I'm in the Business of Hope:
How to Keep Believing when Things Feel Impossible

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Who Am I?

Dr. Matt Zakreski, clinical psychologist, neurodiversity advocate, and "grown-up gifted kid."

Professional cartoonist

Brain-tumor survivor

CW: This presentation will discuss suicide and suicidal ideation

Why do people come to therapy?

What is Hope?

To have hope is to want an outcome that makes your life better in some way.

"The expectation that one will have positive experiences or that a potentially threatening or negative situation will not materialize or will ultimately result in a favorable state of affairs." (APA)

Where does hope come from?

+ Personal values and dreams

+ Confidence in life

+ We are, as a species, "not content to be content."

+ Our brains like to create narratives of our lives – hope give us a guiding principle

"HOPE IS A GOOD THING, MAYBE THE BEST OF THINGS, AND NO GOOD THING EVER DIES."

———

ANDY DUFRESNE
The Shawshank Redemption (1994)

révas productions

Hope vs. Optimism

Hope is linked to optimism, but it isn't the same thing

Optimism is the attitude or outlook that good things will happen, and one's wishes or aims will ultimately be fulfilled.

In this sense, hope is essential to setting and ultimately achieving goals.

What does hope do?

Hope provides us with goals and the motivation to meet them

Hope looks to the future and makes the present easier to bare

Hope connects us to a broader, cosmic (or spiritual) universe

S – Specific

M – Measurable

A – Achievable

R – Relevant

T – Time-Bound

What Makes a Good Goal?

"Pray for rain all you like, but dig a well as you do it."

Stephen King

Hope Helps

Hope is a type of "psychological capital".
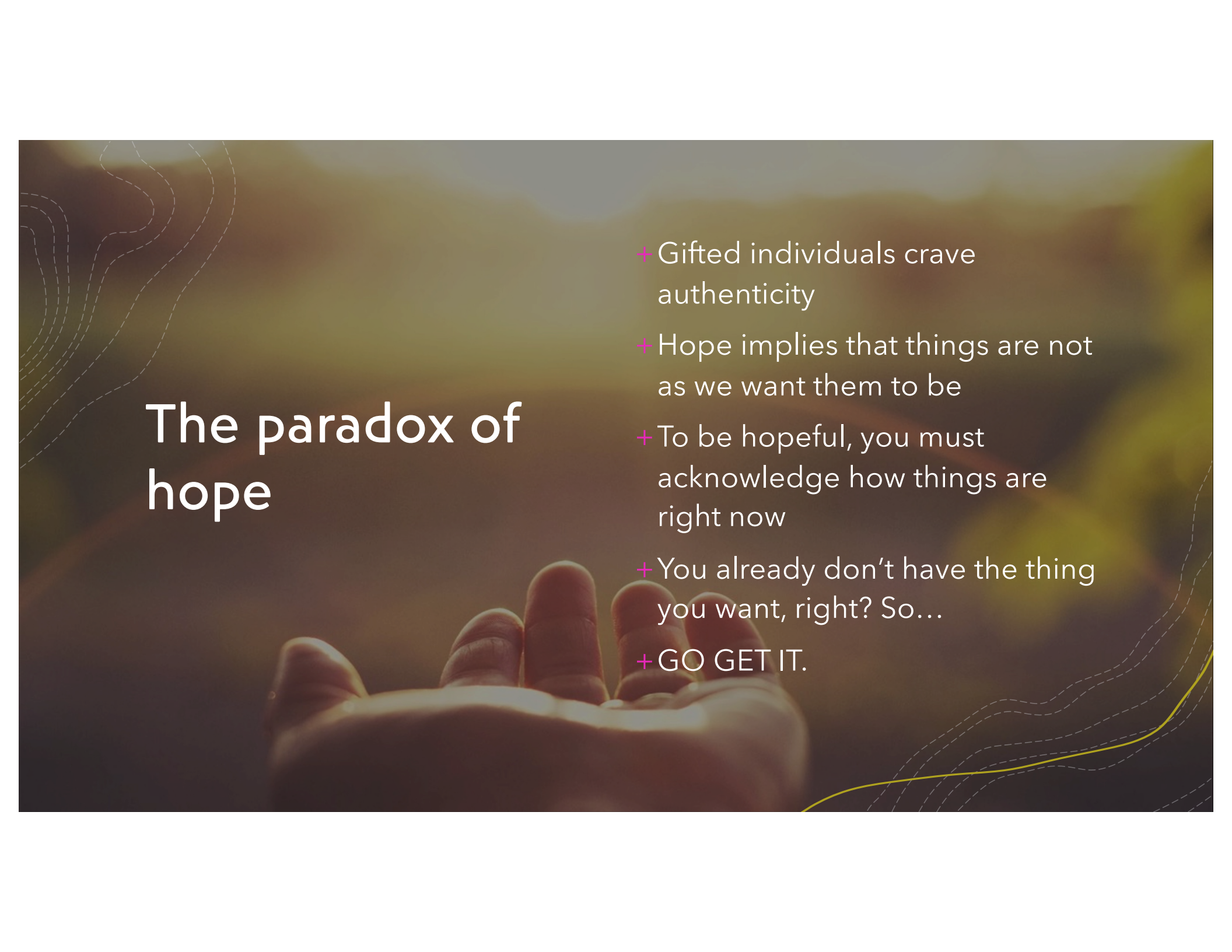
More hope is positively related to:

- Better health outcomes
- Better athletic outcomes
- Better academic outcomes
- Better occupational outcomes

Hope is cumulative

The paradox of hope

+ Gifted individuals crave authenticity

+ Hope implies that things are not as we want them to be

+ To be hopeful, you must acknowledge how things are right now

+ You already don't have the thing you want, right? So…

+ GO GET IT.

Hope benefits from community

+ It is possible to be hopeful alone, but easier to be hopeful in a community

+ We are social animals, and constantly learn for and from others

+ Community limits negative and self-defeating beliefs

+ Multiple perspectives allow for multiple avenues for success

Ways to build hope in yourself

Look back on past wins

Celebrate yourself and your current wins (the "YES!" test)

Be creative – what haven't you tried?

Reflect, pray, or meditate

Filter your inputs (no doomscrolling)

Instill hope in others

How to promote an atmosphere of hope

Set

Set clear goals – achievable, concrete, realistic

Align

Align goals with values – what matters to you will help you both set and achieve your goals
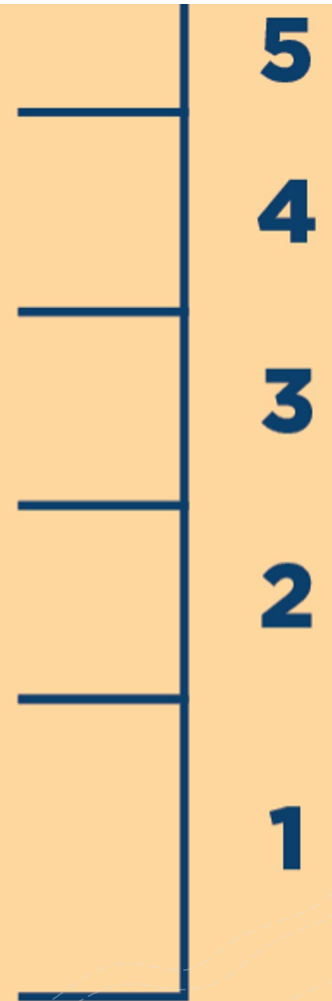
Cultivate

Cultivate a growth mindset – I'm always learning, and I can take my failures and move forward (F.A.I.L.)
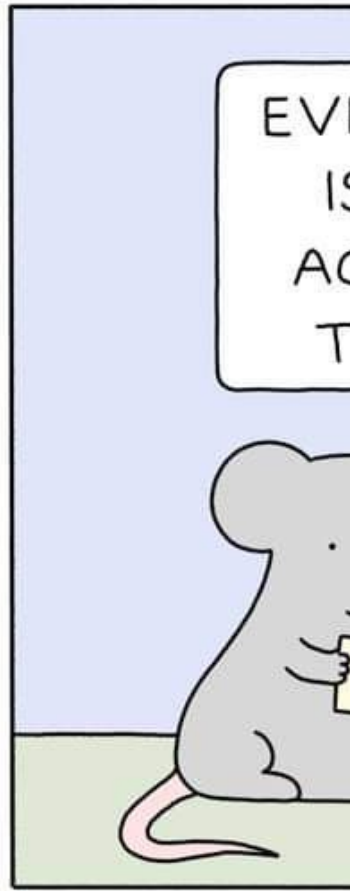
Take

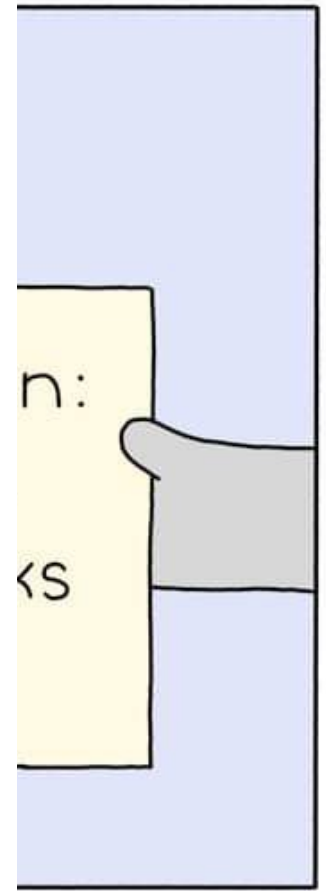Take perspective – make time to check in with yourself and see how you're doing and how far you've come

The Ice Cream Sundae Test

5
4
3
2
1

"It's Gonna Be OK!"

+ Who's ever said that to an upset kid/client/partner?

+ First off – do we *really* know that?

+ Second – runs the risk of invalidating their feelings

+ Are we saying that for our comfort or for theirs?

+ Regression to the mean – math can help!

Regression / Reversion to the Mean
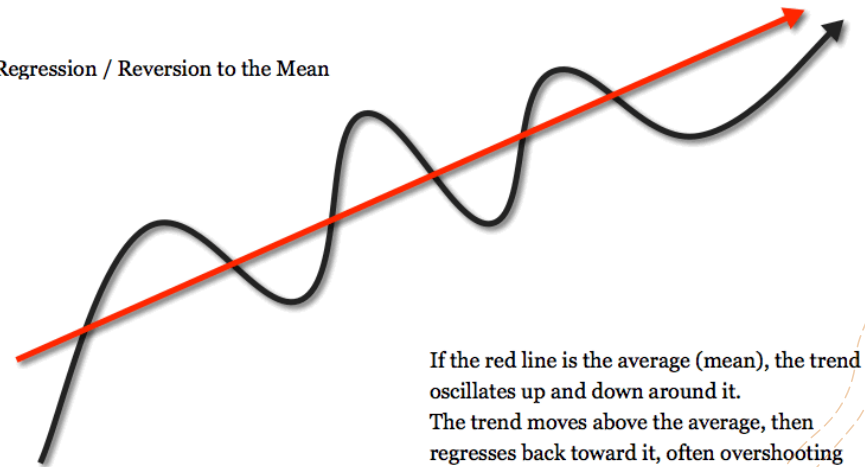
If the red line is the average (mean), the trend oscillates up and down around it.
The trend moves above the average, then regresses back toward it, often overshooting up and down.

Let's not have toxic positivity

The excessive and ineffective overgeneralization of a happy, optimistic state across all situations.

The process of toxic positivity results in the denial, minimization, and invalidation of the authentic human emotional experience.

By disallowing the existence of certain feelings, we fall into a state of denial and repressed emotions

Signs of Toxic Positivity

+ Hiding/Masking your true feelings

+ Trying to "just get on with it" by stuffing/dismissing an emotion(s)

+ Feeling guilty for feeling what you feel

+ Minimizing other people's experiences with "feel good" quotes or statements

+ Trying to give someone perspective (e.g., "it could be worse") instead of validating their emotional experience

+ Shaming or chastising others for expressing frustration or anything other than positivity

+ Brushing off things that are bothering you with an "It is what it is"
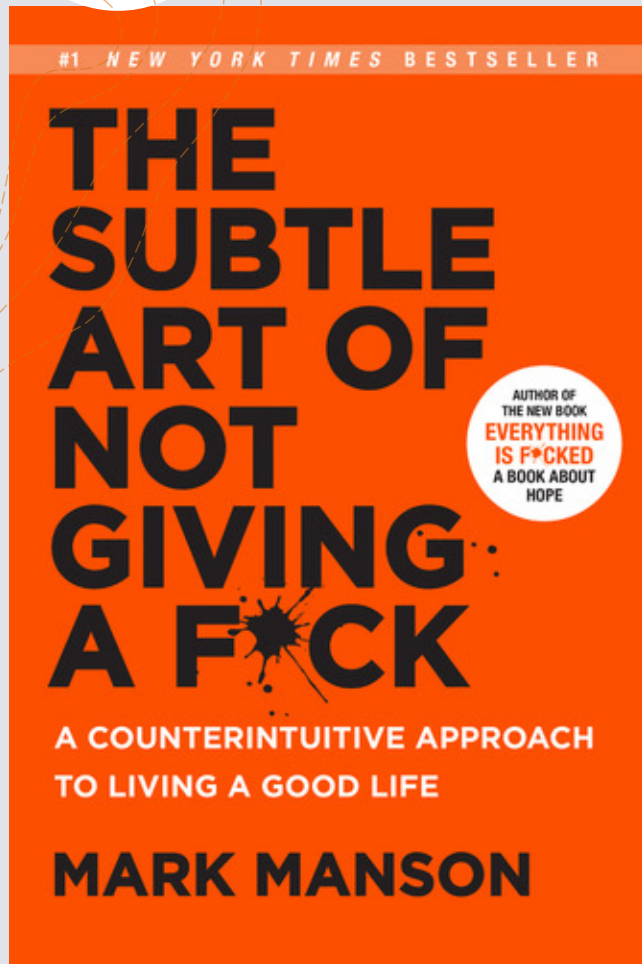
Mark Manson

"Everything worthwhile in life is won through surmounting the associated negative experience. Any attempt to escape the negative, to avoid it or quash it or silence it, only backfires… Real hope comes only from owning the pain to overcome it."

Back to therapy

Feel your feelings - be authentic

"The paradox is that, as soon as I accept myself as I am, I can begin to change" – Carl Jung

Challenges are not about personal worth – even if you caused the problem

The Miracle Question

Internal Locus of Control

Risk Factors

+ Existential Depression

+ Ruminative Cognitive Style – turning it over and over and over

+ Poor Fits in Environments(s)

+ Previous traumas/ruptures in environments

+ Emotional Intensity

+ Lack of Understanding of the Self/Your Neurodivergence

Suicidality – a Lack of Connection

Hopelessness

Helplessness

Worthlessness

SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS

	IS PATH WARM	
I		IDEATION
S		SUBSTANCE ABUSE
P		PURPOSELESSNESS
A		ANXIETY
T		TRAPPED
H		HOPELESSNESS
W		WITHDRAWAL
A		ANGER
R		RECKLESSNESS
M		MOOD CHANGES

Choices
Psychotherapy

Be curious

+ Don't argue or condemn! – "OK, Tell me more."

+ If we understand how someone thinks, then their choices make more sense

+ No one chooses to be/feel suicidal – what has happened?

Five core steps

Ask, then listen

Be there with them – create connectedness

Keep them safe – how concrete is their plan? What's the timeline? How can you get them in a safe place/keep them away from an unsafe place?

Help them connect – to people and resources

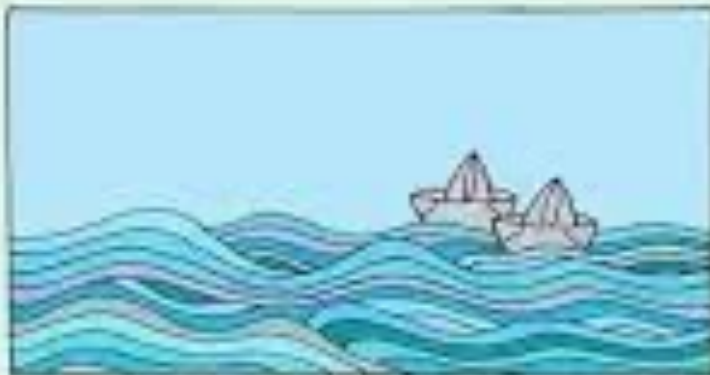Follow up – don't pretend it didn't happen; postcard project
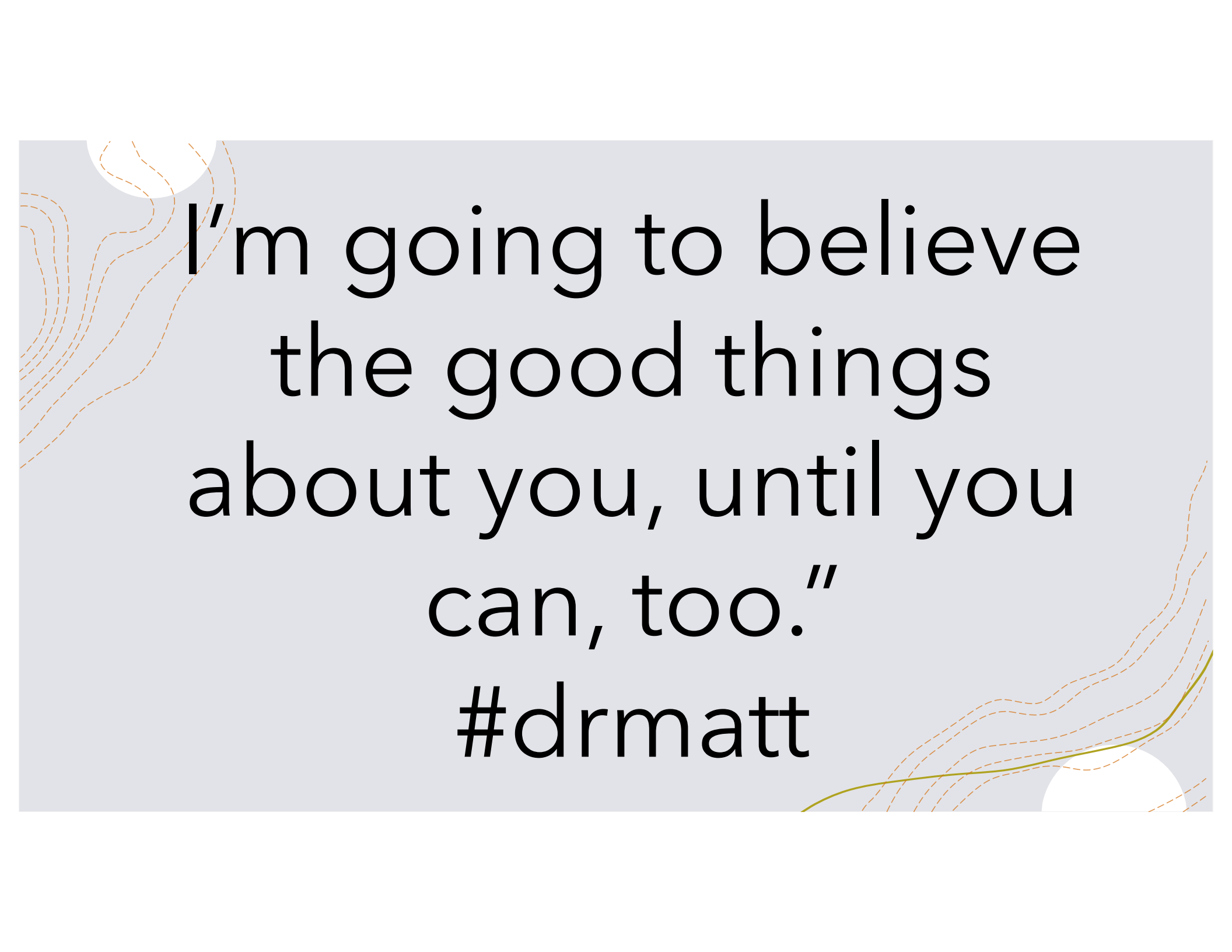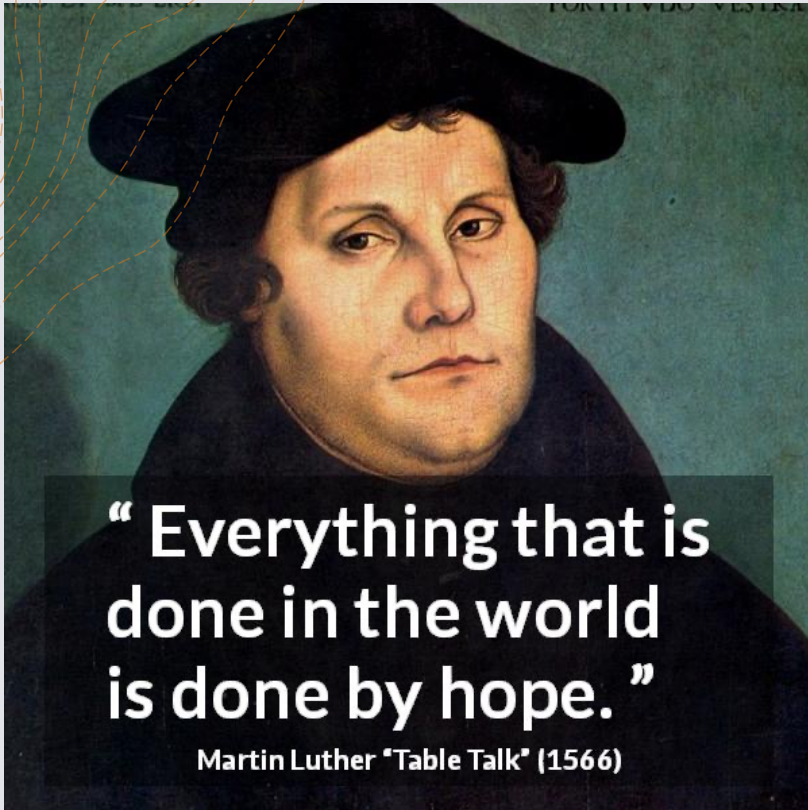
Try to be the lighthouse

What is School

+A place to learn

+A place to be inspired

+A place to get access to materials/opportunities

+A place to eat

+A place to be warm/cool

+A place to be around people who love/like you

+Our interventions to create hope at school **might not be about learning**

I'm going to believe the good things about you, until you can, too."
#drmatt

Questions?

Here's how to find me:

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+www.facebook.com/drmattzakreski

" Everything that is done in the world is done by hope. "

Martin Luther 'Table Talk' (1566)

Resources

+https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mental-health-in-the-workplace/202110/the-psychology-hope

+https://thepsychologygroup.com/toxic-positivity/

+https://www.drnicolemayeda.com/notesonbfrbs/2016/12/17/wholeness-over-goodness

+https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide-and-seek/201411/what-hope

+https://blog.iqmatrix.com/nurturing-hope

+https://forge.medium.com/10-science-based-ways-to-increase-your-hope-430892caacb2

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