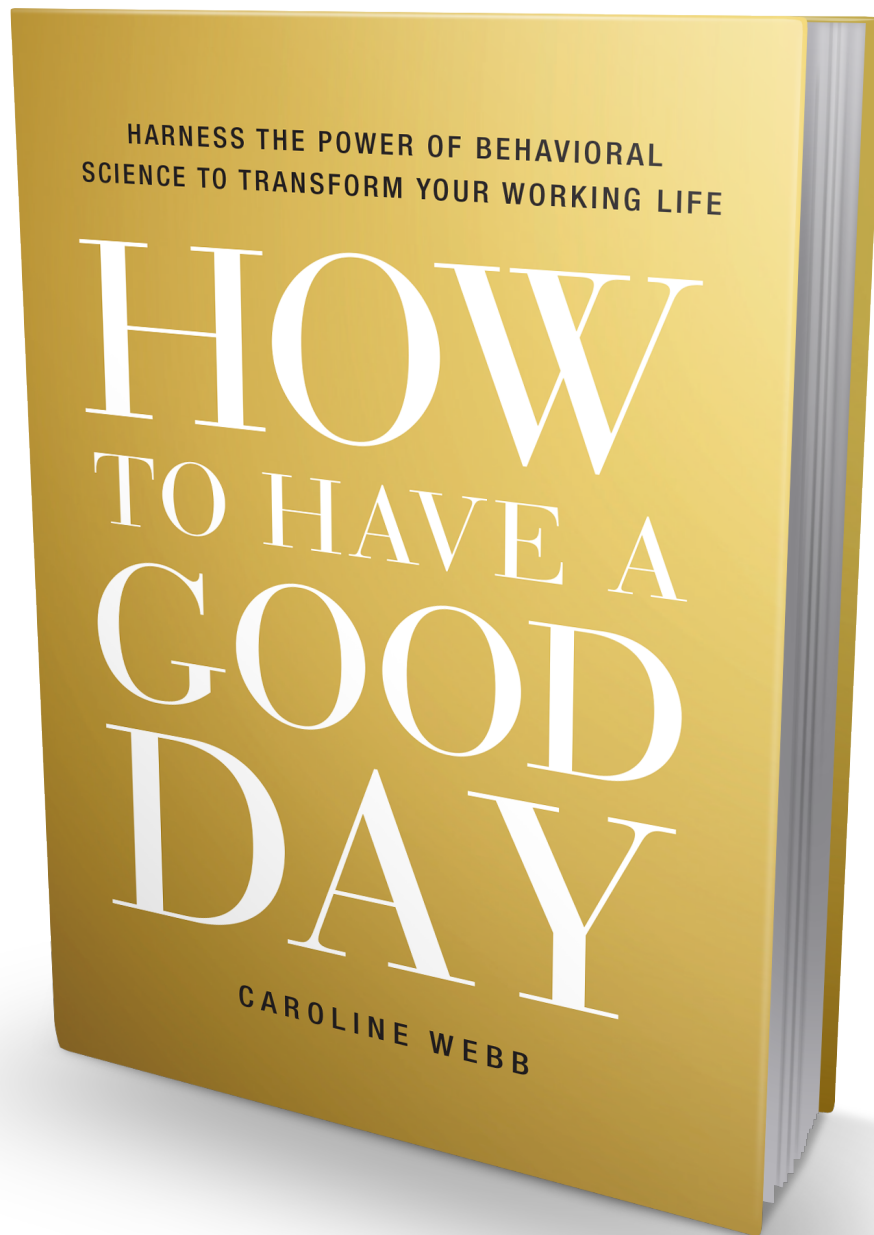


Excerpt from **How To Have A Good Day**



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RESOLVE DILEMMAS WITH (GREATER) EASE

Let me close this chapter by adding some advice for handling situations where wisdom can feel especially elusive: times when we need to choose between two valid courses of action that are so different that they're hard to compare. The Greeks called this a *dilemma*, meaning “two premises,” because it involves two quite different models of what's best. For example, suppose you've been given a free ticket to a conference in your field. You'd love to go, because it would enable you to publicize an important project. But you have a close colleague who's told you he's trying to build his network by attending more conferences. What should you do? Should you give him the ticket, or not? One option is good for your project, the other is good for your colleague. They both matter. Argh—what to do?

Economist Ting Zhang and her Harvard colleagues, in a series of experiments, found that one subtle shift better enabled people to find ways to resolve dilemmas like this. The shift was this:

- Don't ask, “What *should* I do?”
- Instead ask, “What *could* I do?”

Why did Zhang find that a “could” question worked better for people trying to square the circle?¹⁴ Her finding makes sense when we keep our discover-defend axis in mind. Just thinking about “shoulds” can set us on edge, by making us feel constrained and obligated. The resulting negative tone shifts us a little toward defensive mode, impairing our ability to think expansively and creatively about options. The word “could,” however, primes us with a sense of possibility, autonomy, and choice. By keeping us in discovery mode, it encourages us to summon our wisest, most insightful selves.

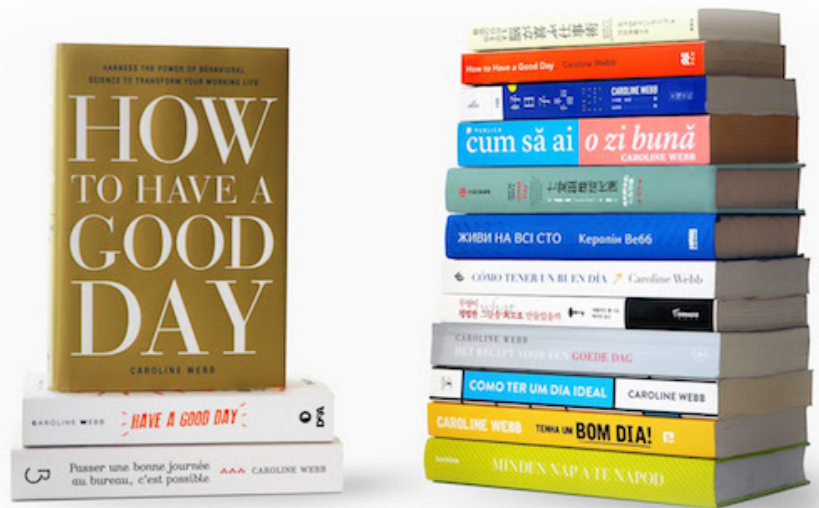
So instead of beating yourself up as you think, “*Should* I give him the ticket?” you might instead wonder, “*Could* I ask for a second ticket?” Or perhaps you realize that it's unlikely you'd attend for the whole day, so you ask whether you could split the ticket between you and your colleague. Both are options you'd be less likely to come up with while you're busy feeling guilty. So next time you're feeling stuck in a moral dilemma, skip the “should” and try a “could.”

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How to Have a Good Day is a smart, thorough, and eminently practical book. Just about every page offers a science-based tip to help you become better off – or, in many cases, just plain better.

Daniel H. Pink, Author of When and Drive



About Caroline Webb

Caroline Webb is an executive coach, author and speaker known for being one of the world's leading experts in using insights from behavioral science to improve professional life. Her bestselling book on that topic, *How To Have A Good Day*, has been published in 14 languages and more than 60 countries. She is also a Senior Advisor to McKinsey, where she was previously a Partner.

Tune in to Caroline's live video series:
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