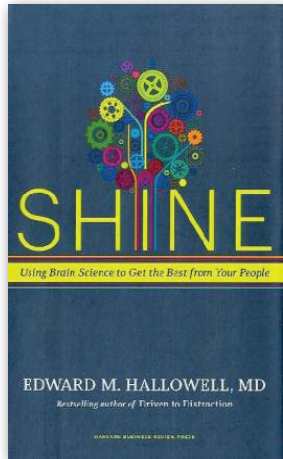
Each of us has it in him or her to draw out of ourselves and others more than we know we have. In a world bursting with problems, conflicts, sadness, and tragedy, what do we have but the power to reach, to hope, to work, to try every day, to do all we can to find that spark, to reach beyond where we think we can go...

This is not abstract preaching. It is a concrete reply to the question each of us answers, implicitly or explicitly: *How to live?*

Seeing Dr. Shine do his work that snowy day at Logan Airport reminded me how available greatness is for every one of us. Dr. Shine is a great man. There's no reason you or I can't be as well.

We live in a world where greatness is too often defined by spurious standards, by standards of fame, notoriety, money, or power. We need the reminder that Dr. Shine gave me through his example. We need the reminder that great men and women surround us, but they are usually not to be found in the newspapers or in lights. They are to be found in ordinary places, doing ordinary jobs... in extraordinary ways.

So go for it. Be a great person. Be like Dr. Shine. Reach out. Reach within. Find that spark. Connect. Play. Grow. And *shine!* **Set the world on fire. Your fire. It's what you're here to do. So do it. And have a ball!** 🏀



BUY THE BOOK

Get more details or buy a copy of Dr. Hallowell's [*Shine*](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Edward M. Hallowell, MD, a psychiatrist, served as an instructor at Harvard Medical School for twenty years and is the director of the Hallowell Centers in New York City and Sadbury, Massachusetts. He has written two popular Harvard Business Review articles and authored eighteen books, including the national bestseller *Driven to Distraction*, which have sold millions of copies. He lives in the Boston area with his wife and three children. You can learn more at www.drhallowell.com.

SEND THIS

[Pass along a copy](#) of this manifesto to others.

SUBSCRIBE

[Sign up for our free e-newsletter](#) to learn about our latest manifestos as soon as they are available.

BORN ON DATE

This document was created on April 6, 2011 and is based on the best information available at that time.

ABOUT CHANGETHIS

[ChangeThis](#) is a vehicle, not a publisher. We make it easy for big ideas to spread. While the authors we work with are responsible for their own work, they don't necessarily agree with everything available in ChangeThis format. But you knew that already.

ChangeThis is supported by the love and tender care of 800-CEO-READ. Visit us at 800-CEO-READ or at our daily [blog](#).

COPYRIGHT INFO

The copyright of this work belongs to the author, who is solely responsible for the content.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License. To view a copy of this license, visit Creative Commons or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA.

Cover image from [iStockphoto](#)®

WHAT YOU CAN DO

You are given the unlimited right to print this manifesto and to distribute it electronically (via email, your website, or any other means). You can print out pages and put them in your favorite coffee shop's windows or your doctor's waiting room. You can transcribe the author's words onto the sidewalk, or you can hand out copies to everyone you meet. You may not alter this manifesto in any way, though, and you may not charge for it.