CHAPTER 4

The Modern Toolbox for Success

"I don't understand," Scout (not her real name) says in distress, stepping into my office, and closing the office door right behind her, with just two minutes left before lunch. The hallways are loud and overcrowded with girls finding friends, gathering for food, and going to school clubs, events, and the next meeting for more Connection & Belonging, empowering each other.

Thump! Scout dropped her backpack. Gus, an Archer Dog (a dog that once lived on the school grounds during the day, as a friend to the students), ran over to see what the noise was all about—Gus, a majestic Collie, is a first responder. He is what we call a therapy dog (although dogs are not therapists). Not all dogs can be therapy dogs. These are special dogs who have a temperament suited to supporting humans, sometimes through social and emotional tasks like snuggling, cuddling, and interactive play to uplift people, and even saving lives. It is in their nature to be present for Connection & Belonging, to give comfort, and to create a sense of unconditional love. It was a privilege to be working alongside two Archer Dogs, Gus and then it was Grover, who came into school each day with their human school counselors. They were my colleagues, too.

Today, research highlights the powerful role pets play

in supporting people across all ages and stages of life. From disability and trauma to recovery and everyday companionship, pets often walk alongside us on our healing journeys. Therapy dogs, in particular, offer meaningful support in educational settings—helping students feel comforted, express emotions, and even build confidence in reading. Studies show that when therapy dogs are present, students often feel more successful and at ease during reading activities. Whether in coaching sessions or assisted reading programs, a dog's calm, nonjudgmental presence supports well-being in simple yet powerful ways (Grieve, C., Henderson, L., Lee, F., and Wardlaw, P., 2021).

Gus could sense when a student felt overwhelmed—and in this moment, Scout was. She was working hard toward her goals and needed support to get back into the "game." This challenge stirred doubt and made her question her own ability.

Scout stared at her laptop, frustrated. "Do you know how hard I worked on this, Ms. Chase?"

After a brief pause—an important tool in your MTS—I responded, "I appreciate you bringing this up." That simple acknowledgment helped her begin to reset. I walked over to the whiteboard near the window, overlooking the courtyard and the Eastern Star fountain—a place that connects our community. "Let's take a look at this together," I said. "What do you notice in your personal MTS?"

With just a couple of minutes before lunch, we shifted our attention to what mattered most. I quickly sketched her MTS on the board—a simple way to see what's hap-

pening without judgment, blame, or shame. Just the truth. The truth is simply what happened—or what didn't happen.

As William Shakespeare wrote in *Hamlet*, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

Truth, in its pure form, is neutral. It's our thoughts that assign meaning—labeling experiences as "good" or "bad." And when you're in the middle of a challenge, there isn't time to judge. But there is always time to pause. To Look & See. And from there, you can choose your next step—course-correcting toward your most generous goals with Grit & Grace.

When a student is under stress, it can be difficult to see clearly. In those moments, it's hard to recognize what is actually happening—or not happening—in the here and now. That's why having a simple visual tool matters. Your MTS gives you a way to pause, reset, and shift your attention throughout the day so you can return to your goals—the ones you came here to pursue.

When you choose to Look & See, you begin to notice what's right in front of you. Like an escape room, you can ask: What tools do I have? What skills do I need right now? What's one next step I can take with Grit & Grace? This small shift opens the door to possibility.

You can take a fresh look at your student journey anytime using your MTS. It's simple enough to use in real life, right when you need it. You don't have to wait for a teacher, tutor, or therapist. You can be the coach you need in that moment. Whether you sketch it on a whiteboard,

the back of a test, or even a lunch napkin, the MTS helps you quickly refocus on what matters most—or what feels most interesting—as you take your next step forward.

When frustration builds, it often pulls you away from ease and joy. You may start focusing on perfection or pressure instead of purpose. And when that happens, everything can feel harder. Challenges seem bigger, and obstacles feel more personal. This is part of being human, but it's also a signal—a moment to pause and reset.

Your MTS becomes your personal navigation system in these moments. It helps you step back, Look & See, and return to what matters. Only you can reset yourself, again and again. You are the hero of your journey, and you have the ability to shift your attention, make a new choice, and take action from within.

Scout was willing to do exactly that. She was open to practicing her real-time tools—not just using her intellect, but accessing something deeper. As she trained her brain, she also connected to her Heart Center. She began to notice the difference between who she is and the thoughts that try to pull her off track.

She could now recognize when worry showed up—about grades, college, test scores, or even how she looked that day. Whatever the thought, she could see it for what it was: just a thought. And by looking at her MTS, she gained a new perspective. From that place, more ease and possibility began to open up, allowing her to return to the goals that mattered most to her.

She had a full day ahead and big goals she was working

toward. As she moved closer to college planning, the pressure increased, and new challenges naturally appeared. At times, those challenges knocked her off course. But now, she had tools to help her come back.

Modern life skills are meant to be used in real time. They help you shift your attention, reset your energy, and keep moving forward—again and again—with Grit & Grace.

"I can see this was a harder week for me," Scout said at the end of our conversation. "Track and field, traveling to Mammoth Lakes for conditioning—it took my whole three-day weekend. I'm exhausted."

And just like that, she could see clearly again (see Appendix B).

Key Questions to Ask:

1. What might I discover for myself, as I continue to look inward and see?
2. What do I notice when I focus on deepening my reflection and building my confidence?
3. Is it true that I followed through with my intentions and goals?
4. What did I notice about how I can gracefully return to the growth of my goals using the MTS?
5. What is one action step I am willing to take right here and now?

And, for a bonus question:

6. What brings you joy?

When Scout took a closer look, without judgment, blame, or shame, at herself or at those who were supportive on her journey, she could see for herself where she had misstepped. "I am reading my teacher's comments. I see that I missed submitting something important."

"Great work," I told her. "I love how you took a step back, to Look & See for yourself, to now take action with Grit & Grace, as you now course-correct with a solution that comes with ease and some joy! What might be your next step, to now make an impact on your goal?"

"I'll go to my teacher's office hours at 2:45 p.m. today, before my track meet," Scout said, while writing it down on the inside of her notebook as her action step to take that day. The student gave herself the opportunity to have just a little bit more ease and joy. The ease and joy bring her the resilience she needs to be confident and to take action.

She resolved her own challenges using real-time tools and student success skills to get her back into the game, a vision she has for herself with Grit & Grace. The MTS was a real-time tool to shift her attention to Look & See at what is most meaningful to her right now. She could have chosen to be upset and frustrated, and to stay off-balance or off her center. This is when the mind might spiral with more thoughts and emotion, taking you away from your goals.

It's not always easy to get back on track with your goals. When emotions rise, it's completely understandable to feel upset or overwhelmed. Whether you're at a high-achieving

school, learning through an online program, or balancing life as a student-athlete or artist, each path comes with its own challenges. Still, each one of you carries unique gifts, talents, and strengths that are meant to be shared as you play for your goals.

Scout saw herself as an intelligent, creative, and passionate neurodivergent learner. She was committed to growing her goals in both computer science and philosophy—stepping outside her comfort zone into something new, different, and even a little extraordinary. With each step forward, she opened herself up to new possibilities and outcomes. Maybe this path would lead to her dream college major, or maybe it would evolve over time. Either way, she was learning that growth requires her to keep showing up with Grit & Grace, again and again.

The truth is, it's not easy—but that's exactly where Grit & Grace come in. There is no final endpoint to your goals. They grow as you grow. Like a garden, your goals need care, attention, and support in real time. As you continue to play for your purposeful passion projects, you begin to see that growth is an ongoing process, not a destination.

At times, the student journey can feel especially hard—even when things seem to be going well. And sometimes, just when it feels like things couldn't get any more difficult, new challenges appear. People, circumstances, and unexpected events may feel like they are trampling on your garden. These moments can be discouraging, but they are also invitations to pause, Look & See, and course-correct.

When you choose to keep playing for your goals with

Grit & Grace, you will meet resistance. That is part of living in the real world. Challenges and obstacles are not signs that something is wrong—they are part of the journey we all share. Sometimes, they ask you to slow down, take a step back, and look more closely at what is happening.

This is where your personal MTS becomes powerful. It gives you a way to reset, refocus, and take your next step forward. As you return to your goals, you reconnect with what brings you meaning, ease, and joy. And with each step, you remind yourself of something important: you are worth it.

Goals

- A goal is set with your intention as a greater reflection of who you are.
- A goal is anchored deep within you, with purpose, meaning, and value.
- A goal is your vision, being creative and enjoying as you choose to contribute, and sharing with others as you're meant to do with Grit & Grace.

Ease

- Ease is less stress, suffering, and struggle.
- Ease is less pressure for more pleasure.
- Ease is reducing pressure or tension by practicing timeless or real-time tools and mastering modern life skills for success with Grit & Grace as you pursue your goals.

Joy

- Joy is a feeling of warmth, soothing to the soul, an authentic sense of appreciation and pleasure.
- Joy is not an emotion with the harsh highs and lows, taking you away from your goals. It is not a falsehood or fear.

Dr. Brené Brown, American academic and author who's spent two decades studying courage, vulnerability, and shame, has coined the term "foreboding joy" in her book *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. Foreboding joy describes the moment when something good is happening—when you feel happy, proud, or peaceful—and then your mind quickly shifts to worry. Most of us tend to experience joy as a rare experience, so we don't think that we need or deserve it. But that's not true.

In fact, joy is healing to the human heart. It replenishes your soul as you play for your goals. Joy is smooth and warm; it is the keeping of harmony and fulfillment, because you're being true to who you are.

Joy comes from simple pleasures—small moments that uplift your spirit without costing you who you are. It supports your goals, no matter what is or isn't happening right now. Even in the middle of frustration, a small return to joy can remind you of who you are at your core. This is where awareness begins. When you Look & See, you may notice that frustration has taken over your thoughts or

energy. That awareness gives you the opportunity to shift. Because while frustration and joy can both exist in your life, you cannot fully hold them in the same moment with the same attention.

Imagine your joy as the sun. Each ray is a small moment of warmth—steady, gentle, and real. Now imagine frustration as something cold you are holding, like ice cream. As the warmth of the sun reaches it, the ice cream begins to melt. In the same way, when you bring your attention back to joy, frustration softens. You don't have to force it away. You simply allow warmth to return.

From awareness, you move into choice. You can choose to bring even a small piece of joy back into your day. This is not about ignoring what's hard—it's about restoring balance. Joy becomes a natural antidote, helping you return to a place of ease so you can keep moving toward your goals.

Then comes action. One helpful practice is creating your own "joy bucket"—a simple list of things that bring you joy. These can be small, everyday moments: music, a favorite snack, time with a pet, a walk outside, laughter with a friend. Keep this list as part of your MTS, so it's available when you need it most. It becomes a tool you can use at any time to return to your Heart Center.

Finally, there is reflection. When you take a moment to notice how joy shifts your energy, you begin to trust it. You remember that you can come back to yourself. You remember that joy is always available to you.

What brings you joy?