

“Timeless wellbeing principles that are both innovative and practical...an essential guide.”

—Chip Conley

Caitlin Krause

DIGITAL WELLBEING

EMPOWERING CONNECTION
WITH WONDER AND IMAGINATION
IN THE AGE OF AI

FOREWORD BY MARC PRENSKY
INTERLUDE BY RODNEY MULLEN

Praise for *Digital Wellbeing*

“Caitlin Krause’s *Digital Wellbeing* masterfully explores the intersection of technology and human potential. This book is a must-read for those who want to leverage the power of AI to unlock their creativity and imagination and ultimately invent new means of expression that will go way beyond human language, art, and science of today.”

—**Ray Kurzweil,**
inventor, futurist, and author of New York Times
bestseller *The Singularity Is Nearer*

“*Digital Wellbeing* is a welcome paradigm shift that invites us all toward a brighter future with tech. The book is brimming with compelling questions and practical insights—it is truly a resource to revisit. Krause is wonder-full as a guide. From her ‘imagination index,’ to ‘the presence pyramid,’ ‘metaverse fluency,’ and ‘collective effervescence,’ Krause gifts us with new language to open up important conversations about digital thriving.”

—**Dr. Emily Weinstein,**
Co-Founder and Executive Director,
Center for Digital Thriving,
Harvard Graduate School of Education

“In today’s rapidly evolving world, *Digital Wellbeing: Empowering Connection with Wonder and Imagination in the Age of AI* stands out as an essential guide for leaders and lifelong learners. This book skillfully addresses the challenges of modern life, offering timeless wellbeing principles that are both innovative and practical. It’s an invaluable resource for anyone looking to thrive at the intersection of technology and personal growth, a must-read for those dedicated to enhancing their professional and personal lives with wonder, wisdom, and authenticity.”

—**Chip Conley,**
New York Times bestselling author
and Founder of Modern Elder Academy

“At a time when the impulse to lead fully digital lives and automate is tempting, Caitlin Krause’s *Digital Wellbeing* offers ways to uphold creative freedom and imagination. She lights a way for integrity in this digital age, recognizing our lives as a Möbius strip of inner-outer connection. This book guides us to access what is most genuine and vital, fostering a mindful and authentic relationship with technology.”

—**Parker J. Palmer**,
author of *Let Your Life Speak, A Hidden Wholeness*,
and *On the Brink of Everything*

“There’s another plane of existence waiting for you, full of so much wonder and meaning. In this delightful book, Caitlin Krause opens your eyes to the marvels that can be found in the digital world. She’s the perfect guide!”

—**Scott Barry Kaufman, PhD**,
author of *Transcend*

“Caitlin Krause is hands-down the ‘go-to expert’ on mental wellbeing and virtual reality. In addition to being a huge thinker on wellbeing in general, she has logged thousands of hours in-headset. She doesn’t just talk the talk, she walks the walk. I can’t think of a better person to write this book.”

—**Jeremy Bailenson**,
founding director of Stanford University’s
Virtual Human Interaction Lab

“Skateboarders become one with their boards to access everyday streets in novel, shared ways; that oneness blurs borders between board and terrain, body and mind, tunneling deeper into how we think and relate, as people. In a resonant way, new technologies are increasingly intertwining with tendrils of our senses, feeding the very perceptions that shape our conceptions of the world around us. Caitlin Krause maps this meshing of the human and digital domain in ways that elevate connection with others and reinvigorates a sense of wonder for the road ahead—all with such graceful clarity.”

—**Rodney Mullen**,
skateboarder, fellow at MIT Media Lab

“Caitlin Krause’s *Digital Wellbeing* is a transformative guide for today’s leaders, showing how technology can enhance—rather than hinder—our capacity for genuine human connection and creativity. It’s a vital resource for anyone who wants to create meaningful impact and navigate the emerging digital world with innovation and authenticity.”

—**Dorie Clark,**

Wall Street Journal bestselling author of *The Long Game*
and executive education faculty, Columbia Business School

“The digital world offers us both challenges and opportunities that our wise and committed guide, Caitlin Krause, explores deeply in the comprehensive chapters of this practical and informed journey into human flourishing. *Digital Wellbeing* provides a feast of science-backed insights into how our attention, emotion, and social interactions are molded by an array of distractions and immersions, from work-focused email to social media. We learn about how the expansive dives into the virtual world and the expansion of our toolkits with AI offer exciting and concerning extensions to our digital lives. With a clear message, a compelling strategy for enhancing health, and illuminating examples illustrating how to maintain and regain our resilience, this book pulls us in and leaves us with important and memorable ways to thrive in the digital domain without become lost in it.”

—**Daniel J. Siegel, MD,**

New York Times bestselling author of *Aware* and *Mind*,
Co-Founder Mindsight Institute
and the UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center

“In this book, Ms. Krause serves as an imagination architect who identifies wonder and awe as essential ingredients to inspire a field of experience design that aims to fundamentally transform and support wellbeing. Her work elucidates the much-needed qualities of creativity, play and interconnection with elegance and simplicity, and invites us via a digital-lens to see the world real and imagined in a new light.”

—**Philippe Goldin, PhD,**

Professor, University of California Davis

“In *Digital Wellbeing*, Caitlin Krause brilliantly explores how we can harness AI and digital technologies to enhance our physical and mental wellbeing. Her playful approach brings movement into the realm of discovery and awe, revolutionizing how we motivate ourselves to get up and moving. Krause’s insights on using immersive experiences to boost body awareness are groundbreaking, offering a fresh perspective on thriving in our increasingly digital world.”

—**Kathy Smith,**
fitness icon and *New York Times* bestselling author

“Caitlin is a world treasure. Every time I read what she has written or give her a hug I am a better person. Take to heart her message that wonder and imagination are not threatened by digital and AI, but instead, like other tools of our age, they can empower us, especially when we listen to and follow the promptings of our own human hearts.”

—**Tom Furness,**
Professor Emeritus and “Grandfather of Virtual Reality”

“In this age of mass confusion and fear about the roles of immersive technologies and AI in our lives, *Digital Wellbeing* by Caitlin Krause distinguishes itself by blending practical frameworks with imaginative concepts to foster digital wellbeing. Unlike other books that focus on digital detox, Krause emphasizes integrating technology mindfully to enhance creativity, connection, and overall human flourishing. We need to embrace change to find the peace we seek, not hide from it.”

—**Alvin W. Graylin,**
bestselling author of *Our Next Reality*
and global vice president at HTC

“We are each surfing an ocean of digital connections, and yet we generally feel less connected than ever. This book covers what we know and can study about digital wellbeing as an ever-growing aspect of our lives. The goal is not necessarily about maximizing profit, or productivity, or even the elusive state of ‘flow,’ but achieving what we all generally long for in a happy life: belonging, love, purpose, and real vs. fake connection. Caitlin Krause leads

us along this journey with a book that is both informative and thought provoking and well worth your time to read.”

—**Avi Bar-Zeev**

Pioneer in Spatial Computing; helping Google Earth,
MS HoloLens, Amazon Echo Frames, and Apple Vision Pro

“Caitlin’s book is full of great insights into the interaction of psychology, technology, and wellbeing. A very informative text on how games can be used to make our lives better in meaningful ways that go beyond just entertainment.”

—**Noah Falstein,**

Games for Healthcare expert,
former chief game designer at Google

“Caitlin’s imaginative approach to the digital world is not only a gift for the present moment, where many of us are in need of reestablishing a healthy relationship with devices, but it is also an experiential peek at a version of the digital future where technology truly encourages human flourishing.”

—**Royce Branning,**

Co-Founder, clearspace

“*Digital Wellbeing* by Caitlin Krause offers a window into creativity and wonder while defining and exploring tech and wellness. These topics often feel nebulous, but Krause provides a framework that readers can follow that will help them in their exploration of technology and how it can both inform and improve our lives. I highly encourage any reader to accept Krause’s invitation to be lifted through digital wellbeing and all it encompasses.”

—**Starr Sackstein,**

author and assessment reformer and disrupter

“Caitlin Krause has brought an insightful and transformative view to the intersection of technology and human flourishing with her book *Digital Wellbeing*. Caitlin’s expertise and vision reflect her deep understanding of enhancing digital experiences with creativity and mindfulness. Her insights empower readers to cultivate a sense of wonder and imagination, driving

personal and professional growth in the digital age. Her book encourages readers to act empathetically and positively impact others in their digital interactions. This book is a must-read. It will open your eyes to the profound importance and impact that the digital world has on all of us.”

—**Dr. Andy Clayton,**

Assistant Professor of Leadership, Air University,
Leadership and Innovation Institute

“*Digital Wellbeing: Empowering Connection with Wonder and Imagination in the Age of AI* by Caitlin Krause empowers leaders to blend technological innovation with genuine human connection, particularly those aiming to lead with purpose and compassion in our increasingly digital world. With this book, Krause has created a call to action for those ready to pioneer with strength and empathy, making it an indispensable resource for visionary leadership.”

—**Shelley Zalis,**

Founder and CEO of The Female Quotient

“In *Digital Wellbeing*, Caitlin Krause has shown us that wellbeing begins with connectedness: to ourselves, to each other, and to the AI-enabled world around us. It’s fundamental.”

—**Gary A. Bolles,**

author, *The Next Rules of Work*

“Caitlin Krause’s book is a masterclass in digital wellbeing. Our tech often overwhelms, and Krause shows us how to reclaim awe and wonder. Essential reading for anyone looking to succeed in this age of noise, disruption, and change.”

—**Scott Galloway,**

Professor of Marketing,
NYU Stern School of Business

DIGITAL WELLBEING

“Timeless wellbeing principles that are both innovative and practical... an essential guide.”

—Chip Conley

Caitlin Krause

DIGITAL WELLBEING

EMPOWERING CONNECTION
WITH WONDER AND IMAGINATION
IN THE AGE OF AI

FOREWORD BY MARC PRENSKY
INTERLUDE BY RODNEY MULLEN

WILEY

Copyright © 2025 by Caitlin Krause. All rights reserved.

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.
Published simultaneously in Canada.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 750-4470, or on the web at www.copyright.com. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permission>.

Trademarks: Wiley and the Wiley logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and/or its affiliates in the United States and other countries and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Further, readers should be aware that websites listed in this work may have changed or disappeared between when this work was written and when it is read. Neither the publisher nor authors shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

For general information on our other products and services or for technical support, please contact our Customer Care Department within the United States at (800) 762-2974, outside the United States at (317) 572-3993 or fax (317) 572-4002.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic formats. For more information about Wiley products, visit our web site at www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is Available:

ISBN 9781394281787 (Cloth)
ISBN 9781394281794 (ePub)
ISBN 9781394281800 (ePDF)

Cover Design: Wiley

Cover Image: © art_of_sun / Adobe Stock

Author Photo: Courtesy of the Author

*For everyone looking to ignite imagination
and bring wonder to life,
giving it wings*

Contents

<i>Foreword by Marc Prensky</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xvii</i>
Introduction: Open Up to a World of Wonder	1
Chapter 1 Defining Wellbeing Through a New Lens	13
Chapter 2 Frameworks for Digital Wellbeing	39
Chapter 3 Facets of Wonder: Implications for Digital Wellbeing	61
Chapter 4 Wellbeing and the Well of Being Well	83
Chapter 5 How Technology Helps: Creating Connection and Belonging Instead of Loneliness	111
Chapter 6 Thriving with Digital Wellbeing: Approaches to Learning	133
Chapter 7 Wellbeing Through Spatial Computing, Gaming, and Extended Reality	147
Chapter 8 Wellbeing Through Immersive Imagination	185
<i>Interlude by Rodney Mullen</i>	186
Chapter 9 Wellbeing Through Music: The Heart Is a Digital Kick Drum	205
Chapter 10 Wellbeing Through Wearables and Movement	215

Chapter 11	Wellbeing Through AI and How to Thrive with Hope	229
	Future Sight: Envisioning a Future of Digital Thriving	241
	<i>Notes</i>	251
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	269
	<i>About the Author</i>	271
	<i>Index</i>	273

Foreword

What I've learned most from Caitlin Krause is that there is another plane to live on than the mundane and ordinary—and that with some guidance, we can all get there. Caitlin lives on that higher plane and wants to bring you, me, and everyone else onto it—all the time. She calls the plane “wellbeing”—a state of presence, observation, relaxation, low stress, awe, wonder, satisfaction, flow, and many other things.

How people can reach and spend more of their time on that plane—rather than in the more tedious and stressful parts of life—is the question and quest that consumes Caitlin. She is everywhere—speaking at TED or LinkedIn, giving workshops, holding meditations, and designing activities and games in real and virtual 3D worlds. She sees further into the future than many of us, and she understands that a new era is upon humankind—I call it “the third millennium”—and that in that new era people—and their activities—will be different and more evolved. As such she is a valuable guide.

As a guide, she has a lovely voice—my first thought was of Galadriel, the elf-queen from *Lord of the Rings*, talking to me, calming me down with her way of speaking. This book is a good reflection of who she is—open (one of her favorite words) to ideas and people. In the book she introduces us to many concepts and people she admires and helps us understand why.

The book is not just about wellbeing, but about *digital* wellbeing. It's about how we can all thrive, and become more evolved through incorporating the new digital world as a full part of us—while being human.

The digital part of humans is still burgeoning—it is less than a hundred years old in a human history of more than a hundred thousand years. But this new human evolutionary step (now nonbiological, like the language, social organization, writing and print, science and other evolutions since we became *homo sapiens*) is on an exponential trajectory that has passed the famous “elbow” of the curve and is now going almost straight up. Caitlin sees where this is going and how positive it will be for humanity because we will all, in the third millennium, get to live more of our lives on that higher plane.

Many of us are just now discovering that that plane exists. Many associate digital with harm and not the higher plane of wellbeing. But it won't be that way for long. The harms will gradually be reduced and the positive promises kept.

I think you will enjoy this book—I did. The journey goes from what it's like being on the higher plane to how we get there. It's filled with all the spaces and directions that Caitlin has explored and loves. Her aim is to not just describe, but to bring us there—and she offers many examples of wellbeing being produced and of models we can use to get more.

At its heart, this book is an invitation to open up our game and live, at least partially, at a new level, which—because of the exponentially growing compute power that defines the third millennium—is now available to more and more of us, and will soon be accessible to all. All of our lives are already digitally entwined—scary as that might seem to us. We all need to start learning to live our new digitally integrated lives in ways that are powerful, uplifting, and healing. Sadly, in the name of greed, some adults have already stepped in and corrupted parts of the digital world, allowing it to become harmful. But that doesn't have to be the way it goes forward—and it won't be if voices like Caitlin's are widely heard. Read on, and you, and those you know and influence, will be lifted—gently, with curiosity and agency—to a brighter and better way of being—a way of *digital wellbeing*.

—Marc Prensky

Preface

Discoveries and questions about digital wellbeing come alive in this book, as topics are approached through a new lens of wonder and imagination. It's been a *meta* sort of process, to adopt, reflect, and aim to embody this expansive approach to wellbeing while writing deeply about a topic that has so many transformative, astonishing—and at times misleading—facets and connotations.

How many of us, including our friends, families, partners, children, colleagues, and teams, need better ways to approach wellbeing right now? And how much does it feel as if tech is getting in the way instead of becoming the bridge to meaningful connection, presence, and imagination? This book changes that story. Here, as we demystify concepts, we give them greater context in ways that apply to our personal and professional lives, all while going beyond buzzwords and emphasizing the essential link between intention and attention. Our purpose in this book's journey is to elevate meaningful connection through experiences, actionable strategies, and dialogues that reach us right where we need it most, in support of full-life thriving.

Our focus involves AI because we're not just living in a digitally mediated time, we're in a transformative age where most of technology, including spatial computing, is powered by AI. It connects all of us and can serve to uplift us. It impacts how we lead, design, innovate, and implement better ways of working and connecting. The book dives into these deeper subjects, illuminating examples of how digital wellbeing is animated by wonder and imagination, within digital systems that use advanced technology as part of

their infrastructure. Feeling connected and empowered, inside and out, as humans in this adventure together, is essential.

As we explore new digital applications for wellbeing, we are anticipating and meeting needs in a spatial computing landscape that will only grow. This moment is significant: humans are establishing new relationships with tech and discovering new ways of approaching ourselves and each other in this interconnected digital landscape. Wonder plays a significant role in our ability to thrive and to transform dreams into realities. This book explores all of this and more, as a guide and practical resource for personal and professional life.

As leaders of an emergent future, it's up to us to have a wider field of vision, which is what this book offers. The journey of it coming to life has been interesting and fascinating. I use that word, "interesting," which my fifth grade librarian told us should never *ever* be in a book report, but I choose it because it's appropriate. It *is* interesting, astonishing, and curiosity-inducing, the process of writing a book about wonder and wellbeing in the modern age, when wellbeing itself is a core metric of success in all arenas.

The interesting part this time around, with this particular topic, is the quality of my own mind, that inner landscape at a time that is incredibly noisy. I'm writing a book about digital wellbeing and wonder. I made a commitment in this process to embody imagination-infused digital wellbeing while I was writing about it because I do believe in that old adage that "you are what you eat" and that a product will inevitably reflect the emotional, psychological, and spiritual state of its creator. This book is also deeper than a product, of course.

As we talk about wellbeing, our own wellbeing is paramount. Secure our own safety belts first. And there's even more to it than that. I've found that striving for perfection with wellbeing and most other topics is not a realistic aim. What's more real, at least for me, is being open—one major theme of this book—really experiencing things as they are.

Two weeks before the due date, a friend asked me how writing the book was going. I said, "The vinegar tastes like vinegar." He understood right away. It's a parable from *The Tao of Pooh*, an allegory about the three major philosophies of China: Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. In the story, Buddha, Confucius, and Lao Tse are gathered around a pot of vinegar. In this interpretation, Buddha tastes the vinegar first and says it tastes bitter because life is bitter and filled with suffering and attachment; his answer is

to transcend life with its extremes and look to live the middle way. Confucius tastes the vinegar and says it tastes sour because life is sour and broken; his answer is to create rules to keep people in line. Lao Tse tastes the vinegar and says it's sweet because life is sweet when it is what it is, and if it tastes like vinegar, it's good that vinegar is vinegar. Life is life. Everything in life is naturally good if it remains true to its inner nature. So when vinegar is vinegar, it can make Lao Tse smile.

Benjamin Hoff, author of *The Tao of Pooh*, commented, "From the Taoist point of view, sourness and bitterness come from the interfering and unappreciative mind. Life itself, when understood and utilized for what it is, is sweet. That is the message of 'The Vinegar Tasters.'"¹

I told my friend "vinegar tastes like vinegar" because writing a book, even a book about wonder and imagination, is a challenging process, and it feels intrinsically true to itself. From an organizational and content standpoint, there are always choices and new ways to approach topics that are naturally complex, layered, and multifaceted. My motivation is to write something that is good for the world and useful, offering agency and ideas at a time when it feels not only nice to have but necessary. I cannot prescribe what I share; I can only offer it. My own imagination has felt as if it's brimming over with ideas related to digital wellbeing. This book is motivated by that sense of possibility and wonder, plus a deep conviction that this book is very much needed at this time as a way to inspire connection, creativity, and freedom over loneliness and sense of separation and disempowerment. Each detail I share will likely shift in the coming months when new research and views uncover more truths in this emergent intersectional field. Change is constant, and that is wonderful. This text becomes a part of the conversation, not static but adaptive and contextual. Use it as a sounding board.

This book contains related topics that are meant to be seen as "beads on a necklace." Each bead can be appreciated and approached as a singular object, and each is also related to the ones beside it. A thread connects each bead, stringing them together. As you read, it's possible to skip around, out of order, and still get a sense of the wholeness of the necklace. The message doesn't change. The beads could potentially be reorganized. They are in line in an order that I think is fitting, and yet each has its own genuine individuality.

In each chapter, each bead, of this book, I will place their meaning and relationship to digital wellbeing and wonder in context, and I will give you

practical approaches and ideas for using the topical insights and knowledge to enhance your own life and inform your work practices. Many strategic applications and methodologies are useful for leaders and teams. The way you approach it is completely up to you, providing an intentional freedom. See what comes up for you. View this book as a series of conversations, where each bead also contains a world within. They are spherical and fully dimensional. While related to the whole, they have individual integrity, just like each of us.

At the end of each chapter, I've included several key reflection questions that will guide conversations and enhance your own sense of wonder about the topics. If you would like to keep a journal, it can become a helpful accompaniment to this book, as an exercise to stretch thinking and offer more than habit change.

Right now, as I'm writing this, I'm outside because the sun is shining and I like to write outdoors. To my left, a two-lane road with traffic going a steady pace speeds by, becoming a hum. To my right, a jackhammer is performing some staccato march in a nearby yard. Birds, mostly crows and songbirds, are varying caws and trills. Squirrels zipper up and down trees that have not yet grown leaves but are budding and signaling springtime. The sun shines warm on my back, and everything becomes part of the music of this book.

The listening mode is hard, given the noise of the world. At times "it's too much with us," isn't it? Yet maybe that's also what it means to be alive at this stage of time, to embrace that semi-chaos and try to find our own ways of being that align with openness and inherent truth.

Writing about digital wellbeing means that I'm listening to all sides. There are many sides, and it's not either/or; it's facets. There are "digital literacies" in pluralism, not singular. Wellbeing in a digital sense is universal because technology is embedded and extended in our way of being now, so it's about literacies to be able to do even more than live lives of comfort, but to live in ways that feel open and true and whole.

We will talk about that wholeness through the course of this book. Since this involves an emergent and complex set of topics that exists in the context of what is also adaptive and multifaceted, there are many extensions to explore. At the end of each chapter, I mention extensions I would like to investigate and develop in the future. Think of it as an emergent, generative, responsive map. I include a few points about where I see the conversation

growing. If you would like it to expand, let me know, and there will be more where this came from.

By now, you might glean a little of my personality. I'm open to us getting to know each other better through the course of this book. In reverence to ritual, to cadence, and to finding what feels good, I'd like to name a few routines that allowed this book to come to life in the way that it did. As you read, these practices might be helpful for you too:

- Waking up to sunlight—stepping outside at least for a few minutes each morning. Even cloudy days offer some sunlight.
- Ideas first, phone later—I always get more creative work done when I work away from my phone.
- Deep work surges—writing while turning everything, including internet access, off, then going back to reference check and research and respond to messages.
- Exercise outdoors—as a break from work, as a release, as reflection, time to “be” and to feel my physical body exerting itself and enjoying nature.
- Getting enough sleep—“enough” varies by the individual. We should not feel guilty for getting eight hours. Most adults need about eight hours, and the worldwide average is 6.8 hours. It affects our baseline health in every sense.
- Declining some things to create space—the things that clamor for our attention will still pass by if we let them go. I think about things from five years ago that seemed to matter so much. And I think about my future self at 100 years old. What would she tell me for advice? And what would I want to look back on and remember?
- Saying “yes” to some things—paying attention to cues like visceral lifts, and whether I feel it would be good for the writing of the book—are a priority. I am curious and have a tendency to lean into a lot. I'm learning to create space between the notes and nodes.
- Practicing reappraisal and the art of reframing—it can help, especially in a world where things are beyond our control. In the past month, I have experienced natural uncertainties, including lost luggage the day before I was giving a keynote overseas, and it was this process of reframing that kept me stable and operating with some form of levity even while experiencing jetlag and stress.

- Neck stretches, finger stretches, body stretches—stretching in general. Taking deliberate breaks for movement doesn't have to mean all-out intense exercise sessions. Just spending five minutes stretching and walking around every 30 minutes or so keeps the flow.
- Writing to music—there are two types of people. Those who love to work and write to music, and those who are no fun. Just kidding. I write to music. I make soundtracks. Most of my creative writing music is wordless. I appreciate when friends share their music with me. I'm grateful for a music, movement, and meditation retreat I was part of at the start of this book-writing process. That music formed the score for the start of this book. Writing is a musical process. Even my percussive typing on keys feels like a musical endeavor, especially when I'm in flow state. It's not easy, but it feels true, and I'm grateful for that and for being able to be some form of conduit to share this with others, including you right now.
- Giving in to the good, noticing moments of wonder. It's rainy at this time of year. I have seen more rainbows in the past week than in the past five years combined. I don't know why. Maybe I'm looking up at the sky in between writing. Or maybe the writing about wellbeing is prompting me to notice the wonder and awe all around me. Maybe a combination of all of it. Maybe there is just a lot of rain and sun and consequently rainbows right now. Point is, I'm here, I'm alive, and I'm noticing and appreciating it all.

Let's enjoy the wonder and discovery of this book. Vinegar tastes sweet, doesn't it?

Introduction: Open Up to a World of Wonder

How the Imagination Opens the Mind

Just as mindfulness, wonder, and awe can open the mind and heart to adopting better approaches to digitally infused wellbeing, technology can become a tool to enhance mindfulness, creativity, wonder, and wellbeing. It's reciprocal and cyclical.

I'd like to invite you to engage with the following imaginative exercise, as you feel most comfortable. If closing your eyes creates discomfort, you could keep your eyes open:

Imagine a time in your life that made you feel completely inspired. You might have felt both big and small all at once, an extreme sense of delight, joy, and connection, or a loss of attachment to time and individual identity. Take a deep breath in and softly exhale, even more slowly than you inhaled. Now close your eyes and keep noticing the details of the experience you imagined, taking in all the sensations, the feelings of what that was like for you. When you're ready, open your eyes.

I have a few questions for us to reflect on, while this experience is fresh:

How would you describe the place you chose?

Was some sort of nature surrounding you?

Was there a feeling of vastness?

Were you surrounded by others, or were you by yourself?

What you just recalled was an awe-inspired experience. It might have been from childhood or your adult life. (If the two distinctions are one and the same, you're unlike most and have likely lived a beautiful life where childhood persists.) You could have been in a group or completely peacefully solitary. It could have happened in any time, in any place. One of the interesting parts is that, as 3D creatures, our awe-inspired moments tend to be deeply grounded in a sense of place. There's a maxim that "a place is a space with meaning" and that lands true for me. Environment matters.

This book is all about wellbeing in layers that start with our human physicality and our consciousness. These days, digital technology permeates our daily lives, enabling us to connect in meaningful ways, if we approach layers of technology mindfully. We might have "offline time" or engage in tech sabbaticals and retreats, but we inevitably return to a world that is connected and supported by technology. While we survey different approaches to wellbeing in this book and investigate the etymology of the term, the premise is that wellbeing and digital wellbeing are one and the same because of that layered approach. They have to do with openness—an open way of being in connection, using imagination and wonder to elevate and thrive. Context will change, and conditions will change, and I cannot tell you what it means to flourish in a way that is formulaic or conditional, in an "if, then" predictive model. We can share about wellbeing as an openness to experience, though, and that openness inevitably leads us back to connection with the senses, and an expansive mindset using wonder and the power of our imaginations to inspire us.

Think of the imaginative exercise you just did. It was an exercise where you engaged with a moment of wonder. These moments tend to have certain things in common. We are at ease with our surroundings, with ourselves, enlivened by them. Some people say these awe experiences "make them come alive." We might have felt, as mentioned, very big and very small all at once. We dropped into a different state, a lucid state where it was as if

we were dreaming and waking all at once. Things came easily to us in these moments, which seemed completely detached from the normal constraints of time. We lost our inhibitions, even our sense of self-consciousness. We lost attachment to identity and all the extra stories we were carrying. There was a joy in this time, a lightness of movement. A oneness with ourselves and everything around us. Everything was in complete flow.

We as humans can have many awe-inspiring experiences once we start to notice the possibility for them and prioritize them. It all starts with our imagination and our willingness to surrender to these experiences with wonder that can be so transporting. Some people will say these are the best moments of life, the ones in which we are filled with awe and rise above what might seem limiting or constraining. We feel deeply connected, and also elevated.

As an imagination architect, I study wonder and awe and apply these principles to experience design in the most transformative ways.

If you've been a part of one of my talks, courses, or workshops, you may have been to a virtual garden space and introduced to an onboarding experience for virtual reality using objects as teaching metaphors for memory palaces. I have taken a group of government officials to the moon and led them in collaborative exercises. I've gone deep sea diving with a team of educators and watched them use the SCUBA method (mentioned in our virtual reality experience design and Hero's Journey models later in the book) in their design strategies for teaching and mentoring young people. I've created snowy landscapes with the northern lights and led poetry readings, and I've taken corporate teams hiking through the Alps and created expressive interactive art on the mountaintops.

Introducing ideas involving team collaboration and "shadow storytelling," we've gathered in caves where vines begin to grow from the cracks and meditative music guides people in their sharing of stories. I've built a moon garden for meditations and a walking path for shared exercises. Some experiences are meditations, and others are active collaborative sessions that lead a group in experiences with shared trust, emotional intelligence, empathy, resilience, and teamwork. There have been movement workshops, interactive design exercises, and all sorts of surprising nuances that add elements of mystery and delight. The best parts are the surprises, internal and external, so I invite you to try it for yourself sometime. Imagine becoming a ball of light and floating through the cosmos. It sounds trippy, I admit, but there's

more to it. In “surreality,” in a spatial world, this becomes a deeply intimate shared experience where new insights can and do emerge.

As this book is a series of “beads on a necklace” for us to consider and explore, we’re incorporating awe, wonder, and imaginative delight as our digital wellbeing threads, or conduits. Wonder becomes a vehicle for transformation. We can access the wonder in ways that are technological as well as biological. This is about layers. When our approach is imaginative and open, new discoveries will emerge on an individual level. I’m inviting you to explore through a new digital lens, and I’ll give you a deeper understanding about the tech tools as we go.

As you can imagine, I’ve designed experiences and led tours across time and space, in physicality, virtuality, and all instances of the full continuum of spatial computing, for decades. I’ve seen hardware and programs change and change again. It’s not about the hardware. There’s something else, and that is essentially one of the deep discoveries that this book is about.

The beauty is, too, that a lot of this involves experimentation and play. To design for wonder, you need to live wonder as a key ingredient. This is not about paint-by-number and forced outcomes. It’s about cosensing each other, and it’s about practicing new ways of engaging in community rhythms. Our communities are deeply missing rituals, especially with the global pandemic having disrupted our traditional ways to physically gather and share.

This book is essentially about connection. There are bright spots: This period of deep disruption and unrest did push us to find new ways to connect and to give some digital connection tools a chance in ways that were different and new. The challenge is that we might not have paid attention to the art of integration in mindful and intentional ways. We might have thought that this brave new world of technology for connection meant having endless zoom meetings all day, sitting still in a chair, and then watching television with that simultaneous mindless scrolling that Esther Perel talks about.

Autopilot mindlessness is not helping us, and the reverb back in response, now that the shock of the pandemic is behind us, could be to push harder against the opportunities of transformative technologies. It’s time we took a collective breath after going through a pandemic together as a society. Many of us endured what was a numbing, unsettling, shocking, and lonely experience. Naming that is part of the healing.

For many of us, this time of disruption caused by a global pandemic was a time of loss and isolation, when hope battled despair. We found new ways to endure. I think about that word, *endure*, and what it means, and how tired we can be underneath it all. For those of us with others depending on us, as leaders, parents, teachers, friends in community, to be there for each other is collective resilience, and it can be individually and collectively exhausting to endure. How do we now stay supple and kind to ourselves and reappraise our vulnerability and all we are going through as a strength?

I say this, and mention *reappraisal*, the art of changing how we view a situation (even one in the past!) to shift its emotional impact, because a lot of people have felt shame over the past years, for how much is beyond our individual control, and we're at a loss to manage our own feelings. We lose hope and dive deeper into isolation and depression. I have found that "the only way through is through," with a gentle self-compassion, and it's with authenticity that we can truly look at our experiences and feel whole. I think about my own practices in gravity and levity, in naming my emotions and also encouraging play. I think of curiosity and willingness to be seen and see others. I think of the power of kindness, the messy, daring, brave kindness that can lead us through and give us a sense of strength and sanity. Brené Brown and others have promising research on the power of reappraisal and reframing,¹ and I use this science to offer what I consider a valuable resource: personal and collective freedom.

The research on reappraisal, particularly in the context of emotional regulation and vulnerability, emphasizes the power of reframing our emotional experiences and the importance of social connections in this process.² Cognitive reappraisal is an emotional regulation strategy that involves changing the way we think about a situation to alter its emotional impact. This approach aligns with the strength of connecting with vulnerability, courage, and the benefits of embracing emotional openness and social support. Cognitive reappraisal encourages individuals to actively reinterpret challenging situations in a more positive or neutral light, thereby reducing negative emotional responses and enhancing wellbeing.³

When people see their vulnerability as weakness, they are more likely to hide it. What we hide and conceal breeds shame. We might not intentionally do this, but it happens quite naturally, and then it disempowers us because we feel that we are somehow leading hidden lives. We sense the disconnection and the lack of completion, and we go about our days in

worlds of concealment, worlds of survival where we are masking our pain and our brokenness instead of owning it and practicing compassion for ourselves, our loved ones, and our teams and communities.

Let's change this story, right here and now.

The brokenness is beautiful and natural. As Leonard Cohen says, *that's how the light gets in*. There are art forms of *Kintsugi* and *Kintsukuroi* dedicated to this, and entire philosophies of *wabi sabi* explain why the most powerful and beautiful experiences involve imperfection, breaking, and lack of pure prediction. There's a spontaneity to life and a responsiveness to the moment, and this impulse is blocked if we hold too tightly to perfection and prescription.

We do this to ourselves all the time, and the worst part is that our connected society often tightens that grip of "expectation" making us feel as if perfection and conformity are the goals, when in essence they are not.

As John O'Donohue so eloquently writes about, the goal is to engage with the wildness in our hearts. We cannot do that if we are listening to external conventions and prescriptions. What comes from us is our source and our wellspring. Parker Palmer calls it a "hidden wholeness" when we come to discover and live that undivided life that reflects our integrity.

The incredible part, which many might not expect, is that digital well-being experiences and tools can help lead us there and unblock and uncover these purest parts of ourselves, the sweetness and the wholeness. If we are consistent and accurate with our measures, true to our values, honest with our integrations, and mindful of our own bodies' ability to teach us, we can have a future where technology is helping to enhance our life instead of blocking it. This is what I've experienced firsthand, and it's deeper than a hope. It's a conviction that there are ways we can do this. Yet we must be deliberate and considerate at this stage, as technology affords us so much power, and we need to harness wisdom to know how to wield it.

As the Center for Humane Technology's Tristan Harris, Aza Raskin, and others will point out, Apple's original vision was that technology could be "a bicycle for the mind," allowing us to travel and experience new freedoms and joy. This was inspiring to more than a generation. That vision sparked a movement. Right now, many would argue, or even despair, that we are not on that track.

Yet, we might be looking through only one lens, or at a certain facet that reflects our own expectations and life experience. The answer is not to