Dr. Laura Aldape

OPTICAL EMOTIONS

THE NINE MENTAL MODELS THROUGH WHICH WE PERCEIVE THE WORLD

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE TECHNIQUES TO UPGRADE YOUR PERCEPTION

PREFACE

In my quest to explore the depths of my emotionally charged perceptions, I encountered the captivating title: *Optical Emotions*.

As I began contemplating ways to enhance my emotional intelligence, the word "vision" brought another compelling word to mind: "eyewear." I recalled numerous instances of hearing the phrase, "We perceive the world through our own lenses." It made me realize that our perceptions are like looking through filters, where the world we see is often colored by our unique perspectives.

This revelation helped me understand that exploring our mental models, which generate our unique perspectives, was a lot like getting an eyeglass prescription. Seeing them this way allowed me to embark on a deeper examination of our perceptions and how they shape our understanding of the world.

Initially, I wanted to define how I perceived the world. Did I offer a unique perspective, or share a few common viewpoints with others? What influenced my observations and interpretations?

My early social and cultural experiences made me perceive the world as a place of fierce competition, where all my reasoning was based on my achievements and behavior. This mindset became a heavy burden to bear as an adult, no matter where I lived in the world. The underlying theme of my perception was centered around the idea of hustling, doing, and being endlessly productive. My judgments and narratives were closely linked to a productivity-driven reality and, at times, based on the external expectations of others about what I should or shouldn't do. Over time, my reality became exhausting. It was only then that I seriously started to question whether what I was experiencing was truly reality or just my own narrative and the perceptions I had formed in childhood.

Along the way, I met people who mirrored me. They seemed to have gotten a similar memo, derived from societal norms, cultural influences, media portrayals, and personal experiences. Our utopia was one where success and achievement were highly valued. On the other hand, I also met productive individuals who managed their lives with a far more "laissez faire" attitude, suggesting that people with alternative viewpoints could still be high achievers. I noticed they weren't overly controlling of their outcomes and were still able to get things done. These realizations

led me to question myself and, ultimately, to reevaluate my worldview.

Consequently, I delved into exercises that challenged my perception. This quest led me through leadership and self-help books, all in pursuit of techniques that would consciously enhance and leverage my perceptions. I saw myself as a hard worker, but I also believed I had to do everything on my own if I wanted tasks done right. Enhancing my perception meant learning to delegate, trust, and release control. Eventually, I adapted. I developed an approach that drew heavily from concepts rooted in my Ph.D. research in behavioral economics, highlighting how soft skills such as listening, empathy, and problem-solving could give people a competitive advantage in both life and the workplace. With this foundation, I created new exercises that helped me—and eventually others—befriend and understand our perceptions, while also questioning and challenging them.

At first, I began blogging and writing as a way to connect and share this research with others. Through this process, I came to another important discovery; that a significant part of my workday revolved around misunderstandings and a lack of common vision. This wasn't because I actively sought to be different, but rather because people naturally have differing viewpoints. I instinctively knew this wasn't just true for me, but for millions of others as well.

I wondered, what if we could all be honest with ourselves and truly explore why we perceive things the way we do? Did our perceptions both aid and hinder us simultaneously?

I sought to understand my predominant perspectives and analyze the narratives that shaped them into my mental models. Using the eyewear analogy, I recognized myself as THE UNBREAKABLE, THE DOER, and THE DREAMER at heart. As I engaged with other various mental models, I realized that without managing my competitive and driven nature, I often pushed myself to exhaustion. In my case, it became essential to resist the impulse to always act, while also lessening the value I placed on productivity as a way of life.

Applying an x-ray to my mental models brought to light that I experience a sense of accomplishment when I tackle challenging tasks and witness the positive impact of my efforts. However, I had not considered that my assertive and overly optimistic nature might lead others to struggle with accepting my ideas. It was as if my enthusiasm and direct communication style were having the adverse effect of making my ideas difficult for others to digest.

I recognized that my modus operandi was to have a competitive and driven nature that compelled me to work diligently, continuously striving to

meet my high standards. When faced with challenges, I exhibited resilience and unwavering determination, always aiming for a consistent and successful performance. Thoughts like: "I must work hard to succeed," and "there will always be new challenges to tackle and achieve," were constantly in the forefront of my mind, leading me to engage in behaviors that were not always in my best interest. At times I found myself pushing to maintain high levels of enthusiasm even when I was exhausted, and I felt compelled to complete every task, sometimes at the cost of overworking myself.

Despite achieving my goals through such relentless effort, feelings of guilt and self-criticism arose when I fell short of my aspirations. Additionally, there were instances when I prioritized meeting the expectations and needs of others, even if it became challenging to empathize with and understand their perspectives and emotions.

The consequences of my mindset became unmistakably apparent. I was overwhelmed and unable to find enjoyment in my work, which eroded the pleasure that I once felt from completing my daily tasks.

For me, carving out moments of rest and relaxation was a challenge, hindered by my persistent struggle to schedule downtime. This unwavering pursuit of productivity and achievement took a toll on me, leading to exhaustion from the demanding levels of mental and physical effort I needed in order to maintain my impeccably high standards.

It became clear to me that these consequences didn't just impact my personal well-being, but also had the potential to hinder my overall productivity and fulfillment in life. Addressing and rebalancing my mindset became my goal as I understood it was essential for fostering a healthier and more sustainable approach to work and life. It also showed me how important this work is for everyone, regardless of their mental models.

Our mental models highlight the positive aspects of our "raison d'être," or purpose in life. They keep us focused on our path and shield us from seeing the true cost of our actions. As evident from my own experience, the intricate connections between our mental models, our perception, narratives, judgment, and emotions can profoundly impact us and the interactions we have with others. By recognizing this interplay and engaging with any of the nine eyewear models I developed as a framework, we can gain profound insights into how our experiences mold our thoughts, feelings, and actions. These constructs act as the lens through which we interpret our circumstances, enabling us to derive meaningful understanding from them.

Optical Emotions was conceived as a comprehensive guide to understanding and applying emotional intelligence techniques to challenge and improve your mental models. Drawing on behavioral techniques like cognitive

restructuring, this book will help you explore the interconnectedness of your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

By providing practical recommendations and methods, the book will aid you in identifying and confronting unhelpful or outdated thoughts that lead to emotional distress and unhealthy behaviors. It guides you in replacing these negative thought patterns with more balanced and rational ones, leading to a transformation in your emotional responses and conduct.

Within its pages, you will discover valuable insights to assess and strengthen your own mental framework, enabling you to communicate more effectively, manage stressful situations with grace, and cultivate empatwhetic connections with others.

The nine mental models presented in this book serve as characterizations, offering a foundation that encompasses both positive and negative components. Their intent is to guide you through the journey of self-acceptance and transformation, empowering you to identify and alter aspects of the model that may hinder you from having a more fulfilled life.

As an experienced coach, in-house trainer, and keynote speaker, my dedication lies in sharing these techniques to unblock your outdated mental models and enhance your emotional intelligence skills. Over the years, I have witnessed the transformative impact on my clients' lives as they learn to effectively manage their emotions, communicate more assertively, build their resilience, embrace change, and foster meaningful personal and professional interactions with others.

I have no doubt that you will also discover the keys to living a more aligned, intentional, and meaningful life through these pages.